

Preface

One of Japan's defining features is that for much of its history it has successfully maintained itself as a world apart. This has provided Japanese culture with a kind of hothouse environment where the influx of outside influences could be regulated in a way that few of its neighbors could ever hope to achieve. Yet, where this control might have produced an art and culture both stale and monotonous, the particular dynamism of the Japanese character has instead fostered a flowering of what seems a limitless variety of rare and beautiful blooms. Because of this profusion, Japanese art and culture has enjoyed an immense popularity in the West since the country opened its doors to the outside world in the mid-nineteenth century. Japanese art has had a not inconsiderable impact on Western art forms of the last century and a half, and Japanese artists and architects today stand at the forefront of developments on the world stage.

Perhaps because it is so easy to become engrossed in just one aspect of Japan's cultural heritage, there have been surprisingly few publications to attempt a synthesis of the entirety of Japan's long and distinguished art history. When in 1993 Penelope Mason wrote the first edition of *History of Japanese Art*, it was the first such volume in thirty years to chart a detailed overview of the subject. The present, revised edition builds on Mason's massive achievement, extending the book's coverage of Japanese art beyond 1945 and introducing new discoveries in both archaeology and scholarship. The new edition also brings into the discussion other art forms left largely or entirely uncovered in the book's original remit. Among these are calligraphy, ceramics, lacquerware, metalware, and textiles. Finally, there has been an attempt to tie together more closely the development of these different art forms within a well-articulated historical and social context, so that the student might better grasp the distinct, but complex evolution of Japanese aesthetics.

The first step towards such an understanding, however, rests in the knowledge of a few basic principles of the culture. As this book is intended for the beginning student, the following explanations should provide the necessary grounding.

Japanese Language

Although the fundamental structure of Japan's spoken languages was probably set some time within the pre- or proto-historic periods, it was not until the seventh century CE that the Japanese people actually began formulating their own written language. Before this time, they used the Chinese language for all affairs of letters. The great flexibility of the Chinese system of ideographs—or characters—is that they represent ideas or concepts and can

therefore be recognized by the speakers of any number of languages, each of whom can pronounce the word for any particular idea or concept according to his or her own linguistic custom. At first, therefore, the Japanese written language was a simple appropriation of Chinese characters, known as *kanji*, and these still form its basis. *Kanji* can be read in two different ways. There is the *on* reading of a character, which is an approximation of its standard Chinese pronunciation at the time the character entered the Japanese vocabulary—not unusually around the seventh century. There is also the *kun* reading, in which the character is pronounced according to its equivalent in Japan's spoken language. For example, for the *kanji* for "temple", the *on* (or Chinese) reading is "ji," while the *kun* (or Japanese) reading is "tera" or "dera." As the language developed, the Japanese came to play with these *on* and *kun* readings, using them to give different nuances to a name or term. In the case of the word "temple," the first Japanese Buddhist temples were often given names ending with "dera," but when these Japanese-style names went out of fashion, they were replaced by more Chinese-sounding names ending with "ji."

However, Japanese is a language with many more polysyllabic words than the form of Chinese for which the Chinese characters were initially devised. Therefore, at the end of the eighth century, two syllabaries or *kana*—*hiragana* and *katakana*—were developed to represent the syllable sounds of the Japanese language. While *kanji* could represent a concept, the *kana* could, in effect, spell it. *Kanji* and each of the *kana*—particularly *hiragana*—can be used on their own, but most commonly all three are used together. The traditional way of writing Japanese is to write the *kanji* and *kana* sentences vertically in tiers, to be read from top to bottom, and from right to left. The custom of reading leftward is basic not only to writing but also to the viewing of paintings, and particularly those in the hand-scroll format.

For this book, however, all Japanese terminology is given in a romanization adapted from the Hepburn system. Certain Japanese terms that now appear in Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary—such as *geisha*, *haiku*, *raku*, *netsuke* and *sake*—are given in their unitalicized and anglicized form. All other Japanese terms, with the obvious exception of names, are placed in italics. Pronouncing Japanese is relatively easy because the vowels have constant sounds.

"a" as in *fa*ther: ka sa ta na ha ma ya ra wa

"i" as in *w*ee*k*: ki shi chi ni hi mi ri wi

"u" as in *w*h*o*: ku su tsu nu fu mu yu ru

"e" as in *b*ed: ke se te ne he me re we

"o" as in *o*h: ko so to no ho mo yo ro wo

The vowels "o" and "u" are often lengthened when speaking, and

this is indicated in the romanization with a macron, essentially a hyphen or bar over the letter: “Ō,” “ō,” “Ū,” “ū.” To aid the Japanese speaker, these have been used throughout the book, except in the case of anglicized terms as given above. Finally, conforming to current usage, most compounds formed of a root and a suffix are closed: hence Hōryūji and not Hōryū-ji. Exceptions are made where the absence of a hyphen could be dangerously confusing, particularly to indicate where one syllable ends and another begins: hence Susano-o and not Susanoo.

Names

As in much of the rest of Asia, Japanese personal names are preceded by the family or surname and followed by the individual's given name. Usually comprised of three or four syllables, the surname is often a reference to a geographical location. For example, Yamamoto means “at the base of the mountain,” Kitagawa, “the north river,” and Fujiwara “a field of wisteria.” Given names are more complicated. Sons are sometimes named according to the sequence in which they were born. For example, Ichirō means the first born; Jirō, the second; Saburō, the third, and so on. Women's names often end in “ko,” written with the symbol for child. However, the symbols for given names can be pronounced in a variety of *on* and *kun* readings, and it is difficult to know exactly how the individual reads his or her own name. Furthermore, in the course of a lifetime individuals may change their names or the reading of their names a number of times.

Aside from these standard family names, the Japanese have traditionally also had recourse to a host of titles, professional—or studio—named nicknames. These could be used in place of, or together with, an individual's family name depending on social circumstance. For example, courtiers serving in the imperial palace often had a palace name different from their original given name, and they usually changed their name again when they retired from service. The woman known as Akiko became Shōshi when she married Emperor Ichijō and then Jōtōmonin when she left the palace, became a nun, and took up residence in the Jōtōmonin Palace. When someone became a monk or a nun, it was standard to assume an ordination name, usually employing two *kanji* to form a Chinese-style epithet—for example: Kūkai (Empty Sea). An emperor on his accession would be given a reign name, and sometimes even acquire a new one upon his death. Recent examples are the emperor Hirohito (r. 1926–1989), whose reign name was Shōwa, and his son Akihito (r. 1989–present) who is known as Heisei. The syllable “go” before an emperor's name indicates that he is the second to be so designated. For example, the emperor Daigo reigned from 897 to 930 and was the namesake of Go Daigo, who was on the imperial throne from 1318 to 1339.

Artists often adopt studio names with which they sign their work and may change them as they feel the style of their work has changed. One artist changed his when the seal he used to sign his work cracked. The woodblock print artist whom we know as Hokusai (1760–1849) took as one of his last studio names “Old Man Mad With Painting.” Traditionally when an artist or artisan

achieves a reputation, they not only establish a family and studio of disciples, but also will select one of their pupils (preferably from their own offspring) to be their spiritual descendant, and that person will be asked to take on the master's name. Thus Saburō, the third son, may be asked to take the studio name of the father and become Danjurō II. If no child within the family can be trained to succeed the father, a promising pupil may be adopted and asked to take the name of the teacher.

Dates and Periods

Over time the Japanese have used several different ways of calculating time, most of which have been adopted from their neighbor China. The oldest known calendar, dating back to 604 CE, is a sexagenary system of reckoning the years in groups of sixty and it is based upon the waxing and waning of the moon. Each year is distinguished by the conjunction of two sets of symbols, one from the cycle of ten units known as stems, *jikan*, the other from a cycle of twelve units known as branches, *junishi*. The ten-stem cycle is based on the yin/yang, positive/negative aspects of the five elements: wood, fire, earth, gold, and water. The twelve branches are a sequence of animals: rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog, and the boar. It takes sixty years before a particular pair of symbols is repeated, thus determining the standard length of a cycle. There were traditionally twelve months in the Japanese year, but, being based on lunar rather than solar phases, the measurements of years and months pre-dating 1873 do not quite match those of the Western solar calendar. In that year, Japan abandoned the sexagenary system and adopted the standard calendar used internationally today. Traditionally the hours of the day were also reckoned in the twelve *junishi*, units applied to the years, and therefore one such unit is equivalent to two Western hours. For official purposes today, the Japanese use the Western system of reckoning age, but traditionally, regardless of when during the year a child is born, that child becomes one year old on the first day of the first month of the new year.

When the 604 calendar was adopted it was used by Japan's first historians to determine the reign dates of previous emperors both divine and human, such periods being the basic historical division of time. In 645, the Japanese imperial court adopted the Chinese imperial system of reign eras, or *nengō*, whereby a ruler's reign was composed of a number of eras, the beginnings and endings of which were determined by astrological and other conditions, such as an auspicious or inauspicious event. These reign eras were the principal means of reference within pre-modern Japanese texts to historical periods. However, as there are over two hundred of them, modern scholars have preferred to group Japan's history into more easily manageable units. In the pre- and proto-historic periods, the units have been determined through the results of modern archaeology, and bear the name either of a prominent site or artefact. In the historical periods, divisions are made according to significant political change, and usually bear the name of the region or place associated with the seat of power. Alternatively they can bear the name of the clan which held the

decisive balance of power during the period. Within this system of periods, there is an overlap between the proto-historical and the historical. The archaeologically defined Kofun period extends through the first two historical periods of the Asuka and Hakuō. For the last 150 years, scholars have returned to the *nengō*. But Emperor Meiji (r. 1868–1911) determined to have only one era and therefore one name for his reign, and his successors have followed suit. The names of these periods are the emperors' reign titles.

The principal periods as used in this volume are:

Prehistoric	Jōmon period (c. 11,000–400 B.C.E.)
Protohistoric	Yayoi period (c. 400 B.C.E.–C.E. 300) Kofun period (300–710)
Historic (Classical)	Asuka period (552–645) Hakuhō period (645–710) Nara period (710–794) Heian period (794–1185) Early Heian (794–951) Middle Heian or Fujiwara (951–1086) Late Heian or Insei (1086–1185)
(Medieval)	Kamakura period (1185–1333) Nambokuchō period (1336–1392) Muromachi or Ashikaga period (1392–1573)
(Early Modern)	Momoyama period (1573–1615) Edo or Tokugawa period (1615–1868)
(Modern)	Meiji period (1868–1911) Taishō period (1911–1926) Shōwa period (1926–1989) Heisei period (1989–present)

Religion

Buddhism and Shinto are the two poles around which the spiritual lives of the Japanese for the most part revolve, and as institutions they were largely established by the end of the seventh century C.E. Shinto is an accretion of local divinities and ancestors gathered around the central cult of the imperial house and its divine ancestors. Most significant of these is the sun goddess Amaterasu whose emblem of the sun remains to this day Japan's symbol, as exemplified by the national flag. Buddhism was officially introduced from Korea in the latter half of the sixth century, and a century later had also established itself as an important creed of the state, remaining closely associated with all of Japan's rulers up to the mid-nineteenth century. The problem of there being two separate national creeds was resolved by the eighth century with the formulation of a fusion of Shinto and Buddhism, so that the deities of the one came to be seen as having an equivalent manifestation in the other. Thus Amaterasu was simply one

kind of emanation of the great universal Buddha, and the latter a manifestation of Amaterasu. This happy circumstance continued until 1868, when the leaders of the newly restored imperial government decided that, in order to strengthen the imperial cult, it was necessary to dissolve the partnership, although it certainly lives on in popular religion. Buddhism itself developed into a number of schools, almost all of which have their source in either China or Korea, and has been one of the greatest patrons of the arts in Japanese history, particularly between the seventh and sixteenth centuries.

Mention should also be made of another Chinese import, Confucianism, which was probably again first established in Japanese circles around the sixth century. A wide-ranging system of thought embracing subjects as diverse as protocol and truth to be found in pure logic, Confucianism was the basis of the educational principles established at the imperial court in the seventh century, and remained so until the advent of Westernization in 1868. As a motivating force in political philosophy, it is always, therefore, in evidence in Japanese history, although during the Edo period it enjoyed its greatest influence.

Class Structure

According to Confucian principles, Japanese society is led by the person of the emperor, and around him (or her) are ranged the aristocracy (or *kuge*). The latter were originally made up of the great clans who leagued themselves with the future imperial Yamato house during the creation of the state in the Kofun period. The Classical epoch of the Asuka to Heian periods was the heyday of imperial and aristocratic culture, and they led the way in the arts as both artist and patron. By the end of the Heian period, there had arisen—largely out of aristocratic and imperial houses—a military class known as the samurai. Ranking just below the court aristocracy, from 1185 to 1868 they took effective control of the country, relegating the emperor, and the surviving aristocratic houses, to a largely symbolic and cultural role. The samurai themselves, however, have also played an important cultural role, not least in their espousal of Zen Buddhism and the arts that developed from it.

Fourth in rank were the agricultural peasantry, who—although accorded a relatively exalted place in society—were throughout much of Japan's history basically tillers of the land for a landlord, whether the emperor, aristocrat, samurai, Buddhist temple, or Shinto shrine. Fifth in rank were townsmen (or *chōnin*), the artisans and merchants. Although lowest on the ladder, their urban setting often gave them a greater freedom than that enjoyed by their social betters. By the Edo period, they would, in fact, outstrip both the emperor and samurai in personal wealth, and become the great art patrons of the time. Outside society there also existed several subclasses of outcasts who performed the jobs considered unclean in both Buddhism and Shinto. These could comprise members of the five classes who had fallen off the social ladder, but were more often made up of the archipelago's ethnic minorities, and of Chinese and Korean slaves plundered from the continent during pirating raids or military endeavor. The

way to escape all social classification was to be ordained as a Buddhist monk or nun, or enter the Shinto priesthood. Many of Japanese culture's greatest figures chose this route to escape either the responsibilities or the limitations of their class, gaining the freedom to pursue unfettered their artistic passion. After 1868, all of these classes were officially abolished.



One of the great pleasures of studying Japanese art and culture derives from the fact that not all the questions have been answered. An archaeological dig will yield new data on the past or a museum may discover a cache of paintings long overlooked which document a particular artistic project. Similarly, a scholar may present a systematic study of an artist whose corpus of work had never before been properly analysed as a whole. It is hoped that *History of Japanese Art* will encourage readers to learn about Japan and to appreciate its art, and perhaps even to stimulate further study.

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There are now 468 illustrations, including 67 new color and 52 new black and white, filling out the book with calligraphy, lacquer, metalwares, ceramics, textiles, and developments in Japanese art since 1945. Thanks for sourcing and organizing this go to Julia Ruxton, and the brilliant design uniting the text with the color images so sorrowfully segregated in the earlier edition is the work of Peter Ling. Editing this book could have been no easy task, and my thanks to Mary Davies for bearing those troubles. My thanks also to Kara Hattersley Smith for setting up the whole project, and to Anne Townley and Lee Greenfield for their patience and support in seeing it through to publication.

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