

Prólogo

I recently had the pleasure of being asked by a colleague in Art History to guest lecture in her summer course, *Art and Architecture of Colonial Latin America: Conquest to Independence*, a course which seemed an unlikely subject for a medieval Japanese historian to lend her expertise to. To my surprise, students were learning about *biombos* (folding screens, or *byōbu* 屏風, in their Japanese context) and their transformation as the art form was brought into colonial Mexico by Japanese emissaries. I was asked to help contextualize the origins of *biombos* as *byōbu* and speak to European contact with the Japanese during the narrow and fuzzy window of Japan's 'Christian Century,' during which lesser-known contact with Spanish America also occurred. From Mexico, the *byōbu* format was adopted, adapted, and local incarnations sent to Europe across the Atlantic.

In my lecture, I introduced concepts of foreign interaction and adaptation within East Asia, from the introduction of *byōbu* through Korea in the seventh century to the emergence of rich *kinbyōbu* in the medieval period alongside austere monochrome works inspired by Song Dynasty paintings. I explained the emergence of *rakuchū rakugai* zu representations of Kyoto and its people, connected early *yamato-e* styles to poetic themes in Edo works, and ultimately bridged the gap between early modern Western art and Japanese art by discussing the cultural entanglement seen in the works of Japanese artists trained in Jesuit workshops in the late sixteenth century. What followed was a lively discussion with students on a number of seventeenth-century *biombos*, such as the *Biombo del palacio de los virreyes de México* (Madrid: Museo de América), *Biombo con vistas de la plaza mayor de la Ciudad de México y del paseo de Iztacalco* (Mexico City: Collection of Rodrigo Rivero Lake Antiquities), and *Biombo de la conquista de México y la muy noble y leal Ciudad de México* (Mexico City: Museo Franz Mayer).

Many of these works selectively borrowed and innovated upon Japanese models, adorning their cityscapes with (admittedly awkward) gold-leaf clouds, painting in representations of flowered brocades to frame their works, and extending the six-panel format to an epic ten panels. At the same time, it is no surprise that they chose to represent subjects of local interest—maps of their cities, representations of various racial or ethnic divisions among the people, and famous historical events. As we discussed these works together, we drew upon individual subject knowledge, pointing out how Latin American artists altered the pieces for their own lived environments, or how some

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Her research focuses on cross-status socioeconomic networks and forgery production during Japan's late medieval era, particularly the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Her dissertation traces individual and regional interactions among metal casters, courtiers, and warriors based on the production and dissemination of documentary forgeries. She is also interested in digital humanities and the use of digital tools to analyze premodern historical sources.

“Asian designs” were distinctly of Ming, Qing, or Japanese background. We also touched upon the famous mission of Hasekura Tsunenaga (1571–1622) to Spain and New Spain (the Keichō embassy of 1613-1620) and I was reminded of not only how seldom such diplomatic events are taught in detail in courses on Japanese history, but also how that absence highlights the stark divides that remain within Japanese Studies as a field.

With the ever-widening spread of technology, it is far less difficult than in previous years to make connections with scholars across oceanic divides. Major organizations and conferences such as the European Association for Japanese Studies (EAJS) or European Association of Japanese Resource Specialists (EAJRS) welcome and encourage a more globally-oriented academic environment with which to share our work among colleagues and be inspired by the critical studies done at top universities around the globe. And yet, too few of us in the States take advantage of these opportunities and even fewer are capable of engaging scholarship if it is not presented in English or Japanese, leading to an unintended structural bias in U.S.-based research on Japan.

Many of us marvel today at foundational figures in Japanese Studies such as Kan’ichi Asakawa (1873-1948), who, though educated and an instructor at Yale University, was fluent in English, French, German, and Latin, and frequently communicated with contemporary European scholars like medievalist Marc Bloch (1886-1944). Many early pioneers in our discipline in the U.S., too, were of a war-time generation, one that rarely had the option of learning an Asian language in their youth, and so they, too, were well-versed in European languages and academic work. Although today school systems in select areas of the United States offer elementary-level immersion programs or high school-level Japanese and Chinese, these chances are exceedingly few, and for those students with a budding interest in Japan, when the time comes in college for second-language acquisition, romance languages and German are almost immediately dropped in favor of Japanese.

For those of us who choose to continue into Master’s or Ph.D. programs, which often require a mastery of two foreign languages, modern Japanese is frequently paired with Chinese or Korean (particularly for those doing premodern work), effectively sealing off the opportunity to easily engage non-English scholarship from Europe. In my own experience, early on in my Ph.D. program, I hoped to learn Portuguese for work on the sixteenth century, but that goal quickly became subsumed in the interest of time to completion of degree and the need to work in-depth on *bungo*, *hentai kanbun*, and *komonjo*. During my preliminary examinations, I found it difficult to locate a substantial amount of recent research on European interaction with Japan, and even more difficult to find works that focused on encounters outside of the archipelago and used a large number of European-language sources.

This is not to say, of course, that such work does not exist. Scholars such as Charlotte von Verschuer (École pratique des hautes études), Derek Massarella (Chuo University), and Birgit Tremml-Werner (University of Zurich), among many others, demonstrate a robust use of non-English, non-Japanese primary and secondary sources. On Japanese Studies mailing lists, European scholars gently remind many of us that while we may believe a certain source has never been translated, a very accomplished scholar may have done so in French or German some decades before. Colleagues of mine who have traveled to EAJS conferences report abashedly that they are awed by the amount of scholarship across the Atlantic they knew little of, and though they enthusiastically wish to (and some can) muddle through European languages of which they are not masters, most lament “If only I had the time!”

As I discussed Hasekura Tsunenaga with this colonial Latin American art historian and her students, I was revisited by these frustrations. I thought of how many incredible archives exist in Spain, Italy, and other areas, the scholarship on them that has been done, and how I may never be able to competently read any such materials without an English translation. Not only those works pertaining to Japan-Europe interaction, but all the more scholarship on other periods in Japan that are being diligently researched and discussed amongst European colleagues I may never know without taking for granted English (or Japanese) as a common language. The irony is not lost on me that the articles contained within this issue are in Spanish and Catalan, neither of which I can claim to read beyond the fumbings of long-atrophied high school-level competency.

While there is little in the way of solutions that I or any other scholar can offer to combat the underlying issues like departmental requirements that lead to these gaps in knowledge and acknowledgement, scholars, especially those in a position to mentor the next generation of academics, must be vigilant in breaking down our Asia-centric blinders with their tendency to look west of the U.S. and less often east. Armed with an awareness of the importance of European scholarship to our global community of Japanese scholars, we must demonstrate a willingness to venture beyond U.S. and Japanese research circles and, much like *biombos*, bridge both transpacific and transatlantic divides.