

The Decorative and the Poetic in Rimpa Art

Cynthia Daugherty

Faculty of Literature, Seinan Gakuin University

6 – 2 – 92 Nishijin, Sawara – ku, Fukuoka 814 – 8511, Japan

Email: cld@seinan-gu.ac.jp

Abstract This paper examines the treatment of flowers and other natural elements in the paintings of the Rimpa style against the background history of style's description as “decorative”. Since this style was one of the first to be admired, collected and studied during the period of Japonism from the late-nineteenth century, the background of European and American writers led to a description of the style as “decorative,” a description that has not only endured but also migrated to Japanese art historical exegesis. In traditional European art such elements from the natural world tend to be supplementary to a historical, religious or mythological theme. Works of art on which these themes are presented on their own are classified as decorative art. In Japanese art, notably in Rimpa such themes are featured as the main subject and derive overwhelmingly from classical literature. In this sense, the themes are more cultural more than natural. Rimpa art is not only highly literary in its choice of themes but also in techniques. Artists made rhetorical use of poetic techniques to assert their connection to classical Japanese culture and to “classicize” the Rimpa tradition itself.

Key words Rimpa; Heian period literature; flowers in painting; decorative art

1. On Becoming “Decorative”

The style of art called Rimpa is a major star in Japanese art – loving world, both in Japan and in Western countries. After Ukiyo-e, it is probably the best represented of Japanese arts in Western collections, particularly in the United States. It was first formulated in Kyoto during the Momoyama and Edo periods by two upper-class merchants, Tawaraya Sôtatsu (late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries) and Hon'ami Kôetsu (1558 – 1637). The second generation is represented by two Kyoto merchant brothers Ogata Kôrin (1658 – 1716) and Kenzan (1663 – 1753), and the third generation by the samurai class artist Sakai Hôitsu (1761 – 1828) who worked in the shogunal city of Edo. There are many other artists, but these are the “towering” figures of the style. Although Rimpa is often translated as “school” (“School of Rin”), it is more accurate to consider it an affiliation, as artists conferred upon themselves status in its ranks.¹ They did not necessarily study with a practitioner of the style, but learned through studying the compositions of earlier masters whom they chose to emulate. In the case of these five artists, their generations did not overlap, so they had only the master's art works from which to learn.

From the late nineteenth century when Europeans and Americans first began

publishing on Japanese art, the works of artists of the style called Rimpa have been described as “decorative”. Among the first Westerners to articulate this link between Rimpa and “decorative” was William Anderson (1842 – 1900), a British surgeon who lived in Tokyo between 1873 – 1880 and collected Japanese art during this stay. His collection gave the British Museum its start in Japanese art (Clark 70). In his *Pictorial Arts of Japan* (1886), he mentions Kôrin. Not an uncritical admirer, he writes that the redeeming feature of the artist’s work is its “decorative qualities”:

In his delineations of the human figure and quadrupeds, however, his daring conventionality converts some of his most serious motives almost into caricature. His men and women had often little more shape and expression than indifferently-made dolls, and his horses and deer were like painted toys; but in spite of all this, the decorative qualities of his designs leave him without a competitor. (66)

The French art historian Louis Gonse (1846 – 1921) wrote on Japanese art in *L’Art Japonais* (1883) and the monthly journal *Japon Artistique* (founded in 1888). In an 1890 issue of the journal, he states: “. . . the decorative sense is the very essence, the supreme law of the Japanese aesthetic . . . (Gonse; quoted in Clark 68); he described Kôrin as “the genius of decoration” (Clark 68). Ernest Francisco Fenollosa (1853 – 1908), an American, was in Japan from 1878 until 1890 during which time he taught at the University of Tokyo and worked for the foundation of the Tokyo Fine Arts Academy. He returned to the United States to become curator of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. As curator, he worked with Okakura Tenshin to make impressive acquisitions for the museum.

Although the term “sôshoku” has existed in the Japanese language, inherited from Chinese, few references occur before the Edo period (Tamamushi 140 – 141). There are three known Edo period uses of the term with references to the plastic arts: paintings on screens and scrolls, sword fittings and sutra mountings.² In the late Edo and Meiji period, with the developing interest in Western aesthetics the term was used as a translation for “decorative”, but it is Western writers who applied the term to describe the traits of Japanese artists, in particular those of the Rimpa style.

After these Western publications appeared, the term started turning up in Japanese descriptions of Rimpa. Early instances may be found in articles about Kôrin’s two most famous works, the National Treasures *Kôhakubai-zu byôbû* (Red and white plum blossom screens) and *Kakitsubata-zu byôbû* (Iris screens)³. They were published for the first time in the prestigious art-historical journal *Kokka* at the beginning of the twentieth century: the Plum screens in 1904 (Hamada, “Ogata Kôrin hitsu bai-ka-zu byôbu nitsuite”) and the Iris screens in 1907 (Hamada, “Ogata Kôrin hitsu kakitsubata-zu”); and both were described as exemplars of Japanese decorativeness in art. The texts begin with statements of Kôrin’s talent, particularly emphasizing his design sense. The entry about the Iris screens states that the work is characterized by its decorative (sôshokuteki) qualities and design (zuanteki) aspects. Kôrin’s skill is revealed in how the repeating pattern of the irises gives the composition unity without becoming monotonous (Hamada, “Ogata Kôrin hitsu kakitsubata-zu” 178). In con-

clusion, the writer states that Kôrin benefited from his study of various styles, which in turn enabled him to produce a work that should be considered as Nihonga, Japanese-style painting (178 – 179). In the 1907 article, the Plum screens are also described as a supreme example of a decorative work of art. To support this statement, the author notes that Western viewers recognize Kôrin as a world-class artist (Hamada, “Ogata Kôrin hitsu kakitsubata-zu” 569 – 570).

That Rimpa was decorative or “sôshokuteki”, depending on the language of the publication, became an *idée reçue* until the work of Satoko Tamamushi and Timothy Clark, who began to historicize the use of the term. In fact, it is not an inaccurate description in certain respects. However, the meaning of the term in Western art history is problematic when applied to a different tradition. On one hand, the way that Rimpa artists presented many of their themes would invite the Western sense of the term, especially given the historic moment when Rimpa works were introduced in Europe and America. On the other hand, by the same definition, Rimpa should be categorized as the opposite of decorative because of its close relationship with Japanese literature.

2. The Presentation of Rimpa

At a glance, Rimpa art presents overwhelmingly as an art of natural imagery, conventionalized figures, a bolder graphic presentation, and material luxury—all connected to being decorative. First, let us consider the themes that are common in Rimpa. Although Rimpa artists depicted traditional Chinese themes, Yamato-e themes dominate. A major genre from the early in the history of the style is paintings of the four seasons. These works with the Inen seal, associated with Sôtatsu, typically present a profusion of flowers over a plain background or against gold-leaf. A landscape setting is not indicated. The clusters of flowers move from right to left, organized according to the progression of the seasons from spring to winter.

Other works treat poem anthologies. Sôtatsu and Kôetsu are in particular known for their collaborations on several hand scrolls of Kôetsu’s calligraphy of *waka* poems and Sôtatsu’s under-painting: flowers of the four seasons on the *Kokinshû* (*Imperial Anthology of Ancient and Modern Poems*, c. 905), deer on the *Shinkokinshû* (*New Collection of Ancient and Modern Times*, 1206), lotus on the *Hyakuninshû* (*100 Poems by 100 Poets*, compiled by Fujiwara no Teika in the 1230s) and cranes on the *Sanjurokkasen* (*Poems of the 36 Poets*, compiled by Fujiwara no Kintô 1009 – 1011)—all flora and fauna. Teika’s twenty-four poems of the birds and flowers of the year (two poems for each month, 1214) are a theme undertaken from the second generation onwards. Kôrin, Kôetsu and Hôitsu produced sets of hanging scroll sets with and without the poems, as well as in works on paper or in Kôetsu’s designs on ceramic. Two sets of screens by Kôrin, both of which have been designated National Treasures, depict little other than flowers and blossoms. The iris screens (*Kakitsubatazu byôbu*) show two different vantage points of a blooming expanse of irises on a golden background. The plum screens (*Kôhakubaizu byôbu*) show two plum trees, one with red and one with white blossoms, separated by a meandering stream.

Although flowers and natural imagery dominate, figures are also common. The

same basic types that we identify in Sôtatsu's compositions turn up again and again in works of virtually all subsequent Rimpa artists. In general, the figures follow the conventions of the Yamato-e classic manner.⁴ They are highly conventionalized and generalized as "everyman" courtiers and ladies. Their faces are portrayed using *hikime-kagihana* (dashes for eyes and a hook for the nose); the women are uniformly portrayed with long flowing hair, executed in a wide calligraphic stroke; and the men wear black *eboshi* caps. The garments of both male and female figures are painted in various colors. Such figures are applied with little variation by Rimpa artists. In short, these "delineations of the human figure and quadrupeds," even if not "caricature" as in Anderson's estimation, can appear as cut-out accessories, pasted where needed.

Third, Rimpa artists also used Yamato-e materials and techniques, in particular rich mineral pigments and gold. However, the number of elements in the compositions tend to be reduced or repeated as a pattern, and the treatment is often bolder. The shapes are often softer and inkier. The most extreme expression of this tendency is the *tarashikomi* (ink pooling) technique, which became a hallmark of Rimpa. These Rimpa traits of a high proportion of images from nature, conventionalized figures, bold expression and luxurious materials mean that it can be interpreted as decorative in the sense of design. However, "decorative" has another salient aspect concerning meaning or a lack thereof.

3. The Decorative in Western Art History

The term "decorative" has had a pejorative connotation in traditional European art history, which even the philosophies of Modernism, the period during which Japanese arts, including paintings, prints, lacquer and ceramics were introduced to the West, did not quite shake. Gonse made an astute observation on a difference between Japanese and European art: "What we call the minor arts there [in Japan] form an inseparable totality with what we call the fine arts" (Gonse). Of course, he was referring to the situation since the Renaissance when the status of artists and craftsmen was differentiated, and artists entered the higher rank as intellectuals with painting joining the disciplines of history, poetry and mathematics. This development was accompanied by a hierarchy of genres. Historical, religious and mythological themes were worthier of depiction since the artist and the viewer needed to read and study in order to convey and understand the art (Runia 28). By contrast, floral themes and landscapes could be seen with the eyes. Depicting them was an act of direct copying, not an engagement with the intellect or imagination. Paintings and sculptures in the high genres may have "decorated" grand spaces, but they were not the decoration. The decoration was what enhanced and filled the space around these "focal points". In this way, fine art asserted meaning and decorative art attended to function. Decorative art was also allied with the applied arts, the point Gonse made in his comparison of Japan and Europe. This point also relates to John Ruskin's preference for Gothic, pre-Renaissance, styles.

The imagery of the decorative and applied arts was often floral or connected with nature. Mythological scenes were also common, but one can say that they were used

“decoratively” not in the manner of, for example, Botticelli’s (c. 1445 – 1510) *Primavera/Allegory of Spring* (c. 1482) or any of Titian’s (c. 1488/90 – 1576) many mythological paintings. Malcolm Bull argues that mythological subjects in fact offered artists an otherwise limited opportunity to depict imagery from nature which was not much a part of the Christian story, nor often in history (75).

In decorative painting schemes, by contrast, flowers, Flora (the mythological goddess of flowers) and allegorical representations of the seasons are common (Hyde 111 – 112). Such scenes did not aim to convey a message or engage the intellect. Rather they were part of a larger scheme, filling space in a beautiful and pleasing way. Fundamentally, elements from nature were not subjects on their own until the advent of the still-life genre.

The genre of still life, emerging around the beginning of the seventeenth century did enable flowers, fruits and insects to take the center proper, but it was a site where the tensions of the history and the associations of flowers converged. On one hand, it was hugely popular, desired even by Kings (Runia 28). In line with this kind of demand, a floral still life was also expensive, costing more than other still life subjects and sometimes even more than a history painting. Moreover, it was a fine vehicle for the display of virtuosity. Yet this very illusionism broadcast it as imitation and highlighted its lack of narrative content. Norman Bryson makes this point in his academic study of still life, one of the first. Still life’s inferior status has also been reflected in scholarship and it was not much examined until Post-Modernism made the study of “lower” genres respectable in academia. In Bryson’s words: “While history painting is constructed around narrative, still life is the world minus its narratives or, better, the world minus its capacity of generating narrative interest” (60). At best, the flower choices could be read for their emblematic meanings. Although such readings did not involve a story, they made possible interpretations of still life as as vanitas, or cautions to the viewer on the meaninglessness of the earthly life. Thus, still life was illusion on both actual and metaphorical levels.

In the period of Modernism, from the late-nineteenth century when our pioneering Japanese art experts were writing, artistic traditions were challenged and new solutions were sought. Decoration or ornament and natural imagery were debated by intellectuals and either embraced or eschewed by artists. The movements of Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau and the Pre-Raphaelites embraced floral themes, though not uniformly decoration and its implication of meaninglessness. Architects tended to damn it. The architect Adolf Loos in his provocatively titled essay “Crime and Ornament” (1910) made the strongest case against it. Among his arguments against ornament was that ornament no longer had any connection with Western culture: “Modern man has art, not ornament”; moreover: “Modern man uses the ornaments of earlier or alien cultures as he sees fit. He concentrates his inventiveness on other things” (294). A comparison may be made with what David Batchelor has written about the systematic marginalization and degradation of color through a process of linking it with the Oriental, pagan and feminine, with what is harmful or offers but brief pleasure, and with emotion or excess; but not wholly with importance or logic. The story of flowers, as well as the decorative, is quite similar. European art has a tradition

where flowers tend to be viewed as decorative. They can be attributes of human characters in history and narratives, as well as emblematic of virtues or vices; but they do not in themselves have the capacity to tell a story.

4. Rimpa in a Literary Space

While Rimpa presents as decorative for its floral motifs and colorful stylized shapes which may seem simply to be visually attractive, the style is by Western notions also the opposite of decorative because of its deep involvement with literature. This involvement links the natural elements and floral motifs to a world of meaning. Many compositions directly relate to a narrative scene and poetic image either as an illustration but more often as a reference to a specific poem or story; other works may not have such a direct link, yet they still carry literary overtones. For example, works in the four seasons genre do not relate to any particular poem but they evoke a literary atmosphere. The connection to the literary world is also evident in the sense that artists put into visual practice something of the principles inherent in the literature.

4.1 Allusive Variation as Visual Rhetoric

Rimpa is seen to exemplify the rhetorical technique of *honkadōri* or allusive variation which is used in classical poetry. Brower and Miner (14) describe its purpose as “not just to borrow material or phrasing, but to raise the atmosphere—something of the situation, the tone, and the meaning—of the original. Through the repetition of established figures, elements and entire compositions, Rimpa artists “raise the atmosphere” of the classical past, Yamato-e painting and their own tradition.

Sōtatsu established the figure type and many compositions that were borrowed by subsequent artists. His own figures seem in turn to have been borrowed from specific figures occurring in earlier Yamato-e scrolls: Sōtatsu's Narihira used in *The Ise Stories* images is from the *Legend of Sugawara Michizane*, his mountain ascetic also in *The Ise Story* images is from Saigyō in *Tales of Saigyō*, and the horse and Narihira's companion is from *Tale of the Hōgen War* (Yamane, *Sōtatsu School* 40). These figures are exemplified in a set of album leaves attributed to Sōtatsu.⁵

One example is “Mount Utsu” (“Utsuyama”) from episode 9 of *The Ise Stories* (compiled from late-ninth through the early-eleventh centuries). The episode narrates that Narihira and his companion (with horse) are on a journey East when they come to Mount Utsu over which they pass by way of a dark, narrow path lined with ivy and maple trees. On the way, they meet an ascetic, traveling in the opposite direction. Missing his love back in the capital, Narihira composed a poem for the ascetic to deliver. The Sōtatsu album leaf shows the three figures, classically portrayed on a landscape that only emerges as a result of the placement of the green shapes against the gold. It indicates the reality of the space but in highly abbreviated forms. The composition shows just the figures separated along the indication of the zig-zag path. Each figure looks in an entirely different direction. Altogether the composition succeeds in freezing a moment of isolation that matches the tone of the poem:

Suruga naru
utsu no yamabe no

utsutsu ni mo
 yume ni mo hito ni
 ahanu narikeri⁶

Where in Suruga
 rise the flanks of Mount Utsu,
 Neither the senses
 nor dreams ever gladden me
 with the presence of my love (Mostow and Tyler 34)

Though the formal qualities can be enjoyed, knowing the associations to the literature and to the Rimpa story adds to the experience of the art. These figures and the mountain path are repeated throughout Rimpa as a set composition that itself functions as a unit or an icon. In many cases, there is little distinct variation, but in other cases artists add their own touch. For example, Fukae Roshû (1699 – 1757) uses the exact scene in a six-panel screen, but to it he adds a stream of water, reminiscent the Kôrin's style of stream.⁷ His composition is “updated” by the addition of the Kôrin-associated element.

Other variations separate the component parts in diptychs and triptychs of hanging scrolls. Hôitsu flanks a Rimpa style Mount Fuji (which appears in the next segment of episode 9) by Narihira on horse back on the left and the traveling companion on the right. Suzuki Kiitsu (1796 – 1858) combines Narihira and the traveling companion on the central scroll, with Mount Fuji on the right scroll and the Sumida River on the left (this river appears in the final scene of episode 9). Kiitsu's work exemplifies allusive variation particularly well because the figures are the “borrowed” elements from earlier works, but the flanking landscapes are not in the typical Rimpa style. Rather they are executed in what can be described as a sharper, harder literati style.⁸ The juxtaposition of the classic figures and the less magical, more “realistic” landscapes throws the “borrowed” nature of the figures into relief.

It is significant that the genre of poet portraits (*kassen*) developed in the second and third generations of Rimpa, as artists became more aware of promoting a Sôtatsu and Kôrin tradition. In particular, Fujiwara no Teika's (1162 – 1241) well-known *honkadori* poem of *Sano Crossing* is appropriate. The key images from Teika's poem are the sleeve and the winter scene:

Koma tomete
 Sode uchiharau
 Kage mo nashi
 Sano no watari no
 Yuki no yûgure.⁹

There is no shelter
 Where I can rest my weary horse
 And brush my laden sleeves;

The Sano ford and its adjoining fields
Spread over with a twilight in the snow. (Brower and Miner 306)

Kôrin's established the elements of the composition: the figure on a horse, a companion or two, and the gesture of arching "a laden sleeve" over the head.¹⁰ These elements are another visual application of allusive variation. Kôrin borrowed the Sôtatsu figures which Sôtatsu borrowed from Yamato-e; Kôrin matched the gesture to the poem's imagery. The set of elements was borrowed by subsequent artists who placed in their own versions. These artists added a new layer of allusive variation by combining this image with other poet/poem compositions. For example, Kiitsu's four handscrolls for the seasons feature a different poet in one season's landscape. Each poet's poem is implied by the borrowed Rimpa imagery for the poet set against the season featured in a famous poem.¹¹ Winter is represented by Teika; Spring by Narihira; summer by Hitomaro; and autumn by Saigyô.¹²

These types of compositions highlight a stylistic gap between the borrowed "old" part and the "new" element. As such, artists make clear that they are taking something from tradition and producing a new combination of what is already familiar, skillfully turning *honkadori* into a visual-rhetorical technique.

4.2 Reducing to Poetic Imagery

Another defining characteristic of Rimpa is a tendency to simplify the compositions by reducing the number of elements. The motivation for reduction is not determined solely by "decorative" or aesthetic goals. There is another principle at work as well. The poetic method of *kibutsu chinshi* (expressing emotion by reference to concrete things) is also influential on the presentation of the visual arts in general and on Rimpa's choices of reduction in particular. The image choices are built into the poetry; and these images are often connected to an element of the natural world: flowers, birds, autumn mists, or the moon.

Since courtiers and ladies communicated their heartfelt emotions through poetry, poems are abundant in the classic romantic narratives, *The Tale of Genji* (completed by 2008) and *The Ise Stories*. A poem is something of the equivalent of the dramatic moment that is depicted in traditional European art. In *The Ise Stories*, one can say poetry is the real focus of each episode in that the narrative revolves around the poems. *The Tale of Genji* also centers around the poems: its 54 chapters include 795 *waka* (Murase 2). Thus, *kibutsu chinshi* is amply present in narrative as well. Both stories have a rich tradition of illustration in the visual arts. There is a canon of textual excerpts and pictorial images for illustrations in a conservative vein (Murase 13 – 14), but creative contribution by many Rimpa artists was a much more extreme reduction to images from the poems.

The most famous scene for reduction relates to the first segment in episode 9 of *The Ise Stories*, which narrates a break during the journey East. When Narihira and his companions come to Yatsu Hashi (Eight Bridges), they sit down around a patch of blooming irises (*kakitsubata*). Narihira is asked to compose an acrostic poem with the syllables *ka-ki-tsu-ha-ta*. After reading his poem, which expresses longing for his lost love left behind in the capital, we are told that it leaves not a dry eye among the

group.

Karagoromo
Kitsutsu narenishi
Tsuma shi areba
Haru-baru kinuru
Tabi wo shizo omofu¹³

Robe from far Cathay
long and comfortably worn
bound by love to stay
I cover these distances
shrouded in melancholy. (Mostow and Tyler 33)

A hanging scroll by Kôrin is on a plain background.¹⁴ The three figures, in purely classic Yamato-e/Sôtatsu style, dominate the composition against a simplified background with few props for their picnic. Sitting on the board curve of the bank, they gaze towards the marsh. Kôrin indicates this shape less through its own delineation than through the interaction between different shapes. In Kôrin's composition, the bank on the water's edge is defined by the meeting of the gold expanse with the clumps of irises and the waves of water; in this sense, the bank is made of negative space. The bridge is also reduced to a minimum of one plank, jutting in horizontally from the left. It is more common to see around five planks, as in the Saga-bon version. The Saga-bon Ise, published in 1608 in Saga, was of the first of the classics to be printed in moveable type, the characters of which were based on Kôetsu's calligraphy. The images in the Saga-bon Ise became established as the standard iconography. However, Kôrin's painting includes far fewer elements and the Yamato-e conventions for the facial expressions are also limiting, and yet it is the faces of the figures against the simplified background that capture the moment of the poem being recited—all three turning to look at the irises with Narihira looking the most pensive and poised. Sôtatsu's *Mount Utsu* album leaf also used the gaze of the characters to good effect.

Among the best-known Rimpa compositions of these same sections of episode 9 remove even the figures. These most reduce to the poetic image. An Inen seal set of screens is a reference to the *Mount Utsu* section.¹⁵ The composition is comprised only of vividly colored green and gold wedge-shaped forms separated by a band of ivy and maple leaves painted in murky tones over gold.¹⁶ Sotatu's more narrative-style composition on the album leaf is interesting to compare to this greatly reduced version for the point that Sôtatsu did not include either maple or ivy in the composition. Those elements are mentioned in the narrative but not the poem, whereas the Inen seal work does include them. In this sense, the Inen work "adds" elements despite the otherwise greatly reduced imagery.

Another composition by Kôrin excluded the figures of the Eight Bridge section,

depicting only repeating shapes for the irises and the bridge.¹⁷ This composition was produced in various formats, including scrolls, screens, fans and a design on lacquer. The composition of the Nezu Museum *Kakitsubata* screens is similar again, but it shows only the irises.¹⁸ *Kakitsubata* is at the center of the poem. It has been argued that this set of screens is an example of design and not connected to *The Ise Stories* because irises are also a motif independent of that story. In the five-volume set of *Rimpa Painting* organized by genres, the iris with bridge screens are in volume 4 (“Scenes from Literature, People”) while *Kakitsubatazu byōbu* are in volume 2 (“Seasonal Flowering Plants and Birds”). However, history of the association of irises with Ise and the depth of the artist’s cultural knowledge seem too strong for the image not to have Ise as one layer of meaning and association.¹⁹

5. Conclusion

Literature is one of the most important themes in Japanese art. Rimpa artists, though known for their many depictions of literary themes, did not on the whole choose an illustrative style of depiction with the goal of recreating the story.²⁰ The Rimpa style is, however, distinguished by a different approach: that of symbols of poems, using techniques from the literary tradition itself. They started with the imagery inherent in the literature and expressed it through the use of stock classical figures and the natural elements in the poems, and their combination. They removed extraneous details and placed the selected elements either on a background of empty space, rich mineral pigments or gold. However, in this luxurious baldness, the elements can be detached from their literary sources and it becomes very easy to read their designs or decorations. Something similar may be said to have happened to the poems. Originally, the elements from nature must have had a greater spiritual or religious significance, but this could have been lost or weakened; the natural elements came to be identified with human emotions.

Rimpa artists repeat these elements both across different works or in a single composition. The repeated elements take the form of clumps of flowers in four season painting, irises or any number of Rimpa motifs (plums, streams, waves). Such usage becomes ritualistic, connected to the idea of asserting a link to the culture that produced the literature and to articulating a Rimpa tradition. However, the repetition of the images also creates a visual pattern, and Rimpa compositions become aestheticized.

Despite the cultural background of Western views on the decorative (a kind of anesthetization), the first Western writers on Japanese art were attracted to Japanese art in general. Thus, we cannot ascribe a pejorative nuance to their description of Rimpa. It might better be termed an expression of cultural primitivism, though not of the noble savage variety but as an exotic and sophisticated alternative culture. Yet it must be noted that the best Rimpa works of art to leave Japan during this period went to collections in the United States, not in Europe. These early writers were from mainly from Britain, France and Germany, with the notable exception of Fenollosa, the American from Boston. On the Japanese side, it is easy to understand why Meiji writers seized on the term for “decorativeness” since it turned Rimpa into a symbol of

the Japanese spirit half of the Meiji motto “Western technology, Japanese spirit,” a motto that is in itself a pattern of allusive variation.

Notes

1. Rimpa is comprised of two characters: “Rin” is the second character in the name Kōrin and “Ha” (“pa”), often translated as school. For more details on the history of the name in English see Yamane, “The Formation and Development of Rimpa Art.” *Rimpa Art from the Idemitsu Collection* (Tokyo, London: The British Museum Press, 1998) 13–14.
2. These are: in Kuwayahma Gyokushū’s *Gyokushū gashū* (1790) for the paintings used to decorate rooms; in Watababe Hidemitsu *Nagasaki Gajinden* (prior to 1830) in connection to sword fittings; and in Okada Kiyoshi’s *Itsukushima hōmotsu zue* (1842) in the context of describing the mountings for the *Heiki Sutra*. See Tamamushi, “‘Decorative’ in Japanese Art Historical Discourse.” *International Symposium on the Preservation of Cultural Property: The Present and the Discipline of Art History in Japan*. Tokyo: Tokyo National Research Institute of Cultural Properties, 1999) 241–242.
3. *Kōhakubai-zu byōbu*, early-eighteenth century, pair of two-panel screens, 156 x 173 cm (each), MOA Museum of Art, Atami. *Kakitsubata-zu byōbu*, pair of six-panel screens, 151.2 x 360.7 (each), Nezu Institute of Fine Arts, Tokyo.
4. The rendering is well exemplified by the illustrated segments from a *Tale of Genji* handscroll, dating to the early 1100s. The twenty illustrations and twenty-eight segments of text are divided amongst several collections. The majority are held by the Gotoh Museum (Tokyo) and the Tokugawa Reimeikai Foundation (Tokyo).
5. The album leaves are distributed among many different private collections. Several are in American collections: The Mary and Jackson Burke Collection (New York), The Cleveland Museum of Art, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (Kansas City, Missouri), The Minneapolis Institute of Arts.
6. The poem (904) is by Narihira, appearing in the *Shinkokinshū*. The translation is by Mostow and Tyler (34).
7. Fukae Roshū, six-panel screen, 152.4 x 267.8 cm, The Cleveland Museum of Art.
8. Hōitsu, Mount Fuji Hanging scroll triptych: 104.5 x 39.5 cm (each), private collection. Kiitsu, Mount Fuji and Sumida River from *The Tales of Ise*, triptych, 98.3 x 29.6 cm, private collection.
9. The poem from *Shinkokinshū* (VI:671) is translated by Brower and Miner (306).
10. Kōrin’s *Crossing at Sano*: two-panel screen, 170 x 184, private collection.
11. Kiitsu, *Scenes from four seasonal poems*, four handscrolls, 10.1 x 143.6 each, private collection.
12. Narihira’s poem is from *Kokinshū* (I:53); the poem attributed in the scroll to Hitomaru is (KKS, IX:409); Saigyō is *Shinkokinshū* (XVIII:1810).
13. The poem (410) appears in the *Kokinshū*. The translation is by Mostow and Tyler (33).
14. Kōrin, Yatsushashi, hanging scroll, 95.7 x 43.3 cm, Tokyo National Museum.
15. Inen seal, Utsuyama, pair of six-panel screens, 159 x 361 cm each, Manno Art Museum (Osaka).
16. The pair of six-panel screens are in the Manno Art Museum (Osaka): color on gold-leaf paper, 159 x 361 cm each.
17. Kōrin, Yatsushashi, pair of six-panel screens, 179 x 371.1 each, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York).
18. The pair of six-panel screens by Kōrin is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York); color on gold-leaf paper, 179 x 371 cm each. A pair of six-panel screens by Hōitsu is in the Idemitsu Museum of Art (Tokyo): color on gold-leafed silk, 163 x 372 each. The composition of the bridge with

irises painted on a gold-leaf background was widely copied by Kōrin's followers.

19. Kobayashi Tadashi edited this set of books with color reproductions of works by the full range of Rimpa artists in all genres.

20. The album leaves are in the Harvard University Art Museum. They were a gift from the Mingei Movement leader, Yanagi Sōetsu, to Langdon Warner, 1946. See Wheelwright, *Work in Flower: The Visualization of Classical Literature in Seventeenth-Century Japan* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1989) 112.

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