ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: Between Body and Spirit: Indian Influences on Modern Japanese Art

Chao Chi, Chiu, Doctor of Philosophy, 2024

Dissertation directed by: Dr. Alicia Volk, Art History Department

This dissertation contributes to ongoing examinations on modern transcultural exchanges between Japan and other Asian countries in the field of Japanese art by investigating the influence of India on itinerant Japanese artists throughout the twentieth century. In doing so, it challenges prevailing assumptions that Japanese artistic engagement with foreign cultures operated entirely within an imperialistic context. Among the many Asian countries that served as sources of artistic inspiration for Japan, India stood out from the rest because of its esteemed spirituality in the eyes of Japanese intellectuals. Contemporary Japanese writings emphasized India's importance as the birth place of Buddhism and framed the South Asian country as a bastion on Asian spiritual fortitude against the influx of Western materialism. Consequently, India also attracted Buddhist artists across Japan to visit its ancient temples and museums to its art. While these Japanese abroad expressed their admiration towards India's religiosity and adherence to keeping its traditions alive, they also fantasized about the exoticism and corporeality embodied in Indian art and contemporary locals. Such fantasies were visualized in

their works in visual icons such as half-nude females with elaborate poses, Buddhist figures, including the Buddha himself, with exaggerated Indian ethnic features, and tropical plants and animals representing a long-lost past. I argue that Japanese adaption of Indian styles and themes into their art was characterized by a precarious harmony between spiritual and corporeal elements in the artist works. Furthermore, each artist defined "spirituality" and "corporeality" in distinct way, which led to diverse approaches.

My dissertation revolved around four artists as case studies: Arai Kanpō, Nōsu Kōsetsu, Ishizaki Kōyō, and Sugimoto Tetsurō. By examining the careers, writings, and artworks of each artist, I will highlight how Japanese artists interpreted Indian materials and utilized them to create unconventional works. Furthermore, I would contextualize these artists' work in the development of Japanese perspectives toward India throughout the twentieth century, expressed through contemporary writings that praised India for its spiritual fortitude but also denigrated them as an inferior Asian country. Examining the artists' life and works in connection to changing perspectives towards India, Buddhism, and religious art in modern society, this dissertation explores the nuances of Japan's artistic interaction with foreign materials beyond the context of colonialism and imperialism.

BETWEEN BODY AND SPIRIT: INDIAN INFLUENCES ON MODERN JAPANESE ART

BY

CHAO CHI, CHIU

Dissertation submitted to the Faculties of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2024

Advisory committee:
Professor Alicia Volk, Chair
Professor Karin J. Zitzewitz
Professor. Anthony Colantuono
Professor Abigail Mcewen
Professor Michele Marie Mason

Dedicated to my family

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to several individuals and organizations who offered me invaluable guidance and access to crucial works of art and documents, without which the completion of my dissertation would not be possible. First, I would like to thank my committee members and other faculties at the University of Maryland's Art History department for their academic guidance. I would also like to thank the university's English Editing for International Graduate Students' service for their aid in editing and polishing my dissertation. During my time conducting research in Japan, I received immense help from Miss. Masumi Igarashi from Okayama University. Her article on Katsuta Shōkin was one of many inspirational academic publications that motivated my research and her guidance during my time in Japan was indispensable. I also want to thank Dr. Yasuko Fukuyama from Ryukoku University in Kyoto, who provided me with valuable research advice and access to several important primary sources. I also received a lot of guidance and assistance from Sugimoto Tarō, who provided me with crucial materials related to his grandfather, Sugimoto Tetsurō, the main subject of the fifth chapter of my dissertation. I offer my sincere gratitude to Mr. Sugimoto for his help and guidance. I also want to extend my thanks to Mr. Miyahara Yutaka, Mr. Mizobuchi Shigeki, and several other individuals from the Society of Honoring the Master Artist Nōsu Kōsetsu. The Society has made great strides in preserving and restoring the murals of Nōsu in India and Mr. Miyahara and Mizobuchi helped facilitate my travels to India for research. While in Japan, I also received immense help from them in locating materials and sources related to Nōsu Kōsetsu. Through their introduction, I met Mr. Nōsu Yoshimitsu, grandson of Nōsu Kōsetsu, who I would also like to offer my gratitude for. Mr. Nōsu provided me with invaluable materials related to his grandfather which were major assets to the completion of my dissertation. I also like to thank

Miss. Ōki Reiko from Arai Kanpō Memorial Museum, Sakura City, Tochigi prefecture. Miss Reiko's scholarship helped inspire my research direction and provided me with invaluable guidance from during my visit to her museum for resources on artist Arai Kanpō. Similarly, Dr. Satō Shino from Yokoyama Taikan Memorial museum, Tokyo, has also been an immense help. Her research on Yokoyama Taikan's activities in India provided me with crucial foundational knowledge and she helped me locate more important materials in Japan.

Apart from the above individuals, I would like to thank the following Japanese museums and temples for their assistance in my research. They provided me important access and permission to use their artworks and also pointed me to other helpful research materials:

. Arai Kanpō Memorial Museum

. Fukumitsu Art Museum

. Fukushima Prefectural Art Museum

. Higashi Honganji Tsumura Betsuin Temple

. Ibaraki Prefectural Museum of Modern Art

. Koyasan Kongobu-ji Temple

. Museum of Shiga Prefecture Biwako-Bunkakan

. Nakanoshima Museum of Art

. The Kagawa Museum

. The Society of Honoring the Master Artist Nōsu Kōsetsu

. Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts

. Tokyo University of the Arts

. Yokoyama Taikan Memorial Museum

I would also like to thank the people of Mulaghanda Kuti Vihara temple, specifically Mr. Lobzang for their immense help when I was conducting research at the temple.

Finally, my sincerest gratitude to my family for their unwavering support for my endeavors, which helped me overcome numerous obstacles in the completion of my research.

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Introduction

In 1969, two policemen were called over to Higashi Honganji Tsukuba Betsuin temple in Osaka after receiving complaints that someone was drawing nude figures on the walls within the temple's interior.[1] When they entered the temple's main lobby, they gazed upon an unfinished fifteen-meter-long mural displaying up to 200 nude figures from top to bottom in various elaborate poses.[2] Titled *Ignorance and Enlightenment* (fig 5.12), this major mural was painted by Buddhist artist Sugimoto Tetsurō (1899-1985) and commissioned by the temple. At the time of its making, Sugimoto's mural was touted for being the largest religious mural in Japan.[3] However, true to the complaints given to the policemen, it also received media attention for its audacious display of multiple nude figures, both men and women. For example, an article from *Mainichi Shinbun* from the same year highlighted Sugimoto's drawing of "humanity in a bizarre example of nudist painting" in its headline.[4] Such contemporary newspaper reports demonstrated the public's fixation on Sugimoto's bold display of nudity within his mural.

When asked about why he painted nude figures on a religious mural, Sugimoto argued that he is following Indian artistic traditions, which he studied intensively during his time abroad in India. First, he claimed that he took inspiration from ancient Indian sculptures which were traditionally nude or carved with a thin layer of clothing that gave off the impression of nudity.

---

[1] Sugimoto Tetsurō, *Tsumura Betsuin Hekiga* (Ōsaka: Honganji Tsumura Betsuin, 1969), 18

[2] Kameda Masao, "Shūkyō-gaka no kyojin, Sugimoto Tetsurō [Giant of Religious Artists, Sugimoto Tetsurō]," in *Shūkyō Gaka Sugimoto Tetsurō [Religion Artist Sugimoto Tetsurō]*, ed. Rittō Rekichi Minzoku Historical and Culture Museum, (Rittō: Rittō Rekishi Minzoku Historical & Culture Museum and JAC Project,1998), 17

[3] Ibid., 16

[4] "Shichinen gakari no Daijigyō Banpaku made ni kansei — 'Ningen' kaku irei no Rataiga [Major work that took seven years, leading up to the World Exposition — portrayal of 'humanity' in bizarre example of nudist painting]," *Mainichi Shinbun.* January 4th, 1967

More importantly, however, Sugimoto argues that nudity in traditional Indian sculptures and figures made them more expressive and sentimental than East Asian figures because it allowed the figures to use their whole bodies to convey emotions. Unlike Chinese or Japanese figures who used only facial expressions and hands to convey emotions, as Sugimoto argues, Indian figures used their full body to express themselves. They emanate emotions through their elaborate and symbolic poses with their arms and legs and convey a sense of motion through their dynamic body language.[5] Sugimoto's intentions did not go unnoticed as newspaper reports praised the emotional intensity conveyed by the mural's figures, stating how they "captured the ugliness of humanity."[6]

Beginning as early as 1903, Japanese artists traveled to the South Asian country to study its art and natural scenery throughout the twentieth century. They took multiple artistic inspirations from India, from iconographies to general themes, and used them to create provocative Buddhist artworks, like Sugimoto's mural, after they returned to Japan. The actions of these itinerant Japanese artists raise interesting questions that reveal their unique approaches toward Buddhist art. Why were Japanese Buddhist artists drawn to India specifically? Why did this phenomenon occur at the turn of the century? How did Japan's interaction with India differ from other foreign cultures such as China and Europe?

Alongside Japan and China, India has long been regarded as part of Japan's traditional "Three-realm" worldview before it was replaced by Western geographical knowledge in the

---

[5] For more details on Sugimoto's explanation of Nudity, please look at Chapter 5

[6] "Shichinen gakari," *Mainichi Shinbun.* January 4th, 1967

nineteenth century.[7] Often referred to by the title of "Tenjiku" in pre-modern Japanese, India was long portrayed in Japanese Buddhist scriptures and popular imagination as the mythical homeland of Buddhism, visited only in fantasy or dream-like visions.[8] In contrast, direct contact between Japan and India was rare before the late nineteenth century, save for a couple of recorded instances. Instead of India, Japan looked toward China for guidance regarding Buddhist teachings and art, and any interaction between India and Japan was done indirectly through China. Japan's interactions with foreign countries became even more restricted when it adopted a strict isolationist policy, better known in Japan as the *Sakoku* policy, that lasted for more than two centuries from the seventeenth century to the late nineteenth century.

However, as Japan ended its isolationist policy and overseas travel became possible, India began to attract Buddhist scholars and artists alike. One event that contributed to Japan re-igniting its fascination with India is the 1893 World's Parliament of Religion, which was a major conference of religious leaders and scholars around the world at the World Columbian Exchange held in Chicago. While both Japan and India sent Buddhist representatives, it was through the efforts of prominent Indian Buddhist leaders such as Angarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) that India was firmly established and recognized internationally as the birthplace of Buddhism.

India further solidified its reputation as a Buddhist spiritual place in Japanese imagination after prominent Japanese scholar and cultural promoter, Okakura Kakuzō (1863-1913), visited the country and praised its spirituality in his book *Ideals of the East: with special reference to the Art of Japan*, one of the earliest and most influential books on Asian Art that Okakura very likely

---

[7] Suzuki Keiko, *The Tale of Tojin: Visualizing Others in Japanese Popular Art from Edo to Early Meiji (*PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2006), 49

[8] Stephan Kigensan Licha, "The Small Vehicle: The Construction of Hinayana and Japan's Modern Buddhism," *Monumenta Nipponica* 76, no. 2 (2021): 330

wrote when he was in India.[9] In his book, Okakura framed India, alongside China, as one of Asia's "classic civilizations" that Japan looked towards for its cultural development throughout history. The prologue, written by Okakura's colleague Sister Nivedita, described how Okakura defined the Asiatic cultures is fundamentally composed of "Chinese learning and Indian religion," which were both traditionally expressed in Japanese art.[10] In other words, Okakura framed India as Japan's spiritual counterpart that could ameliorate the "soullessness" or materialism of the nation; a sentiment that would be shared by many Japanese Buddhist scholars and artists as the country rapidly modernized.

More importantly, Okakura was one of the earliest cultural thinkers to encourage Japanese artists to travel to India. Through his communication with Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), a world-renowned Indian polymath, philosopher, and first Asian recipient of the Nobel Prize, Okakura arranged to have his students travel abroad to India to teach Japanese art techniques to the local artists. Additionally, he also encouraged them to seek artistic inspiration from Indian Buddhist art and culture, which he argues could serve as an artistic theme to rejuvenate Japanese art.[11] One of the most important Indian Buddhist sites that Okakura particular emphasized for Japanese artists and intellectuals to visit is the Ajanta Caves.

Located among the Sahyadri hills of India's Deccan plateau, the Ajanta Caves are an ancient series of Buddhist cave temples ranging from the 2nd-century BCE to the 8th-century

---

[9] Igarashi Masumi, *Drawn Toward India: Okakura Kakuzo's Interpretation of Rajendralala Mitra's Work in His Construction of Pan-Asianism and the History of Japanese Art(PhD diss*., University of North Carolina, 2010), 35

[10] Okakura Kakuzō, *The Ideals of the East : With Special Reference to the Art of Japan (*Stone Bridge Classics Ser. Berkeley, Calif: Stone Bridge Press, 2007), 5

[11] Micah Auerbach, *A Storied Sage: Canon and Creation in the Making of a Japanese Buddha (*Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 166

CE, renowned for its cave murals that depict various scenes from the life of Buddha. [12] By the early twentieth century, it became a crucial pilgrimage site for Japanese Buddhist artists and scholars after Japanese intellectuals and art historians, including Okakura Tenshin, proposed the theory that the ancient caves bear stylistic similarities with one of Japan's most important Buddhist cultural heritages: the Buddhist murals of Horyū-ji temple located at Nara.[13] Thus,Ajanta, and by association India, was touted as the origins of Japan's Buddhist artistic traditions, and several artists were attracted to the cultural link between India and Japan, visiting the ancient caves to copy its murals and gain inspiration for their own artworks. With the prominence of Ajanta among Japanese intellectuals and artists, India further cemented its reputation as an authority in Buddhist art and culture in Japan.

As the above examples demonstrate, India has held a special place in Japanese popular imagination as a spiritual place and served as a crucial inspiration for many modern Buddhist artists. Yet, there has been little scholarship on India's influence on modern Japanese art within the field of Japanese art history despite the rising trend of exploring Japan's transnational relationships within contemporary publications. In recent years, more Japanese art historians are beginning to analyze modern Japanese art within a larger context of its connections with other Asian countries.[14] Furthermore, such analyses were usually done within the framework of imperialism or colonialism as many scholars focused on artists and artworks related to Japan's overseas colonies during its imperialistic era, such as Taiwan, Korea, and parts of China. While

---

[12] Emiko Shimizu, "Kakuzō Okakura in cultural exchange between India and Japan," in *Culture as Power: Buddhist Heritage and the Indo-Japanese Dialogue,* ed. Madhu Bhalla (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021), 55

[13] Yasuko Fukuyama, "Japanese encounters with Ajanta," in *Culture as Power*, 189-190

[14] For more scholarship on Japanese art's transnational relationship, please consult *East Asian Art History in a Transnational Context* edited by Eriko Tomizawa-Kay and Toshio Watanabe.

this new trend of exploring Japan within a wider Asian context significantly contributed to a better understanding of Japan's transnational artistic exchanges, there are still many relatively unexplored areas, and the topic of Indo-Japanese artistic exchanges is a glaring example.

This lack of attention towards artistic exchanges between India and Japan has unfortunately placed some limitations on our understanding of certain topics in Japanese art history. First, it has contributed to another topic in Japanese art history becoming equally neglected: modern religious Japanese art. As previously established, the main draw of India for many Japanese during the 20th century was its reputation as a spiritual place, and several Japanese Buddhist artists successfully created innovative Buddhist art upon their return from India. Thus, an oversight of itinerant Buddhist artists who traveled to India has resulted in an incomplete comprehension of modern Buddhist art in Japan. This insufficient comprehension is compounded by the fact that studies on modern Japanese Buddhist art are already overshadowed by studies on Japanese pre-modern or ancient Buddhist art due to what some scholars described as a "presumption on the aesthetic superiority of early Japanese Buddhist cultural artifacts and a concomitant asserted decline in the institutional power of the religion after the sixteenth century in Japan."[15]

Additionally, insufficient considerations for Indo-Japanese interactions can potentially limit scholars' understanding of Japan's relationship with other Asian countries to only that of colonizer and colonized, and other analytical frameworks revolving around imperialism. While it is undeniable that recent efforts in studying Japan's relationship with other Asian cultures have contributed greatly to the field, the majority of studies are focused on Imperial Japan's

---

[15] Patricia Jane Graham, *Faith and Power in Japanese Buddhist Art, 1600-2005 (*Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 2

aggression towards its oversea neighbors. Examples include analyses of war paintings that portray Japan's activities in China and South East Asia, or studies of how artists from Japan's colonies, such as Taiwan and Korea, reacted against Japanese colonialism. What sets modern Indo-Japanese relationships apart from other Asian countries is that India was never directly colonized or invaded by Imperial Japan, and interactions between India and Japan primarily lie within the realms of religious or cultural exchanges rather than militaristic ones.

However, this is not to deny that Japanese intellectuals did not view India through a colonizer's gaze, portraying its people and culture as exotic and inferior. While many of them respected India for its spirituality and Buddhist connection with Japan, this respect was often used to justify Japan's imperial ambitions, claiming that Japan's spiritual bond with India legitimized its intervention and control of the South Asian cultural sphere, replacing Western colonial powers that had dominated India for centuries. A deep examination of Indo-Japanese artistic exchanges allows us to see the intricate ways that Japanese artists and scholars navigate between commending India for its spirituality and framing it as Japan's inferior to justify colonial aspirations. Such nuanced approach contrasted with Japan's more belligerent interactions with other Asian countries, presenting us with a new perspective on Japan's foreign interactions beyond overt militarism and imperialism.

A study of modern artistic interactions between India and Japan touches upon other understudied areas in Japanese art history and encourages new perspectives on Japan's artistic exchanges with foreign cultures. In this dissertation, I will examine the influences that Indian art and culture had on modern Japanese Buddhist art through the experiences and artworks of Japanese artists who traveled to the South Asian country. In looking at the Indian-themed

artworks produced by these itinerant Buddhist artists, I will analyze how they embodied changing perspectives toward Buddhism and its art in Japan, and how Japanese interactions with India contributed to such changes. Through my analysis, I argue that paintings produced by Japanese artists who traveled to India throughout the 20th-century captured simultaneously, not only the spirituality but also the exotic fantasies that many Japanese artists associated with India. Furthermore, such exotic fantasies were often embodied within the corporeal or materialistic aspects of the paintings: namely the physical bodies of Buddhist figures, illustrations of animals and plants, or even the artistic medium itself.

In other words, the most defining feature of Indian-themed paintings by Japanese artists is the precarious balance of "spirit' and "body" that Japanese artists strive to capture in their depictions of India. Additionally, I argue that such innovations in Buddhist paintings reflected the secularization and historicization of Buddhism in modern Japan. By analyzing how Japanese artists balanced the spiritual and exotic aspects of India in their art and how it relatedto modern transformations in Japanese Buddhism, this dissertation contributes to existing scholarship on Indo-Japanese artistic exchanges by linking the phenomenon to larger social and cultural changes in Japan.

State of the field

As mentioned above, the topic of Indo-Japanese artistic exchanges has been an obscure topic in the field of Japanese art history, often overshadowed by scholarship on Japan's interactions with its East Asian colonies, China, and the West in general. Thankfully, the topic began to attract scholarly interest mainly from the 1990s to the present day, with a majority of interest coming from Japanese scholars. Even though most writings on Japan's artistic

relationship with India came after 1990, one of the earliest scholars to write about this subject is Azuma Kazuo in his 1974 article "Modern Indian Art and Arai Kanpō (Kindai Indo-Bijutsu to Arai Kanpō)," which looks at the titular artist's engagement with Indian art. Azuma's article is a part of his larger book *Tagore's World (Tagōru no Sekai),* which details the life and thoughts of Rabindranath Tagore, a Bengali polymath whose conversations and camaraderie with the aforementioned Okakura Tenshin became a cornerstone of modern Indo-Japanese relationships and stimulus for many Japanese artists to travel to India. Azuma framed Arai Kanpō's interactions with Indian art within the legacy of Rabindranath and Okakura, and this emphasis on Rabindranath and Okakura would become a recurring theme in future scholarships on Indo-Japanese artistic interactions.

Following Azuma's article, writings on Indo-Japanese exchanges mainly fall into two categories. The first is surveys of various Japanese artists throughout the twentieth century who traveled to India, such as Inaga Shigemi's 2009 article "The Interaction of Bengali and Japanese Artistic Milieus in the First Half of the Twentieth Century."[16] However, even though such writings provide a window into the full history of Indo-Japanese engagements, very few went beyond describing the phenomenon to link it to larger cultural and social changes happening in Japan. The second type is writings that examine a single artist or a specific painting to derive deeper nuances on Indo-Japanese artistic exchanges. One example includes Narihara Yuki's analysis of a portrait of Shakyamuni titled *Śākyamuni's Departure* (fig 1.18) by Katsuta Shōkin (1879-1963). In her 2005 article, "Considerations of the Characteristics and Meaning of Katsuta Shokin's "Śākyamuni's Departure," Narihara highlights how Katsuta's painting reflected the

---

[16] Inaga Shigemi, "The Interaction of Bengali and Japanese Artistic Milieus in the First Half of the Twentieth Century (1901-1945): Rabindranath Tagore, Arai Kanpō, and Nandalal Bose," Japan Review 21 (2009): 149-81

"historicization" of Buddhist Studies in Japan during the early 20th century as Buddhist scholars and artists alike explore their religion's historic roots in India.[17] While such writings dove deeper beyond describing the phenomenon and provide us with insightful analyses, they are limited in scope by only focusing on one artist or painting. If we expand upon the observations scholars such as Narihara derived from their analyses, either by examining multiple artists or exploring the full oeuvre of one artist, we can potentially discover more interesting patterns and attain a more comprehensive picture of Indo-Japanese artistic interactions.

While many Japanese publications have tackled the topic of 20th-century artistic interactions between Japan and India, English language writings have been slow to pick up the subject. One of the earliest English publications exploring Indian-themed Japanese paintings was Miriam Wattles's 1996 article *The 1909 Ryūtō and the Aesthetics of Affectivity*, which revolves around the titular painting by Yokoyama Taikan, *Floating Lanterns* (fig 1.11). In a similar manner to Narihara's article, Wattles analyzed Yokoyama's painting to uncover larger concepts in Japanese interactions with Indian culture and art as she argues how it reflected the perspectives of Japanese audiences towards India where many felt a sense of spiritual unity, or "affectivity" as she described, between India and Japan yet also fantasized about India as an exotic place.[18]

Apart from Wattle's article, the subject of Indo-Japanese artistic exchanges was only touched upon lightly in English publications, but rarely the main topic of discussion. For example, the 6th chapter of *Japanese Painting and national identity* by Victoria Weston covers

---

[17] Narihara Yuki, "'Shutsujō Shyaka'no tokushitsu to imi ni kansuru kōsatsu[Examinations regarding the characteristics and meaning of *Śākyamuni's Departure*]," in *Bukkyo bijutsu to rekishi bunka* [Buddhist art and historical culture], ed. Manabe Shunshō (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2005), 549-569

[18] For more information on Yokoyama Taikan's "*Ryūtō"* please read chapter 1 of this dissertation and Miriam Wattle's article

the Pan-Asianist cultural movement under Okakura and Tagore and followed the activities of artists Yokoyama Taikan and Hishida Shunso's activities in India.[19] Similarly, Aida Yuen Wong's article *Landscapes of Nandalal Bose*, published in *Okakura Tenshin and Pan-Asianism*, also touches uponYokoyama and Hishida's engagement with Indian art and culture even though her paper is primarily on the titular Nandalal Bose.[20]

The most recent publication on the subject of modern Indo-Japanese artistic exchanges is from 2021 when the Mombusho Scholars Association of India (MOSAI) published a major compilation of English essays and articles on Indo-Japanese relationships titled *India-Japan Narratives: Lesser Known Historical and Cultural Interactions.* It contains two articles on the subject of artistic exchanges that shine a light on artists who were overlooked in previous scholarships. The first is an article titled *Katsuta Shokin: A Japanese Painter at the Governmental School of Art, Calcutta, 1905-1907* by Masumi Igarashi, which expands upon the aforementioned Katsuta that was discussed by Narihara. In her article, Igarashi recounts the life of Katsuta and explores the artist's lesser-known Indian-themed works, including several lost paintings, to demonstrate the unique ways that India inspired Japanese artists and encourage future studies on Indo-Japanese exchanges.

Apart from Igarashi's essay, there is also *Ruptures and Continuity in Pan-Asianism: New Insights into India-Japan Artistic Exchanges in the first half of the Twentieth Century* by Eve Loh Kazuhara. Kazuhara's essay followed a similar format to previous scholarships on Indo-Japanese interactions, recounting the history of Japanese artists who traveled to India starting

---

[19]Victoria Weston, *Japanese Painting and National Identity: Okakura Tenshin and His Circle* (University of Michigan, 2004)

[20] Aida Yuen Wong, "Landscapes Of Nandalal Bose (1882-1966): Japanism, Nationalism and Populism in Modern India," in *Okakura Tenshin and Pan-Asianism,* ed. Brij Tankha (Folkstonne: Brill, 2009), 93–110

with the earliest artists from 1903 such as Yokoyama Taikan and Hishida Shunso. However, she also included artists that were overlooked in previous writings, like Nōsu Kōsetsu (1885-1973) and Kiriya Senrin (1877-1932). Kazuhara was also the first scholar to categorize periods of Indo-Japanese interactions into two "waves." As Kazuhara described, the first wave was represented by Okakura Tenshin and his circle from the early 1900s, while the second wave described artists who traveled during the 1910s to 1920s due to a fascination with Indian culture that was happening in Japan's art and intellectual world during that time.[21] Both articles expanded upon previous works by looking at lesser-known Japanese artists, and both discussed the potential of future studies on the topic of Indo-Japanese exchanges that can reveal other artists or uncover more interesting observations.

As the above examples have shown, there has been significant progress in the study of modern Indo-Japanese artistic exchanges from the 1990s to today. However, as many of the authors pointed out, there are still many overlooked areas. First, the connection between the phenomenon of Japanese artists traveling to India and modern religious art is insufficiently explored, even though many Japanese artists who traveled to India were Buddhist and proclaimed India's religious importance. Furthermore, this oversight of Indo-Japanese exchanges' connection to religion also leads to certain artistic mediums getting overlooked, such as modern Japanese temple murals and other interior decorations. For example, artists such as Nōsu Kosetsu (1885-1973) and Sugimoto Tetsurō (1899-1985) both received commissions from

[21] This period of fascination is sometimes referred to as the "Tagore Boom" in Japan. Rabindranath Tagore is the first Asian recipient of the Nobel prize, and his 1917 visit to Japan was highly publicized. For more information on Tagore's visit to Japan and its effects, please see chapter 2

Buddhist temples to paint murals on their walls, and both artists used such opportunities to utilize what they learned and experienced in India to decorate temple interiors.

Finally, scholarship has rarely compared and contrasted itinerant Japanese artists to observe repeated patterns among artists who visited India, which can potentially reveal widespread perspectives toward India in Japanese society. In surveys and exhibition catalogs, examinations of thematic works by artists returning from India remained surface-level as authors only pointed out how the artworks captured Indian sceneries without examining the artist's motivations for doing so or what messages they intended to convey with the Indian iconography. Alternatively, academic articles have connected the artists' innovations to larger contexts of Japanese cultural relationships with India or transformations in Buddhist Studies. However, many of these articles are limited in scope as they often focus on only one artist or artwork. Few studies discern identity patterns and other repeated themes among Japanese artists who traveled to India. As the topic of Indo-Japanese exchanges continues to gain traction among Japanese art historical scholarship, these limitations can hopefully be overcome for a more insightful window into the complex but innovative ways Japanese artists engaged with Indian culture .

Methodology and Analytical Framework

This dissertation expands upon existing scholarship in Indo-Japanese artistic exchanges by highlighting shared themes and methods among Japanese artists who traveled to India and depicted its iconographies and sceneries among Buddhist works. It will connects them to deeper socio-cultural concepts that define Japan's perspectives towards India. In my analysis of paintings by these itinerant Japanese artists, I will focus on what I argue are the most defining characteristics of Indian-themed modern Japanese art, which sets it apart from Japan's depiction

of other countries: the precarious harmony of religious and corporeal themes, which embody Japanese fantasies of India's exoticism, that each artist strives to achieve on their canvas. In other words, for each artwork, I divide my examination into two areas of focus. First, I inspect how the artwork reflects spiritual and religious themes. Secondly, and most importantly, I focus on what I defined as the "corporeal" or materialistic aspects of each painting in this paper, which includes depiction of human bodies, animals and plants, and the physical landscape.

The first element Ilook for in Indian-themed Japanese paintings is religiosity. What made Indo-Japanese artistic exchanges stand out from Japan's interactions with other countries was the heavy emphasis on "spirituality." This isoften the Buddhist subject matter of the paintings, but in other cases can also refer to the artist's personal religious views or a more universal concept of spirituality not confined to a specific religion. However, my analysis does not simply identify the Buddhist subject matters in Indian-themed Japanese paintings. I argue that the paintings also reflect Buddhist developments in Japan during the early-to-mid twentieth century; a transition from the mystical and ritualistic version of Buddhism practiced in pre-modern Japan to a more empirical approach characterized by an exploration of the religion's roots in India. I will also take into consideration the artists' viewpoints on spirituality and how they express such views in their artworks. By examining Indian-themed paintings within a larger context of modern Buddhist developments and the artist's perspectives, I highlight religion's major role in defining Indo-Japanese artistic exchanges and influencing how Japanese artists depicted India.

Parallel to this paper's focus on religiosity in Indian-themed Japanese paintings is a deep examination of how such paintings experimented with "corporeal" themes and concepts. In other words, this dissertation considers how Indian-themed Japanese paintings captured the "body"

alongside the "spirit." I conceptualize the corporeal in a variety of interpretations and definitions. Generally, what I define as the "corporeal" refers to the secular elements of Indian-themed Buddhist paintings, specifically the Indian iconographies and symbols that Japanese artists incorporated into their works. I argue that with the incorporation of these "corporeal" elements, these artists used what they learned from India to create a new, more modern, kind of Buddhist art that diverged from its pre-modern ritualistic functions with a new emphasis on historicity, exoticism, or a more universal perspective of "spirituality" not tied to a single religion.

The first and simplest interpretation of the corporeal in paintings are depictions of human bodies, which I argue is one of the most crucial components that Japanese artists focused on in their Buddhist paintings after returning to India. Some artists, like Sugimoto, implemented the style and postures of figures from Indian art to create more dynamic and erotic figures that they claim are more expressive than conventional Japanese figures from ancient and pre-modern paintings. Meanwhile, artists such as Katsuta Shōkin explored the Indian identity of the historical Buddha through painting, taking inspiration from Indian ethnic features and the Ajanta Caves to create a new form of Buddha that reflected Indian influences. Such efforts were in line with the larger context of Buddhist revisionism in Japan, where Buddhist scholars explored thereligion's historicity and Indian roots. Throughout my analysis, I will focus on the human figures in the artworks: their posture, their form, and the meaning they symbolize. I also examine how the figures embodied each artist's philosophies or fantasies, or reflect larger themes associated with Japanese perspectives toward India that were disseminated within Japan's intellectual circles.

While my examination of human body depictions is my primary focus in the discernment of the "corporeal" from paintings produced by Japanese artists returning from India, it is not the

only "corporeal" element that I examine in their artworks.. While many Japanese artists were fascinated with how ancient Indian sculptures and cave paintings from Ajanta depict the human body, others were just as attracted to India's exotic animals, fauna, and landscapes. For bird-and-flower painters such as Ishizaki Kōyō, the exotic birds and plants of India inspired him to capture their vibrant colors and dynamism and fulfill his fantasies of India as a spiritual land of untainted nature.[22] Other artists, such as Sugimoto Tetsurō, were attracted to famous Indian landmarks like the Himalayan mountains, which garnered reputation among Japanese intellectual circles as the origin of many religions and a symbol of Asian spiritual unity during the mid-to-late twentieth century.[23] In the works of such artists, spirituality is embodied within the natural scenery depicted within the artwork and reflects the Japanese imagination of India as a spiritual land with an untainted nature that offsets a rapidly modernizing Japan.

Through my analytical framework, I argue that through their experiences in India, Japanese Buddhist artists produced innovative Buddhist paintings where the emphasis is less on the artwork's function as a religious object and more on its ability to embody the Japanese imagination of India, either in the figure of Buddha, other dynamic figures, or the natural landscape. Furthermore, I examine how the ideas and concepts that were embodied in the bodies and iconographies in such Indian-themed Japanese art reflect changes in Buddhist thought in Japan, particularly its new emphasis on the religion's historicity and its origins in India. By examining how they balanced religious themes with the corporeal aspects within their Indian-themed artworks, this paper will draw a connection between the artistic approaches of Japanese

---

[22] Birds-and-flowers painting, known as *Kachō-ga* in Japan, is a traditional genre of painting where artists depict birds and other small animals accompanied with plants.

[23] For more information, please look at chapter 4 and the writings of Buddhist scholar Takakusu Junjirō.

artist in adapting Indian subject matters and styles with the place of India in contemporary Japanese popular imagination and scholarly works, which transforms throughout the twentieth century following changing relationships between the two countries.

Chapter Organization

This dissertation loosely follows a chronological order in exploring Indian influences on Japanese Buddhist art; starting with the earliest interactions between the two countries during the early twentieth century and ending with the postwar era. Each chapter focuses on one of many itinerant artists who traveled to India as case studies that demonstrate the innovative ways Japanese artists engaged with Indian art in their works. The examination of each artist follow a similar format. First, I compare the artworks they produced before and after their travel to India to highlight how their time abroad transformed their artwork. Next, I closely examine primary documents and other writings closely associated with the artists and their works to discern the messages conveyed by the styles and iconographies that the artists implemented in their Indian-themed works, how the works were received by critics and the general public, and how they relate to wider socio-cultural developments happening in Japan.

Chapter one provides a foundation on the topic of modern Indo-Japanese artistic interactions by covering the early periods of exchanges between the two countries during the early 20th century (1903 - 1916). The chapter also recounts the beginning of modern Indo-Japanese artistic relationships initiated by the historical meeting between Japan's Okakura TKakuzō and India's Rabindranath Tagore, where the two men arranged for the first Japanese artists to arrive in India to study its art: Yokoyama Taikan and Hishida Shunsō. Not only are Yokoyama and Hishida two of Japan's most well-known modern artists, but they are also the

most prominent students from Okakura's circle who fully embraced their teacher's philosophy of Asian unity. An examination of Yokoyama and Hishida's paintings will demonstrate how early Japanese artists engaged with Indian materials and themes in their art. I argue that both artists started with exotic portrayals of Indian people and culture, but gradually shifted to more sensitive and delicate representations as they began to appreciate the spiritual unity between Japan and India.

In addition to Yokoyama and Hishida, this chapter also looks at Katsuta Shōkin, the third artist to visit India under Okakura's arrangement. Even though very little remained of his India-related artworks except for one painting and some rough sketches, Katsuta provided detailed insights into the state of modern Indian art and its relationship to Japanese art in newspaper articles. His sketches and remaining art also reveal his efforts to create a Buddhist art that explores the religion's roots in India and the biography of Buddha bymimicking figural portrayals in Indian art in his strive towards authenticity. Through an analysis of Yokoyama Taikan, Hishida Shunso, and Katsuta Shokin, the first chapter highlights the specific aspects of Indian culture and art that attracted Japanese artists and how they engaged with those aspects in their art.

Chapter two explores how Japanese artists adopted the figural styles and compositions of ancient Indian Buddhist art, particularly those from the Ajanta Caves. Furthermore, I examine the "Indianesque" transformation of Japanese Buddhist figures within the context of early 20th-century discussions regarding the dichotomy between spirituality and materialism within art in both Indian and Japanese writing. This chapter primarily focuses on the career and artworks of Arai Kanpō as a case study, although it will also draw connections to other transformations

happening in Japan's art world, especially new approaches to Buddhist art, during the time that Arai was active. Even though many Japanese artists visited and studied the Ajanta Cave murals before Arai, he was the first artist to lead a fully sponsored team to copy the ancient Indian murals. Moreover, the myriad figural paintings that Arai created and submitted to annual exhibitions after he returned to Japan presents us with an exemplary visualization of Japanese artists' perspectives toward Indian bodies and their representation in art. Through an examination of Arai's writings, such as his diary detailing his time in India and other publications, I explore Arai's activities in India, his outlook towards the Ajanta cave paintings, and how he implemented what he learned at Ajanta into his paintings. In addition to his time at Ajanta, I also discern from Arai's writings his perspectives toward Indian people, particularly their bodies, and their depiction in art.

I argue that through a combination of his studies of ancient Indian figures and personal observations of Indian women in their daily activities, Arai attempted to construct a new kind of Buddhist figure that simultaneously embodied his exotic fantasies of India and the sentimentality and passion he perceived were embodied within Indian figures. Characterized by their partial nudity and dynamic poses, Arai's Buddhist figures defied Buddhist conventions and boldly explored the potential exotic femininity within the genre of Buddhist paintings. I argue that Arai's controversial paintings reflect the romanticization of history and foreign cultures that were spreading among Japanese intellectual circles, whereas India, as the birthplace of Buddhism, was fantasized as Japan's long-lost spiritual past.

Chapter three focuses on the artist Nōsu Kōsetsu as a window into the diplomatic roles that Japanese artists served between India and Japan. Nōsu was one of Arai Kanpō's assistants

when Arai was copying the ancient murals at the Ajanta Caves as part of the Kokka project. However, he later received an opportunity to create a mural when the Maha Bodhi Society, a major Buddhist revivalist organization founded by Angarika Dharmapala, requested Japanese artists to decorate the interior walls of one of its newly-founded temple in 1931: the Mulagandha Kuti Vihara Temple located in Sarnath, India. By using Nōsu and his mural at Sarnath as a case study, this chapter will examine how Japanese artists reconciled the stylistic and thematic differences between Indian and Japanese art in their attempts to create transcultural Buddhist art.

In this chapter, I use the term "Buddhist transculturalism" to describe the pan-asian message that artists like Nōsu strove to express in their works; an emphasis and celebration of the shared religious and artistic conventions across Asia. In contrast to earlier artists who were more drawn to India's exoticism, Nōsu was more interested in the fundamental differences between Indian and East Asian Buddhist art, including Chinese Buddhist art. Furthermore, this interest was not exclusive to Nōsu as scholars contemporaneous to him also made similar explorations into how different Buddhist traditions between China, India, and Japan led to diverse artistic conventions across Asia. For Nōsu Kōsetsu, not only did he face the challenge of discerning diverse Buddhist artistic traditions across Asia, but he must also reconcile such artistic differences in his execution of his mural in India.

This chapter primarily focuses on Nosu's mural in India. I highlight the challenges that Nōsu faced while executing his murals: his attempts to find a compromise between different styles and artistic techniques to create mural art that appealed to both Indian and Japanese viewers, his exploration of narrative techniques on the walls of the temple, and his efforts to express Buddhism's role as a unifying force between Japan and India. I engage in a close reading

of Nōsu's publications on his mural progress in the bulletin of the India-Japan association. I also examine how Nōsu's mural tackled racial representations of Indian people and highlight how some of the artist's figure touched upon discriminatory views toward Indians and contemporary socio-politcal issues that happened concurrent to Nosū's execution of his temple mural.

Chapter four briefly shifts away from looking at Buddhist figures to artworks that explored India's natural scenery through the life and career of Ishizaki Kōyō. Asa a renowned bird-and-flower artist in Japan, many of Ishizaki's India-inspired paintings were illustrations of peacocks and other avians in tropical landscapes whose connection to India's tropical landscape was not immediately evident. However, with an an an analysis of Ishizaki's artworks produced after his travels in India, we can see that not only did Ishizaki imbue his depictions of nature with romantic and imaginative themes, but his artworks also reflected investigations into the connection between nature and Buddhism by Takakusu Junjirō (1866-1945), one of Japan's foremost Buddhist scholar of the twentieth century and an acquaintance of Ishizaki. Furthermore, as a practitioner of Rinpa-style Japanese painting, Ishizaki's artworks invite showcased the artist's creativity at combining diverse styles and themes. The ways he combined Indian subject matters with Japanese conventional styles demonstrated, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the challenge of reconciling the artistic differences between India and Japan that many Japanese artists returning from India faced.

Apart from tropical birds andflora, Ishizaki also took an interest in the Himalayan mountain ranges, which he eagerly visited during his time in India and depicted in his art. One of his most prominent depictions of them is his twelve-panel sliding-door painting, *Rainbow Pheasant* (*Kō-Chi,* fig. 4.11), located at Kōyasan Kongōbu-ji temple. With its vivid display of

Himalayan hibiscus and monal amidst a mountain backdrop*Rainbow Pheasant* serves as an exemplar of how Japanese scholars and artists drew links between Indian landscapes and Japanese artistic values regarding nature. Decorating the interiors of a temple guesthouse with a misty mountainous landscape, I argue that through his depictions of the Himalayas, Ishizaki's art embodied the ideals of Takakusu, who proposed the theory that the Himalayas was the birthplace of various religions and framed the mountains as a symbol of Asian spiritual unity. Additionally, I will also demonstrate how Ishizaki's interest in the Himalayas is connected to traditional Japanese Buddhist mountain worship. This connection is especially transparent with his sliding-door painting at one of Japan's most important mountain temples, Kōyasan Kongobuji Temple.

Chapter five focuses on the works of "religious artist" Sugimoto Tetsurō to explore how Japanese artists looked to Indian art for inspiration for their modern religious murals. Similar to the other Japanese artists discussed in this dissertation, Sugimoto Tetsurō took great interest in the Ajanta cave murals and traveled there to copy and study them. However, what sets him apart from his predecessors, who focused on the iconographies, religious themes, and perceived exoticism at Ajanta, is that Sugimoto was more interested in how ancient artists at Ajanta organized the figural depictions and narrative format of their cave paintings.. As reflected in the essays and books he wrote after he traveled in India, Sugimoto pondered on the scarcity of religious murals in modern Japan and what artists could learn from Ajanta to bring religious themes into public spaces. He also discussed the role of religious art in modern society and his attempts at breaking some of its conventions, most notably in his controversial depictions of nudity in public religious murals.

Finally, I must emphasize that while this dissertation revolves around the topic of Indo-Japanese artistic exchanges, it is fundamentally a Japanese art history study and will only focus on Japanese artists. I acknowledge that the full story of artistic exchanges between Indian and Japanese artists is multifaceted and entailed many fascinating developments, and both Indian and Japanese artists learned much from each other to advance the arts of their respective countries. Unfortunately, my unfamiliarity with Indian art history and culture hinders my ability to offer a cohesive analysis of the full impact of Japanese artists on modern Indian art and its evolution.

Chapter 1: Re-defining Buddha — Early Exchanges and Depicting Indian Bodies

Regarding the initiation of modern Indian and Japanese artistic exchanges, most scholarship points to the 1902 meeting in India between the two countries' leading cultural figures. First, from Japan, was Okakura Kakuzō (1863-1913): Japan's central promoter of Oriental art and culture and the director of Japan Art Institute (*Nihon Bijutsu-in)*, one of the nation's most significant art organizations. Meeting with him was the Indian polymath Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), whose family was at the forefront of an Indian art revivalist movement known as the "Bengal Renaissance." Rabindranath also founded a prominent university named Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan, West Bengal. The meeting between Rabindranath and Okakura resulted in a strong friendship between the two men and an agreement for Okakura to send students from his academy to Rabindranath's school to foster artistic exchanges between Japan and India. While there were many preceding cultural and religious exchanges between India and Japan, it was the meeting between Okakura and Rabindranath that commenced the first modern artistic exchanges between the two countries. The arrangement between the two men led to the first Japanese artists to arrive in India, paving the way for more Japanese artists to travel to the country throughout the twentieth century. Thus, the contribution of Okakura and Rabindranath towards initiating modern Indo-Japanese artistic exchanges holds undeniable significance.

While this narrative highlighted how the encounter between India and Japan's respective cultural leaders led to the first Japanese artists to travel to India and was often promoted as an example of Indo-Japanese cultural camaraderie, the deeper story of why this meeting happened in the first place has sometimes been overlooked. The meeting between Rabindranath and

Okakura illustrated larger, more complex developments in Japanese Buddhism during the early twentieth century. Years before the two men met, Japanese scholars had been changing its perspective towards Buddhism and gaining interest in India. Buddhist clerical circles adopted academic and interpretive approaches from Western-styled Buddhist studies and Japanese scholars uncovered the history of Buddhism's origins in India and the figure of the Śākyamuni, Buddhism's historical founder.

This revolution in Buddhist studies led to the emergence of a new kind of Buddhist art that diverged from conventions of Japanese Buddhist art by becoming more "Indianized." For example, paintings of Buddhist stories began to incorporate figures with Indian ethnic features or attire. Indian female figures also appeared more prominently as exotic icons. Such provocative paintings came primarily from itinerant Japanese artists who traveled to India for inspiration, attracted by its reputation as the sacred birthplace of Buddhism. Upon their arrival, they enthusiastically studied India's ancient sculptures, visual arts, and local peoples to develop new types of Buddhist figures. These figures visualized Indian ethnicity and culture, demonstrated Japan's academic shift to Buddhist teachings, a shift that emphasized the religion's Indian origins. This emphasis on Indian bodies was a signature characteristic of early twentieth-century Japanese Buddhist art.

Simultaneously, with multiple portrayals of Indian women by Japanese artists from this period, we can speculate that this tendency to portray India as an exotic and feminized "other" to Japan acted as a visual strategy to establish a hierarchy that placed India as inferior to Japan. After all, Japan itself experienced similar attitudes from Western colonial powers who visually represented Japan as a feminine and inferior counterpart. Thus, in India, Japanese scholars and

artists found an opportunity to assert the superiority of Japan to counter-balance the hierarchy established by Western powers.

This chapter traces how the development of Buddhist studies along the lines of Western academicism led to India's becoming the principal reference for modern Japanese Buddhist art and an essential destination for artists seeking inspiration. It highlights how this academic shift motivated the first generation of itinerant Japanese artists to India, namely the students of Okakura's teachings, to create a new, more modern kind of Buddhist art that emphasized the religion's Indian origins. While this chapter focuses on Buddhist art, it also acknowledges that Japanese artists in India took inspiration from diverse sources including local people and Hindu art. Thus, this chapter will also cover the creative ways that Japanese artists sought out references beyond Buddhist art to construct Indian figural types in their art.

Additionally, with an examination of the Indian-themed works produced by the first Japanese artists in India, this chapter also explores the earliest instances of Buddhist art conveying the ideology of Pan-Asianism: the modern belief of Asian unity against Western Imperialism, which Okakura Tenshin fervently promoted; one that emphasized the spiritual unity among Asian cultures, especially between India and Japan, to act as a counterbalance against Western materialism.[24] In his quest for Pan-Asianism, Okakura advised Japanese artists to study Buddhist art in India, which he claimed was a crucial source that could rejuvenate Japanese traditional art. He encouraged his students to create art that embodied Asian values and artistic traditions as a counter against the influx of Western art in Japan, which he saw as threatening Japan's traditions. Taking their teacher's advice to heart, Okakura's students visualized their

---

[24] Richard M Jaffe,*Seeking Śākyamuni: South Asia in the Formation of Modern Japanese Buddhism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 17-18

teacher's Pan-Asian ideology by creating artworks that referenced both Indian and Japanese conventions. For example, some students portrayed Indian subject matter using Japanese techniques and others combined Indian and Japanese styles and motifs as a symbolic gesture to unite the two diverse cultures.

By recounting the transformations in Buddhist understanding in Japan during the early twentieth century, tracing its connection to the first Japanese artists to travel to India, and contextualizing the artworks they produced within such developments, this chapter lays down the foundations of 20th century Indo-Japanese artistic exchanges. It highlights the inspirations that Japanese artists looked for in India and explores recurring themes that appeared in the works they produced. The themes that early Japanese artists embodied in their Indian-themed paintings, such as notions of Indian exotic beauty and historical Buddhist paintings, become recurring themes in the artworks of future Japanese travelers to India. Even though later artists developed new styles and iconographies, the concepts that they strove to capture shared many parallels with the interests of the first generation. Thus, a detailed recount of the early years of Indo-Japanese artistic exchanges, including associated artists and their work, can provide us with an essential foundational understanding that can help us examine the works of all Japanese artists who traveled to India throughout the twentieth century.

Early 20th-century Buddhist Studies in Japan: Discovering the Indian Connection

As previously mentioned, the years leading up to Okakura and Rabindranath's meeting (from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century) were classified by major changes in Japanese understanding of Buddhism and its relationship with India. While many Japanese had known that Buddhism originated in India ever since pre-modern times, few displayed an accurate

understanding of the place. Commonly referred to as *Tenjiku*, India was often portrayed as a mythical land that was seldom visited by Japanese Buddhists outside of stories and dream-like visions.[25] Furthermore, while most Japanese knew Buddhism originated in India, not many possessed a precise comprehension on the differences in Buddhist practices between India and Japan. To begin with, Indian Buddhist traditions lie within what contemporary scholars identify as *Theravada* Buddhism in current Buddhist nomenclature: the original form of Buddhism founded in ancient India and characterized by its adherence to the teachings of Śākyamuni, the historical Buddha and founder of the religion.

In contrast to India, Buddhist practices in Japan fall under the overarching category of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. Even though Mahāyāna Buddhism also originated from India, it adopted more ritualistic practices and spread to East Asia to places such as China, Korea, and Japan, becoming the dominant religion of these regions throughout East Asian History. In today's scholarship, Mahāyāna Buddhism was commonly framed as the counterpart to Theravada Buddhism and used as an umbrella term to describe diverse schools of practices across Asia. By the late nineteenth century, Japanese Buddhist scholars have also begun to use the term "Eastern Buddhism" as a synonym to Mahāyāna Buddhism distinguish their religious practices from Indian traditions.[26] Unlike Indian Buddhism, East Asian Buddhism deified the Buddha and portrayed the figure as a divine cosmic god rather than a historical spiritual leader. Additionally, in medieval and pre-modern Japan, Buddhist devotees worshipped a pantheon of deities and

---

[25] Licha, 330

[26] Snodgrass, Judith M. "Japan's Contribution to Modern Global Buddhism: The World's Parliament of Religions Revisited," *The Eastern Buddhist*, New Series, Vol. 43, No. 1/2 (Japan: Eastern Buddhist Society, 2012): 83

Bodhisattvas in addition to the historical Śākyamuni.[27] Admittedly, in Japanese Buddhist practices, the figure of Śākyamuni does appear among the many incarnations of Buddha and other deities as an idol of worship and devotion.

However, this historical identity tends to be downplayed in favor of a more divine representation.[28] This is most evident in the theory of *Trikāya* or "three bodies" from Mahayana Buddhist doctrines, which proposes that the Buddha possesses three distinct incarnations or bodies: his *dharmakāya* or "body of truth," his *sambhogakāya* or "body of reward," and finally his *nirmānakāya* or "body of transformation." Continually, Śākyamuni is commonly associated with the "body of transformation," *nirmānakāya*, where the Buddha physically manifested on Earth as the historical founder of Buddhism to guide sentient beings.[29] As the theory of *Trikāya* showed, while Japanese devotees acknowledged the existence of Śākyamuni, they perceived him as simply the physical representation of the Buddha, lesser in importance to other more metaphysical and divine forms.

While this was the conventional portrayal of Śākyamuni in Japanese traditions leading up the the pre-modern period, Japanese Buddhist scholars gained a renewed interest in the historical Buddha as Japan transitioned to the late-nineteenth century due to exposure to European scholarship on Buddhism. As Japan underwent intense modernization in the Meiji period (1869-1912), opportunities for overseas travel opened up and Japanese scholars were able to study Buddhism according to Western scholarly methodologies in Europe. Notable individuals

---

[27] Auerback, 3-4

[28] Ibid., 4

[29] Auerback, 13. For a detailed explanation on the *Trikāya* and Śākyamuni's place in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, please see page 87 to 90 of Snodgrass's *Japan's Contribution to Modern Global Buddhism: The World's Parliament of Religions Revisited*

included Nanjō Bunyū (1849 –1927) and Kitabatake Dōryū (1820-1907). Both traveled to London and studied under the philologist Max Müller (1823-1900), one of the leading figures in oriental and Buddhist studies at the time.[30] Under the influence of Western scholarship, Japanese scholars and artists began to apply a scientific and historical approach to their study of Buddhism.

Furthermore, the historical approach adopted by Japanese scholars paralleled how British and Indian scholars approached Buddhist studies from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. Buddhism as a religion was re-discovered and revived in modern India through archaeological efforts. Decades before Japan opened its doors to Western scholarship, Buddhism in India had been in decline for centuries due to religious competition with other major religions such as Hinduism and Islam as well as other socio-political factors. First, fierce hostilities from Brahmanism, progenitors of Hindu practices during the Vedic period (1500 B.C - 500 A.D), led to persecutions and forced assimilation of Buddhists in India.[31] Buddhism faced further challenges with the arrival of Islam into India under Turkish invaders and the Mughal Empire, resulting in the destruction of several Buddhist sites and kingdoms.[32] By the nineteenth century, Buddhism was only practiced by a small handful of communities across India with several of its religious sites in ruins.

However, it was also in the nineteenth century when Buddhism experienced a resurgence as British archaeologists and officials in India slowly re-discovered and recorded Buddhist ruins

---

[30] Harding, John S., *Mahayana Phoenix: Japan's Buddhist at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions,* American University Studies, Series Vii, Theology and Religion, Vol. 270, (New York: Lang Publishing, 2008), 30

[31] D. L. Ramteke, *Revival of Buddhism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep, 1983), 25-29

[32] Ibid., 36-37

across India, piecing together the history of the religion. Furthermore, the recovery of Buddhist sites helped restore pilgrimage practices for Buddhist practitioners in India, helping the religion regain some prominence and gain more followers.[33] One of the most important pioneers in Buddhist revival in India was the Sri Lankan monk Anagarika Dharmapāla (1864-1933), who helped institutionalize Buddhism in India. He established the Maha Bodhi Society in Calcutta in 1891, which helped reinvigorate networks of pilgrimages, built new temples across India, and attracted global followers to the religion.[34] Thus, as Japanese scholars began studying Buddhism's origin and development in India, they were similarly learning about a newly recovered religion. Continually, Japanese scholars were also aware of the decline of Buddhism in Indian history. For example, *A Comprehensive History of Buddhism in India and China [Indoshina Bukkyō Tōshi]* by Itō Yoshikata (1885-1969), published as early as 1901, contained a chapter detailing how Buddhism fell in India, followed by its survival by spreading Eastward to China, Korea, and finally, Japan.[35] Unfortunately, as discussed below, the decline of Buddhism in India was also used by some Japanese Buddhist apologists to justify the superiority of East Asian Buddhist practices over Indian Buddhism, establishing a hierarchy that placed Indians as inferior to Japanese.

As Japan discovered more about the newly revised Buddhism in India, Western publications from Europe and America on the life of Buddha were also translated and distributed

---

[33] Ibid., 43-46.

[34] Douglas Ober, *Dust on the Throne: The Search for Buddhism in Modern India,* (California: Stanford University Press, 2023), 21-22. For more information on Anagarika Dharmapāla and the Maha Bodhi Society, please see chapter 3.

[35] Itō Yoshikata, *A Comprehensive History of Buddhism in India and China [Indoshina Bukkyō Tōshi], (Kendōshoin,* 1901).

across Japan by the 1890s, which became an attractive topic among Japan's intellectual and artistic circles.[36] Examples include the 1894 book *The Gospel of Buddha* by Paul Carus (1852-1919), which was translated into Japanese by religious scholar Suzuki Daisetsu (a.k.a. D. T. Suzuki, 1870–1966) and read widely by the Japanese public.[37] Through interactions with Western scholarly knowledge and distributed publications, Japanese Buddhist intellectuals began to change their understanding of Buddhism with an affirmation of India as the birthplace of Buddhism and a renewed interest in the character of Śākyamuni.

Furthermore, under Western scholarship's influence, India rapidly garnered interest from Japanese Buddhists and many designated it as an attractive, even essential, destination for Buddhist pilgrims to visit. With the possibility of international travel by the turn of the twentieth century, India went from an imagined land to a crucial destination in the pursuit of Buddhist knowledge for Japanese priests and intellectuals. For example, on his way back to Japan from Europe, Kitabatake visited Buddhist archaeological sites across India associated with the life of Śākyamuni.[38] Most notably, Shaku Sōen (1860-1919) traveled to Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka) to study the precepts of Theravada Buddhism and toured religious sites in India.[39] The journeys and activities of these early Japanese explorers in India would later become the archetypal pilgrimage for future Japanese travelers, including artists, to follow.[40]

---

[36] Auerback, 165-166

[37] Ibid., 204

[38] Jaffe, 29-31.

[39] Harding, 66-67

[40] For more information on early Japanese pilgrims to India and their effects on future travelers, see Chapter 1 of Richard Jaffe's *South Asian Encounters*

Yet, even though the travels of these early Japanese travelers ignited fascination towards India as the spiritual birthplace of Buddhism, this did not stop prejudicial depictions of India from appearing from such early interactions. Even though India garnered respect from Japan's intellectual crowd for its religiosity, the subcontinent was also stereotyped for being superstitious and backwards. Moreover, Japan also looked down on India as a country humiliatingly subjugated by European colonial powers, a clear indication of their inferiority to a modernized Japan. Such prejudicial views made an appearance in artistic representations from the time, best shown through a late 19th-century woodblock print showing Kitabatake Dōryū's supposed discovery of Śākyamuni tomb in India (fig 1.1). In the woodblock print's representation, Kitabatake was dressed as a modern man, in Western clothing, standing as equals to the image of the Buddha. Additionally, the print also showed Śākyamuni shining a divine light on the Japanese explorers, illuminating them as the honorable inheritors of Buddhist traditions, the modern country that shall keep Buddhist traditions alive. In contrast, the Indian followers were depicted as half-dressed, dark-skinned, and kneeling, depicted as primitive backward people who blindly follows superstitions.[41] As this print showed, despite Japanese fascination towards India, few individuals extended such admiration towards the local populace of India who were portrayed as primitive and superstitious to accentuate Japan's modern developments.

Examining these derogatory portrayal alongside the materials with which Japanese Buddhist scholars engaged with at the time, we can speculate that such representations came from a sense of competition between Japanese and Indian Buddhism. As Stephen Kigensan Licha described, many Japanese Buddhist scholars objected to Western academia's presentation of

---

[41] Jaffe, 31-32

Indian Buddhism as the "pure" Buddhism over Japan's *Mahāyāna* Buddhist traditions, which Westerners deemed as superstitious.[42] Fighting against Western scholarship's dismissive attitude towards their practices, Japanese Buddhist apologists used various strategies to fashion their Buddhist traditions as a modern religion that is more philosophical and rationalized.[43]

As the woodblock print featuring Kitabatake demonstrated, Indian Buddhist practices were portrayed as more primitive and inferior, framing Japanese practices as more modern and scholarly in comparison. Through such visualizations, Japanese artists fought back against Western scholarship, which favored Indian over Japanese Buddhism as the more "authentic" Buddhism.[44] Many Japanese intellectuals regarded India as an Asian country humiliatingly subjugated by European powers, and they associated Indian Buddhism with a "lesser" form of Buddhism practiced by colonized people.[45] This condescending perspective towards Indian people came as a result of Japan's humiliating subjugation under Euroamerican colonial powers during the late 19th century when they were deemed as "inferior races" under a Western racial hierarchy. Thus, as a growing power in Asia, Japan adopted the same racial hierarchy that the West used to demean them and used it to place other Asian cultures underneath them to resist their feeling of inferiority.[46] While Japanese Buddhists acknowledged the scholarly and religious significance of India, they also perceived it as a competitor for international recognition and a target to frame as an inferior race to bolster their own sense of superiority.

---

[42] Licha, 330

[43] Snodgrass, 83

[44] Jaffe, 30-31

[45] Licha, 330-331

[46] Rotem Kowner, "'Lighter than Yellow, but not Enough': Western Discourse on the Japanese 'Race', 1854-1904," *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 1, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 108-110

Japan's mixed perception towards India was also prominently displayed at the World Parliament of Religions, a conference of world religions held at the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, which played a crucial role in establishing India's importance in Japanese Buddhist Studies. Additionally, it was at this event that scholars from around the world delineated the framework for Buddhist nomenclature. Many of the aforementioned terminologies such as *Theravada, Mahāyāna*, and other Buddhist classifications underwent clarification. One of the invitees at the Parliament was the Sri Lankan Buddhist leader Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) as the representative of Theravada Buddhism. Angarika helped India be recognized globally as the birthplace of Buddhism. At the same event, Japanese delegates also attended to represent their version of Buddhism, which laid a firm foundation for the dichotomy between *Mahāyana* (Japanese) and Theravada (Indian) Buddhism.[47] However, while the World Parliament of Religions helped incite global interest in India and differentiated between Japanese and Indian Buddhism, it also allowed the Japanese Buddhist delegates to subtly present a Buddhist hierarchical structure that framed *Mahāyāna* Buddhism as superior to Indian Buddhism. For example, attendants at the congregation gave Indian Buddhism the label of *Hīnayāna* Buddhism, meaning the "lower vehicle" acting as the counterpart to *Mahāyana* Buddhism, the "greater vehicle." Such verbal strategies acted as another example of Japanese Buddhists framing their practices as superior.

From a fascination with India and Śākyamuni to framing Theravada Buddhism as inferior, there were a range of perceptions towards India and its version of Buddhism among early Japanese Buddhist scholars and apologists, and their perspectives will have some parallels

---

[47] Ibid., 332

with Japanese Buddhist artists' perception of the subcontinent following the World Parliament of Religion. Even though many respected India as an authority on Buddhism, many also stereotyped the country and its people as an exotic "Other" in painting. For example, some painters portrayed Indian people, especially women, as dark-skinned and scantily dressed. Others featured India's wild tropical vegetation and animals as backdrops in their works, creating a romanticized picture of a foreign and ancient land that was technologically inferior but spiritually superior to Japan.

Effect on modern Japanese art — Okakura Kakuzō and "new Buddhist art"

As Japanese scholars intensified their focus on the history of Buddhism in Japan and the figure of Śākyamuni, the transformation naturally affected Japan's artistic circles, which saw great potential for new subject matters in the narrative of Śākyamuni's biography. Blurring the lines between religious and historical paintings, artists began to depict episodes from Buddha's life and experimented with new visual strategies that presented Śākyamuni as an Indian man, rather than the cosmic deity that was worshipped for centuries in Japan. Furthermore, the individual who most fervently transferred such developments to the art world was Okakura Kakuzo. Okakura was one of the most important figures in modern Japanese art history, known for his endeavors in defending Japan's artistic traditions as the nation rapidly modernized. He was the director of Japan's prestigious Tokyo School of Fine Arts (*Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō)* from 1887 until his resignation in 1898. Bringing several of his closest students with him, Okakura founded the competing Japan Art Institute, dedicated to the study of Japanese-style painting, better known as *nihonga*. Thus, many of Okakura's students went on to become renowned nihonga artists, such

as Yokoyama Taikan (1868-1958), Hishida Shunso (1874-1911), and Shimomura Kanzan (1873-1930).

In modern Japanese art history, nihonga is often presented as the counterpart to Japanese Western-style painting, or y*ōga*, and used to describe a diverse array of artworks that utilized traditional Japanese themes, materials, and techniques. However, it does not follow that nihonga artists have been strict followers of conventions. The Nihonga artists in Okakura's circle often clashed with conservative artists due to their eccentric techniques and themes in their attempt to "modernize" Japanese painting. One example is the creation of the *mōrōtai* style, which is best represented by Yokoyama Taikan's *Towing a Boat* (fig 1.2). Usually translated as "vague" or "hazy" style, *mōrōtai* included a lack of outlines and strong contrasts between light and dark areas which created a foggy ambiance, hence its name.[48] While the style was not well-received in Japan, it was better received by Indian artists when Yokoyama and Hishida introduced it during their time abroad, further encouraging artistic exchanges between Indian and Japanese artists.[49]

Apart from encouraging his fellow artists to try new styles and techniques, Okakura emphasized the importance of Buddhist art in modernizing nihonga. With India garnering worldwide interest as the birthplace of Buddhism following the World Parliament of Religion, Okakura encouraged his students to travel to India to rediscover their nation's spiritual roots. More specifically, he wanted Japanese artists to study India's ancient Buddhist arts, which he

---

[48] Inaga, 152

[49] Satō Shino, "Mōrōtai to Bengaru•Runesensu: Yokoyama Taikan, Hishida Shunsō ga Obonindoronato•Tagōru ni etaeta eikyō ni tsuite (1) [Mōrōtai style and Bengal Renaissance: Yokoyama Taikan and Hishida Shunsō's influence on Abanindranth Tagore (1)]," *Bulletin of the study on philosophy and history of art in University of Tsukuba 15, 1998*, 78-79

claimed were the predecessors to Japan's religious art.[50] Okakura showcased his dedication to Buddhist art when, in 1895, he organized a painting competition where artists were charged to depict episodes from the life of Buddha "as contained in *The Gospel of Buddha* written by [Paul] Carus." Among the set of rules he drew for the competition, Okakura emphasized that his competition aimed to "widen the scope [of Buddhism], and to give a new stimulus to Buddhist art." He expressed his discontent with traditional Buddhist art in Japan, which he believed fell short in capturing the vibrant and dynamic aspects of the Buddha's life with its adherence to repetitive iconographies for centuries.[51] For instance, Okakura described how "previous Buddhist images (*butsuzō*) all copied the single posture of the Buddha in meditation (*zenjō*)" with little variety. In contrast, he described how European Christian art vividly portrayed episodes from the life of Jesus with diverse iconographies and modern of expressions.[52]

Among the first to respond to Okakura's call for new Buddhist paintings was his colleague, Shimomura Kanzan, with his scroll painting, *Buddha's Birth* (fig 1.3), which was submitted to the Autumn Exhibition of the Japan Painting Association (*Nihon Kaiga Kyōkai)* in 1896. The painting depicts a newborn Śākyamuni standing upright on a lotus surrounded by figures in eye-catching clothing. To the left of Śakyamuni stands a figure with his chest exposed with only a single cloth draped over his torso. Meanwhile, the figure to Śākyamuni's right is draped in a cloth that resembles Persian textiles found at the Shōsōin, a historic treasure house located at Japan's Tōdai-ji temple renowned for its valuable artifacts, with their iconic blue

---

[50] Inaga, 152

[51] Okakura Kakuzō, "Kenshō butsuga boshū [Notice of a Call for a Prize for Buddhist Painting]," *Kaiga sōshi* 105 (October 25, 1895), translated and cited in Auerback, *A Storied Sage*, 204-205

[52] Ibid.

medallion designs.[53] Shōsōin Together with the figure with the exposed chest, Shimomura depicted two figures in clothing that invoke a Japanese imaginary of ancient civilizations, highlighting the foreign exotic origins of Buddhism. When the painting was displayed, some critics immediately pointed out the Indian influences apparent in the outfits of the retainers. One report stated how Shimomura "took into account the dress and customs of India, by the recent development of archaeology," while criticizing it for "slightly lacking in elegance."[54] Another review expressed uncertainty regarding the painting's Indian influence, stating how "the characters differ from previous Buddhist paintings, but they can't be regarded as definitely Indian, either," followed by a scathing remark saying that the piece is "lacking in vitality."[55] These reviews demonstrated disparate opinions of Japanese viewers on the adoption of Indian elements in Buddhist paintings. Some disagreed about the appropriate attire for represeningt Indian people and many found Shimomura's Buddhist figures unconventional and difficult to judge. Nevertheless, Kanzan's painting is an example of artists answering Okakura's call to rejuvenate Buddhist art by adapting Indian elements.

Apart from his endeavors in encouraging new forms of Buddhist art, Okakura also called for stronger cultural and spiritual unity between Asian countries in the face of Western imperialism, which became the backbone of his ideology of Pan-Asianism, outlined in the publication of his famous 1903 English-language book *The Ideals of the East.* While Okakura is remembered today as an advocate of Pan-Asianism, most have overlooked the contributions of

---

[53] Ogata, Atsuhiko, The Shoso-in Textiles of the Era of Emperor Shomu, *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings 720* (University of Nebraska Digital Commons, September 19-22, 2012): 2-5

[54] Nihon Bijutsuin Hyakunenshi 1-kan jō (zuhan hen), page 530, quoted and translated in Micah Auerback, *A Storied Sage*, 212

[55] Ibid.

Indian scholars in the formation of his ideology. At the time, many Indian intellectuals shared Okakura's Pan-Asianist thinking. Most notable was the Hindu reformer Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), whose impassioned speech on spiritual universalism and harmony at the 1893 Parliament of World Religions resonated greatly with Okakura. In fact, Okakura traveled to India in 1902 specifically to invite Vivekananda to lecture in Japan. During his travel, he became acquainted with other intellectuals who shared his belief in Pan-Asianism, such as Sister Nivedita (1867-1911), an Irish expatriate, and crucial figure in Indian nationalism, Rabindranath Tagore. Sister Nivedita even helped translate several of Okakura's Japanese lectures and collaborated with him in writing *The Ideals of the East* when he was in India.[56] Thus, we can see how Okakura's time abroad contributed to his Pan-Asian perspective.

The examples above illustrate how Okakura connected many contemporary developments to Japanese Buddhism and Indo-Japanese relationships to the art world. Following Japan's new trend of focusing on Buddhism's history, he encouraged his artists to draw inspiration from the life of Śākyamuni. Working with contemporary Indian intellectuals, he developed his ideas for Pan-Asianism. Among the Indians with whom he worked, Rabindranath Tagore was the most significant in initiating artistic exchanges. Tagore suggested that Okakura send his artists to his school to initiate a series of exchanges whereby Okakura's students could teach Japanese art techniques to his family. Thus, in 1903, Okakura advised two of his brightest students to travel to India: Yokoyama Taikan (1868-1958) and Hishida Shunso (1874-1911).[57]

---

[56] Inaga, Shigemi, "Sister Nivedita and Her 'Kali The Mother, The Web of Indian Life', and Art Criticism: New Insights into Okakura Kakuzō's Indian Writings and the Function of Art in the Shaping of Nationality", *Japan Review* 16 (2004): 130

[57] Wattles, Miriam, "The 1909 Ryūtō and the Aesthetics of Affectivity," *Art Journal* 55, no. 3 (1996): 51

Yokoyama and Hishida in India — Visualizing Indian Women in Buddhist Art

Today, Yokoyama Taikan and Hishida Shunsō, along with the aforementioned Shimomura Kanzan, are considered among the most recognizable artists associated with the genre of nihonga. Their artworks highlighted the principles of their mentor Okakura: to restore appreciation for Japan's traditional arts, explore possibilities to modernize Japanese-style paintings, and preserve Asian values against the encroachment of Western art and culture. Yet, despite being the most respected nihonga artists today, Yokoyama and Hishida's "Indian period," lasting between 1903 and 1909, received little attention, even though it was a formative period for both artists and has presented us with several important examples of their early-career works. Their travels to India in 1903, under the encouragement of Okakura, defined an important chapter in both artists' careers.

Even though Okakura instructed Yokoyama and Hishida to teach the Tagore family Japanese painting techniques and study India's Buddhist art, the two young students' first paintings in India took more inspiration from Hindu rather than Buddhist themes. During their time at Tagore's school, the Indian poet's family commissioned both artists to depict traditional Indian stories to observe how Japanese art techniques could be applied to Indian themes. One member who interacted closely with Yokoyama and Hishida was Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951), the nephew of Rabindranath and an important figure in Indian modern art. While the commissioned paintings by Abanindranath and others were not Buddhist, they gave the Japanese artists their first opportunity to depict Indian figures in their paintings. These early paintings were reviewed in the 1922 article *Indo-Japanese Painting,* published in the popular

Indian art periodical *Rupam* by an anonymous author.[58] Despite the long period between its publication and Yokoyama and Hishida's stay in India, the article provides us with an insightful look at the reception of both artists' early paintings by Indian audiences. Among the earliest paintings Yokoyama Taikan produced in India are*Ras Lila* (fig 1.4) and *Indian Guardian* (*Indo Shūgo-Jin, (*fig 1.5).

*Ras Lila*took the form of a silk painting that Yokoyama painted on the request of Abanindranath Tagore to decorate one of his atelier's walls with a large painting in 1903. The title refers to a well-known story about the Hindu deity Krishna dancing with his wife Radha and several milkmaids (*Gopīs*), signifying the love between a divine being and mortals. Furthermore, "Raslila" has been a popular motif in Indian art since the 16th century, ranging from Rajput paintings to Mughal miniatures. While there were several variations in how the subject matter was depicted in Indian art, one consistent motif is the crowd of female figures in elaborate outfits dancing with abandon around the figure of Krishna. By asking Yokoyama to paint this well-known Indian tale, Abanindranath eagerly wanted to see what innovation Yokoyama could bring to a traditional Indian motif like Raslila through the medium of Japanese art.[59]

Curiously, after he was given a rudimentary explanation of the story of Raslila, Yokoyama did not ask to look at Indian art for references. Instead, as recorded in Abanindranth's famous memoir *Jorasankor Dhare*, Yokoyama asked to see how Indian women wear the Sari (traditional Indian garment for women). He requested Abanindranath's daughter to model for him while wearing the garment. In addition to a live model, Yokoyama also consulted

---

58 "Indo-Japanese Painting," *Rupam, An Illustrated Quarterly Journal of Oriental Art* 10 (Apr, 1922), 39-42

59 Satō, "Yokoyama Taikan no 'Rasyū.Lila' to Bengaru-ha no gaka ni suite [Yokoyama Taikan's 'Ras Lila' and the artists of the Bengal Movement]," *Yokoyama Taikan Kinen-kan Kanhō* 18 (2002): 3-5

photographs of archaic art and sculptures to better understand Indian garments and the way they were worn, doing ample research to ensure an authentic portrayal of Indian women in traditional attire.[60] Yokoyama's adherence to realism might have prompted some unfavorable reactions from his Indian colleagues. At the time of his visit, Bengali artists were pushing for a shift away from Western artistic practices, such as an emphasis on life-sketching and realism, in favor of more traditional Indian approaches.[61] Thus, Yokoyama's avoidance of local visual depictions of Raslila for live models demonstrated the challenge of compromising Japanese and Indian differences. Unfortunately, no visual records remain of Yokohama's painting save for a photographic reproduction that appeared as the frontispiece of *Indo-Japanese Paintings*. However, even through a black-and-white reproduction, viewers can see the dexterity of Yokoyama's hand. Leaving a few empty spaces, Yokoyama filled the painting with dancing figures whose bodies, from head to toe, take up the entire vertical space of the painting. The Sari and outer garments of the women and Krishna also appear diaphanous and suggest movement through their flowing motion.

In the same year, Yokoyama painted *Indian Guardian*, which depicted the multi-armed blue-skinned Hindu goddess, Kali. At the time of Yokoyama's visit, the image of Kali had become a widely distributed icon in India through lithography, with the most famous example being an image used to advertise cigarettes (fig 1.6).[62] In Bengal, many of these inexpensive lithograph prints were distributed by Calcutta Art Studio, best known for their widespread print

---

[60] Ibid.

[61] Partha Mitter. *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922 : Occidental Orientations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 189

[62] Mitter, 210-215

images of Hindu Gods and Goddesses.[63] Thus, Yokoyama had no shortage of contemporary artistic examples to use as references. In Yokoyama's configuration of Kali, he displayed all the conventional motifs associated with the Hindu goddess, including the multiple limbs, the blue skin, and the necklace of human heads. However, if we compare Yokoyama's version of Kali to contemporary Indian portrayals of the goddess, such as the cigarette advertisement, we can see how his portrayal diverged from the popular image that was widespread in India.

Using the popular cigarette advertisement as an example, the image of Kali contained violent imagery such as blood dripping off the goddess' cleaver and her necklace of severed heads. The goddess also appeared belligerent with her wide stride, foot on top of a man, and her tongue sticking out. In contrast, Yokoyama's Kali figure appeared more subdued without any blood while standing still with a serene expression. The unconventional way that Yokoyama portrayed Kali was not lost on Indian locals, as evidenced by the scathing review his work received in *Indo-Japanese Paintings*:

> "In the benign and even, charming face, the artist has forgotten the original conception of "The Terrible One" (Kali), familiar to us in the Indian versions […] Our Japanese illustrator of "Kali" has [substituted] an attractive face in place of the traditional "repulsive" one, incidentally eliminating the feeling of the terrible (the bhayânaka rasa), which is the staple part of the conception."[64]

As the review showed, by toning down the macabre and combative aesthetics associated with Kali, Yokoyama's painting failed to capture the goddess's iconic characteristics.

The scathing reviews of the Indian critics held considerable merit. Examining Yokoyama's portrayal in the context of conventions, associated with Kali in the history of Indian

---

[63] Imma Ramos, "The Fragmentation of Sati: Contracting Hindu Identity through Pilgrimage Souvenirs," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 27 (2015): 26

[64] *Indo-Japanese Painting*, 41

art reveals how the Japanese artist fell short in capturing the depth and symbolisms of the divine goddess. To begin with, the widely distributed lithograph image of Kali that Yokoyama likely based his painting on was itself an unconventional portrayal of the goddess in India. As part of several colored prints produced by Calcutta Art Studio, the popular image of Kali was depicted through Western-styled lithography, evident through its rich shadings and other characteristics. In contrast, traditional depictions of Kali, such as those that appeared in mid-19th century "battala" woodblock prints (fig 1.7) appeared quite different and less accessible for Yokoyama to use as models. As shown in the prints that predated the version produced by Calcutta Art Studio, older portrayals of Kali appeared flat and stylized, depicted in a frontal and symmetric form that mimicked devotional effigies from temples.[65] She also possessed exaggerated facial features, particularly the eyes and tongue, and her figure was mainly composed of geometric shapes and lines. Such depictions of Kali differed drastically from both the version depicted by Calcutta Art Studio and Yokoyama Taikan.

Furthermore, meanings associated with Kali had evolved by the time Yokoyama painted *Indian Guardian*. Unlike the stylized woodcut versions, which primarily functioned as devotional images, the lithographic images of Kali that Yokoyama encountered contained subtexts of Indian nationalism and often adapted as icons of resistance; a trend that did not go unnoticed by British colonizers in India. For example, one British official worriedly pointed out how Kali's garland of severed heads in the popular lithograph resembled the heads of Europeans.[66] Even before the establishment of the Calcutta Art Studio, British residents in India

---

[65] Fayre Hirsch, "A Rare Kali Woodcut from the Era of the Battala Printers," *Art in Print* 6, no. 3, (2016): 25

[66] Ramos, 26

had always felt anxious about the goddess' terrifying appearance and symbolism. With her fierce face, dark skin, and bloodied appearance, the goddess represented a wrathful destroyer of evil.[67] Thus, aware of British uneasiness towards her image and perceiving colonialism as a malicious system, Indian patriots eagerly adopted the goddess as an appropriate anti-colonial symbol.[68]

From a stylistically represented devotional image to a widespread patriotic icon, the figure of Kali went through multiple evolutions in both its visual depiction and symbolism. Yet, Yokoyama Taikan's *Indian Goddess* omitted all the cultural and political nuances associated with the iconic goddess, explaining the unfavorable reviews it reviewed by Indian critics. With its defined limbs and face, it departed from conventional effigy-like depictions of Kali as they appeared in devotional woodblock prints. Simultaneously, his choice of a serene expression and posture for his figure also failed to capture Kali's usual frightening appearance, meant to evoke fiery anti-colonial sentiments.

In the same article, Yokoyama's *Ras Lila* received similar criticisms for failing to capture the artistic conventions of Raslila in Indian art. One section of the article claimed that "it was useless to claim that the artist has been able to adequately picture the personality of Krishna, notwithstanding the flourish of the flute and Kadama flowers. The 'Gopis,' the dancing milkmaids, are presented without any respect for, or understanding of, Indian types."[69] These criticisms toward Yokoyama's two early paintings from *Indo-Japanese art* revealed how rather than learning its conventions, Yokoyama utilized Indian art more like a vessel for his fantasies of

---

[67] Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India,* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 108-109

[68] Ibid., 110-111

[69] *Indo-Japanese Painting*, 42

India. His preference for a live model over contemporary Indian works as a reference for *Ras Lila* and his omission of the threatening traits of Kali all showed a lack of interest in Indian conventions. Instead, Yokoyama treated Indian figures more like a platform to construct idealized female figures as vessels to display his study of Indian women.

Around the same time that Yokoyama produced his two paintings, Hishida also experimented with Indian-themed paintings, evidenced by his depiction of the Indo-Japanese Buddhist deity, *Benzaiten* (fig 1.8), a Buddhist goddess that came from East Asian interpretations of the Hindu goddess of learning, Sarasvati. By choosing a goddess that is simultaneously Japanese and Indian, Shunsō depicted the spiritual and cultural unity between the two Asian countries. Additionally, not unlike Yokoyama's *Indian Guardian*, Hishida's Benzaiten figure took inspiration from widely circulated images of Sarasvati in India, such as a popular lithograph produced by Calcutta Art Studio (fig 1.9). Unlike Yokoyama, however, Hishida directly molded his figure after the lithograph image with his Benzaiten having the same pose as Sarasvati from the lithograph.[70] Furthermore, he also incorporated various signs from the lithograph into his painting to make his figure unmistakably Indian. For example, the goddess holds an Indian *vina* (a lute-like instrument) and wears a *sari* with jewelry adornments.

While Hishida's figure mimicked the adornments and pose of the lithograph's Sarasvati, its face and clothing diverged from it. Instead of the large eyes of the lithograph figure, Hishida depicted Benzaiten with slender eyes, giving her an appearance more Japanese than Indian. He also painted his figure in simple white translucent clothes rather than the colorful red and orange

---

[70] Satō, "Yokoyama Taikan no 'Shaka Chichi ni au' ni tsuite — kindai nihon ni okeru Ajyantā Hekiga Juyō no Ichisokumen [Regarding Yokoyama Taikan's"Shaka Chichi ni au" ― One aspect of Modern Japan's reception of the Ajanta murals]," *Yokoyama Taikan Kinen-Kan kanhō* 26 (2010): 3-4

attire worn by the lithograph figure.As these characteristics showed, while Hishida faithfully adapted the pose, instrument, and attire associated with the lithograph figure, he, like Yokoyama, also demonstrated his own creativity in constructing his personal Sarasvati figure.

From the early works of Hishida and Yokoyama, we can see how Indian women bodies captivated both artists. Yokoyama requested Abanindranath's daughter to model for him in a Sari and, as the reviews in *Indo-Japanese Painting* noted, he hardly followed Indian artistic traditions. Instead, Yokoyama focused more on capturing the bodies of Indian women rather than following traditional female iconographies in Indian art. Meanwhile, Hishida was more open to looking at contemporary images of Indian female figures for reference and following their conventions. However, even he dispensed with Indian traditions to make his goddess figure appear more Japanese. While their approaches differed, both Yokoyama and Hishida focused on Indian women's bodies in their early works.

On the surface, it appears that both artists' attraction to Indian women revealed their objectification of India and its people. While it is undeniable that the two young artists were drawn by the allure of an exotic land and acted on their fantasies of India, a closer look at the historical context of both paintings shows more complex motivations behind their attraction to Indian women's bodies. To begin with, Yokoyama and Hishida's paintings of Kali and Sarasvati (Benzaiten) were produced in response to an Indian woman's request: Abanindranath's niece, Sarala Devi Chaudhurani (1872-1945), one of India's most notable feminists who contributed immensely to women's rights and education.[71] As recorded in her autobiography *Jibaner Jhalapara*, Sarala requested Japanese artists to produce paintings of Indian goddesses because,

---

[71] Togawa Masahiko, *Okakura to Indo [Okakura and India]*, (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2023), 62

similar to Abanindranath, she wished to see how Japanese art could introduce new icons and styles to the Bengal Renaissance.[72] Thus, more than just portraying Indian women to satisfy their exotic fantasies, Yokoyama and Hishida collaborated with contemporary Indians to create a female icon of a transnational and culturally-fluid "Oriental Woman" that united all Asian cultures.

By the time Okakura sent his students to India, Indian female figures were gaining prominence as symbols of Indian pride and rebellion against Western imperialism. One of the most important female nationalist symbols to arise in this period, was the figure of Bhārat Mātā, which was the personification of India as a woman, symbolizing the "mother country." This popular representation of India as a maternal nationalist icon can be traced back to the 1873 poem titled *Vande Mataram* by Bengali novelist and poet Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. In his poem, Chatterjee personified Bengal as a "mother goddess," and the iconography became a popular nationalist symbol for Bengali intellectuals such as Rabindranath Tagore and Sister Nivedita.[73]

Furthermore, the icon of a "mother India" was also conflated with other Indian goddesses. For example, in Bengal, the goddess Kali was often used as a model for Bharat Mata.[74] This association came as no surprise for, as discussed above, the figure of the Hindu goddess Kali had always been a popular patriotic icon in Bengal. She appeared as a political metaphor in Sister Nivedita's famous book *Kali the Mother*, published in 1900. Vehemently

---

[72] Ibid., 44

[73] Jasodhara Bagchi, "Representing Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in Colonial Bengal," *Economic and Political Weekly* 25, no. 42/43 (Oct 20-27, 1990): 68-69

[74] Ramaswamy, 109-110

defending the practice of Kali worship in India, often seen as barbaric and superstitious by Westerners, Nivedita's book celebrated Kali as a symbol of Indian motherhood and cultural values.[75] Through his interactions with Nivedita while in India, Okakura also expressed interest in Kali as evidenced by his short dedication to the goddess:

> "India worships thee in Kali, dread mother of relentless mercy; Japan worships thee in Fudo, grand vision of unflinching pity […] Sleep on, for the hand of Kali shall awaken thee to gleam as gleam the teeth of lightening when the storm laughs on the clouds. Om to the Strong! Om to the Invincible!"[76]

Not only did Okakura praise Kali as a powerful symbol, but he also compared the goddess and the Japanese Buddhist deity Fudō Myō-ō ("Immovable Lord"). This comparison highlights his eagerness to culturally unite India and Japan for his Pan-Asianist vision. Thus, more than an exotic representation, Yokoyama's painting of Kali embodied strong cultural values shared by Indian intellectuals and Okakura.

While Chatterjee introduced the concept of Bhārat Mātā through writing, it was Abanindranath Tagore who created one of the earliest visual representations of the figure. A few years after Yokoyama and Hishida's time in India, Abanindranath produced the painting *Bhārat Mātā* (fig 1.10), or "Mother India," one of the most renowned paintings in modern Indian art history. When the painting first appeared in 1905, it was praised by Sister Nivedita for its display of modern artistic techniques without mitigating the "purely Indian idea [and] form."[77] First, Abanindranath's painting utilized the *morotai* style of Yokoyama and Hishida in its execution of

---

[75] Inaga, *Sister Nivedita*, 134-136

[76] Okakura Kakuzo, *Collected English Writings vol. 1*, ed. Sunao Nakamura, Heibonsha, 1984, 166

[77] Pravrajika Atmaprana, ed., *Collected Writings of Sister Nivedita,* vol. 3, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1967-68), 57

the background, shown through the fading colors and translucent nature.[78] Such visual characteristics visible in Abanindranath's painting demonstrated how Indian artists like Abanindranath valued Japanese contributions in crafting their idealized nationalist female icon. Yet, unlike Yokoyama's *Indian Guardian*, Abanindranath successfully captured the meaning and sentiments associated with his female figure, allowing contemporary critics to appreciate the figure as a new national aesthetic.[79] Modeled after the everyday Bengali woman, Abanindranth's portrayal invoked themes of motherhood. Yet, the figure also showcased motifs associated with divine power such as her four limbs and halo.[80] With these characteristics combined, Abanindranath's *Bhārat Mātā* simultaneously embodied maternal affection and spiritual fortitude, making the painting an appealing national icon for intellectuals such as Sister Nivedita.

Comparing Abanindranath's *Bhārat Mātā* with Yokoyama's *Indian Guardian*, we see the disconnect between Indian and Japanese artists regarding adopting Indian women into art. Whereas Japanese artists eagerly used Indian women as exotic icons, they usually failed to understand the deeper nuances associated with female figures in Indian art, treating foreign women's bodies more as vessels for their exotic fantasies. Even though future itinerant artists to come after Yokoyama Taikan performed better at visualizing the sentiments and symbolisms embodied by such female figures, it remained a constant obstacle for Japanese artists seeking to adopt India into their art.

Naturally, Yokoyama and Hishida's exploration of Indian women's bodies as powerful icons also made their way into their experimental Buddhist paintings after they returned to Japan.

---

[78] Satō, *Morotai to Bengaru Runessansu*, 89

[79] Ramaswamy, 16

[80] Ibid.,15

Answering Okakura's call for unconventional Buddhist paintings, Yokoyama produced two religious-themed works after returning to Japan: *White-clothed Kannon (Haku-i Kannon* fig 1.11*)* and *Floating Lanterns* (*Ryutō*, fig 1.12). In the first painting, the artist integrated his observation of Indian women's bodies into the figure of the Buddhist deity Kannon, with her large almond-shaped eyes and brown skin. Originally known as Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, in India and traditionally depicted as a male figure, Kannon is the bodhisattva's East Asian incarnation. In contrast to Avalokiteśvara's consistent male identity in India, East Asian visual depictions of Kannon vary, presenting the figure as male, female, or androgynous.[81] In Yokoyama's painting, the artist not only attributed a female identity to Kannon but an Indian racial identity. Furthermore, Kannon's body also appeared rotund and fleshy with large thighs and folds of flesh on her neck. She wore a transparent *sari* with her left breast slightly exposed, expressing hints of eroticism.

As with *Ras Lila,* Yokoyama's conception of an Indian Kannon likely came from his observations of Indian women. This is suggested by a comment he made in 1903, where he compared Indian and Japanese body types:

> "The [Indian] ladies are even more beautiful and gentle than Japanese ladies. Their facial features are especially wonderful with the very same type of expression as bodhisattvas. A high-class lady is particularly so. With her body covered in glittering gold jewelry and emanating a shining aura, she looks exactly like a painting of Kannon"[82]

---

[81] Chelsea Foxwell, "'Merciful Mother Kannon' and Its Audiences," *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (December 2010): 330. An example of a modern portrayal of Kannon that includes both male and female traits is the 1888 painting *Merciful Mother Kannon* by Japanese artist Kano Hōgai, which depicts the bodhisattva with a mustache but also feminine characteristics like long hair and rounded shoulders. For more information on Kannon's gender fluidity in East Asian visual traditions, see Foxwell, "Merciful Mother Kannon," 326-347.

[82] "Taikan, Shunsō Kyōto de no Indo dan," in *Yokoyama Taikan Kinenkan*, ed., *Taikan no garon,* 43*,* cited and translated by Miriam Wattles in "The 1909 Ryūtō and the Aesthetics of Affectivity,*" Art Journal 55*, no. 3 (1996): 54

The way that Yokoyama compared an Indian woman to "a painting of Kannon" strongly indicates the conceptual origin of *Kannon in White*. In addition, the ways that Yokoyama described Indian women with Buddhist similes such as "bodhisattvas" or "shining aura"reveals how he fantasized about Indian women as primitive but religious people and evinces the widespread stereotype of India as a spiritual place in Japan.

While *White-clothed Kannon* fully displayed Yokoyama's fantasies, his 1909 painting *Ryūtō*, meaning "floating lanterns," appeared more subtle. Displayed at Japan's Third National Exhibition, the hanging scroll features three Indian women standing near the banks of the Ganges as they placed floating lanterns down the river as part of a religious ceremony. The painting's inspiration came from Yokoyama's first-hand observation of a Diwali festival at Varanasi, where he described young women gathering near the banks of the Ganges to set afloat earthen lamps.[83] While Diwali is a Hindu festival, Yokoyama conflated it with the Japanese Buddhist festival of *O-bon (*お盆), where floating lanterns also play a critical role. When the painting was displayed at Japan's Third National Exhibition in 1909, critics commended it for both its technical and sentimental achievements and viewers were amused to find that India has a lantern festival similar to Japan.

As art historian Miriam Wattles described, Yokoyama's painting achieved a sense of "affectivity" (*kokoromochi)* among its viewers: a word denoting sentimentality in a general sense but also used as a metaphor based on emotionality. When *Floating Lanterns* was first displayed, Japanese audiences, praised the painting for its sentimental value, feeling a spiritual connection

---

[83] Yokoyama Taikan, *Taikan gadan* [Taikan's Art Critiques], (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1968), 58

to India through Yokoyama's painting.[84] What contributed greatly to this ambiance of affectivity were the figures within Yokoyama's painting, where the artist incorporated both Japanese and Indian characteristics to construct his ideal image of a spiritual woman that conveyed not only a sense of exoticism but also familiarity to Japanese audiences. First, similar to the Kannon figure in *White-clothed Kannon,* Yokoyama gave his figures almond-shaped eyes and prominent noses, making the foreign and exotic identities of the women immediately apparent to Japanese audiences.[85] Yet, Yokoyama also made small touches to suppress the Indian-ness of the figures and make them fit more closely to Japanese standards of beauty, such as giving them pale skin and small mouths. Whether it is in *Kannon in White* or *Floating Lanterns*, the portrayal of Indian people in Yokoyama's paintings represents a physical manifestation of Japan's nostalgic Orientalism.

From the early Indian-themed works of Yokoyama and Hishida, we see how they experimented with Indian women bodies in creative ways. Initially, such figures developed at the request of Indian intellectuals who collaborated with Japanese artists to create a national female icon. After returning to Japan, however, Yokoyama utilized what he learned from India to incorporate Indianized bodies into Buddhist-themed works that embodied his fantasies of a spiritual yet exotic India. Yet, in works such as Hishida's *Benzaiten* or Yokoyama's *Floating Lanterns*, we also see them combine Indian and Japanese traits to create ethnically ambiguous female figures that can serve as transnational icons. Both cases showcased the importance of Indian women bodies as a platform for expression for Japanese artists. However, during their

---

[84] Wattles, 55

[85] Ibid., 53

time in India, Japanese artists like Yokoyama and Hishida fixated on more than just Indian women, for the figure of Śākyamuni also became a coveted icon as artists explored his Indian identity. In their endeavor to study Śākyamuni's depiction in Indian art, Japanese artists flocked to one of the most crucial sources of ancient Buddhist art in India: the Ajanta Caves.

Creating Śākyamuni—Yokoyama and Hishida's visit to Ajanta

While Yokoyama and Hishida spent their time in India studying how to depict Indian women bodies, they also explored visual representations of Śākyamuni in Indian art. As mentioned above, Okakura called for his students to rejuvenate the genre of Buddhist art by taking inspiration from the life of Buddha. However, in addition to the biography of Śākyamuni, Okakura also encouraged Japanese artists to look towards ancient Buddhist art in India for inspiration, and the site that he emphasized most heavily was the Ajanta Caves. Located in modern-day Maharashtra, Ajanta is an ancient cave temple complex dating between the 2nd century B.C. and 480 A.D., renowned for its wall paintings, which have been touted as one of the oldest Buddhist arts in the world. They were rediscovered by British colonial forces in India during the 19th century and received attention as a crucial archaeological site with both Indian and English artists documenting the cave paintings through copies. Meanwhile, the first mention of the caves in a Japanese publication did not come until 1901 with the manuscript, *Abbreviated History of Japanese Imperial Arts* (*Kōhon Nihon Teikoku Bijutsu Ryakushi)*, where the editorial supervisor, Kuki Shūichi, pointed out how the ancient Indian paintings bear a resemblance to the ancient Buddhist murals at Hōryū-Ji temple, one of Japan's most important national heritage sites. However, even before the book's publication, Okakura promoted the idea as early as 1890 when he gave lectures at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts suggesting a connection between the

Ajanta Caves and the Hōryū-ji murals.[86] Thus, it comes as no surprise that Yokoyama and Hishida, as Okakura's brightest students, would travel to Ajanta to study its cave paintings, implementing these archaic figures in their art to create an authentic presentation of ancient Buddhist figures.

Among the many figures displayed at the Ajanta Caves, none drew more attention than the central figure of the Bodhisattva Padmapani (fig 1.13), located in Cave 1 at Ajanta. As one of the most recognizable figural centerpieces at Ajanta, Padmapani referred to an alternate name and form of the Buddhist deity of compassion, Avalokiteshvera, known more widely in Japan as the deity Kannon.[87] Examining the figure of Padmapani, scholars found the strongest evidence that the Hōryū-Buddhist murals came from the same visual lineage as the Ajanta Caves as they argued that it resembled a notable 8th century Kannon figures from the walls of Hōryū-ji (fig 1.13). Some of the shared characteristics commonly pointed out included their downward tilting heads, half-opened eyes, and long curly hairs.[88] As Japanese artists visited the Ajanta Caves throughout the twentieth century, many of them focused their attention on the figure of Padmapani due to its Japanese art historical significance.

In Yokoyama's case, however, he used other images from Ajanta as a reference to construct his figure of Śākyamuni, best evidenced in his now-lost 1903 painting *Śākyamuni Encounters his Father* (*Shaka chi chi ni au*, fig 1.15), displayed at the 15th Competitive Painting

---

[86] Fukuyama, 189-190

[87] Simpas Biswas, *Indian Influences on the Art of Japan*, (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2010), 60

[88] Ibid.

Exhibition (*Kaiga Kyōshinkai*) organized by the Japanese Painting Association.[89] As art historian Satō Shino has argued, Yokoyama modeled several elements of his painting on various images from Ajanta. For example, the appearance of Śākyamuni bears a resemblance to a similar figure of the Buddha from Ajanta's Cave 17 (fig 1.16), with his right hand holding an alms bowl and his left hand raised, as with Yokoyama's depiction. Other aspects of Yokoyama's paintings incorporated attributes from Ajanta in more subtle ways, such as how the floral and geometric patterns on the father's belt (fig 1.17) were seemingly inspired by similar square patterns from ceiling paintings at Ajanta (fig 1.18).[90]

When the work was displayed in Japan, reviewers praised Yokoyama's authentic portrayals of Indian people, describing the viewing experience as comparable to "viewing a scene from ancient India."[91] One review noted that "the figures appear to be sketched from real-life Indians, but their postures are strangely missing, and the painting avoided giving a sense of unnaturalness."[92] Such reviews come as no surprise, for even though only photographic reproductions of this painting remain today, viewers can see exotic Indian features on both figures, such as Śākyamuni's mustache and his father's long beard and turban.[93] As these reviews showed, Japanese audiences valued modern Buddhist paintings for their portrayals of Indian people, and judged figural depictions based on how much they showcased ethnic features of

---

[89] Ibarakiken Yokoyama Taikan Denki Hensan Iinkai, ed., *Yokoyama Taikan den* [Yokoyama Taikan Biography] (Mito: Ibarakiken, 1959), 50-51

[90] Satō, *Yokoyama Taikan no 'Shaka Chichi ni au' ni tsuite*, 9

[91] "Ega Kyōshin-kai Shinbun-hyō, "*Nihon Bijutsu 58*, 1903, quoted in *Yokoyama Taikan no 'Shaka Chichi ni au' ni tsuite*, 10

[92] Ibid.

[93] Auerback, 218

Indians. However, as the latter quote showed, they also looked upon the Indian race with an exotic gaze, expecting them to give off a sense of "unnaturalness" or having certain postures. These responses reflected the mixed attitudes that Japan had towards India, where they admired the nation as the birthplace of Buddhism yet objectified its people as exotic foreigners.

Yokoyama's work represented an early example of nihonga artists using the Ajanta Caves as a reference to create a historical and Indian Śākyamuni faithful to the roots of Buddhism. However, with the arrival of the next Japanese artist in India after Yokoyama and Hishida, we see more diverse approaches in capturing and interpreting Śākyamuni in painting: Katsuta Shōkin (1879-1963).

Creating Śākyamuni—Katsuta Shōkin and his portraits

After Okakura's two students returned to Japan, Rabindranath Tagore eagerly asked him to send another artist to teach his family and his school. Thus, in 1905, Okakura chose a young graduate from the Tokyo School of Fine Arts named Katsuta Shōkin for this undertaking. Today, Katsuta is largely remembered as a respected bird-and-flower artist, while his activities in India and related works receive little attention. That is because nearly all of his Indian-themed works remain missing, leaving only rough sketches or black-and-white reproductions of his works to offer us a glimpse. Despite this, even in what remained of Katsuta's time in India, we can see the artist's passion for exploring Indian bodies and ethnicity in Buddhist painting. However, unlike Yokoyama and Hishida who explored exotic femininity in Indian bodies, Katsuta spent more time exploring the "Indian-ness" of the historical Buddha.

The only Indian-themed painting by Katsuta that can be viewed today is his 1907 work, *Śākyamuni's Departure* (*Shūtsūjo Shaka*, fig 1.19), which depicted the young Śākyamuni

wearing royal garments, standing near his palace entrance and next to a servant with a horse. The painting depicts an episode from Śākyamuni's life when the then-young prince made the momentous choice to leave his luxurious palace and family to pursue an ascetic life, marking the start of his path to enlightenment. In her analysis of the painting, Buddhist art scholar Narihara Yuki highlights how Katsuta incorporated both his observations of Indian people and ancient figures from Ajanta to create a historically and ethnically authentic Śākyamuni in his portraiture. For example, the prince's pose in the painting closely resembled the pose of a figure (fig 1.20), possibly a monk, that Katsuta sketched in his notebook from his time in India.[94] Both figures stood with their weight on their left foot while holding up their clothes with their left arm. What set Śākyamuni apart from the sketched figure was that he stood confidently taller and wore more jewelry and adornments, conveying his royal status. However, the biggest difference is in the face and crown of Śākyamuni, which Narihara argued were inspired by a specific figure from Ajanta: the Bodhisattva Vajrapani (fig 1.21).

Occupying the wall space across from the figure of Padmapani and acting as its counterpart, the deity Vajrapani acted as a figural embodiment of power and thunder.[95] If we compare the head of Katsuta's Śākyamuni (fig 1.22) with the figure of Vajrapani from Ajanta, we can see several resemblances. Both featured a dark-skinned male with long slender eyes and long black hair matted onto the shoulders. The elaborate crown that Śākyamuni wore in Katsuta's painting also resembled the one worn by Vajrapani from Ajanta, with strings of pearls hanging

---

[94] Narihara, 553.

[95] K. Benoy Behl, *The Ajanta Caves: Artistic Wonder of Ancient Buddhist India* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 66

from it.[96] Just as Yokoyama and Hishida referenced contemporary Indian art and observations of Indian locals to construct their figures, Katsuta looked towards both Ajanta's ancient paintings and the body of an Indian man to create his idealized version of the young Śākyamuni. In doing so, he portrayed the Buddhanot as the cosmic entity worshipped in Japan for many years, but as a historical figure.

However, although Narihara's analysis shows how Katsuta's portraiture of Śākyamuni referenced many of his observations while in India, a little-known colored sketch (fig 1.23) by Katsuta that also illustrated the story of Śākyamuni's departure reveals how the artist initially intended an entirely different composition. Like the painting, the colored sketch shows Śākyamuni alone, accompanied only by his horse. Unlike the painting, though, he is surrounded by tropical vegetation, and his attire differs.Śākyamuni's attire offered few visual clues to his royal status save for a diadem, necklaces, and a sword. Most importantly, his right shoulder and chest are laid bare and he wears no shoes, making him closer in resemblance to the sketched monk figure from Katsuta's notebook. The composition portrays Śākyamuni closer to his persona as a forest ascetic than as a royal prince. Thus, it is plausible that this sketch was narratively the sequel to Śākyamuni's departure where the prince reached the forests and discarded his royal attire.

Compared to *Śākyamuni's Departure*, the colored sketch expresses a more exotic atmosphere with Śākyamuni barefooted and half-dressed while surrounded by tropical vegetation. Unlike Katsuta's finished painting, which referenced India's ancient history with the stone pillar in the background and Śākyamuni's attire, the colored sketch makes more reference

---

[96] Ibid., 557

to Japanese imaginations of contemporary India as a tropical country of scantily dressed people. It reveals how even though Japanese artists aimed to authentically depict Śākyamuni closer to his Indian roots, they were also eager to use the figure of Śākyamuni similar to Indian female figures: as vessels for their exotic fantasies.

Following *Śākyamuni's Departure*, Shōkin painted another version of Śākyamuni in the now-lost painting titled *Prince Siddhārtha beneath the Jambu Tree* (*Enbujuka no Shidda Taishi* fig 1.24) in 1908. This work portrayed him more as a religious figure than a historical prince. Although only photographic reproductions remain today, viewers can see how the painting diverged from *Śākyamuni's Departure*. In the depiction, Katsuta abandoned rich jewelry and a confident posture in favor of a more reserved Śākyamuni with head bowed and hands clasped together at hisfront near the waist. Instead of a palace entrance, the background features the titular Jambu tree near a stone platform. With this depiction, Katsuta created a sentimental painting that highlighted Śākyamuni's spiritual devotion. However, when the painting was displayed at the first National Painting Achievement Association's (*Kokuga Gyokusei-Kai*) exhibition, which showcased various avant-garde Japanese-styled paintings by young artists, it received some harsh criticism. One account mocked how Śākyamuni looked like "a urinating young prince."[97] Another criticism pointed out how Katsuta's new version of Śākyamuni "appeared more like a foreigner [Westerner], and not like an Indian."[98]

These criticisms offer insight into the reception of Śākyamuni in Japanese art at a time when audiences had come to expect historical Buddhist figures to appear Indian. However, it can

---

[97] *Kokumin shinbun*, 1908, quoted in Nihon Bijutsuin Hyakunenshi Henshūshitsu, ed., *Nihon Bijutsuin hyakunenshi 3-kan jō (zuhan hen)* (Tokyo: Nihon Bijutsuin, 1992), 753

[98] *Nihon bijutsu* 118, 1908, quoted in *Nihon Bijutsuin hyakunenshi 3-kan,* 753

also be argued that they were simply looking for exoticism rather than spirituality in the Indianized figure of Śākyamuni, which reflected the mixed attitude that artists, including Katsuta, and viewers had towards India. Undeniably, Katsuta dedicated much effort to constructing an authentic figure through his studies of Ajanta and Indian locals. However, he also imbued his art with his fantasies of India, with the tropical scenery and half-dressed monk figures. Similar to his predecessors, Katsuta's adaptation of India into art was characterized by an admiration for its innate spirituality and cultural ties with Japan. Yet, his approach also evinced his objectification of India, emphasizing the exotic aspect of its culture and people for Japanese gazes.

Conclusions

The early twentieth century was a time of transformation for Buddhist understanding in Japan where scholars and artists started to recognize the importance of India as the birthplace of Buddhism. Western academicism helped Japanese scholars and artists gain a new appreciation for the country, which motivated artists to travel to India. In India, these artists searched for inspiration for a new kind of Buddhist art that emphasized the religion's Indian origin and actively engaged with Indian culture and people. What immediately attracted them were the bodies of Indian locals. Artists such as Yokoyama and Hishida viewed Indian women as new icons for Buddhist art, combining ethnic features from both Indian and Japanese women to create culturally fluid figures in their quest to create idealized oriental bodies. Others, such as Katsuta, explored the Indian ethnicity of Śākyamuni, referencing the Ajanta Caves and Indian locals to depict him authentically. Whether through an attraction to Indian women or the figure of

Sākyamuni, Indian bodies found their way into modern Japanese Buddhist paintings, serving as foundational models for bodhisattvas, women, and depictions of the Buddha.

The artists' desire to travel to India for artistic inspiration indicates their respect for India as a repository of Buddhist heritage. However, they also adopted an objectifying and voyeuristic gaze and framed Indian culture and people in an exotic light. Indo-Japanese relationships during the twentieth century cannot be defined easily and modern Buddhist works produced by Japanese artists who traveled to India reflect this complexity. Showcasing wide varieties of approaches and innovations in adapting India into their works, especially as human figures, these Japanese artists showed how cross-cultural exchanges could lead to unexpected developments in Buddhist art.

Chapter 2: Arai Kanpō and Taishō period Indianesque figures

In the previous chapter, we looked at how Japanese artists interacted with India during the late Meiji period. The approaches toward Indian art and culture taken by these early artists were characterized by both admiration for India as an authoritative source of Buddhist art and curiosity towards its exotic culture. Additionally, these early artists, who were associated with Okakura's circle and his teachings, also strove to capture their teacher's Pan-Asianist ideals in their paintings; They attempted to establish a link between Japan and India in both style and subject matter. As Japan entered the Taisho period (1912-1926), fascination with India only intensified among new generations of Nihonga artists. In what scholar Katsuyama Shigeru described as an "Indianesque tendency in Taishō Nihonga"[99], paintings featuring Indian subject matter surged among the submissions to the Nihonga sections of many annual exhibitions. So frequently were artists engaging with Indian themes that critics began to refer to them as the "India clique" (*Indo-Ha*).[100]

The interest in India reached its zenith during the Taishō period due to several factors. With India's reputation as a spiritual country, attention towards it grew alongside a growing humanitarianism and liberal education during the era. Scholarly works on Indian art, including essays by the esteemed Indian art historian Ananda Coomaraswamy were translated into Japanese and made accessible to the public. Reproductions and analyses of Indian art were

---

[99] Katsuyama Shigeru, *Taisho Nihonga no Indo teki keiko: Sono Kigen to hensen* [The Indianesque Tendency of Taisho Nihonga: Its origin and transformation]. (Tokyo: Tokyo Geijutsu Daigaku, 1994)

[100] Sunaoka Reiko, "Aya no Kyōen - Ishizaki Kōyō to no deai • Arai Kanpō no Indo [Competition of Colors: The Encounter with Ishizaki Kōyō. Arai Kanpō's India]," in *Indo ni Miserareta Nihon Gaka : Arai Kanpō・Ishizaki Kōyō Ten [Japanese Artists Fascinated by India: Arai Kanpō and Ishizaki Kōyō Exhibition],* edited by Ujie Museum and Fukimitsu Art Museum, eds., (Tochigi: Ujie Museum and Toyama: Fukumitsu Art Museum, 2004), 11

published widely in popular art magazines like *Bijutsu Gahō* and *Bijutsu Shinpō*.[101] Fascination towards India also benefited immensely when Rabindranath Tagore, who achieved celebrity status as the first Asian recipient of the Nobel Prize, visited Japan in 1916. While his visit received mixed receptions in Japan, Tagore's arrival ignited further interest in India for Japanese artists and scholars. Thus, thanks to various factors, the Taishō period marked a crucial time for Indo-Japanese artistic exchanges.

Following the last chapter in chronological order, this chapter will focus on the Taishō period, which I argue was the era when Japanese Nihonga artist's fascination with India peaked, evidenced by the pervasiveness of Indian-themed submissions to annual exhibitions and associated publications in magazines. I will also demonstrate how the Taishō period was marked a time when Japanese artists took a more technical approach to implementing Indian art in their works, which ran parallel to the thematic and sentimental considerations of the artists when looking towards Indian art for inspiration. The most noticeable influence was on figural compositions in Buddhist art produced during this period as artists who studied Indian art boldly displayed dynamic and erotic figures. Some other influences included the inclusion of brighter colors and further emphasis on line control. Alongside China, India increasingly became a crucial source of artistic inspiration as Japanese artists combined artistic features from various Asian cultures to create a new kind of "Oriental art" (*tōyōga*) for the modern age.

To understand the extent of Indian influences on Taishō Nihonga, this chapter will largely revolve around the life and career of the most prolific artist of Indian-themed paintings during the period: the Buddhist artist Arai Kanpo (1878-1945). Among the many artists who looked to

---

[101] Katsuyama, 23

India for inspiration during the early 20th century, Arai serves as an exemplary case study due to many factors. First, he was a regular participant in the biennial Japanese Art Institute exhibitions (*Nihon Bijutsu-in Tenrankai)*, more commonly called the "Inten" exhibitions, Japan's most notable avenue for experimental Nihonga paintings throughout the twentieth century. Secondly, before becoming an active participant in the Inten exhibitions, Arai received the chance to travel to India and study its art firsthand like his Meiji-period predecessors. This allows us to compare the works he produced before and after his travel to India and thereby discern interesting evolutions in his art.

More importantly, Arai was in charge of a crucial project in 1916 when he was in India: the project to fully copy and publish the Ajanta cave murals, led by *Kokka,* the art periodical for which Arai worked. Even though previous Japanese artists in India visited and sketched the Ajanta murals, *Kokka*'s reproduction project, led by Arai, was often considered the first serious Japanese endeavor to copy the ancient cave murals in full. Rather than copying the murals for personal reference, Arai's reproduction was considered a serious study of ancient art. His copies of painted figures and sculptures from the ancient site were made available to the public through the pages of *Kokka* and other art magazines, cementing his reputation as an Indian art aficionado and one of the most significant artists to introduce Indian art to a wider public. Furthermore, Arai's accounts of his experience with India, his analysis of Indian art, and his process of copying the Ajanta murals were also published in journals that were widely read. Thus, his accounts provide a good window into the kind of India-related materials that Japanese artists would see or read about during the Taishō period.

Finally, what set Arai apart from his predecessors, from Yokoyama Taikan to Katsuta Shokin, was that Arai was a dedicated Buddhist artist. His affinity for religion is also a worthwhile subject of inquiry. In his discussions of India, Arai often expressed admiration for its innate religiosity. His strong religious sentiment was a crucial factor in his adaptation of Indian art. Additionally, Arai worked during a time when artists and critics stressed the importance of spirituality in painting out of a sense of cultural nationalism, framing it as one of oriental art's central virtues. Yet, definitions of "spirituality" were often vague, ranging from Buddhist virtues to Asian philosophy or general sentimentality. Such vague definitions allowed artists to interpret spirituality for themselves and practice their creativity. For Arai, after he traveled to India, he perceived spirituality as a deeply rooted Indian concept conveyed through the sensual figures common in Indian art. Such a notion also reflected the common perspectives that Japanese critics and artists had toward the goal of adapting Indian art into Buddhist works: the harmony between corporeality and spirituality.

Arai's Early Life and Works

Arai Kanpō was born in 1878 in Ujie City (modern-day Sakura City), Tochigi Prefecture. At the age of twenty-one, he left his home for Tokyo where to studied under ukiyo-e[102] artist Mizuno Toshikata (1866-1908) and initially focused on producing historical and genre paintings. Under Mizuno's guidance, he developed an affinity for civilian life and sketching ordinary people in their daily activities. His early experience with historical paintings also ignited his interest in ancient art. Such experiences would affect Arai's future travel to India as he gravitated towards the country's local denizens and ancient art for inspiration.

---

[102] Translating to "pictures of floating world" and often synonymous with Japanese woodblock prints, the genre of "ukiyo-e" revolved around themes of urban life and pleasure.

In 1902 Arai found a job working as a copyist for *Kokka* magazine, where he reproduced antique Japanese Buddhist art for the magazine's pages for the next nine years.[103] In addition to honing his skills as a copyist, Arai's employment at Kokka had a profound effect on his artistic career in two ways. First, as Arai himself described it, his encounters with archaic Japanese art and his time spent studying and copying it gave him an appreciation for Buddhist art. He described Buddhist artworks as the "pinnacle of fine art" and decided to become a full-fledged Buddhist artist.[104] However, Arai's fascination with Buddhist art also stemmed from his interest in the expressiveness of human figures as portrayed in Buddhist art and the spiritual intimacy such figures they can convey. As he described some years later:

> "I was drawn to the deep, unforgettable impression I felt from human eyes and facial expressions, and I began painting for the sake of expressing such impressions […] In other words, it was drawn to the impression on the faces of us humans filled with that spirituality, and that is why it led me towards painting Buddhist art in later years."[105]

It is possible that Arai maintained an interest in human figures and expressions thanks to his training in the ukiyo-e genre. As a result, several of his future Buddhist works demonstrate a strong affinity for expressive human figures and faces.

While Arai's time at *Kokka* ignited in him his passion for Buddhist art, it also introduced him to an important patron, Hara Tomitarō (1868-1939), who not only became Arai's financial support throughout the artist's life but also the catalyst that would lead to Arai's attraction and eventual travel to India. Tomitarō Hara (1868-1939) was a wealthy silk trader and art collector who resided in Yokohama, where he designed and built his famous residence and garden

---

[103] Ujie Museum., ed, *Indo to Arai Kanpo* [India and Arai Kanpō], (Tochigi: Ujie Museum, 1998), 96

[104] Arai Kanpō, *Amida-in Zakki*, (Nara: Hōryu-ji Ikaru Furusato-sha, 1943), 221

[105] Arai, "Watashi no Butsu-ga, Shūkyō no Shinnen [My Buddhist Painting and Religious Beliefs]," *Ega Seidan*, (Tokyo: Ega Seidan-sha, 1916): 12

complex, Sankei-en, one of Yokoyama's top attractions today. On top of collecting antique Japanese art, he was also a prominent buyer and patron of various leading Nihonga artists of his time, particularly the followers of Okakura Tenshin such as Yokoyama Taikan and Shimomura Kanzan.[106] More than just providing financial support, Tomitarō allowed various Nihonga artists to gather at Sankei-en where they could socialize and exchange ideas, forming an informal clique of Nihonga artists who inherited Okakura's teachings and shared a passion for ancient Buddhist arts and India at his Yokohama residence.

Sometime during the early twentieth century, Tomitarō bought one of the most valuable items in his collection in one of the biggest transactions of the Meiji period: the acquisition of the Heian-period (794-1185) Buddhist painting, *Kujaku Myoō* (fig 2.1), considered one of Japan's national treasures. It was through this historical acquisition that Tomitarō became acquainted with Arai Kanpō, for in 1906 the wealthy merchant sought a skillful copyist to produce reproductions of his recent prized purchase and hired Arai from Kokka. Impressed with the young artist's technique, Tomitarō eagerly introduced Arai to the Sankei-en clique where he would garner a fascination for India through his interactions with Yokoyama and Shimomura, who would persuade him to travel to India to study the roots of Buddhist art.[107]

However, even before Arai's eventual travel to India, his early Buddhist paintings already evinced some Indian influences, mainly in the attires given to his Buddhist figures. One example of Arai's early Buddhist paintings is *Under the Bodhi Tree* (fig 2.2), a depiction of the three

---

[106] See Chapter 1 for more info on Okakura's circle of Nihonga artists

[107] Sunaoka, "Arai Kanpō no To-in: Gagyō e no eikyō [Arai Kanpō's India Travel: Influence towards his career]," in *Indo to Arai Kanpo*, 84

demon daughters of Mara[108] which he submitted to the first Bunten exhibition in 1907. Even though only a monochrome draft of the painting remains today, we can see that it demonstrated Arai's skills at figural compositions and line control in his delineation of the complicated posture and clothing of the three female figures. With one figure resting on the ground and two others standing, each facing a different angle, the diverse poses of the figures allowed Arai to demonstrate his adroitness with figures. The different gestures also allowed him to delineate the folds on the females' clothes, giving them a solid and realistic form. Arai also used skillful line control to provide a variety of facial expressions from different angles for the figures, giving them slender eyes and small lips that evinced his delicate hand.

Interestingly, while *Under the Bodhi Tree* referenced the story of Buddha's temptation, Buddha was absent from the depiction. Instead, Arai reserved the center of attention for the three female figures and only hinted at Buddha's off-screen presence through the direction of the figures' gazes. This visual technique of hinting at Buddha's presence would recur in Arai's other Buddhist works as a way to represent Buddha's spiritual omnipresence. In contrast, female figures took center stage in many of Arai's Buddhist paintings as he aimed to capture a balance between feminine beauty and religiosity. Even as a rough sketch, *Under the Bodhi Tree* was an exemplary prototype of Arai's early Buddhist works, and it helps us highlight the evolution of his later works whenArai had become better exposed to Indian art.

Following *Under the Bodhi Tree*, Arai submitted another Buddhist painting in 1911 to the 5th Bunten exhibition: a pair of hanging scrolls titled *Sermon in the Bamboo Forest* (fig 2.3). The subject of the painting was the Buddhist story of how the Bimbisara, the King of the ancient

---

[108] See Chapter 1

Indian kingdom of Magadha, provided Sākyamuni with a temple in the bamboo forests to preach, marking the foundation from which Buddhism grew.[109] In his painting, Arai cleverly used the postures of the human worshippers to delineate the depth within the picture with standing figures in the background while sitting and kneeling figures are featured prominently at the front. Additionally, the background figures appear to fade into the painting with light shades of color while the kneeling foreground figures feature bright colors that make them stand out, increasing the sense of depth within the picture. Like *Under the Bodhi Tree*, Arai dressed his figures, particularly the King and queen on the left screen in exotic attires with their upper torso bare, wrapped in only a sari or piece of cloth. Similarly, the right screen featured both a man and a woman with exposed upper bodies, evoking exotic fantasies of ancient Indian people. When the painting was first displayed at the fifth Bunten exhibition, it received positive reviews with one critic commenting on the "attractiveness of the colors" and commended on the detailed patterns on the figures' attires.[110]

Finally, Arai also touched upon Indian ethnicities and with his portraiture of the Buddha. One such example included *Amidha* (fig 2.4), a set of three hanging scrolls that showed a seated Buddha flanked by groups of musicians and bodhisattvas. Diverging from Buddhist art conventions, Arai gave the Buddha in the center brown skin (fig 2.4a), making him appear ethnically closer to an Indian. Furthermore, he also gave the flanking Boddhisattvas attires that were similar to the ones seen in Shimomura's *Buddha's Birth* (fig 1.1), consisting of exposed upper torsos draped with a sari and adorned skirts, replicating Japanese common imagination of

---

[109] *Indo to Arai Kanpo*, 17

[110] Ibid.

Indian attires.[111] The flanking hanging scrolls also showcased Arai's skill at using vivid colors and complex ornamentations to create an animated composition, even giving a pair of Bodhisattvas expressive faces (fig 2.4b) to convey liveliness. Yet, when Arai attempted to submit this work to the 7th annual Bunten exhibitions in 1913, the judges selected only the center hanging scroll of the seated Buddha for display rather than the left and right supplementary scrolls. In other words, only the sole, more modest, figure of the Indianized Buddha caught their attention and not the elaborate assembly of musicians and attendants. While neither the judges or Arai ever provided an explanation for why the left and right scrolls were left out of the display, we can speculate that this deliberate choice reveals the conservative inclinations of the Bunten's panel of judges, which would become a major point of contention for Nihonga artists later during the Taisho period.[112]

Offering of Rice Gruel in a period of change

While both of Arai's early figures from 1907 to 1911 showcased his interest in India through their foreign attires, they also revealed Arai's strict adherence to Japanese styles and techniques with their slender eyes and strong contours. However, Arai's next Buddhist painting in 1915, *Offering of Rice Gruel* (fig 2.5), diverged radically from his former works and represented Arai's first attempt at replicating the type of figures seen in Indian art. *Offering of Rice Gruel* took the form of a six-panel screen painting depicting topless female figures in side profiles, facing right. The title of the screen painting refers to the story of Sākyamuni and Sujata, in which a milkmaid named Sujata offered a dish of milk and rice to the emaciated Sākyamuni

---

[111] See Chapter 1

[112] Ujie Museum, *Arai Kanpō: Butsuga no Miryoku* [Arai Kanpō: The Charm of Buddhist Art] (Ujie: Ujie Museum, 2002), 11

who was practicing extreme asceticism in his pursuit of enlightenment. This ultimately ended Sākyamuni ascetic ways.

Similar to *Sermon in the Bamboo Forest,* Arai purposefully left out Sākyamuni from his painting and only hinted at his off-screen presence. Yet, unlike *Sermon in the Bamboo Forest* with its detailed figures in various poses, Arai chose to depict the figures in *Offering of Rice Gruel* in simplified forms. First, he painted all the figures in side profiles with their facial expressions consisting of only one eye, lips, and a protruding nose. Also, unlike his previous paintings where he cleverly positioned his figures to create a sense of depth within his work, both kneeling and standing figures appeared flat on the screen, and the lack of any backgrounds further highlighted the planar nature of his work. Another unique feature was Arai's use of red lines for the contours of his figures, which diverged from the usual black ink outlines in his previous works. This is most notable for the two central figures as viewers can see how Arai outlined their knees and legs underneath their dresses with thick lines, supplemented by slight use of shading to accentuate the creases of their knees to depict a solid form. As one review by Arai's contemporaneous art historian Sawamura Sentarō (1884-1930) described, Arai "abandoned his technique from the past two to three years to follow a new method, whose results are quite a sight to behold."[113]

More importantly, Sawamura not only saw changes in Arai's style but also his commitment to adapting Indian characteristics. In another review of *Offering of Rice Gruel* published the same year, he discussed Arai's new techniques evinced "consultations of the Ajanta

---

[113] Sawamura sentarō, Bijutsu Shinpō, 1915, cited in *Indo to Arai Kanpō*, 18

Cave murals and Central Asian archaeological murals."[114] Furthermore, Sawamura was not the only individual to notice the Indian elements in Arai's work. When Arai displayed *Offering of Rice Gruel* at the second annual Inten exhibitions in 1915, artist Ishii Hakutei (1882-1958) also pointed out how it possessed the characteristics of "Indian-Persian miniature art."[115] As the comments from Sawamura and Ishii showed, most artists and educated Japanese individuals possessed basic knowledge of Indian art styles by 1915 and were able to recognize their characteristics when Arai's work. Most importantly, the fact that Arai's *Offering of Rice Gruel* embodied multiple characteristics from Indian art demonstrated the accessibility of Indian artistic information and references for artists like Arai by 1915. The spread of information regarding India coincided with the emergence of radical stylistic and thematic changes in Nihonga paintings in exhibitions at the time, making Indian art an attractive reference for innovative artists like Arai. The following paragraphs will contextualize Arai's work vis-a-vis the changing Nihonga scene in Japan and its reception of Indian art and culture.

First, as early as 1913, foreign books on Indian art were steadily translated and published for the Japanese public. Examples included *A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon* by Vincent A Smith (fig 2.6), which was advertised and sold by the Japanese magazine *Gakutō*.[116] Similarly, *The Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon* by famed Indian art historian Ananda Coomaraswamy received a review in the next issue of *Gakutō*.[117] In addition to the sporadic appearance of books

---

114 Sawamura, "Saikin ni okeru Nihonga no Keikō [Recent Nihonga inclinations]," *Shin-Nihon* vol. 5, issue 12, (Tokyo: Shin Nihon-sha, 1915), 144-145

115 Ishii Hakutei, *Chū-ō Bijutsu* 1(2) (November 1915), reproduced in *Nihon Bijutsuin Hyakunen-shi* vol. 4 [Nihon Bijutsu-in Hundred Year History Vol. 4], edited by *Nihon Bijutsuin* (Tokyo: Nihon Bijutsuin-sha, 1994), 489

116 "A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon", *Gakutō 18, issue 6, (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1913), 62*

117 "Chinretsujō yori [from the display hall]", *Gakutō 18, issue 7,* (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1914), 12-14

and magazines, another notable source of Indian art for many artists was the Japanese Buddhist artist Kiritani Senrin (1877-1932). From 1911 onward, he traveled across India for three years, collecting and photographing Indian artifacts as part of his research on Indian Buddhist art. When he returned to Japan in 1913, he held a small exhibition displaying his collection of various artworks from India, which fascinated many young Nihonga artists.[118] Many items in Kiritani's Indian collection were featured in a special issue on Indian art by the art magazine *Bijutsu Gahō*, which included several reproductions that Arai Kanpō could have used as references for *Offering of Rice Gruel.*[119]

One example is a reproduction of an Indian miniature painting featuring figures in side profiles and large eyes like Arai's figure in *Offering of Rice Gruel* (fig 2.7). Also included in the special issue were Kiritani's photographs of Ajanta Cave paintings, some of which shared characteristics with Arai's works. For example, one of Kiritani's photographs showed multiple Ajanta figures with almond-shaped eyes and thick lips similar to Arai's figures (fig 2.8). Kiritani also provided samples of Ajanta roof decorations with distinctive geometric and floral designs (fig 2.9) that resembled the belts that Arai's figures wore (fig 2.10). The special issue also described Ajanta's figures as depicted with "contours drawn with strong red earth colors" which may suggest an inspiration behind the similar red outlines for Arai's figures.[120]

Furthermore, from 1914 to 1915, Japanese periodicals not only reproduced examples of Indian art but also provided detailed interpretive articles. In the same year that Kiritani's images

---

[118] Sunaoka, *Arai Kanpō no To-in*, 87-88

[119] "Indo Bijutsu Gō [Indian Art Issue]", *Bijutsu Gahō Ring Zōkan*, (Tokyo: Gahō-sha, 1913)

[120] Description for Image number 25 in *Indo Bijutsu Gō*

were featured in *Bijutsu Gahō*, he also published the article "Exploration of Indian Art" in *Bijutsu Shinpō* where he discussed the idiosyncrasies of Indian art. Going beyond discussing the Ajanta-Hôryûji connection like his predecessors, Kiritani described India's medieval paintings such as Rajput and Mughal miniatures, highlighting their use of bright colors and delicate lines.[121] Illustrating his article were two reproductions of Indian miniatures (fig 2.11) displaying figures with distinctive large eyes and side profiles (fig 2.12). With Kiritani Senrin and other art magazines providing first-hand information on Indian art, specifically miniatures, Arai had no shortage of resources after which to model his figures.

On top of accessible writings and visual examples from Kiritani Senrin regarding Indian miniatures, Arai could access up-to-date writings on the Ajanta Cave images through other Japanese periodicals. One such source included a detailed publication on the Ajanta Caves from Tokyo University art historian and *Kokka* chief editor Taki Seiichi.[122] In 1914, he published an article on the unique characteristics of the Ajanta Caves titled "The Light of East Asia (Tōyō no Hikari)," which contained descriptions that were reflected in Arai's screen painting. For example, Taki emphasized the diverse approaches that ancient Indian artists used toward depicting the human form in the murals. In some cases, they painted the figures with firm colored lines.[123] Additionally, Taki highlighted the unique ways that the Ajanta painters utilized shading. Rather than having great tonal contrasts, shading was used sparingly to "depict bulges from the body or

---

[121] Kiritani Senrin, "Indo Bijutsu no Tanken [Exploration of Indian Art]", *Bijutsu Shinpō* 12, no. 11, (Tokyo: Tōzai Bijutsu Shuppan-sha, 1913), 410

[122] Takabayashi Mutsuko, "Tagōru no Rainichi to Kindai Nihonga [Tagore's Japan Visit and Modern Japanese Art], in *Indo ni Miserareta Nihongaka-tachi: Tenshin to Tagōru no deai kara* [*Japanese Artists Fascinated by India: Since the meeting between Tenshin and Tagore]* (Ibaraki Prefecture Tenshin Memorial Gora Museum, 1998), 107

[123] Taki Seiichi, "Indo Ajyantā no Sekkutsudera ni tsuite [Regarding the Indian Ajanta Cave Temples], *To-a no Hikari* 9, no. 11, (Tokyo: *To-a Kyōkai*, 1914), 14

roundness of objects."[124] In other words, Taki argued how shading functioned more like contours for Ajanta figures in that it was used to outline the form of human bodies. His description of the colored lines and shading on human figures at Ajanta brought to mind Arai's figures in *Offering of Rice Gruel*. With their thick red lines acting as contours and Arai's slight shading on the figures' dresses accentuating the bulge of the knees underneath the attire, Arai's work evidences his understanding of contemporary art historical analyses of the Ajanta cave murals by Japanese scholars like Taki Seiichi.

Furthermore, it is worth pointing out how in his article Taki pointed out the shortcomings of Western scholarship analysis on the Ajanta Caves, specifically John Griffith's *Paintings in the Buddhist Cave-temples of Ajanta*. For example, he highlighted how Griffith's book failed to adequately explain the unique colored contours and line-works that appeared on the ancient figures. Taki postulated that Griffith must not have received satisfactory explanations from other scholars. More importantly, he stated that "the brushworks associated with such contours would have been difficult to explain to a Westerner."[125] He also argued that the verbal description of the figural contours in Griffith's book made them sound like line works from Western artistic traditions, yet when he visited the caves he discerned that the ancient contours were stylistically closer to Oriental traditions. It is possible that Taki's disagreement with Griffith's analysis was a subtle strategy to undermine the Eurocentricism in scholarship regarding the Ajanta Caves and to place the ancient cave paintings firmly within Oriental artistic traditions. Thus, through Taki's

---

[124] Ibid, 15

[125] Ibid.

writing, we see how Japanese interpretations of Indian art during Arai's time began to shift away from a reliance on Euro-American scholarship.

From the flat side profiles of Indian miniatures to the thick contours of Ajanta figures, Arai's screen painting displayed visual characteristics of Indian art that were accessible through reproductions and writings at the time. While Arai's implementation of Indian visual elements derived from his passion for Indian art, his decision to drastically change his style was also connected to a radical new development in the Nihonga art scene: the creation of the annual Inten, a non-governmental art exhibition under the re-established Japan Art Institute (*Saikō Nihon Bijutsu-in*), which following its founding in 1914 rivaled the governmental Bunten exhibition.[126] The Inten was founded when conservative members of the Bunten's Nihonga jury clashed with more experimental and progressive members, many of whom were followers of Okakura Kakuzō, such as Taikan and Shunshô.[127] Following Okakura's death in 1913, his enemies saw a chance to oust his most important disciple, Taikan, from the Nihonga jury the following year as the first step in purging the Bunten of Okakura's influence.

In response to Yokoyama's dismissal, several prominent Nihonga artists, including Hishida Shunsō, Shimomura Kanzan, and many others, resigned from the Bunten jury in protest and followed Taikan. As loyal disciples of Okakura, they declared their intention to revive the Japan Art Institute in Ibaraki prefecture, which had temporarily closed with Okakura's death, and create a rival non-governmental annual Nihonga exhibition that welcomed radical and innovative

---

[126] Szostak, John Donald, "Painting Circles: Tsuchida Bakusen and Nihonga Collectives in Early 20th-Century Japan, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 57

[127] See Chapter 1 for more about Okakura's teachings

paintings in contrast to the more conservative Bunten under the Ministry of Education.[128] It was against this dramatic backdrop that Arai Kanpō also transitioned from the Bunten to the Inten with his submission of *Offering of Rice Gruel* to the Inten's second annual exhibition in 1915. The painting's radical departure from Arai's earlier works made it an ideal fit for the Inten exhibition.

The Inten was established by Nihonga artists under Okakura who were more open to radical experimentation in style and theme. A majority of them adopted foreign art styles, including Indian art, in their work. As early as 1911, Taki Seiichi mentioned how conservative artists descried what they called the "delirious" actions of progressive Nihonga artists, such as "learning Western art, or mimicking modern Indian art."[129] As the Inten exhibition continued throughout the Taisho period into the 1920s, exotic foreign styles continued to dominate and paintings showing Indian visual elements became commonplace.

As the above paragraphs showed, *Offering of Rice Gruel* represented not only a turning point in Arai's style but also speaks to the transformative decade of the 1910s for Nihonga. In the years leading up to Arai's production of the screen painting, information on Indian art was made widely accessible, which explains how Arai was able to implement elements from Indian visual art before his travel to India. Moreover, his creation of the screen painting also coincided with the inauguration of the Inten exhibition, a progressive venue that welcomed radical experimentation in Nihonga painting; it would be an ideal place to display Indian-themed Japanese art in the future. While *Offering of Rice Gruel* embodied Arai's foray into Indian styles

---

[128] Szostak, 58-61

[129] Taki, "Nihongakai no Iwayuru Kyūha [The so-called old faction of the Nihonga world]", *Shin Nihon [New Japan] vol 1, issue 10,* (Tokyo: Shin Nihon-sha, 1911), *136*

while the artist still resided in Japan, his travel to India in 1917 enabled him to become more familiar with Indian art. He would submit more innovative Indian-themed works to future Inten exhibitions. This influential travel to India came as a result of a momentous event in 1916: Tagore's visit to Japan.

After Offering of Rice Gruel (1916): Tagore's Japan visit

The years following Arai's creation of *Offering of Rice Gruel* saw an additional influx of literature on Indian art and culture to Japan. First, Ananda Cooramaswamy's *Indian Art History* was translated and published in Japanese in 1916, further contributing to the spread of Indian art knowledge in Japan.[130] However, the most crucial contribution in garnering attention towards Indian art among Japanese intellectuals was the visit of Rabindranath Tagore to Japan in 1916. As the first Asian recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, Tagore had already garnered popularity in Japan during the 1910s. His award-winning collection of poems, *Gitanjali*, was translated and distributed in Japan, earning many Japanese fans who regarded him as an Asian hero.[131] In 1916, Tagore embarked on a world tour with a planned three-month stay in Japan between June and September before he continued his travels to the U.S.[132]

Tagore's 1916 visit to Japan had a direct impact on Arai Kanpō's life. As Arai himself described, his opportunity to visit India was thanks to Rabindranath Tagore's invitation.[133] During his Japan visit, Tagore resided at Hara Tomitarō's Sankei-en in the company of its clique

---

[130] A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Indo Bijutsushi [Indian Art History],* trans. Sobu Rokurō and Iwasaki Mazumi (Tokyo: Kōryō-sha, 1916).

[131] Takabayashi, 106

[132] Sunaoka, *Arai Kanpō no To-in*, 85

[133] Arai, *Amida-in Zakki*, 5

of Nihonga artists under Hara's patronage. Tagore eagerly befriended the Japanese artists as he wished to foster further artistic exchanges between India and Japan as he had with Okakura Tenshin fourteen years before.[134] During his time at Sankeien, Tagore learned about Arai's proficiency as a copyist and his intense interest in India and extended an invitation for him to reproduce Japanese works in India and to teach at his school.[135]

While Tagore invited Arai to India as a favor to the artist, knowing Arai's fascination with India, it was also part of his ongoing efforts to revitalize Asian art motivated by Pan-Asian cultural nationalism. Tagore expressed his concerns regarding the displacement of Oriental art and culture due to Western imperialism, and he emphasized the need for an Indo-Japanese collaboration to revitalize Oriental art. Moreover, his appeals reflected a broader belief in the distinctive attributes of Oriental art, including both Japanese and Indian traditions. Tagore shared such beliefs with contemporary Japanese intellectuals who held a similar sense of cultural nationalism. The following paragraphs will explore the outlook of Tagore and other Japanese intellectuals regarding Oriental art, as well as the impact of such an outlook on artists like Arai.

While in Japan, Tagore collaborated with the newly reformed Japan Art Institute (hereafter simplified as "the Institute"), which included his Japanese friends such as Yokoyama Taikan and others, to introduce modern Indian art to Japanese audiences. First, he delivered a public talk on June 10th at the Institute titled *Art Theory*. Tagore's lecture was followed by an exhibition featuring watercolors and miniatures by contemporaneous Indian artists such as

---

[134] See Chapter 1

[135] To provide more details, Tagore hired Arai to reproduce a specific screen painting by Shimomura Kanzan titled *Yorobōshi*, which he saw at Sankei-en. Inaga Shigemi, "The Interaction of Bengali and Japanese Artistic Milieus in the First Half of the Twentieth Century (1901-1945)," *Japan Review,* no. 21 (2009): 158-159

Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, and Mukul Chandra Dey. Both Tagore's lecture and his exhibition were documented in the booklet *Bichitra Art School's Indian Art Book* **(***Bichittora Bijutsu Gakkō Indo Gashū)*, published by the Institute. It includes 29 reproductions of artworks displayed at the exhibition and Tagore's translated lecture as an introduction to the art book.[136] By hosting Tagore's lecture, providing space for his exhibition of Indian art, and publishing the booklet, the Institute and its members demonstrated their commitment to making Tagore and Indian art more accessible to the Japanese public.

In his lecture at the Institute, which was translated and recorded in written form in Japanese, Tagore presented a philosophical outlook on art. He established a dichotomy between physical objects and an abstract concept of "essence" (shinzui, Japanese translation) which Tagore metaphorically referred to as the "heart" (kokoro, Japanese translation) of objects.[137] For example, using a tree as a metaphor, Tagore described how while a botanist possesses ample scientific knowledge of a tree, from the way it grows to the seed it bears, only an artist understands the heart or "spirit" (seishin, Japanese translation) that lies within the tree. Furthermore, Tagore stressed how "a true artist loves said spirit and possesses a mutual love between himself and nature." Continually, Tagore emphasized that the responsibility of the artist is to "deeply understand the hearts of earth, trees, waters, winds, birds, and express them to the best of his abilities."[138]

---

[136] Emiko, 65

[137] For this essay we are using Rabindranath's published lecture in *Bijittora Bijutsu Gakkō Indo Gashū,* translated into Japanese by Okakura Tenshin's brother, Okakura Yoshisaburō. Thus, it's unclear what are the original words that Rabindranath used to discuss the non-material aspects of objects. In his Japanese translation, Yoshisaburō translated such terms into words such as "spiritual" (seishin), "essence" (shinzui), or "idealistic" (risō).

[138] Tagore, Rabindranath, Geijutsu-ron [Art theory], translated by Okakura Yoshisaburō, in *Bijittora Bijutsu Gakkō Indo Gashū* [Bichitra Art School's Indian Art Book], (Tokyo: Seika-sha, 1916), 7

Moreover, Tagore linked this physical-spiritual divide to the duality between Oriental and Western art:

> "While I've only seen some Western Art, it placed most of their strengths in depicting details. In contrast, for Oriental art, specifically Chinese and Japanese art, details aren't necessary. Instead, it prioritizes capturing the essence of objects, which they believed to be the 'spirit' of objects […] Oriental beliefs establish that there are spirits in all objects and beauty arises when one connects with such spirit and not any other unnecessary elements."[139]

As his statement shows, Tagore argued how Western art was more adept at capturing an object's physical appearance and was overly concerned with "details." By contrast, Oriental art appeared more simplistic because it is more focused on capturing an object's "essence" or "spirit."

Furthermore, he lamented how Westernized modern Japan had become, and urged Japanese people to appreciate their antique and traditional arts, which he claimed were more in touch with an object's essence.[140] Tagore echoed this message in another lecture he delivered in Japan titled *The Message of India to Japan* in which he further warned of Japan's complacency in becoming a Westernized nation, hoping that "Japan may never lose her faith in her soul in the mere pride of her foreign acquisitions, for that pride is a humiliation ultimately leading to poverty and weakness."[141]

Overall, Tagore's lectures revolved heavily around his maxim of Oriental culture as spiritually attuned, which was reflected in its art. He described Oriental art as simplistic compared to Western art but stated that it possesses more "heart" and sentimentality. Admittedly,

---

[139] Ibid., 12

[140] Ibid., 14

[141] Tagore, *The Message of India to Japan: A Lecture, (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 14*

Tagore's contrast of a materialistic West against a spiritual East appears simplistic, and he did not provide a clear description of the spiritual aspects of objects, which he described as the "heart" or "essence." Instead, Tagore merely defined his abstract concept of the spiritual in Oriental art as an antithesis to Western artistic values, characterized by a rejection of detailed styles in favor of a more simplistic style that sheds unnecessary "details" in depictions.

By the time gave his lecture in 1916, the dichotomy between a spiritual East and a materialistic West had already been a popular concept among Japanese intellectuals. For instance, Okakura's Tenshin's *Book of Tea*, published in 1906, similarly defended Oriental cultures' spiritual values against the influx of Western culture.[142] Furthermore, one year before Tagore arrived in Japan, Buddhist scholar Ebe Ōson published the book *Tagore's Ideology and Religion (Tagōru no shisō oyobi Shūkyō*), which further distributed Tagore's writings to Japanese readers. Once again, the book highlighted Tagore's emphasis on "spirituality" in Asian cultures and their "ideological and selfless" nature in contrast to the egotism of Western cultures.[143] Ebe's book demonstrates Japanese interest in Tagore and Indian culture by 1915 due to the latter's reputation as a Nobel prize recipient.

Following Ebe's book, popular magazines published articles on Indian culture and thoughts in anticipation of Tagore's visit. These publications not only discussed Tagore's vision of Oriental culture but also frequently framed India in a poetic light: as superior to other nations in spirit, philosophy, and idealism despite its subjugated state. For example, an article on Oriental

---

[142] Takabayashi, 106

[143] Ebe Ōson, *Tagōru no Shisō to Shūkyō* [*Tagore's Ideology and Religion],* (Tokyo: Nichigetsu-sha 日月社, 1915), 56

thought by Hiroi Tatsutarō stated that "while India has collapsed physically, Western civilization has collapsed spiritually," offering India as a beacon of Asian spiritual strength despite its fall to colonization.[144] Hiroi's statement evince the typical perspective of Japanese intellectuals toward India in 1914, and such stereotypes also influenced reviews of Indian art. For instance, in an article on modern Indian art published the same year as Hiroi's article in the same magazine, Komori Hikoji described how the works of Abanindranath Tagore possessed "fiery pure Indian thoughts" that reflected the artist's "rich philosophy."[145] As these Japanese writings showed, Tagore's theory of a spiritual East against a materialistic West was gaining support amongst some Japanese intellectuals, although these scholars frequently singled out India as the spiritual counterpart against Western civilization rather than Oriental cultures as a whole.

Yet, while 1915 was characterized by optimism towards India and Tagore as spiritual symbols, Tagore's 1916 visit to Japan also created some unexpected tensions. Tagore's passionate speeches on Oriental spirituality and Japan's potential to rival the West received mixed reactions from the Japanese. Many individuals who were proud of Japan's modernization felt displeased by Tagore's criticism of Japanese adherence to Western culture and forgetfulness of the country's Oriental roots. Coupled with the fact that Tagore came from a "defeated nation," the Indian poet's unflattering outlook on Japan provoked some dissonant reactions.[146] Nevertheless, some individuals remained inspired by Tagore. One of Tagore's most vocal defenders included

---

[144] Hiroi Tatsutarō, "Tōyō Ishiki [Oriental Consciousness]," in *Jidai Shichō,* May issue*,* (Tokyo: Jidai Shichō-Sha*,* 1915), 35

[145] Komori Hikoji, "Shin Indoga ni tsuite [Regarding New Indian Art]," in *Jidai Shichō*, 47

[146] For a more comprehensive summary of Japan's reception to Tagore's 1916 visit, please read *Rabindranath Tagore and Japan* by Kyoko Niwa in *Tagore and Japan*

Takakusu Junjirō who mocked how those who criticized Tagore had no comprehension of the poet's writings and Indian philosophy. Furthermore, Takakusu firmly identified the "spirituality" that frequented Tagore's speech and writings as Buddhist and claimed that Japanese ignorance towards Tagore's theories demonstrated how disconnected the nation had become from its Buddhist roots.[147] As a dedicated Buddhist scholar, Takakusu had hoped for Tagore's visit to alleviate what he perceived as Japan's spiritual deterioration.

Tagore's 1916 Visit: Japanese Reception of Modern Indian Art

Apart from Takakusu, Tagore received a more positive reception from Japanese artists and art historians thanks to the minor exhibition of Indian art that accompanied Tagore's lecture, which ignited some intrigue. Admittedly, some individuals mocked the displays as simple miniature paintings with a "mournful tone of a fallen country," and claimed that admirers were "only enchanted by Tagore's fame."[148] Yet other articles published the same year expressed more positive sentiments. Moreover, many conveyed a sense of respect towards the idealism or philosophy embodied within the seemingly simple styles of Indian art, which had some parallels to Tagore's statement about the "heart" innate to Asian art. For example, in a short newspaper article titled *The Characteristics of Indian Art and Japanese Art,* artist Kawakami Ryoka described contemporary Indian works as "not the techniques visible in Japanese or French painting, but possessing idealism (*kannen no koto*)."[149] Yet, despite his appreciation of modern

---

[147] Takakusu Junjirō, "Indo Shisō Tagōru [Indian Master Poet, Tagore]," in *Ṣei Tagōru* [Holy Tagore], edited by Kyōiku gakujutsu kenkyūkai [Education and Scholarship Research Group], (Tokyo: Dōbun-kan, 1916), 62-63

[148] "Taishō Go-nen no Nihonga-kai" [The world of Nihonga in year Taisho 5 (1916], *Bijutsu Gahō* 40, no. 2 (1917): 29

[149] Ryoka Kawakami, "Indoga no Tokushitsu to Nihonga [*The characteristics of Indian Art and Japanese Art],"* *Yomiuri Shinbun,* July 6th-8th 1916*,* reproduced in Nihon Bijutsuin Hyakunenshi, vol. 4, 1143

Indian art, Ryoka believed it lacked the intense mysticism and religiosity of ancient Indian civilization. He further suggested that contemporary Indian art should adapt the formal and technical aspects of Japanese art to manifest the same "mandala-esque" spirituality in painting.[150]

Ryoka's comments regarding the ideological nature of Indian art and the potential for Japanese art to contribute to its evolution were echoed in a similar review of the same exhibition by Buddhist studies professor Takeda Toyoshirō. In his article, Takeda expressed his respect for modern Indian art for bringing to light the "enlightenment of Indian intellectualism since the 19th century," but lamented modern Indian artists' insistence on learning Western art in their effort to modernize.[151] However, Takeda remained optimistic that recent interactions between Japanese and Indian artists could help the arts of both countries evolve, stating that:

> "I believe that foundational thoughts and emotions are not only a powerful force in bringing India and Japan closer. It helps Indians understand Japan, and Japanese to realize that great art is present in India, fostering closeness of both countries in the field of art"[152]

Similar to Ryoka, Takeda admired the non-material and non-technical elements of Indian art, using terms such as "intellectualism" and "thoughts and emotions" to highlight its strength and connection to Japan. Mirroring Ryoka's sentiments, however, he also insinuated Indian art's inferiority to Japanese art as he hinted at the necessity of Japanese artists' intervention in Indian art's development.

---

[150] Ibid, 1144

[151] Takeda Toyoshirō. "Tagōru-ka to Indoga [Tagore Family and Indian Art]," in *Kensei Bijutsu*, no. 108, (Tokyo: Bijustu Kensei-sha, 1916), 13

[152] Ibid

Finally, we have the review of Arai Kanpō himself. Despite his passion for India, Arai also portrayed Indian art as an eccentric but inferior art form that required Japanese intervention. In a brief statement, Arai described the works shown at Tagore's exhibition as "complex and admirable in its ideological contents, but limited to miniature objects or works resembling Western watercolors."[153] More importantly, Arai stated how the lines and contours in contemporary Indian art did not possess a unique expressiveness or complexity compared to those in contemporary Japanese art. He affirmed how Tagore developed a fondness for Japanese lines during his visit and hired him to teach such techniques to Indian artists. This invitation bestowed upon him equal parts honor and daunting responsibility as a representative of Japanese art in India.[154] Arai's mention of Japanese lines when talking about Indian art invites some interpretation because it parallels similar comments in Ryoka Kawakami's review. Describing the lines in Indian art as simply "unpainted areas between colored portions," Ryoka felt they lacked the sentimental expressiveness of Japanese lines.[155] Arai and Ryoka shared a sense of pride in the beauty of Japanese lines, which they saw as the missing element in the works of contemporary Indian artists. In Arai's case, he considered it his responsibility to introduce this uniquely Japanese technique to Indian art.

Looking at the reviews of Takeda, Ryoka, and Arai regarding the works displayed at Tagore's exhibition, we can see recurring patterns in their comments. All three highlighted the "ideological" or "intellectual" aspects of Indian art as its strength but found it lacking in

---

[153] Arai. "Indo e iku Watashi no Shimei [My Mission to go to India]," *Kensei Bijutsu*, no. 109, (Bijustu Kensei-sha, 1916): 27-28

[154] Ibid, 28

[155] Ryoka, 1143

technique. All three favored Japanese art, with its technical superiority, and considered it to offer a remedy for Indian art. Such reviews paralleled similar viewpoints towards India of Japanese scholars such as Ebe Ōson and Takakusu Junjirō, who romanticized India with its idealism and spirituality as an exemplary counterpart to Western civilization. Even though the reviews of the artworks stressed their innate "ideology" rather than "spirit" like in the writings of Ebe and Takakusu, they shared a similarity in stressing the non-materialistic elements of India as its strength. Yet, despite the reviews' praise for Indian ideology and spirit, they were also colored by a tinge of condescending nationalism as they used Indian art as a foil to extol Japan and its art as superior to Indian art.

Arai in India: 1917-1919

As established above, Tagore's 1916 visit had several effects on Japan's intellectual and artistic community. Arai's encounter with Tagore marked a turning point in his career, as he was invited to travel to India. This opportunity provided him a long-awaited chance to study Buddhist art at its origins and "savor the original religious concepts of India."[156] Among the many religious sites in India, Arai was most eager to view the Ajanta Cave murals, which he described as possessing a "technical spirit" (*Shuhō Seishin)*.[157] This comment reflected Arai's outlook towards Buddhist art: not only were technique and draftsmanship as important as the spiritual message, but many times, they were crucial in embodying or expressing said religiosity. With his travels in India, Arai hoped to find inspiration to create his ideal Buddhist art that would combine a so-called harmony of technique and spirit.

---

[156] Arai. "Indo ni omomuku ni tsuite [Regarding going to India]," Kaiga Seidan, vol. 4, no. 8, (Tokyo: Kaiga Seidan-sha, 1916), 6

[157] Ibid.

In addition to his passionate writings on Buddhist art, Arai also kept detailed records of his time in India. First were his handwritten journals that he kept throughout his travels, which were reproduced in his 1975 retrospective catalog, *Arai Kanpō: The Individual and his Works*, under the name of *Indian Diary (Indo Nisshi)*.[158] Apart from entries detailing his activities and observations, his journal contained multiple illustrations providing valuable information about his time abroad. Arai also contributed articles and interviews to various periodicals after returning to Japan. These writings give us a valuable window into Arai's activities and perceptions in India.

Arai's time in India lasted for roughly two years, starting with his arrival in Calcutta in December 1916. He spent six months in West Bengal, primarily at Tagore's school, located in modern-day Bolpur, where he taught Japanese art techniques to Tagore's circle of artists. He also took the occasion to visit the nearby cities of Puri and Karnataka. By May, Arai went on a tour of the Himalayan regions of India, particularly Darjeeling, where he spent a month and a half observing the mountainous sceneries before returning to Calcutta. Sometime during September, Arai received a request from *Kokka* to travel to the Ajanta Caves to create copies of the ancient mural, which the artist eagerly accepted.[159] However, before commencing the Ajanta project, he decided to embark on a nearly fifty-day tour of ancient sites across India. Starting in October, Arai traveled southwards from Calcutta, and visited renowned ancient sites such as the Ellora and Elephanta Caves, before returning to Calcutta by late November.[160]

---

[158] Arai, *Indo Nisshi [India Diary],* reproduced in *Arai Kanpō Hito to Sakuhin [Arai Kanpō: Man and Work]*, edited by Nonaka Taizō, (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Bijutsu, 1974).

[159] Arai, *Indo Nisshi*, 77

[160] Museum Ujie*, Arai Kanpō Butsuga no Miryoku*, Ujie (now Sakura City): Museum Ujie, 2002, 84

Two additional individuals accompanied Arai in his travels. First was the artist Kitayama Nanpu, who left Japan with Arai and remained with him throughout West Bengal. Like Arai, Kitayama sought inspiration in India and created compelling artworks upon returning to Japan.[161] On his tour of ancient sites, Arai was also accompanied by Oka Kyōtsu, a Buddhist monk studying Sanskrit in India.[162] Oka took several photographs of cities and ancient ruins while with Arai, which he later published as a photo album titled *Buddhist Monuments in India (Indo Busseki)* in 1918.[163] These companions demonstrated how Arai was not alone in his enthrallment with India as many other Japanese drawn to its allure during the early 20th century.

Throughout his travels, Arai was enraptured by the diversity of Indian art he saw, from ancient sculptures to simple folk art. Observing various Indian sculptures from both Hindu and Buddhist traditions, Arai frequently expressed his fascination with their "carnal" (*niku-teki*) beauty, such as their elaborate poses and nudity. For example, he described how the Buddhist sculptures at the Ellora caves possessed a "freedom of the flesh's dynamism," which he claimed were Hindu influences.[164] Similarly, at the Elephanta Caves, he sketched Indian sculptures with animated poses. This included a sketch of a Shiva sculpture (fig 2.13), with its multiple arms raised, legs in stride, and upper torso pointed at an angle.[165] Moreover, sketches of female figures dominated Arai's sketchbooks as the artist highlighted the carnal elements typical of ancient Indian sculptures. Examples included another sketch from Elephanta showing a half-nude female

---

[161] See Chapter 4 for more on Kitayama Nanpu

[162] Sunaoka, *Aya no Kyōen*, 10

[163] Oka Kyōtsu, *Indo Busseki Shashin-chō* [*Indian Buddhist Monuments album]*, self-published, 1918

[164] Arai, *Indo Nisshi*, 84

[165] Shiva is one the major deities of Hinduism, and commonly depicted with snake motifs and multiple arms in Indian sculpture. These attributes can be seen in Arai's sketch.

figure (fig 2.14) with round breasts and wide hips. Continually, Arai also illustrated male and female figures in sensuous embrace (fig 2.15), evoking erotic sentiments. Such sketches evinced Arai's captivation with the sensual nature of Indian sculptures. As he described in a visit to Konark Sun Temple near Puri:

> "The main hall was entirely covered with carvings of what appeared to be men and women engaging in sex, which surprised me. As artworks, they displayed carnal beauty with no inhibition, creating images in accordance to the artist's desires."[166]

Outside of ancient sites, Arai also relied on local Indian museums as sources for art viewing. One example included a Bharhut Chandra Yakshi sculpture at the Indian Museum in Kolkata, which Arai sketched in his journal alongside his note of *Chandra the Yakshini* (fig 2.16).[167] By the time Arai traveled abroad, reproductions of Chandra Yakshini figures had already appeared in some Japanese periodicals, including one (fig 2.17) among the display of Kiritani's Indian collections in the *Bijutsu Gahō*'s special issue from 1913, simply titled as "Indian woman sculpture" (*Indo fujin no zō)*.[168] As shown through both Arai's sketch and Kiritani's photo, common motifs associated with Chandra Yakshini included her bare-breasted upper body, her left knee wrapped around a tree, and her right arm reaching upwards to touch the tree's branches. With her animated pose and attire, Chandra Yakshini captured a sense of exoticism for artists like Arai and Kiritani.

On top of his studies of ancient Indian sculptures, Arai also observed and sketched local Indian women in their daily activities, often with a hint of voyeurism. For example, in one of his

---

[166] Arai, *Indo Nisshi*, 67

[167] The Chandra Yakshi sculptural reliefs are carvings of female nature spirits, known as "Yakshis" or "Yakshinis," that decorated the columns of stone stupas unearthed from an archaeological dig at Bharhut. Several of them are displayed at the Bharhut Galleries at the Indian Museum today.

[168] See page 74

journal entries, he described various women bathing near the Ganges one morning, which gave him a good chance to study Indian women bodies:

> "When they entered the water clad in only thin white cloths, they're almost prime examples. Their breasts are much higher, and their waists largely protrude from behind. The small abdomen is also beautiful. Their physical beauty has the potential to affect Japanese women."[169]

Supplementing his comments were several sketches of Indian women, sometimes half-dressed, in their daily activities. One noteworthy example included a sketch of a half-nude bathing woman with exaggerated hips and chests in his notebook (fig 2.18), which fully illustrated his journal entry.

As his journal entries and sketches showed, Arai gained an appreciation for human bodies from his observations of Indian sculptures and local women, which would deeply impact his art after he returned to Japan. In several entries, he used terms such as "dynamism" and "carnal beauties" to describe Indian sculptures and highlighted their elaborate poses in drawings. Moreover, he also expressed interest in the erotic femininity that he perceived in both sculptures and Indian women. While such comments may suggest Arai's objectification of Indians, the artist also voiced his fondness for the sense of liberation innate in such provocative bodies. Granting him many opportunities to study new figures, Arai's travel across India had an impact on the artist. However, his deepest engagement with Indian art would come when he initiated his project to copy the Ajanta cave paintings.

Arai's Ajanta Cave reproductions and analysis of "carnal beauty"

Before traveling to India, Arai announced his desire to visit the Ajanta Caves and he fortunately received this opportunity when *Kokka's* chief editor, the aforementioned Taki Seiichi,

---

[169] Arai, *Indo Nisshi*, 74

launched an expedition to copy Ajanta's ancient murals. Taki requested Arai to lead the artistic endeavor, but also assigned multiple individuals to assist him. First, he appointed art historian Sawamura Sentaro as the project's supervisor.[170] Furthermore, Arai received the assistance of other artists such as Asai Kanpa (1897-1985), Nōsu Kōsetsu (1885-1973), and Kiritani Senrin, which we have established as a well-known Indophile. With the participation of renowned art historians like Taki and Sawamura and artists like Nōsu and Kiritani who all shared a passion for India, the *Kokka*-sponsored Ajanta project marked a significant event for all involved.[171]

The project began in December 1917 and lasted for nearly after 3 months.[172] After completing the copies Arai described how he was almost moved to tears by the "devoutness and spirit" innate in the ancient paintings and felt grateful for a chance to "communicate with the souls of the artists from thousands of years ago."[173] Following the project's completion, Arai returned to Japan shortly after, followed by his Ajanta reproductions. From 1918 to 1919, these reproductions were exhibited widely in major cities such as Tokyo, Osaka, and Kyoto. Supplementing these exhibitions was a series of talks given by Taki and Sawamura on the importance of the Ajanta caves.[174] Following the cross-country tour, Arai's reproductions were

---

[170] Inaga, 161

[171] See Chapter 3 for more about Nōsu Kōsetsu and how his time at Ajanta impacted his art

[172]Arai, *Indo Nisshi,* 85-85. As Arai described in his diary, he received and accepted the request to copy the Ajanta cave murals through telegram. He made preparations and gathered with Sawamura, Nōsu, and other Japanese individuals at Mumbai between December 3rd and 5th, 1917 before starting work at Mumbai by December 11th, 1917.

[173] Arai, Hekiga Mosha Kaisō [Recollection on Mural Reproduction], *Tōei,* vol 11, issue 10, (1935): 13

[174] Yasuko Fukyama, "Japanese Encounters with Ajanta," in *Culture as Power: Buddhist Heritage and the Indo-Japanese Dialogue,* edited by Madhu Bhalla, (Oxon; New York: Routledge: 2021), 198 -199 189-208

stored at Tokyo Imperial University under Taki's supervision, but tragically, many of the copies were lost to fire during the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923.[175]

Fortunately, some of Arai's original copies remain today, which offers us a glimpse at the kind of art Arai encountered at Ajanta. One reproduction showed a slender male figure wearing an elaborate headpiece with his upper body shifted to one side (fig 2.19). This body composition, known as the "Tribhanga" pose, is a conventional stance common for traditional Indian figures, where the upper body and hips point in opposite directions.[176] Another significant reproduction showed the Birth of Buddha, depicting an infant Sākyamuni held by two female attendants next to his mother, Maya (fig 2.20). Referred by Asai Kanpa as a "nude beauty" (*ratai bijin*) the figure of Madame Maya captured the attention of the Japanese artists working at Ajanta alongside other nude and half-nude figures, as described by Asai.[177] In Arai's copy, her slender waist contrasted strongly with her rotund breasts, hips, and thighs, she captured the "carnal beauty" that Arai used to describe Indian figures.[178] Arai also featured ancient female figures prominently in the other sketches he produced, such as one reproduction from Cave 16 showing two crouching women with one of them holding flowers (fig 2.21), and another copy from Cave 17 featuring three women (fig 2.22).

Arai's approach to copying the Ajanta figures also varied widely. As shown with his female figures, he sketched their bodies with red contours but used black lines for their hair, head, and

---

[175] Inaga, 164

[176] Sunaoka, "Arai Kanpō no Geijutsu [The Art of Arai Kanpō]," in *Arai Kanpō Butsuga no Miryoku*, 78

[177] Asai Kanpa, "Ajyanta no Hekiga ni tsuite [regarding the Ajanta murals]," *Shinkyō Bijutsu* 4, no. 2, (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1920), 23

[178] See page 29

eyebrows. As described by Kiritani in a report, this aligned with the manner the ancient figures were painted on the wall, where "the bodies were delineated with red lines, while the face, particularly above the eyes, mouth, and other vital points, was adorned with ink lines."[179] However, for some reproductions, Arai even captured the colors as seen with a reproduction of a standing Buddha figure (fig 2.23). Arai explained that he used only lines and no colors to produce copies of unfinished or deteriorated parts, which helped him learn the draftsmanship of the paintings.[180]

Moreover, as his sketches showed, Arai reserved this approach primarily for female figures, illustrating his interest in Ajanta's depiction of provocative bodies. After he returned to Japan, he gave a vivid description of Indian women bodies in an interview, highlighting their sensual characteristics such as their rotund breasts and hips, large eyes, and overall erotic features.[181] While his comment may seem lascivious, a look at Arai's other post-India writings revealed how the artist considered Indian bodies as genuine embodiments of beauty, emphasizing their cultural and ideological significance things that embodied the culture and ideology of India. He described India as an "extreme" country in both its nature and people and viewed them as interrelated.[182]

For example, Arai described how the extremely hot Indian climate encouraged its people to embrace nudity and loose clothing since ancient times, accentuating the "natural beauties" of

---

[179] Kiritani, "Ajyanta Dōkuji no Kenkyū (2) [Research on the Ajanta Cave Temple (2)]," *Bijutsu no Niho*n, vol 10, no. 8 (1918): 12

[180] Arai, "Tai-in Shoken [Notes on my Indian Stay]," *Bijutsu Gahō,* vol. 42, no. 4 (1919)*:* 54

[181] Arai. Interview by 'Reizan,' "Arai Kanpo-shi to Busseki Junyū [Mr. Arai Kanpo and Buddhist pilgrimage]," in *Gendai no Bijutsu*, vol 1, issue 2 (1918): 7

[182] Arai, "Indo no Shinbi Shisō oyobi Geijutsu no Kontei (1) [The root of India's mysterious ideology and art, part 1], in *Bijutsu no Nihon*, vol 13, issue 6 (1921): 2

their bodies and their depiction in art.[183] Moreover, Arai highlighted how Indian art commonly used nude bodies to illustrate scenes of men and women in a passionate embrace. Arai argued how rather than simply eroticism, the blatant nudity and intimacy shown in Indian art and sculpture symbolized more profound spiritual principles such as universal love or the absence of ego, and depictions of nude figures in Indian art embodied the spiritual hearts of the artists.[184] As he described:

> "Nude paintings can either be noble and admirable art or vulgar works depending on the state of the artist's heart and mental conditions. As a remnant of this [spiritual] principle, depictions of such physical unions remain carved in stone on gateposts and entrances of caves throughout India, portraying the essence of this philosophy."[185]

As he argued in his statement, Arai valued nude figures in Indian art as symbolic vessels for sacred teachings and philosophy. This sentiment was shared by Asai Kanpa, who commented on the abundance of nude figures at Ajanta and described how their contours were "soft and idealized, containing many sensuous elements."[186] In both Arai and Asai's accounts, we can see how both Japanese artists perceived the figures in Indian art as embodiments of ideologies and spiritual teachings.

Most importantly, the innate idealism and spirituality in Indian art were also noticed by Taki Seiichi, who published a series of newspaper articles discussing the importance of researching Indian art. Taki highlighted how ancient Indian art possessed a certain "philosophical idealism" and "natural attitude" that Japan's religious art had abandoned in favor of technical

---

[183] Arai, "Indo no Shinbi Shisō oyobi Geijutsu no Kontei (2)", in *Bijutsu no Nihon*, vol 13, issue 7 (1921): 6

[184] Arai used the word "muga" in his original script, which means "Anattā," a Buddhist concept "non-self"

[185] Arai, *Arai Kanpo-shi to Busseki Junyū*, 8

[186] Asai, 24

mastery in painting.[187] He called for modern Japanese artists to study Indian art and create new kinds of Buddhist art that capture the unique ideal and spiritual strengths of oriental art to counter the incursion of Western art onto Japan's art scene.[188] While Taki's writing reflected strong nationalistic sentiments, his emphasis on the non-materialistic aspects of Indian art, such as its idealism, philosophy, and spirit, paralleled Arai and Asai's perceptions of hidden ideologies and spirits embodied within Indian figures. More importantly, the thoughts of all Japanese involved with Ajanta, from Taki to Arai, were analogous to Tagore's speeches regarding capturing the "heart" or "essence" of objects in art rather than emphasizing technique.[189]

From Tagore's speeches in 1916 to the writings of Arai and Taki following their work at Ajanta in 1918 to 1919, we can discern a common theme in their discussions of Indian art: its strength in the metaphysical, encompassing religiosity, ideology, and philosophy, which compensated for its technical and stylistic simplicity. For Taki, this metaphysical strength, which he often referred to as the "ideological" or "philosophical" aspects of Indian art, held particular significance. He perceived it as a remedy for the dominance of Western influences in modern Japanese art. Yet even though many Japanese commended India for its metaphysical or spiritual strengths, there was a lack of consensus on the specific definition of such "spirit." Even Tagore employed ambiguous terms such as "heart" and "essence" to describe the metaphysical aspects of art, and their definition was up to each artist's interpretation. Arai interpreted this spirit as a manifestation of spontaneity and passionate religiosity, expressed through India's provocative

---

[187] Taki, "Indo Geijutsu Kenkyu no Hitsuyō [The Necessity of Studying Indian Art]," Osaka Asahi shinbun, April 14-18, 1918, reproduced in *Nippon Bijutsuin* vol. 5, 1994, 1142

[188] Ibid, 1143

[189] See page 19-22 for more details on Tagore's speeches on "essence" in art.

figures. Furthermore, with his return to India coinciding with Taki's call for serious implementation of Indian art into Japanese art, he saw an opportunity to test all he learned from India in his annual submissions to the Inten exhibitions.

Arai's Post-India Works, 1918 onwards

After returning to Japan Arai immediately implemented his experience abroad into a pair of screen paintings titled *Buddha's Birth* (fig 2.24), which he submitted to the fifth Inten Exhibition. Even though only monochrome reproductions remain today, one can easily perceive influences from Ajanta and other Indian art. As implied by the title, Arai's screen painting portrayed the legend of Buddha's Birth with the right screen showing Madame Maya with her right arm raised and her right foot behind her left leg (fig 2.24a). With her pose, we can immediately see the resemblance between Arai's sketch of Ajanta's version of Madame Maya (fig 2.20) and the Chandra Yakshi figure from Calcutta (fig 2.16), both also featured raised right arms. Moreover, the crossed-foot Maya also seemed to be inspired by Indian figures with similar postures that Arai sketched in his journal (fig 2.25). Furthermore, the left screen featured crouching female attendants with flower baskets (fig 2.24), which resembled the crouching figures Arai copied from Ajanta (fig. 2.21). With his first Inten submission after returning from abroad, we can immediately see Arai's enthusiasm for exploring Indian figures in his works.

As Arai described, he painted this work in India shortly after finishing his work at Ajanta, for the experience filled him with religious sentiment and he was eager to paint this work as a memorabilia.[190] Arai also discussed how he strove to be faithful to Indian religious motifs in this work, as shown by the pose of Madame Maya and the figure of the infant Buddha. According to

---

[190] Arai, *Taiyō* 24, issue 12 (October 1918), reproduced in *Nihon Bijutsu-in* vol. 4, 668

legends, Maya gave birth to Buddha through her right armpit when she reached up to touch a tree branch of a Bodhi tree and Arai highlighted this signature pose in his work. Moreover, he claimed that his depiction of the infant Buddha (fig 2.24a), with the palm outstretched and raised towards the viewer, followed Indian visual traditions rather than Japanese ones, which usually depict Buddha raising his index finger towards the sky. Most importantly, Arai claimed that *Buddha's Birth* served as the inception of his journey to faithfully capture the spirituality of India in his subsequent Buddhist works.[191]

The iconographical and religious devotion Arai placed in his works did not go unnoticed by audiences. Some praised Arai for his accuracy in Indian figural styles through his depiction of Madame Maya with her "exceptionally developed breasts and hips."[192] The dynamic pose of Maya also conveyed a sense of "joyous dancing" to certain viewers, who praised Arai's newest figure for its heightened sentimentality and expressiveness compared to those featured in his previous works.[193] Others described being able to perceive the passion Arai put into his work and the "efforts [he] made while enduring the intense heat of India."[194] As such reviews showed, *Buddha's Birth* attracted much attention for its exotic figural styles and the religious sentiment and passion embodied within, marking a successful start in Arai's post-India career.

Undoubtedly, *Buddha's Birth* stood out as a significant work that marked the beginning of Arai's post-India artistic direction. Regrettably, only reproductions remain of the work today, which cannot adequately convey Arai's novel approach to depicting figures. Fortunately, in the

---

[191] Ibid.

[192] Nishi Ryōsei, *Kokumin Shinbun* (September 13th, 1918), reproduced in *Nihon Bijutsu-in* vol. 4, 669

[193] Sawamura Koi, *Taiyō* 24, issue 12 (October 1918), reproduced in *Nihon Bijutsu-in* vol. 4, 668

[194] Ibid.

same year, Arai produced a portrait of Madame Maya, which remains visible today. While Arai never submitted it to the Inten exhibitions, *Madame Maya* (fig 2.26) allows us a chance for a closer look at the distinctive features of Maya's figure as depicted in *Buddha's Birth*. Similar to *Buddha's Birth*, Arai's portraiture showed Maya with her characteristic raised hand and shifted foot. Furthermore, the hand gesture with the raised pinky finger (fig 2.26a) was directly modeled after Ajanta's version of Maya, showcasing Arai's meticulousness in copying the ancient art style (fig 2.27). Unlike *Buddha's Birth's* photographic reproduction, we can also see Arai's creative use of colors in Maya's portrait. First, the green foliage and bright orange flowers in the background contrasted with Maya's blue skirt and yellow headdress to create a vibrant image. Moreover, similar to his approach to *Offering of Rice Gruel* (fig 2.5a) from his early career, Arai used red lines to delineate Maya's figure underneath the blue skirt. As established before, the use of red lines delineating contours emerged as one of the most recognizable features of figural depictions from Ajanta.

Most interestingly, Arai portrayed a difference in skin tone between Maya and her attendant with Maya possessing white skin in contrast to the attendant's brown skin which may suggest a representation of racial distinctions in India. On one hand, it could be another characteristic of Ajanta figures that Arai added to his portrait. Based on his time working at the caves, Asai Kanpa stated that ancient female figures were commonly depicted in white. He postulated whether these representations accurately depicted ancient Indians, who might possess lighter skin tones, or if they were idealized portrayals. However, Asai also highlighted how some contemporaneous Indians had light skin tones comparable to those of the Japanese.[195] Similarly,

[195] Asai, 24

Arai also commented on the skin tones of Indians in his journal, with one notable instance where he described how the people of Ranchi possessed darker skin than other Indians he had met.[196] While not explicitly prejudicial, Arai's statement still revealed his perceptions of Indians as exotic foreigners. Furthermore, by portraying the divine figure of Maya with a lighter skin tone in contrast to her subordinate, Arai's portrait conveyed a nuanced but unsettling connection between spiritual bodies and race. Nevertheless, in both *Buddha's Birth* and his portraiture, Arai creatively used Madame Maya as his figural prototype, encapsulating the knowledge acquired and his imaginative perceptions of India following his firsthand experience abroad.

While 1918 marked Arai's first attempt at creating an Indianized Buddhist figure through the figure of Madame Maya, the next year saw him take an unexpected turn with a non-Buddhist submission to the Inten with *Shiva of the Snow Mountains* (fig 2.28). Even with only black-and-white reproductions of this work remaining today, we can see *Shiva of the Snow Mountains* displayed several distinct characteristics. It featured the titular Hindu god Shiva accompanied by his wife, Parvati, and his sacred bull, Nandi, before a backdrop of looming Himalayan mountains.[197] As Arai asserted in his article published the same year, this painting signified his deliberate effort to personify intangible concepts such as power and creation through the figure of Shiva, signifying Arai's attempt to convey spirit and other metaphysical concepts through a human form in art.

Arai began his article by asserting how India was the source of all Oriental thoughts. Moreover, as an artist, Arai believed he was responsible for visualizing such

---

[196] Arai, *Indo Nisshi*, 76

[197] Arai, "Indo Bijutsu no Shōkai-sha toshite [As the Introducer of Indian Art]," in *Kaiga Seidan,* vol 7 (September, 1919): 41

thoughts, which were often hard to grasp.[198]To Arai, the figure of Shiva served as an exemplar of what he hoped to achieve. During his time in India, Arai encountered multiple artistic representations of Shiva as shown by his sketch of the ancient Shiva statue from Elephanta (fig 2.13). Despite being a Buddhist artist, Arai was fascinated by the symbolism of Shiva. According to Hindu legends, or at least Arai's interpretation of them, Shiva was the human embodiment of destruction, preservation, and creation, symbolizing abstract universal forces. Continually, when depicted alongside his wife, Parvati, the divine couple also symbolized passionate romance. Regarding the powerful symbolism of Shiva, Arai stated that:

> "It was an incredible challenge to artistically portray the mythological personification of the universe's powerful forces. However, I chose such a theme because I believed it was essential for my improvement."[199]

In other words, rather than an experiment with Indian technique or style, *Shiva of the Snow Mountains* represented the artist's attempt at tackling deeper Indian cultural thoughts associated with their iconographies and divine figures. This approach set him apart from his predecessors such as Yokoyama Taikan, who were more fascinated with the exotic allure of Indian figures.

Rather than dynamic poses or displaying partial nudity, as seen with Madame Maya, Arai focused more on iconography. For example, Arai highlighted the snake coiled around Shiva's neck and the tiger pelt wrapped around his waist as a symbol of Shiva's ferocious nature, which were also conventional iconographies associated with the deity. Yet, Arai also wanted to illustrate peaceful and calmer themes, such as the theme of love as symbolized by Shiva and Parvati

---

[198] Arai, *Indo Bijutsu no Shōkai-sha toshite,* 40

[199] Ibid, 42

together, which required him to break some Indian conventions and take personal liberties. As shown in one of his sketches from the Elephant caves, ancient reliefs of Shiva and Parvati often portrayed both deities as half-nude with Tribhanga poses (fig 2.29). Yet, in Arai's picture, he preferred to portray Parvati fully clothed and in a side profile, resembling closer to the Indian miniatures that Arai referenced during his early career.[200] Furthermore, Arai claimed that while Shiva was often portrayed with a more intense expression, he went for a gentler tone in his picture to emphasize the loving nature between Shiva and Parvati.[201] As expressed through his explanations of his painting, Arai explored various ways to embody abstract concepts such as gentle romance and destructive forces through the figure of Shiva and Parvati.

Arai's efforts achieved some level of success as demonstrated through the reviews his painting of Shiva received. While not many perceived the subtleties of gentle love, universal forces, and other abstract concepts Arai intended to convey, certain reviews at least acknowledged some philosophical or spiritual essence in the figure of Shiva. However, concurrently, certain observers claimed that, unlike his previous work, Arai's new painting simply took advantage of the exotic allure of India without conveying more profound spiritual or philosophical messages. For example, one review stated that

> Arai's efforts were evident and there's no doubt that the work possessed spiritual love, but the transition from *Buddha's Birth* to Shiva was quite a surprise. If he's simply taking religious themes and deriving artistic vitality from the curiosity of the public, then such an approach is not very noble. […] Today, what we look for in paintings are not just techniques or form, but the spirit behind it.[202]

---

[200] See Page 12

[201] Arai, *Indo Bijutsu no Shōkai-sha toshite*, 42

[202] Shimizu Kikumura, *Shinbi,* vol 8, issue 10 (October, 1919), reproduced in *Nihon Bijutsu-in* vol. 4, 750

Such a quote captured the precarious reception of Indian-themed paintings in Inten exhibitions by 1919 and the challenge faced by artists who depicted foreign cultures, like Arai. While foreign subject matter drew curious eyes, it began to face a backlash from certain viewers who accused such works of superficially displaying exotic subjects to elicit voyeuristic curiosity without conveying meaningful messages. Moreover, they directed such accusations against Indian-themed paintings and works depicting other foreign cultures such as China.

Such sentiments were best expressed by cultural historian Watsuji Tetsurō, who mockingly recounted:

> "As I perused the Nihon Bijutsuin Exhibitions, the first thing that struck me about the artists is that while they certainly possess the technique, they lack inner-life […] like a cocktail of India and China with a flavor of Yamato-e, trying to stand out as a novelty."[203]

As Watsuji's comment and the criticism showed, viewers expressed concern for artists' obsession with implementing foreign styles or subjects but putting insufficient effort into the "inner life" of their paintings. Moreover, such concerns paralleled the messages of Tagore and earlier scholars on the nature of Oriental art, which emphasized the importance of a "heart" or "spirit" within a work as much as technical prowess.

Unfortunately for Arai, his 1920 submission, *Dream of Madame Maya* (fig 2.30), would receive similar criticisms amidst its lukewarm reception. As another lost work, *Dream of Madame Maya* was a pair of folding screens that depicted the Buddhist legend of Madame Maya's prophetic dream of a white elephant that signified she would give birth to Buddha in the future. Returning to Buddhist themes and Maya, Arai featured the titular figure on the right screen, lying in bed with a group of female attendants in the background. Even through

---

[203] Watsuji Tetsurō, "Inten Nihonga Shokan [Impression of the Inten Nihonga]", *Chū-ō Bijutsu* 5, no. 10 (Tokyo: Chū-ō Kōron Bijutsu Shuppan, 1919)

photographic reproductions, one can see the figure's resemblance to the ancient figures that Arai copied from Ajanta, with their exposed breasts and arms on hips (fig 2.30a). However, the centerpiece of Arai's work was the large white elephant on the left screen that nearly took up the entire screen with its large size. Many viewers praised the elephant's phantasmagorical nature, with one reviewer who praising it as an "extraordinary and bold construction of ideas."[204] Yet, other individuals were not so impressed with Arai's latest submission. In an article titled *The Field of Religious Art*, author Kosha Wakamizu stated:

> "…[Arai's] painting is overflowing with a unique Indian atmosphere. However, while his exemplary technical skills are certainly dazzling, his central symbol is slightly lacking. Arai, meticulously followed the source of the legend he was depicting and was rather successful in implementing details from the Ajanta murals and modern Indian art. Yet, the failure of the painting's composition is quite disheartening. I thought it was no less than being an Indian souvenir. […] Instead of narrating the content of the titular "Spiritual dream" it presents a series of materials to narrate while symbolizing nothing. [205]

As Kosha described, Arai's screen painting displayed the artist's technical skills but failed to connect to him on an emotional level. He also found it lackluster in conveying the Buddhist legend of Maya's dream due to its confusing layout. Interestingly, Arai's assistant from Ajanta, Nōsu Kōsetsu, also submitted an Indian-themed screen painting titled *Morning at the Caves* (fig 3.6) that same year.[206] Depicting two women in a devotional ceremony amidst a misty morning at the Ajanta Caves, Kosha had a more positive response to Nōsu's submission compared to Arai's work. In the same article where he criticized Arai's work, Kosha commended the feeling of the "pure joy and passion" that Nōsu's figures embodied even if they appear simple and

---

[204] Furukawa Osamu, "Inten no Nihonga [The Nihonga of the Inten]," in *Waseda Bungaku* vol. 2, issue 179 (October 1920): 115

[205] Kosha Wakamizu, "Shūkyōga no Kyōchi [The Field of Religious Art]," in *Rokudai Shinpō*, no. 885 (October 1920): 3-4

[206] See Chapter 3 for more on Nōsu Kōsetsu and *Morning at the Caves*

technically inferior to Arai's.[207] Kosha's comparison of Arai and Nōsu's work further illustrated ongoing debates surrounding the dichotomy between technique and emotional expression, and between exoticism and genuine religiosity in the evaluations of Indian themes.

As the above reviews of Arai's post-India works showed, even though many viewers praised the artist for his technical skills, a couple asserted that Arai seemed more interested in conveying the exoticism of India through provocative figures than expressing religious sentimentality that many associated with India. However, while Arai's work may seem like the artist's superficial interest in Indian exotic art, they can also be interpreted as serious endeavors in expressing abstract Indian philosophy or thought through the human body. One example of such efforts included Arai's 1926 painting *Taishaku-ten* (fig 2.31), which depicted the titular Buddhist deity in a vibrant pose on top of a swirling mass of blue and white painted through rapid bold brushstrokes. Continually, the figure of the deity also showed clear references to the "flesh's dynamism" Indian sculptures Arai saw while abroad, with their raised arm and vigorous poses (fig 2.13).[208] Compared to Arai's pre-India words, such as *Sermon in the Bamboo Forest* or *Offering of Rice Gruel*, with their meticulously delineated figures and careful compositions, the impulsive style expressed by the blue swirl in *Taishaku-ten* diverged strongly from Arai's usual approach.

As curator Sunaoka Reiko has described, Arai's post-India works expressed more dynamism compared to the elegant "stillness" of his previous works. By using rapid brushstrokes and vibrant blues and whites, Arai strove to visualize abstract ideas such as motion and speed in

---

[207] Kosha, 4

[208] See page 27

his painting.[209] Sunaoka presented a valid analysis as it paralleled Arai's writings on Indian art and his desire to express abstract concepts in paintings the same way ancient Indian figures embodied philosophical thoughts. As with *Shiva of the Snowy Mountain*s, Arai's depiction of *Taishaku-ten* represented another one of Arai's attempts to visualize metaphysical concepts through a human form and touched upon the challenging harmony of "heart" and "body" that artists strove for in adopting Indian materials.

By the 1930s, in the final decade of his artistic career, Arai gradually moved away from Indian themes to explore other foreign cultures and some of his works showed a return to more conventional Buddhist motifs. However, some of his later works, such as his 1937 *Koshibo* (fig 2.32) continued to demonstrate subtle Indian characteristics, showing the everlasting influence that India had on the artist. Depicting a Buddhist deity associated with children and motherly love, Arai illustrated the figure of Koshibo as a half-nude woman holding a child. She displayed the common traits of female figures in ancient Indian art such as exaggerated breasts, wide hips, and narrow waists similar to Arai's Madame Maya figure. It was possible that through the figure of Koshibo Arai strove to convey maternal themes, which he encountered frequently during his time in India. For example, there were multiple depictions of Indian women with children throughout his book (fig 2.33). Most notable was a sketched half-nude figure with a child that's very likely based on a Hindu sculpture labeled "Krishna and his mother" (fig 2.34), showing similar bodily proportions.

---

[209] Sunaoka, *Arai Kanpō no To-in*, 88

When Arai displayed the work in 1937, viewers once again praised it for its technical achievements with its "precise line drawings and luminous colors."[210] While no records remained on how contemporary viewers perceived the sentimentality or religiosity of the painting, it is reasonable to infer that *Koshibo* would have incited less criticism. Other than the exaggerated body proportions, the figure of *Koshibo* appeared less blatantly Indian compared to Arai's previous works and represented the artist's late-career changes as he made the Indian elements in his work more subtle. His late artistic direction may represent a shift in interests, but it may also be his effort at sculpting a figure more congruent with the preferences of Japanese audiences in a departure from the overtly exotic figures in his past works. In other words, with a less radical figure, *Koshibo* might epitomize a more spiritually evocative painting rather than a mere exotic portrayal. While we can only speculate on the reasons behind Arai's stylistic shift, the figure of Koshibo demonstrated Arai's continued dedication to using human forms to convey abstract and sentimental messages during the 1930s.

Despite Arai's efforts to balance technique and spirit in his paintings, particularly his figures, most people respected him for his technical skills. This was most apparent when he was commissioned to restore the Buddhist murals at Hōryū-ji by the 1940s. Many believed him to be the best candidate for the job because of his experiences with copying the Ajanta Cave murals. Moreover, prevalent theories on the connections between Hōryū-ji murals and the ancient Indian murals remained widespread throughout Japan during that period. Unfortunately, Arai passed away before he had a chance to work at Hōryu-ji in 1945.[211] Nevertheless, by the time of his

---

[210] *Bi no Kuni*, vol. 12, issue 3, reproduced in *Nihon Bijutsu-in Hyakunenshi*

[211] Sunaoka, *Arai Kanpō no Geijutsu*, 81

passing, Arai had left behind a legacy as an innovative Buddhist artist who boldly displayed provocative figures in his art. Many admired his skills at accurately capturing the unique styles of Indian-styled figures. While some found his exotic displays as perfunctory means of drawing attention, he achieved moderate success in conveying spiritual or abstract themes with his figures as some felt his figures evoked intense feelings of passion and vitality, especially with *Buddha's Birth*.

As many of Arai's works demonstrated, female figures played a crucial role in conveying this sensation of exoticism and spiritual passion simultaneously. Their nudity and erotic nature were also often topics of discussion for many viewers, who often commended them for their sensual (*niku-teki*) nature. However, just as many reviews questioned the purpose of such erotic figures in religious-themed paintings. As shown by the criticisms targeted at some of Arai's paintings, some wondered if Indian figures, with their exotic poses and nudity, could be more than just foreign objects for a voyeuristic gaze but icons of sentimentality and spirituality; in other words, figures that can balance both "spirit" and "body" into a perfect model. Furthermore, Arai was not alone in facing this challenge. As Indian-themed paintings dominated the Inten and other exhibitions, other artists pondered how to depict foreign figures as both sensuous and emotionally appealing. As the following short section will show, one artist, Murakami Kagaku, achieved the most success in this endeavor. A comparison between his work and Arai's serves as an exemplar of the harmony of spirit and body that both artists and spectators look for in Indian figures during the Taishō period.

Balancing Body and Spirit: A Comparison between Murakami's *Nude* and Arai's *Maya Fujin*

So far, we have highlighted how Arai's works explored various ways of creating an erotic feminine archetype for Buddhist paintings with his portraiture *Maya Fujin* as one of his most notable examples. However, Arai's *Maya Fujin* was not the only instance of a Japanese artist's attempt at unifying spiritual and exotic themes through an Indianized female figure during the Taisho period. Just two years after Arai painted *Madame Maya*, another Indian enthusiast, Murakami Kagaku, produced one of the most famous female figural depictions in the history of Nihonga painting, titled *Nude (Rafu-Zu, fig 2.35).*

Murakami Kagaku was born and raised in Kobe. As an artist, he was best remembered for his Buddhist-themed paintings and as one of the founding members of the Kokuga Sōsaku Kyōkai Society (hereafter referred to as the "Kokuga Society"), an artists' group established in 1917 by Nihonga painters centered in and around Kyoto. Since its founding, the society held annual exhibitions, referred to as "Kokuten exhibitions," that slowly gained a reputation for their controversial and unconventional Nihonga paintings.[212] It was during the 3rd annual Kokuten exhibition in 1920 that Murakami's *Nude* was displayed to the public. One of Murakami's greatest strengths was his ability to absorb artistic influences from a diverse range of sources, including archaic Japanese art, woodblock prints, Italian medieval and renaissance painting, and of course, Indian art.[213] With *Nude*, the artist skillfully leveraged his knowledge and fascination with Indian culture to craft his ideal figure.

Murakami's *Nude* depicted a half-clothed woman sitting on rocks with her body leaning towards one side, demonstrating the Tribhanga body composition shared with Arai's figures. One

---

[212] Szostak, 1

[213] Ibid, 100

of her most notable characteristics was her body shape, specifically her face and hair, which diverged from Japanese artistic conventions of feminine beauty. Instead of a tall slender head, Murakami's female nude has a rotund head, nearly resembling a perfect circle. When compared to Arai's *Maya Fujin*, Murakami's figure appeared more subdued in both pose and color. Instead of raised arms or dynamic postures, the woman sits solemnly amidst an earthly monochromatic tone that dominates the painting. Even though Murakami titled his painting *Nude,* the figure in his painting is actually dressed in thinly veiled attire. Because of the painting's monochromatic tone, Murakami relied on delicate lines to delineate the details of the attire, using multiple wavy lines from the figure's upper torso to her feet to highlight the transparent layer of clothing. This diverged from Arai's approach of using thick red lines to highlight features on Madame Maya. Furthermore, Murakami's figure lacked apparent narrative and iconographical references. Rather than any recognizable Bodhisattvas, goddess, or historical figures, Murakami's female figure retained an ambiguous identity, adding a sense of mystery to the painting. This ambiguity also extends to the figure's ethnic identity. With its tanned skin, slender eyes, and long black hair, it combined characteristics from both Indian and East Asian ethnicities to create an all-encompassing Asian identity.

Interestingly, despite its lack of any conspicuous religious motifs, art critics praised Murakami's *Nude* for its delicate balance between spiritual and erotic themes. For example, art critic Haruyama Takamatsu described how even though Murakami portrayed the corporeal body of a mortal rather than a god or goddess, it nevertheless reflected Murakami's strong affinity with spirituality and is commendable as a "euphoria of divinity."[214] Haruyama especially admired

---

[214] Haruyama Takamatsu,. "Kokuten-hei [Kokuten Exhibitions critique]," *Kaiga Seidan,* vol. 8, (December 1920): 10

Murakami's ability to embody religious sentimentality within the sensuous figure of the half-dressed woman. Highlighting Murakami's unique figural composition in his review and drawing attention to the exotic foreign influences apparent in Murakami's *Nude*. He wrote:

> "From a combination of Italy, India, and Japan, Murakami has created a sort of fantastical nude woman. The slender body, voluptuous flesh, round face, body, and composition of the four limbs were painted in a way that purifies our sentiments. "[215]

With his quote emphasizing the corporeal "voluptuous" qualities of the figure while commending it for its "euphoria of divinity," Haruyama praised Murakami's work as an achievement in both spirit and body.

Haruyama's sentiments toward Murakami and his work were shared by critic Kawaji Ryūko who similarly commended Murakami for his spiritual sensitivity. In a monograph on the Japanese art world published in 1925, Kawaji praised Murakami for his distinctively oriental approach to religious subject matter by "seeking Buddhist spiritualism within the framework of modern consciousness in contrast to modern Western painters who depicted biblical themes from a heretical perspective."[216] In other words, Kawaji believed Murakami displayed Asian virtues by keeping spiritual values untainted and pure in the modern world in opposition to Westerners who distorted or undermined religiosity in favor of modernization. Moreover, Kawaji commended Murakami's Buddhist works for their sensuous lines and mellow colors, and he described Murakami's paintings as the antitheses of Arai's works.[217] By specifically mentioning Arai's

---

[215] Ibid, 10-11

[216] Kawaji Ryūko, *Gendai Nihon Bijutsu-kai [The Modern Japanese Art World]*, (Tokyo: Chū-Ō Bijutsu-sha, 1925), 105

[217] Ibid, 106

name, Kawaji further juxtaposed Murakami's sentimental achievements against Arai's stylistic accomplishments.

Finally, art historian Yashiro Yukio who, despite assessing Murakami's work more than thirty years later in 1954, similarly commended the work for both its corporeality and sentimentality. As he stated:

> "While the vibrant sensuality of an Indian woman gushed forth like a ripe fruit, it delves into a melancholic and mysterious dream state rather than heavy raw emotions. It appears that this painting was a human representation of Kagaku's spiritual state [from that period]"[218]

As the reviews of Murakami and *Nude* showed, the artist received praise for evoking sentiments through a sensual female figure. Additionally, Haruyama and Yashiro's quotes highlighted how the figure undeniably possessed Indian influences and attributed the essence of religiosity and mysticism to the Indian-ness of the figure. Such commendations mirrored those given to the figure of Madame Maya in Arai's *Buddha's Birth* in 1918 when the artist returned to Japan fresh from his time in India. Yet, unlike Arai, Murakami never traveled abroad to India. In fact, by exploring Murakami's portraiture in context with the artist's upbringing and the writings he produced, *Nude* served more as an embodiment of the Oriental spirit as a whole rather than just India.

Despite never having traveled to India, Murakami was nevertheless familiar with its people and culture. Growing up in Kobe, he socialized frequently with a small community of Indian immigrants. As he described in one of his posthumous essays, he claimed that "rather than being noisy, Indians have a sort of religious gloomy and ancient mannerism and a contemplative

---

[218] Yashiro Yukio, "Murakami Kagaku," *Geijutsu Shinchō*, vol. 5, issue 12 (December 1954): 108

mindset."[219] While this quote undeniably displayed a stereotypical perspective, it also showcased his strong association of Indian culture with spirituality from a young age. Yet, as he created *Nude,* Murakami decided to expand upon the concept of Indian spirituality to the spirituality of all Asian cultures.

In a series of essays published in 1940, Murakami provided many details on his inspirations behind *Nude*. He claimed that by drawing upon a diverse range of oriental artistic traditions, like Chinese and Indian art, he aimed to create his idealized image of an "eternal woman" (*Kuon no josei*); a construction of a feminine archetype not limited to a specific Asian culture or ethnicity, but unifies Asian spiritual virtues as a whole in one all-encompassing body as an antithesis against Western artistic philosophy. As Murakami described in his short essay:

> "In Western ideology, there has always been an unquestionable disharmony between spirit and body. In contrast, this disharmony is not present within Oriental ideology, especially in India, where body and spirit mixed harmoniously […] Last year when I painted *Nude* as an element of the ideal model of the "eternal woman" that humanity eternally yearned for, I endeavored to have her eyes reflect the kind of purity that you see in figures of Bodhisattva Kannon. At the same time, I also hoped that her inflated breasts reflect the same kind of purity; the kind of beauty that contains both spirit and flesh. Including the hair, mouth, arms, and legs, all the virtues in harmony together to express the kind of beauty that I strive to depict. That is what I mean by an"eternal woman."[220]

As Murakami emphasized, "body" and "spirit" are equally important elements in Asian art that should harmonize together, and he asserted that this harmonization can be done through the human body. Murakami's female figure undeniably possessed Indian elements as seen in Arai's *Madame May*a, such as the nudity and the Tribhanga pose, it also implemented other Asian elements such as the slender eyes. Moreover, as Murakami explained, such slender eyes reflected

---

[219] Murakami Kagaku, *Garōn* [Art Theory], (Tokyo: Kobun-dō, 1940), 173-174

[220] Murakami, 36

religious concepts that Japanese audiences were more familiar with, such as "purity." Thus, it is reasonable to attribute the success of Murakami's *Nude* to its successful combination of Japanese and Indian elements as it conveyed spiritual concepts that resonated with Japanese viewers while possessing enough foreign exoticism to attract attention.

On the other hand, Arai attempted to convey esoteric cultural beliefs from India, such as passionate love and spiritual ferocity, which few Japanese audiences could understand or accept. Moreover, he expressed such philosophical concepts through the unique body language of Indian figures, something that Japanese viewers may not have comprehended. Thus, this dissonance between the artist and the audience led to less-than-stellar responses to some of Arai's submissions. In other words, Arai and general Japanese audiences held different interpretations and expectations of "spirit" and "body" when it came to adapting Indian art.

Conclusion

Arai's artistic career unfolded during the Taisho period, which marked a critical time for Indo-Japanese artistic exchanges. Starting from the 1910s, visual and textual information on Indian art and culture steadily flowed into Japan. Artists like Kiritani Senrin acted as major sources of information, providing photographs and textual accounts from their journey across India. Moreover, foreign writings on Indian art, including those by renowned figures such as Indian art historian Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, were translated and circulated across Japan. As an artist with an interest in ancient and religious art, whose career commenced during the turn of the Taisho period, Arai inevitably found himself caught up in the fervor towards India like many of his contemporaries.

While this growing interest in Indian art among the Japanese can be attributed to their superficial curiosity towards an exotic culture, it also represented efforts to define the unique beauty of Asian art, including both Indian and Japanese visual traditions. This action came as a response to the increasing dominance of Western art, with its realistic styles and technical superiority, in both Japan's and India's modern art scene. Intellectuals and artists from both countries sought to defend the values of Oriental art as a matter of cultural pride. For example, both Taki Seiichi and Arai Kanpō emphasized the importance of draftsmanship in Oriental art traditions and highlighted the dexterity of line work in both archaic Japanese and Indian art. However, more crucial than emphasizing the stylistic uniqueness of Oriental art, scholars and artists asserted that Oriental art's biggest strength lay in its intrinsic spirituality and idealism, juxtaposed against the materialism of Western Art. Moreover, many Japanese framed Indian art as exemplifying the spiritual and emotional richness of Oriental art. Several reviews of Indian art from Arai's time frequently used terms such as "spiritual" (*seishin-teki*) or "ideological" (*shisō-teki*) to describe its characteristics.

The Japanese perception of India and its art as Asia's spiritual center further intensified with Tagore's visit to Japan in 1916 where the Indian poet gave public lectures discussing the philosophy behind Oriental art during his stay. In his speeches, Tagore accentuated what he called the "essence" or "heart" of objects and proclaimed that true artists should focus on capturing such metaphysical elements in art rather than highlighting an object's outward appearance in detail. Tagore's theory of art paralleled similar proclamations by contemporary Japanese intellectuals who advocated for Oriental art's spiritual superiority to Western art. This dichotomy between a spiritual East and a materialistic West undeniably influenced Arai, a

dedicated Buddhist artist, who longed to travel to India to study Buddhist art at its spiritual roots. With Tagore's visit, not only did Arai become more convinced to capture the spiritual strength of Oriental culture through his Buddhist paintings, but he directly received an opportunity to travel to India when the Indian poet invited him to visit him abroad.

Yet, as his memoirs and personal sketches from India revealed, Arai skillfully navigated the ambiguous definitions of the "spiritual" elements inherent in Oriental art. He demonstrated creative autonomy with his interpretations of the "spirit" embodied in the Indian art and sculptures he saw. Paradoxically, Arai focused his attention on the corporeal elements of India in his search for spirituality in India. He wrote extensively on the nudity, dynamism, and eroticism prevalent in India's ancient art and sculptures, which he supplemented with sketches that highlighted the eccentric features of the Indian figures he saw. Arai also extended such descriptions to Indian women he encountered, saying how they possessed a certain "carnal beauty" (*nikutai-bi*) compared to Japanese women.[221] Arai's study of Indian figures culminated with his project at Ajanta as he copied the ancient murals and studied their styles. At the end of his trip abroad, Arai came to admire the corporeal nature of Indian art with its provocative figures, but he never forgot the spiritual elements in Indian art. Rather than viewing the erotic and religious aspects of Indian arts as opposites of each other, Arai came to see them as interrelated, asserting that the provocative figures embodied esoteric concepts from Indian philosophy such as universal love and religious passion. Thus, Arai highlighted the importance of Indian figures as vessels of spiritual ideologies from ancient times, perceiving their potential as innovative religious icons for his Buddhist paintings.

---

[221] Arai, *Indo Nisshi*, 74. Also see page 92

Upon his return to Japan, Arai's new Buddhist paintings reflected his views on Indian figures as he implemented them into his works, striving to use such figures to achieve a precarious harmony between exotic bodies and spiritual messages. However, while some of his exhibition submissions had Arai's desired effects of inciting spiritual sentiments among viewers, his other works, especially those around received mixed receptions. Even though critics praised Arai for accurately depicting Indian styles and his technical prowess, some found his works lacking sentimentality. They criticized his works as mere "Indian souvenirs" that indulged in exotic and sensual figures but failed to express meaningful religious or emotional messages. As some of the contemporary reviews described, Arai's work lacked "spirit" despite its technical achievements.

In contrast, the works of Arai's contemporaries such as Murakami Kagaku received more favorable reviews with critics praising Murakami's ability to convey spiritual sentiments through a sensuous half-nude female figure; a perfect balance of "spirit" and "body." Comparing Murakami and Arai's works, we can make some compelling observations on Japanese perspectives on "spirit" and "body" in Buddhist works that borrowed motifs from India. In his work, Murakami borrowed characteristics from not only Indian art but also Japanese and even Italian art to create an idealized oriental figure that was simultaneously exotic and familiar to Japanese audiences. The subtle facial resemblances of Murakami's *Nude* to traditional Bodhisattva figures in Japanese art further assisted Japanese viewers in perceiving an innate spirituality within the painting. In contrast, Arai focused on Indian styles and figures in his art and strove to convey esoteric concepts that were prevalent in Indian culture but cryptic for

Japanese audiences. Thus, they perceived only the exotic corporeal aspects of Arai's work but not the spiritual essence embodied within.

Regardless of the disparate reviews they received, the works of Arai, Murakami, and other Nihonga artists during the Taisho period displayed a fascination with India. With information on India distributed through art magazines coupled with Tagore's publicized visit to India, Japanese intellectuals and artists who engaged with Indian materials were enthusiastically attracted to its exotic allure and spirituality. Yet, undeniably, their interest also involved a degree of condescension. As some responses to Tagore's visit showed, several Japanese regarded India as a "ruined country." However, for artists like Arai, India and its art remained a crucial source of artistic inspiration.

Indian art offered them not only sensual figures but also age-old spiritual themes that had guided Asian cultures for centuries. In their implementation of Indian art into their works, they faced the challenge of balancing both the corporeal and spiritual elements, creatively using provocative figures to embody oriental sentiments and philosophy. As Tagore and contemporary Japanese intellectuals stressed in their writings, spirituality and sentimentality represented oriental art's greatest strength, and Buddhist artists should strive to convey it effectively in their paintings as a matter of cultural pride. Even though enthusiasm towards India and its spirituality waned as the Taisho period transitioned into the Showa period, the concept of spirit remained a cornerstone in Japanese perspectives towards Indian art.

Chapter 3: Nōsu Kōsetsu and the Mulagandha Kuti Temple murals — Creating Trans-cultural Buddhist Art

Throughout this dissertation, we have explored itinerant Japanese artists who created Indian-themed works after they returned to Japan. Even though many of them, from Yokoyama to Arai, eagerly adapted Indian iconographies and styles, their works were still intended for Japanese audiences. However, in 1933, one Japanese artist took a different path by traveling to India and producing a mural intended for a global audience: Nōsu Kōsetsu. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Nōsu assisted Arai Kanpō alongside Kiritani Senrin and Asai Kanpō in reproducing the Ajanta murals.[222] While those involved with the project went on to become respected Buddhist artists in Japan, Nōsu remains relatively unheard of to this day with very few publications or exhibitions on his career and works. One contributing factor to his obscurity is the location of his most important work, far away from Japanese attention: his murals at Mulagandha Kuti Temple, located at the Buddhist site of Sarnath, India.

To give some context, Nōsu's mural came from a commission from the Maha Bodhi Society, a major Buddhist organization founded by the Sri Lankan monk, Anagarika Dharmapāla. When the Society built a new temple at Sarnath in 1931, Anagarika decided to invite a Japanese artist to decorate its interior walls, for which Nōsu was ultimately chosen. Answering the high expectations of his Indian hosts, Nōsu painted a narrative-heavy mural that depicted the life of Buddha, from his birth to his death. In addition to the rich narrative, Nōsu's temple mural also featured a wide diversity of figures across the walls of the temple, ranging from pious monks with solemn stances and expressions to demoness and heretics with erotic and belligerent body language. A lot of his figures demonstrated the influences he received from his experience

[222] See Chapter 2

working at the Ajanta Caves alongside Arai Kanpō. However, Nōsu's mural also showcased his incorporation of other forms of Indian art, his research on Hōryū-ji temple's Buddhist murals, and his own creativity to create a modern Buddhist mural that combined characteristics from both Ajanta and Hōryū-ji as a symbolic amalgamation of Buddhist art and cultures across Asia.

Nōsu's mural and the story behind its making present us with several interesting inquiries: Why was Nōsu, a Japanese artist, chosen for the mural project when there were several Indian artists available? How did Nōsu find a compromise between the artistic and cultural differences between India and Japan? How did he create a mural that can please Indian audiences while leaving space for his aesthetic tastes? How did Nōsu apply the styles and iconographies of ancient Indian art to his mural while having it be a representation of modern Buddhist art befitting of a newly built temple? Such questions demonstrate the challenge faced by Nōsu as he strove to create a Buddhist mural with multiple, sometimes conflicting, symbolic roles: as a representation of Indo-Japanese relationships to global Buddhist audiences, a narrative tool meant to educate visitors to the temple, and a representation of the rich tradition of Buddhist muralism in both India and Japan. More than just a decorative wall painting, Nōsu's mural held significance for both Indians and Japanese, and Nōsu faced the challenge of harmonizing the artistic and cultural differences between diverse Buddhist countries to create a more "transcultural" Buddhist art that can be appreciated by worshippers around the world. In a way, Nōsu's mural embodied the Pan-Asianist ideology established by Okakura but firmly framed that ideology in a Buddhist context with its emphasis on Asian spiritual unity.

In this chapter, I will focus primarily on Nōsu Kōsetsu and his mural as a representation of a shift in focus among Japanese artists who took inspiration from India. I argue that Nōsu

Kōsetsu's murals at Mulanghandha Kuti Temple embodied the artist's enthusiasm for "Buddhist trans-culturalism."

Throughout this chapter, I use the term "Buddhist trans-culturalism" to refer to the spread of Buddhism from India, across Asia, to Japan. However, the term also described the spiritual unity between India and Japan, or the global reach of Buddhism in general. Most of all, this chapter will use the term to refer to Nōsu's unique perspective towards Indian Buddhist art where, instead of studying it in isolation, he compared it to Buddhist artistic traditions across East Asia, particularly China and Japan. Diverging from his contemporaries, Nōsu wasn't interested in simply capturing the exoticism of India. Instead, he focused on discerning how Indian Buddhist artistic traditions differed from Japan's Buddhist art; mapping out how Buddhist art transformed as it spread from India, across China, and finally to Japan. Furthermore, he utilized what he learned in his mural at Mulanghandha Kuti Temple, where he combined the characteristics of both Indian and East Asian Buddhist art to create a culturally fluid mural. In doing so, Nōsu conveyed the idea of Buddhist trans-culturalism through a mural that artistically bridged the distance between India and Japan.

Admittedly, Nōsu was not the first Japanese artist to explore Buddhist transnationalism. As demonstrated in previous chapters, some artists who came before Nōsu also combined Japanese and Indian characteristics in their artworks to explore the concept. For example, Yokoyama Taikan's *Floating Lanterns* depicted Indian women in Japanese styles to convey a sense of affinity shared between India and Japan.[223] Similarly, Murakami Kagaku painted a female figure that mixed subtle Indian features with other characteristics from other Asian

---

[223] See Chapter 1

cultures to create an "eternal woman" that embodied Asian spiritual virtues and beauty.[224] Both artists utilized the human body as an embodiment of Asian spiritual unity. However, unlike his predecessors, Nōsu explored this ideology through a mural instead of portraiture; a large-scale public art project intended for international Buddhist viewers. Furthermore, Nōsu's mural also differed from previous Japanese artists in its diverse display of figures, going beyond the typical feminine archetype or Indianized Buddha. The variance in figures further emphasized the message of Buddhist transnationalism that Nōsu wanted his mural to convey. For example, rather than depicting only exotic Indian figures, Nōsu's figures changed drastically over time and displayed a lot of ethnic diversity. Some of his figures are unmistakably Indian, some bearing a clear resemblance to Japanese conventional figures, while others can be completely ethnically fluid, possessing unique skin colors and other characteristics that give no clear indication of their racial background. The diversity of Nōsu's figures reflected his sensitivity to the way that Buddhism spread across Asia and multiple diverse cultures and ethnicities.

Furthermore, the concept of Buddhist trans-culturalism is an evolution of Okakura's Pan-Asianism with further emphasis on the Buddhist legacy shared between Asian countries and united them together. It also places more historical and cultural emphasis on the spread of Buddhism from India to Japan, as artists such as Nōsu investigated how the two culture's Buddhist art differed from one another. In Nōsu's case, he also had to find ways to mix the two distinct styles when he was creating his mural at Sarnath to create an artwork that could be appreciated by a global Buddhist audience. Through a detailed analysis of Nōsu's temple mural, I will demonstrate how Nōsu's work at Mulanghandha Kuti Temple embodied his efforts to create

---

[224] See Chapter 2

transcultural Buddhist art that acted as a symbolic bridge between India and Japan. By looking at Nōsu's life and his mural as a case study this chapter shall demonstrate an alternative way that Japanese artists approached Indian art, where instead of capturing the exoticism of India they instead try to homogenize the differences between India and Japan.

Additionally, this chapter will touch upon the burgeoning sub-field of Buddhist muralism in Japan's interaction with Indian art; an art form that was considered and attempted during the Taisho period but wasn't fully realized until the Showa period with Nōsu.[225] As Japanese scholars and artists continued to show interest in the connection between India's Ajanta murals and Japan's Hōryu-Ji murals, more individuals began to explore the medium of Buddhist murals and their modern-day potential. While Nōsu was one of many artists who studied both the Ajanta and Hōryū-Ji murals, he set himself apart from the rest by focusing more on the distinctions between the two murals rather than their similarities. In doing so, Nōsu examined the idiosyncrasies of both East Asian Buddhist murals and ancient Indian murals and applied both characteristics to the mural he executed at Sarnath as a representation of a modern transnational religious mural that united both India and Japan.

As this chapter analyzes Nōsu's works with Buddhist trans-culturalism in mind, the issue of how Nōsu utilizes the medium of murals to reconcile the religious and cultural differences between India and Japan will be central to the discussion: the way that Nōsu combined the characteristics of both ancient Indian and Japanese religious murals to create the quintessential Buddhist mural and the didactic potential of such a mural in educating and inspiring a global Buddhist audience. With a close examination of Nōsu's mural in India, this chapter will highlight

---

[225] See Chapter 2 and the planned Hōryu-ji mural restoration plan with Arai Kanpō

how Japanese artists created artworks that embody the message of Buddhist trans-culturalism, in both art style and art form, which represented a new approach to adopting Indian art and culture in modern Japanese art where artists celebrated the shared Buddhist heritage between the two countries.

Early Life and Graduation Works - Nōsu's early Buddhist figures

Nōsu Kōsetsu was born in Takamatsu City, Kanagawa Prefecture, in 1885. As the son of a monk, he was attuned to Buddhist thoughts and practices from a young age, which contributed greatly to his determination to become a Buddhist artist. Displaying an aptitude for art from a young age, Nōsu's parents decided to enroll him in the Kagawa Prefectural School of Crafts (*Kagawa-Ken Kōgei Gakkō)*[226] at the age of 14 for a promising artistic career. Upon his graduation, Nōsu received the opportunity to travel to Tokyo to further hone his skills at Okakura Tenshin's prestigious Tokyo School of Fine Arts in 1903.[227] As a student of the Nihonga department at the school, his teachers included Shimomura Kanzan and Yokoyama Taikan, who, as discussed in previous chapters, were all prominent artists in Okakura's circle and enthusiasts of Indian art. Additionally, Nōsu also became acquainted with Kiritani Senrin as a classmate at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. Thus, as Shimomura and Yokoyama's students, Nōsu represents the next generation of artists to follow Okakura's teachings. It was also during his time at Tokyo School of Fine Arts that Nōsu became interested in Indian art, spurred by its connection to

---

[226] Today, the school is called the Kagawa Takamatsu Prefectural Senior School of Crafts (*Kagawa-Ken Kenritsu Takamatsu Kōgei Kōtō Gakkō).* Kagawa-ken Bunka Kaikan, *Nōsu Kōsetsu kaikoten: Tōyō no kokoro, Indo e no Atsuki Omoi* [Nōsu Kōsetsu Retrospective Exhibition: Heart of the Oriental. Passion towards India] (Takamatsu: Kagawa-ken Bunka Kaikan, 1986), 82

[227] Mizobuchi Shigeki and Nakamura Yoshihiro, *Nōsu Kōsetsu: Sono Shōgai to Indo no Butsuden hekiga: hekiga kansei 80-shūnen o kinen shite* [Kōsetsu Nōsu : his life and the Japanese mural painting : in commemoration of the 80th anniversary - Sarnath Japanese mural painting] (Takamatsu City: Ikuta Press, 2016), 142

ancient Buddhist art. Seeing how Nōsu's enrollment coincided with the same period (the 1900s to 1910s) when his teachers fervently engaged with Indian art, it came as no surprise when Nōsu took after his teachers.[228]

Upon his graduation in 1908, Nōsu produced two Buddhist-themed paintings as his graduation paintings. The first, titled *Yellow Spring* (fig. 3.1), depicted a procession of souls in the afterlife following a figure holding a lamp against a misty background. The name of the painting refers to the realm of the dead in Japanese mythology and was also used to refer to the Buddhist afterlife. The whole painting appears monochromatic as an earthly tone dominates both the background and the skin tone of the figures. Similarly, the second painting, titled *Path through the Yellow Spring* (fig. 3.2), continued the theme with a depiction of a praying figure traveling through the afterlife on a boat.

As curator Mizobuchi Shigeki described, Nōsu's graduation paintings showed strong influences from Western art. For example, *Path through the Yellow Spring* uses foreshortening techniques where Nōsu creates a sense of depth with the landscape reaching into a vanishing point in the background and the human figures appearing larger to seem closer to the viewer.[229] In *Yellow Spring*, Nōsu demonstrated good tonal control on the figures to express the lighting effects. However, as Mizobuchi noted, both of his graduation paintings also retained Japanese artistic traditions in the Buddhist figures, which possess strong use of lines and contours. For example, in *Yellow Spring,* Nōsu used strong black lines to highlight the folds on the figures' clothes, giving them more solidity. The use of strong contours was more apparent in the praying

---

[228] Stortini, Paride, "Reimagining Ancient India in Modern Japan: Interactions between Buddhist Priests, Scholars, and Artists at Ajanta", *Journal of World Buddhist Cultures Vol. 4* (2021)*,* 127

[229] Kagawa-ken Bunka Kaikan, 84

figure (fig. 3.2a) in *Path through the Yellow Spring*, as Nōsu not only used intricate ink lines to delineate the figure's clothes but also the folds of flesh on her neck, resembling the styles of ancient Buddhist sculptures.[230] Such features, alongside Western artistic characteristics, demonstrated Nōsu's attentiveness to the conventions of Japanese and Buddhist art and his innovation at mixing styles.

Other than the blend of Eastern and Western characteristics, Nōsu's early figures also convey a sense of foreignness, which is most visible in his *Yellow Spring*. There, the figures possessed large pointed noses and ears with expressions that gave them an otherworldly appearance. Coupled with the earthly tone of the painting, they also appear dark-skinned. Even though it is unclear whether or not these figures were meant to represent Indian people or not, it is apparent that they do not resemble Japanese people. Interestingly, Nōsu's graduation paintings coincided with the time when Japan started exploring the Indian roots of Buddhism which, as discussed in previous chapters, led to romanticization and exotic portrayals in Buddhist art.[231] Thus, we can speculate that Nōsu's portrayal of the figures in *Yellow Spring* is another artistic example of this phenomenon.

This, together with the mix of Western and Eastern art techniques in both of Nōsu's graduation paintings, is a testament to Nōsu's interest in experimenting with various ways to break away from Buddhist conventions and create more unique, modern Buddhist paintings; a principle he inherited from the artists from Okakura's circle. However, as Nōsu advanced in his

---

[230] Ibid, 85

[231] See Chapter 1 for more information

career and further engaged with Indian art, he eventually developed his idiosyncratic approach to developing new Buddhist art that diverged from the styles of his graduation works.

Nōsu first travel to India and early publications: 1916-1920

Nōsu's activities in the years following his graduation from the Tokyo School of Fine Arts were vague, but in the few records that remained of this period, it is clear that he continued to dedicate himself to researching Buddhist art. He continued his tutelage under Shimomura Kanzan when the latter became the director of the Japanese Academy of Fine Arts (*Nihon Bijutsuin*) in 1914. As a member of the academy, Nōsu continued to specialize in Buddhist art and developed an interest in ancient Indian murals.[232] His interest in India was further established through Tagore's visit to Japan in 1916, as the Indian polymath's public lectures and display of contemporary Indian painting inspired the young artist greatly.[233] Just one year after Tagore visited Japan, Nōsu became determined to travel to India to study its Buddhist artistic traditions, and through the financial support offered by Maejima Hisoka, Minister of Communication and Transport, he successfully arrived in India in 1917.[234]

In India, Nōsu spent one year visiting various locations across the subcontinent. He dedicated most of his time to researching ancient Buddhist art by either visiting Buddhist archaeological sites such as Sanchi, or museums such as the Kolkata Museum. While Nōsu received many opportunities to study Buddhist and Indian painting first-hand, his most valuable chance came when he volunteered to join Arai Kanpō and Kiritani Senrin in copying the Ajanta

---

[232] Zank, Dinah. "Painting the Life of Buddha at Sarnath: Transculturality, Patronage and an Artist's Vision" in *Ruptures and Continuities of Japanese Modernization. Perspectives on Japan's Modern Transformation: papers from the Freie Universität Berlin - University of Tsukuba joint workshops* (2016), 198

[233] See Chapter 2 for more details on Tagore's visit

[234] Zank, 199

murals, as the year he traveled to India coincided with Arai's project under *Kokka.* Similar to his contemporaries and other Japanese artists who traveled before him, Nōsu's time abroad had a significant impact on his artistic career, evidenced by his writings and works after he returned to Japan.

Compared to Arai, Nōsu did not leave behind many sketches and writings from his time in India in 1917. Instead of a journal, most of his experiences were recorded in scattered articles across multiple art periodicals. One such example included the short article *Indian Buddhist Painting* (Indo no Bukkyou Bijutsu*).* In his article, Nōsu briefly recounted the history of Buddhist art in India and expressed his admiration for the unique characteristics of Indian art, which he described as symbolic and decorative. Most importantly, in the section where he described the Ajanta Caves, he noted his fascination with how the wall paintings were able to successfully convey the narrative of Buddha's life; using diverse and creative ways to string together multiple episodes without losing its dynamism. Continually, Nōsu also admired how ancient Indian artists harmonized lines and colors in their depictions, noting how they used bright vibrant colors combined with expressive lines to give off a strong sense of dynamism.[235]

Such terms can also be found in Nōsu's description of India's non-Buddhist art, which he came across during his time in India and recounted in another published article titled *Early Modern Indian Painting*. Even though Nōsu was dedicated to studying Indian Buddhist art, he maintained an open mind towards India's non-religious arts and eagerly engaged with other types of Indian traditional art, ranging from Mughal miniatures to Rajput paintings. To Nōsu, what he

---

[235] Nōsu, "Indo no Bukkyou Bijutsu" [Indian Buddhist Painting]." *Gendai no Bijutsu* 3, no. 1 (1920): 7

found most attractive about India's pre-modern art was their use of bright colors, strong outlines, dynamism, and preference for symbolic representation over realistic depictions.[236]

Out of all the articles that Nōsu published after he returned, however, his 1918 article *The Indian Ajanta Murals and Hōryū-Ji's Kondō* provided the most details regarding Nōsu's studies of the Ajanta cave paintings. The article also reproduced two of Nōsu's copies from Ajanta: a dancing female figure (fig 3.3) and multiple sketches of faces (fig 3.4), highlighting their elaborate hand gestures and the diverse facial expressions that caught Nōsu's attention.[237] In his sketch of the dancing figure, we see Nōsu illustrate a bowed head, slanted half-opened eyes, thick lips, and a protruding nose. Such characteristics also appeared on figures in Arai's copies, as shown in the last chapter, and both artists highlighted the stylistic similarities among Ajanta figures.

However, Nōsu was also mindful of the stylistic variations that existed between figures at the caves. In his article, he stressed how discrete caves at Ajanta dated to various historical periods in Ajanta's long history, which led to a diverse range of styles across figures from different caves.[238] As he described:

> "The character and facial expressions of figures will differ in details such as their eyes' outlines or their protruding cheekbones, setting them apart from those found in other caves with distinct attributes."[239]

---

[236] Nōsu, "Indo no Kinsei Ega [Early-modern Indian Painting]," *Gendai no Bijutsu* 2 No. 2 (1919): 41-42

[237] A few of Nōsu's Ajanta sketches are currently in the possession of his grandson Nōsu Yoshimitsu.

[238] Nōsu, "Indo Ajyanta no Hekiga to Hōryū-ji Kondō [The Indian Ajanta Murals and Hōryū-Ji's Kondō]." *Gendai no Bijutsu* 1, issue 4, (Tokyo: Gendai-no-Bijutsu-sha, 1918): 14-15

[239] Ibid, 15

Nōsu's observation of such facial distinctions was reflected in his two reproduced copies. For example, while Nōsu's dancing female figure showed half-opened eyes with wavy eyelids, Nōsu's other facial sketches from Ajanta showed them with wide-opened almond-shaped eyes and large irises. As shown through both his writing and sketches, Nōsu demonstrated his keen attention to the facial distinctions among figures at Ajanta.

The diversity in facial styles in ancient Indian art fascinated not only Nōsu but also his close friend who worked alongside him at Ajanta, Kiritani Senrin. As discussed in the last chapter, Kiritani spent the 1910s traveling across India, researching its ancient art. As part of his research, he scrutinized and classified the shapes of eyes, noses, and mouths, from various Indian Buddhist sculptures and he published his results in a two-part article in the art periodical *Bijutsu no Nihon*. In his article, Kiritani identified the two distinct eye types that appeared in Nōsu's sketches from Ajanta: rotund, large eyes (fig 3.5a), and slanted half-opened eyes (fig 3.5b). Kiritani argued that large eyes were a defining feature of sculptures dating to India's most ancient periods.[240] This included both Mauryan period (3rd century B.C.) sculptures and Greek-influenced Gandharan-styled sculptures (1st century B.C.E to 1st century A.D).[241] While Kiritani admitted that the wide-opened eyes on such sculptures were influenced by Greek sculptures, he

---

[240] Kiritani. "Budda Ganmen no Kenkyū sono ichi [Research on Buddhist Facial Features (1)]," *Bijutsu no Nihon*, vol 9, no. 3, (1917): 8-9

[241] In his article, Kiritani did not give precise dates, and the dates used in this chapter rely on current-day terminologies for Indian historical dates and artistic styles. According to Kiritani, large round eyes were found on both sculptures dating from "the period of King Ashoka" and "Gandharan statues that were influenced by the Greeks." King Ashoka was a king from the Mauryan period who was credited for spreading Buddhism across India. "Gandhara" referred to a style of ancient Buddhist sculpture that syncretized ancient Greek and Indian sculptural styles. It is important to note that terms such as "Mauryan sculpture" and "Gandharan sculptures" encompassed a broad range of styles and developments spanning extensive periods.

claimed that they were also realistic depictions of Indian facial features, noting how modern-day Indians also possess large eyes.[242]

In contrast to ancient sculpture, Kiritani observed slanted half-opened eyes from sculptures dating to later periods, similar to those found on the dancing figure Nōsu sketched. In his own words, he described them as "merciful eyes" (*Jigan)*, that conveyed the solemn and peaceful sentimentality associated with the Buddha.[243] Tracing the transition of wide eyes to half-opened eyes in the history of Indian sculptures, Kiritani asserted how this development highlighted the shift from realism to sentimentality in the evolution of Indian Buddhist sculptures across history. Moreover, he argued that East Asian Buddhist sculptures, including Japanese sculptures, went on to inherit the trait of slanted half-opened eyes from India.[244] While Kiritani's article was focused on sculptures, we can speculate that his theories and research would've been shared with Nōsu and ignited his attentiveness to facial expressions when copying Indian art.

As shown through the articles he published after he returned to Japan, Nōsu garnered much knowledge of Indian art from his personal experience and his fellow artists abroad. His article on Ajanta also showcased his diligence in recording the unique style of the ancient murals, similar to Arai and Kiriya. However, Nōsu's examination diverged from those of the other two artists in that, as expressed by his article's title, he also examined the differences between the Ajanta cave murals and the Buddhist murals at Hōryū-ji temple in Japan. As established in previous chapters, during the early twentieth century, Buddhist scholars and intellectuals like Okakura Tenshin emphasized a direct connection between the Buddhist murals at Horyū-ji and

---

[242] Kiritani, *Budda Ganmen no Kenkyū,* 11

[243] Ibid., 8

[244] Ibid., 10

the Ajanta Caves.[245] On the other hand, Nōsu argued that Ajanta and Hōryū-ji had a more indirect connection with each other, highlighting several differences between Hōryū-ji and Ajanta's murals.

Comparing the two murals, Nōsu argued that Hōryū-ji's murals showed more Chinese artistic conventions because they performed a ceremonial function with solemn Buddhist figures positioned at the center of each wall as devotional images for people to pray to.[246] In contrast, the Ajanta murals featured more narrative imagery with decorative elements and figures in motion, seemingly "painted freely without any inhibition."[247] While Nōsu did not deny the presence of Indian styles in the Hōryū-ji murals, he credited those characteristics to ancient Chinese monks who studied in India and introduced its artistic styles to Japan.[248] By 1940, near the end of his artistic career, he maintained his belief that Hōryū-ji's murals represented East Asian mural conventions.[249]

As his writings expressed, while Nōsu was interested in Indian Buddhist art and Ajanta like his contemporaries, he was also fascinated with Buddhist art from other cultures. He acknowledged Chinese Buddhist mural conventions and their influence on Japan's Hōryū-ji temple. His perspectives diverged from Okakura's proposed theory, which downplayed the Chinese artistic influences on the Hōryū-ji caves in favor of a more direct connection between Japanese and Indian art. Nōsu's consideration of the larger picture of pan-Asian transcultural

---

[245] See Chapter 1

[246] Nōsu, *Indo Ajyanta no Hekiga to Hōryū-ji Kondō*, 17

[247] Ibid., 16

[248] Ibid., 17

[249] Nōsu, "Hōryū-ji to Ajyanta no Hekiga no Ishu [Distinctive Allure of Hōryū-ji and the Ajanta Murals]," in *Chawan, issue* 109, (1940): 19

interactions allowed him to create works that diverged from his predecessors such as Arai Kanpō. As shown in his future works, he not only adapted Indian styles but also implemented characteristics from East Asian art to create a unique blend.

Morning at the Caves: Nōsu's mid-career work

After he returned to Japan, Nōsu took the opportunity to apply what he learned from his time abroad to a work he submitted to the 7th Inten exhibitions in 1920: a pair of screen-painting titled *Morning at the Caves* (fig 3.6).[250] It depicted two Indian women holding ceremonial offerings in front of one of the cave entrances to the Ajanta caves. The background featured a panorama of Ajanta during a misty morning with prominently carved reliefs showing Indian sculptures. The left half of the screen paintings showcased more natural imagery with lush trees dominating the composition. Nōsu's composition came together to create a romantic picture of ancient people conducting morning rituals at the caves, capturing his fantasies of a bygone age. Compared to Nōsu's earlier works, *Morning at the Caves* displayed a drastic change in style for Nōsu, influenced by his time abroad.

The most eye-catching aspect of the piece was the two figures, which embodied a similar style to figures in the works of Nōsu's contemporaries. For example, the figure in the side profile resembled the figure of Sujata in Arai's *Offering of Rice Gruel* (fig 2.7), with both figures showing one side of their face and arms raised with offerings. More tellingly, the figure holding a basket of flowers emulates similarities with another figure with a flower basket in Yokoyama Taikan's *Sākyamuni Encounters his Father* (fig 1.14) painting, which suggests that both artists

[250] See Chapter 2 for more information on the Inten exhibitions

drew from the same source from Ajanta.[251] Furthermore, both figures showcased Indian facial features that demonstrated Nōsu's study at Ajanta. Similar to his sketch of the dancing figure (fig 3.3) from Ajanta, the figures in Nōsu's screen painting possess large almond-shaped eyes and prominent noses. Nōsu also mimicked his sketch by giving his figures half-opened eyes, conveying the solemn sentimentality that Kiritani Senrin ascribed to such eyes. However, Nōsu gave the eyes and eyebrows on his new figures some characteristics distinct from those of his sketched figure. While the dancing figure's eyebrows and eyelids were both delineated with undulating lines, Nōsu instead gave his two figures rounder-shaped eyes with a straight black line to distinguish the upper eyelid from the eye and curved eyebrows (fig 3.6a). With these distinctions, we can see Nōsu adding his personal touches to stylizing the faces of his Indian figures rather than reproducing his Ajanta reproductions.

Other than the figures' faces, Nōsu's stylistic approach to his figures' attire and contours also showcased major developments, especially when compared to Nōsu's earlier works such as *Yellow Spring.* Unlike the figures in his previous works, Nōsu's new figures did not feature strong black outlines that delineated the bodies or highlighted the folds of the clothes. Instead, Nōsu barely used contours or shading for the figure in the orange skirt. For example, we see how Nōsu abandoned the use of lines to discern the body from the skirt, instead relying on the color contrast between the skin and the cloth (fig 3.6b). Similarly, he used simple squares of blue or orange color to depict the belt and the skirt's patterns.

In comparison, the figure in the pale blue skirt featured more variations. Even though she also lacked contours delineating the boundary between the attire and the skin, her skirt contained

---

[251] See Chapter 1 page for more information

more details and included shadings and line work. Nōsu created a more detailed belt with meticulous brushwork that included geometric decorations (fig 3.6c). Similar to Taikan's *Sākyamuni Encounters his Father*, the geometric patterns on the belt mimicked the arabesque ceiling tiles at Ajanta, further demonstrating Nōsu's studies of the ancient murals. Behind the belt, Nōsu applied skillful brushwork rather than patches of colors to create detailed ornamentations on the hem of the skirt, showing an alternative approach from the other figure. Apart from the use of lines and brushwork, Nōsu also utilizes slight shading to outline the legs beneath the skirt, further accentuated with subtle uses of lines. As covered in the preceding chapter, this technique of using shading to accentuate a figure's body beneath clothes also appeared in Arai Kanpō's work, such as *Offering of Rice Gruel* (fig 2.7), and both artists adapted this technique from the Ajanta Caves.[252] The subtle distinction in artistic approaches between the two figures highlights Nōsu's exploration of diverse styles and methods he learned from his time abroad.

Examining the diverse approaches in Nōsu's new figures in context with his post-India publications, we can speculate that these artistic choices represented his attempts at implementing what he learned in India into his works. For example, in *The Indian Ajanta Murals and Hōryū-Ji's Kondō*, he described how figural styles varied in the caves, lacking a uniform style, and how some figures were drawn without any contours.[253] Furthermore, his inspiration for utilizing strong vivid colors came from both his observations of Ajanta mural paintings and other forms of Indian art. As elaborated in his article, he extolled how the Ajanta murals boldly used

---

[252] For more details on Taki Seiichi's discussion of shading at Ajanta, see Chapter 2

[253] Nōsu, *Indo Ajyanta no Hekiga to Hōryū-ji Kondō*, 15

bright colors such as "ultramarine, green, blue, and white."[254] In his other article, *Modern Indian Painting* Nōsu made similar comments in his observation of India's non-Buddhist arts, particularly Islamic paintings such as Mughal miniatures, highlighting their affinity for primary colors such as blue, yellow, and green, and their frequent use of arabesque patterns on the clothing of characters.[255]

Examining Nōsu's vibrant use of colors for the attires of his figures in *Morning at the Caves* in tandem with his writings, we can discern characteristics that align with Nōsu's descriptions. First, Nōsu used some of the colors that he observed from Ajanta and Mughal miniatures for the figures' attires, such as green and blue for the shawls and belts. On the skirts of both figures, despite different approaches, Nōsu also explored ways to re-create the ornate patterns that he saw on depictions of Indian attires. In contrast to his graduation works from the 1900s, Nōsu deviated from earthly tones, shading, and contours in favor of an Indian style that utilized vibrant colors and stylized facial features.

Nōsu's decision to forgo a realistic style in favor of a simplified and colorful one proved fruitful. When his work was displayed at the 7th Inten exhibition in 1920, some viewers commented on the vivid and affectionate nature of the figures. The display of Nōsu's screen also coincided with the display of Arai Kanpō's *Dream of Madam Maya* (fig 2.30) at the same exhibition, and critics cannot help but compare the two Indian-themed works by both artists.[256] Most critics determined that while Arai's screen painting showcased more skillful draftsmanship, Nōsu's work showed more creativity and sentimentality, which won some critics over. For

---

[254] Ibid.

[255] Nōsu, *Indo no Kinsei Ega*, 42

[256] See Chapter 2, page number to be decided

example, poet and literary critic Kawaji Ryūkō wrote a review on Nōsu's screen painting where he compared the work to those produced by Nōsu's colleagues from the Ajanta Project:

> "Even though Nōsu's *Morning at the Caves* displays immature technique in comparison with the [other works] (Arai Kanpō and others) it made up for that with a certain sense of lyricism and avoided giving off a bad impression. The weak physicality in the human figures and the composition of the left screen somewhat falters, but the colors are well organized. "[257]

While Ryūkō found Nōsu's figural form lacking, other critics' opinions were more positive. For example, art historian Haruyama Takematsu praised Nōsu for his creative approach to his figures in two of his reviews, complementing how the colors and figural composition of the two women enhanced the conceptual composition of the screen painting:

> "The image took on a dreamlike quality […] Neither appearing nor disappearing, the faint shadows that melt into the dream is abruptly broken by the vivid colors of the two women […] the light movements implied by how the woman's arms stretch to the left and right, moving diagonally to the front, is the best part of this work. However, in terms of technique, he cannot compare to Mr. Arai; especially in the composition of the flesh."[258]

As the reviews illustrated, both critics agree that Nōsu's figural composition appeared overly simplified compared to his colleagues at the same exhibition. However, both extolled Nōsu for his bold use of colors that gave his work a dream-like and sentimental quality. The depiction of two women engaging in religious activities in an ancient era also conveyed a sense of fantasized nostalgia that attracted viewers.

However, while *Morning at the Caves* embodied the culmination of Nōsu's studies of Indian techniques and themes from his time abroad, it only represented one aspect of the artist's

---

[257] Kawaji Ryūkō, *Chū-ō Bijutsu* 6, no. 10, 1920, reproduced in *Nihon Bijutsuin Hyakunen-shi*, vol. 4 [Nihon Bijutsu-in Hundred Year History Vol. 4], edited by *Nihon Bijutsuin* (Tokyo: Nihon Bijutsuin-sha, 1994), 870-871

[258] Haruyama, Takematsu, *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun* (September 3, 1920), reproduced in *Nihon Bijutsuin Hyakunen-shi* 4, 870

full oeuvre. As shown in his other works that were produced after he returned from India, presumably after he completed *Morning at the Caves*, the artist would explore figures that synthesized Indian and Japanese conventions, evincing the artist's interest in combining diverse art styles in Buddhist art across Asian cultures. One such painting was *Beauty Under the Tree* (fig 3.7), a hanging scroll portraiture displaying a female figure in Indian attire. While scholars today can not provide an accurate date for when Nōsu created this painting, many believe that it was produced around the same time that Nōsu created *Morning at the Caves.*[259] In contrast to Nōsu's screen painting, with its heavy Indian influences, *Beauty Under the Tree* demonstrated Nōsu's careful strategy to selectively harmonize characteristics from both Indian and Japanese culture to create a transnational Asian figure.

At first glance, the Indian influence in the portraiture is unmistakable through the figure's exotic attire. With her upper garment leaving her shoulder exposed and a shawl draping her whole body, the female figure immediately satisfied the Japanese imagination of the typical Indian woman. Other than her attire, Nōsu also implemented Indian styles for the woman's facial features with the indicative almond-shaped eyes. However, while the shared Indian aesthetics between Nōsu's portraiture and his screen painting is unmistakable, *Beauty Under the Tree* possessed many traits that set it apart from the latter. Comparing the face of its figure to those of the female figures in *Morning at the Caves*, we see how Nōsu toned down its features for a more delicate portrayal. Rather than the exaggerated eyes and protruding noses seen on the faces of the figures in the screen painting, the figure in *Beauty Under the Tree* possesses a rounder face and

---

[259] The artist did not leave a date on the painting and no materials on this painting remained today. However, curators and scholars today agree that the painting was probably produced between Nōsu's return from India in 1919 and his second trip abroad in 1932.

nose, and her eyes appear smaller in proportion to her face (fig. 3.7a). The facial disparity between the figures of Nōsu's two works brings to mind similar differences between Yokoyama Taikan's works, *White-Clothed Kannon* and *Floating Lanterns*. While Taikan depicted a conspicuously Indian figure in *White-Clothed Kannon* he toned down such ethnic traits for the figures in *Ryūtō* while implementing Japanese characteristics, such as pale skin and smaller eyes, to create idealized Asian female figures that synchronized both Indian and Japanese attributes.[260] With *Beauty Under the Tree*, we can see Nōsu attempting the same visual strategy as Taikan, combining features from both cultures into one figure.

However, Nōsu implemented Japanese aesthetics not just through the figure but also through visual techniques and subtle icons. For instance, the leaves and branches of the tree in the background demonstrated his adroitness with the Japanese "drip ink" or *tarashikomi* technique, where the artist drips colored pigments on wet ink.[261] This traditional technique creates a ripple-like or blurry aesthetic that is especially suitable for highlighting mosses on tree trunks and the luminosity of tree leaves, both visible in Nōsu's painting (fig 3.7c). Other than technique, Nōsu also included subtle Japanese iconography. For example, rather than an Indian fan, the figure held a Japanese *uchiwa* fan in her right hand, recognizable through its round shape (fig 3.7d). This type of fan commonly appeared as a woman's accessory in Japanese woodblock prints of beautiful women, otherwise known as the *Bijin-ga* genre, making it a traditional icon associated with femininity or beauty in Japanese art.[262] With the inclusion of *tarashikomi* and the

---

[260] See Chapter 1

[261] Carpenter, John T., *Designing Nature: The Rinpa Aesthetic in Japanese Art*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), 17-18

[262] Notable examples of uchiwa fans in Japanese *Bijin-ga* woodblock prints include the famous *Three Beauties of the Present Day* by Kitagawa Utamaro with the woman at the bottom right corner holding such a fan.

uchiwa fan with his figure, Nōsu subtly combined aesthetics from Japanese and Indian art to highlight the connection between the two cultures.

Finally, beyond the painting's visual elements, the title of *Beauty under the Tree* also encapsulated the transnational message that Nōsu strove to convey through his painting. Commonly known as "*Juka Bijin,"* this motif of beautiful women standing under a tree has long been a recurring theme in Asian art since antiquity. In Japanese art, one of the most notable examples included the 8th-century *Torige Ryūjo* screen painting (fig 3.8) kept at Shōsōin treasure house. As one of Japan's oldest works and considered a national treasure today, it featured the titular female figure underneath a blossoming tree in various attire, illustrating the pairing of tree and women in the conventional subject matter of *Juka Bijin*. Even though it is unclear whether Nōsu's painting was given the title of *Juka Bijin* by the artist himself or future critics and curators, Nōsu's painting was probably inspired by concepts and iconographies associated with the motif. Around the same time that Nōsu produced his painting, the motif of *Juka Bijin had* become an attractive topic for scholars of oriental art when Japanese archaeological explorations in Central Asia discovered ancient works of art that featured similar motifs, and scholars explored how the theme spread across Asia to Japan. The motif attained increased attention during the Taisho period when a 1914 exploration of ancient Buddhist sites in Central Asia, sponsored by the Buddhist abbot Ōtani Kōzui (1876-1948), unearthed a Tang-dynasty artwork featuring a woman and a juvenile boy. Commonly labeled as *Lady under a Tree* (fig 3.9) today, Japanese art magazines in Nōsu's time celebrated the discovery of the Chinese painting,

highlighting the similarities it possessed with Japan's *Torige Ryūjo* screen painting and extolling it as one of the earliest artistic examples of the *Juka Bijin* motif.[263]

Similar to the ties between Ajanta and Hōryū-ji, the connection between the Chinese painting and *Torige Ryūjo* incited Pan-Asianist sentiments as Japanese intellectuals perceived an interrelatedness between Japan and other Asian cultures through the shared visual culture of *Juka Bijin*. This was further evidenced by the inclusion of Okakura Tenshin's famous quote"Asia is one" in the description of *Lady under a Tree* in the 1921 catalog, *Meihin Sōran: Tōyō Bijutsu*.[264] Moreover, Japanese scholars did not ascribe the visual motif of *Juka Bijin* to only East Asian art but also Indian art. For example, in a 1924 issue of *Indo Bijutsu Sōran*, a widely circulated Japanese catalog showcasing photographic reproductions of Indian art, we see the catalog used the label of *Juka Bijin* for a selection of ancient Indian female figurines underneath carved treetops (fig 3.10).[265] The use of such terminology for Indian sculptures with the same women-tree motif showed that by 1924, coinciding with the estimated time Nōsu produced his painting, Japanese scholars have long recognized the motif as a Pan-Asian one that appeared in art traditions across Asia, including Chinese, Indian, and Japanese.

Thus, with its title of *Beauty Under the Tree* and its depiction of a female figure underneath vegetation, we see how Nōsu connected his painting to contemporary discussions on *Juka Bijin* as a transcultural motif uniting artistic conventions across Asia. With its combination of Indian and Japanese characteristics and a transcultural title, Nōsu's *Beauty Under the Tree* demonstrated

---

263 "Meihin Sōran Kaisetsu Dai-Shichi [Explanations of Fine Works, number seven]," *Meihin Sōran: Tōyō Bijutsu* 1, no. 7, (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shiryou Kankouka, 1921), 87

264 Ibid.

265 "Juka Bijin [Beauty under Tree]," *Indo Geijutsu Sōran [A General View of Indian Arts],* vol 1, issue 10, (Tokyo: The Society for Study of Indian Arts, 1924)

how he did not simply view India in isolation but as a culture that's connected with the rest of Asia. While *Morning at the Caves* embodied his fascination and studies of India's exotic art style from his time abroad, *Beauty Under the Tree* reflected his interest in the connection of India and Japan through the larger context of Pan-Asian spiritual and artistic traditions. When Nōsu returned to India in 1932 to paint his mural for Mulanghanda Kuti temple, he expanded upon the transcultural messages and visual strategies he explored in *Beauty Under the Tree*, further demonstrating his commitment to visualizing the transcultural ties between India and Japan. However, in the years that led up to his second travel to India in 1932, he explored more visual strategies and themes that contributed to the culmination of his skill and passion with his mural in India.

Nōsu's inquiries into Indian Art, post-1920

Despite the fairly positive reception of *Morning at the Caves* in 1920, Nōsu's activities between 1920 and 1932 proved a challenge to accurately discern for scholars today. As Mizobuchi described, scant records and artworks of the artist remained from this decade and information on this period was largely speculative.[266] From what little information remained from this period, scholars can confirm that he took a job as an art lecturer at Shukutoku Females High School in 1921, which was a position he retained until 1945.[267] He also produced paintings ranging from Buddhist-themed works to landscapes and portraiture, and many were possibly intended for submissions to the annual Inten Exhibitions. Unfortunately, none of his works from this period were accepted, leaving *Morning at the Caves* as Nōsu's only successful submission to

---

[266] Mizobuchi, "Nōsu no Shōgai to Sakuhin [Nōsu's Life and Works]," *Nōsu Kōsetsu Kaikoten*, 89

[267] Ibid, 90

the Inten Exhibitions in his life. Examining the few works that were believed to come from this decade, we can observe how Nōsu tested various techniques and subject matter during this period.[268]

To begin with, his Buddhist-themed paintings from this period showcased some slight departures from *Morning at the Caves*. One example included a lost pair of screen paintings titled *Buddha's Reunion with his Father* (fig 3.11), which depicted the story of Buddha's meeting with his elderly father after he achieved enlightenment. While little visual records of this work remain today, we can discern from reproductions how Nōsu's new screen painting retained some traits seen in *Morning at the Caves*, such as having figures in side-profile. However, Nōsu also attempted new visual techniques to illustrate the distance, both physical and emotional, that had developed between Buddha and his father. For example, he strategically separated the figures of Buddha and his father between the right and left screen respectively. He also filled the left edge of the right screen with thick tree trunks as a visual boundary segregating Buddha from his father. From these artistic choices, we see how Nōsu explored ways to utilize the screens' layout and composition for narrative expression, using visual elements to demarcate characters and episodes. It is plausible that Nōsu was testing narrative techniques that he observed from the Ajanta murals. As he described in *The Indian Ajanta Murals and Hōryū-Ji's Kondō*, Nōsu expressed his amusement at how the ancient Indian murals "intertwined separate [episodic] events with irrational but skillful techniques," transitioning from one narrative segment to another without following a strict format.[269] The visual storytelling techniques that Nōsu utilized

---

[268] Because of the lack of information on Nōsu Kōsetsu following 1920, the dating of several of Nōsu's paintings from this period remained dubious.

[269] Nōsu, *Indo Ajyanta no Hekiga to Hōryū-ji Kondō*, 16

in his lost screen painting offer us a glimpse into his early ventures into creating narrative structures in art, which will further develop in Nōsu's future works.

Other than *Buddha's Reunion with his Father,* another one of Nōsu's Buddhist paintings that was purportedly produced between 1920 and 1930 is a two-panel screen portraiture titled *The Sad Yaśodharā* (*Kanashimi no Yashōdara,* fig 3.12). In Buddhist lore, Yaśodharā was the wife of Sākyamuni whom he left behind when he departed his palatial life to pursue enlightenment.[270] In his work, Nōsu depicted Yaśodharā sitting on her bed with a forlorn expression, grieving her abandonment by her husband. Like his previous works, Nōsu implemented many characteristics from Ajanta into this painting. For example, the grid-like carvings on Yaśodharā's bed and the pillars in the background also mimicked the decorative tiles found at Ajanta. However, in contrast to his previous works, which featured figures with austere expressions, Nōsu used Yaśodharā's facial expressions to emote strong sentiments without breaking away from the conventional style associated with the faces of Ajanta figures. Discerning the figure's face closely, we can perceive the thick lips, large eyes, and arched brow that resembled the figures in Nōsu's *Morning at the Caves*. Yet, Nōsu implemented slight adjustments to Yaśodharā's facial features to create an expression of sadness, depicting heavier eyelids that left her eyes half-opened and deflected the edge of her mouth downwards to form a frown. The touches that Nōsu made to Yaśodharā's facial features to make her emotive followed his usual approach of implementing Indian styles with his personal touches, demonstrating his agency as an artist.

---

[270] *Indo to Arai Kanpo*, 76

Even though Nōsu's two Buddhist paintings failed to appear in any public exhibitions, the artist managed to make them accessible to wider audiences through a different format. Both paintings were reproduced within a series of eight images that Nōsu produced as a postcard series, which was commissioned and published by the religious youth organization All Japan Young Buddhist Association (Zen Nippon Bukkyō Seinen Kai) in 1931.[271] Through the sequence of postcard images, Nōsu illustrated the life of Buddha through visual narration and the set of cards also included short explanations provided by Tokyo Imperial University (Now University of Tokyo) professor Ui Hakuju. From his collaboration with the Buddhist youth organization, we see Nōsu's early experience in connecting his works to create episodic illustrations, which he used as a didactic tool to educate others on the life of Buddha. Thus, even though his paintings during this period failed to garner attention from Japan's art scene, they served as an opportunity for Nōsu to contemplate how to structure the narrative of Buddha's life into a series of illustrations. This gave him the necessary experience later on to structure the visual episodes of Buddha's life on his temple mural.

Apart from Nōsu's minor artistic activities during the 1920s, despite few successes or attention, he also devoted much of his time educating himself on topics regarding Buddhist Studies and Indian culture, evincing his continuing passion for Buddhist art. He frequented the Department of Buddhist and Sanskrit Studies at Tokyo Imperial University (now the University of Tokyo) to educate himself on such areas, possibly making acquaintances with the department's notable faculties.[272] Furthermore, Nōsu also formed an informal "Indian Art

---

[271] "Nōsu Kōsetsu Gahaku no "Satori Kādo" ["Enlightenment Cards" by Master Artist Nōsu Kōsetsu]," *Kyōiku to Shūkyō,* vol 3, issue 12, (Tokyo: Kyōiku to Shūkyō-sha, 1931): 52

[272] Mizobuchi, *Nōsu no Shōgai to Sakuhin*, 90

Research Group" with fellow Buddhist scholars and Indian enthusiasts, who gathered regularly at his house to converse about their shared interests in India over meals and drinks.[273] One notable member of Nōsu's friend group included the renowned Waseda University professor of Indian philosophy and Buddhist studies, Takeda Toyoshirō (1882-1958).

As shown in one of his earlier writings, Takeda, as a scholar of Indian thoughts and philosophy, displayed an admiration of the non-materialistic elements in Indian art, arguing how they're more capable than Western art at expressing sentiments or philosophical ideas. Throughout the 1920s, he fervently advocated for the spiritual values of Indian culture through several writings and lectures. Some notable examples included his lecture *Ancient Indian Culture* (*Kodai Indo no bunka*) and his essay *India's Contribution to Japanese Culture* (Nihon bunka ni taisuru Indo no kiyō), both produced in 1926. In his writings, Takeda frequently used the dialectical terminologies "spirit" and "body" as metaphors for what he described as the spiritual and carnal aspects of Indian culture and philosophy. Takeda used the term "carnal" (*niku-teki*) to describe the sensual needs of humans, such as sexual desires, pleasure, and romance.

While many cultures framed carnality as the antithesis to spirituality, Takeda argued that "fulfillment of both spirit and body on both fronts is the philosophy of ancient India."[274] He described how rather than viewing them as sacrilegious or salacious, Indian philosophy embraced the virtues inherited in the carnal aspects of life, highlighting how they embodied passion, love, and integral components that constitute a human's soul. Takeda also asserted how romantic virtues in Indian philosophy translated to its art, where passion and other drives

---

[273] Kame Yamato. "Nōsu Kōsetsu no Geijutsu [The art of Nōsu Kōsetsu]." *Kyōiku to Shūkyō,* vol. 1, issue 4*,* (Tokyo: Kyōiku to Shūkyō-sha, 1929): 36

[274] Takeda, "Nihon bunka ni taisuru Indo no kiyō [India's Contribution to Japanese Culture]," in *Bukkyō Dokuhon [The Buddhism Primer]*, edited by Momiyama Hansaburō, (Kannon-ka, 1926), 14

manifested into artistic inspiration, described as "rasa" or "taste" in Indian aesthetic culture.[275] Because of their embrace of carnal values and uninhibited passion, Takeda argued that this explained the main difference between Indian and East Asian Buddhist art with Indian art more tolerant of wild and playful styles in contrast to the religious solemnity seen in Chinese and Japanese Buddhist art.[276] As seen in the language used in his writings, Takeda romanticized India and its culture as a "strove for perfection in both spirit and body."[277]

Admittedly, Takeda's description of India appeared stereotypical and idealized. He indulged in Japanese fantasies of India as a backward country lacking in modernity but spirituality resilient. However, in his writing, he referenced contemporary Indian writers who similarly advocated for the "carnal" and sensual virtues of their culture, highlighting the harmony between the carnal and spiritual aspects of Indian religion. For example, Takeda quoted the 1916 book *Love in Hindu Literature* by Bengali scholar Benoy Kumar Sarkar. As Takeda described, Benoy defended the place of sex and other provocative subject matters in Indian literature and art, explaining the connections of such seemingly salacious themes to concepts of spiritual love and passion rooted in Indian philosophy.[278] Furthermore, Takeda also included Coomaraswamy's *Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon* among the sources he consulted for his writing. The Indian art historian's book discussed the dichotomy of "spirit" and "matter" in its preface and helped publicize such concepts for both Indian and Japanese scholars.[279] With his

---

[275] Ibid., 15

[276] Ibid., 18-19

[277] Takeda, "Kodai Indo no bunka [Ancient Indian Culture]," in *Tōyōshi kōza* [Oriental History Lecture series]16, (Tokyo: Yūzen kaku-sha, 1940), 39

[278] Ibid., 30

[279] See Chapter 2

knowledge of contemporary Indian writings and their discussions of "spirit," Takeda's arguments were built upon notions spreading among scholars in both India and Japan. As Nōsu Kōsetsu's close friend and fellow Indian enthusiast, Takeda's writings of spirit and body no doubt influenced Nōsu, and the artist would also encounter the challenge of harmonizing the duality of carnal and spiritual aspects of his mural.

Finally, Takeda and Nōsu's enthusiasm for India also helped them become acquainted with the Japan-India Association (*Nichi-in kyōkai*), which directly facilitated Nōsu's future travel to India. Existing today as a minor charity foundation, the Japan-India Association was initially created and funded in 1903 by Japanese statesmen Ōkuma Shigenobu (1838-1922), Nagaoka Moriyoshi (1842-1906) and Shibusawa Eiichi (1840-1931) as a government-sponsored foundation to foster closer ties between Japan and India.[280] By Nōsu's time, the organization members included other well-known scholars and artists in the field of Indian and Buddhist studies, such as Nōsu's friend, Kiritani Senrin, and famed Buddhist scholar Takakusu Junjirō.[281] While the organization was initially created to support closer economic ties between the two countries, mainly by providing financial support, it gradually expanded into cultural and religious affairs. One notable example included the construction of an official "Indian Research Hall" (*Indo kenkyū-dō*) building to foster research and studies on Japan, involving some of its members such as Takeda Toyoshirō and Kiritani Senrin.[282] Nōsu's involvement with the

---

[280] Hirabayashi Hiroshi, "110 Years of the Japan-India Association-Retrospect and Perspective," in *Monthly Journal of the Japan-India Association 110*, no. 1, (Tokyo: Japan-India Association, 2013): 4. For more information on the Japan-India Association and its history, please visit their website: https://www.japan-india.com/about_us

[281] "Kyōkai Tenbō [Outlook on Education world]," *Kyōiku to Shūkyō,* vol 4, issue 10, (Tokyo: Kyōiku to Shūkyō-sha, 1932): 52

[282] "*Ihō* [Compilations]," *Gendai no Bijutsu [Modern Art]*, (Tokyo: Gendai no bijutsu-sha, 1919): 76-77

association provided him with the opportunity and funds to travel to India for a second time. The association also provided a venue outside of Nōsu's informal group to interact with his fellow artists and intellectuals such as Takeda and Kiritani, allowing them to exchange their studies related to Indian art and culture that would affect Nōsu's mural project at Sarnath.

With his engagement with more visual strategies in Buddhist artworks, his studies, and his interactions with scholars of Indian culture and philosophy, the 1920s marked a period of growth for Nōsu. Despite his absence from exhibition-related activities, the artist maintained diligence in honing his artistic skills and learning about India, showcasing his continued passion for its foreign culture and art even many years after his initial travel.

Preparations for the murals: Sarnath and Mulagandha Kuti Vihara Temple

Before looking at Nōsu's mural, it is important to understand the history of Sarnath and the newly built Mulagandha Kuti Vihara temple to understand how the location where Nōsu created his mural contributed to the religious value of his work. Sarnath is a significant Buddhist site located near Varanasi in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India. By the turn of the twentieth century, it has earned a dual reputation as an important archaeological site and a sacred location. Supported by ancient Buddhist scriptures and inscriptions found at its ruins, Sarnath is considered the place where Buddha gave his first sermon, thus earning its status as one of the most sacred Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India.[283] Apart from its religious importance, it also became a crucial archaeological site from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century due to British excavations at the location.

---

[283] Asher, Frederick M, and Getty Research Institute. *Sarnath : A Critical History of the Place Where Buddhism Began*. Los Angeles: Published by The Getty Research Institute, 2020, 5-7.

One of the first explorers of Sarnath was British army engineer Alexander Cunningham, who is often credited as the earliest individual to conduct an archaeological survey of the site and the one to declare Sarnath as the site of Buddha's first sermon.[284] While several British archaeologists would follow in Cunningham's footsteps and conduct excavations there, it wasn't until 1904 that archaeologist Sir John Marshall established the foundations for a museum at the site. In an effort to create a place to house the materials excavated from Sarnath, Marshall laid plans for what would later become the Archaeological Museum Sarnath (now Sarnath Museum), one of India's oldest and most prominent museums today.[285] Housing a large array of ancient Buddhist sculptures and reliefs, the museum served as an important location for Nōsu to study the ancient styles of Indian sculptures for reference during his time working at Sarnath.

With Sarnath rapidly garnering attention as a major Buddhist site in India, it attracted the attention of the Buddhist organization Maha Bodhi Society, founded under the pioneering **S**ri Lankan Buddhist revivalist and missionary Anagarika Dharmapala. As the foremost Buddhist revivalist of the modern age, Dharmapala traveled across India from the late nineteenth to early twentieth, looking for suitable locations to establish his society as part of his revivalist movement.[286] After he successfully established a headquarters for the Maha Bodhi Society in Calcutta, Dharmapala moved to Sarnath where he dedicated the last years of his life to constructing a new temple at the sacred site. With financial support from India's colonial government and Western backers, such as Dharmapala's American friend Mary Foster, the Maha

---

[284] Asher, 12

[285] Ibid., 35

[286] Ibid., 146

Bodhi Society built their new temple, Mulagandha Kuti Vihara (shortened henceforth as "Mulagandha"), and officially opened its doors on November 11th, 1931.[287]

Even before construction for Mulagandha's building was finished, Dharmapala already had plans to decorate its interior walls with illustrations of the life of Buddha. This wish was passed on to an individual named B.L. Broughton, a representative from the British branch of the Maha Bodhi Society, who generously donated a total of 10,000 rupees to fund the art project.[288] Even though many members of the Maha Bodhi Society expressed enthusiasm for a mural, few can agree on the style of the mural and the appropriate artists for the project. For example, in a letter to the editors of *The British Buddhist* from the secretary and treasurer of the Maha-Bodhi Society, P.P. Siriwardhana mentioned a bold plan to turn the mural project into an international collaborative effort, hiring artists from various Buddhist countries around the world. Each artist shall contribute one oil painting to form a grand gallery of artworks illustrating the life of Buddha, creating a "truly universal" art project.[289] As Siriwardhana's letter revealed, many viewed the anticipated mural as a Pan-Asian collaborative effort, embodying the Maha Bodhi Society's goals of uniting Buddhist cultures around the world and making Buddhism more international.

Despite the initial audacious plan, the society eventually settled for a more reserved plan of hiring one artist for the project. Furthermore, the suggestion to hire a Japanese artist to

---

[287] Ibid, 147

[288] World Famous Japanese Artist Kosetsu Nosu Remembered." *Dharmadoot.* (Calcutta*:* Maha Bodhi Society of India, 2000: 21

[289] Siriwardhana, P.P., "Letter to the Editor," *The British Buddhist 3, no. 11, (August 1929): 21-22*

decorate the walls came from Mr. Broughton rather than an Indian or a Japanese.[290] This suggestion gained further traction when Rabindranath Tagore, who had a long history with Japanese artists, voiced his support in hopes of developing a Pan-Asian art style that could bridge the differences between Indian and Japanese art.[291] As a result of Broughton and Rabindranath's suggestion, the Maha Bodhi Society contacted the Japan-India Association to send a suitable artist for the endeavor.

Interestingly, the Association initially chose Nōsu's friend Kiritani Senrin for the project, due to Kiritani's experience working at Ajanta and his knowledge regarding ancient Indian styles. However, amidst his preparations, Kiritani unfortunately passed away from illness, leading to Nōsu volunteering as his replacement.[292] The artist received further recommendations from influential members of the association, such as prominent Buddhist scholar Takakusu Junjirō and monk Watanabe Kaikyōku. Thanks to the support of the two men, Nōsu secured his opportunity to return to India again to create the most important work of his artistic career. Furthermore, Takakusu and Kaikyōku also collaborated with the artist on choosing Buddhist narratives that will constitute the subject matter of the temple mural.[293]

The choice of the Japan-India Association to select Kiritani and Nōsu for the mural project also insinuated some interesting aspects of the Japanese perspective towards the mural. Both artists had experiences with the Ajanta murals from their time working with Arai Kanpō for the *Kokka* Ajanta reproduction project. Therefore, we can postulate that members of the Japan-

---

[290] *World Famous Japanese Artist*, 22

[291] Asher, 150-151

[292] Mizobuchi, "Kōsetsu no Shōgai [Life of Kōsetsu]," in *Nōsu Kōsetsu: Sono Shōgai,* 54

[293] *Kyōkai Tenbō,* 52

India association chose their artists based on whoever had the most experience and knowledge of ancient Indian wall paintings. While members of the Indian Maha Bodhi Society perceived the mural project as an opportunity to visualize the organization's message of international Buddhist unity, members from the Japanese association perceived it more as a chance for artistic experimentation, including recreating the ancient styles and themes of Ajanta in the modern age.

For Nōsu's supporter, Takakusu, he also viewed the mural project as a chance to experiment with Buddhist artistic didacticism. As a dedicated scholar of Buddhism and Indology, Takakusu had always been interested in the possibility of educating lay audiences on the life of Buddha through artistic means, such as music, theater, and visual arts. As highlighted in his chapter "*Is Artistic Representation of Buddha's Narrative Possible?*," in his 1934 book *Buddhism as the Light of the Orient*, Takakusu explored the various artistic expressions of Buddha's biography and teachings throughout history, from poetry to dance, and discussed the idiosyncrasies and challenges inherent in each art form. At the end of the chapter, he discussed the representation of Buddha's narrative through visual art and highlighted the ongoing Mulaghanda mural project as a rare opportunity to visually display the narrative on walls.[294] Through Takakusu's writing and his collaboration with Nōsu in deciding the narrative episodes for the mural, we can see how the Japanese collaborators viewed Mulaghanda as a chance to experiment with visual didactic methodologies that impart Buddhist teachings.

Furthermore, when discussing the sculptural expressions of Buddhist narratives he specifically emphasized sculptures from *Hinayana* (*Shōjō bukkyō* in Japanese) Buddhist

---

[294] Takakusu Junjirō, *Tōhō no hikari toshite no bukkyō* [*Buddhism as the Light of the Orient],* (Daikōkaku, 1934), 261-262

traditions, which he described as "solemn and serious."[295] As established before, Japanese scholars used the term *Hinayana* as an overarching term to describe the Buddhist practices of India and Southeast Asia, which we refer to as Theravada Buddhism today. They perceived them as the more orthodox counterpart to *Mahayana (Daijō bukkyō)* Buddhism, which Japanese Buddhists were more familiar with.[296] Takakusu's writing revealed that Japanese scholars during his period had begun to distinguish visual traditions associated with specific Buddhist traditions. Additionally, some dichotomized Buddhist art into two categories: solemn, serious styles, and playful decorative styles. The inquiry of discerning Buddhist traditions, especially the division between reserved and uninhibited visual styles, will later have parallels in the challenges Nōsu faced while creating his mural.

The activities of the Japan-India Association revealed a multitude of goals that the Japanese participants wished to achieve for the mural: recreating the styles of ancient Buddhist art, exploring ways to impart Buddhist teachings through artistic means, and assessing distinct Buddhist visual traditions. However, this does not imply that they don't share the same passion as the Indian participants in using the mural to visualize Buddhism as a transcultural unifying force. In one issue of the Japan-India Association's monthly bulletin, Nōsu provided a list of the selected narrative episodes planned for the mural, which included depictions showing Buddhism's spread from India to China and Japan. For example, two of the planned episodes included an illustration of the Bodhidharma introducing Buddhism to Chinese emperor Han

---

[295] Takakusu, 262-263

[296] In the following pages, I will be using the more appropriate term Theravada Buddhism. In Nōsu's writings and other Japanese sources referenced throughout this paper, they used the term "hinayana" (*shōjo*) or "Southern (*nanpō*) Buddhism. For more details on the distinction between hinayana and mahayana buddhism, please look at Chapter 1

Wudi, followed by a portraiture of Prince Shōtoko, the bringer of Buddhism to Japan.[297] Other planned illustrations included the story of Emperor Ashoka and the journey of the Chinese monk Xuanzang to India.[298] In the end, these illustrations were omitted from Nōsu's mural in India, possibly prioritizing the life of Buddha within spatial constraints. Nevertheless, records of these omitted episodes demonstrated the Japanese participants' desire to highlight the legacy of Buddhism's dissemination across Asia as a potent message of interconnected Buddhist heritage. Thus, both Japanese and Indian participants shared the same vision of making the mural a symbol of Pan-Asian Buddhist unity.

Without a doubt, Nōsu felt sentimental and determined to visualize the spiritual connection between India and Japan. Yet, he also acknowledged the daunting task of harmonizing the religious and artistic differences between India and Japan: Hinayana against Mahayana traditions, and Indian against Japanese conventions. Before Nōsu began his work at Sarnath, he made a stop at Calcutta to consult Rabindranath Tagore about this issue at Tagore's university, Santiniketan. As he described in a later speech:

> "[...] It is well known that every nation's art reflects its soul. Naturally, the spirit of Japanese Art would not be the same as that of the Indian. How to harmonize these two is, I believe, the most difficult but essential part of my task. The other day I had the honor to pay a visit to Dr. Tagore at Santiniketan. […] He strongly impressed upon me the importance of unifying the characteristics of Indian Art with that of the Japanese, through the spirit of Buddhism, I could not but reply that it would be impossible to accomplish such

---

[297] Nōsu, "My Mission at Fresco painting at Benares, India," *Journal of the Japan-India Association*, no. 52, (Tokyo: Japan-India Association, December, 1932): 148

[298] Ashoka was an Indian emperor from the 3rd-century B.C who conquered a large portion of the Indian subcontinent and spread Buddhism throughout his empire. Xuanzang was a 7th-century Buddhist monk who traveled from China to India to retrieve and translate Buddhist texts, making him a crucial figure in bringing Mahayana Buddhism to China and East Asia.

> work within the time allowed, to say nothing about my poor skill. The poet encouraged me by saying that devotion to our Lord Buddha would solve my difficulties."[299]

Through this speech, we can see how both Nōsu and his Indian clients desired a mural that combined Indian and Japanese traits to highlight the spiritual unity between the two countries.

Besides Tagore, Nōsu also visited an old Indian friend named Mukul Dey (1895-1989), a prominent Indian artist who joined him on his project on copying the Ajanta Caves and who had since become the principal of the Government College of Art and Craft in Calcutta. Despite his joy at seeing Nōsu again, Mukul divulged that there was some unfortunate dissent from Indian artists towards Nōsu within his school. When news spread that a Japanese artist would undertake the task of decorating the walls of Mulagandha, many Indian artists expressed their displeasure over a foreigner getting chosen over many talented locals to paint at one of India's most sacred locations. Mukul himself admitted that he was initially against the plan.[300] Fortunately, the opposition subsided because of Tagore's support for Nōsu, and Mukul also rescinded his initial opposition and welcomed the Japanese artist's involvement. With knowledge regarding the contentions behind his selection, Nōsu felt more pressured to smoothly harmonize the artistic differences between Indian and Japanese traditions to assuage the local Indian community.

Other than visiting old friends, there is also the possibility that Nōsu visited Calcutta Santiniketan to look at contemporary Indian murals for reference. By the time Nōsu arrived in India to begin his work, artists at Santiniketan had been experimenting with mural art for several decades, primarily under Abanindranath Tagore's student Nandalal Bose (1882-1966). Totaling

---

[299] Dey, Mukul C. "The Japanese Artists Mr. Kosetsu Nosu and Mr. Kisho Kawai in Calcutta." In: *Our Magazine*, 1 Dec. 1932, Vol. 1, No. 4: 6–8

[300] Nōsu, "Shoten Hōrin-ji no Hekiga" [The mural of Shoten Hōrin-ji]. *Tōei* 12, no 12, (Tokyo: Tōei-sha, 1936): 26

over fifty murals ranging in diverse styles, Bose and the artists he strove to test the full potential of public murals as a new direction to advance modern Indian art.[301] Considering the rich history and experience with modern Indian murals, the dissatisfaction of local Indian artists on Nōsu being chose for the Sarnath mural project became understandable. In his memoirs and other records, Nōsu never mentioned the Santiniketan murals by Nandalal Bose or if he took inspiration from them, but it would have been highly unlikely for him to overlook the murals during his visit to Santiniketan when he was inquiring about murals techniques. The connection between the Santiniketan murals and Nōsu future temple work can also be seen in the material approaches utilized by both, as Nandalal Bose also took some inspiration from the Ajanta Caves when it comes to the pigments and plasters he used.

Parallel to the challenge of synchronizing Indian and Japanese artistic differences was the challenge of synchronizing their slight religious differences as well, particularly the visual traditions of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. After all, Nōsu's Indian employers, Dharmapala the Maha Bodhi Society originated from Sri Lanka, which followed Theravada traditions and Nōsu believed that his mural shall include some representation of his employer's practices. In Nōsu's words, he commonly used the terms "Northern" (Mahayana) and "Southern" (Theravada) Buddhism to describe the two separate traditions, and he claimed that the majority of Buddhist art that remained in India belonged to the visual traditions of Northern (Mahayana) Buddhism, which he was familiar with.[302] In contrast, Nōsu acknowledged his unfamiliarity with

---

[301] K.G Subramanyan, "Forward," in *The Santiniketan Murals,* ed. Jayanta Chakrabarti, R. Sivar Kumam, and Arun K. Nag (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1995), 9

[302] Nōsu, "Shakuson Ichidaiki no Hekiga wo kansei suru made [Until the completion of the mural 'Life of Sākyamuni Buddha'," in *Daihōrin* 81, issue 3 (2014): 241. Originally printed in *Daihōrin* 880, (February 1934), Tokyo: Daihōrinkaku.

Theravada Buddhism's visual traditions and viewed the harmonization of Theravada and Mahayana traditions as a daunting task.[303] Thankfully, Nōsu found a solution by consulting various archaeological artifacts from the Sarnath Archaeological Museum located right next to the Mulaghanda temple. In his reports and explanations of the various imageries he depicted in his mural, Nōsu frequently referenced the sculptures from the Museum when discussing Theravada iconographies.

Admittedly, archaic artworks and images that narrate and teach Buddhist stories, including the life of Śākyamuni, have long existed in Japan, dating as far back as the 8th century. Notable examples include illustrations accompanying the *Sutra of Cause and Effect (Kako Genzai Ingakyō)* which depict scenes of Buddhist's past lives and journey to enlightenment, providing a visual supplement to the text. Other samples include visualizations of "*Jatāka"* tales, stories of Buddha's past incarnations, with the paintings that adorned the Tamamushi Shrine, a miniature stone shrine at Hōryū-ji, as exemplars in both style and narrative technique. It's also crucial to note that such Japanese examples also came from Mahayana Buddhist traditions, which feature different iconographies from Theravada Buddhism. Thus, as an artist knowledgeable of the conventions of Japanese Buddhist narrative art and faced with the challenge of harmonizing diverse Buddhist visual traditions, Nōsu often had to decide between choosing techniques and styles from either Indian, Japanese, or synchronizing both conventions, showcasing his innovation in mixing diverse traditions.

However, an examination of Nōsu's mural will show that the artist appeared to conflate the quandary of harmonizing Mahayana and Theravada visual traditions with his desire to

---

[303] Ibid.

harmonize East Asian and Indian artistic traditions. While many sections of the mural showcased Nōsu's effort in learning iconographies and subject matters associated with Theravada Buddhism, just as many demonstrated his implementation of East Asian conventions in his pursuit of a Pan-Asian mural. Moreover, the most subtle and integral implementation lay in the way Nōsu organized the episodes around the wall's surface.

***Buddha's Enlightenment* and ceremonial centerpieces - Buddha as a ceremonial icon**

Nosu's murals take up three interior walls of the temple, depicting Buddha's life in a clockwise direction starting with the southern wall where the temple's entrance is located. However, the painted narrative episodes of Buddha's life do not follow a strict left-to-right arrangement as they go around the walls, because Nōsu reserved the center of each wall for the most important or dramatic events. Beginning with the southern wall and ending with the eastern wall in a clockwise manner, the center of each wall depicts the following episodes: Buddha's birth on the southern wall (fig 3.13), his enlightenment and victory over the demon Mara on the western wall (fig 3.14), and then finally Buddha's death on the eastern wall (fig 3.15). Meanwhile, the Northern section of the temple is reserved for the shrine with a sculpture of Buddha that symbolizes his first sermon; an episode that occurred between Buddha's enlightenment and death. Thus, even though the northern shrine contains no walls or murals, its sculpture contributes to the narrative structure of the temple's interior and fits into the clockwise flow of the episodes.[304]

This deliberate organization reflected Nōsu's studies of the differences between the Buddhist murals of Hōryū-ji and the Ajanta cave paintings, which he argued represented

---

[304] Nōsu, "Shoten Hōrin-ji no Hekiga (ni)" [The Mural of Shoten Ho0rin-ji temple (2)], *Nichi-in* 99

fundamental variances between Indian and East Asian muralism. As he discussed in his article *The Indian Ajanta Murals and Hōryū-Ji's Kondō*, Nōsu argued that Hōryū-ji murals performed a ceremonial function with each of their four walls having a Buddha figure placed at their center, acting as ceremonial images to pray to.[305] For example, as Nōsu described, the Western wall depicted both the Amitābha Buddha and the historical Śākyamuni, the Eastern wall depicted the "Jewel-Born" Buddha,while the Northern wall presented the Medicinal Buddha, Yakushini.[306] As he began work on his mural, Nōsu arranged the visual layout similarly to Hōryū-ji's murals with the figure of the Buddha enlarged and centered on each wall.

While Nōsu's placement of the Buddha at the center of each wall took inspiration from the East Asian format from Hōryū-ji, his execution of the narrative stories surrounding the central figures relied heavily on the idiosyncratic traits of the Ajanta Cave murals. In contrast to the ceremonial function of the Hōryū-ji murals, as Nōsu argued, the Ajanta murals were more story-driven. Depicting the life and previous reincarnations of Buddha, Nōsu claimed that the Ajanta wall paintings are "time-oriented art" (*jikan-teki*) that depicted narrative episodes and figures with a sense of movement, suggesting a progression of time in their depictions. In his execution of scenes and figures surrounding the centerpiece of each wall, Nōsu applied similar narrative-oriented characteristics, creating a unique blend of Indian and East Asian traits when combined with the central figures.

---

[305] Nōsu, *Indo Ajyanta no Hekiga to Hōryū-ji Kondō*, 16

[306] Here, Nōsu is describing various deities worshipped across different schools of Mahayana Buddhism. All these Buddhas can be interpreted as various deifications of the historical Buddha from Hinayana Buddhism, Shyakamuni, who was worshipped in India. For more information on the various incarnations of the Buddha across Asian cultures, please consult *The Foundations of Buddhism* by Rupert Gethin

Furthermore, Nōsu also highlighted how the different functions between Hōryū-ji and Ajanta also dictated the stylistic variances between the two murals with Ajanta's style as the energetic counterpart to the somber nature of Hōryū-ji. First, Nōsu described the art of Ajanta as more decorative and uninhibited. Rather than displaying solely devotional Buddhist figures, the wall paintings at Ajanta also featured depictions of birds and beasts, decorative patterns, and many other forms of imagery that don't serve a religious function. In Nōsu's words, the artists at Ajanta "acted according to their mood while painting, heeding a free and unrepressed world. It makes one fondly reminisce about folk art."[307]

Other than its decorative aspect, Nōsu also emphasized the presence of motion in Ajanta's style. As he described:

> "If one sits opposite to the pictures and gazes upon them, they may seem simplistic at first glance. However, whether or not the paintings are classified as Oriental art or Buddhist art, the way they seek movements in their stillness is the peculiarity of [Ajanta]"[308]

Nōsu argued that the Ajanta murals embodied this sense of motion not just through their dynamic figures, but their capricious use of lines. Beyond simply using lines as contours for figures, Nōsu highlighted how such lines would interact with colors, range from thick to thin, and sometimes disappear altogether.[309] This unpredictability expressed a certain playfulness in the art style of Ajanta, which further accentuates what Nōsu described as the animated nature of Indian murals. In contrast to Ajanta's liveliness, Nōsu described the Hōryū-Ji murals as solemn (*shōgon*),

---

[307] Nōsu, *Horyū-ji to Ajanta no Hekiga no I-shu*, 19

[308] Nōsu, "Hekiga Seikatsu no Omoi de [Memories of life at the murals]," *Shinri* 18, no. 11, (Tokyo: Shinri-sha, 1952): 9

[309] Nōsu, *Indo Ajyanta no Hekiga to Hōryū-ji Kondō*, 15

especially in their figures. This solemnity also dictated their lines, which delineate the figures "with the solemnity, sincerity, and precision, aiming for the most authentic representation."[310]

Admittedly, Nōsu's comparison of Indian and East Asian Buddhist mural traditions appeared overly generalized, framing Indian styles as untamed and playful against the solemn nature of East Asian visual traditions. Furthermore, he relied solely on his comparison between Ajanta and Hōryū-ji to arrive at his observation, which only represented a small sample in the rich history of both traditions. However, when we explore Nōsu's writing in the context of Japanese studies on diverse Buddhist visual traditions at the time, including Indian, Chinese, and Japanese, we see how many Japanese scholars arrived at similar observations. One example included the 1924 publication *Ten Lectures of Buddhism (Bukkyō Jikkō)* by Nonomura Shūei (1893-death date unknown), which discerned Buddhist traditions between India, China, and Japan, including visual traditions. In his book, Nonomura framed the styles of Ajanta similar to Nōsu, describing them as "active and playful" *(Katsuyaku Kigi)*.[311] On the other hand, looking at examples of ancient Chinese Buddhist murals, particularly the Dunhuang Caves, he argued how they embodied the contemplative philosophies of China, such as the teachings of Laozi, and reflected the "solemn nature of Jōdō Buddhism." Nonomura further drew connections between the styles of Dunhuang with Zen Buddhist paintings produced in Japan, such as the works of the monk Sesshū Tōyō (1420-1506), noting their effects at inciting a meditative attitude in viewers, matching Nōsu's framing of the Hōryū-ji murals as "ritualistic."[312] This observation continued in

---

[310] Ibid, 16

[311] Nonomura Shūei, *Bukkyō Jikkō [Ten Lectures of Buddhism],* (Kyoto: Kyobunkan, 1924), 108

[312] Ibid., 121-122

his argument for Japanese Buddhist visual traditions, using the Buddhist sculpture at Tōdai-ji temple as an example, as solemn and dignified with a sense of elegance.[313]

Apart from Nonomura, another telling publication included the 1927 *Research on Mahayana Buddhist History* (*Daijō Bukkyō Geijutsushi no Kenkyū)* by notable Buddhist art scholar Ono Genmyō (1883-1939). In a section in Ono's book, the scholar similarly compared the Dunhuang cave paintings to Japan's Hōryū-ji's murals, describing them both as solemn (*shōgon)* and displayed a more organized composition that implies a ceremonial function or an adherence to architectural forms.[314] As these publications showed, Japanese scholars increasingly began to define East Asian Buddhist visual arts and murals, using China's Dunhuang caves and Japan's Hōryū-ji as prime examples, as solemn and dignified Buddhist arts in opposition to the untamed and playful nature of Indian Buddhist murals, represented by Ajanta. Thus, it's highly possible that contemporary Japanese studies influenced Nōsu to see similar observations. Examining the observations made by such Japanese scholars during the 1920s, we can determine that their research evinced undertones of bias as they portrayed Indian art as the unkempt and wild counterpart to dignified East Asian traditions.

As his writing expressed, Nōsu framed the Ajanta and Hōryū-ji murals as antithetical to each other with Ajanta possessing liveliness in both style and purpose while Hōryū-ji expressing a strong sense of solemnity for its ceremonial purpose. This, Nōsu asserted, also represented the fundamental differences between Indian and East Asian Art, and the artist faced the challenge of harmonizing the two opposing traditions in his mural. Among the many scenes depicted within

---

[313] Ibid., 198-200

[314] Ono Genmyō, *Daijō Bukkyō Geijutsushi no Kenkyū [Research on Mahayana Buddhist History],(Daiyūkaku, 1927),* 154

Nōsu's mural, the scene of Buddha's Enlightenment, the centerpiece of the West Wall, demonstrated Nōsu's method of combining the two traditions.

Even though Nōsu's mural narratively began on the South Wall with Buddha's Birth, the dramatic scene of Buddha's Enlightenment (fig 3.14) was the first section of the mural that Nōsu worked on. It tells the story of the demon king Māra's unsuccessful attempt at preventing Śākyamuni from achieving enlightenment by first sending his daughters to seduce Śākyamuni and then assaulting him with an army of demons.[315] As the centerpiece of the whole mural, Nōsu filled the scene with vibrant colors and multiple figures. At the center sits Śākyamuni, positioned above a doorway. Beneath him are the three daughters of Mara in seductive poses, flanking the doorway with two of the female figures occupying the space to the left of Śākyamuni. A closer analysis of the demoness to the lower right of Śākyamuni revealed how the figures shared some similar traits with the Ajanta figure that Nōsu copied (fig 3.3) many years ago, such as the downward bending head and the crown and headdress, showcasing the Ajanta influence in Nōsu's centerpiece.

Heightening the dramatic scene, Nōsu depicted several demon figures surrounding the figure of Śākyamuni. Comparing the demons to Śākyamuni, we can immediately see how Nōsu juxtaposed the solemn and reserved figure of Śākyamuni with the belligerence of the demons, characterized by wild and exaggerated expressions and animated poses. Through this intentional juxtaposition, Nōsu simultaneously illustrates the solemnity of East Asian Buddhist art and the dynamism of Indian murals in the centerpiece, creating a unique blend of both traditions. As discussed in the pages above, there was a consensus among scholars and artists to frame Chinese

---

[315] Nōsu, "Shoten Hōrin-ji no Hekiga" [The mural of Shoten Hōrin-ji], *Nichi-in Kyōkai Kaihō* 55 (1934): 92

and Japanese Buddhist traditions as solemn and ceremonial in contrast to the evocative and playful nature of Indian Buddhist art, as seen in Ajanta examples.[316] While Nōsu's solemn style for Śākyamuni was his way of inserting East Asian visual traditions, it may also reflect a subtle reference to Hinayana Buddhist styles. As mentioned before, even though most Japanese scholars pushed for the image of East Asian solemnity against Indian playfulness, Nōsu's friend and prominent scholar Takakusu applied such dichotomy to Mahayana and Theravadan art instead.

As mentioned above, Takakusu argued that solemnity was a defining trait of Hinayana art, visible in some sculptures.[317] Yet, Takakusu did not elaborate on whether he can extend such an observation to the visual traditions of China and Japan. It's also unclear how much influence Takakusu's writings may have had on Nōsu, the characteristics of solemnity and seriousness were brought up multiple times in writings discerning the differences between Hinayana and Mahayana visual traditions. As these examples showed, while Japanese scholars aimed to divide Buddhist visual traditions between the two camps of solemn and playful, not all of them agree on how to apply such dichotomy, reflecting the complexities in differentiating the differences between diverse traditions during Nōsu's time. Thus, Nōsu's sensitivity to the discernment of solemn and playful style showcased his awareness of diverse Buddhist visual traditions, whether it's between Japanese and Indian or Hinayana and Mahayana.

Moreover, Nōsu also implemented the dynamism of lines that he observed at Ajanta into the centerpiece to accentuate the action expressed by the demons. For example, he used several rapidly brushed near-transparent lines to illustrate gusts of wind, aligning with the motions of the

---

[316] See page 167

[317] Takakusu, 262-263

demons, creating what he defined as "seeking movements in stillness" as he described. This dynamic use of lines represented another example of Nōsu replicating the visual styles of Indian murals.

Even though Nōsu's dramatic centerpiece successfully illustrated his desired blend of East Asian and Indian visual styles, he, unfortunately, encountered the dilemma of including visual traditions from Theravada Buddhism while creating the scene. According to Nōsu, he came into a disagreement with Angarika Dharmapala over the correct mudra (Buddhist hand gesture) for Śākyamuni's enlightenment. Both men contended over how to represent the bhumiparsha (earth-touching) mudra, where Śākyamuni touches the earth with his right hand to call witness to his enlightenment.[318] Nōsu argued that Śākyamuni's palm should be facing upwards to stay authentic to the way the mudra was portrayed in the Ajanta Caves, evidenced by the sketches of John Griffith (fig 3.16). Angarika, on the other hand, argued that the palm should be pointing downwards as it had always been depicted in traditional sculptures of the enlightenment motif. This specific version of the mudra, visible on some Buddhist sculptures kept at the Sarnath Museum (fig 3.17), lends credence to Angarika's claim.[319]

Interestingly, as shown in his draft version of the scene (fig 3.14a), Nōsu initially had Buddha's right palm on his knee and facing downwards, yet his final product displayed the version that he preferred against Angarika's wishes (3.14b). This suggested that Nōsu made a spontaneous decision to have the palm facing upward. While Nōsu did not elaborate on how he resolved his dispute with Angarika, his preference for Ajanta's version of the mudra over the

---

[318] Asher, 50

[319] Nōsu, "Shoten Hōrin-ji no Hekiga," *Nichi-in Kyōkai*, 92

conventional version seen on multiple Buddhist sculptures demonstrated his bias for the ancient art rather than visual conventions that the Indian populace was familiar with. He also stated how Angarika's early death before the mural's completion allowed him more liberty to personalize the mural to his liking.[320]

Other than his depiction of the mudra, Nōsu also demonstrated his creativity and personal preference through his execution of the three demonesses beneath Śākyamuni, particularly in their skin colors. Looking at Nōsu's draft for Buddha's Enlightenment, we can see how he initially gave all three female figures the same skin color with only slight variances (fig 3.14a). In his finished product, however, Nōsu drastically changed the skin colors to represent different ethnic races around the world. For example, two of the demonesses to the left of Buddha have dark and Asian skin tones (fig 3.14c) while the other one possesses pale skin (fig 3.14d). However, Nōsu also claimed that aside from the racial symbolism, he also intended for the skin colors to represent certain sentiments. As he explained, the three colors also represented joy, lust, and delight, symbolically accentuating the sensuality represented by the three demonesses.[321] Unfortunately, Nōsu never elaborated on how the colors symbolized the concepts he described, and the racial connotations behind the demoness's skin colors appeared more apparent than the sentimental symbolisms that Nōsu attempted. Regardless of his intention, however, Nōsu's representation of global racial identities through the demonesses showcased his creative method of establishing a connection between his mural and the global world. Through this inclusion, he

---

[320] Ibid.

[321] Ibid, 97

evinced his interest in connecting to a wider global context on top of his concerns of harmonizing Indian and East Asian traditions.

By comparing Nōsu's execution of The Enlightenment to how such scenes were depicted in older Japanese artworks that narrate the life of Buddha, we can perceive how Nōsu diverged from the narrative conventions in Japan. Taking an illustrated example from a Sutra of Cause and Effect from Daigō-ji temple, we see how the figures were portrayed in a more simplified style with expressions and minimum indications of motion (fig 3.14e). It must be noted that such illustrations were often designed as a supplement to texts, thus providing minimalistic imagery and icons to simply visualize scenes retold in the text. Meanwhile, Nōsu had to rely solely on images to narrate his story, which prompted him to follow the conventions of the Ajanta murals where the narrative scene was enhanced and related to audiences through strong expressions and suggestions of motions. It's such selective choices of specific Buddhist traditions to provide a suitable narrative that displayed Nōsu's innovation.

As the above examples showed, Nōsu included multiple strategies in combining East Asian and Indian visual traditions while also displaying his creativity in his execution of Buddha's Enlightenment. Unfortunately, his approach caused some members of the Maha Bodhi Society to disagree with Nōsu's choice of iconographies, as seen in his debate with Anagarika over Śākyamuni's mudra. Such dilemmas also sprang up in Nōsu's depiction of the other centerpieces, such as the section showing Buddha's Birth on the South wall (fig 3.13). As Nōsu described in a report, members disagreed on the type of tree that should appear behind the infant Buddha and his mother, with some arguing that the tree should be a "Sara" tree while others claiming that the "Plaksha" tree was the correct iconography associated with the motif. In the

end, Nōsu remained adamant in his choice of the Ashoka tree (*muyūki*), claiming its authenticity based on historical Indian sculptures.[322]

In comparison to Buddha's Birth, Nōsu encountered fewer dissents from other individuals when depicting the centerpiece of the Eastern wall, Buddha's Death (fig 3.15). Yet, as the disparity between his draft (fig 3.15a) and the final scene showed, Nōsu encountered a different challenge with the Eastern wall: the issue of color. As seen in his draft, Nōsu intended for an eye-catching depiction by clothing Śākyamuni and his disciples in bright yellow attire. Yet, he abandoned such a plan in the final description, dressing most of the characters in cloudy white clothing with folds delineated through red contours. This color composition matches Nōsu's description in his report, as he described how he "shaded the entire surface with cloudy tones with subtle incorporations of gold, expressing the great enlightenment through the gradations of line and color."[323]

On one hand, Nōsu chose less vibrant colors in his final product out of practicality, for the artist expressed the incompatibility of many of his pigments with the intense heat of India, limiting his color choices for the mural.[324] However, this limitation also allowed Nōsu the opportunity to showcase his creative approach to blending Indian and East Asian traits. For example, Nōsu mimicked the Ajanta Caves' style by using strong red contours to delineate his figures, which appeared more apparent when contrasted against the pale figures. Yet, whether intentional or not, the subdued color tone also reflected characteristics of East Asian murals, according to Nōsu's interpretation. In his analysis of the distinctions between Hōryū-ji and

---

[322] Ibid, 94

[323] Nōsu, "Shoten Hōrin-ji no Hekiga (ni)," *Nichi-in Kyōkai,* 104

[324] Nōsu, "Shoten Hōrin-ji no Hekiga," *Nichi-in Kyōkai,* 93

Ajanta, Nōsu argued that the Japanese murals utilized more subdued colors and placed more emphasis on the principality on strong lines to delineate the Buddhist figures and accentuate their solemnity.[325] Thus, with the limitations placed on him, Nōsu sought out more subtle ways to create his synchronistic blend of diverse Buddhist visual traditions. Moreover, Nōsu also added his personal touches through the mourning expressions on Śākyamuni's followers. Recreating a similar effect seen in his previous work, *The Sad Yaśodharā*, Nōsu adjusted the eyes and mouths of the figures to express strong sentiments while maintaining the typical facial styles seen on Ajanta figures, including the large eyes and thick lips.

As seen in the execution of his centerpieces, Nōsu subtly harmonized distinct mural visual styles through the specific ways he depicted lines and colors. However, relied most strongly on the solemnity and ceremonial nature of his centerpieces to mimic the format of Hōryū-ji temple mural, placing them at the center of each wall. His writings further evidenced his desire for viewers to perceive his centerpieces as devotional imagery similar to the Hōryū-ji murals. For example, Nōsu recalled fondly an occasion when, after he completed the scene of *Buddha's Enlightenment* the Western wall, Angarika Dharmapala arrived to inspect the finished work. The Sri Lankan monk scrutinized the mural, sat in front of his Western mural, facing his painting of Buddha's Enlightenment, and meditated briefly. Afterward, he contentedly told Nōsu that "his wish has finally been fulfilled."[326]

Another instance of the murals displaying their ceremonial purpose came when Nōsu finished all his wall paintings in 1936 and the temple held an opening ceremony for the murals

---

[325] Nōsu, *Indo Ajyanta no Hekiga to Hōryū-ji Kondō,* 16-17

[326] Ibid., 92

with *Buddha's Enlightenment* playing a central role in the ritualistic opening. Accounts claimed that cloth covered the section of the wall and after a short recitation from venerable monks, the cloth was removed to officially declare the murals opened. Afterward, the painted Buddhist figure was also used for the eye-opening ceremony as a senior monk touched the eyes of the Buddha figure with a brush.[327] Seeing his centerpiece used for the ceremony, Nōsu expressed satisfaction as he stated how "his long-cherished wish has been fulfilled."[328] This occasion demonstrated how the centerpieces Nōsu weren't just decorations for the temple but also interactive venerable images used for ceremonial and ritualistic purposes.

Nōsu's narrative styles and symbolic representations

If the ceremonial centerpieces on each wall represented Nōsu's strongest implementation of East Asian mural conventions, then the narrative episodes recounting the life of Buddha best showcased Nōsu's utilization of visual story-telling techniques he learned from Ajanta. When he began painting his murals, Nōsu faced the dilemma of structuring multiple narrative episodes across the walls in a way that would not interfere with the centerpieces while effectively conveying the narrative for viewers. Due to the limited wall space, Nōsu also had to consider how much space to allocate to each narrative scene and ways to allow viewers to visually transition from one scene to another to understand the full narrative.

Starting with the Southern wall, we can immediately see some of Nōsu's unique techniques for saving space and transitioning. As the wall that initiated the narrative, and the one

---

[327] Seewalee, Bhante, *Mūlagandha Kutī Vihāra: In the historical background of Isipatana-Sarnath Varanasi* (Kolkata: Maha Bodhi Society of India, 2022), 46-47. The eye-opening ceremony (*kaigen-hōyō* in Japanese) is a Buddhist ceremony to consecrate a sculpture or painted image of the Buddha to endow it with spiritual properties. This usually involves a high-ranking monk dotting or touching the eyes of the sculpture or the image with a brush.

[328] Nōsu, "Shoten Hōrin-ji no Hekiga," *Tōei*, 28.

with the least amount of space, the Southern wall (fig 3.13) depicted episodes recounting Buddha's birth and his early life, beginning from the upper left corner of the wall and ending with the lower right corner of the wall, going in a top-down, left-right order. In narrative order, the episodes were: i) The Dream of Madame Maya (upper left corner), ii) The Prophecy of Asita (lower left corner)[329], iii) Buddha's Birth (center), iv) Buddha's Depression at the Harvest festival (upper right corner)[330], and finally v) Buddha's "four encounters" and his farewell to his wife and children (lower right corner).

In certain areas, Nōsu demarcated the episodes through simple straight lines, as demonstrated by the boundary between *The Dream of Madame Maya* and *The Prophecy of Asita* (fig 3.13a). In other areas, however, Nōsu made the daring choice to not have any physical lines separate the multiple episodes on the walls. For example, between *The Dream of Madame Maya* and *Buddha's Birth* (3.13), Nōsu left no clear demarcations in the scenes as they appeared to overlap with one another with only clouds and a single tree acting as a visual boundary. Nōsu claimed that he learned about this method of storytelling from the Ajanta Caves, where he admired the way that the ancient murals represented the multitude of stories on the wall surface:

> "There were no lines dividing the different subjects and it appeared as if one single subject was boldly painted and stretched out across the whole wall surface. However, if you look closely, such as towards the left and right of a tree or a house, you can see completely different scenes being represented. Thus, the representation always functions more sentimentally rather than rationally, with every change in a line or color tone working independently in harmony to bring the painting to life. I believe this is where you can see the preciousness of religious painting "[331]

---

[329] Asita's prophecy is about how an ascetic named Asita told Buddha's father how his son will either become a great king or a supreme religious leader

[330] This story is about Buddha's first encounter with death as he saw a bird eats an insect, making him contemplate the fragility of life

[331] Nōsu, *Hekiga Seikatsu no Omoi de*, 9-10

In Nōsu's earlier work, *Buddha's Reunion with his Father* (fig 3.11), we see Nōsu's attempt at using such visual storytelling techniques, such as when he used the trees between Śākyamuni and his father to represent the physical and sentimental distance between the two characters. On his mural, we see Nōsu replicated the effect of using objects such as clouds and trees to serve as indirect demarcations between scenes, creating more fluidity. As he highlighted in his description, Nōsu believed such visual techniques created a more sentimental atmosphere, which helped accentuate the idiosyncrasies of religious paintings. While Nōsu experimented with creative boundaries on the South wall, he will further hone such techniques on the Western wall.

Moreover, Nōsu also utilized creative representations when faced with the problem of limited space. We can see this in the way that Nōsu portrayed the Buddhist parable of the "Four Sights" similar to stone carvings found at Ajanta (fig 3.13b). According to Buddhist lore, the "four sights" referred to four specific scenes that the young Śākyamuni saw when he left his palace for the first time: a sick person, an elderly man, a corpse, and an ascetic.[332] In his mural, Nōsu portrayed each of the four sights as small monochrome carvings and aligned them into a single column bordering the left edge of the scene showing Buddha's farewell, the next narrative event following the Four Sights. With this arrangement, he simultaneously displayed a crucial episode from Buddha's life without taking too much space while also integrating two related episodes into one depiction.

Another instance where Nōsu addressed the issue of limited wall space with creative composition appeared on the left edge of the Western wall, where Nōsu depicted the scene of Śākyamuni's departure (fig 3.18) from his palace in a narrow section. In this section, the figure

[332] Nōsu, "Shoten Hōrin-ji no Hekiga," *Nichi-in Kyōkai,* 95

of Śākyamuni riding his horse floats above the palace he's departing from. The ceiling of the palace is removed, giving viewers a top-down glimpse into its interior where we can see Śākyamuni's father sleeping. As Nōsu described in his own words, he modeled the top-down perspective and the removal of the building's ceilings "after the conventions of Yamato painting (traditional Japanese art)," demonstrating another instance of him implementing Japanese art into his mural[333] Moreover, with the floating figure of Śākyamuni above a ceiling-less palace, Nōsu eschewed realism for a more imaginative representation, capturing the spiritual and fantastical nature of Buddha's life as he had hoped for.

Even though Nōsu's depiction of Śākyamuni's Departure followed the conventions of Japanese art like Yamato painting, it also diverged from Japanese conventions, particularly imagery related to Mahayana Buddhist beliefs. Taking an illustrated example from a 13th-century Sutra of Cause and Effect again (fig 3.18a), we see how Japanese depictions showed a more fantastical depiction of Buddha's departure from his palace accompanied by Bodhisattvas and other divine figures, reflecting the belief in pantheons of gods and goddesses in Japanese Mahayana beliefs. This contrasted with the more grounded depiction of Nōsu which showed only the princely figure of Śākyamuni.

To the immediate right of Śākyamuni's departure, Nōsu continued the narrative with three interrelated stories (fig 3.19). First, he depicted Śākyamuni's encounter with the ascetic Alara (fig 3.19a), who was Śākyamuni first spiritual teacher after he left his palace. Next, Nōsu depicted the group of ascetics (fig 3.19b) that Śākyamuni joined in his pursuit of enlightenment,

---

[333] Ibid, 96

followed by the dramatic event of Buddha's encounter with Sujata (fig 3.19c).[334] For these three closely connected episodes, Nōsu combined them into one single depiction, using only a single tree to separate the three events. Once again, Nōsu utilized the narrative device that he learned from Ajanta to intentionally leave out clear boundaries between scenes to create a more natural narrative flow, and his combination of the three events using the Bodhi tree demonstrated the most skillful use of this technique among his mural.

First, Nōsu places the episode of Buddha and Sujata as the central image, showing an emaciated Śākyamuni with a devotional Sujata across from him while the Bodhi tree loomed over both figures. To the left of the tree lay the five ascetics whom Śākyamuni joined with one of the figures glancing towards Śākyamuni, creating a connection between the two images. Most importantly, Nōsu placed the scene of Śākyamuni meeting with Alara amidst the branches of the tree, creating an imaginative effect similar to his approach to depicting Śākyamuni's departure. Gazing upon the wall section, viewers will follow the three narrative events from the top of the tree, to its trunk, ending with the principal figure of Śākyamuni at the root of the tree. Using the tree as a narrative framing device, Nōsu demonstrated a creative implementation of what he learned from Ajanta to help organize the narrative flow of his mural.

While Nōsu utilized a visual narrative technique from the Ajanta to link three different episodes together, some comparisons can also be drawn with some Japanese Buddhist conventions, such as the famous Jataka story of Buddha (in his past incarnation, and hereafter referred to as "Buddha" for simplicity) feeding a tigress and cub depicted on the Tamamushi Shrine (fig 3.19d). In the archaic image, we see the figure of the Buddha depicted three times

---

[334] See Chapter 2 and Arai's screen painting *Offering of Rice Gruel* for more information on the story of Sujata

from top to bottom in narrative succession: from him hanging his clothes on a tree branch, leaping off a cliff, to finally feeding the tigers at the bottom of the image. Appearing in the same composition, this repeated display of the figure showed a succession of motion within a single image, allowing viewers to follow the event and learn the story. Nōsu's depiction of the three episodic events shares some similarities but also differs from the Tamamushi image in drastic ways. For example, the artist followed a top-to-bottom format where viewers follow the stories from the top. However, instead of using this vertical format to display motion in one single narrative scene, Nōsu used it to show three different narrative episodes. Thus, he displayed his innovation in synchronizing Indian and Japanese practices.

While the Western and Southern walls displayed Nōsu's innovative organization of space and framing devices, the Eastern Wall also featured other unique visual story-telling techniques. On the left space of the Eastern wall, Nōsu depicted two episodes that both utilized color, or the absence of it, to convey a narrative (3.20). First, near the top edge of the wall, Nōsu depicted the event where Buddha prevented a war between rival tribes over water sources (fig 3.20a). Beneath it, Nōsu displayed the reunion between Buddha and his father (fig 3.20b). In contrast to all other episodes, both depictions completely lacked colors with their whole composition made out of simple black lines against a yellow background. At first glance, the depictions appeared unfinished, evidencing Nōsu's dilemma with paint pigments. However, early drafts showed that Nōsu intended to paint the two episodes in a monochromatic tone from the beginning (3.20c). Even though Nōsu provided no clear explanations for the monochrome style, we can speculate that the monochromatic tone might be inspired by the teachings behind the story of Buddha's reunion with his father.

As Nōsu described in his bulletin, when Buddha went forth to meet his father, the king of the Shakya clan, with his followers of monks, the contrasts between his followers, with their frugal appearances, and his father's lavishly decorated retainers were immediately apparent.[335] Thus, the story of Buddha's reunion with his father can be seen as a subtle lesson on mendicancy, and the lack of colors is Nōsu's way of visualizing that lesson by taking away any ostentatious colors. A closer look at Nōsu's depiction further lent credence to this theory because, within the monochromatic representation, Nōsu subtly gave the crown of the king and other objects near him a golden tinge, highlighting the lavish accessories possessed by the king and his retainers and contrasting against Śākyamuni and his group.

Simultaneously, the use of monochrome could also represent another attempt of Nōsu to implement East Asian characteristics, particularly as a reference to ink painting, an art genre widely practiced in Chinese and Japanese art. Even though Nōsu did not specify the reason behind his deliberate choice to use monochrome for that section of the wall, it nevertheless demonstrated his enthusiasm to innovate with various methods to aid him in his visual storytelling. As shown through his use of Japanese artistic conventions for Śākyamuni's Departure, confirmed in his report of the murals' subject matters, Nōsu's possible reference to ink painting highlighted his desire to synchronize Indian and East Asian traits throughout his mural to create a trans-cultural artwork.

Racial figures in Nōsu's mural — Superstition and Spirituality

So far we have covered multiple examples of Nōsu combining characteristics from both Indian and East Asian murals to create a transcultural mural. However, despite his respect for

---

[335] Nōsu, *Shoten Hōrin-ji no Hekiga (ni)*, 103

Indian visual traditions, Nōsu unfortunately fell into the same pattern of portraying Indian people as exotic or inferior, similar to his predecessors. Throughout his mural, he depicted figures with racialized features with the three demonesses on the Western Wall as an apparent example. While Nōsu implemented such features to his figures to convey a message of global connectedness, some of his figures unfortunately displayed Indian features with less empathetic connotations. On the space right to the scene of Buddha's Death, Nōsu painted a small but eye-catching section depicting the story of *Angulimala* (fig 3.21), which showed the titular character with notable darker skin compared to other figures across the murals, coupled with a contorted body pose and exaggerated facial features. Accentuating the macabre portrayal, Nōsu also provided a halo of bloody hand prints around the figure. In Hinayana Buddhist traditions, Angulimala was an infamous serial killer who was forced to collect severed fingers from nine hundred and ninety-nine victims. He was intercepted and redeemed by the Buddha when he almost murdered his own mother by accident, and thus, his story became a fable of redemption in Theravada Buddhism today.

According to his written records, Nōsu intended for Angulimala to serve as a figural representation of non-Buddhist pagans, and he described how he struggled with capturing its intense facial expression until a personal encounter with local Indians.[336] He recounted an event where he returned home after a day working at the mural and encountered three Indian men from a local village sitting beneath his window. The three men came to him to ask for medicine because they mistook Nōsu as a doctor, believing since Japan was the most medically advanced country in Asia at the time. After Nōsu told them that he could not help them, he recalled seeing

---

[336] Nōsu, "Gedō no Kao" [The Face of Heresy]," *Shin Ajia* 1 (1939): 127

the "troubled look of the men as they walked away" and during the brief moment he observed their dejected facial expressions, he "found [his] model for Angulimala"[337]

Examining the figure of Angulimala in the context of this personal story from Nōsu, we see the artist replicating the unfortunate phenomenon of Japanese artists and intellectuals denigrating Indians as superstitious and backward. Notable examples mentioned in past chapters included the nineteenth-century woodblock print of Kitabatake Dōryū. As such examples showed, despite the admiration that Japanese artists and scholars showed towards the spirituality embedded in Indian Buddhist art and culture, very few individuals extended such respect to India's other religions or contemporary laymen. In a short article he published shortly after he returned to Japan, Nōsu reflected similar attitudes as he described the everyday life of local Indians. In his article, even though he expressed his admiration for the principality of religion in the life of Indian denizens, he focused much of his attention on the superstitious and exotic practices of non-Buddhist Indians, particularly Hindu customs. For example, he highlighted how followers of Shivaism worshipped phallic sculptures (*lingam*) or performed unhygienic actions such as mixing ashes from burnt cow dung with water and rubbing themselves with the mixture.[338] Nōsu also supplemented his descriptions with sketches of shamen in meditative poses (fig 3.22), illustrating his account of seeing such "skinny and naked monks, meditating underneath trees or near the Ganges."[339]

His description have some parallels with the figure of Śākyamuni in the mural section showing the story of Sujata (fig 3.17c), with Śākyamuni appearing emaciated and displaying

---

[337] Ibid, 128-129

[338] Nōsu, "*Indo no Sugata* [Appearance of India]," *Shin Ajia* 13, no. 2 (February, 1940): 110-112

[339] Ibid, 112

darker skin tone compared to his other portrayals across the mural. While not stated explicitly in his report, we can speculate that Nōsu based this specific, more racialized, figure of Śākyamuni on his observation of local Indians. Furthermore, since the emaciated figure of Śākyamuni in the story of Sujata symbolized the dangers of blind belief and extreme asceticism, Nōsu subtly conveyed his disapproval of non-Buddhist Indian practices. In both the figure of Angulimala and the ascetic Śākyamuni, we see how Nōsu used Indian bodies as embodiments of heresy and savagery, which evinced some of his unfortunate prejudicial views.

However, in other mural sections, Nōsu also used Indian figures to highlight his sensitivity to social inequality and his knowledge of contemporary Indian events. For example, on a far corner of the Western wall, Nōsu depicted the Buddhist narrative of *Anand and the Untouchable* (fig 3.23), which tells the story of how Buddha's disciple, Anand, accepted water from a woman who came from the lowest social status in India's traditional caste system, commonly called the "untouchables."[340] The narrative acted as a fable of the Buddhist teaching of social equality. In Nōsu's depiction, he exotically portrayed the untouchable woman with her dark skin and right breast exposed, seemingly capturing Japanese stereotypical fantasies of Indian women. However, Nōsu also claimed that he included this image as a reference to Mahatma Gandhi (1868-1948)'s campaign to end the Indian caste system and other forms of social inequality.[341] During the time that Nōsu was creating his mural, the Indian independence movement under Gandhi had gained

---

[340] Nōsu, *Shoten Hōrin-ji no Hekiga (ni)*, 101

[341] Ibid

considerable traction in India, and the Japanese artist expressed his interest and support for several of the reforms promoted by the movement.[342]

This was best expressed in his short 1948 article *Gandhi and Gandhism*, where he voiced his admiration for Gandhi's rebellion against European colonialism and determination to end "untouchability" in India.[343] Most importantly, Nōsu emphasized the spiritualism embedded in Gandhi's independence movement, highlighting how many of the Indian activist's reforms and beliefs revolved around deep-rooted teachings from Indian religion, including both Buddhism and Hinduism. Highlighting the spirituality in Gandhi's activism, Nōsu reflected on his own devotion to a transcultural sense of spiritualism that united Asian cultures together, underscoring it as the strength of Asian cultures that Western science and materialism can never overcome.[344] Thus, as his short article shows, even though Nōsu inevitably indulged in Indian stereotypes in his art, he maintained a strong belief in Pan-Asian spiritual unity that motivated his trans-cultural arts.

Considering Nōsu's commitment to Buddhist religiosity and his interest in utilizing racialized figures, we can see how the artist's work showcased a precarious balance between spiritual and carnal themes that appeared in many other works of Japanese artists who traveled to India; in other words, another visualization of the duality of "spirit" and "body" in Indian-themed Japanese works. As mentioned before, Nōsu spent many years interacting with Takeda Toyoshirō, who frequently discussed the spiritual and carnal aspects of Indian culture and

---

[342] For more information on Gandhi's anti-colonial independence campaign, please consult *Approach to Caste and Untouchability: A Reappraisal* by Sujay Biswas, in Social Scientists 46, no. 9–10 (2018): 71-90

[343] Nōsu, "Ganjī to Ganjī-kyō [Gandhi and Gandhism]," *Chi to Gyō* 3, no. 9 (Sep, 1948): 15

[344] Ibid, 18

philosophy.[345] Thus, it is possible that Nōsu gained a sensibility toward similar ideas, using radicalized bodies to portray specific events or ideologies. Yet, simultaneously, he always remembered the spiritual aspects of India and highlighted its role in connecting multiple Asian countries.

Conclusion

In our analysis of Nōsu's mural and its connection to Buddhist transnationalism, we can see how Nōsu's approach to India and its arts shares several similarities with those of his predecessors but also diverges from them to showcase his idiosyncrasies. In contrast to Arai Kanpō and other predecessors who directly mimicked the styles of Indian art and were more fixated on the exoticism of India, Nōsu and his mural represented a transitional period where Japanese artists began to celebrate the legacy of Buddhism's spread from India to Japan and the spiritual link between the two countries. This can also be seen as a continuation of the historicization of Buddhism by Japanese artists except that the interest transitioned from focusing on the religion's Indian roots to focusing on its spread to Japan. Furthermore, continuing with the theme of the dichotomy between the corporeal and spiritual in India-inspired Japanese art, I will demonstrate how the Buddhist figures that appear in Nōsu's works embodied the artist's belief in Buddhist trans-culturalism.

Throughout his career, Nōsu had always paid attention to how Buddhist art from different countries differed from each other: evidenced by his essays discussing the variance between the murals at Japan's Horyū-ji temple and India's Ajanta, and also his concerns over harmonizing the difference between Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism when he was painting his mural in

---

[345] See Chapter 1

India. Unlike earlier artists and scholars who explored Buddhism's roots in India or indulged in India's exotic culture, Nōsu and his colleagues explored Indian Buddhist art and culture in connection with the rest of Asia; highlighting crucial differences and framing religion as a universal unifying force in its narrative themes, iconographies, and styles. By implementing the characteristics of both Indian and East Asian Buddhist murals, Nōsu succeeded in creating a modern transnational religious mural that's befitting for a global Buddhist audience.

In the next chapters, we see artists and Buddhist scholars take Buddhist transnationalism in new directions. Many artists take the concept beyond the context of Indo-Japanese relationships to explore spiritual unity among all Asian countries or even global religious unity.[346] Despite this, India remained significant as the symbol of spirituality for Japan, with its culture and geography used as spiritual iconographies. The most significant example is the Himalayan mountains to the north of India, which were promoted as a religious icon by Japanese artists and intellectuals.[347] Additionally, as with the proposal of the cultural connection between Ajanta and Hōryu-ji, Japanese artists also connected the symbolism of the Himalayas to Japan's traditions of sacred mountain worship. The use of the Himalayan mountains as religious iconography demonstrated another unique way that Japanese artists took inspiration from India, which is to draw from the subcontinent's nature, wildlife, and geography, and apply religious significance to them in art.

---

[346] See Chapter 5 and Sugimoto's *Ten Great Religions* for further context

[347] See Chapter 4's "Himalaya theory" for further information

Chapter 4: Peacocks and Tropical Colors — Ishizaki Kōyō and depictions of India's natural scenery in modern Japanese painting.

It is no exaggeration to say that Buddhist themes dominated the works produced by Japanese artists who returned from India. As the previous chapters demonstrated, Japanese artists were fixated on India as the originator of Buddhism and they eagerly studied its religious art and traditions for artistic inspiration. Thus, it came as no surprise that the majority of Indian-themed works were Buddhist paintings. However, as discussed before, it's also undeniable that many of these Japanese artists were equally attracted to the exoticism of India. So far, in this dissertation, we have highlighted how Japanese artists precariously balanced exoticism and spirituality in their Indian-themed works, usually in the form of depicting provocative bodies in artworks about Buddhist teachings. Apart from human bodies, however, there were also many instances of Japanese artists being attracted to the striking vegetation and animals of India. For instance, Arai Kanpō recorded the time that wild tigers were spotted near the caves where he worked in *Amida-in Zakki* and described the excitement and fear he felt.[348] Similarly, Nōsu expressed amusement at the prevalence of peacocks and tigers when he was working at Ajanta.[349] These accounts demonstrated the attraction that Japanese artists had towards India's exotic wildlife, showing how India's natural scenery can rival its Buddhist culture as an attractive subject for Japanese artists.

Other than "Tenjiku," Japanese artists commonly referred to India as the "hot country" (*netsukoku*), and many Japanese artists were drawn to India's exotic and tropical sceneries. However, compared to their interactions with ancient Indian art and sculpture, Japanese artists

---

[348] Arai, *Amida-in Zakki*, 324

[349] Nōsu, *Hekiga Seikatsu*, 10

integrated India's natural scenery and wildlife into their art in a different manner. Rather than imitating Indian styles and iconography as they did in Buddhist art, Japanese artists depicted Indian birds, plants, and landscapes in traditional Japanese styles; incorporating Indian subject matters into familiar art forms and mediums. Japanese art has long been closely associated with nature with the genres of birds-and-flowers (*Kachōga*) paintings, which are depictions that pair avians with plants, and natural landscape paintings (*Sansuiga)*. Thus, as Japanese artists traveled to India throughout the twentieth century, they discovered a chance to not only rejuvenate Buddhist art but other traditional genres in Japanese art.

In this chapter, we will briefly diverge from Buddhist art to focus on paintings that depict the wildlife and landscapes of India. By examining such works, I will highlight the paradoxical manner in which Japanese artists interpreted and portrayed India's natural sceneries as both foreign and familiar subjects to viewers. On one hand, they portrayed India as an exotic tropical land where nature remained untamed by civilization; an antithesis to a rapidly industrializing Japan. On the other, they also lessened India's foreignness for Japanese audiences by integrating its sceneries into existing Japanese art genres and establishing symbolic connections between Japan and India's natural landmarks, highlighting similarities between the two countries to create a sense of closeness.

Admittedly, this visual strategy of portraying India as simultaneously exotic and intimate has appeared in some of the Buddhist works featured in previous chapters, such as Yokoyama's *Floating Lanterns*. However, this chapter will highlight how Japanese artists used a different approach in adopting India's wildlife, landscape, and other secular subjects in contrast to India's ancient Buddhist art. I argue that unlike Buddhist paintings, which boldly challenged

conventions with elaborate styles and figural types adopted from Indian art, Japanese paintings depicting India's natural sceneries aimed to conform them to Japanese artistic traditions. Many artist travelers to India found the subcontinent's natural sceneries, with their bright sunlights and colors, a suitable match for Japanese art's ornate and decorative aesthetics. Travelers to India could not help but admire the exotic charm of India's nature, and amongst the many who traveled to India throughout the century, none were more drawn to its tropical scenery and majestic mountains than Ishizaki Kōyō (1884-1947).

As a student of the renowned Kyoto artist Takeuchi Seihō (1864-1942), Ishizaki had a successful artistic career during his lifetime with his paintings earning awards twice at government-sponsored exhibitions. Today, he left behind a legacy as a master of the birds-and-flower genre. Yet, despite garnering fame during his life and today, not many scholars focused on his travels to India despite their crucial influence on Ishizaki's most famous works. In a time when Japanese artists flocked overseas to explore the Ajanta Caves and India's Buddhist culture, Ishizaki stood out from the rest for his fixation on India's wildlife and fauna. His paintings after he returned to Japan focused exclusively on the exotic birds and flowers of India, executed in traditional decorative styles of Japanese painting but intermingled with his creative touches.

However, even though Ishizaki focused on nature and earthly subject matters rather than Buddhist ones, his depictions of India's wildlife and landscape still embodied many of Japan's spiritual fantasies of India. While not directly referencing Buddhist narratives or teachings, Ishizaki's work highlighted a looser definition of spirituality that was often conflated with India's nature; a romantic notion of India's wild forests and mountains acting as a remedy for the soullessness of modernity and offering artists like Ishizaki a sanctuary to escape the city and

enrich their mind. Coupled with his application of Japanese styles and techniques, Ishizaki's works created cross-cultural dialogues that drew connections between the natures of Japan and India. This was most evident when he was commissioned to create a multi-paneled screen-door painting (*fusama-e*) for a guest house at Kōyasan Kongobu-ji temple, where he depicted the Himalayan mountains painted in traditional Japanese style and conceptually connected the Indian mountain range to the religious symbolism of mountains. In addition to his artworks, Ishizaki also wrote extensively on his experience in India, and his travel journal and other essays he published further made him an attractive artist to examine. With vivid descriptions of the subcontinent's birds, flowers, and landscape, Ishizaki's writings showcased the kind of sceneries that attracted Japanese artists and the emotions invoked in them.

In this chapter, I will focus on Ishizaki's travels in India and their effects on his works as a window into how Japanese artists interpret and adapt India's natural scenery. Even though this chapter's focus is not on Buddhist paintings, the theme of spirituality and corporeality remains relevant in our analysis of Japanese paintings depicting India's nature. While Ishizaki was not as focused on Buddhism or the Ajanta caves as artists from previous chapters, spirituality still factored into his fantasies of India and some of his works contained subtle Buddhist connotations. In his observations of exotic birds and the grand snowy landscape of the Himalayas, he would also use religious metaphors to describe them, touching upon fantasies of India as a spiritual paradise untainted by modernism. Continually, corporeality remained an important element to consider in our analysis, and this chapter will expand upon the definition of corporeality beyond human bodies to include diverse material objects, such as the bodies of animals, vegetation, and the physicality of India's landscapes. Similarly to the human figures in

Buddhist paintings explored in previous chapters, the wildlife and plants of India acted as vessels that embodied Japanese fantasies of the tropical subcontinent. Furthermore, I argue that these corporeal elements also embodied spirituality when depicted by Japanese artists as they highlighted the innate sense of spirit or mysticism they saw in India's flora, fauna, and mountains.

Through my analysis, I shall highlight how India's nature and wildlife presented an ideal opportunity for Ishizaki to depict a foreign land using traditional Japanese aesthetics because the bright light and colors of India matched the decorative aspects of Yamamoto and Rinpa style painting in Japanese art. In doing so, Ishizaki's works demonstrated the unique perspective that Japanese artists had toward India's landscape and wildlife, characterized by an admiration for their bright colors and innate dynamism. Additionally, this chapter will also touch upon other artists apart from Ishizaki, who created works that explored the secular themes from India. Examples included Imamura Shikō, whose picture scroll of India's sprawling hills and coastline became a landmark in the history of Nihonga painting. Together, with Ishizaki, these individuals demonstrated Japanese artistic engagements with India beyond the realms of religion.

Imamura Shikō's *Scroll of the Hot Country* — Colorful Developments and South Sea Fantasies

Before looking at Ishizaki's life and works, it's crucial to explore the kind of fantasies that inspired him and other artists to travel to India. While the subcontinent attracted many Japanese artists thanks to its prestige as the pinnacle of Buddhist teachings and art, just as many artists traveled there because of their desire to "go South." As art historian Eve Loh Kazuhara described, several Japanese artists traveled Southwards to places such as Okinawa and Southeast

Asia during the early 1900s. This phenomenon was in part inspired by the story of Paul Gauguin's travels to Tahiti, which many young Japanese artists were familiar with at the time.[350] Motivated by accounts of how the French artist's depiction of Tahiti's exotic people and landscapes became his most famous works, several Japanese artists imitated Gauguin and traveled to tropical places for artistic inspiration, motivated by a sense of artistic individualism.[351]

Perhaps the most influential non-Buddhist painting to visualize India as a tropical paradise was the picture scroll (*emaki)* titled *Scroll of the Tropical Land* (fig 4.1) by artist Imamura Shikō (1880-1916). For example, Nōsu Kōsetsu described Imamura as one of the "genius who inspired him" after returning from India in 1918.[352] Similarly, artist Katayama Nanpū, who accompanied Arai Kanpō and Ishizaki Kōyō in India, also referred to Imamura's picture scroll when describing the sceneries of India in an article he published.[353] As Nōsu and Katayama's accounts showed, Imamura and his work had an undeniable impact on artists who traveled to India after him. Imamura was part of the rebellious group of artists close to Okakura Tenshin, who followed Yokoyama Taikan and Hishida Shunsō to form the Reorganized Japan Art Institute after Taikan got ousted from the Bunten exhibition jury. As one of Taikan and Shunsō's colleagues, Imamura demonstrated his affinity for unconventional methods like many other

---

[350] Eugène Henri Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) was a 19th century French Post-Impressionist artist who is most famous for spending several years on the tropical island of Tahiti, painting its local inhabitants.

[351] Kazuhara, Eve Loh. "Ruptures and Continuity in Pan-Asianism: New Insights into India-Japan 99 Artistic Exchanges in the first half of the Twentieth Century" in *India-Japan Narratives: Lesser Known Historical and Cultural Interactions*, ed. Sushila Narsimhan, (New Delhi: Mombusho Scholars Association of India, 2021), 107

[352] "Ko-Shikō no nekkoku maki [Scroll of the Tropical Land by the late Shikō," Gendai no Bijutsu 1, issue 2, (Gendai no Bijutsu-sha, 1918): 55

[353] Katayama Nanpū, "Indō no Fūkō [Scenery of India]," *Kaiga Seidan* 5*,* issue 5, (Kaiga Seidan-sha, 1917): 25

artists loyal to Okakura.[354] His connections to this group of artists also imparted upon him an interest in India. In 1914, with support from Hara Tomitarō, the usual financial backer of many nihonga artists, Imamura boarded a passenger ship to visit the tropical subcontinent for artistic inspiration.[355] Unlike many of his predecessors abroad, however, Imamura spent only three months overseas and as little as fifteen days in India. Instead, most of his time was spent visiting various sites around East and South East Asia on his sea route from Kobe to India, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Bangkok, and Penang.[356] Despite his short time abroad, the experience inspired Imamura to create *Scroll of the Tropical Land* after his return.

Imamura's *Scroll of the Tropical Land* spanned ten meters and consisted of two halves, with one half labeled as the "morning scroll" and the other labeled as the "evening scroll." Admittedly, according to scholarly analyses today, *Scroll of the Tropical Land* did not feature an exclusively Indian landscape as the morning scroll portion appeared to depict the landscape of Singapore and Penang instead. Nevertheless, it included several sceneries that captured the Japanese imagination of the tropical south, such as fishing villages drifting on top of the water, coconut trees, and sea waves glistening from the sunshine (fig 4.1a). The evening scroll, on the other hand, featured an undeniably Indian landscape, recognizable from the temple architecture, and also showcased more elaborate colors compared to the morning scroll. Using bright primary colors such as red, yellow, orange, and green, Imamura painted a sprawling tropical landscape composed purely out of the contrasts between colors, featuring little to no black outlines for any

---

354 *Painting Circles*, 61-62

355 *Indo ni miserareta*, 110

356 Satō, Dōshin, "Imamura Shikō *Netsukoku no Ken* (Netsukoku no Asa • Netsukoku no Yū) [Imamura Shikō's *Scroll of the Tropical Land* (Morning of the Tropics • Evening of the Tropics]", *Kokka* no. 1277, 2002, 31

of the figures or architecture. To further accentuate the major role that colors played in the visual composition, Imamura also relegated several objects to simple geometric shapes in his scroll, evincing a minimalist approach. For example, instead of highlighting the leaves and branches of the trees, Imamura simplified them into patches of green and brown (fig 4.1b). Similarly, he used short brushstrokes of yellow and orange to depict the earth, portraying them as large areas of orange that helped green hills and trees stand out. With little to no use of contours or shading, Imamura presented a minimalist Indian landscape through color contrasts.

When Imamura displayed his scroll at the first Inten Exhibition in October 1914, critics immediately noticed the unconventional use of colors. As described by art historian Nakagawa Tadayori (1873-1923):

> "The surge of vivid red, the shine of copper red and lazulite blue, boldly exhibiting the force of the light and heat, [Imamura] revealed his strength at utilizing intense colors, never seen to such an extent in the modern art scene."[357]

Nakagawa's comment highlighted Imamura's effectiveness at capturing the intense sunlight and heat in India using bright red and yellow pigments, demonstrating an innovative use of colors that provide new sensations among viewers. Similarly, other reviewers expressed praise for Imamura's daring effort at breaking artistic conventions, extolling it as the right step towards modernizing nihonga painting. One reviewer highlighted the artist's "rejection of realism" in favor of a more impressionist and decorative style, which they argued represented the modern inclination of both Eastern and Western art.[358] Other reviews made similar comments on how

---

[357] Nakagawa Tadayori, "Bijutsu-in no Tenrankai [The Exhibition of the Art Institute]," *Kensei Bijutsu* 96 (1914): 23

[358] Ki Seiho, "Yomiuri shinbun,, November 20th, 1914," reproduced in *Nihon Bijutsu-in Hyakunenshi* 4, 445

Imamura's creative use of color resembled contemporary Western art movements, rebelling against established artistic conventions.

However, some other critics also pointed out how Imamura implemented some characteristics from pre-modern or traditional Japanese art forms. For example, Sawamura Sentarō commented that the technique Imamura used to depict the sea waves on both scrolls, using repeating blue lines, also appeared in old Japanese paintings (fig 4.1c).[359] Other critics also pointed out that Imamura's choice of a picture hand scroll (*emaki*) as the medium brought to mind the practices of artists from the Tosa school of painting, one of Japan's most notable pre-modern styles that specialized in Japanese pictorial arts (*Yamato-e*).[360] Furthermore, Imamura's implementation of Yamato-e characteristics did not stop at the art medium but also in his approach to style. While the overarching category of "Yamato-e" included diverse styles and characteristics, some of its common features included a flat picture plane, stylized hills, and extravagant uses of colors.[361] Examining Imamura's *Scroll of the Tropical Land,* we can see how the artist embodied such characteristics in his depiction, with the river and rice fields appearing as planar patches of color (fig 4.1d) and hills appearing as simple round shapes (fig 4.1e). Thus, Imamura's portrayal of the tropical Indian landscape simultaneously diverged from artistic conventions with its bold use of colors while also adhering to some aspects of traditional Japanese paintings. This unique approach of testing unorthodox techniques within the confines of artistic conventions revealed Imamura's influence from his nihonga colleagues who were

---

[359] Sawamura Ko-i, "Bijutsu shinpō, issue 242, November 1914," reproduced in *Nihon Bijutsu-in Hyakunenshi* 4*,* 446

[360] Date Nankai, "Ōsaka mainichi shinbun, November 29th, 1914," reproduced in *Nihon Bijutsu-in Hyakunenshi* 4*,* 445

[361] Carpenter, 11

pushing for a revival of old Japanese art forms for the modern art scene. Furthermore, the Indian sceneries as subject matter provided an appropriate avenue for artists such as Imamura to utilize Japanese art techniques in novel ways.

While primarily drawn by the exotic allure of India, Imamura's motivation to travel abroad also stemmed from a desire to explore innovative colors from foreign sceneries, a desire shared with his colleagues. For example, in 1905, Taikan and Shunsō jointly published the notable manifesto, *Regarding Painting* (*Ega ni suite*), where they emphasized the strong sentimentality appeal and psychological impact that colors possessed and called for more implementation of vibrant colors in nihonga painting. Most importantly, both artists pointed to the works of the celebrated pre-modern Japanese artist, Ogata Kōrin (1659-1716), the namesake of the Japanese "Rinpa" art style, as an exemplar of creative color usage.[362]

"Rinpa," translating to "school of Kōrin," referred to a distinctive Japanese pictorial style developed during the early seventeenth century by Kōrin (1659-1716). Some of the most recognizable characteristics of the Rinpa style included bold uses of lavish colors, strong applications of gold and silver pigments, and exaggerated renderings of natural motifs.[363] In their manifesto, both Taikan and Shunsō praised Kōrin for his bold departure from realism, using vibrant colors to express complex emotions and ideas. They found Kōrin's method similar to recent innovations in modern Western art, describing his style as "Color Impressionism" (*Iro no*

---

[362] Taikan and Shunsō, "Ega ni Tsuite [Regarding painting]," (Nihon Bijutsu-in, December 1905), reproduced in *Hishida Shunsō Den* [Hishida Shunsō biography], by Kodaka Kentarō, *Hishida Shunsō,* Bijutsu Kenkyū Shiryō, vol. 9 (Tokyo: Bijutsu Kenkyū-jo, 1940): 47-48

[363] To clarify, as John T. Carpenter described, "Rinpa-style" is a modern art historical term to describe specific styles and brush techniques shared across various individual artists across generations. There was never an official Rinpa "school" of art and the creation of the style were often credited to the Kyoto-based artists Tawaraya Sōtatsu (1570-1640) and Hon'ami Kōetsu (1558 – 1637) rather than Ogata Kōrin. However, most scholars agree that Ogata Kōrin was monumental in reviving and popularizing the style after Sōtatsu and Kōetsu's passing. Carpenter, 11-12.

Inshō-sha). Furthermore, both artists stressed the necessity of studying the works of Kōrin and other Rinpa-style artists to explore innovative and sentimental uses of colors, which they framed as an appropriate counter against the prevalence of realistic styles in contemporary Japanese painting.[364]

Taikan and Shunsō's inquiries on color similarly inspired Imamura Shikō who, shortly after displaying *Scroll of the Tropical Land* at the Inten exhibitions, published an article titled *Discussion on Color (Shikisai no hanashi)*, where he discussed his thoughts on color in nihonga painting. Like Taikan and Shunsō, Imamura lamented that modern-day nihonga paled in comparison to the works of old masters like Kōrin, who "acquired the skills to freely utilize rich color palettes to assimilate nature."[365] He argued that artists should apply colors creatively to their chosen subject matter, beyond simply utilizing palettes to achieve verisimilitude. For example, he proposed using warm colors such as pink for spring sceneries and cool colors such as blue and green to create a refreshing effect on for summer sceneries.[366] Imamura also raised the issue of color harmonization in painting, where he used red and yellow, the primary color palettes he used for *Scroll of the Tropical Land,* as an example of appropriately pairing colors.[367]

More crucially, throughout his article, Imamura stressed the importance of replicating nature through the use of colors, not just to achieve visual realism but also to capture the sentimental essence inherent in natural landscapes. Examining *Scroll of the Tropical Land* in

---

[364] Taikan and Shunsō, 48

[365] Imamura Shikō, "Shikisai no hanashi [Discussion on Color]," *Shin Nihonga Bunka Kōwa* (Nihon Bijutsu-in, 1915): 2

[366] Ibid, 5

[367] Ibid, 7

light of Imamura's arguments, it becomes evident that the exotic Indian landscape attracted Imamura because it provided him an opportunity to experiment with colors outside of the confines of depicting Japanese sceneries. Featuring climates and sceneries that can only be experienced outside of Japan, India presented Imamura with the enticing challenge of using Japanese colors to portray a foreign landscape. He embodied the intense light and heat of India's tropical climate with vibrant yellow and red, harmonizing colors and evoking sentiments that conventional Japanese landscapes rarely evoked.

The positive reception of Imamura's *Scroll of the Tropical Land* no doubt owed much to the artist's innovative use of colors. However, another contributing factor to the artwork's success was general interest among the Japanese public in tropical regions south of Japan (henceforth referred to as the "tropical South"), commonly called the "south sea" (*nanyō)* or "southern lands" (*nankoku)* and referring to South East Asia (including regions such as Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia). This interest also extended to more distant lands such as Micronesia, the North Mariana Islands, and other Pacific islands, all grouped under the Japanese denomination of "south sea islands" (*nanyō guntō*). As art historian Eve Loh Kazuhara argued, stories of Paul Gauguin's journey to Tahiti ignited interest among Japanese artists in similar tropical lands on the verges of modern civilization, inspiring them to attempt similar expeditions for artistic inspiration.[368] However, as publications contemporaneous to Imamura's work showed, Japanese interest in the tropical South also had connections to imperial motivations.

As early as the Meiji period (1868-1912), Japan began to adopt a policy to expand its sphere of influence towards Southeast Asia and the Pacific; an agenda known as the "Southern

---

[368] see page 187

Expansion Doctrine" (*nanshin-ron)*.[369] While Japan's plans to militarily expand and colonize southern regions did not go into full effect until the late 1930s, certain publications from the 1910s were already generating intrigue towards the south. One significant example included the 1910 *Record of the Southern Lands* (*nankoku-ki*) by politician and historian Takekoshi Yosaburō (1865-1950), who strongly advocated for Southern expansion. Detailing his travels through Indonesia, Malaysia, and Indochina, Takekoshi highlighted the natural resources and economic potential of the places he visited, strongly arguing for Japan's need to expand and colonize the South with expressive chapter titles such as "whoever controls the tropics controls the world."[370] More importantly, Takekoshi's book contained vivid descriptions of the tropical environments he saw, such as his recounts of "rows of coconut trees with bright sunlight shining through green leaves" from his time in Indonesia.[371]

Following Takekoshi's book, other minor publications also underscored the allure of similar tropical regions. Published in the same year as *Record of the Southern Lands*, an article titled "The South Sea Islands: A New Land for Japanese Activities" in the youth magazine *Seikō* advocated for Japanese immigration to the Mariana and Caroline Islands. Apart from talking about the rich resources of the islands, the article also provided illustrative accounts of the exotic landscape and inhabitants of the islands, contributing to Japanese popular imagination regarding the tropical South.[372] Furthermore, in 1913, military man Kawasaki Ryūzaburō (1874-1925) and

---

[369] Leo Ching, "Empire's Afterlife: The "South" of Japan and "Asian" Heroes in Popular Culture*," Global South* 5, no. 1 (2011): 93-94

[370] Takekoshi Yosaburō, *Nankoku-ki [Record of the Southern Lands[,* (Nisei-sha, 1910).

[371] Ibid., 108

[372] Shokumin Michito, "Nanyō Guntō Nihonjin Katsudō no Shintenchi," in *Seikō 19, no. 5, (*Seikō Zasshi-sha, 1910): 55-57

editor Maruho Yasuhiro ((b. n.d. - d. n.d.) co-authored and published *Sole Possession of the South Sea Islands: Treasure Trove of the Pacific*, serving as another example of Japanese intrigue in the tropical South.

Thus, by the time Imamura displayed *Scroll of the Tropical Land* to the public in 1914, popular imaginations associated with the tropics, such as images of sun-scorched humid lands with people living amidst coconut trees, would have permeated widely among Japanese intellectual crowds. Therefore, many of them praised the artist for visually capturing such imaginations through his bright colors and simplified shapes. Furthermore, India, with a similar tropical climate to Southeast Asia and the Pacific islands, was usually included in Japanese popular fantasies of the tropical South. As mentioned above, both Nōsu and Katayama referred to Imamura's scroll when they described India's landscape and climate during their time there, and Ishizaki Kōyō, who traveled abroad shortly after the debut of Imamura's work, will similarly express his fondness for the tropical scenery while in India. In some respect, Imamura's *Scroll of the Tropical Land* had as much impact in propagating Japanese imperial fervor as in technical achievement. In its vivid portrayal of tropical lands, it reflected patriotic sentiments in occupying the tropical South and other exotic places, gratifying popular fantasies in under-developed regions that required Japanese colonial interventions.[373]

Imamura's groundbreaking artwork demonstrated how the foreign sceneries of India provided nihonga artists an opportunity to explore novel ways of modernizing Japanese techniques and palettes. As one of the earliest Japanese artists to illustrate India's landscapes,

---

[373] By the end of the First World War, 4 years after Imamura presented his work, Japan would replace Germany as colonial occupiers of the Marshall Islands and Micronesia. This is followed by imperial excursions into South East Asia during World War 2. These historical examples demonstrated Japan's ambitions to expand its empire into the tropical South.

Imamura's work set a precedent for later artists such as Ishizaki and others to follow. His method of utilizing the vibrant decorative style of Rinpa and other Japanese art forms motivated future artists to portray India's flora and fauna with ostentatious palettes. His choice of abstraction over realism also heightened the fantasy that Japanese audiences associated with Indian nature and other tropical regions. Furthermore, the fantasy he visually captured also reflected the prevalent patriotic fervor to occupy such tropical regions for Japan's gain, fulfilling the Japanese public's imagination of underdeveloped exotic regions and visiting such places as colonizers. Thus, itinerant artists who came after him similarly emphasized the imaginative sentiments they experienced from India's wildlife as much as accurately depicting its birds and flowers. Even though each artist after Imamura will apply his unique interpretations, many of their works share characteristics with Imamura's *Scroll of the Tropical Land*, demonstrating his lasting influence.

Ishizaki Kōyō — Early activities and training

Imamura's *Scroll of the Tropical Land* established itself as an influential artwork that challenged artistic conventions and inspired future artists to travel to India. His highly decorative and abstract approach to depicting India's landscape became a defining style that future Japanese artists used to depict the tropical climate of India, for the vibrant green, red, and yellow colors that Imamura used in his picture scroll proved suitable in capturing the exoticism and heat of India. However, artists who came after Imamura did not blindly imitate his style, and many brought their personal experiences and training into creating their style to capture India's wildlife and nature. Ishizaki Kōyō best demonstrated such agency with his Indian-themed works evincing his training in multiple Japanese traditional art forms, such as including Rinpa style and Maruyama-Shijō style. Instead of leaning heavily towards abstraction, Ishizaki's training allowed

him to combine both realistic and decorative characteristics in his works, portraying the wildlife of India in a manner different from Imamura's approach.

Ishizaki Kōyō was born in Fukumitsu, Toyama prefecture, in 1884 to a family working in the business of maritime transport. Displaying a strong talent and passion for art at a young age, his father Ishizaki Wazan (1848-1906) arranged for his son to study under Yamamoto Kōichi (1843-1905), a famous Rinpa style artist, Kanazawa City at the age of twelve.[374] Thus, from a young age, Ishizaki familiarized himself with Rinpa style's decorative styles and techniques from Yamamoto. Most importantly, apart from its decorative and abstract attributes, Rinpa-style artists had a long history of depicting nature with birds-and-flowers paintings as one of its foundational genres.[375] Learning the fundamentals of the Rinpa style from Yamamoto, Ishizaki became an artist fully dedicated to birds-and-flowers painting, and his early training in Rinpa techniques and themes shall become a crucial influence on the artist's future works.

In 1903, at the age of 19, Ishizaki left Kanazawa for Kyoto to become a disciple of Takeuchi Seihō (1864-1942), a well-respected artist in Kyoto who practiced one of the ancient capital's most distinguished style: that of the Maruyama-Shijō's school of painting.[376] Named after its founder, the 18th-century artist Maruyama Ōkyo (1733-1795)[377], the Maruyama-Shijō school of painting became one of Kyoto's most peculiar art groups for its syncretism of Japanese

---

[374] Watanabe Kazumi, "Ishizaki Kōyō Sono Gagyō [The Painting Career of Ishizaki Kōyō]," in *Kachoga no kirameki - Botsugo 70 nen Ishizaki Kōyō ten* [The luster of birds-and-flower paintings - 70 years after death Ishizaki Kōyō exhibition], ed. Toyamaken Suiboku Bijutsukan [Toyama Prefecture Ink wash art museum], (Toyamaken Suiboku Bijutsukan: 2017), 76

[375] Yatsuo Masaharu, *Kenran no Kachō-ga Ishizaki Kōyō* [The Brilliance of birds-and-flower painting, Ishizaki Kōyō], (Toyama: Fukumitsu Art Museum, 1997), 2

[376] Watanabe, 76

[377] Apart from Maruyama Ōkyo, the school also got its name from Shijō (四条) street in Kyoto. Literally meaning "4th avenue," it was the base for several Kyoto artists.

and Western techniques. While retaining the decorative aspects of Japanese art, it implemented techniques from Western art, such as shading and light control, to achieve a sense of objective realism. Most importantly, Maruyama Ōkyo was an important advocate for the practice of live sketching, known otherwise as "*shasei*" in Japanese. Taking inspiration from Western artistic practices, Maruyama emphasized the importance of realism and encouraged artists to set foot outdoors and sketch animals and plants from live observation. Meanwhile, Maruyama's successor and founder of the Shijō branch of the school, Matsumura Goshun (1752-1811) supplemented Maruyama's empirical style with the bright colors and ornamental applications of Kyoto's artistic traditions, creating the unique blend of realistic and decorative that defined the Maruyama-Shijō style.[378] As a student of Takeuchi Seihō, Ishizaki learned the techniques of the Mauryama-Shijō style in addition to his early training in Rinpa style under Yamamoto Kōichi, which helped him create his unique style later in his life, characterized by an amalgamation of realism and decorative.

Through his mentor, Ishizaki inherited many of the techniques and philosophies of the Maruyama-Shijō school, but even before he arrived in Kyoto the young artist already took Maruyama's practice of *shasei* to heart. During his residing in Kanazawa city as Yamamoto's student, Ishizaki would frequent the surrounding mountain wilderness of Kanazawa and sketch birds, small animals, and landscapes from live observations.[379] Under the guidance of Takeuchi, *shasei* became an even more crucial skill of Ishizaki's artistic repertoire, which had a lasting effect on Ishizaki's treatment of India's nature and landscape when he traveled abroad. However,

---

[378] Guth, Christine, *Art of Edo Japan: The Artist and the City 1615-1868,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 79-81

[379] Yatsuo, 2-3

the exposure to the Maruyama-Shijō style of painting had another crucial effect on the young artist: bestowing upon him a love for peacocks.

While not native to Japan, peacocks have been imported into its borders from overseas since ancient times and they were often kept as pets by powerful individuals as a status symbol. As exotic and beautiful birds, they naturally became a favorite for artists and patrons alike to feature in paintings from the mid-Edo period (18th century) onward, including Maruyama Ōkyo.[380] While native to India, Japanese artists have long associated peacocks with China owing to borrowed visual motifs regarding the avians from Chinese art.[381] In Chinese Tang dynasty (618-907 A.D) paintings, peacocks were often paired with peonies and featured prominently in birds-and-flower paintings. With the steady import and reproduction of Chinese art in Japan throughout the centuries, Japanese artists inevitably adopted similar visual practices regarding peacock motifs.[382] Thus, with its rich history as an icon in Japanese art, it came as no surprise that Maruyama chose peacocks as his subject in one of his most well-known works.

Maruyama produced one of the most famous Japanese works to feature peacocks when he decorated one of the rooms at Daijō-ji temple during the late 18th century with a series of sliding-door paintings (*fusuma-e*). Depicting peacocks paired with pine trees and painted delicately in ink against a vast gold background, Maruyama's *fusuma* painting (fig 4.2) at Daijō-ji was one of his most notable works that Ishizaki Kōyō studied and even copied (fig 4.3) in 1907

---

[380] Robert T. Singer and Kawai Masatomo, ed., *The Life of Animals in Japanese Art*, (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2019), 204

[381] Merrily Baird, *Symbols of Japan: Thematic Motifs in Art and Design*, (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2001), 114

[382] Katherine M. Ball, *Animal Motifs in Asian Art*, (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), 223

at the age of 23, evincing the significance influence that Maruyama's peacock painting had on Ishizaki.

In Maruyama's original version, we see several attributes of traditional Japanese art that Ishizaki will replicate in some of his works throughout his career. One such attribute included the large expanse of undecorated background, which was a minimalistic aesthetic popular during Japan's Momoyama period (1573-1615), commonly used for folding screens and sliding door paintings.[383] Continually, Maruyama demonstrated his skills with Western art techniques through the peacocks as he painted them using monochrome ink but utilized tonal control to create light and dark areas on the peacock's body, especially its neck, creating a more realistic image by accentuating the corporeality and textures of the avians' feathers. In comparison, Ishizaki's copy added colors to the peacocks but retained the dark shading for the peacock's neck, wings, and legs to maintain a realistic look. Furthermore, Ishizaki also demonstrated his skill with a brush by meticulously painting the peacock's tail feathers and the individual twigs of the pines in detail.

Thanks to his training under Takeuchi, Ishizaki enjoyed modest success early in his career, with his first exhibited work, *Spring Announcement* (*Shunken,* no images available) earning a prize at the 9th annual *New Antique Art Exhibition* (*Shin-Kobijutsu Ten*) in 1904. Following this achievement, Ishizaki displayed another painting, *Monal* (*Kiji*, no images available) at the same exhibition the next year, which also earned him praise.[384] While little to no visual records remained of both works, the titles demonstrated Ishizaki's strong affinity with

---

[383] Carpenter, 13-17

[384] Yatsuo, 5

birds-and-flowers paintings since the beginning of his artistic career. Yet, despite a promising start, Ishizaki did not participate in another exhibition for six years after 1905. Some scholars speculated that this was due to him focusing on his research on antique Maruyama-styled paintings, for many of his copies of Maruyama-Shijō style paintings, including the copy of Maruyama's Daijō-ji fusuma painting, came from this period. Other scholars, however, believed that Ishizaki's absence from exhibitions during this period was because of his newfound hobby that would heavily influence his future artworks: mountain hiking.[385]

As a native of the mountainous Toyama prefecture, Ishizaki became an avid hiker from a young age. Between 1906 and 1910, he ventured to several notable mountains in Toyama, such as Mount Tate and Mount Tsurugi, and in 1909, he was even inducted into the Japanese Alpine Group (*Nihon Sangakukai)*, which cemented his passion and skill as a mountain climber.[386] More than just a hobby, Ishizaki valued mountains as a source of artistic inspiration as he regularly took photographs or made sketches of mountaintop sceneries viewed from the mountaintop. Furthermore, Ishizaki saw mountains as more than just beautiful landscapes but spiritual places to escape from modern society. This was best shown in an article he published following his hike up Haku mountain, located between Gifu and Ishikawa prefecture, where he extolled the symbolic significance of its snowy mountain scenery. In his own words, he described:

> "Among various universal phenomena, is there anything as profound as snow? […] no matter, mystery, dignity, radiance, melancholy, beauty, compared to other [natural phenomena], only snow encompasses all subtle implications. It possesses the magical

---

[385] Oyama Shō, "Kachō-gaka Kōyō no Yama to Yuki[Birds-and-flower painter Kōyō's Mountains and Snow]" in *Ishizaki Kōyō no Yama — Utsushikomareta 20 Seiki Shotō no Indo. Himalaya* [Ishizaki Kōyō's Mountains: Imprints of 20th century Himalaya, India], (Toyama Prefecture: Tateyama Museum, 2000), 3-4

[386] Ibid, 4

> ability to spiritualize everything. A mountain without snow undoubtedly lacks a solemn charm"[387]

Ishizaki's ornate description evinced his admiration of snow as a spiritual phenomenon, attributing various symbolic meanings and sentiments to it. He held a reverence for mountains covered in snow, perceiving them as the pinnacle of natural sceneries for their mystic connotations. While Ishizaki's description did not necessarily reference Buddhist spirituality or other religious beliefs, it emphasized his appreciation for hiking as a transcendent endeavor. For him, snow-covered mountains represented an ideal iconography to represent nature's spirituality. His attachment to snow and mountains as spiritual icons would later serve as a significant motivator for his travel to India because one of his goals to travel abroad was to venture into the subcontinent's most famous mountain range, the Himalayan mountain ranges.

Following his 4 years absence from exhibitions, Ishizaki returned to the Japanese art scene in 1912 when he submitted a peacock painting, *Summer Breeze* (fig 4.4) to the 6th Bunten exhibitions.[388] Even though only monochrome reproductions remain today, viewers can still see Ishizaki's skillful draftsmanship as he meticulously highlights the details of each tail feather of the peacock. In 1914 he submitted another work, a pair of screens titled *Water Trough* (fig 4.5), to the Bunten exhibitions, which further demonstrated his skills as a birds-and-flowers artist. *Water Trough* featured the titular log trough crossing horizontally across both screens. On the left screen, Ishizaki covered the entire screen with white lilies, leaving only small gaps to reveal the trough hidden behind the flowers. This composition contrasted with the right screen where Ishizaki reduced the number of flowers to create more room to show the centerpiece of the work:

---

[387] Ishizaki Kōyō, Haru no Yukiyama [Snow Mountain of Spring]. *Sangaku* 6 -1, 1911

[388] Oyama, *Kachō-gaka Kōyō no yama to yuki*, 5

the titular water trough with a pair of swallows resting on top. Ishizaki's *Water Trough* demonstrated the artist's predilection to juxtapose pairs of screen paintings, with one screen featuring intermingled faunas that dominated its surface while the other presenting the work's centerpiece amidst more open spaces, strategically drawing the viewer's attention. Both *Summer Breeze* and *Water Trough* demonstrated the extent of Ishizaki's training and served as exemplary representations of his early style.

Attraction to India

While Ishizaki enjoyed early success practicing Japanese styles and producing conventional birds-and-flower paintings, 1916 marked a momentous turning point in his career when he decided to travel to India to study its nature and wildlife for artistic inspiration. Furthermore, his travel to India roughly coincided with the time that Arai Kanpō and Nōsu Kōsetsu also made their journeys abroad, with all three artists visiting between 1916 and 1917. As mentioned in the previous chapters, both Arai and Nōsu, as part of the coalition of nihonga artists who shared Okakura's ideology of Pan-Asianism, emphasized their attraction to India's spiritual allure and ancient Buddhist arts, which motivated their travels abroad. In contrast, Ishizaki, who had little to no associations with Okakura's group nor affinity with Buddhist art, expressed more interest in India's nature. As he described in a declaration after he returned from his trip abroad, Ishizaki identified some of his "impulses" for traveling to India:

> "There are three main impulses that served as the reason for why I yearn for India. To be nourished and blessed with intense sunshine at all times, without any restrictions or oppression, wander within the jungle of tropical flowers decorated with gorgeous cloths, and sleep with the beasts and avians. To fundamentally educate myself with an examination of [India's] scattered ancient architecture and sculpture that came from the profound fervor of the religious lives of ancient people who worshipped the light of Śākyamuni. And finally, to enter the embrace of the Himalayas that meander across the

> blue sky, spanning thousands of miles as the "spine of the world," singing to my heart's content within the great nature since the creation of heaven and earth. It's with these three impulses that I started my journey."[389]

Deconstructing Ishizaki's poetic description, we see the myriad of motivations behind his decision to travel to India. Admittedly, as shown in what he described as his "second impulse," Ishizaki understood India's importance as a source of ancient Buddhist art, drawn to its spiritual significance like many of his contemporaries.[390] However, he revolved his other two motivators around his desire to personally experience the nature of India. Using languages such as "without any restrictions" and "singing to [his] heart's content," Ishizaki perceived India's nature as a liberating force, romanticizing it as a venue where he can depart from the confines of civilization and experience primordial mystical forces. While not explicitly a Buddhist experience or associated with any religious framework, Indian nature represented a personal spiritual experience for Ishizaki, similar to his perspective on snow-covered mountains.

As his romantic account evinced, Ishizaki's sentiments and zeal crucially motivated him to travel to India in 1916. However, examining other events in Japan's intellectual and artistic circles that year, we can speculate that external factors also likely impacted his decision. First, Ishizaki's travel occurred one year after Imamura displayed *Scroll of the Tropical Land* to Japanese audiences amidst much astonishment and acclaim. As established above, Imamura's work also had connections to popular Japanese imaginations of the tropical south, paralleling

---

[389] Ishizaki, "Shogen [Foreword]," in *Indo Kutsu-in Seika* [Essence of Indian Cave Temple], (Kyoto: Benridō, 1919).

[390] As evidenced in his published travel memoirs and photographs, *Essence of Indian Cave Temple*, Ishizaki journeyed to several of the ancient sites that his predecessors also visited, such as Ajanta and Ellora, and he commented on the beauty and religiosity. This is coupled with a large series of photographs he took of ancient sculptures from the sites. However, he never produced any Buddhist paintings or works that utilized the Indian figures he photographed after he returned to Japan, producing only bird-and-flower paintings.

Japan's concurrent imperial ambitions.[391] Thus, Ishizaki was very likely affected by Imamura's renowned scroll and rising interest in bright tropical destinations in Japan.

Simultaneously, events shortly before Ishizaki's travel also ignited a passion for India for the young artist. His departure coincided with Tagore's publicized visit to Japan that same year, which similarly inspired many of Ishizaki's contemporaries such as Arai Kanpō and Nōsu Kōsetsu. While these events generated enthusiasm for India for many Japanese artists, a more direct influence for Ishizaki came from the writings of the Buddhist scholar, Takakusu Junjirō. Shortly after Ishizaki returned from India, he published his travel journal to the public under the name *Record of India Journey (Indo Gyōki)*, which detailed many of his experiences abroad.[392] In the preface of his journal, Ishizaki listed Takakusu among the list of individuals whom he thanked for supporting him on his journey.[393] Moreover, Takakusu also dedicated a poem and a prologue to Ishizaki's publication. From this collaboration, we can see the strong connection between the two men and their shared romantic outlook on India's nature.

As stated in previous chapters, Takakusu established himself as a notable Indologist and Buddhist scholar with connections to many Japanese artists who traveled to India. In 1913, he traveled to India to "study ancient civilizations and religions."[394] Upon his return, he perpetuated

---

[391] See page 198

[392] Ishizaki's *Record of India Journey* was part of the larger publication, *Essence of Indian Cave Temple*, consisting of a collection of photographs he took of ancient Indian sculptures and his aforementioned travel records. While the title of the main publication implies Ishizaki's photographs of ancient artifacts were the main subject, the artists dedicated most of his writing to India's natural scenery within his journal. In this paper, we will be focusing on *Record of India Journey*, which relates more strongly to the works he produced after his travels.

[393] Ishizaki, *Shogen*

[394] Takakusu, "Indo ryokō-dan (sono-ni) [India Travel talk, part 2]," *Fujin Zasshi* 28, issue 8 (Fujin Zasshi-sha, August 1913): 7. Records of Takakusu's travels abroad were serialized in the magazine *Fujin Zasshi*, and also included his travels to other places such as Korea and Greek. Most of his reports were focused on comparing Asian civilizations to Western civilization, and he emphasized the religiosity of India.

the stereotypical image of India as an idealistic civilization untouched by modernity and tied to nature, which made an impression on Ishizaki. One example included his lecture, *The Place of Buddhism,* written and published as a book in 1915, one year before Ishizaki's travel. In his lecture, Takakusu argued while Western civilizations aimed to conquer nature, Indian civilizations strove for humans to "live in harmony with nature." Because of this difference, Takakusu labeled India as a "spiritual" civilization in contrast to "materialistic" Western civilizations.[395] He claimed that India's connection with nature accentuated its idealistic and spiritual nature, as he stated:

> "The ideals of Indian people is to live in the mountains and woods and live a life surrounded by nature in contrast to Western civilizations that preferred living in urban areas […] Secluded in the wild, they think and meditate, and from their meditation sprang forth civilization. It's as if civilization came from a shabby beggar-looking sage." [396]

To give examples of India's proximity to nature, Takusu also provided accounts of Indian denizens leaving food outside their homes for wild birds and animals to eat. He also described how Indian children do not throw stones at peacocks, who in turn have no fear of humans and do not run away from them.[397] From his descriptions, we can see that Takakus highly romanticized India's connection with nature, emphasizing its spiritual strength.

On the surface, Takakusu's statement on India appeared complementary but also condescending, framing India as an underdeveloped and superstitious country that valued primitive lifestyles. However, Takakusu's ideologies of India's connection to nature and its spiritual implications may have come from the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore himself. In the

---

[395] Takakusu, *Bukkyō no Chi-i* [The Place of Buddhism], ed. and pub. by Hirata Hiroji (1915): 56-57

[396] Ibid, 56

[397] Ibid, 59

same year that *The Place of Buddhism* was published, Tagore's notable work *Sadhana, The Realisation of Life* received a translation by Nakazawa Rinkawa and became available for the general Japanese public.[398] In Tagore's work, the introductory chapter, *The Relation of the Individual to the Universe*, Tagore laid out arguments in defense of Indian philosophy that strongly paralleled Takakusu's arguments. For example, he lamented how Western ideology viewed nature as an obstacle to overcome while "the Indian mind never has any hesitation in acknowledging its kinship with nature."[399] Other than *Sadhana,* Tagore's translated poetry also ignited Japanese fantasies of India's nature. For example, in a 1915 article titled *Tagore's Poetry and India's Nature,* novelist Yoshida Genjirō (1886-1956) extolled Tagore's writing for vividly expressing his intimacy with India's nature, describing sentiments of "eternal joy under the evergreen shades while hearing mystic whispers" when reading his poetry.[400]

As these examples showed, from 1914 to 1916, before Ishizaki's departure, primitivist fantasies of India's nature as a spiritual panacea for modern society had permeated across Japan's art and intellectual scenes. From Tagore's poetry, and Imamura's painting, to Takakusu's lectures, multiple individuals contributed to widespread Japanese romantic perspectives toward India's nature, and Tagore's 1916 visit further amplified such sentiments. Thus, despite having no affiliations with Okakura's group and little interest in Buddhist art, Ishizaki discovered his motivation to travel to India from the pervasive idealization of India's nature. Furthermore, as a master of Rinpa and Maruyama-Shijō style, Ishizaki recognized the alluring challenge of

---

398 Nakazawa Rinkawa, Tagōru to Sei no jitsugen [Tagore and the Realization of Life], (Shinchō-sha, 1915)

399 Tagore, Rabindranath, *Sadhana: The Realisation of Life,* (Leipzig : Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1921), originally published in 1913, 23

400 Yoshida Genjirō, "Tagōru no shi to indo no shizen [Taore's poetry and India's Nature]," in Meishi no Tagōru-kan [Perspectives on distinguished person, Tagore], ed., Seitaku Gan, (Jōnan-sha, 1915), 93

capturing India's exotic sceneries through conventional Japanese aesthetics. His time abroad would define a turning point in his career where, similar to Imamura, his encounter with the unfamiliar sights of India encouraged him to discover innovative ways to utilize colors and techniques that challenged the boundaries of Japanese artistic conventions.

Ishizaki Kōyō's peacocks — recreating foreign scenes

Ishizaki spent a total of eight months in India, from October 1916 to July 1917. As mentioned above, *Record of India Journey (Indo Gyōki)*, published in 1919, stood out as his most prominent account of his time in India, detailing his travels to various notable sites in India, such as Calcutta, Agra, Mumbai, and Darjeeling. As with his predecessors, Ishizaki also visited India's famous ancient sites such as Ajanta and Ellora, where he commented on the symbolic significance of their ancient sculptures. Ishizaki believed that the ancient arts of India embodied Indian civilization's innate religiosity. Compared to his descriptions of ancient ruins, however, Ishizaki expressed more enthusiasm towards the wild flora and fauna of India with many of his descriptions reflected upon the works he produced after he returned.

One year before the publication of *Record of India Journey*, he summarized his admiration towards India's nature in the article *The Natural Beauty of India*, expressing his fascination with the seasonal changes in India and the prevalence of wild animals. While Ishizaki's artistic focus lies in birds-and-flowers paintings and natural depictions, his descriptions of India's scenery reflected his familiarity with Buddhist themes. For example, he described how:

> "With its jungles mottled with flowers and wild animals frolicking, [the scenery] appears as if looking at countless birds and flowers from a Chinese painting or the backdrop

> of a Parinirvana picture. There are many paradises filled with peaceful light and dazzling colors."[401]

Ishizaki's metaphor of a Chinese painting and a scene of Parinirvana demonstrated his thought process as he attempted to mentally convert the natural scenery into an artistic depiction. Comparing the view to a Chinese painting, he highlighted the suitability of the scenery for the Chinese-Japanese art genre of birds-and-flowers painting, which he specialized in. Most interestingly, Ishizaki's comparison of the scenery to a Parinirvana picture demonstrated how he associated India's nature with a sense of religiosity. In archaic Japanese paintings of Buddha's death, especially those from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, artists have long used crowds of animals gathering at Buddha's deathbed as a popular motif associated with the subject matter.[402] Thus, as his metaphors evinced, Ishizaki strove to find connections between India's exotic scenery with familiar themes and genres in Japanese art, a strategy of making the unfamiliar familiar.

Apart from highlighting the compatibility of India's nature with Asian aesthetics, Ishizaki's article highlighted the distinct colors and scenery associated with the seasonal changes in India, which he witnessed during his monthly stays. Out of all the seasons, Ishizaki declared India's springtime as the most beautiful because of its vivid green colors:

> "India's most beautiful time is definitely spring. Even though India is evergreen during all seasons, its fields become more intensely green [during spring], and the flowers bloom as if they are on fire."[403]

---

[401] Ishizaki Kōyō, "Indo no Shizen-bi [India's Natural beauty]," *Geijutsu* 1, issue 1, (Geijutsu-sha, November 1918), 100

[402] Yiengpruksawan, Mimi Hall, "The Interstitial Buddha: Picturing the Death of Śākyamuni," *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin*, (Yale: 2007): 60

[403] Ishizaki, *Indo no shizen-bi*, 102

In Ishizaki's description, he highlighted the intense green colors that define the spring scenery of India, and shortly after he returned to Japan, he utilized this observation in the first major work he produced after his travels, *Spring in the Tropics* (*Netsu-koku Kenshūn,* fig 4.6). This work represented the first in a series of screen paintings that Ishizaki produced from 1918 to 1919 for annual art exhibitions, all showing tropical fauna and avians, especially peacocks. As the first work that Ishizaki painted after his return, *Spring in the Tropics* evinced the artist's fascination with India's spring scenery.

Spring in the Tropics consisted of two large screens covered with green foliage. While both the left and right screens appear similar to each other, a close look reveals that Ishizaki depicted different plant species and utilized different techniques for each screen. On the right screen, coconut palm leaves covered a large portion of its surface, and each leaf featured strong black contours. Meanwhile, other tropical plants and white flowers intermingled with the coconut leaves, grouped around the top right corner of the right screen. A single moss-covered tree branch peaked out from the vegetation with a blue bird perched on top. Similarly, the left screen also had a large portion of its surface covered in green foliage, but featured an alternate tropical plant with a different shade of green.

In contrast to the coconut leaves on the right screen, Ishizaki painted the dark green leaves on the left screen using the *mokkotsu-hō* or "boneless" technique. This is a traditional style from Chinese and Japanese painting where the artist intentionally left out any outlines and contours and part of the repertoire of techniques that Ishizaki picked up in his training in Rinpa style.[404] By using strong black outlines for the plants on the right screens while painting those on the left

---

[404] Carpenter, 31

screen in the boneless style, Ishizaki successfully conveyed the unique textures associated with the tropical plants that he depicted. For example, the thick black outlines on the coconut leaves helped convey the stiffness and robustness of the leaves' real-life texture. In contrast, the boneless style on the left screen accentuated the soft and delicate nature of the other plants.[405] Furthermore, Ishizaki also utilized the boneless style to highlight the movement of the bird on the left screen, composing the avian's body through colors and shades alone.[406] In doing so, Ishizaki intentionally created a blurry effect with the bird, giving off the impression of rapidly fluttering wings and feathers in the bird's flight among the foliage. Using different styles for each of the screens in *Spring in the Tropics* to highlight diverse plant textures and the movement of the avians, Ishizaki demonstrated his adroitness with traditional Japanese techniques.

On both screens, Ishizaki blanketed the whole surface with green foliage, which broke with Japanese conventions of leaving large areas of open spaces for screen and screen-door paintings. Curiously, in one of his early drafts for *Spring in the Tropics* (fig 4.6a), we see a version of the left screen that appeared closer to Japanese traditions with large areas of empty spaces save for a single tree trunk to the left of the screen, giving more focus to the flying bird that served as the centerpiece on the left screen. However, Ishizaki ultimately chose to defy traditions and leave no empty spaces on both screens, which gave *Spring in the Tropics* an aesthetic appeal resembling that of decorative art. In the words of art historian, Moriguchi Tari 森口多里 (1892-1984), the screen paintings showcased "the beauty of Crafts."[407]

---

[405] Yatsuo, 13-14

[406] *Kachoga no kirameki - Botsugo 70 nen Ishizaki Kōyō ten*, 76

[407] Oyama, *Kachō-gaka Kōyō no Yama to Yuki*, 15

In addition to his space organization, Ishizaki also creatively used different shades of green, ranging from dark to light, to distinguish different vegetation species, successfully achieving some variety despite the predominant use of green throughout both screens. Interestingly, by utilizing different tones of the same color, Ishizaki reflected a method of color harmonization that Imamura Shikō mentioned in *Discussion on Color*. While Imamura emphasized the importance of pairing distinct colors to create strong contrasts, he also highlighted the possibility of combining Western art's strengths in shading and tonal control with the application of colors in Japanese painting. He described how controlling the "strength" of a single color, ranging from light to dark, allowed the artist to harmonize color in an alternative way and create innovative venues for expression.[408] By utilizing different shades of green to create distinction in his screen painting, Ishizaki demonstrated his involvement with inquiries and experimentations of color application alongside contemporary nihonga artists and showcased the importance of India's natural scenery in providing opportunities for Japanese artists to test new artists' methodologies related to color.

While Ishizaki dedicated a lot of effort in distinguishing the textures and green shades of the vegetation in his work, the most eye-catching element of *Spring in the Tropics* (fig 4.6b) is undeniably the colorful bird suspended mid-flight among the foliage above the water lilies. However, the significance of the bird on the left screen lies not only in the artistic techniques it displayed but its connection to Ishizaki. Most surprising of all, the bird's appearance on Ishizaki's screen is anomalous as it is not a bird endemic to India at all, for it is a bird of paradise. Commonly called the *gokurakuchō* in Japanese, such birds are endemic to Papua New

---

[408] Imamura, 7-8

Guinea and Indonesia rather than India, and Ishizaki was well aware of this fact as expressed in his published travel journal.[409] Despite this, the artist had always fondly associated birds of paradise with India. On a postcard postmarked to November 9th, 1916 that Ishizaki sent to his own home, possibly sent right before he embarked from Kobe to India, the artist wrote down that he "felt an exceptional feeling as [he] rode the waves of Seto Inland Sea while reminiscing about the country where peacocks sing and birds-of-paradise dance."[410] As this quote showed, even before setting foot in India, Ishizaki was already using birds-of-paradise as a metaphor for India's untamed wildlife. By conflating a bird endemic to Indonesia and Papua New Guinea with India, Ishizaki's adoration of the avian species demonstrated how India was fantasized as part of Japan's imagined "tropical south" by itinerant artists.

Additionally, Ishizaki did encounter a living birds-of-paradise while in India. During his time in Calcutta, he took the chance to visit the city's zoo to study the diverse bird species housed there, including a bird-of-paradise kept in an enclosure among numerous parakeet exhibits. Ishizaki was immediately attracted to the colorful bird and fondly called it his favorite animal in the whole zoo, spending long hours observing the behavior of the avian.[411] To Ishizaki, the bird-of-paradise was not only spectacular in appearance but also in its dynamic motion:

> "Its velvet-like crest gleamed with a greenish metallic shine[…] as the soft breeze tampered with its splendid feathers, it extended its wings like a phoenix, spreading out its ornate feathers all at once, and fluttered its wings nervously. This was a kind of breathtaking and beautiful dance unique to this bird. Without acting as prideful as a peacock or as eccentric as an argus (a kind of Southeast Asian pheasant), the bird will spin and perform this dance while perched on a beam. As its ornate feathers drooped down,

---

[409] Ishizaki, *Indo Kutsu-in*, 16

[410] Oyama, *Kachō-gaka Kōyō no Yama to Yuki*, 5

[411] Ishizaki, *Indo Kutsu-in*, 16

> looking like gold and silver threads, one can't help but feel a divine feeling as if encountering auroras."[412]

Ishizaki's account evinced the artist's fascination with the ornamental aesthetics of the avian, as many of the metaphors he used to describe its feathers contained references to decorative arts, such as velvet, gold and silver threads, and metallurgy. His comparison of the bird-of-paradise to a phoenix also demonstrated his conflation of the bird with Japanese iconography.

Ishizaki also interestingly mentioned a "divine feeling" he felt as he gazed upon the bird, which revealed the artist's association of the avian with his spiritual fantasies. As he continued to describe in his journal:

> "Its cry complimented its form as it possesses a voice like that of an immortal bird. Deep in the old mountainous forests, in a heavenly rainbow-colored robe of feathers, suspended between branches where the exotically scented orchids bloom, even as the fiendish barbarian with its threatening blowdart that passed below it."[413]

As his writing showed, Ishizaki imbued several of his fantasies onto the avian, describing it as a mythological animal from a bygone age. With colorful descriptions such as "immortal bird" and "heavenly rainbow-colored robe," he portrayed the bird as an embodiment of divinity, aloof from mortal affairs and a contrast to the "fiendish barbarian." Despite not being endemic to India, Ishizaki nevertheless included the bird in his depiction as an iconography for divinity, showcasing his willingness to favor a romantic portrayal over an accurate presentation of India's nature.

With his innovative application of colors, Japanese art techniques, and a romantic portrayal of an avian, Ishizaki carefully constructed an image of India in *Spring in the Tropics* that

---

[412] Ibid.

[413] Ibid

simultaneously offered audiences a glimpse at a foreign land while fulfilling their fantasies. When Ishizaki displayed his work at the 12th Bunten exhibition in 1919, critics praised the artist for his precarious mixture of realism and imagination. For example, one individual named Kobayashi Haratarō commended Ishizaki's technical achievement, highlighting his skillful harmonization of colors and his ability to distinguish rigid and soft faunas through his skillful use of contours and palettes. He highlighted Ishizaki's success in achieving realism and depicting a flow of movement throughout his work.[414] Another critic by the name of Koike Kitakaze similarly extolled the verisimilitude of the tropical plants in Ishizaki's work, praising Ishizaki's work as an "authority of realistic birds-and-flower painting" at the exhibition.[415] However, while both critics agreed on Ishizaki's achievement of realism, they differed on its sentimental achievements. For Kobayashi, Ishizaki effectively conveyed the sensibilities and atmosphere of India's tropical environment.[416] Yet, Koike argued that while he recognized Ishizaki's handwork in accurately recreating India's scenery, he found its lyrical qualities lacking.[417]

These varied reviews showcased the challenges that itinerant artists such as Ishizaki faced when depicting India's sceneries using Japanese styles, where they strove to accurately recreate the tropical environment on the canvas while simultaneously capturing the fantastical allure it had over Japanese audiences. While Ishizaki's *Spring in the Tropics* demonstrated some influences from Imamura, such as the innovative use of color tones, the artist also applied his

---

[414] Kobayashi Haratarō, Chū-ō bijutsu, November 1918, as quoted in *Nittenshi 5,* (Tokyo: Nitten, 1980), 374

[415] Koike Kitakaze, "Bunten haikenki [Observation notes of the Bunten exhibition]," *Kensei Bijutsu*, no. 130 (Bijutsu sensei-kai, November 1918): 7-8

[416] Kobayashi, 374

[417] Koike, 8

idiosyncrasies. He utilized both strong contours and boneless techniques to visually differentiate the plants and create a sense of movement for his avian centerpiece. Thus, in contrast to Imamura's abstract and simplistic portrayal of India's landscape, Ishizaki preferred to meticulously highlight the details of exotic objects, leaning towards realism. However, he still aimed to capture the romantic and spiritual sentiments associated with India's nature, such as his placement of the bird-of-paradise, which held a personal value to him, as his centerpiece. As his first work after his return from his travels, however, *Spring in the Tropics* represented Ishizaki's earliest attempt. His later works would demonstrate other innovative approaches and also reflect other sentiments that he associated with India's nature.

Ishizaki's *Radiant Rain* — capturing movement and light

In 1919, one year after displaying *Spring in the Tropics*, Ishizaki submitted another pair of screen paintings that depicted a tropical scene to the first annual Imperial Arts Exhibitions, otherwise known as the "Teiten" (帝展) exhibitions.[418] Titled *Radiant Rain* (*San-U,* fig 4.7), Ishizaki's new screen painting displayed two peacocks and multiple flying parrots intermingled with a spread of red flowers. With its bright red and orange color tones, we can speculate that Ishizaki took inspiration from Imamura Shikō. Apart from the vibrant colors, one of *Radiant Rain*'s most defining features is its expression of motion and dynamism.

The award-winning screen painting diverged from Ishizaki's other depictions of peacocks by its intense expression of motion and dynamism. The centerpiece of the work featured a pair of peacocks perched on a tree branch with their bodies pointing diagonally toward the upper-right

[418] The Imperial Arts Exhibitions (Teiten) were a continuation of the Bunten exhibitions under a different name. The name change was because the supervision of the exhibitions shifted from the Japan's Ministry of Culture to the Imperial Academy of Arts. Please see chapter 2 for more information on the Bunten/Teiten exhibitions.

corner of the screens, giving off an impression of taking flight. In contrast to the peacocks' direction, groups of parrots dove towards the lower-left corners of the screens, each with their wings spread out. Accentuating the sense of movements of the avians, Ishizaki depicted diagonal streaks of golden rays (fig 4.7a), symbolizing the titular rain, interspersed across both screens. Furthermore, Ishizaki created these golden diagonal lines using *kindei*, a traditional Japanese pigment made from gold powder diluted in an adhesive, often used in decorative and visual arts to add a lustrous shine to the artwork.[419] In *Radiant Rain*, Ishizaki not only used the golden lines to depict the rain in an ornamental fashion but also to accentuate the dynamism of the birds in flight. Spread across the screens in the same diagonal orientation as the flying parrots, the golden streaks of rain conveyed a sense of speed. Moreover, the pattern-like distribution of the rays, with its slight geometric alignment of the lines and strong gold colors, across the screens also showcased Ishizaki's heavier use of Rinpa-style aesthetics.[420]

Furthermore, Ishizaki also depicted the tree branches, leaves, and flowers in his screen painting in a blurry and abstract manner, diverging strongly from his meticulous approaches in his previous work. For example, rather than carefully highlighting details, Ishizaki used unrestrained brushstrokes to depict the tree branches, leaving visible diagonal strokes (fig 4.7b). Similarly, he simplified the red flowers and green leaves into patches of vibrant pigments while also leaving discernible brushstrokes. The overall composition marked a drastic departure from

---

[419] Fukumitsu Art Museum, eds., *Kenran no Kachō-ga Ishizaki Kōyō botsugo 60 nenten* [The luster of birds-and-flower paintings - Ishizaki Kōyō 60 years after death commemoration exhibition], (Toyama: Fukumitsu Art Museum, 2008), 14

[420] Oyama, "Ishizaki no shi Yamamoto Kōichi [Ishizaki's Master Yamamoto Kōichi], in *Kenran no Kachō-ga Ishizaki Kōyō botsugo 60 nenten,* 47

the realistic approach in Ishizaki's previous work and leaned more towards an abstract impressionistic style paralleling Imamura's *Scroll of the Tropical Land*.

The effect did not go unnoticed by viewers when Ishizaki displayed his painting at the Teitan exhibitions, with one reviewer highlighting how the luster of the work drew viewers with its "imaginative fantasy." The reviewer also praised Ishizaki for depicting motion and vitality, describing that "in its gorgeous splendor, there is activity. And within that activity, the artist's sensitivity is at work."[421] Thus, unlike *Spring in the Tropics* where he utilized his style to achieve a realistic portrayal, Ishizaki strove for a more imaginative and abstract representation in his new work, making *Radiant Rain* a piece that leaned closer to Imamura's approach. His choice for a more abstract approach also helped him highlight the intense motions expressed by the birds and the rain. However, with his use of highly decorative elements, such as the application of *kindei* and vibrant colors, Ishizaki stayed faithful to the conventional styles of Rinpa while utilizing them in innovative ways to capture a foreign scene. Using Rinpa style to depict an Indian scenery, Ishizaki harmonized and drew connections between the two distinct cultures.

More importantly, Ishizaki drew connections between India and Japan not simply through the style, but also the subtle symbolism behind the flower that he depicted in his screen painting. With its bright red flowers and green leaves, it is very plausible that the plant in Ishizaki's *Radiant Rain* is the Delonix Regia plant, more commonly called the *Krishna Chura* tree in India. In his travel journal, Ishizaki described how he came across a forest of such plants in Mumbai, named "flame forest," due to its bright red blooming flowers that "flicker like embers burning the tree tops." Furthermore, according to Ishizaki, local Indians also referred to the plant as the

---

[421] Furukawa, 240

"royal peacock flower," adding more to the fiery and tropical connotations associated with the plant and coincidentally fitting Ishizaki's love for peacocks.[422] Yet, despite the strong exotic flavors it embodied, Ishizaki interestingly described the *Krishna Chura* in his journal less as an exotic plant and more as a distant relative of one of Japan's most iconic flowers, the cherry blossom (Sakura):

> "In local language, the tree is referred to as the *Krishna Chura*, but many [Japanese] residing in Mumbai called it the 'Mumbai Sakura.' When thousands of them bloomed at the same time and covered an entire forest, it's as if I'm wandering through a cloud or mist of cherry blossoms."[423]

The manner in which Ishizaki and Japanese expatriates compared the *Krishna Chura* to cherry blossoms highlighted another example of Indian fauna being conflated with icons from Japanese culture. Both Ishizaki and other Japanese felt sentimental towards the ephemeral nature of the Indian flower and found it comparable to similar cultural connotations of the cherry blossom. Furthermore, by incorporating the Indian flower into *Radiant Rain,* amongst the blurry motions of the avians and the golden rays, Ishizaki conflated the evanescence of the Indian flower with cherry blossoms.

Ishizaki's other peacock paintings: *White Peacock* and *Enlightenment*

Following the successes of both *Spring in the Tropics* and *Radiant Rain* at annual exhibitions, Ishizaki displayed two more works revolving around peacocks that showcased some of his other innovative approaches to capturing Indian sceneries. The first work is a screen painting titled *White Peacocks* (Shiro Kujaku, fig 4.8) that he submitted to the 4th Teiten exhibition in 1922. It displayed three white peacocks amidst a background filled with green

---

[422] Ishizaki, *Indo Kutsu-in*, 33-34

[423] Ibid, 34

leaves with thick black contours, coupled with a large moss-covered tree trunk that spanned both screens. Blue lily flowers adorned the compositions with most of the flowers decorating the left half of the screen. Ishizaki's placement of the peacocks in his composition also deserved attention, with the left screen showing a white peacock partially hidden from view behind green leaves, contrasting with the right screen that boldly displayed a pair of white peacocks as its centerpiece. The delicate feathers of the peacock's tail highlighted Ishizaki's skill in realistic sketching.

As shown through multiple drafts left over from the planning stages of *White Peacock*, Ishizaki Kōyō tested multitudes of different faunas for the background of his screen-painting. In one version he experimented with banana leaves (fig 4.8a) as the backdrop and only featured two peacocks on the right screen. Furthermore, he also intended to show more open spaces on the left screen with the banana leaves dominating only portions of the screen's space. Following this initial draft, Ishizaki created a second version that bore the closest resemblance to the final work (fig 4.8b), with a tree trunk spanning both trees and green leaves covering the entire composition, leaving little empty spaces.[424] However, an interesting variance between the second draft and the final result was the lighter shade of green used for the foliage in the draft version. Finally, Ishizaki created a third draft (fig 4.8c) that featured dark green plants with strong textures as the backdrop. The most interesting aspect of the third draft was the inclusion of a blue peacock on the left screen, acting as a contrast to the white peacocks and providing more color varieties. Comparing the final work to the three drafts, it appeared that Ishizaki combined both the second and third versions, modeling his composition on the second draft, but utilizing the dark green

[424] Ishizaki left no clear indication of the sequences of the drafts. He painted them all on a single scroll and we speculate based on the order they appeared in from right-to-left.

colors of the third draft as his primary color. With his experimentations of multiple different Indian plants in his preparation for his screen, Ishizaki demonstrated his considerations on the varied aesthetic effects that the tropical vegetation can express.

Examining *White Peacock*, we see several similarities with Ishizaki's previous works, especially with *Spring in the Tropics* with its excessive green composition. For the foliage of green leaves that covered both screens, Ishizaki used strong black contours to express the toughness of the leaves' textures, similar to his approach in *Spring in the Tropics*. He also used them to delineate the sharp jagged outlines of the leaves, further accentuating the toughness of the plants. Moreover, Ishizaki demonstrated his usual adroitness in implementing Japanese techniques. In the execution of the moss-covered tree trunks, Ishizaki utilized the signature drip technique (*tarashikomi)* of Rinpa-style aesthetics to create the rough texture of the tree trunk and the moss (fig 4.8d), evidenced by the blurred nature of the pigments. Other than the tree trunks and mosses, he also applied tarashikomi to the center of each leaf to create a tonal gradation of green colors, increasing the aesthetic appeal of the plants.

While *White Peacock* appeared similar to *Spring in the Tropics*, casual viewers can still notice that it featured a different type of plant and Ishizaki made its leaf appear more pronounced than its previous works, spreading it across his screens like a pattern. Upon closer inspection, the black outlines of the leaves revealed a layer of gold leaf beneath the dark pigments, slightly visible as crisscrossing grid patterns of gold lines (fig 4.8e). This subtle crisscross pattern of gold, when combined with the repetition of sharply outlined leaves across the whole screen, gave Ishizaki's work an aesthetic similar to craft with the golden lines mimicking threads and the leaves resembling textile patterns. This aesthetic effect was not lost to viewers at the Teiten

exhibitions. One review censured the work, describing how Ishizaki's unorthodox application of decorative techniques resulted in a work that "resembled a sewn object" made apparent by the artist's "mechanical outlining." Other reviews found the work a downgrade compared to Ishizaki's previous work, *Radiant Rain*, lacking its vibrancy and vividness.[425]

While contemporary reviews reacted unfavorably to the craft-like aesthetic in Ishizaki's work, none pondered why the artist transitioned from the vibrant style in his previous work to a craft-like approach. The reasoning lay in the specific plant species that Ishizaki chose for his screen, for it was a "chinar" tree, which Ishizaki observed and sketched in India (fig 4.9).[426] As recorded in a note provided alongside his sketch, Ishizaki expressed his admiration for the lively green colors of chinar tree leaves. Most importantly, he noted how in the Kashmir region of India, local textiles and embroideries commonly used such leaves and flowers as motifs.[427] From his description, we see how Ishizaki replicated the craft-like aesthetics associated with the plant on his screen. In contrast to his previous folding screen works where he expressed his romantic perspectives and sentiments toward India's tropical nature, *White Peacock* showcased Ishizaki's interest in exploring how India's natural motifs were utilized in its local arts and replicating such effects through Japanese techniques. In doing so, he demonstrated his commitment to finding innovative ways of harmonizing Japanese artistic conventions with India's exotic nature.

However, many years after he displayed *White Peacock*, Ishizaki created one last painting of peacocks that represented a strong departure: *Enlightenment* (*Jakkō,* fig 4.10). Rather than a large pair of six-paneled screens, Enlightenment took a more modest form of a single two-

---

[425] Anonymous review, *Bijutsu no Nihon*, October 1922, reproduced in *Nittenshi* 6, 543

[426] In his note, Ishizaki labeled the tree as "chināru" and it's probably an Oriental plane tree.

[427] Tateyama Museum, *Ishizaki Kōyō no Yama,* 23

paneled screen. The depiction featured five peacocks perched on top of gray branches in front of a moon amidst decorative mists with an empty gold background. Demonstrating his usual lustrousness, Ishizaki scattered cut gold foil within the boundaries of the mists to create a glittering effect, accentuating the radiance of the work.[428] Despite its bright gold colors, however, Ishizaki's new work lacked the vibrant red, orange, and green from his previous works, because it abandoned the Indian tropical settings that dominated Ishizaki's previous works. Using an empty background and bold use of gold, Ishizaki reverted to the decorative conventions of Japanese art with little to no visual cues of India save for the peacocks. This stylistic regression did not go unnoticed when Ishizaki displayed *Enlightenment* at the 10th Teiten exhibition in 1929, as critics welcomed its familiar Japanese aesthetics. One newspaper review commended the ornamental effects, describing how the gray branches accentuated the "sentiments of a moonlit night."[429]

Examining *Enlightenment* within the full oeuvre of Ishizaki, scholars described the work as a transitional piece that evoked both the highly ornamental nature of his Indian-themed works and the "oriental tranquility" of his later-year works.[430] While it is unclear why Ishizaki shifted away from wild experimentations with tropical landscapes to works more grounded in Japanese conventions in his later years, it is possible that the artist began to appreciate more subtle representations after his audacious use of colors in past works gave him mixed reactions from viewers. Moreover, *Enlightenment* may also represent the artist's transition from romanticizing

---

[428] Fukumitsu Art Museum, *Kenran no Kachō-ga,* 29

[429] Tokyo nichi-nichi Shinbun, October 3rd, 1929, reproduced in *Nittenshi* 9*,* ed. Nittenshi Hensan Iinkai, (Tokyo: Nitten, 1983), 636

[430] Fukumitsu Art Museum, *Kenran no Kachō*-ga, 29

India's exotic landscape to a deeper acknowledgment of its innate spirituality, evoked through the work's Japanese title *Jakkō*. Roughly translating to 'tranquil' or 'lonely' light, Jakkō is a term with strong Buddhist connotations, often used to refer to the state of enlightenment or inner peace. By associating the concept of enlightenment with peacocks, which Ishizaki had long used as an icon for India, Ishizaki expressed the spiritual sentiments he felt from Indian wildlife and nature. He also expressed such sentimentality in his early writings, demonstrated through his comparison of India's nature with a "scene from Parinirvana" and using metaphors such as "peaceful light" in *India's Natural Beauty*.[431]

From his 1919 *Spring in the Tropics* to *Enlightenment* in 1929, the decade following his trip to India saw Ishizaki attempt various innovative ways to capture the foreign scenery of India using traditional Japanese techniques. He utilized both strong contours and boneless styles to capture the diverse textures associated with India's vegetation and experimented with brushstrokes and gold pigments to evoke the dynamism and effervescence he associated with the exotic scenery. Through such vivid portrayals, he followed in the footsteps of Imamura Shikō, utilizing the extravagant nature of India as a platform to experiment with Japanese styles and colors. In his later years, he began to shift away from audacious, highly romanticized portrayals in preference for more subtle representations, culminating with *Enlightenment*, which highlighted the tranquil religiosity he saw in India's wildlife, especially peacocks. Some years after displaying *Enlightenment*, Ishizaki further evinced his transition to more spiritually attuned works when he executed a series of sliding door paintings for one of Japan's most important Buddhist temples: Kōyasan Kongobu-ji Temple

---

[431] Ishizaki Kōyō, *Indo no Shizen-bi*, 100

Kōyasan Kongobuji-temple Fusuma-e

As the above examples showed, Ishizaki mainly operated in official exhibitions after his trip to India where he displayed his screen paintings of tropical fauna and peacocks. While these works earned him praise and validated his skills as a modern-day Rinpa artist, they only reflected one aspect of Ishizaki's treatment and perspectives towards Indian nature. In 1933, Ishizaki received a request from Kōyasan Kongobu-ji Temple (henceforth referred to as Kōyasan Temple), one of Japan's principal temples of the Shingon school of Buddhism, to create a sliding door painting (fusuma) for one its many guest rooms. Kōyasan Kongobu-ji was first built in 816 under the monk Kūkai (774-835), the founder of Japan's Shingon-sect of Buddhism.[432] Thus, Ishizaki's involvement with the historical temple evinced his reputation as a well-respected artist. Answering the temple's request, Ishizaki dedicated a multi-panel fusuma painting that decorated the room's interior with a panorama of the Himalayan mountain range, titled *Rainbow Pheasants* (*Kō-chi,* fig 4.11). Out of the many works in Ishizaki's oeuvre, *Rainbow Pheasants* stood out as the artist's only project created in response to a temple commission rather than an art exhibition. In preparation for this major work, Ishizaki traveled back to India for a short period to study its Himalayan landscape, though he left little written records of his second trip to India.

Initially, Ishizaki planned to create a total of 40 panels for the guest rooms. However, he only completed 20 panels before he died in 1947. Today, his remaining 20 panels decorated two guest rooms at Kōyasan temple, titled the "Rainbow Pheasant Room" (*Kō-chi no ma*) and the "Snowy Peaks Room" (*Setsurei no ma)* respectively.[433] While Ishizaki never gave his sliding

---

[432] Kirii Shoko, "Kongōbuji-okuden no Fusuma-e ni tsuite [Regarding the sliding door painting at Kongōbuji temple's inner palace]" in *Kachoga no kirameki - Botsugo 70 nen*, 36

[433] Kirii, 37

door paintings an official title, scholars today commonly refer to the works as *Rainbow Pheasants* (*Kō-chi),* for it is in the Rainbow Pheasant Room that Ishizaki's work centerpiece is displayed. Following the traditions of 16th to 17th-century Japanese sliding door conventions, Ishizaki adopted large empty spaces decorated with misty clouds and gold leaf.[434] For the centerpiece of the Rainbow Pheasant room, Ishizaki depicted a large tree sporting bright red and white flowers. Its singular large trunks and multiple branches encircled the room. Similar to his approach in *White Peacock,* a detailed look at Ishizaki's rendering of the branches revealed his usual skillful application of Rinpa-style techniques, such as the use *tarashikomi* to highlight the texture of the tree trunks and moss. Perched on top of its branches were a couple of pheasants (fig 4.11a), which gave the work and its room its name. Both the plant and the avian depicted on the sliding door panels were native to the Himalayan regions of India. For example, the tree that Ishizaki chose for his centerpiece is a Himalayan Rhododendron tree (*Himaraya syakunage)*, while the pheasant species is known as the Himalayan monal. Interestingly, in *The Natural Beauty of India*, Ishizaki erroneously described the Himalayan monal as a "type of peacock that resides in the snowy mountains," which places *Rainbow Pheasant* as part of the long series of peacock paintings that Ishizaki produced throughout his life.[435]

Supplementing the tree and the avians, Ishizaki aligned the top and bottom edges of his sliding door panels with simplified representations of the Himalayan mountain ranges. Slightly obscured by the branches were jagged mountain peaks with earthly tones of green and brown. Paralleling the detailed stone peaks that supplemented the tree branches, Ishizaki aligned the top

---

[434] Yatsuo, 39

[435] Ishizaki, *Indo no Shizen-bi*, 101

edges with flat depictions of alternating green and white mountain tops, portrayed in simple conical shapes to represent the snowy Himalayan mountain panorama seen from a far distance. In contrast to the simplistic representation of the snowy mountains in the Rainbow Pheasant room, Ishizaki applied more details to the mountains in the other room, the Snow Peaks room (fig 4.10b), where the Himalayan mountain peaks took a more central role in the composition. There, Ishizaki featured the mountains more prominently, taking up more space and possessing more varied forms. He also implemented black contours and slight uses of shading to create a more solid and detailed portrayal, making the mountains tower above the clouds, evoking a sense of majesty. In contrast, Ishizaki portrayed the ground in the foreground as a simple green slope, simplified as large patches of colors, reminiscing the conventions of Yamato-e painting.[436] In both rooms, Ishizaki demonstrated his mastery of conventional Japanese styles.

At first glance, *Rainbow Pheasant* is comparable to *Enlightenment*, with both works representing Ishizaki's departure from overt Indian themes in preference for orthodox styles. However, an examination of the symbolism of the Himalayan mountains in the eyes of Ishizaki and his contemporaries will reveal how Ishizaki's sliding door paintings visualized the spiritual connection between India and Japan. Similar to Nōsu Kōsetsu's mural in India, Ishizaki used the interior space of a building to create a trans-cultural artwork that celebrated Pan-Asian spirituality. However, in contrast to Nōsu's bold narrative-oriented depictions, Ishizaki relied more on subtle symbolisms and aimed to highlight more abstract spiritual concepts deeply rooted in both Indian and Japanese philosophy. To understand the thematic significance behind

---

[436] Carpenter, 14

Ishizaki's depiction of the Himalayan mountain ranges within the interior space of a Japanese temple, it is necessary to return to the writings of Ishizaki's friend, Takakusu Junjirō.

As discussed above, Takakusu played a crucial role in spreading a romanticized image of India as a culture untainted by modernization and connected to nature and spirituality. While his writings from 1915 helped solidify India's reputation as an idealistic country for Japanese artists, by the 1920s, he increasingly turned his attention to the Himalayan mountains, using them as a symbol to further promote his agenda regarding India's spiritualism. Furthermore, he may have directly passed such teachings to Ishizaki Kōyō, which affected how the artist perceived and interacted with the Himalayas during his time abroad, as proven by a preface that Takakusu dedicated to Ishizaki's 1920 *Record of India Journey.* In his preface, Takakusu underlined the symbolic significance of the land of India and commended Ishizaki's journey across the subcontinent. He began by saying:

> "The Great Snow Mountain [Himalaya] is the spine of all Asia. The center of India's venerations and where ideals of both past and present gather. […]To perfectly understand the ideals of the past, one should not passively investigate. Rather, one should use a proactive method to get to know the ideal India; personally getting in touch with India's great nature."[437]

As Takakusu's preface showed, the Himalayas simultaneously represented a holy landmark and a Pan-Asian symbol. Furthermore, he stressed the importance of physically traveling to the mountains as a necessary step to fully understand Indian philosophy.

It should come as no surprise that Ishizaki agreed with Takakusu's recommendation of hiking up the Himalayan mountains because, as discussed above, he has always been an avid mountain climber. Furthermore, as shown by his poetic description of his hike up Haku

---

[437] Takakusu, in *Indo Kutsuin,* foreword

Mountain back in 1909, Ishizaki had always associated mountain hiking as a spiritual activity.[438] Thus, when Ishizaki described his journey through Darjeeling, West Bengal, at the foot of the Himalayas mountains, Ishizaki once again compared his journey to a divine experience:

> "The spiritual energy of the snowy mountain filled all the valleys, and the feeling of walking into this secluded place that's deeply loved by the mountain gods was like no other feeling as I felt myself concealed within divinity."[439]

Thus, from Ishizaki's quote, we can see how he shared the same sentimentality as Takakusu towards the Himalayan mountains, enthralled with its innate spirituality.

In his other writings following his 1920 preface, Takakusu continuously framed the Himalayas in a Buddhist context, as shown through his quote "India has the tallest mountain in the world, the Himalaya, as its spine, and thus, from therein came the greatest character in the world, Sākyamuni."[440] Continually, his description of the mountains and the sentimentalities they invoked in him revealed several metaphors that were visualized in Ishizaki's screen door painting:

> "[…]the pure white snow mountains are like screen paintings (*Byōbu)* with an expanse of cold in the north direction and on top of this screen-like mountain range is an even higher peak. […] Unlike Mount Fuji, which I immediately found beautiful, the question of whether these snow mountains are beautiful or not never crossed my mind, and I was instead struck by thoughts about eternity when I looked at them; feelings of 'absolute infinity' or 'endlessness' that cannot describe any other place in Japan."[441]

As his description showed, Takakusu made a direct comment on the aesthetic appeal of the Himalayan landscape. He highlighted how its vast expanse of mountains and mists conveyed a

---

438 Ishizaki, *Haru no Yukiyama*

439 Indo Kutsu-in, 20

440 Takakusu*, Nama no Jitsugen toshite no Bukkyō* [Buddhism as the realization of Life], (Daiōkaku, 1924), 41

441 Ibid, 43

sense of endlessness, which made it a suitable subject for Japanese large-format art mediums like folding screens and screen door paintings. Examining Ishizaki's sliding door in context with Takakusu's comment, we can see how the artist implemented the scholars' metaphors of infinity and endless space. For example, the way Ishizaki portrayed the long expanse of Himalayan mountain ranges in the Rainbow Pheasant room aligned with Takakusu's description of immense peaks lying to the north, and his portrayal of them appearing far away played with Takakusus's metaphor of infinite space.

More importantly, Takakusu framed the Himalayas as a spiritual icon and highlighted the mountain's importance in India's religious practices. After commentating on the Himalaya's aesthetic appeal, he stressed the mountain's symbolic role in Indian Buddhism:

> "When Indian people enter contemplative meditation, they strive to comprehend the grand ideals of nature and heaven and earth through the majestic form of the mountain."[442]

As his description showed, not only did Takakusu stress the Himalayas as a spiritual icon, but he also promoted the mountain as a meditative tool in religious practices or spiritual self-reflection.

Examining Ishizaki's *Rainbow Pheasant* in context with Takakusu's writings, the sprawling Himalayan scenery that encircled the room takes on a more engaging role than simply room decoration. Even though Ishizaki's sliding door painting decorated a guest room instead of a prayer room, his elaborate rendition of the mountainous view allowed guests to practice private meditation in their room, confining the expansive spirituality of the Himalayas into an intimate space. This subtle approach is comparable to Nōsu Kōsetsu's mural in India with both artists testing ways to imbue a ritualistic function to their murals. Furthermore, by using the Himalayan

---

[442] Ibid, 43-44

landscape as a means to enhance the meditative experience of guests in the rooms, Ishizaki touches upon Japanese practices of mountain worship, which Koyasan Temple had strong ties to. For example, the temple had a legendary origin story describing how its founder, Kukai, was granted Mount Koya by the mountain's deity to build his temple.[443] Moreover, several other Japanese mountains also garnered reputations as sacred places throughout history. Some Buddhist schools, including the Shingon sect that the Koyasan Temple belongs to, also promoted the practice of mountain hermitism known as *Shūgendō*.[444] Thus, Ishizaki's portrayal of the Himalayan mountains at Koyasan Temple highlighted the shared belief in mountain sacredness between India and Japan, evoking a strong sense of interconnectedness between the two nations.

Finally, this attraction towards India's mountains was not limited to just Ishizaki and Takakusu. For several Japanese artists who visited India, the Himalayan mountains, specifically the town of Darjeeling which lies within it, was a popular destination to visit. Not only did a visit give them a chance to avoid the intense hot climate of India, but many were awed by the mountains' symbolic presence and eagerly used them as art subjects. Examples from previous chapters include Arai Kanpō's *Shiva of the Snow Mountains*, which embodied the artist's fascination with Indian myths surrounding the Himalayas and the mountains' symbolism in Indian culture.[445] As the works of both Arai and Ishizaki revealed, Japanese artists who traveled to India viewed the Himalayas as a spiritual icon, fascinated by the mountain's place in Indian religion. Furthermore, Arai Kanpō shared many of Ishizaki's fantasies towards India's nature, as

---

[443] Miyake Hitoshi, "Japanese Mountain Religion: Shrines, Temples and the Development of Shugendō," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 18, (2009): 76

[444] Ibid, 85-86

[445] See Chapter 2

shown through some of his lesser known works, evincing the widespread effect that the tropical scenery had on Japanese imagination

Ishizaki's Contemporaries: Comparisons with Arai Kanpō's Works

Ishizaki's works highlighted Japanese fantasies about India's nature and the innovative ways artists conflated it with Japan's culture. However, as seen with Imamura Shikō, he was not the only artist to be fascinated with India's nature. Arai Kanpō, despite focusing mainly on Buddhist works, also produced innovative artworks that explored India's tropical scenery through innovative art techniques. Coming from a different artistic background as Ishizaki, Arai's depictions showcased a different approach in expressing the exotic nature of India, more aligned with Imamura's approach.

One exemplary work by Arai Kanpō that captured the Japanese imagination of India's wildlife is the *Summer Breeze* (fig 4.12) . Sharing the same name as Ishizaki's early work from 1912 (fig 4.4), Arai's painting also displayed paralleling subject matters. With its diverse arrangements of peculiar-looking plants, including one with blue leaves, and peacocks camouflaged within the wild vegetation, *Summer Breeze* evoked popular Japanese fantasies of India as a wild country where nature remains untamed.[446] Furthermore, Arai utilized a slightly abstract and geometric style for the plants' depiction to accentuate the whimsical ambiance. For example, he depicted the floral bushes in the paintings as spherical shapes and the trunks of the blue-leafed coconut trees as simple slender forms. The geometric plants came together to create a planar composition, portraying a surreal environment. Through this stylistic choice, deliberately

[446] See Chapter 2

diverging from a realistic portrayal, Arai's depiction evoked the sense of fantasy that Japanese audiences associated with India's tropical environment.

Yet, despite the visual strategies he utilized to construct an exotic foreign scenery, Arai's vibrant display of India's wildlife also hid subtle hints of themes familiar to Japanese audiences. For example, the title of the painting, *Kunpū*, is a traditional Japanese seasonal word (*Kigo)* used to describe early summer that was frequently referenced in poetry and other arts.[447] By pairing a Japanese poetic title with Indian scenery, Arai was able to culturally connect India and Japan. Similar to Yokoyama's *Floating Lanterns,* he enabled Japanese audiences to discover something familiar in the exotic and feel a sense of affectivity in Indian subjects.[448] In Ishizaki Kōyō's *Jakkō*, we can also see this strategic pairing of Japanese themes and Indian scenery through the intentional juxtaposition between the title and depiction, demonstrating the tendency of Japanese artist of making the foreign familiar when tackling Indian sceneries.

In addition to *Summer Breeze,* Arai attempted another depiction of India's nature, which he submitted to the 9th Inten Exhibitions in 1919: a pair of screen paintings titled *Paradise* (fig. 4.13). This coincided with his submission of *Shiva of the Snow Mountains* (fig 2.28), one of his rare non-Buddhist Indian paintings, to the same exhibition, evincing the experimental predilections that defined Arai's works that year.[449] Unfortunately, as with *Shiva of the Snow Mountains*, only monochrome reproductions remained of Arai's screen painting today, although we can speculate that *Paradise* would have featured a color palette close to *Summer Breeze*.

---

[447] The word itself originated from a poem by Tang Dynasty Emperor, Wenzong, and its Chinese characters of *Kunpū* can be translated into "aromatic wind." It was used to denote the winds of early summer that carry the smells of summer plants.

[448] See Chapter 1 for more on Yokoyama's *Floating Lanterns*

[449] See Chapter 2 for more on *Shiva of the Snow Mountains*

Nevertheless, even without colors, reproductions of *Paradise* showcased Arai's interesting stylistic choices in his depiction of India's wildlife. On the right screen, a white peacock with its tails fanned out dominated half of the screen's space, adjacent to an assortment of tropical vegetation perched with other avians (fig 4.12). In contrast, the left screen featured a tidy arrangement of rocks and plants with parrots and other birds nestled within them. Instead of an ostentatious white peacock as a centerpiece, the left screen had a white peacock partially obstructed from view behind a rock and a tree, creating a contrasting juxtaposition to the right screen.

Arai's *Paradise* and Ishizaki's *White Peacock* shared many characteristics with both using white peacocks as their centerpieces, and with Arai's screen painting preceding Ishizaki's work, Ishizaki could have received his inspiration from Arai, though no concrete evidence supports this assertion. However, despite their similarities, a closer examination highlights how Ishizaki's style diverged from Arai's quite drastically. Instead of meticulous details, as seen in Ishizaki's version, Arai's style appeared more simplified and geometric. For example, Arai depicted his white peacock in a symmetrical form with its tail feathers forming a half circle, evincing a geometric style in contrast to Ishizaki's realism. Arai also followed more closely the traditions of Japanese folding screen conventions in the ways he left large areas of empty spaces with sporadic inclusions of objects.

Conclusion

By the time Ishizaki Kōyō passed away in 1947 at the age of sixty-two, he had established himself as the quintessential birds-and-flower artist of Japan's annual government-sponsored exhibitions. Despite this, his experiences with India have remained esoteric to the

general public until recent years, even though Indian sceneries had a crucial influence on his works from the 1910s to the late 1920s. Throughout his career, he utilized innovative ways to combine Japanese techniques with Indian scenery, enhancing the fantastical associations. To capture the intense light and colors of India, Ishizaki utilized conventional styles and techniques associated with Rinpa-style painting to accurately convey the exoticism of India's landscape. In doing so, he followed in the footsteps of previous artists such as Imamura Shikō who also utilized the bright colors and simplified shapes associated with Yamato-e painting to paint the Indian landscape. Through artists such as Imamura and Ishizaki, we see Japanese artists use a different strategy compared to Buddhist artists when it comes to implementing Indian art and culture. Unlike Indian-themed Buddhist art, which challenged conventions with its racial figures with provocative poses, Japanese portrayals of India's nature embraced it with imagination and explored ways to harmonize Japanese styles with exotic scenery.

Despite his fantastical depictions of Indian animals and flowers, however, this does not indicate that Ishizaki's works were devoid of spiritualism. His depiction of Indian nature embodied the writings of Takakusu Junjirō who often romanticized Indian people's proximity to nature as a sign of their religiosity. Furthermore, Ishizaki also made a connection between India's Himalayas to Japan's tradition of mountain worship through his vivid sliding door painting at Koyasan temple, bringing a sense of exotic spiritualism into sacred and private spaces at Japanese temples. This strategy of redefining interior space through the inclusion of imagery or figures that reference India has been explored by past artists such as Nōsu Kōsetsu. However, it will also be explored by future artists to travel to India, who would take the art form of interior space decorations even further.

Chapter 5: Sugimoto Tetsurō and Modern Buddhist Muralism — Ancient Figures and Modern Space

In the last couple of analyses, murals and temple decorations emerged as a common trend in the works of artists who traveled to India. For example, Arai Kanpō intended to restore the ancient murals at Hōryū-Ji before his untimely death and Nōsu created murals for both Mulanghandha Kuti temple in India and Zenkō-ji in Japan. Similarly, Ishizaki Kōyō's *Rainbow Pheasant*, as a screen-door painting, bore a resemblance to mural art in that it decorates the interior of a building. It came as no surprise that the Ajanta Caves played a major role in inspiringthese artists to create murals and temple decorations. As mentioned before, Ajanta garnered widespread attention within Japanese artistic and intellectual circles with notable people such as Okakura promoting the ancient cave paintings as the predecessors to Hōryū-ji's Buddhist murals. The interest that Ajanta garnered for Japanese artists inspired them to create religious murals in Japan, for many of them perceived muralism as a long-lost art form in Japan that they are eager to revive. Like the artists, Buddhist temples across Japan were also attracted to the idea of developing religious murals by hiring Japanese artists returning from India to decorate their interiors, as seen with the previous examples of Zenkō-ji and Koyasan Kongōbu-ji.

However, while Japanese contact with the Ajanta Caves spurred interest in muralism throughout the century, not many considered the nature of the medium itself or questioned the modern potential of the art form. For example, not many artists asked questions about the function of wall paintings, their relationship with modern architecture, and most importantly, the place of religious muralism in a modern secularized society. That is not to say that no Japanese artists explored muralism's format and functionality. For example, Nōsu wrote essays discerning

the differences between Indian and East Asian mural traditions in preparation for his mural. However, his focus was on ancient murals from both cultures and he never had an opportunity to dive deeper into how the artistic characteristics of such murals can rejuvenate modern murals. Thankfully Nōsu's legacy will be taken up by a religious muralist who produced some of the most innovative India-inspired murals during postwar Japan: Sugimoto Tetsurō (1899-1985).

As an artist who largely operated during Japan's postwar period (1945-1989), Sugimoto was considered an eccentric figure who earned many titles and monikers during his lifetime. Despite starting his career as a Nihonga artist, Sugimoto came to condemn the state of Nihonga in postwar Japan (after 1945) and acted as an independent artist with little to no associations with any art groups in Japan. He did not participate in either any of the highly publicized government-sponsored annual exhibitions, except for a single time early in his career. This earned him a reputation as a "heretical" and "solitary" artist who rebelled against the official salons and remained isolated from the trends of Japan's artworks throughout his life.[450] Thanks to his self-isolation, Sugimoto remained relatively unheard of in studies detailing Japan's postwar artistic movements.

Yet, while many regarded him as a heretical artist, Sugimoto also earned himself a reputation as an "artist of religion" (*Shūkyō Gaka)* because of the numerous religious-themed paintings he produced. However, this moniker came not just from the large quantity of religious works he produced. Sugimoto often attracted attention for the unconventional and controversial ways he tackled religious subject matter in art, especially in his depiction of figures and their role

---

[450] Kameda Masao, "Shūkyō-gaka no kyojin, Sugimoto Tetsurō [Giant of Religious Artists, Sugimoto Tetsurō]," *Shūkyō Gaka Sugimoto Tetsurō* [Religion Artist Sugimoto Tetsurō], ed. Rittō Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan, (Shiga: Rittō Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan, 1998), 7

in murals. Like his predecessors who took inspiration from India, Sugimoto took great interest in Indian art's flamboyant and provocative figures and implemented them in his works. However, unlike his predecessors, much of his artworks were monumental murals intended for public viewing, and his audacious display of unconventional figures in such works earned him a lot of attention in Japan's religious circles. In other words, Sugimoto stood out from previous artists who traveled to India as a committed religious muralist.

What makes Sugimoto an attractive artist to study is his dedication to mural art. While previous artists who visited India wrote sparingly on Indian murals, Sugimoto wrote prolifically on them, discerning their stylistic characteristics, comparisons with other Asian murals, differences from Western murals, and their potential to inspire more religious murals in modern Japan. Furthermore, in his examination of ancient Indian murals, Sugimoto also queried about the function of religious murals as public art: discussing the inseparability between religion and murals since antiquity and whether murals depicting religious imagery can maintain their religious functions as venerated images that in an increasingly modern and secularized society, or will they be relegated to wall decorations. This query isn't limited to his writings as he attempted various approaches in creating religious murals for diverse establishments ranging from private residences to modern temples. In these attempts, he implemented what he learned from studying Indian murals in different ways for each work, resulting in his works demonstrating a diverse range of styles and subject matters despite them sharing the same Indian source.

Related to his interest in murals was Sugimoto's attentiveness to the relationship between human figures and mural art, namely the question about appropriate portrayals of human bodies in monumental works intended for public viewing. This attentiveness followed the pattern of

previous Japanese artists who traveled to India, who all demonstrated a fascination with portrayals of the human body in Indian art. Just like his predecessors, Sugimoto drew from the Ajanta caves and Indian sculptures for inspiration, with his figures sharing the same elaborate poses as the multitude of characters depicted in ancient Indian art. However, his figures also reflected inspirations from other South Asian sources and a unique approach in his adaptation. For example, Sugimoto also visited Sigirya in Sri Lanka, an ancient rock fortress that features vibrant painted figures on its rock faces. Displaying divergent figural styles and compositions from the Ajanta Caves, Sigiriya provided Sugimoto with a different South Asian inspirational source.

In his adaptation of both Ajanta and Sigiriya figures, Sugimoto also stood out from his predecessors because of his attentiveness to the nudity of his figures. While previous artists were no strangers to the nudity apparent in Indian art, Sugimoto's deliberate inclusion of nude figures in public religious works earned him some controversies and the artist wrote extensively to defend his decisions. More than just a publicity stunt, Sugimoto's approach towards nudity reflects his studies in India and his considerations of bodies as devotional objects or vessels for religiosity. Unlike previous artists who subtly portrayed nude figures, Sugimoto blatantly displayed large crowds of nude figures in public places and featured both male and female figures. In doing so, he challenged accepted conventions of Buddhist figures as religious objects and developed murals that couldn't be easily labeled as either art or venerable objects. With his experiences studying Indian figural types beyond those from Ajanta and his innovative perspectives toward nudity in religious art, Sugimoto expanded upon the themes that his predecessors adapted from Indian art. Together, with his focus on religious muralism, Sugimoto's

work highlighted the influence that Indian art had on modern Japanese religious muralism. While earlier artists such as Nōsu experimented with incorporating Indian elements into religious murals, it was during Japan's postwar period (after 1945), when Sugimoto was active, that Indian influence on this art genre reached an innovative stage.

In this chapter, I will focus on Sugimoto's works and writings to highlight how India helped inspire Japanese artists to develop modern religious murals in Japan, which is an art medium that remains understudied today. With an examination of his writings on the ancient murals at Ajanta and Sigiriya, I will highlight the specific artistic characteristics of Indian wall paintings that Sugimoto focused on during his visit. This will help us understand some of the idiosyncrasies of Sugimoto's works, for many peculiar features in his murals reflected his studies of Indian murals. Similar to the artists who came before him, Sugimoto was especially attracted to the peculiar ways that ancient Indians portrayed the human body. However, I argue that what sets him apart was his consideration of nudity and its place on monumental religious murals intended for public viewing.

Furthermore, I will also connect Sugimoto to the wider context of modern religious muralism in Japan, which I argue was a burgeoning but overshadowed art movement that heavily revolved around Indian influences. I will compare Sugimoto to contemporaneous Japanese artists who were also hired to create murals to decorate temples and other religious spaces and examine how they took inspiration from India but implemented the influences in a different way from Sugimoto. By connecting Sugimoto to other contemporary muralists who all took inspiration from India, I will highlight how Indo-Japanese interactions helped develop murals in modern Japan. In doing so, I hope that this chapter can provide a foundation to explore modern Japanese

muralism, which I argue is an understudied but crucial topic in Japanese art history. With itinerant Japanese artists such as Sugimoto using them to explore what they learned abroad, modern religious murals in Japan serve as an important platform, both literally and conceptually, to explore Japan's artistic interactions with other Asian cultures.

Japan's Reception to Murals: A "West vs East" Dichotomy

By the time Sugimoto began his artistic career, the art genre of muralism had already gained some prominence in the Japanese art scene with considerable popularity among Japanese Western-style (yoga) artists. Moreover, well-educated Japanese individuals frequenting art exhibitions also possessed fundamental knowledge of the art form. Yet, as curator and art historian Kuraya Mika highlighted in her essay *Murals and Tableau: 1900-1940 era*, muralism in Japan eluded simple categorization, compounded by various factors such as the distinction between Asian and Western artistic definitions and changing perspectives toward the relationship between artworks and the space they occupied. While common definitions of murals encompassed any type of large-scale art applied directly onto the surface of a wall or ceiling surface, Japanese definitions of muralism, in both form and style, underwent multiple revisions, reflected in the complex nomenclature that Japanese artists and scholars developed.

In regards to ancient murals from Asian traditions, the topic of religious murals and monumental temple art gained prominence in Japan thanks to the attention that both the Ajanta caves and the Hōryū-ji temple garnered. However, discussions of muralism as modern art took place primarily in the realm of Western-style paintings in Japan. As Japan entered the twentieth century, many young Japanese painters traveled abroad to Europe to learn Western art and brought back categorical nomenclatures to describe diverse art forms. This included the

introduction of the binary opposition between the two categories of "tableaus" and "murals" according to French artistic standards. First, "tableaus" referred to a diverse range of portable paintings displayed in picture frames, adorning the walls and other surface areas that displayed them but fundamentally disconnected from architectural structures. In contrast, most definitions of "murals" revolved around immovable artworks permanently fixed onto the surface of walls and inseparable from the architecture that held them.[451] In 1916, the influential Yoga artist Wada Eisaku (1874-1959), who spent many years studying Western painting in France, published his essay *Wall Decorations* (*Hekimen Sōshuku*), which firmly established the fundamental differences between tableau and murals, not just in their physical forms but also their styles.

In his essay, Wada emphasized that because tableaus were confined within the space within the picture frame, their stylistic strength lay in their realistic depictions, allowing viewers to experience a separate world from their physical space within the boundaries provided by the frame. In contrast, murals with realistic scenic depictions could potentially create dissonance with the physical space they occupy, and thus, Wada argued that mural art should embrace more decorative rather than realistic styles.[452] Moreover, Wada used the works of prominent 19th-century French muralist Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898) as foundational models for mural styles. Some unique characteristics of Chavannes' murals that Wada highlighted include the French artist's use of light colors over heavy shading, flat backgrounds, and depictions of

---

[451] Kuraya Mika, "Hekiga to taburo: 1900-1940 nendai" [Murals and Tableau: 1900-1940 era], in *Bijutsu o sasaerumono,* ed. Kinoshita Naoyuki, Koza nihon bijutsushi, vol.6 (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2005), 111-112

[452] Wada Eisaku, "Hekimen Sōshuku [Wall Decorations]," *Chū-ō Bijutsu* 2, no. 5, (Chū-ō Bijutsu-sha, May 1916): 109-110

detailed individual figures rather than crowds of people in the composition.[453] Wada's essay reflected the far-reaching impact that Chavannes had on Japanese perspectives on modern muralism, evidenced by the common usage of "Chavannes-style" (*shavannu-fū)* in descriptions of murals and other large-scale artworks during the early half of the twentieth century.[454]

While Japan's exposure to Western artistic categories and Chavannes during the 1900s and 1910s solidified their understanding of modern muralism, developments during the 1920s challenged the tableaus-murals division and encouraged new interpretations regarding murals. One contributing factor included the establishment of permanent exhibition spaces and galleries to display art in Japan, which encouraged artists to consider the enduring presence of murals within such structures, aligning them with the function and theme of the building's interior space.[455] Such considerations also extended to "tableau" works with artists creating large-sized framed paintings that took into consideration the permanent spaces they intended to display such paintings, making such paintings integral to the architectural space that held them. Described by some audiences as "mural-style tableaus," such framed paintings challenged previously established boundaries between tableaus and murals.[456] With the developments during the 1920s, Japanese definitions for murals expanded beyond artworks applied on wall surfaces to encompass large-scale works intended for public viewing.

However, by the 1930s, Japanese art critics and historians also learned about contemporary modern muralist movements happening outside of Asia, and popular art magazines

---

[453] Kuraya, 116

[454] Ibid, 117

[455] Ibid, 123-124

[456] Ibid, 127

in Japan provided both artists and scholars with reports on the international muralist movement spreading across North America.[457] For example, in 1934, *Chū-ō Bijutsu* magazine published a translation of *Regarding Murals and Architecture* by world-renowned Mexican muralist Diego Rivera. Similarly, journals such as Atelier and Mizuru published the articles *Modern Murals Special Edition* (*Gendai Hekiga Tokushū)* and *Muralism Research (Hekiga Kenkyū)* respectively in 1936. The attention generated by the spread of muralism across the Western Hemisphere also stimulated some Japanese Western-style artists to take on the art form and declare themselves muralists. Some of the most enthusiastic Japanese muralists included Inoue Sankō, and Tsuruta Gorō, who formed the Japanese Muralist Group (*Nihon Hekiga-kai*) in 1935.[458]

In 1936, through a published interview in the art magazine *Bijutsu*, members of the Japanese muralist groups discussed several of the idiosyncrasies of muralism as an art form and its modern potential, presenting us with an interesting insight into Japanese perspectives toward muralism. In the interview, the members underscored the importance of harmonizing murals with the architecture that contains them in regards to form and function and also emphasized the nature of murals as public-oriented art that should reflect societal (*shakaiteki)* issues. Furthermore, some of the members talked about the place of muralism within the larger context of the "so-called analytical pursuit and development of modern paintings."[459] This evinced how the Japanese Muralist Group considered muralism as a contemporary art form, aligned with avant-garde pursuits; concerned with modern innovations and challenging conventions. However, members of the group also recognized the importance of learning from archaic forms

---

[457] Ibid, 127-128

[458] Ibid, 128

[459] "Hekiga ni tsuite [Regarding Murals]," *Bijutsu* 11, no. 6, (Bijutsu Hakkōjo, June 1936): 103-104

of muralism, such as ancient wall paintings. One member described that among avant-garde muralists, some "sought innovation within the old, and when it comes to murals, religious elements inevitably entered [the conversations]."[460] As this statement showed, Japanese muralists, even those who worked primarily in Western art, believed that the art form began as religious art in the past and themes of religiosity remained pertinent in modern practices of muralism.

As the above examples showed, muralism as a modern art form underwent several interpretations and definitions, beginning with artistic definitions according to French standards to contemporary discussions on the relationship between art, space, and societal values. However, such discussions primarily revolved around Western-style murals, especially contemporary international muralism that spread from the West to Japan. In contrast, discussions regarding the topic of oriental murals, whether from Indian or East Asian traditions, rarely did scholars consider muralism as modern art. For many scholars and artists outside the realm of Western art, the terminology of "oriental murals" (*tōyō hekiga*) invoked mental images of the ancient cave paintings from Ajanta and similar archaeological sites in China, or archaic wall paintings located at various Buddhist temples across Japan. Discourses surrounding the connection between Ajanta and Hōryū-ji dominated conversations on oriental muralism, as shown in the writings of individuals such as Taki Seiichi and Nōsu Kōsetsu. However, one of the most comprehensive publications on the subject of oriental murals was the 1944 book *Research on Japanese Murals* by the art historian Tanaka Shigehisa (1905-1979).[461] It consisted of a large

---

[460] Ibid, 104

[461] Tanaka Shigehisa, *Nihon Hekiga no Kenkyū* [Research on Japanese Murals], Tōka-sha Shobō, 1944.

compilation of murals and other interior decorations located within Buddhist temples across Japan, ranging from the 7th century to the 18th century.

Tanaka's book also included a preface by the famous architect and architectural historian Itō Chūta (1867-1954), who underscored the importance of mural research in Japan. In his preface, Itō highlighted the fragility of ancient murals throughout Japan and emphasized a need to study them before they succumbed to time and natural elements. He also drew attention to the uniqueness of murals as an art form that must coordinate with architectural features and, in the case of religious murals, align themselves to symbolic spatial placements to perform ritualistic functions. Itō ended his preface by commending the efforts of Tanaka and other contemporary art historians in their effort to record and study murals and suggested increased studies of ancient murals in other Asian countries to create a more comprehensive examination of shared oriental artistic practices.[462] With his preface, Itō reflected Japan's increased attention towards its multiple temple mural heritage other than Hōryū-ji. Many factors potentially drove Japanese scholars to intensify their studies of oriental murals, including a potential sense of cultural imperialism and the effects of war, given that Tanaka's book was published near the end of the Pacific War in 1944.[463] Due to the effects of war, Japanese scholars discovered an urgency to record and preserve its Buddhist temple heritages and discover its shared cultural practices with other Asian countries to justify its imperial ambitions to unite Asia under Japan's leadership.

Other than Tanaka's publications, the topic of oriental murals appeared in other writings from the time. For example, Kawaji Ryūko dedicated a section of his 1943 book *The Archetype*

---

[462] Itō Chūta, "Jo [Preface]," in *Nihon Hekiga no Kenkyū*

[463] The "Pacific War" refers to the East Asian theatre of the Second World War where Japan entered conflict with several Asian nations due to its imperial ambitions.

of Beauty (Bi no Tenkei) to the topic of Oriental murals, titled *Oriental Murals and their Technique.* In his section, Kawaji began by firmly establishing the crucial contribution that religion had to the birth of ancient murals in Asia. He described how ancient wall paintings developed out of the ritualistic practices of ancient people in all Asian cultures and evolved in both style and theme throughout history to suit public needs. Moreover, he suggested the potential of reviving such ancient practices in the modern age with murals decorating public spaces such as libraries or music halls, demonstrating a rare occasion of a Japanese scholar considering the modern potential of oriental murals.[464] Kawaji also underscored fundamental differences between Western and Oriental murals, highlighting how their materiality affected their style and historical development.

For example, Kawaji claimed that the majority of Western murals fall into the category of "frescoes," a type of wall painting where artists apply pigments onto wet plaster before it dries, which allows the mural to last longer with its pigments merged into the wall. However, the fresco technique leaves little room for corrections after the plaster dries, which places considerable constraints on the artist.[465] In contrast, Kawaji argued, oriental murals consisted of pigments applied directly onto the dry surface of walls, which allowed more artistic freedom at the cost of diminished durability. In his comparison, he used the Ajanta as an exemplar of the creative liberties seen in oriental murals, highlighting its vivid use of colors and bold use of lines like many other Japanese scholars. However, Kawaji also drew attention to another major South

---

[464] Kawaji, *Bi no Tenkei* [The Archetype of Beauty], (Dantaitō, 1943), 16-18

[465] Kawaji, 21

Asian mural: the murals of Sigiriya, located in Sri Lanka.[466] As Kawaji described, Sigiriya was an ancient stone fortress dating back to the fifth century, well known for its colorful archaic murals featuring elaborate figures comparable to those from Ajanta. Kawaji argued that similar to Ajanta, the Sigiriya murals displayed techniques idiosyncratic to oriental muralism, such as the use of shading to provide more volume to the human body and highlighting folds in clothing.[467]

As the publications from art historians such as Tanaka and Kawaji demonstrated, research on oriental murals during the 1940s followed similar patterns and mindsets. Japanese scholars focused on historical temple murals located throughout Japan and other Asian cultures and examined how their style and materiality reflected traditional artistic practices shared between Japan and other Asian cultures. They also emphasized the close connection between muralism and religiosity, underscoring the importance of wall paintings in fulfilling ritualistic functions or spreading spiritual messages in ancient times. By highlighting the religiosity and artistic conventions shared between ancient murals across Asia, the research by these scholars embodied subtle Pan-Asian agendas by underscoring the cultural heritages shared between Asian cultures, illuminating the robust spiritual and artistic traditions that united them together in the face of Western cultural hegemony.

However, this also created an overemphasis on oriental murals as ancient art forms with little discussion regarding their modern relevance, which diverged strongly from the visions of Japanese Western-style artists such as the Japanese Muralist Group. Except for a brief comment

---

[466] Today, Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) is a separate country from India. However, its artistic traditions shared the same lineage as some of India's artistic traditions. At the time of Kawaji's writing, it was part of Great Britain's South Asian colonies and perceived as an extended part of India due to historical and cultural connections

[467] Ibid, 25-26

from Kawaji Ryūko, very few writings on oriental murals critically analyzed the art form to discern its artistic value in the modern art scene or its relationship to modern Asian societies. The predilection to examine oriental murals solely through historical or archaeological lenses contrasted with the manifesto put forth by the Japanese Muralist Groups who enthusiastically explored muralism as avant-garde art, following in the footsteps of the international muralist movement spreading across North America. Even though most Japanese artists admired the artistic traditions and religiosity innate in ancient murals across Asia from the Ajanta Caves and Sigiriya to Hōryū-ji, few artists attempted to repurpose the styles and themes seen on ancient murals to contemporary murals to create what some would define as a "modern mural" in lieu with Asian artistic conventions. Thus, it was in such a context that the artist Sugimoto Tetsurō initiated his solitary artistic career, which he dedicated to studying muralism and religious art, setting him on a path to travel to India and Sri Lanka to study their ancient arts. Even though some of his predecessors like Nōsu Kōsetsu have utilized Indian styles to create murals before, Sugimoto stood out from other nihonga artists who have traveled to India for his commitment to muralism and his dedication to "modernizing" the themes and styles of Indian murals to create avant-garde artworks fitting for the Japanese contemporary art scene.

Sugimoto's early life and theories on muralism — dissatisfaction with Nihonga and solitary career

Sugimoto Tetsurō was born in Otsu City, Shiga Prefecture in 1899. At the age of 14, he entered the Kyoto City School of Arts and Crafts and, he began studying art under esteemed Nihonga artist Yamamoto Shunkyo (1871 - 1933). However, a rift quickly formed between Sugimoto and his teacher as the young artist's affinity for a more liberal approach towards

Nihonga clashed strongly with Yamamoto's conservatism. Sugimoto's training under Yamamoto coincided with the period of transformation happening within Kyoto's Nihonga art scene in 1918, culminating with the creation of the National Painting Creation Association (*Kokuga Sōsaku Kyōkai*). Young artists such as Murakami Kagaku, Tsuchida Bakusen, and many others rallied for experimental Nihonga paintings uninhibited by conventions and spurred by liberalism and creativity, and Sugimoto fervently supported such ideals much to his mentor's disapproval.[468] Inspired by the National Painting Creation Association, Sugimoto created a similar short-lived group named the White Light Association (*Hakkosha)* among Yamamoto's other students, focused on exploring non-conventional and experimental approaches to nihonga painting; an action that further undermined the relationships between Sugimoto and Yamamoto.

Despite his mentor's censure of his unorthodox attitude to Japanese style painting, Sugimoto had a successful start to his career with a breakthrough in 1922, when one of his works (currently missing) was accepted for the 4th annual Teiten exhibitions.[469] Yet, despite this early success, Sugimoto came to criticize the artistic predilections and commercialized nature of the Teiten exhibitions. As reflected in some personal essays he wrote and published later in life, Sugimoto censured the annual government-sponsored exhibitions for its grasp on the art world, acting as the sole authority dictating an artwork's worth or an artist's fame. He also denounced the exhibition for judging artworks based on their potential monetary value rather than their artistic worth.[470] Sugimoto argued that the monopoly that the Teiten held over the art world could

---

[468] Kameda, 9

[469] See Chapter 4 for more information on the Teiten exhibitions

[470] Sugimoto Tetsurō, "Tei-in mondai to gadan [The Teiten issue and the art world]," in *Sugimoto Tetsurō shūkyō gashū* [Sugimoto Tetsurō Religious Art Collection], ed. Sugimoto Tetsurō, (Kyoto: Ranshobō, 1949), 51-52 (originally written 1936, reprint 1949)

perpetuate deleterious practices where artists produced artworks not out of personal passion or creativity but to simply satisfy mass audiences with tawdry soulless works. As he described in his essay, Sugimoto firmly asserted rather than dedicating their works and life to official exhibitions, true artists should live an independent life, and only in such environments can "absolute freedom and originality" emerge.[471] As his strong statements showed, Sugimoto strongly upholds the values of creative liberty and independence in art. He condemned the stagnation of nihonga and called for artists to innovate and experiment. Because of his negative experience with the Teiten, Sugimoto never exhibited his works at government-sponsored exhibitions again. More importantly, in 1923, at the age of 25, Sugimoto made the momentous decision to cut off ties with his mentor, Yamamoto Shunkyo, setting off his solitary artistic career in pursuit of what he deemed as "true art" and "true nihonga."[472]

Interestingly, as his first action after initiating his solitary path, Sugimoto decided to travel abroad to archaeological sites in Manchuria and Korea. While Sugimoto left little records of his time abroad, his visit to ancient sites contributed crucially to his decision to fully transition into a self-proclaimed "religion artist."[473] Convinced that the root of Japanese painting lay in ancient Buddhist art across Asia, Sugimoto believed that by focusing his attention on ancient religious art, he could get in touch with artistic elements that modern nihonga paintings lack. Moreover, his trip to ancient sites abroad may have also marked his first encounter with Asian murals, which would heavily motivate him to pursue muralism as his primary specialty. In some

---

[471] Ibid, 53

[472] Kameda 9

[473] Sakakuchi Yasuaki, "Sugimoto Tetsurō no shōgai to gagyō [Sugimoto Tetsurō — life and career]," in *Sugimoto Tetsurō — Nagahama Yukari no idai na geijutsuka* [Sugimoto Testsurō — the great artist connected to Nagahama], ed. Nagahama Castle Historical Museum, (Shiga:Nagahama Castle Historical Museum, 2022), 5

way, Sugimoto's travel abroad demonstrated the effects that scholarships on oriental muralism had on artists at the time, as many became motivated to visit ancient sites across Asia to examine the root of Asian art.

Yet, while his travel abroad highlighted Sugimoto's commitment to oriental artistic traditions, he maintained an open mind for the potential that Western art may bring in terms of innovation. Soon after he began his solitary career, he began studying under Western-styled artist Takeshirō Kanokogi (1874-1941), who was trained in French historical paintings and muralism.[474] Under Takeshirō's guidance, Sugimoto learned the fundamentals of Western muralism, which further enhanced his experience as a dedicated muralist in addition to his studies of ancient oriental murals. Sugimoto's exposure to Western art techniques under Takeshirō not only allowed him to mix both Japanese and Western styles in his future works but also helped the young artist develop an appreciation for anatomical realism. For example, Sugimoto would spend time at Osaka's Medical University (now Osaka Medical and Pharmaceutical University) studying dissected cadavers to examine how to accurately depict human bodies with anatomical precision.[475] With his training under Tankeshirō, Sugimoto demonstrated his unorthodox approaches as he explored the potential of Western art to invigorate nihonga painting with new techniques and themes.

From his studies of both oriental and Western muralism and their associated techniques, Sugimoto evinced his dedication to establish himself as a skilled muralist after leaving the exhibition scene. In 1936, he put his new training to the test with his first major work after

---

[474] Kameda, 10

[475] Ibid.

leaving his mentor, *Woodcutters* (fig 5.1). Since Sugimoto rejected government exhibitions, he displayed his work at the seventh Blue Dragon exhibition (*Seiryū-ten*), an annual nihonga exhibition organized by the committee of the same name created by the artist Kawabata Ryūshi (1885-1966).[476] Similar to Sugimoto, Kawabata was a nonconformist artist who left the annual Inten exhibitions and created his art circle, the Blue Dragon committee (*Seiryū-sha*), that welcomed highly experimental approaches to Japanese painting.[477] Thus, Sugimoto participation in the exhibition highlighted his affinity with like-minded nonconformist artists.

With a size of eight feet by thirteen feet, the large size of the work drew much attention at the exhibition and underscored Sugimoto's transition to painting large-scale works intended for public audiences.[478] Even though only monochromatic reproductions of *Woodcutter* remain today, we can see Sugimoto's adroitness with Western art techniques displayed through his portrayal of the titular figures with their well-defined musculature. Viewers at the exhibition did not overlook the artist's combination of Western and Japanese elements, with some describing it as a "natural blend of Japanese traditional techniques and Western muralism."[479] Other reports on the exhibition echoed similar perspectives, describing Sugimoto's work as a "piece painted with Japanese mineral pigments but used rigid contours that brought to mind 15th century Italian murals" and contextualizing it among contemporary trends of nihonga artists radically challenging Japanese conventions and implementing highly unorthodox approaches in their

---

476 *Shūkyō Gaka Sugimoto Tetsurō*, ed. Rittō Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan, 65

477 For more information on Kawabata Ryūshi and the Blue Dragon committee (*Seiryū-sha*), please consult *Nihonga: Transcending the Past: Japanese-Style Painting* by Ellen P. Conant, J. Thomas Rimer, and Steven D. Owyoung

478 *Nihon bijutsu nenkan shōwa jūichi-nen ban* [Japanese Art Annual, Shōwa 11 year edition], edited by Bijutsu Kenkyū-sho [Art Research Institute], (Tokyo: Bijutsu Kenkyū-sho, 1936), 41

479 Kameda, 10

works.[480] Most tellingly, one review by Western-style artist Nakagawa Kigen (1892-1972) highlighted how Sugimoto's composition for this work followed Chavannes' model.[481] Examining the reproduction of Sugimoto's work, we can discern some characteristics of Chavannes' mural style. Even though Sugimoto implemented anatomical realism in how he painted the figures' bodies, he displayed the figures side-by-side amidst a partially flat background, inhibiting the impression of depth. Thus, with his first large-scale work, Sugimoto demonstrated his knowledge of the common mural model widespread among Japanese western-styled artists, which he likely learned under Takeshirō.

Yet, while Sugimoto's *Woodcutter* demonstrated his adherence to Chavannes' mural style early in his career, the artist expressed his radical approaches by boldly displaying his figures in the nude. Among the five figures shown in his work, Sugimoto painted two men completely in the nude while clothing the other three figures in nothing but white loincloths, drawing attention to their toned muscles that demonstrated Sugimoto's anatomically realistic figural style. As expressed in essays and other writings he wrote shortly after embarking on his solitary path, Sugimoto staunchly supported the inclusion of nudity in painting and viewed it as an appropriate rebellion against Nihonga's conservative dogmatism. For example, in his self-published book *Sugimoto Tetsurō's Collection of Artworks and Art Theories: Nihonga* (*Sugimoto Tetsurō Gashū Oyobi Garon: Nihonga*), Sugimoto lamented the stagnation of Japanese painting throughout the ages, highlighting its "incapability to depict the beauty of human bodies."[482] Even though

---

480 *Nihon bijutsu nenkan,* 7

481 Nakagawa Kigen, "*Seiryū-ten Suken* [Inspection of the Blue Dragon Exhibition]," *Bijutsu* 10, no. 10, (Tokyo: Bijutsu hakō-sho, 1935): 10

482 Sugimoto, *Sugimoto Tetsurō Gashū oyobi Garon: Nihonga* [Sugimoto Tetsurō's Collection of artworks and Art Theories: Nihonga], (Tokyo: Atolia-sha, 1933), 4-5

Sugimoto admitted that nudity appeared in some conventional Japanese arts, such as woodblock prints and archaic Buddhist art, he argued that their portrayal remained subtle and reserved for private viewings compared to Western art's audacious display of human bodies to a wider populace. Sugimoto argued that even with the introduction of Western art and changes to society's aesthetic tastes, Japanese paintings refused to develop accordingly, limiting any opportunities for innovation or artistic liberty. From his early writing, Sugimoto revealed his interest in nudity in art and his belief in its ability to challenge the conservatism in Japanese painting. His inclusion of nude figures in *Woodcutter* represented his first venture in boldly displaying such themes to a wider public.

With his combination of Chavannes' mural composition and nudity, Sugimoto's work evinced the artist's attempt at creating his own mural style, simultaneously following certain conventions while breaking others. Apart from nudity, Sugimoto included another subtle element in his work which he argued was crucial to all muralism: religiosity. In a description of his work that he provided late in life, Sugimoto claimed that he diversified the ages of the figures in *Woodcutter,* ranging from young men to the elderly, to symbolize the natural progression of life. Moreover, Sugimoto highlighted how the elderly figure resting on the tree stump sat as if in prayer, showing his devotional gratitude at the end of a hard day's toil, simultaneously symbolizing his prayers at the end of his life.[483] In an essay that he wrote the same year he created his work, titled *Mural Authenticity Theory (Hekiga Honkaku-ron)*, Sugimoto examined the history of murals in both Asian and Western cultures. Similar to his contemporaries such as the Japanese Muralist Group and scholars who examined oriental murals, Sugimoto underscored

---

[483] *Sugimoto Tetsurō shūkyō gashū*, 14

how muralism originated as a religious and ceremonial art form in both Eastern and Western art history, stressing its importance as a foundation for both cultures' art. However, he went further to suggest how muralism also acted as a foundation for modern art, stating how the art form's connection to religiosity evinced muralism's "fulfillment of societal functions." This, Sugimoto argues, made muralism similar to modern art because of its affinity to more profound and universal values rather than simply serving a decorative purpose.[484]

More importantly, in his essay, Sugimoto argued for the need to study ancient murals to create what he deemed as "genuine" (*honkaku-teki*) murals: long-lasting artworks that embodied universal timeless values, contributing to the general public. In his words, Sugimoto described that good artworks should possess both "spiritual" and "materialistic" permanence, with spiritual permanence referring to the eternal and significant value expressed in the artwork's subject matter.[485] Following his description of an artwork's spiritual and physical permanence, Sugimoto highlighted how authentic muralism represented the pinnacle of both types as artworks meant to endure for long periods and convey timeless messages. Furthermore, Sugimoto framed religiosity as the ideal universal value that murals should convey in modern society, establishing his primary motivation to become a religious muralist.[486]

Analyzing *Woodcutter* in tandem with Sugimoto's essay on muralism written the same year, we can perceive how the work represented Sugimoto's crucial first step as a muralist. Even though Sugimoto produced a framed painting, he included several characteristics of muralism,

---

[484] Sugimoto, "*Hekiga honkaku-ron* [Mural Authenticity Theory]," in *Sugimoto Tetsurō shūkyō gashū*, 39, (originally written on November 3rd, 1936, reprint 1949)

[485] Ibid, 41-42

[486] Ibid, 43

both from his training in Western painting and his own interpretations of the art form. With its realistic depiction of, unique compositions, and implementation of nudity and subtle spiritual message, Sugimoto's work fully demonstrated his independent style after cutting off his ties with government exhibitions and his mentor. As he continued down his solitary path, Sugimoto would go on to produce more innovative murals that shared some similarities with *Woodcutter* while also strongly diverging from it, demonstrating the artist's evolution as a muralist. Analyzing Sugimoto's later works, we see how Sugimoto transitioned from depicting subtle religious messages to fully realized religious works with blatant oriental iconographies and styles, strongly diverging from the western-styled *Woodcutter*. This stylistic and thematic transition came as a result of a major episode in Sugimoto's life: his travels to India.

Sugimoto's Travel to India and Sri Lanka, 1937

In his discussions on ancient murals, Sugimoto demonstrated his awareness of the importance of ancient Indian murals such as Ajanta and Sigiriya, shown through his mention of both murals in *Mural Authenticity Theory.* Outside of his independent research at the time he began his solitary career, Sugimoto also encountered several individuals who contributed greatly to igniting his interest in India, ultimately motivating him to travel abroad for a detailed study. Around the same time that Sugimoto created *Woodcutter*, he became acquainted with Japan's most respected researchers in oriental and archaic arts: art historian Sawamura Sentarō, Takakusu Junjirō, and Buddhism historian Matsumoto Bunzaburō. As established in previous chapters, all three scholars made significant contributions to oriental and Buddhist studies in Japan during their lifetime and also publicized the significance of India and the Ajanta caves in the development of Asian art and philosophy. Understanding the young artist's quandary on studying

the true essence of Japanese art, Takakusu and Matsumoto both encouraged the young artist to study Buddhist painting in India, which they argue is the root of all Japanese painting.[487] Inspired by both scholars' words, Sugimoto became determined to travel to India to study the Ajanta murals and make reproductions of the ancient paintings like many who came before him. He began to make preparations for his travels and dedicate himself to the studies of Buddhist art. In the months leading up to his travel abroad, he consulted with other Buddhist art scholars and former artists who had traveled to India, such as Ono Gemyo (1883–1939) and Arai Kanpō. He also secured support from the chairman of the Japan-India Association and received financial support from Japan's Department of Cultural Affairs. Acquiring sufficient knowledge and support from various sources, Sugimoto finally departed Japan for India in 1937 at the age of 38, arriving in Mumbai in November.[488]

Yet, despite his preparations, Sugimoto's solitary attitude created some issues for him overseas. Unlike Arai Kanpō or Nōsu Kōsetsu, who had the liberty to fully reproduce the murals at Ajanta under a major project sponsored by the major Japanese art periodical *Kokka*, Sugimoto traveled to India alone as an independent artist. Thus, he encountered difficulties trying to obtain permission to create reproductions at Ajanta. At the time of Sugimoto's visit, the caves were under the jurisdiction of both the state of Hyderabad and the Archaeological Survey of India, and Sugimoto found himself needing to acquire permission from both entities.[489] As he described in his later recollection, authorities initially only allowed Sugimoto to reproduce one single subject from the caves, but through his thorough negotiation, he eventually obtained permission from the

---

[487] Kameda, 11

[488] Rittō Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan, 65

[489] *Sugimoto Tetsurō shūkyō gashū*, 137

authorities at Hyderabad to reproduce "one pose" from the caves.[490] Because of the limitations placed upon him, Sugimoto applied creative interpretations of the vague phrase "one pose" to allow himself more reproductions from Ajanta. In the end, Sugimoto settled on three primary scenes from the ancient murals.

The first, and most crucial, was a reproduction of the prominent figure of *Padmapani* (fig 5.2) from Ajanta's Cave 1. As established in previous chapters, Padmapani showcased the most visual similarities with a similar figure from Hōryū-ji, making it arguably the most attractive Ajanta figure for Japanese artists.[491] Thus, Sugimoto's decision to reproduce Padmapani came as no surprise. In addition to Padmapani, Sugimoto also created reproductions of a pair of lover figures located directly to the left of Padmapani, which Sugimoto labeled as *The Lovers* (fig 5.3) in his writings. Because of its proximity to Padmapani, Sugimoto possibly included the depiction within his reproduction of Padmapani to remain within the "one pose" rule he was given. For his last figure, Sugimoto selected a singular figure from Cave 17 depicted on a pillar, which he labeled as *Bodhisattva with a lotus* (fig 5.4). Even though it pales in notoriety compared to Padmapani and other imageries, the figure possessed many of the idiosyncratic traits emblematic of Ajanta Buddhist figures, such as its tribhanga pose and half-opened eyes. Given the figure's similar posture to the Padmapani figure, we can speculate that Sugimoto took advantage of the vagueness of the limitations placed on him, the instruction of "one pose," and included this figure among his reproductions. Sugimoto spent some months working at Ajanta where, besides creating his reproductions, he spent considerable effort examining the murals. Afterward, he set

---

[490] Sugimoto, *Indo kodai hekiga wo saguru* [In search of ancient Indian murals], (Kyoto: Ritsumeikan Shuppan-sha, 1940), 85-86

[491] See Chapter 1

off for Sri Lanka in 1938 after receiving permission to reproduce the Sigiriya rock murals through the help of the Japanese Association in India.[492] Unlike Ajanta, Sugimoto faced fewer obstacles in Sri Lanka with the freedom to fully copy the murals at Sigiriya. As he described and sketched in his account, Sigiriya the murals at Sigirya took the form of a long stretch of open-aired rock face located on the side of a cliff depicting several female figures (fig 5.5). In his research, Sugimoto divided the long stretch into two separate sections that he labeled "A" and "B" respectively, based on a rock protrusion that bisected the mural in the middle.[493] Because of its less complex composition, Sugimoto paid more attention to the unique features of the figures at Sigiriya.

After finishing his research and reproductions at Sigiriya, Sugimoto held a short exhibition displaying his copies from both Ajanta and Sigiriya in Mumbai and even widely broadcasted his findings by radio across India, Japan, and even London.[494] While few records remained of Sugimoto's exhibitions in India and broadcasts, such events demonstrated the artist's enthusiasm for sharing his knowledge with a wider public. Admittedly, from his arrival in Mumbai to his return back to Japan, Sugimoto spent less than a year in India for his research, and it was far from his only time abroad. For example, after just two years after returning to Japan, he joined a team of archaeologists to study more murals in Inner Mongolia and China in 1940. In 1943, he also led the *Southern Buddhism Investigation Team (Nanpō bijutsu chōsa-tai)*, sponsored by Japan's Higashi Honganji Temple on a research tour of various ancient sites across

---

[492] Rittō Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan, 65

[493] Sugimoto, *Indo kodai hekiga no kenkyū* [Research of ancient Indian murals], (Kyoto: Ritsumeikan Shuppan-sha, 1943), 77-78.

[494] Rittō Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan, 65

Southeast Asia, most notably Angkor Wat in Cambodia.[495] In the years following his first trip to India, Sugimoto became an avid world traveler. He returned to India during the 1950s to serve as an art teacher at Santiniketan University and also created some murals and artworks while abroad.[496] He also traveled to a wide variety of locations around the world throughout his life, including Hawaii, Brazil, the Middle East, Europe, and the United States, where he displayed his art and also studied artistic traditions from other cultures.[497] All these experiences highlighted Sugimoto's interest in art traditions from around the world in his pursuit of the true essence of art.

Yet, despite Sugimoto's multiple trips around the world, his initial trip to India in 1938 remained his most formative time abroad where his detailed studies of ancient Indian and Sri Lankan murals prominently solidified his style for the rest of his career. Sugimoto highlighted the significance of his first trip to India through two publications following his return to Japan. In 1940, he published *In Search of Ancient Indian Murals (Indo Kodai Hekiga wo sagaru),* which detailed his experiences in India and Sri Lanka in the form of a travel diary. Three years later, he published a more empirical book titled *Research on Ancient Indian Murals (Indo Kodai Hekiga no Kenkyū)*, which presented his detailed observations on the murals of Ajanta and Sigiriya, highlighting their idiosyncratic styles and mural compositions. As these two publications showed, Sugimoto's first trip to India provided the artist with crucial research on ancient murals, which provided him with many inspirations for his murals in the future.

Sugimoto's Research Findings — Mural and figural types

---

[495] Sakakuchi, 6

[496] Rittō Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan, 65

[497] Sakakuchi, 6

In *Research on Ancient Indian Murals*, Sugimoto divided the murals at Ajanta into three main groups: narrative, portraiture, and decorative murals.[498] By "narrative murals," which Sugimoto declared as the most prominent category at Ajanta, Sugimoto described them as imageries that took up large portions of the walls' surfaces and depicted significant stories or historical events. To Sugimoto, the artistic strength of narrative murals lay in their depictions of multiple figures simultaneously, interacting with each other and expressing through their body language to convey the narrative. He also commended the sentimentality embodied through the face and poses, observing depictions of happiness, anger, and sadness on the ancient walls.[499] Moreover, in an observation that paralleled Nōsu Kōsetsu's analysis from many years ago, Sugimoto highlighted the fluidity between different narrative scenes on the Ajanta murals.[500] Using the image of Padmapani (fig 5.2) as an example, Sugimoto underscored how different scenes and figures surrounded the central figure without any clear boundaries.[501] Even though Sugimoto established Padmapani as one of the largest depicted figures at the Ajanta caves, he classified it as a special image that can be classified as both a portraiture and a narrative mural because of the lack of boundaries between the central figure and the depicted narratives surrounding it, giving the Bodhisattva a presence in the depicted stories. Most importantly, Sugimoto also characterized narrative murals according to their use of symbolic iconographies that express specific ideologies.[502]

---

[498] Sugimoto, *Indo kodai hekiga no kenkyū*, 20

[499] Ibid., 24

[500] See Chapter 3 for more details on Nōsu's analysis

[501] Sugimoto, *Indo kodai hekiga no kenkyū*, 27.

[502] Ibid., 26

Besides narrative murals, Sugimoto highlighted the second category of portraiture murals, which he classified as "depictions of Bodhisattvas and other deities, usually adorning columns."[503] Among the images Sugimoto reproduced from Ajanta, he framed the figure from Cave 17, which he labeled "Bodhisattva with a lotus" (fig 5.4), as an exemplar beside the figure of Padmapani. In his analysis, Sugimoto admitted his uncertainty regarding which character the Bodhisattva figure represents and claimed that even his Indian guide lacked the knowledge, simply calling the figure a "dancing man." Yet, even without knowledge of the figures' narrative significance, Sugimoto argued for the value of the figure's pose, highlighting its iconic "tribhanga" pose where the body shifts to one side. In his writing, Sugimoto described portraiture murals as depictions that highlight the general beauty of the human body without referring to a specific character, thus representing an idealized spiritual body.

Finally, Sugimoto classified a third type of "decorative murals" at the caves, which he described as various ornamental depictions that supplemented narrative depictions and portraitures that appeared on the ceilings and the corners of walls. Even though they perform a minor function compared to the other types of murals, Sugimoto found their varied designs worthy of study. He highlighted how several of them appeared as geometric shapes or arabesque floral designs, abandoning realism in favor of more abstract representations. In contrast to them, however, he also highlighted more organic representations serving as decorations, such as plants, animals, and dancing figures. Noting how the lively figures of plants, animals, and humans appeared to blend and interact with each other without clear boundaries, Sugimoto believed that

---

[503] Ibid., 20

such a representation conveyed the message of universal love.[504] With his detailed examination of the different mural types at Ajanta and their respective functions, Sugimoto demonstrated his keen eye for ancient mural compositions.

While Sugimoto spent considerable effort in inspecting the Ajanta as mural art, he spent an equal amount of effort in highlighting the unique characteristics of its figures. In his examination, Sugimoto strongly declared the Ajanta figures as quintessential examples of figures in East Asian Art, serving as principal antitheses to figures from Western style figures. Most importantly, Sugimoto argued that the Ajanta figures contrasted Western art not just in style, but also in the philosophy behind their compositions. In his examination, Sugimoto described them as "having fat upper bodies, rotund breasts, narrow abdomen, and a large posterior."[505] He went on to describe how the limbs were "depicted as exaggerated and larger than the body, yet the proportion is by no means unnatural. Rather, they displayed a composed figure." Examining the male figures, Sugimoto pointed out how, similar to the female figures, their limbs displayed a certain "elasticity" (*danryōkusai*) and appeared serpentine. Overall, Sugimoto argued that the most important characteristic of the Ajanta figures was their embrace of exaggeration with no concerns for realism.[506]

Sugimoto was also fascinated by how color was used to discern between male and female figures, highlighting the image of *The Lovers* (5.3) next to Padmapani as a prime example. He highlighted even though the ancient pigment has deteriorated over time, he can still perceive how the male figure's skin was tinted in a red tone while the female figure was tinted in blue,

---

[504] Ibid., 34-35

[505] Ibid., 44

[506] Ibid., 45-46

describing it as a symbolic use of colors.[507] Moreover, Sugimoto noticed this pattern repeated in other figures where unrealistic colors were used for skin color, such as purple and deep blue.[508] Together with the exaggerated bodily features, Sugimoto argued that the symbolism innate in the colors of the Ajanta figures further evoked the pursuit of idealism embodied in the figures. In his examination of the figures, Sugimoto made a strong statement arguing for the dichotomy between East Asian idealism, embodied in Ajanta-style figures, and Western realism, and these concepts will play a significant role in his murals in the future.

In contrast to the exaggerated and spirited nature of the figures, however, Sugimoto claimed that the contours used to delineate the figures evoke a sense of rationality. Like his predecessors, Sugimoto highlighted the distinctive use of red contours at Ajanta but he also expanded upon past analyses by scrutinizing the contours' dimensions. Sugimoto asserted that lines at Ajanta appeared uniform and systematic throughout the composition with little variations, indicating that the ancient artists must have used stiff brushes. He claimed the ancient contours lack the sensuous nature of East Asian ink brushes displayed, where the sentiments of the artist dictate the nature of the line from its thickness to its tone. Yet, Sugimoto argued that the contours' mechanical nature did not undermine the aesthetic appeal of the murals. Rather, they displayed the "calm rationality of an architect," as they helped organize complex amalgamations of scenes and figures, segmenting them into a comprehensible form.[509]

Moreover, Sugimoto made similar observations regarding the role of color, highlighting how "refined and subdued color tones skillfully arranged the complex compositions." For

---

[507] Ibid., 27

[508] Ibid., 37

[509] Ibid., 47-48

example, he noted how the ancient murals utilized the contrast between red, yellow, and green to distinguish between different figures and scenes. Examining the role that methodical lines and colors played in organizing the organic compositions, Sugimoto asserted that Ajanta's seamlessly harmonized such opposing elements demonstrated one of the ancient murals' greatest strengths.[510] With his detailed analysis of the role that lines and colors played in organizing the visual representations, Sugimoto showcased his sensibility to mural-style compositions, setting him apart from his predecessors.

After his sojourn in Ajanta, Sugimoto boarded a ship and traveled to Sri Lanka to visit Sigiriya, examining the multitude of painted figures from its ancient murals. In his analysis of the Sigiriya figures, Sugimoto also praised them as exemplars of Southern Buddhist art. Analyzing the multiple figures at Sigiriya, he titled one particular section of the mural *Offering Scattered Flowers* (*Kuyō Sanka*, fig 5.6), which showcased multiple large female figures, as a major centerpiece that stood out from the rest, basing his many observations on the image. Examining their style and composition, he highlighted several similarities that the Sirigiya figures shared with the Ajanta ones. Examples include their vivacity expressed through their hand and body language and their vivid use of colors.[511]

However, the artist also highlighted some crucial differences between Sigiriya and Ajanta, primarily with more emphasis on the nudity of the figures. Sugimoto argued that the Sigiriya murals embraced the beauty of the human body more than the Ajanta murals. Even though both murals featured a certain degree of nudity, Sugimoto argued that figures at Sigiriya

---

[510] Ibid., 48-50

[511] Ibid., 93-94

featured less clothing and ornaments, relying more on the natural beauty of women body.[512] Sugimoto was especially avid towards the way that female figures were displayed on its cliff edge, praising how the ancient artists' accentuated the corporeal beauty of the female figures through their skillful use of lines and color composition.[513] However, Sugimoto also argued that even though the figures had visible breasts, they were not entirely naked as perceived with a casual glance. With a closer look, Sugiomto claimed that the figures wore transparent clothing with their fabrics and hems depicted through near-invisible wavy lines.[514] As Sugimoto described, the unique ways that lines were used at Sigiriya further demonstrated the uniqueness of oriental art. Unlike in Western art where lines were used to "highlight form" (*shakeiteki)*, Sugimoto argues that lines in oriental murals were used to "expression" (*shayiteki)*.[515] Thus, rather than realistically depict clothes, the ancient artists at Sigiriya used a more expressive and abstract representation. Furthermore, Sugimoto argues that lines were used to accentuate the ideal and most beautiful features of the human body, such as the face and the breasts.

From his extensive research on both Ajanta and Sigiriya, Sugimoto demonstrated his dedication to muralist art with his emphasis on how the art styles and figures relate to the composition of the image on the surface of the wall. For example, he highlighted the crucial role that contours and colors played in delineating figures and scenes at Ajanta, making the complex arrangements comprehensible for viewers. More crucially, as an artist who trained in Western muralism, Sugimoto emphasized heavily how the characteristics at Ajanta and Sigiriya diverged

---

[512] Ibid., 101

[513] Ibid., 88

[514] Ibid., 99

[515] Ibid., 102

from Western artistic conventions, framing them as exemplars of Oriental Muralism. In his comparison, he replicated similar observations from past artists to India, emphasizing the innate idealism and spirituality embodied by Indian figures, evoked through their unrealistic and exaggerated forms. However, in contrast to his predecessors, Sugimoto considered how he could transfer such ideological figures to murals in Japan, touching upon questions regarding the display of provocative bodies in public spaces and bringing religiosity into buildings. His commitment to answering such inquiries were best demonstrated with two major murals he produced after he returned to Japan.

Offering of Relics **at Biwako Bunkakan Building — muralism and building's purpose**

After he returned from India in 1938, Sugimoto more years traveling abroad to several countries around Asia. However, by 1949, he finally received an opportunity to create his first major mural when he was commissioned by the Shiga Prefectural Industry and Culture Center to decorate one of its exhibition rooms. Today, the building has been renamed the Shiga Prefectural Lake Biwa Culture Center (*Biwako Bunkakan)*, which still contains the mural by Sugimoto Tetsurō in one of its buildings.[516] Bearing the title of *Offering of Relics* (*Shari Kuyo*, fig 5.7), Sugimoto took advantage of his first major religious mural to address the issue of religious muralism and its relationship to modern buildings.

Admittedly, the request for an artist to paint a Buddhist-themed mural for a public space in postwar Japan was atypical and more closely resembled practices from wartime Japan when religious-themed murals were used as propaganda to unite the Japanese public for the war effort.

---

[516] Inoue Yū. "Sugimoto Tetsurō hekiga 'Shari Kuyō' ni nassareta 'Shun Kō' gōi ni tsuite [Regarding the seal 'Shun Kō' inscribed on Sugimoto Tetsurō's 'Shari Kuyō']." *The Annual Reports of the Biwako Bunkakan,* no. 39 (March 2023): 20

As art historian Yasuko Tsuchikane argued, some Buddhist temple hired artists to create temple decorations for public spaces to convey the "spiritual matter" of the war to the public; a means of garnering support by associating the war effort with a sense of national spirit conflated with religious sentiments.[517] After the war, however, we can speculate how Buddhist imagery, and the religious sentiments they embodied, became a way to offer comfort and unity to people in a defeated Japan. Thus, Sugimoto's Buddhist theme mural in a public space appear to perform such as function. Simultaneously, it's likely that the Buddhist subject matter was also intended to match the permanent Buddhist art exhibition that was displayed in the space occupied by the mural, as discussed below.

Offering of Relics takes the form of three separate wall paintings: one centerpiece takes up a large wall, flanked by two horizontal bands of murals on either side of the centerpiece. For the center wall, two giant standing Buddhist figures flanked the left and right while the center of the wall shows a pedestal, the titular "relics." Meanwhile, Sugimoto placed two flanking horizontal panels to the sides of the center wall, located on separated walls at the top, near the ceiling. The left panel showed a repertoire of musicians with a variety of instruments (fig.5.8). Opposite it, the right panel depicted multiple dancing figures each with animated poses (fig 5.9). Each horizontal panel has a standing bodhisattva figure flanking the furthest edge with the left panel showing a green figure (fig 5.8a) and the right panel depicting a red figure (fig 5.9a).

Inspecting the multitude of figures and their arrangements, the influences from Ajanta and Sigirya on Sugimoto's work became apparent. For example, the center panel showcased Sugimoto's utilization of the different categories of murals he identified from Ajanta. Adorning

---

[517] Yasuko Tsuchikane, "Domoto Insho (1891-1975) and Buddhist Temple Art in Twentieth Century Japan" (Ph.d diss., Columbia University, 2009), 230-231

the corners of the center panels were flying and dancing figures while a large canopy of leaves, and flowers with mythical beasts hovered above the centerpiece. Such depictions shared characteristics with the decorative-type murals that Sugimoto identified. In contrast, the two large standing bodhisattvas both showed slightly bent bodies with the right bodhisattva's pose appearing more pronounced. This demonstrated the signature Tribhanga poses that Sugimoto observed in the figure of Padmapani and the Bodhisattva figure he copied. Furthermore, the red and green figures in the two flanking panels also displayed Tribhanga poses, appearing more exaggerated compared to the bodhisattva figures in the center. Their unique skin colors also displayed another influence from Ajanta figures: the symbolic use of colors to denote divine figures.

While the poses of the two center figures appeared subdued, Sugimoto's rendition of their attires showcased an elaborate display of what he learned from Sigiriya, namely the delicate lines used to highlight the attires. As a closer inspection shows, Sugimoto used several geometric and wavy lines to highlight the layer of clothes on the Bodhisattva bodies. In some areas, the lines were difficult to distinguish, appearing as simple lines that overlapped with the contours of the bodies and acting as a demarcation between two different skin colors to denote transparency (fig 5.7a). In other areas, Sugimoto applied dull colors to the clothes without interfering with the potency of the lines to represent the folds and decorations (fig 5.7b). Moreover, Sugimoto made the clothing appear flat on the bodies of the Bodhisattvas, conveying its skin-tight nature similar to the attire he observed on Sigiriya figures. With his innovative rendition of the figures' clothing, Sugimoto emphasized the importance of lines on oriental figures and firmly established his mural within East Asian traditions.

Apart from the unique lines used for the bodhisattva's clothes, another area where Sugimoto applied influences from Sigiriya was in the clothing of the musicians and dancing figures that appeared in the flanking panels to the left and right of the center image. In his examination of the colors that appeared at Sigiriya, Sugimoto described how the figures used the primary colors of red, green, and yellow, taking advantage of the strong contrasts between the three colors to compose the body.[518] Similarly, Sugimoto used darker shades of red, green, and blue for the costumes of the flanking figures, with their clothes contrasting their yellow-tinged skins (fig 5.8).

On the other hand, the flanking dancing figures also displayed unexpected influences from other sources. For example, one of the dancing figures on the right panel was posed in the signature *nataraja* pose that was often associated with the Hindu god Shiva (fig. 5.9b). As he explained in a compilation of paintings and essays published the same year, *Sugimoto Tetsurō's Religious Art Collection*, Sugimoto highlighted that he came across several Indian sculptures displaying such pose at museums located in both India and Sigiriya, and wrote about his intrigue with the religious connotations behind the pose.[519] Sugimoto's reference to Hinduism and its visual traditions in his mural suggested his interesting perspective towards religiosity, where he held an open mind to other religions and deemed them to have equal spiritual value as Buddhism. His ideology of global spiritualism will become more pronounced in his future murals. Apart from the nataraja pose, another interesting reference included the *Biwa* instrument that one of the musical figures was holding (fig 5.8). Its design was directly modeled after the

---

[518] Sugimoto, *Indo Kodai Hekiga no Kenkyū,* 82

[519] Sugimoto, "Shiva no odoru [Shiva is dancing]," in *Sugimoto Tetsurō shūkyō gashū*, 12

famous *Kuwanoki* Biwa (fig 5.10) kept at Japan's Shōsōin treasure house (hereafter referred to as the "Shōsōin Biwa"), one of the most recognizable national treasures in Japan.[520]

While Sugimoto did not provide a reason for this reference, we can speculate some possibilities. First, he may be drawing attention to Lake Biwa where the murals' building is located nearby and a significant landmark of Shiga Prefecture. More interestingly, his inclusion of the Shōsōin Biwa suggests a Pan-Asian message because of the instrument's connection to the trans-cultural Silk Road trade and artistic conventions from other Asian cultures, thematically tying Sugimoto's work to those of several artists who traveled to India before him. First, as part of the Shōsōin repository, the Biwa belonged to a diverse collection that, as scholar Todd Munson described, represented the "final destination" of the Silk Roads.[521] Several objects from the treasure house showed influences or came directly from China and Persia, and the Biwa itself is an instrument that originated from Central Asia. Furthermore, the materials and motifs present on the Shōsōin Biwa also referenced other Asian cultures. For example, the flowery motif (*hosoge)* on the back of the instrument had roots in Persian and Chinese Tang dynasty conventions.[522] Furthermore, the mother-of-pearl inlay image of a Persian musician on camelback decorating the front of the instrument further demonstrated a connection to the Silk Road. Thus, with the inclusion of the Shōsōin Biwa, Sugimoto not only considered his mural's

---

[520] Munson Todd, "Beyond the Sinosphere in Early Japan Nara and the Silk Roads," *Education About Asia* 26, no. 3, (2021): 41

[521] Ibid., 41

[522] Ono Moto, "Kōgei no shiten kara mita Shōsōin gomotsu "raden shidan go-gen biwa [The Shōsōin Raden Purple Sandalwood Five-stringed Biwa from the Perspective of Craft]" (Master Thesis., Hyogo University of Teacher Education, 2001), 57

relationship with the building but also its geographical location and wider Asian cultural context, demonstrating his critical thinking regarding mural art and its connection to space.

While the figures of *Offering of Relics* showcased the fruit of Sugimoto's studies of the Ajanta and Sigirya murals, the most interesting aspect of Sugimoto's arguably lies in the original space that the mural occupied. To give some context, the current location of the mural was not its original location because the building it occupied, Shiga Prefectural Lake Biwa Culture Center underwent an intense renovation in 1959, where it was torn down, rebuilt, and renamed into the current building that stands there today, Lake Biwa Culture Center.[523] When the murals still occupied the former building, it was intended to be paired with the permanent Buddhist collection that was on display in the building's West wing (fig 5.11), sharing its Buddhist themes.[524]

Furthermore, instead of *Offering of Relics*, the work's original name was *Buddha's Welcoming* (Raigōzu). As a common motif in Japanese Buddhist art, "Buddha's Welcoming" refers to the appearance of the Buddha at one's death, usually accompanied by bodhisattvas and musicians to welcome the dead into heaven. In Sugimoto's mural, we see the appearance of the Bodhisattvas, musicians, and dancers associated with the conventional composition, yet the figure of the Buddha is missing from the center. Instead, Sugimoto chose to depict a reliquary as a stand-in for the Buddha.[525] This is because, in the original exhibition room where Sugimoto's

---

[523] Inoue, 22

[524] Ibid., 28

[525] In her article, Inoue Yū argues that the reliquary represented the ashes of Sugimoto's deceased teacher Yamamoto Shunkyo who passed away in 1933, and it was Sugimoto's subtle way to pay tribute to his teacher. This argument was supported by how Sugimoto signed this mural as "Shunkō" instead of his usual name, which was the "azana" (traditional pseudonym taken by a student after entering an apprenticeship under a master) that Sugimoto adopted as a student under Yamamoto.

murals were located, a wooden statue of the Amida Buddha was originally exhibited in front of the mural, acting as the physical centerpiece of Sugimoto's work, flanked by Bodhisattvas as per the motif's conventions.[526]

This backstory revealed how Sugimoto's mural served more than just a decorative purpose, acting as a supplement to the exhibition room and directly accentuating the spaces' function by interacting with the exhibitions. This creative approach demonstrated Sugimoto's attempt at creating what he coined many years earlier as a "genuine" mural — a mural that exemplified a building's purpose and served more than just a decorative purpose.[527] Furthermore, a juxtaposition between Sugimoto's Indian-style figures and the Japanese Buddhist artifacts displayed in the room helped Sugimoto create a unique dialogue between two different Buddhist traditions, allowing viewers to perceive their similarities and differences. Such dialogues also helped visitors appreciate the lineage of Buddhist visual traditions from India to Japan, evoking a sense of spiritual connection between the two countries. Unfortunately, due to the renovation of the building, coupled with the temporary removal and re-installation of Sugimoto's mural in 1959, the original message of Sugimoto's mural was lost.

The Higashi Hongan-ji Betsuin mural: Modernism and sentimentality in murals

With his mural at the Biwako Cultural building, Sugimoto mimicked the figures he saw at the Ajanta Caves in both style and color composition. *Offering of Relics* served as a good representation of Sugimoto's style right after he returned from India, characterized by a close imitation of the ancient figures from Ajanta and Sigiriya. However, his next major mural project,

---

[526] Inoue, 19

[527] Sugimoto, *Hekiga honkaku-ron*, 35

painted twenty years after *Shari Kuyō*, evinced a drastic departure from his earlier style. In 1969, Sugimoto received an opportunity to decorate one of the interior walls in the main lobby of Higashi Honganji Tsumura Betsuin Temple (shortened to Betsuin Temple below), located in Osaka. Unlike his previous commissions, Sugimoto finally received a chance to create a mural for a temple, where he could test his theories on religious art and its connection to the public. In response to the temple's request, Sugimoto answered that he would happily paint a mural under the condition that he be given complete artistic freedom, which Ōtani, the main abbot of Betsuin Temple, obliged. Answering the request of Betsuin temple, Sugimoto dedicated one of the most important works in his career: a grand mural titled *Ignorance and Enlightenment* (*Mumyō to Jakkō*, fig 5.12). With a length of 15 meters and depicting up to 200 human figures, it was touted as one of the largest religious murals in Japan at the time of its creation.[528] To Sugimoto, however, *Ignorance and Enlightenment's* significance did not come just from its size but from its status as an exemplary representation of his research in murals and a quintessential mix of Western and Eastern muralism. Admittedly, *Ignorance and Enlightenment* appeared to showcase more Western styles than Indian, demonstrating Sugimoto's early training. However, while Sugimoto did not heavily implement Indian influences through style or techniques, he heavily implemented them in terms of the concepts behind his mural, which is the inclusion of sentimentality in his work. By "sentimentality," Sugimoto refers to the strong sense of religiosity he felt in his visit to Ajanta, and strove to replicate such effects in modern Japanese temple spaces.

---

[528] Kameda, 17

Sugimoto's mural takes up one wall in the main hallway of the temple that contains the entrance to the temple's lecture hall, immediately visible upon entering through the temple's main entrance. Similar to Nōsu's mural, Sugimoto's Betsuin mural showed scenes from the life of Buddha, but Sugimoto took more liberties in its arrangement compared to Nōsu. When describing his mural, Sugimoto self-deprecatingly admitted that the typical visitor to the temple would probably not be pleased with his work. Unlike Nōsu's mural in India, Sugimoto's mural displayed the narrative episodes of Buddha's life in a disorderly manner, so his work fails as a pedagogical tool for visitors. Continually, its blatant display of nude figures did not conform to what people commonly perceived as aesthetically beautiful.[529] In regards to the general arrangement, the mural can be divided into two halves: the top half shows an organized arrangement assortment of divine figures (fig 5.12a). In contrast, the bottom half of the mural depicts a hellish and chaotic scene with macabre and contorted bodies scattered throughout the composition amongst flames (fig 5.12b).

Before looking at why Sugimoto declined to go for a pedagogical or decorative approach, it is necessary to explore the larger context of Betsuin temple's reconstruction that led to Sugimoto's commission, for the rebuilding of the temple, which followed modern architectural guidelines, had an effect on Sugimoto's design for his mural. When the temple suffered heavy fire damage during the Second World War, a major reconstruction plan started in 1964 to rebuild the temple in a modernized version using materials such as glass and concrete in contrast to wood. Thus, with his murals considered as a part of the reconstruction project, Sugimoto had to consider how to implement "modernity" into his work to match the modern design of the

---

[529] Sugimoto, *Tsumura Betsuin Hekiga* [Tsumura Betsuin Temple Mural], (Osaka: Honganji Tsumura Betsuin, 1969), 14

building. According to Sugimoto, the construction of Betsuin temple followed the design principle of pioneering Japanese architect Hideto Kishida (1899-1966), who took a lot of inspiration from American architectural trends. For example, Hideto designed the temple's interior space as a large lobby coupled with four major corner pillars, all made out of undressed concrete.[530]

In defense of his work, Sugimoto argued that he designed his mural to be in harmony with the building it resides in and the religiosity it's supposed to embody. Sugimoto expressed mixed feelings regarding the modern design of the temple, questioning whether such trends are suitable for Japan. He also expressed his displeasure at the concrete-built modern interior of the temple, describing it as failing to invoke the feeling of a holy shrine and more like a "gloomy and barren scene as if under a metal bridge or inside a guardrail." He commented on the unsuitability of the building's interior space for a "decorative" mural, stating how the giant columns obstructed easy viewing.

Thus, Sugimoto planned his work to be conceptually aligned with the fundamental purpose of the building. Because of his mural's location within a modern Buddhist temple, Sugimoto argued that he shall express a strong sense of religiosity to tie in with the religious purpose of the temple. However, Sugimoto did not simply want to emphasize Buddhism, but religiosity as a whole, which was why he included Western styles in his work. In the essay he published in the catalog for the mural, Sugimoto asserted his belief that muralism and religious art are inseparable from one another, stating that "originally, religious art was unquestionably murals whether in Western or Oriental cultures. However, as orthodox techniques [or muralism]

---

[530] Ibid, 15

became lost, the original spirit of religious art also declined."[531] Thus, in employing both Western and Eastern mural traditions, Sugimoto imbued a sense of global religiosity into his painting.

Continually, he also argued that he wished to create a modern mural by going beyond a decorative function. He claimed that the major theme of his mural was sentiments, and by expressing emotions, he simultaneously captured both religion and modernity with his mural. Sugimoto argued that in recent years, emotional expressions have been a deciding factor in labeling art as "modern," and this was why abstract expressionism particularly dominated the modern art scene.[532] However, Sugimoto argues that abstraction was not compatible with murals, and insufficient to convey religiosity. He argued that only human bodies, expressing happiness, sadness, and other emotions can best highlight the sense of sentimentality that people experience in everyday life. Sugimoto believed that only provocative figures can successfully convey the prevalence of sentiments and religiosity. Thus, even though Sugimoto's figures were tied to the mural's narrative and used as characters to convey specific Buddhist episodes, the artist was less concerned about whether audiences could follow the stories told within his mural and more interested in the emotions that his figures can ignite among viewers.

The figures of *Ignorance and Enlightenment*: Sugimoto's perspectives of Western and Asian figures

With its multitude of nude and muscular figures, the casual observer would notice that Sugimoto's mural bears many similarities to the world-renowned fresco *The Last Judgment* (fig

---

[531] Sugimoto, *Tsumura*, 10

[532] Ibid, 13-14

5.13) by Renaissance artist Michelangelo. However, instead of simply mimicking Michelangelo's work, Sugimoto intended his mural to be a subversion of the famous Italian fresco. As he described in his own words, he sought to capture the "unique characteristics of oriental mural paintings" in the same way that Michelangelo's mural represents the quintessential Western-styled mural. [533] In his book *Research on Ancient Indian Murals*, Sugimoto specifically used the Renaissance mural as a counterpoint to highlight the uniqueness of the Ajanta figures. He is especially attracted to the way the human bodies are depicted in Michelangelo's wall painting, which he described as "scientific" and "anatomical". As he described in *Research on Ancient Indian Murals*, portrayals of human bodies, specifically in The Last Judgement, appear more solid and fleshy. In contrast, even though the human figures in the Ajanta Caves do not possess the anatomical precision of Western Art, what they do have is a sense of "spirit". Sugimoto argues how the figures on Ajanta have more sentimentality and are more expressive with their elaborate poses and facial expressions.[534]

In his comparison of Ajanta figures with Michelangelo's figures, Sugimoto also described what he perceives as philosophical differences between Western and Asian art where each culture approached human body depictions differently. In his interpretation of Michelangelo's fresco, Sugimoto argues that the anatomical characteristics of Western mural figures also reflected a certain spiritual desire that guided Western artists: a desire to take the role of the "creator" in art. He described how *The Last Judgement* was executed with what can be described as a "scientific" attitude.[535] This contrasted with the philosophy behind the execution of the figures at Ajanta and

---

[533] Ibid, 17

[534] Sugimoto, *Indo Kodai Hekiga no Kenkyū*, 44

[535] Ibid.

Sigiriya, as Sugimoto argued, where spirit was not defined by a divine creator, but by an all-encompassing sense of sentimentality that appeared in everyday life.[536]

Such characteristics can be seen in the figures that appeared in Sugimoto's mural, where he used strong contours to highlight the muscles of his figures, expressing a solidness similar to Michelangelo's approach. However, Sugimoto included East Asian artistic styles through the use of colors on top of contours. Rather than vibrant bright colors like his previous mural, Sugimoto painted *Ignorance and Enlightenment* entirely in a red and brown monochromatic tone, conveying an earthly atmosphere. First of all, the use of redlines strongly highlighted the influence of Ajanta, since Sugimoto replicated the signature red contours that were used on the ancient figures in India. However, Sugimoto argued that he also used red contours and flame-like colors to better emphasize the outlines of the human bodies and express their contorted nature and suffering (fig 5.12b). The monochrome characteristic and the smoke-like nature of the ink outlines helped Sugimoto replicate the sentimental and spiritual effect he wanted and helped emphasize the ghost-like nature of the bodies.[537] However, Sugimoto also wanted to highlight that he wanted the vibrant red colors to represent liveliness and signs of hope that people can find the light while in their despair, illuminating the theme of Ignorance against Enlightenment as reflected in his title.[538]

Looking at the bottom half of Sugimoto's mural, we see a dynamic composition of contorted bodies scattered amidst bright red flames, evoking hellish imagery. This combination of bodies and hell imagery, while noted by Sugimoto for its significance, can be contextualized

---

[536] Ibid, 45

[537] Sugimoto, *Tsumura,* 16-17

[538] Sugimoto, *Tsumura,* 16

within a broader artistic trend in postwar Japan. With the trauma of the Second World War and the horrific effects of the atomic bomb, particularly on the human body, still fresh in many Japanese minds, themes of Hell and cadavers spread across literature and art alike. One significant example included *City of Corpse (Shikabane no Machi)* by Yōko Ōta (1903–1963) published in 1948, a memoir and firsthand account of the author's experience and survival of the atomic bombing at Hiroshima. With her graphic descriptions of the bomb's effect on humans, Yōko's literary work contributed to the public's attentiveness to bodily experiences to the after-effects of war and imaginations of Hell.[539]

Apart from literature, themes of corpses and hell also made their way to postwar Japanese works with artists, like Sugimoto, taking inspiration from both Western and Japanese art to tackle such topics. For example, surrealist painter Fukuzawa Ichirō (1898-1992), began producing a series of paintings, such as his 1946 *River of Sorrow* (fig 5.13*,* also called *Fantasies of Dante's Inferno*), showcasing contorted figures in fiery hellish landscapes.[540] As demonstrated by his works' titles, Fukuzawa took inspiration from illustrations of *Inferno* by 14th-century Italian writer, Dante Alighieri, which detailed a man's journey through Hell.[541] In the 1920s and 1930s, popular prints by French print artist Gustave Doré (1832-1882) illustrating scenes from Dante's *Inferno* circulated widely across Japan in publications such as *Dante's Divine Comedy Art*

---

[539] Yōko's works after *City of Corpse* similarly invoked the human body in their titles, such as *Tattered Humanity* (Ningen Ranru, 1951) and *Half Human (Han Ningen,* 1954). For more on the works Yōkō and *City of Corpse*, please see Yuko Shibata "'City of Corpses' by Yoko Ota," ed., G. Thomas Couser and Susannah B Mintz, *Disabilities Experiences: Memoirs, Autobiographies, and Other Personal Narrative*s (Michigan: Macmillan Reference, 2019).

[540] For more on Fukuzawa's postwar works and their relationship to Dante's *Inferno*, see Teiichi Hijikata, "Fukuzawa Ichirō Ron [Theory on Fukuzawa Ichirō]" in *Gendai Bijutsu: Kindai Bijutsu to Rearizumu [Modern Art: Premodern Art and Realism] (*Azuma Bookstore, 1948): 154-170

[541] *Inferno* is the title of the first section of the *Divine Comedy* and is often used synonymously as the book's title

Compilation (Dante Shinkyoku gashû), which gave Fukuzawa no shortage of references.[542] Paralleling Sugimoto's reference to Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*, Fukuzawa's allusion to *Inferno* demonstrated instances of Japanese artists looking towards Western sources to address postwar issues.

However, postwar Japanese artists also took inspiration from Japan's artistic conventions when visualizing bodies and Hell to address postwar sentiments. It is also worth pointing out that in the years before and when Sugimoto was working on his murals, one of the most notorious and publicized artworks in Japan was *The Hiroshima Panels* (fig 5.14) by husband and wife artists Toshi and Iri Maruki. Consisting of several painted panels that featured contorted naked figures expressing the dreadful effects of the bomb on people, the Marukis' utilized a monochrome palette with sparring use of red and other colors to connote the suffering of humans.[543] Furthermore, in the same way that Fukuzawa alluded to visions of Hell from the works of Dante, the Marukis' panels closely resembled medieval Buddhist scroll paintings depicted scenes of Hell, showing influences from Japanese rather than Western art. This observation was also shared by contemporary critics who viewed the panels first-hand. Considering that Toshi Maruki was raised in a temple as the child of a Buddhist priest, it's highly plausible that she would have been familiar with didactic scrolls depicting hell, which inspired her and her husband's work.[544]

---

542 Nakayama Masaki, ed., *Dante Shinkyō gashū [Dante's Divine Comedy Art Compilation]*, Shinsei-dō, 1926.

543 For further information on *The Hiroshima Panels*, I recommend the article *The Hiroshima Panels: The Art of Iri Maruki and Toshi Maruki* by John W. Dower.

544 Charlotte Eubanks, "The Mirror of Memory: Constructions of Hell in the Marukis' Nuclear Murals," *PMLA 124, no. 5, (2009):* 1616

In his recount, Sugimoto described how some viewers asked him if he was capturing the effects of the atomic bomb because they claimed that the red tone of his work invoked a sense of burning and suffering as he was partially inspired by the atomic bomb.[545] While Sugimoto lamented that was not his intention, he did not discredit viewers who made such a connection. He expressed satisfaction that people were able to see such sentiments in his painting, for it showed that his use of color had its intended effect on people. With the widespread attention that the Hiroshima Panels were garnering at the time Sugimoto was creating his mural, the artist may have taken inspiration from the Marukis' work in his portrayal of human suffering. Furthermore, his reference to the atomic bomb highlighted how the recently-ended Second World War was still fresh in many Japanese artists' minds, imbuing their works with a sense of melancholy.

Nudity, sentimentality, and religiosity

Interestingly, because Sugimoto implemented some characteristics from Michelangelo's *The Last Judgement* to create a dialogue of Western against Eastern visual traditions in his work, he faced the same controversy that the Italian Renaissance master faced during the 16th century: the issue of nudity. Sugimoto even recalled an incident where a police officer was called while he was working on his mural because of anonymous complaints that he was painting nude figures inside a temple. The artist also makes no secret on how several monks and Buddhist officials objected to the inclusion of nudity on the temple walls and it was thankfully through the leniency of abbot Ōtani that Sugimoto was granted full artistic freedom over his mural.[546]

---

[545] Ibid, 17

[546] Sugimoto, *Tsumura,* 19

Reflected throughout his career, Sugimoto had always been mindful of nudity and its potential in modern art. As mentioned before in his early writings, he commented on nudity's potential to rejuvenate Nihonga and lamented how the genre's reluctance to depict nude figures in the modern day demonstrated its stagnation.[547] This was further demonstrated by how he always highlighted the way ancient styles accentuated nude figures when doing research at Ajanta and Sigiriya. When asked to provide reasons for the inclusion of nude figures, Sugimoto emphasized that nudity, or the impression of it, has always been a feature of archaic Indian art, and he wished to authentically replicate the style. As he highlighted in his study at Sigiriya, Sugimoto also argued that the thin layer of clothing gave off a false impression of nudity, and he claimed that similar characteristics can be seen in ancient Buddhist sculptures are nude.[548]

Sugimoto's second and more important reason for incorporating nudity in his mural, however, is his belief that bare human bodies, in their most original and raw form, are better at expressing strong emotions. This, he argues, is an important lesson he learned from studying Indian art, and a crucial form of artistic expression which he laments that Japan and East Asian religious art have lost. Unlike Japanese and other East Asian Art conventions that rely solely on the face and hand, traditional Indian figures use the whole body to express themselves with symbolic and complex gestures and postures. Through the naked elaborate poses, Sugimoto claims that he can show more dynamism and expression through the figures, creating a more modern and elaborate Buddhist mural for the public.[549]

---

[547] Sugimoto, "Shin-nihonga e no kaihou [Release towards New Nihonga]" in *Sugimoto Tetsurō Gashū kyū Garon: Nihonga*, 4-5

[548] Sugimoto, *Tsumura,* 19

[549] Ibid, 19

When responding to controversies regarding nudity desecrating the sacredness of religious paintings, Sugimoto argues that such paintings are still art objects and their devotional function should not inhibit their artistic value. As he described in his essay *Private Thoughts on Buddhist Art* (*Butsuga Shikō*):

> "There were many times that people told me they wanted Buddhist paintings that they can pray to, or express how it's difficult to pray to nude Buddhist figures. However, I believe the question of whether to pray or not shouldn't be the responsibility of the art object and instead should be left to the devotee's perspectives."[550]

Sugimoto went on to iterate that the Buddhist figures and sculptures that people deemed"easy to pray to" follow aesthetic traditions from China and Korea, and criticized such figures as stagnant and devoid of emotions. He reiterated a conversation he once had with Japanese historian Watsuji Tetsurō (1889-1960) and described how the historian stated how "Westerners expressed how Japanese Buddhist figures lacked a certain 'cleverness' whenever they looked at them."[551] For Sugimoto, this highlighted the stagnated state of East Asian Buddhist figures. In contrast, Sugimoto described Indian figures as "difficult to pray to" because of their apparent nudity and their provocative poses, and he argued that such figures embodied the kind of Buddhist figures that should be implemented into modern religious art, especially murals. He argued that the nudity of Indian figures was more expressive and embodied more sentiments, making them more fitting in highlighting the pervasiveness of religion in the form of everyday emotions.

Thus, with provocative figures, nudity, and the combination of Western and East Asian styles, Sugimoto strove to create a modern mural that expressed both a novel definition of

---

[550] Sugimoto, "Butsu-ga Shikō" [Private Thoughts on Buddhist Art], in *Sugimoto Tetsurō shūkyō gashū*, 19

[551] Ibid, 22

religiosity and also challenged the common perception of the role of murals in religious buildings.

Conclusion

Sugimoto Tetsurō has always been an artist isolated from Japan's primary art circles, as he has always been critical of the stagnation of Nihonga painting and religious muralism in Japan. His lack of involvement with Japan's "official" art circles helped him develop an idiosyncratic style that bears little resemblance to the popular art forms circulating Japan's postwar art scene. As the above examples showed, Sugimoto's artworks maintained a certain stylistic consistency. Many of his works are characterized by large crowds of figures with undulating limbs and provocative poses and were either half-nude in Indian attire or completely nude. At the same time, we also see how his work evolved over time as it becomes more connected to a concept of global spiritualism in both style and subject matter.

His early works, such as *Offering of Relics* demonstrated a direct imitation of figural archetypes from Ajanta and Indian sculptures. In contrast, his late-year work *Ignorance and Enlightenment* displayed his transition to a more international style as he implemented the characteristics of Western and Eastern mural and figural art into his work to create an amalgamation. With his combined styles, Sugimoto conveyed a message of global spiritual connectedness. In both style and theme, Sugimoto's works conveyed his interest in foreign cultures beyond Japan's neighboring countries and demonstrated his global awareness.

However, despite visiting diverse cultures around the world, India remained the most influential of all the places Sugimoto visited. It was through his interactions with renowned Indologists like Takakusu Junjirō, who encouraged him to visit India, that Sugimoto became

motivated to become a religious artist. Continually, Sugimoto's studies at Ajanta, Sigiriya, and other places in India provided a foundation for his style and mural composition that remained with him throughout his career. The most concrete evidence of India's importance to Sugimoto is his two major publications *Research on Ancient Indian murals* and *In Search of Ancient Indian Murals.* Both books detailed his close examinations of both Ajanta and Sigiriya, including their figural compositions, the materiality of their ancient murals, and the organization and function of their paintings. Furthermore, Sugimoto was taking inspiration not just from South Asian art but also from what he perceived as the innate religiosity in Indian people, such as when he praised simple Indian domestic decorations for their symbolic value. His experiences in India motivated his conviction of making religious art more accessible to the public and integrating it into communal spaces, and this conviction remained a guiding force throughout his career as a religious muralist. Thus, in both his elaborate figures and religious commitment, the influence of India on Sugimoto cannot be understated.

In many regards, the ways that Sugimoto interpreted and adapted Indian art followed in the footsteps of his predecessors, which is a simultaneous fascination with Indian bodies and religiosity. Continually, his dedication to religious murals was shared with Nōsu Kōsetsu, and both artists took inspiration from the Ajanta Caves as a foundational model for religious art. At the same time, however, Sugimoto managed to expand upon the themes and queries that were touched upon in the works of his predecessors. In both his writings and the works he produced, Sugimoto demonstrated his affinity with experimenting with mural forms and styles that pushed the boundaries of what can be accepted as religious murals. In his query on the place of religious murals in a secularized world, Sugimoto also considered the question of global spiritualism in his

writings and works where he discerns the similarities and differences between religions practiced around the world and how it affected their respective arts. Thus, like Ishizaki and Nōsu before him, Sugimoto supports the idea concept of religious unity but applies it to a larger context of worldwide religions rather than just Asia.

To this day, the topic of Japanese modern murals remains inefficiently studied, and with a thorough examination of Sugimoto and other religious muralist's works in context with contemporary publications, we see how Japanese perceptions on oriental or Asian murals differed greatly from views towards contemporary international muralist movement because there were rarely associations of Oriental murals with modern art. Scholarly discussions on oriental murals continued to discuss them as ancient art and mentions of Ajanta or Hōryū were unavoidable. Similarly, when describing their murals, Sugimoto and other religious muralists often credited Indian art and Ajanta as major sources of inspiration and see their art as a Neo-classical revival of ancient Buddhist art.

Conclusion

When Okakura and Rabindranath met each other in 1902 to discuss the artistic exchanges to strengthen the relationships between the two countries, both men had a general picture of the effect that the exchanges would have on both country's art. Before his travel to India, Okakura already encouraged his students to look toward Indian ancient art for inspiration to create new Buddhist artworks. He predicted that his students would mimic the figures from Ajanta and Indian sculptures and depict narrative episodes from Buddha's life to create innovative Buddhist artworks that challenge established conventions related to the genre in Japan. Similarly, Rabindranath agreed to the exchange because of his enthusiasm toward Japanese artistic techniques, such as Japanese brushworks, their skillful control of lines and contours in painting, and the recent *morotai* style developed by Okakura's students. He eagerly invited modern Japanese artists to his school to teach his students innovative techniques in the hopes that these foreign artists would bring something new to the modern Indian art scene. In certain areas, both men's predictions came true. Yokoyama and Hishida's *morotai* style intrigued contemporary Indian artists, who implemented them in some of their works. Furthermore, artists from Yokoyama Taikan to Arai Kanpō created provocative Buddhist paintings that featured figures stylized after Indian figures. However, both men did not foresee some unpredictable effects when they initiated Indo-Japanese artistic exchanges.

While artists such as Arai Kanpō produced innovative Buddhist art based on their experiences in India, the way they interpret India's ancient art and utilize it in their work can vary. Beyond simply imitating the style of Ajanta, Arai also took inspiration from animated figures in other forms of Indian art. This was best represented in how he combined the figure of

Maya from Ajanta with the Chandra Yakshi figure displayed at Calcutta Museum to create his idealized Buddhist female figure. Furthermore, by including Indian women bodies in his works, Arai did not shy away from provocative displays as he recreated the nudity and erotic poses that he observed from Indian figures. In doing so, he strove to replicate the sense of intense passionate love between deities and humans that he learned from Indian art, representing a message of universal spiritualism. Besides Arai, Murakami Kagaku also took an interest in Indianized female figures despite never traveling to India and drew inspiration from them to create his idealized female figure. In his bold attempt, he strove to create an "eternal women" that embodied the beautiful traits of all Asian visual cultures.

Continually several artists also considered Indian art in connection to visual traditions across East Asia. For example, Nōsu Kōsetsu's mural at Mulagandha Kuti Temple in Sarnath India followed several patterns from his predecessors, featuring several influences from Ajanta such as arabesque floral patterns and Indian figures. However the artist also subtly included characteristics from East Asian traditions, specifically Chinese and Japanese art. Such characteristics were best expressed through the stoicism of Buddha depictions that occupied the center of each wall, acting as centerpieces. Their solemn portrayal and position on the wall represented Nōsu's goal of replicating the Buddhist figures that formerly adorned the walls of Hōryū-ji temple, recreating their ritualistic nature on his mural.

Similarly, artists such as Ishizaki Kōyō and Imamura Shikō, who operated in other art genres than Buddhist art, focused their attention on depicting the exotic nature and landscape of India. Instead of documenting the foreign sceneries for audiences in painting, both artists sought to capture the romantic sentiments that they associated with India's nature, resulting in

unexpected representations. Furthermore, they saw an opportunity in India to experiment with Japanese conventional styles, using its techniques and colors in unorthodox ways to represent foreign sceneries.

Finally, Sugimoto Tetsurō, as an artist concerned with avant-garde and muralism, traveled to India and Sri Lanka for inspiration. He examined the ancient caves of Ajanta and Sigirya from a different perspective than his predecessors, focusing on how figures were represented in murals and their arrangements. As a dedicated muralist and religious artist, he developed his philosophies on religion's relationship to modernity and murals based on what he learned in India, implementing them into his provocative murals after returning to Japan.

As these artists demonstrated, not all artists who traveled to India produced Buddhist art as Okakura thought, and some used India as a platform to explore other topics, such as other Asian arts, muralism, or global religions. In the diverse ways that artists drew inspiration from India, however, the challenge of balancing "spirit" and "body" appeared as a recurring pattern for these artists. However, it's crucial to remember that perspectives toward the dichotomy between spirit and body experienced multiple developments and are susceptible to different artists' interpretations. Thus, even though the theme of spirit and body united the experiences of Japanese artists who traveled to India, it avoided easy definitions.

Arising as a popular concept in both art and literature, the dichotomy of spirit and body served as an attractive metaphor to describe the fundamental difference between Western and Asian Culture. Scholars such as Takakusu Junjirō underscored the prevalence of materialism and realism in Western culture in his writing, highlighting their preoccupation with objectivity and realistic portrayals in art. This sense of materialism, as a dictating force in Western culture, was

sometimes described with the metaphor of the "body," representing physical needs and physical desires. In contrast, the concept of "spirit" was a popular ideology that artists, poets, and other intellectuals from India and Japan both rallied around. As a counterpoint against Western ridicule of Asian civilizations appearing underdeveloped and Asian Art appearing simple and unrealistic, poets and artists promoted idealism and spirituality as core values in Asian cultures, which fall under the overarching metaphor of "spirit." Moreover, many framed spirit as a unifying force for Asian cultures, becoming an inseparable concept from Pan-Asianism. As a country that has undergone intense modernization and Westernization itself, Japan framed India as the archetypal spiritual country in Asia, the religious panacea to modern Japan. In reviews of Indian art and its nature, terminologies such as "spiritual" and "philosophical" appeared frequently in Japanese descriptions of Indian art and culture, highlighting their admiration of the religiosity embodied by India. Thus, the esoteric concept of spirit became a crucial value that itinerant Japanese artists in India tried to capture as they adopted the visual traditions they observed abroad into their art.

However, in their adoption of Indian art, Japanese artists also found themselves tackling themes of corporeality in their pursuit of capturing India's spirituality. Thus, implementing India into Japanese art became an issue of balancing "spirit" and "body" for many Japanese artists. Regarding issues related to "corporeality," the most common one that Japanese artists faced was the representation of physical human bodies. For many artists, implementing Indian influences meant adopting the ethnic or imagined features from both ancient Indian figures and contemporary Indians. Furthermore, many artists also experimented with Indian bodies as symbolic vessels. For example, Yokoyama Taikan, Arai Kanpō, and Nōsu Kōsetsu all used

Indian women bodies as exotic representations, embodying concepts such as passionate love or heretical beliefs.

Meanwhile, other Japanese artists took an interest in Indian bodies simply to explore ways to depict the figure of Buddha authentically, staying faithful to Buddhism's Indian roots. This was best demonstrated by Katsuta Shōkin's portrayal of Śākyamuni, which included many features from Ajanta figures to highlight Śākyamuni's Indian ethnicity. The artistic desire to portray Buddha as an Indian also reflected developments in Buddhism happening in Japan during the time, where scholars and artists alike focused on Buddhism's historic roots and ties to India. Finally, we also have artists whose experience with Indian art helped them become more attentive to the depiction of figures, not just Indian bodies, and their artistic potential. For example, Murakami Kagaku used Indian women bodies as a starting point to create an all-encompassing figure to represent Asian beauty as a whole. Similarly, Sugimoto Tetsurō's figures in his mural did not showcase explicit Indian features, but they represented innovative representations of the human body that he learned from studying Indian murals. Regardless of the diverse interpretations and approaches seen in their works, figures and representations of the human body became a crucial component in the works of many Japanese artists who went to India.

Yet, other artists also interpreted "body" differently in a way that went beyond the human body. For example, Ishizaki Kōyō's enthusiasm for Indian peacocks, tropical plants, and its Himalayan mountains demonstrated a different definition of "body" to include the corporeal earth, the physical land of India itself, and animal bodies. Similarly, Sugimoto also involved corporeality in his works not just through human bodies but his consideration of the physical

building that contains his murals and. As these examples showed, while “body” was a central theme in the works of Japanese artists who took inspiration from India in their works, some artists defined the body or corporeality in creative ways.

Paralleling corporeality in terms of importance was the theme of spirit for the Japanese artists. Given Japan’s heavy promotion of India as the spiritual center of Asia and the location of the world’s most ancient Buddhist art throughout the twentieth century, it came as no surprise that almost all Japanese artists who traveled to India were Buddhist. Yet, similar to the varying definitions of corporeality, the concept of spirituality also underwent diverging interpretations and depictions, including instances where artists made little to no references to Buddhism in their works. For example, while Arai Kanpō produced many Buddhist works, he also explored esoteric spiritual concepts in Indian beliefs, such as spiritual passion evoked through erotic figures or the religious symbolisms behind the Himalayan mountains. Meanwhile, in his temple mural, Nōsu Kōsetsu explored spiritualism as a Pan-Asian concept, celebrating Buddhism’s centrality in all Asian cultures by implementing both East Asian and Indian visual characteristics to create a trans-cultural work.

Once again, in contrast to Arai and Nōsu, Ishizaki and Sugimoto interpreted spiritualism very differently. In his works, Ishizaki expressed a sense of spiritualism that had little to do with Buddhism, but simply a sense of romantic ideal of leaving society and finding oneself in the wild. Similarly, Sugimoto, connected spiritualism to a global sense of religiosity without referencing a specific religion, expanding upon Nōsu’s Pan-Asian spirituality to include the whole world.

As these artists demonstrated, the precarious balance between spirit and body appeared in the works of Japanese artists who traveled to India. The appearance of the pairing themes in their works also reflected the general attitudes of these artists towards India, a simultaneous fascination with their exotic culture, and a respect for their religiosity. Yet such perspectives were not always positive and fell into the realms of stereotypes or prejudice. It is crucial to address that even though Japanese intellectuals framed as a religious country and emphasized closer cultural ties for strong Asian unity, that did not mean prejudicial views were absent. For example, while emphasizing the spirituality of Indian people, Japanese artists and intellectuals also spread the image of Indians as superstitious and backward. This stereotypical view extended to the portrayal of Indian bodies, where women were depicted as exotic nude figures and men were caricatured as primitive people. While Japanese artists who traveled to India undeniably showed respect towards its spirituality and felt a bond with Indian people, it was also undeniable that prejudices still occurred. Such mixed perspectives also reflected Japan's complex relationships with its neighboring countries where even though Japan emphasized a connectedness to the rest of Asia it also used various strategies to place itself as superior to its Asian neighbors.

Nevertheless, the artistic exchanges between India and Japan highlighted an interesting episode in the development of Japanese modern art that received scant attention, and I hope this dissertation can shine some light on an untold episode, challenge how we perceive modern art, and inspire future research in the field. This dissertation follows in the footsteps of recent scholars who explored Japan's modern artistic connection to other Asian countries as a means to step away from a Eurocentric mode of analysis that has dominated the field for many years. While recent investigations on Japan's relationship with places such as China, Korea, and Taiwan

have uncovered fascinating observations that moved the field forward, India has always remained under the radar despite the major influence it had on Japanese Buddhist art. I hope that my dissertation can encourage more examinations of Japan's foreign connections beyond the East Asian cultural sphere, which may bring unexpected discoveries. Moreover, this dissertation also touched upon other areas in the field that have received insufficient attention. For example, the creative adoption of Indian figures and the controversies associated with them brought up the question of figural portrayal in Japanese-style art and Buddhist art, particularly the question of nudity and unorthodox figures that challenged Japanese figural conventions. Such inquiries have often been reserved for scholarship related to Western art. Furthermore, with the work of Nōsu and Sugimoto, we also see artists tackle the medium of modern religious muralism, which has also received scant attention. The artistic exchange between India and Japan shines a light to many interesting areas that may encourage further studies.

Bibliography

Introduction

Auerback, Micah L. *A Storied Sage: Canon and Creation in the Making of a Japanese Buddha*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016

Fukuyama, Yasuko. "Japanese encounters with Ajanta." In *Culture as Power: Buddhist Heritage and the Indo-Japanese Dialogue,* edited by Madhu Bhalla, 189-208. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021.

Graham, Patricia Jane. *Faith and Power in Japanese Buddhist Art, 1600-2005.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007.

Kameda Masao. "Shūkyō-gaka no kyojin, Sugimoto Tetsurō [Giant of Religious Artists, Sugimoto Tetsurō]." In *Shūkyō Gaka Sugimoto Tetsurō [Religion Artist Sugimoto Tetsurō]*, edited by Rittō Rekichi Minzoku Historical and Culture Museum, 7-18. Rittō: Rittō Rekishi Minzoku Historical & Culture Museum and JAC Project, 1998.

Igarashi Masumi. *Drawn Toward India: Okakura Kakuzo's Interpretation of Rajendralála Mitra's Work in His Construction of Pan-Asianism and the History of Japanese Art.* PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 2010.

Inaga Shiegmi. "The Interaction of Bengali and Japanese Artistic Milieus in the First Half of the Twentieth Century (1901-1945): Rabindranath Tagore, Arai Kanpō, and Nandalal Bose." *Japan Review* 21 (2009): 149-81.

Licha, Stephan Kigensan. "The Small Vehicle: The Construction of Hinayana and Japan's Modern Buddhism." *Monumenta Nipponica* 76, no. 2 (2021): 329-361.

Narihara Yuki. "'Shutsujō Shyaka'no tokushitsu to imi ni kansuru kōsatsu [Examinations regarding the characteristics and meaning of *Śākyamuni's Departure*]." In *Bukkyo bijutsu to rekishi bunka* [Buddhist art and historical culture], edited by Manabe Shunshō, 549-569. Kyoto: Hōzōkan*,* 2005.

Okakura Kakuzō. *The Ideals of the East : With Special Reference to the Art of Japan*. Stone Bridge Classics Ser. Berkeley, Calif: Stone Bridge Press, 2007.

"Shichinen gakari no Daijigyō Banpaku made ni kansei — 'Ningen' kaku irei no Rataiga [Major work that took seven years, leading up to the World Exposition — portrayal of 'humanity' in bizarre example of nudist painting]," *Mainichi Shinbun.* January 4th, 1967.

Shimizu, Emiko. "Kakuzō Okakura in cultural exchange between India and Japan." In *Culture as* Power, 49-68.

Sugimoto Tetsurō. *Tsumura Betsuin Hekiga* [Tsumura Betsuin Temple Mural]. Osaka: Honganji Tsumura Betsuin, 1969.

Suzuki Keiko. *The Tale of Tojin: Visualizing Others in Japanese Popular Art from Edo to Early Meiji.* PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2006.

Weston, Victoria. *Japanese Painting and National Identity: Okakura Tenshin and His Circle.* Ann Arbor, Michigan*:* Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2004.

Wong, Aida Yuen. "Landscapes Of Nandalal Bose (1882-1966): Japanism, Nationalism and Populism in Modern India." In *Okakura Tenshin and Pan-Asianism*, edited by Brij Tankha, 93–110. Folkstonne: Brill, 2009

Chapter 1

Atmaprana,Pravrajika, ed. *Collected Writings of Sister Nivedita,* vol. 3. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1967-68.

Bagchi, Jasodhara, "Representing Nationalism: Ideology of Motherhood in Colonial Bengal," *Economic and Political Weekly* 25*,* no. 42/43 (Oct 20-27, 1990): 65-71

Balla, Madhu, ed. *Culture as Power: Buddhist Heritage and The Indo-Japanese Dialogue*. Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2021.

———. Fukuyama, Yasuko, "Japanese encounters with Ajanta," in *Culture as Power*, 189-209

Behl, K. Benoy, *The Ajanta Caves: Artistic Wonder of Ancient Buddhist India.* London: Thames and Hudson, 1998.

Biswas, Simpas. *Indian Influences on the Art of Japan*. New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2010.

Foxwell, Chelsea. "Merciful Mother Kannon' and Its Audiences." *The Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (December 2010): 326-347.

Harding, John S., *Mahayana Phoenix: Japan's Buddhist at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions.* American University Studies, Series Vii, Theology and Religion, Vol. 270. New York: Lang Publishing, 2008.

Hirsch, Faye. "A Rare Kali Woodcut from the Era of the Battala Printers." *Art in Print* 6, no. 3, (2016): 24-28

Ibarakiken Yokoyama Taikan Denki Hensan Iinkai, ed. *Yokoyama Taikan den* [Yokoyama Taikan Biography]. Mito: Ibaraki, 1959.

Itō Yoshikata. *A Comprehensive History of Buddhism in India and China [Indoshina Bukkyō Tōshi]. Kendōshoin,* 1901.

Inaga, Shigemi. "Sister Nivedita and Her 'Kali The Mother, The Web of Indian Life', and Art Criticism: New Insights into Okakura Kakuzō's Indian Writings and the Function of Art in the Shaping of Nationality," *Japan Review* 16 (2004): 129-159

"Indo-Japanese Painting". *Rupam, An Illustrated Quarterly Journal of Oriental Art* 10 (Apr, 1922): 39-42

Jaffe, Richard M. *Seeking Śākyamuni: South Asia in the Formation of Modern Japanese Buddhism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019

Kowner, Rotem. "'Lighter than Yellow, but not Enough': Western Discourse on the Japanese 'Race', 1854-1904," *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 103-131

Mitter, Partha. *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Nihon Bijutsuin Hyakunenshi 1-kan jō (zuhan hen)[Nihon Bijutsuin 100 year history, volume 1, part 1 (illustration edition)]. Edited by Nihon Bijutsuin Hyakunenshi Henshūshitsu. Tokyo: Nihon Bijutsuin, 1989.

Nihon Bijutsuin Hyakunenshi 3-kan jō (zuhan hen) [Nihon Bijutsuin 100 year history, volume 3, part 1(illustration edition)]. Edited by Nihon Bijutsuin Hyakunenshi Henshūshitsu. Tokyo: Nihon Bijutsuin, 1992

Ober, Douglas. *Dust on the Throne: The Search for Buddhism in Modern India.* California: Stanford University Press, 2023.

Okakura Kakuzo. *Collected English Writings vol. 1*, ed. Sunao Nakamura. Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1984

Ogata, Atsuhiko. "The Shoso-in Textiles of the Era of Emperor Shomu," *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings 720* (University of Nebraska Digital Commons, September 19-22, 2012): 1-10

Ramaswamy, Sumathi. *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010.

Ramos, Imma. "The Fragmentation of Sati: Contracting Hindu Identity through Pilgrimage Souvenirs." *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 27 (2015): 12- 26

Ramteke, D. L. *Revival of Buddhism in Modern India*. New Delhi: Deep & Deep, 1983

Satō, Shino. "Yokoyama Taikan no Rasyū.Lila to Bengaru-ha no gaka ni suite [Yokoyama Taikan's 'Ras Lila' and the artists of the Bengal Movement]." *Yokoyama Taikan Kinen-Kan Kanhō* 18 (2002): 3-14

———. "Mōrōtai to Bengaru•Runesensu: Yokoyama Taikan, Hishida Shunsō ga Obonindoronato•Tagōru ni etaeta eikyō ni tsuite (1) [Mōrōtai style and Bengal Renaissance: Yokoyama Taikan and Hishida Shunsō's influence on Abanindranth Tagore (1)]." *Bulletin of the Study on Philosophy and History of Art in University of Tsukuba 15* (1998): 77-106

———. "Yokoyama Taikan no 'Shaka Chichi ni au' ni tsuite — kindai nihon ni okeru Ajyantā Hekiga Juyō no Ichisokumen [Regarding Yokoyama Taikan's"Shaka Chichi ni au" — One aspect of Modern Japan's reception of the Ajanta murals]." *Yokoyama Taikan Kinen-Kan Kanhō* 26 (2010): 3-14

———. "Yokoyama Taikan no Rasyū.Lila to Bengaru-ha no gaka ni suite [Regarding Yokoyama Taikan's *Ras Lila* and Bengali Artists]." *Yokoyama Taikan Kinen-Kan Kanhō* 18 (2002): 3-14.

———. "Yokoyama Taikan to Ajyantā Hekiga—1903 nen saku 'Shaka Chichi ni au' wo chūshin ni" [Reception of Ajanta mural painting in Yokoyama Taikan's "Shaka Chichi ni au"]. *Indo Kōko Kenkyū* 32 (2010): 57-70

Snodgrass, Judith M. "Japan's Contribution to Modern Global Buddhism: The World's Parliament of Religions Revisited." *The Eastern Buddhist*, *New Series* 43, no. 1/2 (Japan: Eastern Buddhist Society, 2012): 81-102

Togawa Masahiko. *Okakura to Indo*[Okakura and India]. Keio University Press, 2023.

Wattles, Miriam. "The 1909 Ryūtō and the Aesthetics of Affectivity". *Art Journal* 55, no. 3 (1996): 48-56

Yokoyama Taikan. *Taikan Gadan* [Taikan's Art Critiques]. Tōkyō: Kōdansha, 1968.

Chapter 2

"A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon", *Gakutō 18, issue 6,* (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1913): 62

A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Indo Bijutsushi [Indian Art History],* trans. Sobu Rokurō and Iwasaki Mazumi. Tokyo: Kōryō-sha, 1916

Arai Kanpō. *Amida-in Zakki*, (Nara: Hōryu-ji Ikaru Furusato-sha), 1943

———. Hekiga Mosha Kaisō [Recollection on Mural Reproduction], *Tōei,* vol 11, issue 10, (1935): 13-15

———. "Indo Bijutsu no Shōkai-sha toshite [As the Introducer of Indian Art]," in *Kaiga Seidan,* vol 7 (September, 1919): 40-42

———. "Indo e iku Watashi no Shimei [My Mission to go to India]," *Kensei Bijutsu*, no. 109, (Bijustu Kensei-sha, 1916): 27-28

———. *Indo Nisshi [India Diary].* Reproduced in *Arai Kanpō Hito to Sakuhin*, 59-101. Originally written in 1917.

———. "Indo no Shinbi Shisō oyobi Geijutsu no Kontei (1) [The root of India's mysterious ideology and art, part 1], in *Bijutsu no Nihon*, vol 13, issue 6 (1921): 2-5

———. "Indo no Shinbi Shisō oyobi Geijutsu no Kontei (2)", in *Bijutsu no Nihon*, vol 13, issue 7 (1921): 4-8

———. Interview by 'Reizan,' "Arai Kanpo-shi to Busseki Junyū [Mr. Arai Kanpo and Buddhist pilgrimage]," in *Gendai no Bijutsu*, vol 1, issue 2 (1918): 4-11

———. "Tai-in Shoken [Notes on my Indian Stay]," *Bijutsu Gahō,* vol. 42, no. 4 (1919): 54-57

———. "Watashi no Butsu-ga, Shūkyō no Shinnen [My Buddhist Painting and Religious Beliefs]," *Ega Seidan*, (Tokyo: Ega Seidan-sha, 1916): 12-13

Asai Kanpa. "Ajyanta no Hekiga ni tsuite [regarding the Ajanta murals]," *Shinkyō Bijutsu* 4, no. 2, (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1920), 19-24

"Chinretsujō yori [from the display hall]." *Gakutō 18, issue 7,* (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1914)*,* 12-14

Ebe Ōson. *Tagōru no Shisō to Shūkyō* [*Tagore's Ideology and Religion].* Tokyo: Nichigetsu-sha, 1915

Furukawa Osam. "Inten no Nihonga [The Nihonga of the Inten]," in *Waseda Bungaku,* vol. 2, issue 179 (October 1920): 110-115

Haruyama Takamatsu. "Kokuten-hei [Kokuten Exhibitions critique]," *Kaiga Seidan*, vol 8 (December 1920): 10-14

Hiroi Tatsutarō. "Tōyō Ishiki [Oriental Consciousness]," in *Jidai Shichō,* May issue*,* (Tokyo: Jidai Shichō-Sha*,* 1915): 29-36

Ibaraki Prefecture Tenshin Memorial Gora Museum., eds. *Indo ni Miserareta Nihongaka-tachi: Tenshin to Tagōru no deai kara* [*Japanese Artists Fascinated by India: Since the meeting between Tenshin and Tagore].* Ibaraki Prefecture Tenshin Memorial Gora Museum, 1998

——-. Takabayashi Mutsuko. "Tagōru no Rainichi to Kindai Nihonga [Tagore's Japan Visit and Modern Japanese Art]." In *Indo ni Miserareta Nihongaka-tachi*, 106-107. 1998

"Indo Bijutsu Gō [Indian Art Issue]", *Bijutsu Gahō Ring Zōkan.* Tokyo: Gahō-sha, 1913

Katsuyama, Shigeru. *Taisho Nihonga no Indo teki keiko: Sono Kigen to hensen* [The Indianesque Tendency of Taisho Nihonga: Its origin and transformation]. Tokyo: Tokyo Geijutsu Daigaku, 1994

Kawaji Ryūko, *Gendai Nihon Bijutsu-kai [The Modern Japanese Art World].* Tokyo: Chū-Ō Bijutsu-sha, 1925

Kiritani Senrin. "Ajyanta Dōkuji no Kenkyū (2) [Research on the Ajanta Cave Temple (2)]," Bijutsu no Nihon, vol 10, no. 8, (1918): 11-13

——. “Indo Bijutsu no Tanken [Exploration of Indian Art].” *Bijutsu Shinpō* 12, no. 11 (Tokyo: Tōzai Bijutsu Shuppan-sha, 1913): 410-414

Komori Hikoji. “Shin Indoga ni tsuite [Regarding New Indian Art],” *Jidai Shichō,* May 1915*,* 44 - 48. Tokyo: Jidai Shichō-Sha*,* 1915

Kosha Wakamizu. “Shūkyōga no Kyōchi [The Field of Religious Art].” *Rokudai Shinpō*, no. 885 (October 1920): 3-5

Murakami Kagaku. *Garōn* [Art Theory]. Tokyo: Kobun-dō, 1940

Taki Seiichi. “Indo Geijutsu Kenkyu no Hitsuyō [The Necessity of Studying Indian Art].” Reproduced in *Nihon Bijutsuin Hyakunen-shi [100 year history of the Nihon Bijutsuin] 4*, 1141-114. Originally published in *Osaka Asahi Shinbun*, April 14 -18, 1918.

Nihon Bijutsuin Hyakunenshi Henshūshitsu, ed. *Nihon Bijutsuin Hyakunenshi 4-kan jō* [Nihon Bijutsuin 100 year history, volume 4, part 1]. Tokyo: Nihon Bijutsuin, 1994.

Nonaka Taizō., ed. *Arai Kanpō Hito to Sakuhin [Arai Kanpō: Man and Work].* Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Bijutsu, 1974.

Okakura Kakuzō. “Kenshō butsuga boshū [Notice of a Call for a Prize for Buddhist Painting].” *Kaiga sōshi* 105 (October 25, 1895), translated and cited in Auerback, *A Storied Sage*, 204-205

Sawamura Sentarō. “Saikin ni okeru Nihonga no Keikō [Recent Nihonga inclinations].” *Shin-Nihon* 5, issue 12, (Tokyo: Shin Nihon-sha, 1915): 140-148.

Szostak, John Donald. *Painting Circles: Tsuchida Bakusen and Nihonga Collectives in Early 20th-Century Japan*. (Leiden: Brill), 2013

Tagore, Rabindranath. “Geijutsu-ron [Art theory],” translated by Okakura Yoshisaburō, in *Bijittora Bijutsu Gakkō Indo Gashū* [Bichitra Art School’s Indian Art Book], (Tokyo: Seika-sha, 1916): 1-15

Tagore, Rabindranath. *The Message of India to Japan: A Lecture,* (New York: Macmillan), 1916

“Taishō Go-nen no Nihonga-kai” [The world of Nihonga in year Taisho 5 (1916], *Bijutsu Gahō* 40, no. 2 (1917): 28-29

Takakusu Junjirō. “Indo Shisō Tagōru [Indian Master Poet, Tagore],” in *Şei Tagōru* [Holy Tagore], edited by Kyōiku gakujutsu kenkyūkai [Education and Scholarship Research Group], (Tokyo: Dōbun-kan, 1916), 57-74

Takeda Toyoshirō. “Tagōru-ka to Indoga [Tagore Family and Indian Art],” *Kensei Bijutsu*, no. 108, (Tokyo: Bijustu Kensei-sha, 1916): 11-13

Taki Seiichi. “Indo Ajyantā no Sekkutsudera ni tsuite [Regarding the Indian Ajanta Cave Temples]. *To-a no Hikari* 9, no. 11. Tokyo: *To-a Kyōkai*, 1914): 6-21

——. “Nihongakai no Iwayuru Kyūha [The so-called old faction of the Nihonga world]”*, Shin Nihon [New Japan] vol 1, issue 10,* (Tokyo: Shin Nihon-sha, 1911): 136-137

Ujie Museum and Fukimitsu Museum., eds. *Indo ni Miserareta Nihon Gaka : Arai Kanpō・Ishizaki Kōyō Ten [Japanese Artists Fascinated by India: Arai Kanpō and Ishizaki Kōyō Exhibition].* Tochigi: Ujie Museum and Toyama: Fukumitsu Art Museum, 2004.

——. Sunaoko, Reiko. “Aya no Kyōen - Ishizaki Kōyō to no deai • Arai Kanpō no Indo [Competition of Colors: The Encounter with Ishizaki Kōyō. Arai Kanpō’s India].” In *Indo ni Miserareta Nihon Gaka,* 7-12.

Ujie Museum., ed, *Indo to Arai Kanpo* [India and Arai Kanpō], (Tochigi: Ujie Museum, 1998)
——. Sunaoko, Reiko. "Arai Kanpō no To-in: Gagyō e no eikyō [Arai Kanpō's India Travel: Influence towards his career]," in *Indo to Arai Kanpo,* 84-89
Ujie Museum., ed, *Arai Kanpō: Butsuga no Miryoku* [Arai Kanpō: The Charm of Buddhist Art], (Tochigi: Ujie Museum), 2002
——. Sunaoko, Reiko. "Arai Kanpō no Geijutsu [The Art of Arai Kanpō]," in *Arai Kanpō Butsuga no Miryoku*, 76-82
Yashiro Yukio. "Murakami Kagaku," *Geijutsu Shinchō*, vol. 5, issue 12 (December 1954): 104-114

Chapter 3

Asher, Frederick M, and Getty Research Institute. *Sarnath : A Critical History of the Place Where Buddhism Began*. Los Angeles: Published by The Getty Research Institute, 2020
Carpenter, John T., *Designing Nature: The Rinpa Aesthetic in Japanese Art.* New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012.
Dey, Mukul C. "The Japanese Artists Mr. Kosetsu Nosu and Mr. Kisho Kawai in Calcutta." In: *Our Magazine*, 1 Dec. 1932, Vol. 1, No. 4: 6–8
Fukuyama, Yasuko, "Japanese encounter with Ajanta." In *Culture As Power : Buddhist Heritage and the Indo-Japanese Dialogue,* edited by Madhu Balla, 189-208. New York: Routledge: 2021.
Haruyama Takematsu. [Excerpt from *Nihon Bijutsu Hyakunen-Shi 4 kan,* 870], *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun*, September 3, 1920
Hirabayashi Hiroshi. "110 Years of the Japan-India Association-Retrospect and Perspective," in *Monthly Journal of the Japan-India Association 110*, no. 1. Tokyo: Japan-India Association, 2013. 4-6
"*Ihō* [Compilations]," *Gendai no Bijutsu [Modern Art]*, (Tokyo: Gendai no bijutsu-sha, 1919): 76-78
"Juka Bijin [Beauty under Tree]," *Indo Geijutsu Sōran [A General View of Indian Arts],* vol 1, issue 10. Tokyo: The Society for Study of Indian Arts, 1924.
Kagawa-ken Bunka Kaikan. *Nousu Kōsetsu Kaikoten: Tōyō no kokoro, Indo eno atsuki omoi* [Nōsu Kōsetsu Retrospective Exhibition: Heart of the Oriental. Passion towards India]. Takamatsu: Kagawa-ken Bunka Kaikan, 1986.
——-. Mizobuchi Shigeki. "Nōsu no Shōgai to Sakuhin [Nōsu's Life and Works]." In *Nousu Kōsetsu kaikoten*, 81-98
"Kyōkai Tenbō [Outlook on Education world]," *Kyōiku to Shūkyō, vol 4, issue 10,* (Tokyo: Kyōiku to Shūkyō-sha, 1932): 52
Kame Yamato. "Nōsu Kōsetsu no Geijutsu[The art of Nōsu Kōsetsu]." *Kyōiku to Shūkyō,* vol. 1, issue 4*,* (Tokyo: Kyōiku to Shūkyō-sha, 1929): 36-37
Kawaji, Ryuko. [Excerpt from *Nihon Bijutsu Hyakunen-Shi 4 kan,* 870-871], *Chū-ō Bijutsu* 6, no. 10, 1920
Kiritani. "Budda Ganmen no Kenkyū [Research on Buddhist Facial Features]," *Bijutsu no Nihon*, vol 9, no. 3, (1917): 6-10

Koike Masahiro, ed. *Nōsu Kōsetsu Butsuga no Sekai* [Nōsu Kōsetsu's World of Buddhist Art]. Nagano: Shinano Mainichi Shinbun-sha, 1987.

"Meihin Sōran Kaisetsu Dai-Shichi [Explanations of Fine Works, number seven]," *Meihin Sōran: Tōyō Bijutsu* 1, no. 7, (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shiryou Kankouka, 1921): 87-98

Miyagawa Yōichi. "Butsuto Nagano to Kōsetsu [Buddhist Capital Nagano and Kōsetsu]." In *Nōsu Kōsetsu Butsuga no Sekai*, 148-152. Nagano: Shinano Mainichi Shinbun-sha, 1987.

Mizobuchi Shigeki and Nakamura Yoshihiro. *Nōsu Kōsetsu: Sono Shōgai to Indo no Butsuden hekiga: hekiga kansei 80-shūnen o kinen shite* [Kōsetsu Nōsu : his life and the Japanese mural painting: in commemoration of the 80th anniversary - Sarnath Japanese mural painting]. Takamatsu City: Ikuta Press, 2016.

Mizobuchi Shigeki. "Kōsetsu no Shōgai [Life of Kōsetsu]." In *Nōsu Kōsetsu: Sono Shōgai,* 45-112. Takamatsu City: Ikuta Press, 2016

Nonomura Shūei. *Bukkyō Jikkō [Ten Lectures of Buddhism].* Kyoto: Kyobunkan, 1924.

"Nōsu Kōsetsu Gahaku no "Satori Kādo" ["Enlightenment Cards" by Master Artist Nōsu Kōsetsu]," *Kyōiku to Shūkyō* 3, issue 12, (Tokyo: Kyōiku to Shūkyō-sha, 1931): 52

Nōsu Kōsetsu. "Gedō no Kao" [The Face of Heresy], *Shin Ajia* 1 (1939): 124-129

——. "Ganjī to Ganjī-kyō [Gandhi and Gandhism]," *Chi to Gyō* 3, no. 9 (Sep, 1948): 14-18

——. "Hekiga Seikatsu no Omoi de [Memories of life at the murals]." *Shinri* 18, no. 11, (Tokyo: Shinri-sha, 1952): 8-10

——. "Horyū-ji to Ajanta no Hekiga no I-shu [The Distinctiveness between the Hōryu-ji and Ajanta murals]." *Chawan* 2, no. 109,(1940), 18-21

——. "Indo Ajyanta no Hekiga to Hōryū-ji Kondō [The Indian Ajanta Murals and Hōryū-Ji's Kondō]." *Gendai no Bijutsu* 1*,* issue 4, (Tokyo: Gendai-no-Bijutsu-sha, 1918): 11-17

——. "Indo no Bukkyou Bijutsu" [Indian Buddhist Painting] in *Gendai no Bijutsu* 3 No. 1 (1920): 4-9

——. "Indo no Kinsei Ega" [Early-modern Indian Painting]. *Gendai no Bijutsu* 2 No. 2 (1919): 41-42

——. "Indo no Sugata [Appearance of India]," *Shin Ajia* 13, no. 2 (February, 1940): 109-115

——. "My Mission at Fresco painting at Benares, India," *Journal of the Japan-India Association*, no. 53, (Tokyo: Japan-India Association, December, 1932): 145-148

——. "Shakuson Ichidaiki no Hekiga wo kansei suru made [Until the completion of the mural 'Life of Sākyamuni Buddha'." *Daihōrin* 81, issue 3, (2014): 236-243. Originally printed in *Daihōrin* 880, (February 1934), Tokyo: Daihōrinkaku.

——. "Shoten Hōrin-ji no Hekiga" [The mural of Shoten Hōrin-ji]. *Nichi-in Kyōkai Kaihō* [Japan-India Association Bulletin] 55 (1934): 89-97

——. "Shoten Hōrin-ji no Hekiga (ni)" [The mural of Shoten Hōrin-ji (Part 2]. *Nichi-in Kyōkai Kaihō* 59 (1936): 92-104

——. "Shoten Hōrin-ji no Hekiga" [The mural of Shoten Hōrin-ji]. *Tōei* 12, no 12, (Tokyo: Tōei-sha, 1936): 25-28

Okina Kyūin. *Kyō no Indo* [Today's India]. Tokyo: Kaizō-Sha, 1933

Ono Genmyō, *Daijō Bukkyō Geijutsushi no Kenkyū [Research on Mahayana Buddhist History].* Daiyūkaku, 1927.

Seewalee, Bhante, *Mūlagandha Kutī Vihāra: In the historical background of Isipatana-Sarnath Varanasi.* Kolkata: Maha Bodhi Society of India, 2022.

Siriwardhana, P.P., "Letter to the Editor," *The British Buddhist 3, no. 11, (August 1929): 21-22*

Stortini, Paride. "Reimagining Ancient India in Modern Japan: Interactions between Buddhist Priests, Scholars, and Artists at Ajanta", *Journal of World Buddhist Cultures Vol. 4* (2021)

Subramanyan, K.G. "Forward." In *The Santiniketan Murals,* edited by, Jayanta Chakrabarti, R. Sivar Kumam, and Arun K. Nag. Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1995.

Takakusu Junjirō. *Tōhō no hikari toshite no bukkyō* [*Buddhism as the Light of the Orient].* Daikōkaku, 1934.

Takeda, "Nihon bunka ni taisuru Indo no kiyō [India's Contribution to Japanese Culture]," in *Bukkyō Dokuhon [The Buddhism Primer]*, edited by Momiyama Hansaburō. *(*Kannon-ka, 1926): 1-32

——. "Kodai Indo no bunka [Ancient Indian Culture]," in *Tōyōshi kōza* [Oriental History Lecture series]16, (Tokyo: Yūzen kaku-sha, 1940): 1-256

"World Famous Japanese Artist Kosetsu Nosu Remembered." *Dharmadoot.* (Calcutta*:* Maha Bodhi Society of India, 2000: 21-26

Zank, Dinah. "Painting the Life of Buddha at Sarnath: Transculturality, Patronage and an Artist's Vision", *Ruptures and Continuities of Japanese Modernization. Perspectives on Japan's Modern Transformation: papers from the Freie Universität Berlin - University of Tsukuba joint workshops* (2016): 193–215

Chapter 4

Baird, Merrily. *Symbols of Japan: Thematic Motifs in Art and Design.* New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2001.

Ball, Katherine M. *Animal Motifs in Asian Art.* New York: Dover Publications, 2004.

Carpenter, John T., *Designing Nature: The Rinpa Aesthetic in Japanese Art.* New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012.

Ching, Leo. "Empire's Afterlife: The "South" of Japan and "Asian" Heroes in Popular Culture." *Global South* 5, no. 1 (2011): 85-100

Fukumitsu Art Museum, eds. *Kenran no Kachō-ga Ishizaki Kōyō botsugo 60 nenten* [The luster of birds-and-flower paintings - Ishizaki Kōyō 60 years after death commemoration exhibition]. Toyama: Fukumitsu Art Museum, 2008.

——-. Oyama Shō. Ishizaki no shi Yamamoto Kōichi [Ishizaki's Master Yamamoto Kōichi]. In *Kenran no Kachō-ga Ishizaki Kōyō botsugo 60 nenten*, 46-47

Furukawa Osamu. "Teuton no nihonga wo hyōsu [Evaluating theTeiten exhibition's nihonga paintings]," *Geien 1,* no. 6 (Teikoku bijutsu-sha, November 1919): 235-240

Guth, Christine, *Art of Edo Japan: The Artist and the City 1615-1868.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

Imamura Shikō. "Shikisai no hanashi [Discussion on Color]," *Shin Nihonga Bunka Kōwa.* (Nihon Bijutsu-in, 1915): 1-12

Ishizaki Kōyō. Haru no Yukiyama [Snow Mountain of Spring]. *Sangaku,* vol. 6 , issue 1. Tokyo: Nihon Sangaku-kai, 1911. Cited in *Kachō-gaka Kōyō no Yama to Yuki*, 4

——-. "Indo Gyōki [Record of India Journey]." *Indo Kutsu-in seika* [Essence of Indian Cave Temple]. Kyoto: Benridō, 1919

——-. Indo no Shizen-bi [India's Natural beauty]. *Geijutsu* 1, issue 1, (Geijutsu-sha, November 1918): 100-106

Katayama Nanpū. "Indō no Fūkō [Scenery of India]," *Kaiga Seidan 5,* issue 5, (Kaiga Seidan-sha, 1917): 25

Kodaka Kentarō. Hishida Shunsō Den[Hishida Shunsō biography].

Hishida Shunsō. *Bijutsu Kenkyū Shiryō*, vol. 9 (Tokyo: Bijutsu Kenkyū-jo, 1940): 1-78

Koike Kitakaze. "Bunten haikenki [Observation notes of the Bunten exhibition]," *Kensei Bijutsu*, no. 130 (Bijutsu sensei-kai, November 1918): 4-18

"Ko-Shikō no nekkoku maki [Scroll of the Tropical Land by the late Shikō," Gendai no Bijutsu 1, issue 2, (Gendai no Bijutsu-sha, 1918): 55

Miyake Hitoshi. "Japanese Mountain Religion: Shrines, Temples and the Development of Shugendō," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 18, (2009): 73-88

Moriguchi Tari and Furukawa Yoshimi. Teikoku Bijutsu-in Dai-ichikai

Tenrankai Gappyō. [Imperial Art Academy First Exhibition Joint Review]." *Waseda Bungaku dai ni ki* [Waseda Literature, 2nd period]] 168,(November, 1919): 84-88.

Nakagawa Tadayori. "Bijutsu-in no Tenrankai [The Exhibition of the Art Institute]." *Kensei Bijutsu* 92 (1914): 21-24

Nakayama Masaki, ed. *Dante Shinkyō gashū [Dante's Divine Comedy Art Compilation]*. Shinsei-dō, 1926.

Nittenshi Hensan Iinkai [Nitten History Editorial Committee), eds. *Nittenshi [Nitten History]* 6. Tokyo: Nitten, 1980.

——-, *Nittenshi [Nitten History]* 9. Tokyo: Nitten, 1983.

Satō, Dōshin. "Imamura Shikō *Netsukoku no Ken* (Netsukoku no Asa • Netsukoku no Yū) [Imamura Shikō's *Scroll of the Tropical Land* (Morning of the Tropics • Evening of the Tropics)]", *Kokka* 1277. Kokka-sha, 2002.

Shokumin Michito, "Nanyō Guntō Nihonjin Katsudō no Shintenchi," in *Seikō 19, no. 5, (*Seikō Zasshi-sha, 1910): 55-57

Singer, Robert T. and Kawai Masatomo, ed., *The Life of Animals in Japanese Art.* Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2019.

Tagore, Rabindranath, *Sadhana: The Realisation of Life,* (Leipzig : Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1921). Originally published in 1913.

Takakusu Junjirō. "Indo ryokō-dan (sono-ni) [India Travel talk, part 2]," *Fujin Zasshi* 28, issue 8, (Fujin Zasshi-sha, August 1913): 6-8

——-. *Bukkyō no Chi-i* [The Place of Buddhism], edited and published by Hirata Hiroji, 1915.

——. *Nama no Jitsugen toshite no Bukkyō* [Buddhism as the Realization of Life]. Daiōkaku, 1924.

Tateyama Museum, eds. *Ishizaki Kōyō no Yama — Utsushikomareta 20 Seiki Shotō no Indo. Himalaya* [Ishizaki Kōyō's Mountains: Imprints of 20th century Himalaya, India]. Toyama Prefecture: Tateyama Museum, 2000.

——-. Oyama Shō. "Kachō-gaka Kōyō no Yama to Yuki [Birds-and-flower painter Kōyō's Mountains and Snow]." In *Ishizaki Kōyō no Yama,* 3-6

Toyamaken Suiboku Bijutsukan. [Toyama Prefecture Ink wash art museum], ed. *Kachoga no kirameki - Botsugo 70 nen Ishizaki Kōyō ten* [The luster of birds-and-flower paintings - 70 years after death Ishizaki Kōyō exhibition]. Toyamaken Suiboku Bijutsukan, 2017.

——-. Kirii Shoko. "Kongōbuji-okuden no Fusuma-e ni tsuite [Regarding the sliding door painting at Kongōbuji temple's 6 palace]." In*Kachoga no kirameki.* 36-38

Yatsuo, Masaharu*, Kenran no Kachō-ga Ishizaki Kōyō* [The brilliance of birds-and-flower painting, Ishizaki Kōyō]. Toyama: Fukumitsu ArtMuseum, 1997.

Yiengpruksawan, Mimi Hall. "The Interstitial Buddha: Picturing the Death of Śākyamuni," *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin*, (Yale: 2007): 44-63

Yosaburō, Takekoshi. *Nankoku-ki [Record of the Southern Lands].* Nisei-sha, 1910.

Yoshida Genjirō. "Tagōru no shi to indo no shizen [Taore's poetry and India's Nature]." In *Meishi no Tagōru-kan* [Perspectives on distinguished person, Tagore], edited by, Seitaku Gan, (Jōnan-sha, 1915), 93

Chapter 5

Bijutsu Kenkyū-sho [Art Research Institute]. *Nihon Bijutsu Nenkan shōwa jūichi-nen ban* [Japanese Art Annual, Shōwa 11 year edition]. Tokyo: Bijutsu Kenkyū-sho, 1936.

Eubanks, Charlotte. "The Mirror of Memory: Constructions of Hell in the Marukis' Nuclear Murals." In *PMLA* 124, no. 5, (2009)*:* 1614-1631

"Hekiga ni tsuite [Regarding Murals]," *Bijutsu* 11, no. 6, (Bijutsu Hakkōjo, June 1936): 103-104

Inoue Yū. "Sugimoto Tetsurō hekiga 'Shari Kuyō' ni nassareta 'Shun Kō' gōi ni tsuite [Regarding the seal 'Shun Kō' inscribed on Sugimoto Tetsurō's 'Shari Kuyō']." *The Annual Reports of the Biwako Bunkakan,* no. 39 (March 2023): 17-36

Itō Chūta. "Jo [Preface]." In *Nihon Hekiga no Kenkyū* [Research on Japanese Murals] (see Tanaka Shigehisa Entry).

Kuraya Mika. "Hekiga to taburo: 1900-1940 nendai [Murals and Tableau: 1900-1940 era]." *Bijutsu o sasaerumono [Objects that support Art].* ed., Kinoshita Naoyuki, Koza nihon bijutsushi [Lectures on Japanese Art History] vol.6. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2005.

Nagahama Castle Historical Museum. *Sugimoto Tetsurō — Nagahama Yukari no idai na geijutsuka* [Sugimoto Testsurō — the great artist connected to Nagahama]. Shiga: Nagahama Castle Historical Museum, 2022

Nakagawa Kigen. "*Seiryū-ten Suken* [Inspection of the Blue Dragon Exhibition]," *Bijutsu* 10, no. 10, (Tokyo: Bijutsu hakō-sho, 1935): 9-10

Nakayama Masaki, ed. *Dante Shinkyō gashū [Dante's Divine Comedy Art Compilation]*. Shinsei-dō, 1926.

Nihon Bijutsu Nenkan shōwa jūichi-nen ban [Japanese Art Annual, Shōwa 11 year edition]. Tokyo: Bijutsu Kenkyū-sho, 1936.

Ono Moto, "Kōgei no shiten kara mita Shōsōin gomotsu "raden shidan go-gen biwa [The Shōsōin Raden Purple Sandalwood Five-stringed Biwa from the Perspective of Craft]." Master Thesis, Hyogo University of Teacher Education, 2001.

Rittō Rekishi Minzoku Historical and Culture Museum. *Shūkyō Gaka Sugimoto Tetsurō* [Religion Artist Sugimoto Tetsurō]. Rittō: Rittō Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan, 1998. (Note: Previously cited in Introduction as "Kameda Masao")

Sakakuchi Yasuaki. "Sugimoto Tetsurō no shōgai to gagyō [Sugimoto Tetsurō — life and career]." In *Sugimoto Tetsurō —Nagahama*, 4-7

Shibata, Yuko. "'City of Corpses' by Yoko Ota." In *Disabilities Experiences: Memoirs, Autobiographies, and Other Personal Narrative*s. Edited by G. Thomas Couser and Susannah B Mintz. Michigan : Macmillan Reference, 2019.

Sugimoto Tetsurō. "Butsu-ga Shikō" [Private Thoughts on Buddhist Art], Dai-Hōrin 22, no.1, (1955): 124-127.

———. *Indo Kodai Hekiga no Kenkyū* [Research on ancient Indian murals], Kyoto: Ritsumeikan Shuppan-sha, 1943.

———. *Indo Kodai Hekiga wo Saguru* [In search of ancient Indian murals]. Kyoto: Ritsumeikan Shuppan-sha, 1940.

———. *Sugimoto Tetsurō Gashū oyobi Garon: Nihonga* [Sugimoto Tetsurō Art Collections and Theories]. Tokyo: Atelier-sha, 1933.

———. *Sugimoto Tetsurō shūkyō gashū* [Sugimoto Tetsurō Religious Art Collection], Kyoto: Ranshobō, 1949.

Tanaka Shigehisa. *Nihon Hekiga no Kenkyū* [Research on Japanese Murals]. Tōka-sha Shobō, 1944.

Teiichi Hijikata. "Fukuzawa Ichirō Ron [Theory on Fukuzawa Ichirō]." In *Gendai Bijutsu: Kindai Bijutsu to Rearizumu [Modern Art: Premodern Art and Realism]. (*Azuma Bookstore, 1948): 154-170

Wada Eisaku. "Hekimen Sōshuku [Wall Decorations]," *Chū-ō Bijutsu* 2, no. 5, (Chū-ō Bijutsu-sha, May 1916): 109-110

Yasuko Tsuchikane. "Domoto Insho (1891-1975) and Buddhist Temple Art in Twentieth-Century Japan." Ph.d diss., Columbia University, 2009.