Painting in Between: Gender and Modernity in the Japanese Literati Art of Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913)

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This dissertation investigates the aesthetic and conceptual transformations of literati art—a dominant mode of both being and representing in the East Asian cultural sphere that experienced unprecedented popularity in early Meiji-period (1868-1912) Japan. Although literati culture had predominantly been seen as a male prerogative since its genesis in medieval China, in early Meiji Japan, the female painter Okuhara Seiko capitalized on this mode of picture-making and self-fashioning. Producing dynamic ink landscapes and deliberately idiosyncratic calligraphy while simultaneously embodying literati ideals through her manner of living, Seiko inhabited the persona of a literatus and crafted an alternative social world. Seiko’s work thus provides a compelling lens through which to reconsider socially constructed dichotomies in the modern era—specifically, conceptions of premodernity and modernity, masculinity and femininity, and China and Japan—as she negotiated the boundaries of these ostensibly dichotomous categories to create a space in which to assert her agency.

Chapter 1 reconstructs the sociocultural circumstances within which literati art thrived in the 1870s. It demonstrates that Seiko deployed literati art as a means of pursuing her autonomy, embodying eremitic ideals both in painting and in actual life and blurring the boundaries between the real world and the ideal world of litterateurs. Chapter 2 examines Seiko’s and contemporary artists’ attempts to “modernize” literati art. These efforts were formulated in response to the reconceptualization of Sinitic culture from the 1880s onward, when the newly defined category
of *bunjinga* (literati painting), as well as Sinitic prose and poetry, came to be deemed incompatible with modernity. Focusing on Seiko’s engagement with literati art in her place of retirement, chapter 3 analyzes the ways in which works of literati art could accommodate multiple subject positions and enable an imaginative transgression of gender and cultural boundaries. Chapter 4 and the epilogue investigate discursive constructions of female artists by contemporary critics in relation to shifting conceptions of art, gender, and sexuality in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Examining the complex relationships between changing perceptions of Sinitic culture and women’s place therein, this study ultimately seeks to reconceptualize the relationship between gender and literati art.
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Introduction

On the third day of the twelfth month of 1865, Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913) hosted a party at Yoshida-tei, a restaurant on Benten Island in Shinobazu Pond in Ueno, to establish her reputation as a painter within the community of literati artists in Edo (renamed Tokyo in 1868). Twenty-five poets, painters, and calligraphers gathered for this occasion, including the leading kanshi poets of the time Ōnuma Chinzan (1818-1891) and Suzuki Shōtō (1824-1898), as well as the literati painters Fukushima Ryūho (1820-1889), Hattori Hazan (1827-1894), and Matsuoka Kansui (1818-1887), with whom Seiko would interact regularly thereafter. A few women artists joined as well, including Nakabayashi Seishuku (1831-1912), a daughter of the painter Nakabayashi Chikutō (1776-1853), whose paintings of plum blossoms would come to be compared to Seiko’s paintings of bamboo. As was conventional at such social events, after plenty of sake was served, the guests, in a state of exhilaration, collaboratively inscribed a piece of cloth (kanreisha), each contributing a short poem or a small picture of plants and flowers to commemorate the gathering. Seiko’s biographer Inamura Ryōhei (dates unknown), whose father Kan’ichirō (dates unknown) assisted Seiko in organizing this event, suggests that this gathering essentially marked Seiko’s debut as a practitioner of literati art. By gathering the artistic luminaries of the time and facilitating their joint production of a work dedicated to her, Seiko seems to have employed this social event as a way of having her artistic identity acknowledged by the literati community and receiving their acceptance of her entry into that community as an

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1 Inamura Ryōhei, Okuhara Seiko (1929; Tokyo: Ōzorasha, 1995), 30-34.

2 Seishuku’s plum paintings were compared to Seiko’s paintings of bamboo in a ranking titled Fūryū meika banzuke published two years later in 1867. This ranking is discussed in Ishii Hakutei, “Okuhara Seiko,” Chūō bijutsu 3, no. 7 (July 1917): 144-145. I thank Nanni Deng for making this important source available to me.

3 Inamura notes that this joint scroll was in his own collection at the time he published his book in 1929; the current whereabouts of the work is unknown. Inamura, Okuhara Seiko, 30-34.

4 Ibid., 30-31.
equal member. The timing of Seiko’s premier could not have been more propitious, for the
demand for literati art, a dominant mode of both being and representing in the East Asian
cultural sphere, was accelerating throughout the Japanese archipelago at an unprecedented speed
precisely at this time. Within the next decade, Seiko’s dynamic ink landscapes and her
deliberately idiosyncratic calligraphy captivated her audience, allowing her to be widely
recognized as one of the top-ranked literati painters of the time.

Working as a female Japanese artist of a non-scholar official class in the modernizing era,
Seiko might be seen as quadruply displaced from the conventional persona of the literati artist.
The paradigm of literati art that Seiko practiced was initially formulated by scholar-officials in
eleventh-century China who pursued the unity of the three arts—painting, poetry, and
calligraphy—as a means of self-cultivation and personal expression. These scholar-officials
aimed at spontaneous and direct expression of the self rather than aesthetic or representational
perfection, creating a visual language of self-averred dilettantism. In doing so, they constructed
an aesthetic and moral value system ostensibly opposed to that of professional painters. Although
one’s physical and psychological removal from the mundane world was championed among
literati, their arts were inherently communal, as they were predicated on social relations among
like-minded men. First associated with this group of highly-educated male bureaucrats, literati
art slowly evolved into a visual idiom that, ironically, professional painters easily mastered.
When these ideals were adopted in eighteenth-century Japan, however, they were never tied to a
specific social class, thus opening an aesthetic domain wherein artists and patrons from various

\[5 \text{ For the foundational English-language account of the development of Chinese literati art, see Susan Bush, } \textit{The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037-1101) to Tung Ch’i-Ch’ ang (1555-1636)} (1971; Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012). A concise, insightful summary of recent revisions to such foundational narratives may be found in Yukio Lippit, ”Urakami Gyokudō: An Intoxicology of Japanese Literati Painting,” in } \textit{Dialogues in Art History, from Mesopotamian to Modern: Readings for a New Century}, ed. Elizabeth Cropper, Studies in the History of Art 74 (Washington, National Gallery of Art, 2009), esp. 167 and 169.\]
social strata could explore a variety of subject positions.⁶ Okuhara Seiko capitalized on this elastic mode of picture-making, claiming the cultural prestige of the idealized Chinese elite for herself and inhabiting the persona of a literatus to lay claim to an alternative world.⁷ Presenting self-fashioning as a social truth, Seiko employed literati art as a powerful means of blurring the boundary between life and work, public and private, reality and imagination.

The artist known to us today as Okuhara Seiko was born in 1837 as Ikeda Setsu, the fourth daughter of a high-ranking retainer (ōban gashira, a chief of the great guards) in the Koga domain (present-day Ibaraki Prefecture).⁸ She received education in Chinese learning (kangaku

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⁶ Although the terms “literati art” and “literati painting” are employed throughout this dissertation as a matter of convenience, the history of their transmission and transformation in Japan is highly complex; indeed, there has been a long-standing debate over the proper terminology to describe Japanese paintings inspired by Chinese and Korean examples. Köno Motoaki, for example, has noted the usefulness of employing the term bunjinga (“literati painting,” derived from the Chinese term wenren hua), for it conveys the Japanese painters’ aspirations to attain the ideals pursued by Chinese scholar-officials. Köno Motoaki, “Nihon bunjinga shiron,” Kokka, no. 1207 (1996): 5-13. Satō Yasuhiro, on the other hand, has argued for the use of the term nanga (literally “southern painting”) to differentiate the early-modern development of Japanese works from that of Chinese wenren hua. Satō argues that a number of Edo-period (1615-1868) artists used paintings produced by professional painters in late-Ming (1368-1644) Suzhou (in addition to woodblock-printed painting manuals) as their models, thereby creating a mode of execution different from that of Chinese literati. See, for example, Satō Yasuhiro, “Nanga/bunjinga/nanshūga o ōdan suru—Uragami Gyokudō no gafū hensen,” in Uragami Gyokudō, ed. Okayama Kenritsu Bijutsukan and Chibashi Bijutsukan, exh. cat. (Okayama and Chiba: Okayama Kenritsu Bijutsukan and Chibashi Bijutsukan, 2006), 243-248; and idem, “Chūgoku no bunjinga to Nihon no nanga,” in Higashi Ajia no naka no Nihon bijutsu, ed. Itakura Masaaki, vol. 6 of Nihon bijutsu zenshū (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 2015), 194-201. The terms bunjinga, nanga, and nanshūga (“southern-school painting”) were, in fact, highly contested during the Meiji and Taishō (1912-1926) periods, as will be discussed in chapter 2 of this dissertation. For a concise summary of this modern discursive contestation and transformation of literati art, see Okuma Toshiyuki, “Nihon nangashi kō,” in Kindai nanga ten, ed. Gunma Kenritsu Kindai Bijutsukan, exh. cat. (Tatebayashi: Gunma Kenritsu Kindai Bijutsukan, 1999), 10-16.


⁸ Detailed biographies of Okuhara Seiko are available in Inamura, Okuhara Seiko; Fujikake Shizuya, “Okuhara Seiko,” in Okuhara Seiko gashū, ed. Fujikake Shizuya (Tokyo: Kōgeisha, 1933), 1-37; Martha J. McClintock, “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913): The Life and Arts of a Meiji Period Literati Artist” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of
under the clan official Chinone Ichiō (1787-1868) and studied literati painting under Hirata Suiseki (1796-1863), one of many students of the eclectic painter Tani Buncho (1763-1840). In 1865, Seiko left her family home for Edo to pursue a career as a professional painter. Although the Koga domain had legal restrictions that prevented women from leaving the domain, she circumvented these restrictions by becoming adopted by her aunt’s family, surnamed Okuhara, in the Sekiyado domain (today’s Chiba Prefecture), from which she was able to move to Edo. Once in the city, she established a painting studio in the Shitaya district, which was becoming a hub for literati painters, poets, and calligraphers. Naming her studio Bokuto En’unro (Pavilion of Ink Spitting Mist and Clouds), she became widely known for her exuberant ink landscapes and her willfully distorted mode of calligraphy.

Strikingly, Seiko is known to have cropped her hair, dressed in men’s kimono, and engaged in cultural practices typically restricted to men, capitalizing on the brief moment of cultural openness shortly after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Although the Meiji (1868-1912) government implemented a series of petty-misdemeanor ordinances that prohibited cross-dressing and women’s sporting of cropped hair beginning in the early 1870s, Seiko procured a special certificate issued by the police that stated that she was exempted from the hair-cutting edict because she suffered from the condition of “blood rushing to the head” (gyakujo no shō).9 Carrying this certificate with her, she kept her hair short throughout the rest of her life. In 1871, the same year she dramatically cropped her hair, Seiko opened her studio residence as a private academy (kajuku) of calligraphy, painting, and Chinese studies, which she ran for eleven years

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9 Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, ed., Okuhara Seiko ten—Okuhara Seiko gashitsu Shūsui Sōdō ichiku kinen, exh. cat. (Koga: Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, 2010), 68.
until 1882. Although the school originally had only three female students between the ages of ten and twenty, Seiko is said to have eventually had hundreds of followers from government officials to geisha and roaming former samurai; even the highly influential art critic Okakura Kakuzō (Tenshin; 1862-1913) is known to have been Seiko’s student at one point.10

In 1891 Seiko abruptly left the metropolitan art world to pursue a quiet life in rural Kamikawakami in Kumagaya City, Saitama Prefecture. The immediate reason for her relocation was the construction of a railroad: the government purchased the land on which Seiko’s studio stood in order to construct what is now the Yamanote line, which circles the heart of Tokyo. Seiko moved to a temporary residence nearby in 1890, but the following year, she retired to the quietude of Kamikawakami, which had belonged to the Koga domain until the Meiji period. She was accompanied by her student Watanabe Seiran (1855-1918) throughout the remainder of her life. Although she removed herself from the art world of the capital, which had begun to cast an increasingly dismissive eye upon literati art, Seiko continued to paint for her patrons while traveling widely throughout the archipelago. Significantly, it was around this time that Seiko dramatically transformed her styles of painting and calligraphy, replacing her earlier exuberant style with an exquisite and refined mode of execution. Seiko passed away in 1913 at the age of 77 at her home in Kumagaya, surrounded by her closest disciples.

The life and work of Okuhara Seiko have been examined in a small body of scholarship in both Japanese and English. Of greatest relevance and importance to my dissertation is the work of Martha J. McClintock, whose doctoral dissertation, “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913): The Life and Arts of a Meiji Period Literati Artist,” completed in 1991, remains the most substantial

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art-historical monograph on Seiko in any language.\textsuperscript{11} Based on the author’s direct study of nearly five hundred works by Seiko and her disciples, McClintock’s dissertation traces the stylistic development of Seiko’s paintings and calligraphy in chronological order. Following a biography of Seiko, the subsequent chapters examine the stylistic transformation of Seiko’s works based on the following periodization of the artist’s career: 1) early studies that Seiko made in her hometown of Koga; 2) transitional works produced between 1864 and 1870—that is, the period around Seiko’s move from Koga to Edo; 3) works of the so-called mature “Tōkai-Seiko” period in Tokyo from 1871 to 1887; 4) transitional works produced between 1887 and 1893, immediately before and after Seiko’s retirement to Kumagaya; 5) early Kumagaya works from 1894 to 1900; and finally, 6) late Kumagaya works from 1901 to 1913.\textsuperscript{12} In particular, McClintock shows how the controlled brushwork of Seiko’s studies in Koga, completed under the guidance of Hirata Suiseki, disappeared entirely by the 1870s when she began to create dynamic, large-scale compositions with energetic, fluctuating brushstrokes in her studio in Tokyo. McClintock notes that many of the paintings from this period are characterized by a freedom and rapidity of execution and by the deliberate awkwardness that results from the juxtaposition of secure and unstable formal elements, often employed to create whimsically distorted landscapes. By the late 1880s, however, this pursuit of exuberance and irregularity in ink on paper gradually gave way to the finer, more detailed execution of smaller works in color on silk, a style that Seiko fully developed after she retired to Kumagaya in the 1890s. It was during this time that she produced some of her most exquisite paintings for her major patrons.


\textsuperscript{12} McClintock, “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913),” 8.
Toward the end of her life in the early twentieth century, Seiko seems to have revived her earlier energetic Tōkai style, as her reputation resurred in the capital.

McClintock’s work necessarily serves as an important foundation for my own analyses in the following pages. Drawing on McClintock’s insightful treatment of the stylistic development of Seiko’s œuvre, I seek to contextualize her production against the dramatic artistic and sociocultural transformations of the modernizing era in order to understand how her stylistic metamorphosis engaged with, or disengaged from, the shifting conceptions and institutional structures of art and literati culture. I also attempt to build upon McClintock’s perceptive visual analyses of Seiko’s paintings to examine how these images relate to the calligraphic inscriptions that she so often brushed upon them—that is, I analyze what kind of meanings were generated by the artist’s performative orchestrations of word and image. Finally, given the frequent commentary on Seiko’s transgressive gender in publications during and immediately after her lifetime, I also examine how her work and gender were perceived, and problematized, in relation to each other.

To treat these intricately interwoven art historical, social, and political phenomena and to explore the ways in which Seiko’s works complicate existing narratives of literati culture and nineteenth-century Japanese art, this dissertation is structured around case studies of three works from three phases of Seiko’s career. These case studies are complemented by a detailed history of the reception of the figure of Okuhara Seiko by critics in the Meiji and Taishō (1912-1926) periods. In an attempt to open this monographic study to broader narratives about the history of modern Japanese art and the place of gender therein, I end with an examination of the rise of Noguchi Shōhin (1847-1917) in the 1890s, a painter who discursively represented everything that Seiko was not.
Chapter 1 demonstrates that the unparalleled florescence of literati art in the mid-nineteenth century was not an isolated artistic phenomenon but rather a product of complex interactions among various sociocultural factors; indeed, its popularity was dependent upon the democratization of proficiencies in reading and composing Sinitic poetry, direct exchanges between Japanese practitioners of literati art and Qing scholars, and the general educational background in the Chinese classics that was widely shared throughout the archipelago in the first decade of Meiji. Seiko played a major role in bringing about this boom of Sinitic culture, producing ink landscapes with bold brushstrokes and calligraphic inscriptions with purposefully distorted characters that captivated early Meiji audiences. Seiko thus deployed literati art as a means of pursuing her autonomy, accumulating substantial wealthy by painting, adopting her disciple as her daughter and becoming a household head, and establishing a private academy of painting, calligraphy, and Chinese learning. More significantly, she inhabited the persona of a literatus both in painting and in actual life, laying claim to an alternative social world and blurring the boundaries between the real world and the ideal world of literateurs. Further, Seiko and her peers’ pursuit of ritualized private gatherings can be seen as attempts to reconcile the tension between their ideal life of aesthetic reclusion and their actual lives invested in the market economy, which increasingly characterized the practice of literati art.

By the 1880s, however, the commercial success of Sinitic culture turned literati art into an object of rhetorical denunciation and institutional exclusion. This period saw paradigm shifts that gradually eroded the cultural foundations on which literati art had flourished in the previous decade. Focusing on Seiko’s *Spring Colors on the Sumida River*, which displays her dramatic stylistic metamorphosis, chapter 2 investigates her attempt to “modernize” literati art in response to the fundamental reconceptualization of Sinitic culture in the mid-Meiji era. During this period,
bunjinga (literati painting) was separated from the broader category of Sinitic painting and stigmatized for its amateurish origins, literary dependency, and expressive brushwork. The rhetorical degeneration of bunjinga, in fact, paralleled the broader social break with Sinitic culture. This trend increasingly rendered Sinitic prose and poetry, which had been considered the superior and standard mode of expression, as obsolete and inappropriate for the modern era. Deemed incompatible with the modern conception of universally accessible art, bunjinga was eventually excluded from state-sponsored exhibitions and the curricula of art academies in Tokyo, while calligraphy was divorced from painting and deemed “non-art.” These paradigm shifts posed a productive challenge to Seiko and her peers to explore other avenues and means of expression. Ultimately, this chapter shows that Seiko and her contemporaries employed the genre of depictions of real-world sites to create a new vision of literati art that balanced Edo-period habits of representation, experimentations with Western-style techniques, and the changing conception of literati culture in the mid-Meiji period.

In 1891 Seiko left the metropolitan art scene to retire to Kumagaya in Saitama Prefecture, enacting the literati ideal of reclusion in actual life. Focusing on Seiko’s Beauty by Plum and Window, the third chapter analyzes the ways in which a work of literati art could accommodate multiple subject positions and enable an imaginative transgression of gender and cultural boundaries. First examining how Seiko’s painting stages the woman as a desirable object for visual delectation, I then compare this painting to other images of beautiful women to illuminate the techniques of representation associated with this genre. In fact, the painting combines visual motifs and representational conventions to construct the depicted woman as an isolated beauty who longs for her absent lover—that is, the viewer. On the other hand, the composite nature of the poem inscribed below the painting, as well as the complex relationships it establishes with
the painted beauty, open up new possibilities for interpreting the scroll as a whole. Ultimately, I argue that the assemblage of pictorial and literary tropes embedded in the work activates modes of engaging with the scroll from multiple subject positions, allowing the beholder to transgress gender and cultural boundaries into an imagined world removed from contemporary concerns. It was through this mode of intimate engagement with literati art that Seiko continued to pursue literati ideals in her solitary life.

Chapter 4 and the epilogue investigate discursive constructions of female artists in relation to shifting conceptions of art, gender, and sexuality in the Meiji and Taishō periods. In the late nineteenth century, journalists, artists, and cultural critics created dramatic stories that sensationalized Seiko’s masculine appearance and character. However, it was in the early twentieth century, especially after her death, that Seiko’s transgressive gender identity became increasingly problematized, as female masculinity came to be perceived as a pressing social issue within the context of Japan’s modernization. Indeed, social critics saw the rise in women’s wage employment following the economic deprivation of the 1910s as a deplorable sign of the “masculinization of women.” Simultaneously, sexologists deployed the rhetoric of scientific knowledge to pathologize the female masculinity that they identified in Seiko.

At the very same moment that Seiko removed herself from the metropolitan art world, another female literati painter Noguchi Shōhin actively intervened both in the institutionalization of art and in the construction of modern Japanese womanhood. Whereas Seiko wrote almost nothing about herself, Shōhin frequently employed the medium of writing to inscribe her femininity in the construction of her public persona. Shōhin thus played an important role in shaping feminine ideals, while creating a new vision of the female artist as a competent yet unthreatening painter who simultaneously serves as a dutiful wife and benevolent mother.
Significantly, Shōhin’s replacement of Seiko in the public eye in the 1890s coincided with the emergence of new conceptualizations of art and gender, in which the feminization of art became a vital part of the shifting conception of modern womanhood. Strikingly, art came to be perceived as a practice appropriate, or even essential, to women’s cultivation of their femininity. As women’s domestic roles as nurturers of the next generation of citizens and managers of the home-as-state gained importance, art came to be posited as an effective means of improving women’s capacity to educate their children and refine the cultural sophistication of their domestic sphere. The modern discourse on art, therefore, was deeply interwoven with the shifting conceptions of ideal womanhood in late Meiji and Taishō Japan.

Ultimately, this study seeks to reconceptualize the relationship between gender and literati art. Far from a male prerogative, the practice of literati art provided female artists in nineteenth-century Japan with a compelling means of exercising their social and artistic agency. Okuhara Seiko’s activities and artistic practices thus provide an important lens through which to reconsider socially constructed dichotomies in the modern era—specifically, conceptions of premodernity and modernity, the public and the private, masculinity and femininity, and China and Japan. Seiko consciously and performatively maneuvered the boundaries of these ostensibly dichotomous categories in order to create a space in which to assert her own agency. Whereas Seiko inhabited the identity of a literatus to claim possession of an alternative gender identity, Noguchi Shōhin feminized literati art to construct a self-image that directly intervened in the conception of modern Japanese womanhood. By examining the intricately interwoven relationships between changing conceptions of Sinitic culture and

women’s place therein, I hope show that the history of literati art cannot be written without addressing the question of gender.
Chapter 1

In Pursuit of Reclusion: *Dreams of Cranes amid Windy Pines*

During Japan’s revolutionary transition to modernity and the height of her popularity in the 1870s, Okuhara Seiko created *Dreams of Cranes amid Windy Pines* (*Shōfū kakumu-zu*), a dramatic ink landscape painting that visually celebrates the reclusive ideals to which the artist herself aspired (Figure 1.1a).¹ Under the billowing clouds and crowning pine trees in this fantastic landscape, a recluse comfortably reclines on a daybed with a fan to the side. Thick clouds surge into the scene from both sides of the composition, forming a voluminous white mass that hovers above the lounging figure. A waterfall rushes downward from the upper-right-hand corner of the composition, disappearing into the mist and reappearing at the lower right. The dynamic movement of these organic forces that flow through the composition adds a sense of instantaneity to this extraordinary site of eternal eremitic dreams; they further encourage the viewer to imagine the vastness of the space that extends beyond the pictorial frame, signaling the complete removal of the recluse from the mundane world.

The aesthetic eremitism epitomized in *Dreams of Cranes* is indeed one of the central themes in literati art. Originally a prerogative of like-minded scholar-officials in medieval China, by the time Seiko created this work in early Meiji-period Japan, the literati arts of poetry, calligraphy, and painting came to be practiced by an ever-larger sector of the populace, creating a phenomenon that might be characterized as the democratization of literati culture.² This

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¹ Martha J. McClintock has discussed this painting as “the culmination of Seiko’s Tōkai period landscapes” and has dated the work to 1874. Martha J. McClintock, in “Okuhara Seiko (1837–1913): The Life and Arts of a Meiji Period Literati Artist” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1991), 146-147. I express my sincere gratitude to Kurai Naoko and Tateishi Takayuki for allowing me to study this painting and other related works invaluable to writing this chapter at the Koga City Museum of History.

unprecedented popularity of Sinitic art forms further led to their commercialization and commodification, whereby literati artists were turned into celebrities and their performances were transformed into spectacles to be purchased.³ Seiko capitalized on this boom of literati culture, creating exuberant styles of painting and calligraphy that met the demands of the time and securing a position as one of the top-ranked artists. On the other hand, she actively participated in ritualized private gatherings of literati artists, which often aimed at dissociating the members from materialism and pursuing the arts as a form of refined leisure. Of course, many literati artists who lived before this time faced a dilemma that stemmed from such a double identity—between their aspirational selves as literati who pursued their arts solely for their self-expression and self-cultivation and their actual selves as professional painters who made a living by selling paintings.⁴ This divide between the ideal and the real, however, became most acute for artists working in the early Meiji period when the commercialism that increasingly characterized their arts reached its crescendo. Painting reclusive visions as seen in Dreams of Cranes thus provided Seiko and her associates with a means of both catering to the rising demand for literati art and recuperating their aspirational identities as lofty literati who were removed from the celebrity culture in which they were otherwise immersed.

How did literati art gain such momentum in mid-nineteenth-century Japan? How did Seiko and her peers participate in its explosive popularity? More importantly, what did it mean for Seiko to engage in literati art? In order to answer these questions, this chapter first investigates the reclusive ideals that Seiko and her fellow artists sought to embody during the


⁴ See, for example, James Cahill, The Painter’s Practice: How Artists Lived and Worked in Traditional China (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
boom of literati art in the first decade of Meiji. No isolated artistic phenomenon, literati art existed at the heart of a complex web of sociocultural factors; indeed, its popularity was dependent upon the democratization of proficiencies in reading and composing Sinitic poetry, direct exchanges between Japanese practitioners of literati art and Qing scholars, and the general educational background in the Chinese classics that was widely shared throughout the archipelago at the time. In was in this context that Seiko pursued her autonomy and success as a professional painter and head of a private academy in the Shitaya community of literati artists. This biographic section is followed by a close analysis of her dramatic ink landscapes and unconventional works of calligraphy, in relation to the sudden influx of artistic and scholarly materials from China that created a broad interest in Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) art that swept throughout the archipelago. Simultaneously, literati culture came to be subsumed by commercialism and commodification on a scale never witnessed before. In order to reconcile the tension between their aspirational life situated in aesthetic reclusion and their actual lives invested in the market economy, Seiko and her circle of artists organized private activities through which they sought elegant modesty and egalitarian friendship in ritualized gatherings. Ultimately, I argue that Seiko’s pursuit of eremitic ideals both in painting and in actual life allowed her to claim possession of an alternative social world where she could inhabit the identity of an untrammeled recluse who boldly transcends mundane concerns.

**Visualizing Eremitic Dreams**

In order to understand the reclusive ideals that Seiko and other literati artists sought to embody, let us return to *Dreams of Cranes* and examine it more closely. A careful analysis of the motifs and techniques employed in the work reveals how the painter creates a composition that is simultaneously vigorous and relaxed. Despite the overall dynamism the painting exudes,
individual motifs are executed carefully by differentiated brushstrokes and ink gradations. Thin dry lines drawn with an apparent sense of ease delineate the clouds, while thicker curvilinear strokes in lighter wet ink are casually brushed in various directions both in and around the nebulous forms; these strokes describe the volume and energetic speed with which the clouds appear to move and transform before the viewer’s (and the recluse’s) eye. Although the water is depicted minimally with several thin strokes, many of the lines make emphatic stops or hooks; they collectively generate a downward force that counteracts the lateral movement of the sweeping clouds. Over the rugged pine trees in the foreground, a series of short sharp strokes are drawn in various tonalities of ink to form clusters of spiky needles from which intertwined vines dangle. The manner in which these pine trees emerge from the boulders on the left and twist their bodies to frame the reclining recluse from lower left to upper right echoes the way that the pine branches hang on the gorge from upper right to lower left, adding a diagonal movement to the vertical and horizontal motion of the clouds and waterfall. The confluence of these organic forces lends a sense of spiraling, kinetic energy to the entire composition.

In contrast to the powerful motion of the swirling clouds and surging waterfall, the recluse exudes a sense of stillness and tranquility (Figure 1.1b). In fact, the dais rests on a reserved oval of the white paper, which is, in turn, framed by two distinct pine trees that stretch their branches to encircle the figure, creating a spiky protective nimbus. Ink dots in various sizes and tonalities of ink scattered throughout the composition create a bold, vibrant energy that contrasts with the sense of ease that the recluse seems to enjoy. Beneath the lower pine tree at the bottom of the composition, three smaller figures prepare tea for their master (Figure 1.1c). One sits on a mat spread on the ground and tends to the brazier, while the other stands behind a table and holds utensils, perhaps to serve to the master sprawling on the couch. The process seems to

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5 I thank Prof. Melissa McCormick for this observation.
have begun in the lower right, near the edge of the bank, where a figure bends forward to draw water with a bucket cast from a rope (Figure 1.1d).  

The poem Seiko inscribes at the upper left of the composition further reinforces the sense that this painting serves to celebrate the eremitic ideals beloved of literati artists:

The caves and ravines are deep and marvelous, the forest vapors, fragrant.  
The fair-weather clouds are crystal white; the rainy clouds are cool.  
The human world is sweltering [but its] steam does not reach [here].  
Resting on a pillow among pines and winds, [my] dreams of cranes are eternal.  

洞壑幽奇林氣香 晴雲晶白雨雲涼  
人間炎暑蒸不到 一枕松風鶴夢長

The poem encourages the viewer to join the poet/recluse in escaping the stifling summer heat of the city to retreat to the cool deep mountain forests, leisurely dreaming among pines, winds, and clouds. Further, by incorporating images of pines and cranes—that is, auspicious symbols of longevity—the poem seems to reinforce the eternity of her eremitic dreams.  

In her calligraphic inscription, Seiko employs thin undulating brushstrokes to brush her poem with relative clarity. Most strikingly, the seventh character in the second column for “reach” 到 is dramatically enlarged and executed with acrobatic motions of the brush; this character seems to make an end point and cordon off the dreaming recluse in the final line of the poem, just as the pine trees

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6 McClintock has noted that the artist’s virtuosic technique of drawing a single line can be found “in so small a detail as the moving coils of the bucket’s rope as it unwinds in the air.” McClintock, “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913),” 146.

7 I thank Prof. Manling Luo for generously sharing her expertise of Chinese poetry with me and for helping me translate this and other poems included in this chapter.

demarcate a protective space. Overall, the ink-saturated brushstrokes of the inscription are fluid, subtle, and at ease as though to evoke—or not to disturb—the hermit’s comfortable midday nap. The relative subtlety of the calligraphic inscription in Dreams of Cranes contrasts starkly with the audacious idiosyncrasy of her stand-alone works of calligraphy from the same period, which will be examined later in this chapter.

The ideal of reclusion that this work celebrates is a recurring theme in literati art. As Alan J. Berkowitz has shown, these ideals took shape in early medieval China (220-589), when reclusion denoted not necessarily religious asceticism or physical isolation from human society but rather a conscientious renunciation of official service in the state bureaucracy. Various referred to as “hidden men” (yinshi), “disengaged persons” (yimin), “high-minded men” (gaoshi), and “scholars-at-home” (chushi), reclusive men eschewed official appointments in order to pursue their own personal agendas or to avoid serving a government that they perceived did not possess the Way (dao). These men received social admiration for maintaining “their mettle, their resolve, their integrity…in the face of adversity, threat, or temptation.” Biographical compilations of historical recluses began to appear in the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), but it was in the early medieval period that the distinctive pattern of reclusion fully emerged in China.

Although Berkowitz’s study primarily concerns “substantive reclusion,” in which a “true” recluse who was genuinely uninterested in politics went into hiding to pursue his own personal

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9 I thank Prof. McCormick for this perceptive observation.


11 Ibid., 5.

12 Ibid., 9 and 14.
such authentic reclusion might have been tangential to much of the development of eremitic themes in East Asian art. As Peter C. Sturman has argued:

Reclusion is an act of disengagement yet, ironically, pronouncing reclusion is the opposite: a calling out for individuals of sympathetic mind. However deeply certain individuals may have aspired to the ideal of the recluse and the solitary existence it implies, reclusion was primarily conceived as a broadly shared discourse that invited commentary within a like-minded community…. For the artist, reclusion represented a private space, a chamber within the mind, but it was a private space that was always intended to be shared.\textsuperscript{14}

In other words, reclusion is predicated on and productive of engagement; its aim is not necessarily to renounce one’s ties with social networks or worldly affairs but rather to create a space where one can pursue communion with high-minded literateurs—whether in actuality or in an imaginary space of literature and visual art. Moreover, reclusion carried important aesthetic connotations as it presumed “a purified body and mind capable of producing superior art.”\textsuperscript{15}

When these ideals were introduced to early modern Japan, where there was no social status equivalent to that of the Chinese scholar-official and where literati art was largely practiced by professional painters of the commoner class, it was the broader conception of reclusive disengagement as a form of aesthetic, communal, trans-historical, and trans-cultural engagement that seems to have taken firm root.

\textbf{The Explosion of Literati Culture and Sino-Japanese Cultural Exchange}

Seiko’s visual and poetic celebration of eremitic ideals in \textit{Dreams of Cranes} was produced at a time when literati art found unparalleled popularity in Japan.\textsuperscript{16} The establishment

\begin{footnotes}
\item[13] Ibid., 147.
\item[15] Ibid., 21.
\item[16] Rosina Buckland has treated the popularity of literati art in early Meiji Japan in her study of Taki Katei (1830-1901); see her \textit{Painting Nature for the Nation}, 43-95.
\end{footnotes}
of formal diplomatic relations with China in the 1870s led to direct exchanges with Qing literati, as well as the massive influx of contemporary artistic and scholarly materials from China.\textsuperscript{17} At the same time, the men who had joined revolutionary movements in overthrowing the Tokugawa shogunate and took offices in the new Meiji administration had all received a traditional education in the Chinese classics. Considering literary Chinese as the most suitable and superior form of expression, they actively participated in this burgeoning literati culture as both practitioners and patrons. Central to this boom of literati culture was the “brilliant florescence” of Sinitic poetry and prose (\textit{kanshibun}) during the early Meiji period.\textsuperscript{18} A brief examination of the various manifestations of this literary florescence will provide an important context for understanding Seiko’s public and private forms of artistic production in the first decade of the Meiji era.

Although \textit{kanshibun} literacy was largely a prerogative of the male elite in the seventeenth century, it became increasingly attainable to an ever-greater portion of the populace by the first decades of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{19} As Matthew Fraleigh has shown, the Kansei Reforms of the 1790s established the Neo-Confucianism of Zhu Xi as state doctrine, codified the Confucian canon, regularized curricula, and linked the central academy to local educational institutions, making “proficiency in Literary Sinitic an important attainment for a much broader range of individuals.”\textsuperscript{20} Further, private academies offering training in the Chinese classics proliferated throughout the archipelago, while printed reference materials “made self-study of the Chinese


\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 469.
classics accessible even to rural commoners." The resultant trend of the proliferation of *kanshi* composition continued into the new era “when poetic societies devoted to kanshi sprung up in both rural and urban areas, the social backgrounds of Japanese kanshi poets further diversified, a broader range of female poets came to participate, and new venues were established to showcase poetic production.” Importantly, not only did *kanshibun* signify the preservation of traditional values during this period of sociopolitical upheaval, but also “its greater diversity of forms, its broader range of thematic content, and its larger vocabulary” made *kanshibun* an effective tool of addressing dramatic transformations in the new age.

From the late Edo period onward, Sinitic prose and poetry held particular significance to *shishi* (men of high purpose) who joined the revolutionary movement to overthrow the shogunate and restore imperial rule. For many of these patriots, “*kanshi* became an important medium for decrying social or political ills or voicing opposition to the shogunate.” As Saitō Mareshi has shown, since argument (*giron*) and indignation (*kōgaï*) were understood to be the central component of *kanshibun*, Sinitic prose and poetry served as a compelling language for those who ardentely searched for ways of proving their ability in a time of urgency. Thus, composing in

21 Ibid.


23 Ibid., 572-573. As Fraleigh has stated, “Literary Sinitic had served as a major vehicle by which Meiji intellectuals encountered and translated Western ideas” (ibid., 577). Burton Watson has also noted that “in addition to the usual hackneyed celebrations of the Japanese landscape there now appeared descriptions in Chinese verse of Niagara Falls or the Rocky Mountains, or poems on the introduction of the electric light to Japan in 1884 or the life of Maria Theresa of Austria.” Burton Watson, “Poetry in Chinese in the Modern Period,” in *The Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literature*, ed. Joshua S. Mostow et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 105. Seiko, in fact, wrote a preface in literary Chinese for a two-volume biography of George Washington titled *Tsūzoku Washinton den*, which was published in 1873. For more on Meiji-period *kanshibun*, see Matthew Fraleigh, “Kanshibun in Modernizing Japan: The Case of Narushima Ryūhoku (1837-1884)” (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2005).


*kanshibun* allowed *shishi* not only to demonstrate their erudition and refinement, but also to acquire their place in history and articulate their identity. Donald Keene has also argued that “the patriots…had naturally and sincerely voiced their deepest emotions in Chinese, considering this language to be the most dignified and manly variety of Japanese expression.” At least for the educated elite in mid-nineteenth-century Japan, therefore, literary Chinese was not necessarily a foreign language but a language of “serious literature,” a conception that changed dramatically from the mid Meiji period onward. Further, following the Meiji restoration, shared training in the Chinese classics, as well as shared interest in composing and exchanging *kanshi* poems, facilitated the creation of horizontal bonds between individual patriots who gathered from various parts of the county to seek employment in the evolving capital of Tokyo. In fact, many of the men who worked as Confucian scholars in the late Edo period came to occupy high-ranking positions in the Meiji administration, as the new government acknowledged their meritorious deeds during the Restoration or valued their proficiency in preparing administrative documents in literary Chinese. Significantly, the establishment of meritocracy allowed Japanese intellectuals to identify themselves with celebrated scholar-officials in China. Modeling...
their identity on continental litterateurs, these Meiji officials actively composed poems and joined poetry salons as a way of maintaining an equilibrium between their public service and private pursuits.32

At the same time, as Rosina Buckland has discussed, the establishment of formal diplomatic relations with China enabled direct exchange between Japanese intellectuals and Qing practitioners of literati art.33 Specifically, the signing of the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Amity in 1871 facilitated trade and travel between the two countries, improving Japanese scholars’ access to recent archeological and epigraphic studies from China.34 Further, the founding of the first Chinese embassy in Tokyo in 1878 created opportunities for direct interactions with Qing diplomats that were often conducted via “brush talks” (J. *hitsudan*; Ch. *bitan*) in which the written form of literary Chinese served as the language of communication.35 It is said that the Japanese poet-officials were so eager to associate with Chinese diplomats that the Qing embassy selected emissaries primarily for their literary talents36 and that the legation occasionally designated staff members specifically to coordinate interactions with Japanese poets.37

Furthermore, Yang Shoujing (1839-1915), a staff member of the Chinese legation who resided in

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32 Saitō, *Kanbunmyaku to kindai Nihon*, 152.
34 Matsuya, “Koyama Shōtarō to ‘sho wa bijutsu narazu’ no jidai,” 14; Buckland, *Painting Nature for the Nation*, 56.
Japan from 1880 to 1884, is credited with introducing to Japan early copies of calligraphic inscriptions in stone and bronze from the Six Dynasties period (222-589). Yang provided the leading Japanese calligraphers of the time, including Matsuda Sekka (1823-1881), Iwaya Ichiroku (1834-1905), and Kusakabe Meikaku (1838-1922), with access to his extensive collection of tracings from stele (which numbered more than ten thousand), as well as works of the Qing-dynasty school of textual scholarship known as “evidential research” (Ch. kaozheng xue; J. kōshōgaku). The increased opportunities for the direct study of ancient continental models supported by Qing empirical scholarship stimulated Japanese scholars’ and artists’ interest in the contemporary Chinese practice of literati art.

It was in this context that Seiko pursued her artistic career in the new capital. Like the figures examined above, Seiko, too, seems to have actively collected Chinese paintings and books; further, in textual biographies of her that circulated in the early Meiji period, she was celebrated for engaging in correspondence with the Qing painter Wei Zhao (dates unknown) from Nanjing. Before examining her paintings and works of calligraphy whose vigorous brushstrokes and unconventional style received much commentary, a brief discussion of how Seiko embarked on her career as a professional painter and instructor at a private academy in Tokyo in the 1860s and 70s will clarify her connections to the broader context of literati cultural activity in the capital at the time.

38 Chen, Meiji zenki Nicchū gakujutsu kōryū no kenkyū, esp. 430-431; Matsuya, “Koyama Shōtarō to ‘sho wa bijutsu narazu’ no jidai,” 14. During his stay in Japan, Yang acquired numerous copies of rare Chinese books, contributing to the reverse importation of Chinese materials that was accelerating at the time. Buckland, Painting Nature for the Nation, 56-57.

39 Buckland, Painting Nature for the Nation, 56-57.

40 See, for example, “Seiko joshi,” Meiyo shinpō 8 (May 1876): 6.
In Pursuit of Autonomy

After moving to Edo from her home domain of Koga in 1865 at the age of twenty-nine, Seiko established her studio-home in the Okachimachi area of the Shitaya district (modern-day Taitō-ku), which became a hub of literati artists by the early nineteenth century and continued to serve as a center of literati activities throughout the first decades of the Meiji era. On the third day of the twelfth month of that year, Seiko hosted a party at the restaurant Yoshida-tei on Benten Island in Shinobazu Pond in Ueno to embark on her career as a professional painter (as discussed in the introduction). In order to establish her reputation within the community of literati artists, Seiko invited twenty-five leading poets, painters, and calligraphers of the time, including Ōnuma Chinzan (1818-1891), Suzuki Shōtō (1824-1898), Fukushima Ryūho (1820-1889), Hattori Hazan (1827-1894), and Matsuoka Kansui (1818-1887) with whom she would frequently associate throughout the remainder of her career in the city. In a separate room at the restaurant, Seiko and her assistant placed a large piece of cloth (kanreisha) on a mat spread over the floor, so that the guests, in a sake-induced state of jubilation, could collaboratively produce a work, each brushing a short poem or a small picture of plants and flowers; the entire scroll was dedicated to the host of the gathering—that is, Seiko. Seiko thus seems to have utilized this occasion, in which the artistic luminaries of the time gathered for her and produced a joint work dedicated to her, as a means of having the literati community acknowledge her artistic identity, as well as her entry into that community as an equal participant.


42 Inamura, Okuhara Seiko, 30-34. Restaurants on Benten Island were frequent gathering spots for poetry societies at the time. Buckland, Painting Nature for the Nation, 90.

43 Inamura, Okuhara Seiko, 30-34.
Seiko’s premier seems to have been successful. Within a few years, she was well integrated into the Shitaya community of literati, studying *kanshi* poetry with Chinzan, the head of the Shitaya Ginsha poetry group who, together with Mori Shuntō (1819-1889), dominated *kanshi* circles in the first two decades of the Meiji era. Further, she secured support from powerful politicians, particularly Yamauchi Toyoshige (Yōdō; 1827-1872) and Kido Takayoshi (Shōkiku; 1833-1877) (Figure 1.2). In fact, Seiko’s name appears frequently in Kido’s diary, which offers crucial insights into the ways in which high-ranking officials of the new government engaged with literati art in the early Meiji period. A leading samurai from the Chōshū domain (modern-day Yamaguchi Prefecture), Kido was instrumental in forming an alliance between the Chōshū and Satsuma (today’s Kagoshima Prefecture) domains that laid the foundation for the Meiji Restoration; he subsequently became a principal architect of the Meiji oligarchy. At the same time, Kido was also a prominent calligrapher and poet, as well as an ardent collector of paintings and antiques. His diary suggests that he was inundated with ceaseless requests for samples of his calligraphy, an art that he often practiced while in an alcohol-induced state of exhilaration. These requests came from various individuals including Buddhist priests and inn proprietors, as well as school administrators and contemporary politicians. Sometimes Kido practiced calligraphy for his own pleasure; at other times, he seems to have wielded his brush out of obligation. For instance, when several dozen families in

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44 In 1871 Kido joined the Iwakura Mission’s diplomatic tour of the United States and Europe; upon his return, he prevented Japan’s invasion of Korea and instead advocated internal reforms, particularly the establishment of a constitutional government. For a biography of Kido Takayoshi, see, for example, Matsuo Masahito, *Kido Takayoshi, Bakumatsu ishin no kosei* 8 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2007).

45 For an insightful discussion of Kido Takayoshi’s engagement with literati art, see Guth, “Meiji Response to *Bunjinga*,” 178-183.
Fukushima asked for his brush traces during his travels with the young emperor in 1876, he found no alternative but to complete fifty or sixty works for them (9.6.21).\footnote{This and the following information about Kido’s activities come from Kido Takayoshi, \textit{The Diary of Kido Takayoshi}, trans. Sidney D. Brown and Akiko Hirota (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1983-1986). The date for each entry is in parentheses. 9.6.21 refers to Meiji 9, sixth month, twenty-first day.}

The diary also mentions numerous parties that Kido hosted or attended in which he performed calligraphy in the company of Seiko and other members of his circle. For example, Kido notes that on the twenty-first day of the first month in 1869,

I visited Seiko in the morning with Seiho and Saitō; and, finding her at home, we talked for a while. We then moved over to Ryōgoku, and had a small party at the Seiryūrō where Seiho, Seiko, and I did calligraphy and ink painting. I dispatched a letter to Lord Akizuki to come over. Lord Saionji came looking for me. I then invited Lord Akizuki over again, and he came. Unexpectedly then the gathering turned into a very lively party…. The party broke up after 3, and I went to the Sakuraya where the cocks were beginning to crow. The geisha, Fuku and Kane, saw me off from there (2.1.21).\footnote{Seiho refers to the painter Nishijima Seiho (1828-1919) who studied painting under Kanae Kinjō in Osaka and joined the Restoration movement in his hometown of Nagato (today’s Yamaguchi Prefecture). Inamura Ryōhei speculates that it might have been Nishijima Seiho (rather than Yamauchi Yōdō) who first introduced Seiko to Kido. Inamura, \textit{Okuhara Seiko}, 50.}

A few weeks later, Seiko joined Kido’s party again, in which the participants collaboratively created an impromptu work (\textit{gassaku}) to commemorate the convivial congregation (2.2.7). An example of such joint production can be found in the collection of Saitō Sōshū (1837-1899), a prosperous fishing-net owner (\textit{amimoto}) in Inouchi village (present-day Sanmu City, Chiba Prefecture) who actively intermingled with contemporary practitioners of literati art, hosting gatherings in his villa and commissioning artists to develop his collection (Figure 1.3).\footnote{For Sōshū’s interactions with contemporary literati including Okuhara Seiko, see Horiuchi Mizuko, “Saitō Sōshū to Meiji zenki no shoga korekushon,” in \textit{Kujākuri-hama no aminushi bunka—Saitō Sōshū to bunjin no kōryū}, ed. Jōsai Kokusai Daigaku Mizuta Bijutsukan, exh. cat. (Togane: Jōsai Kokusai Daigaku Mizuta Bijutsukan, 2013), 30-37.} It was entrepreneurs such as Sōshū who supported literati activities and facilitated cultural interactions.
between the center and the periphery. Along with seven other prominent politician-artists, Kido inscribed a poem on the right-hand edge of the scroll, as well as a panting of orchids above, under the four-character inscription by Katsu Kaishū (1823-1899). Seiko participated actively in the production of such joint works, as well. A collaborative painting of plants, flowers, rock, and stationery in the Kōsetsu Memorial Museum of Jissen Women’s Educational Institute, for example, seems to commemorate a gathering held in 1877 at Seiko’s studio-residence, Bokuto En’unrō (“Ink Spitting Mist and Clouds Pavilion”), with her artist-friends including Hazan, Ryūho, and Kansui, all of whom attended the party Seiko hosted at Yoshida-tei in 1865 (Figure 1.4).

A more unusual gassaku survives in the Kumagaya City Library in the form of a small banko-ware sencha (steeped green leaf-tea) teapot that rests easily in one’s hand (Figures 1.5a-c). Seiko’s calligraphic signature “Tōkai Seiko” appears prominently on one side of the lid, followed by a seal-shaped signature “Seiko” carefully written in thin, uniform vermilion lines; the other side of the lid seems to bear an image of orchids—one of the subjects Seiko frequently depicted on collaborative works—painted in ink and gold. Further, five other artists elaborately decorated the body of the teapot with pictures and poetic inscriptions. Near the spout, Fukushima Ryūho has depicted chrysanthemums, whose leaves are executed with pools of ink in a “boneless” manner; each petal of the flowers is carefully delineated by thin lines, on top of which clusters of dots in gold pigment rest, suggesting stamens. To the lower left, Hattori Hazan has painted an

49 Buckland notes that other major patrons of literati art managed the production of soy sauce and rice wine. Buckland, Painting Nature for the Nation, 47.

50 For more on this work, see Ōta Karin, “Okuhara Seiko, Taki Katei, Hattori Hazan, Fukushima Ryūho, Matsuoka Kansui ‘Bunjin yosegaki’ ni tsuite,” Jissen Joshi Gakuen Kōsetsu Kinen Shiryōkan kanpō 10 (2012): 31-38. I thank Prof. Nakamachi Keiko and Ōta Karin for allowing me to study this scroll and other works by Seiko at the Kōsetsu Memorial Museum.

51 I am very grateful to Dr. Martha J. McClintock for letting me know about this important object and to Ōi Norihiro for giving me the opportunity to study this work.
equally delicate image of persimmons placed in a basket; parts of the basket and persimmon leaves are brushed in thin gold lines. To the left, the poet Ono Kozan (1814-1910) has inscribed a *kanshi* poem, punctuating the pictures and enhancing the visual interest of the entire object. Further, the image painted on the side and beneath the handle depicts a kettle resting on top of a decorative brazier, under which rest a basket of charcoals and a tea set. This visualization of *sencha* renders the entire object playfully self-referential. *Sencha* was, in fact, an indispensable part of literati culture in nineteenth-century Japan, as will be examined below.

Not only does each image painted on the surface of the teapot bear traces of gold pigment; gold is also applied to the teapot itself—e.g., the lid knob, the rim of the mouth, the rim of the spout, and the tip of the handle. The lavish use of gold, the level of attention to details, and the number of hands involved in creating such a small delicate *gassaku* all contribute to enhancing the object’s value and rarity; further, they seem to make the user’s experience of steeping tea in the pot more intimate, precious, and magical, possibly transforming the taste of the tea itself.\(^\text{52}\) It is often said that the importance of collaborative art-making lay less in the aesthetic quality of the finished product than in its function to solidify friendship, to facilitate intellectual play, or to visualize shared cultural values.\(^\text{53}\) The existence of intricately executed *gassaku* such as this teapot seems to suggest that aesthetic qualities may sometimes have played a significant role in the process of creating, handling, and appreciating a joint production. Simultaneously decorative and utilitarian, this collaboratively painted and inscribed teapot might be seen as an ideal object through which to enact reclusive disengagement, allowing the user to

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\(^{52}\) The teapot bears traces of use on the inside of the body, the edge of the lid, and the underside of the spout. However, the original ownership of the teapot, as well as circumstances of its use, are unknown.

make tea in solitude while conjuring up an imaginary gathering of the artists who participated in
the creation of the teapot and, by implication, the tea steeped in the pot itself.

Kido Takayoshi’s diary further suggests his passion for acquiring and appreciating
paintings and antiques. He seems to have been especially fond of Tanomura Chikuden (1777-
1835), Tsubaki Chinzan (1801-1854), and Rai San’yō (1780-1832), purchasing their works in
Tokyo, Kyoto, and Nagasaki, among other places.54 As Christine Guth has argued, ideological
considerations seem to have figured in the prestige that Kido and his associates ascribed to artists
such as Chikuden and San’yō: “By the act of relinquishing their official posts for a peripatetic
life, these artists…inspired and lent legitimacy to Kido and his peers’ growing dissatisfaction
with and alienation from the Tokugawa rule. Furthermore, although San’yō was not in fact a
revolutionary, he was seen as a forerunner of the Restoration because of the loyalist sentiments
enunciated in his unofficial history of Japan, Nihon Gaishi.”55 Watanabe Kazan (1793-1841), too,
seems to have enjoyed esteem among members of Kido’s circle for similar ideological reasons.56
Indeed, Kido presented a painting by Kazan and a book by San’yō as gifts to other statesmen
(1.12.6 and 2.9.1), possibly deploying them as political tools. Underlining their ideological
appeal, Kido took pride in his possessions; when several items from his collection, including
works by Chikuden, Zhang Qiugu (dates unknown), and Okada Hankō (1782-1846), were put on

54 Some of the entries in the diary speak to the particular appeal that Chikuden held for Kido and his associates. For
instance, on 3.3.28, he visited his friend’s residence in Hagi (Kido’s hometown) to examine paintings by Chikuden
in a private collection. Kido seems to have been so enamored of the works that he borrowed an album and
appreciated it again under his lamplight at home. The inebriated owner promised to lend the book to Kido for life,
but the following morning he hurried to Kido’s residence to apologize and retract the pledge (3.3.29). Kido
nevertheless owned an album of paintings by Chikuden by the time he departed Japan for his round-the-world
journey in 1871, for he notes that he carried the album with him during his travels abroad. Since Chikuden created
the album during his stay in Shimonoseki, which included a poem about his experience there, it might have served
for Kido as a fond reminder of his home region (8.1.1). Further, this album was one of the treasures Kido displayed
on New Year’s Day in his room at an inn in Shimonoseki in 1875 to receive a stream of guests who came to offer
greetings. For a detailed discussion of this album, see Guth, “Meiji Response to Bunjinga,” 180-182.

55 Ibid., 181.

56 Ibid.
display at a teahouse in Ueno, he noted that his objects “were among the finest things in the exhibition” (7.1.26). In fact, Seiko seems to have had opportunities to view works by Chinese artists in Kido’s collection, as will be examined shortly.

By late 1871, six years after embarking on her career as a professional painter, Seiko opened her studio-residence in Shitaya as a private school of painting, calligraphy, and Chinese learning called Shunchō Kajuku (or Shunchō Gakusha), remaining in operation until 1882.57 Seiko’s school appears in several records of private schools compiled during the Meiji period, providing insights into her management, curriculum, and students. As Conrad Totman has noted, for most people in early modern Japan, formal education meant instruction at locally organized schools (terakoya), the majority of which opened in the nineteenth century.58 Following the promulgation of the Education Law (Gakusei) in 1872, however, these predominantly secular, private educational institutions came under the jurisdiction of the central government.59 The law required that individuals who wished to open schools submit applications to the Ministry of Education (Monbushō) through the local government; the Ministry granted permission to those who passed their evaluation.60 Following the provisions of the new law, Seiko submitted an

57 Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, ed., Okuhara Seiko ten—botsugo 100-nen kinen, exh. cat. (Koga: Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, 2013), 75.

58 Conrad Totman, Early Modern Japan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 433. Totman notes that “[b]y one count, only 588 terakoya were established before 1803, but 3,050 during 1803-43, and 6,691 during 1844-67. Of the 6,000 or more operating in 1850, however, some 1,200 are said to have been in Edo, while many rural areas had none” (ibid.). For a study of various types of private schools in early modern Japan, see Richard Rubinger, Private Academies of Tokugawa Japan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

59 Margaret Mehl states that the Education Law established in principle a centrally regulated public educational system in which the acquisition of Western learning was linked directly to social mobility. See Margaret Mehl, Private Academies of Chinese Learning in Meiji Japan: The Decline and Transformation of the Kangaku Juku (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2003), 31. Simultaneously, the law made elementary education compulsory for both boys and girls, but the actual attendance rates remained significantly lower for girls throughout most of the Meiji period, as they were often expected to fulfill domestic duties or paid work. See Vera Mackie, Creating Socialist Women in Japan: Gender, Labour and Activism, 1900-1937 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 32.

60 Fujiwara Keiko, “Meiji shoki ni okeru ‘juku’ no jittai—Tōkyō no joshi kyōiku tono kanren de,” Shakaigaku kenkyū kiyō, no. 20 (1980): 12. Several surveys of educational institutions were conducted at both local and national
application to open her school (*kajuku kaigyō negai*) to Tokyo Prefecture in the eleventh month of 1872.\(^1\) The application lists the school’s address and fees, as well as the instructor’s educational experience and curriculum.\(^2\) Seiko lists her home address as the location of her school, which specialized in Chinese learning, calligraphy, and painting (*shinagaku shoga*).\(^3\) To levels shortly after the enactment of the Education Law. Although the figures in these surveys are not completely reliable due to frequent fluctuations, they nevertheless provide data that are useful to understanding the approximate distribution of men and women among teachers and students. For example, in her analysis of a survey conducted by the Ministry of Education in 1883, Sugano Noriko has noted that before the implementation of the Education Law, only three of 122 *shijuku* in Tokyo were operated by women, while fifty-three (more than ten percent) of 488 *terakoya* in Tokyo were managed by female instructors. Sugano Noriko, “Terakoya to onna shishō—Edo kara Meiji e,” *Hitotsubashi ronshō* 111, no. 2 (February 1994): 241-243. These figures are based on a survey of educational situations in individual prefectures conducted by the Ministry of Education in 1883; the Ministry subsequently edited and published the results in *Monbushō Sōmukyoku, Nihon kyōkushō shiryō* (Tokyo: Monbushō Sōmukyoku, 1890-92). Although there was no clear distinction between *shijuku* and *terakoya*, *terakoya* generally taught basic literacy and numeracy to commoners, while *shijuku* tended to offer more advanced education in medicine or Chinese, Japanese, or Western learning. Mehl, *Private Academies of Chinese Learning in Meiji Japan, 3,* Sugano, “Terakoya to onna shishō,” 241; Fujiwara, “Meiji shoki ni okeru ‘juku’ no jittai,” 12-13. Fujiwara also notes that a significantly greater number of girls studied at *terakoya* than *shijuku*. Eighty-nine girls for every one hundred boys went to *terakoya*, while fewer than ten girls for every one hundred boys studied at *shijuku*, suggesting that most girls were expected to receive only elementary education centered on calligraphy. Fujiwara, “Meiji shoki ni okeru ‘juku’ no jittai,” 15. Examining a separate survey undertaken by Tokyo Prefecture from 1872 to 1873, Fujiwara Keiko has revealed that eighty-three of one thousand private schools (including *terakoya* and *shijuku*) in Tokyo were operated solely by women, and seven schools were taught by both male and female instructors. Only one school was open exclusively to girls, while the majority of schools (817) had both male and female students. Further, the survey records ninety-two female teachers working in Tokyo at the time, a figure that constituted only 7.7 percent of the total number of instructors within the prefecture. A majority of these women exclusively instructed calligraphy (*hitsudō*). Fujiwara, “Meiji shoki ni okeru ‘juku’ no jittai,” 13; the original survey is available in Tōkyō-to Tosei Shiryōkan, ed., *Tōkyō-fu kaigaku meisaisho* (Tokyo: Tōkyō-to Tosei Shiryōkan, 1961-63). Thus, Seiko’s Shuncho Kajuku was one of the few specialized private schools operated solely by women.

\(^1\) On the day the Education Law was proclaimed on September 5, 1872, “all existing schools were ordered to close, to be reopened according to the provisions of the new law.” Mehl, *Private Academies of Chinese Learning in Meiji Japan,* 18. Seiko’s school seems to have been in operation by late 1871, but she was required to submit an application to open her school after the enactment of this law.

\(^2\) Seiko’s application is available in *Kaigaku gansho* held in the Tokyo Metropolitan Archives. It is reproduced and transcribed in Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, *Okuhara Seiko ten—botsugo 100-nen kinen,* 76; and Inamura, *Okuhara Seiko,* 65-68.

\(^3\) Seiko applied for permission to open her school as an “elder sister” of her cousin Ōta Yoshinobu, a member of the *shizoku* (former samurai) class from Tochigi Prefecture who worked as a government official in the early years of the Meiji period. It is unclear why Seiko specifically listed herself as Yoshinobu’s sister in her petition; Inamura Ryōhei speculates that it was because residency in Okachimachi was restricted to former samurai. Inamura, *Okuhara Seiko,* 65. It is also possible that showing a familial affiliation with a government official might have facilitated her application process. In 1878 Yoshinobu left the government to become an entrepreneur and subsequently founded a pharmaceutical company specializing in the manufacture of the stomach medicine Ōta Seiyaku that still exists today. A biography of Ōta Yoshinobu is available in Kubota Kōkichi, *Tōyō jitsugyōka hyōden* (Tokyo: Hakkōden, 1894), 52-83. In 1871, prior to Seiko’s application to open her *juku*, Yoshinobu submitted a petition (*kajuku negai*) to Tokyo Prefecture on behalf of Seiko; this petition is reproduced and transcribed in Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, *Okuhara Seiko ten—botsugo 100-nen kinen,* 75.
establish her credentials, Seiko briefly describes her educational background, stating that she studied Chinese learning under the scholar Chinone Ichiō (1787-1868)\(^{64}\) and practiced calligraphy and painting with Hirata Moriyuki (Suiseki; 1796-1863)\(^{65}\) from 1854 to 1858 (in her hometown of Koga). Although students paid an admission fee (1 yen) and a monthly fee (0.5 yen), as well as a monthly boarding fee (2.5 yen) for those who lived in Seiko’s house, the instructor’s salary is listed as none, suggesting that Seiko did not rely on income from her school.\(^{66}\) Further, the application lists the regimented schedule of the curriculum: the students studied *shinagaku* from eight to noon by reading the Four Books, Five Classics, and histories; in the afternoon (from noon to three), they received instruction in calligraphy and painting and spent the long evening hours (from three to nine) studying poetry and prose.\(^{67}\) They were not allowed to leave the school grounds except for holidays, which were held on days numbered with

\(^{64}\) Chinone Nobuyuki (Mokuzaemon) was a samurai in Koga domain. Ichiō was his sobriquet. He was an overseer (*metsuke-yaku*) and ship administrator (*funa-bugyō*), as well as a master of spear fighting (*yarijutsu*). He died in 1868 at the age of eighty-one. See Kobayashi Shōsei, “Okuhara Seiko,” in *Okuhara Seiko gashū*, ed. Fujikake Shizuya (Tokyo: Kōgeisha, 1933), 13.

\(^{65}\) Hirata Suiseki was a retainer of Koga domain who became one of the numerous students of the eclectic literati painter Tani Bunchō (1763-1840), a central figure in the development of literati art in the late Edo-period Kantō Plain. Seiko was related to Suiseki through her father, Ikeda Masaaki.

\(^{66}\) As Mehl notes, *juku* in Tokyo generally served as boarding schools since many students came from outside the capital. Further, the master of a *juku* traditionally did not charge fees for his instruction, but in the late Edo period, a growing number of teachers relied on fees and gifts given by their students. This situation became even more pronounced in the Meiji period when, samurai who lost their stipends made a living by teaching at schools. In applications to open schools, however, most instructors stated that they charged no regular fees and received no salary. See Mehl, *Private Academies of Chinese Learning in Meiji Japan*, 49 and 162.

\(^{67}\) The Four Books and Five Classics were the standard textbooks used at private schools of Chinese learning. Mehl mentions that in the applications to open private academies submitted to Tokyo Prefecture in 1872, all *kangaku juku* named these books as their textbooks (ibid., 132). As Mehl has shown, conventional study at a *juku* was largely self-guided. Students would begin by reading aloud the Chinese classics without necessarily understanding their meanings in a practice known as *sodoku* (simple repetitive reading), often with the help of older students. Once students had acquired the basic skills of reading, they would move onto *rindoku*, in which they would read and explain the texts by turns, with or without the master’s presence (ibid., 129-130). Further, as Martha J. McClintock and Victoria Weston have suggested, the extensive collection of *funpon* sketches that Seiko and Seiran created and compiled (now at the Koga City Museum of History) might have served as an important tool of instruction for her pupils. See Martha J. McClintock and Victoria Weston, “Okuhara Seiko: A Case of Funpon Training in Late Edo Literati Painting,” in *Copying the Master and Stealing his Secrets: Talent and Training in Japanese Painting*, ed. Brenda G. Jordan and Victoria Louise Weston (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press 2003), 138.
one (the first, eleventh, and twenty-first). Exams were given on days numbered with four and nine (the fourth, ninth, fourteenth, nineteenth, twenty-fourth, and twenty-ninth), and desultory conversation (zatsudan) was forbidden.68

A few photographs of Seiko’s students survive from the early years of the Meiji period. One of them shows Seiko seated on a chair at the center, surrounded by five young students (Figure 1.6). Okuhara Seisui (1852-1921; who is seated on Seiko’s left) and Watanabe Seiran (1855-1918; who stands behind Seiko to her right) were Seiko’s principal students. Seisui, who entered Seiko’s studio in 1866 at the age of fifteen, was subsequently adopted by Seiko. In the early 1880s, Seisui left Seiko’s residence to open her own studio in Shitaya. When Seiko retired to Kumagaya in 1891, Seisui remained in Tokyo to continue working as a professional painter. In contrast to Seiko, who is said to have often refused to submit her works to public exhibitions, Seisui frequently submitted her paintings to domestic exhibitions and international expositions, receiving numerous awards and securing imperial patronage. Seisui’s ability to attain public recognition by successfully integrating herself into the newly constructed institutional system of

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68 This rigorous curriculum of Seiko’s school is also discussed in McClintock and Weston, “Okuhara Seiko,” 137-138. Another document about Shunchō Kajuku that Seiko submitted to Tokyo Prefecture in the eleventh month of 1872 shows that her juku had three female pupils at the time the record was prepared: one between the ages of ten and thirteen, one between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, and one between the ages of seventeen and twenty. This document is included in Tokyo meisai shirabe and is reproduced and transcribed in Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, Okuhara Seiko ten—botsugo 100-nen kinen, 77. A later record published in 1892 (Monbushō Sōmukyoku, Nihon kyōiku kōshō, vol. 8, 161) lists Seiko as a male instructor who taught eighty-two boys and one hundred and seventy girls at the time the survey was undertaken in 1871, but the validity of this source is questionable. This source is also discussed in Taitōkushi Hensan Senmon Iinkai, ed., Taitōkushi: Tsūshi-hen (Tokyo: Tōkyō Taitōku, 2000), 3:446.

69 Seisui was born as Teru in 1852 as a daughter of Kosugi Rintarō, a commissioner (buryō) at the Handa silver mine in Iwashiro province (modern-day Fukushima). When Seisui was nine years old, Rintarō left his family for Kyoto to join the royalists in their effort to topple the shogunate. Seisui and her mother traveled to Kyoto to search for him but to no avail, for Rintarō was working in the residence of the aristocrat Anegakōji Kinyoshi under an assumed name. During her brief stay in Kyoto, Seisui studied painting under the artist and educator Atomi Kakei (1840-1926). Failing to find Rintarō, Seisui and her mother moved to Edo to stay with a relative in the Okachimachi district, where Seiko established her studio in 1865. Learning of Seiko’s rising fame as a painter, Seisui’s mother entrusted her fifteen-year-old daughter to Seiko’s care in 1866; two years later, Seiko adopted Seisui as her daughter. For Seisui’s biography, see Fujikake Shizuya, “Okuhara Seiko,” in Fujikake, Okuhara Seiko gashū, 38-45; McClintock, “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913),” 263-268; and Okuhara Ichirō, ed., Seisui no shōgai (private publication, 1921). I thank Kurai Naoko and Tateishi Takayuki for making the last source available to me.
art resonates with the career strategy that another female literati painter, Noguchi Shōhin (1847-1917), employed, as will be examined in the epilogue of this dissertation. While Seisui eventually pursued an artistic career independent from Seiko, Seiran, who entered Seiko’s household in 1870 at the age of sixteen, remained her devoted disciple and constant companion until Seiko’s death in 1913.\(^70\) In fact, this photographic portrait of Seiko and her pupils is said to have been taken to commemorate the occasion of Seiran’s entrance to Seiko’s studio.\(^71\) Numerous anecdotes testify to Seiran’s devotion to Seiko. When Seiko and Seiran studied paintings and calligraphy in patrons’ collections, for example, it was reportedly Seiran who made faithful copies of them, so that Seiko could use them as reference sources in her future productions. Seiran also accompanied Seiko on her numerous travels throughout the archipelago; it is said that when they stayed at an inn in Nagoya, the innkeeper took Seiko and Seiran to be man and wife.\(^72\) Such a perception might not have been far from the truth of their actual relationship. As Martha McClintock and Victoria Weston have argued, the relationship between Seiko and Seiran both reinforced and confounded social expectations: Seiran performed the traditional role of a wife, fulfilling “the gamut of support roles in the house and in the studio” as she served as “travel companion, housekeeper, cook, account keeper, and general attendant to Seiko.”\(^73\) Seiko, on the other hand, pursued her career as a full-time literati artist and master of a private academy while relying on Seiran’s self-effacing domestic support. In other words,

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\(^70\) Seiran was born as Watanabe Saku in Edo in 1855. Her father Watanabe Toshihira was a hatamoto samurai (a direct vassal of the shogun) and her mother came from the Yamanori family in the village of Kurihashi (in today’s Saitama Prefecture). On Seiran, see McClintock, “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913),” 268-277; and Fujikake, “Okuhara Seiko,” 45-50.

\(^71\) Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, ed., Okuhara Seiko ten—Okuhara Seiko gashitsu Shūsui Sōdō ichiku kinen, exh. cat. (Koga: Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, 2010), 70.

\(^72\) Inamura, Okuhara Seiko, 127; Fujikake, “Okuhara Seiko,” 47.

\(^73\) McClintock and Weston, “Okuhara Seiko,” 141.
“Seiran performed both the secondary labor of an urchi deshi and the more trusted, familial roles of a life partner,” while Seiko played the roles of a household head and an artistic master—roles that were traditionally reserved for men.  

Besides these close students, Seiko is said to have had nearly three hundred followers (monjin). Male students commuted to Seiko’s academy, while some female students lived with Seiko at her house, suggesting that her juku functioned as a boarding school exclusively for girls. In fact, in 1872—the same year she applied to establish her school—Seiko attempted to purchase from the government a piece of land adjacent to her property, possibly with the intention of expanding her studio-home to accommodate the students. Her petition was subsequently granted, and Seiko received a certificate of land ownership (chiken) issued by Tokyo Prefecture in 1878. The certificate (which marks both Seiko’s ownership of land as well as her obligation to pay taxes) indicates that she owned a little over two hundred tsubo (approximately 660m²) of land in the Shitaya district, whose value is listed as 138 yen and eleven sen in gold. This investment might not have been too burdensome, for Seiko generated additional income by constructing two one-story buildings on the south-side of her property, which faced the main street, and renting them to tenants. In addition to younger pupils who

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74 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Seiko’s petition to the government is reproduced in Inamura, Okuhara Seiko, 70. Inamura notes that Seiko renovated, expanded, or reformed her house annually (ibid., 68).
78 This certificate is reproduced in ibid., 68.
received elementary education at Seiko’s school, geisha and former samurai with literati predilections are said to have frequented Seiko’s studio. Some well-known figures, including Okakura Kakuzō (Tenshin; 1862-1913), are also known to have studied painting and calligraphy under Seiko. Okakura’s name, in fact, appears in Seiko’s ledger, indicating that he purchased a work from Seiko for two ryō in January 1882. It is unclear what kind of work Okakura acquired from Seiko, but in the 1870s and early 1880s, she was widely known for her audaciously executed ink landscapes and deliberately distorted calligraphy.

Immersing herself in the literati community of Shitaya and training students at her studio-residence, Seiko became one of the most celebrated artists in early Meiji-period Tokyo. Her popularity is testified by the prominent positions she occupied in numerous rankings of artists (banzuke) published at the time. For example, in a single-sheet ranking of calligraphers and painters titled Shoga ichiran produced in 1875, Seiko is listed as one of the masters (meika), occupying a conspicuous place alongside other male painters in the top left register of the print (Figure 1.7). In many other rankings, however, Seiko is frequently confined to the category of women painters (often referred to as josei gaka or keishū gaka) that tended to be relegated to the bottom of the sheets, implying that female artists fell outside the normative (male) framework of painters and masters. Whereas Seiko signed her earlier works as “Ms. Seiko” (Seiko joshi),

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81 The New Currency Regulations (Shinka jōrei) of 1871 established that one ryō equaled one yen. This ledger (Gafuku baibai hikaechō) is preserved at the Koga City Museum of History. It is also discussed in Kawashima Junji, “Shin-chiken Okuhara Seiko,” in Heisei yonendo bijutsu kōza kōgiroku “Shin-chiken Okuara Seiko”, ed. Kumagaya Shiritsu Toshokan Bijutsu Kyōdo Gakari (Kumagaya: Kumagaya Shiritsu Toshokan, 1992), 26-32. I thank Dr. Kawashima for making his essay available to me.

82 This ranking is also discussed in Nakamachi Keiko, “Bokuto En’unrō no onna bunjin,” in Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, Okuhara Seiko ten—botsugo 100-nen kinen, 5.

83 For more on these rankings, see chapter 4 of this dissertation.
inscribing her female gender directly onto her works, after she established herself in Tokyo, Seiko entirely removed the gendered title “Ms.” from her signature. Almost none of the paintings and calligraphy Seiko produced since the 1870s bore any mark that specifically identified the painter as a “woman.”

More strikingly, Seiko underwent a dramatic physical transformation at the time when she rose to popularity in the first years of the Meiji period. In a recently uncovered photographic portrait from 1871 (Figure 1.8), Seiko’s hair seems to be cropped above the shoulders, and she seems to be wearing tonbi—something like the cape-like inverness coat of Victorian England, which came to be worn by men over kimono during the Meiji period. Another recently discovered albumen photograph mounted on a paper card captures a bust portrait of Seiko with closely cropped and parted hair (Figure 1.9). The photograph presents her in a three-quarter view with her right shoulder closest to the camera. She does not return the viewer’s gaze but rather fixes her line of sight to the right of the camera. She seems to be wearing a man’s kimono whose collar is left loose at the neck. The small size and format of the photograph suggests that it might have functioned as a carte de visite, possibly produced in large number. Since women

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84 For examples of paintings from the 1860s in which Seiko uses the title joshi in her signature, see Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, Okuhara Seiko ten—Okuhara Seiko gashitsu Shūsui Sōdō ichiku kinen, 11-12.

85 For a history of the popularization of the inverness coat in Japan, see Sakikawa Naoko, “Wasōyō inbanesu no fukyū o megutte,” Kokusai fukushoku gakkaishi, no. 18 (November 2000): 70-83.

86 I express my sincere gratitude to Fujishiro Jōichi for helping me obtain this photograph.

87 The backing card on which the photograph is mounted has round edges and is composed of two white sheets of paper sandwiching several layers of thin recycled paper that are pasted together. The oval shape that contains the image of Seiko measures 4.2 x 5.9 cm; the photograph itself measures 5.3 x 8.3 cm; and the card measures 5.9 x 9.8 cm. At least one other copy of the same photograph survives in a private collection in Japan. As Maki Fukuoka has shown, “by the mid-1870s, photographic representation had disseminated into the material and popular culture accessible to ordinary Japanese people as an aspect of celebrity culture. Indeed, photographic portraits had become so popular that a photographer could make a living solely by selling cartes-de-visite of celebrity actors and courtesans.” Maki Fukuoka, “Selling Portrait Photographs: Early Photographic Business in Asakusa,” History of Photography 35, no. 4 (2011): 360. Fukuoka further notes that “having a portrait of oneself was…fairly affordable” in the early Meiji period, since “[i]n 1878, 15 sen, the cost for a portrait in collodion positive on glass, was the average amount earned daily by a male farmer, and one-third of a metal smith’s daily earnings” (ibid., 365). Wet-
were legally prohibited from cropping their hair, Seiko carried a certificate issued by the police in 1875 that officially allowed her to maintain her short hair because of a supposed chronic illness. Sporting cropped hair and wearing items of men’s clothing, Seiko’s tonsorial transgression made for sensational news, which will be discussed in chapter 4 of this dissertation. Significantly, it was the perceived virility of both Seiko’s appearance and her brush dynamics that seem to have made her works particularly desirable at this moment in the early Meiji period.

**Inkwork and the Bravura of the Sinophile**

*Dreams of Cranes amid Windy Pines* (ca. 1870s), the exuberant ink landscape examined earlier, is in fact more meticulously crafted than many other works Seiko produced during the peak of her popularity in the first decade of the Meiji era. Another painting simply titled *Landscape* (*Sansui-zu*), now in the Ibaraki Prefectural Museum of History and dated to the fifth month of Meiji 3 (1870; Figure 1.10), however, gives a clearer sense of the dynamism that contemporary viewers seem to have prized in her work.88 In this scroll, Seiko exploits the long narrow vertical format of the paper to craft a seemingly paradoxical landscape. An arch drawn across the image in the middle of the composition starkly divides the painting into upper and lower registers that are spatially incongruous with each other. In the foreground, a pair of tall pine trees bearing clusters of spiky needles emerges from the ground. Behind them to the left, two figures, delineated minimally by a few brushstrokes, stand near the edge of the earth. A figure on the left turns his back toward the viewer and seems to be contemplating the empty space that lies ahead of him; a seemingly younger figure on the right stands in profile behind him.

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88 I thank Haraguchi Tomotake for allowing me to study this painting and other works by Seiko at the Ibaraki Prefectural Museum of History.

Collodion on glass or ambrotype, which was invented by the English sculptor and inventor Frederick Scott Archer (1813-1857) in 1851, became a dominant process of photography in Japan by the 1870s, for it was reproducible and required shorter exposure time than the irreproducible daguerreotypes. “Using the wet-collodion on glass as a negative, photographers could reproduce multiple reproductions from the plate on paper treated with egg white (hence the term ‘albumen prints’)” (ibid., 365).
attending to the introspective master. As we move our eyes along the upward stretch of the pine
trees, we encounter a mountain village clinging to a precariously sloping bank in the shadow of a
lofty peak. Buildings and small trees seem to cling to the curving earth, while taller trees to the
left appear to be sliding into an abyss. In the middle of the arch, a tall tree erupts, the long flimsy
line that constitutes its trunk echoing (and almost reaching out to) the finial of a pagoda that
stands on the mountain slope. The tension between the upward lift of the master mountain and
the downward slide of the arching earth generates a simultaneous sense of dynamism and
equilibrium. The calligraphic inscription in the upper left reads as follows:

When the ancients discussed painting, they said that if mountains are not upright, then
they are not outstanding, and if people are not upright, they are mediocre and petty. When
one paints a landscape, one should bear this idea in mind. Today I fortuitously took up
this idea and painted this picture.

古人論畫曰 山不挺則不秀 人不挺則庸瑣 画山水宜佩此意
今日偶然取其意 作此圖云

This elongated landscape might then be seen as a literal visualization of the uprightness that the
ancients valued in painting. The vertically stretched format of the painting is, in fact, accentuated
by the upward movement of the pine trees and pointed mountain, which seems to maintain its
erect shape despite the sliding earth below. Further, the principal figure in the foreground whose
back is turned to the viewer might be identified as the ancient who contemplates his painting
theory or a figure embodying the abstract concept of uprightness; it is also possible to view this
figure as Seiko herself, who seems to claim in the inscription that she has internalized the
ancients’ painting theory to such an extent that she can casually, albeit deliberately, take up the
idea as an inspiration for her work. In other words, the images of the ancient, artist, and upright
person overlap in this self-referential (or even self-celebratory) painting. The calmness of this
figure contrasts with the agitated rhythmic energy of the spiky pines and the arching landscape
above. The sense of ease the figure seems to exude recalls the blissful tranquility of the recluse in *Dreams of Cranes*.

A *Landscape* (*Sansui*) in the Tokyo National Museum dated to the fourth month of Meiji 7 (1874) similarly displays the dramatic compositional tendencies, vigorous brushstrokes, and expansive spaces that characterize Seiko’s early ink landscapes (Figure 1.11). In this scroll on silk, a large bulging bluff projects toward the sky from lower left, while a stream surges around the boulders in the foreground. A bridge precariously hangs from the upper right of the bluff, suggesting that another cliff towers to the right, outside of the pictorial space. On the other side of the central bluff, a simple hut is nestled behind the peak of the rock formation, on which two figures stand facing each other. The figure on the right raises his hand to point rightward, possibly inviting his friend to continue their journey or discussing a site of interest that lies in that direction. The diminished scale of the figures emphasizes the vastness of the surrounding environment. Further, both the gesturing hand and the bridge floating in midair encourage the viewer to imagine the landscape that extends beyond the pictorial frame, transforming the painting into an invitation to explore unfathomable nature. That sense of immersion in nature is the subject of the poem that Seiko has inscribed in the upper left:

> Among the cliffs, flying streams whistle;  
> at the top of the forest, hidden birds call.  
> Who could appreciate such leisurely delights?  
> —[only] you and I, [here] in the mountains.

岩際飛泉喰 林端幽鳥語  
閱趣誰領略 山中我与汝

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89 For a visual analysis of this work, see also McClintock, “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913),” 131-133. I express my deep gratitude to Profs. Nakamachi Keiko and Kojima Kaoru for allowing me to study this painting and works by other women painters with them at the Tokyo National Museum.
The poem evokes the sounds of rushing water and the cries of unseen birds that reverberate in deep mountains, thereby immersing the viewer in a vast natural environment isolated from the distractions of everyday life. The poet then addresses the viewer as “you” and suggests that only they can appreciate such leisurely delights. The poem thus encourages the audience to identify the two figures as the artist and viewer, creating an intimate communion between them.

As is true of the poem, the painted landscape evokes infinite space lying beyond the surface of the silk; at the same time, however, its asymmetrical composition conveys a sense of instability, which is exacerbated by the ways in which individual motifs are painted with a speedy, deliberately clumsy brush. For example, as McClintock has noted, “Seiko gives both the bridge and hut a particularly ephemeral quality by rendering them in a minimum of flimsy, askew strokes.”90 Indeed, the bridge appears nearly untenable; its structure seems haphazard and indeterminate, and the flimsiness of its lines and the arbitrariness of their positions make the bridge look terrifyingly precarious. The hut seems equally, if not more, insubstantial, as a hip of the hut’s roof tapers toward the lower left and remains unconnected to the eave. The eave itself is composed of a single wavering brushstroke; the streaks of white within the “flying-white” stroke further render the roof immaterial, turning the architectural structure into a calligraphic artifice. Meanwhile, the central rocky outcropping is primarily rendered in free-form, tangled strokes in light grey and smeared wet ink, while choppy strokes or dots in darker ink are applied around the edges and internal faces of the bluff, giving a rough structure and damply rugged texture to the dominant rock formation. Another cliff appears vaguely in the distance behind the bridge on the right. It is rendered simply by vigorously running a wide brush, which contains a minimal amount of ink, over the silk until a series of broad vertical brushstrokes form a barely discernible

mountainous shape. The speed and coarseness of the execution make these motifs seem as though they are in the process of coming into form, thereby imbuing the entire landscape with agitated energy.  

This sense of agitation also characterizes the calligraphic inscription of the poem. The inconsistent size and unbalanced configurations of the characters seem to demand the viewer’s attention. For example, the “field” radical of the fifth character in the second column 畦 is so enlarged and plump that it seems to overshadow the right-hand side of the character. Further, the character for “middle” 中 (seventh character in the second column) seems equally prominent, not only because of its size but also because of the stark contrast between the thick lines that form a pronounced square and the flimsy undulating line that thins and thickens as it travels downward.  

Seiko, in fact, employed even bolder, more exuberant brushstrokes in her works of calligraphy, whose outlandish quality invited much commentary. Reed Flowers in Autumn Wind, a work of calligraphy Seiko executed later in 1874 (Figure 1.12a), perhaps best captures the drama of her newly configured calligraphic style, as the work confronts the viewer with a dramatic disparity of scale between individual characters, relentless variation of form, and an audaciously unbalanced application of ink. Most of Seiko’s characters manifest an upward tilt to the right, but some characters slant to the lower right, imparting a syncopated rhythm to the

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91 Seiko seems to have created a variant of this painting, as a miniature copy of a similar painting appears in one of her sketchbooks in the Koga City Museum of History. Just as in the Tokyo National Museum painting, a large cliff projects from lower left to upper right, but a bridge appears in the foreground, connecting the cliff to another rock formation on the lower right, while a hut is located at the pinnacle of the cliff. Two figures are depicted on the left, as though they are squeezed between the slope of the cliff and the edge of the pictorial frame. The placement of the bridge and hut suggests that the figures, having crossed the bridge from right to left, are climbing the cliff toward the hut. Thus, the implied narrative of this image seems more contained than that of the Tokyo National Museum landscape, in which the gesturing figure and hovering bridge create a sense of a rightward expansion of the scenery. On Seiko’s sketchbooks, see ibid., 188-190.

92 For a close formal analysis of Reed Flowers in Autumn Wind, see also ibid., 130-131. McClintock calls this work a “visual tour de force” that “maintains the desired ‘awkwardness’ or angular syncopation of the [Zheng Xie] style, while creating a balanced composition of bold, elegant calligraphy” (ibid.).
entire composition. As McClintock has observed, Seiko also incorporates various script types within a single column, such as the archaic ideographic characters employed for “mountain” and “water” (fourth and sixth characters from the bottom in the third column).\(^93\) The dramatic interplay between wet and dry ink accentuates the deliberately off-balanced configuration of the three-peaked mountain, whose blunt, primitive appearance stands out in the lower middle of the composition (Figure 1.12b). Some of the other characters in the same column, however, are inscribed with a more fluid movement of the brush in a running-cursive script. The eleventh character from the bottom (Figure 1.12c), for instance, is largely composed of a continuous stroke that rapidly creates loops and hooks in an acrobatic manner; its light pliability contrasts with the awkward rigidity of the contorted “mountain.” Such distortion of form can also be found in the character for “wind” 風 in the first column, in which the “roof” radical is relegated to the upper left, while the rest of the character seems upright and firmly grounded (Figure 1.12d). The final stroke of this character connects to the “mouth” radical of the following character “to blow,” 吹 but the radical is so elongated that it no longer retains a square shape. This enlarged “mouth” thus seems to blow the roof of “wind,” creating a playful interaction between the forms and the meanings of the characters.\(^94\) Moreover, some characters, such as “reed” 蘆 (the fifth character of the first column), even seem to embody an internal tension (Figure 1.12e). The ideographic “grass” radical evokes seal script, while the rest of the character is brushed with more continuous (though decisively idiosyncratic) strokes in a version of running script. Further, each part of the

\(^{93}\) Ibid., 130.

\(^{94}\) Similarly, the “mouth” radical of the character for “cry” 哀 located at the top of the second column is radically misshapen; the first vertical oblique stroke noticeably tapers to the lower left and barely connects to the bottom stroke brushed thickly at an angle. The character for “bird” on the right is so constricted in the middle that it is difficult to unpack the movement of strokes. Further, two of the four dots in the “bird” character are dropped to the bottom and linked to the rest of the character with thin vertical strokes, as if to evoke a bird’s feet.
character is twisted or dislocated as though it has its own predilections and agency. Composed of individuated independent parts, the character seems to be on the verge of disintegration.

Moreover, although these angular, agitated characters fill the entire work, the spacing between the lines and characters is inconsistent throughout the scroll. In fact, the dense overall composition is interspersed with occasional voids located in unexpected places. For instance, the final vertical stroke of the character for “sound” 聲 (fourth column, second character from the bottom) makes a long downward movement before it curves to the left and disappears in “flying white.” The resultant empty space in the upper left of the elongated curve conveys a sense of spontaneity, while possibly visualizing through that void the reverberation of sound that transpires in the poem. Thus, Seiko’s idiosyncratic, syncopated mode of calligraphy imparts kinetic energy to the multifarious characters that seem to twist and turn of their own will.

Seiko’s physical manner of executing her works may well have been as dynamic as the appearance of her calligraphy. A hanging scroll titled White Herons and Willows (Figure 1.13a) seems to contain traces of her hands—important clues that tell us about the circumstances of her artistic production. On a large sheet of paper (172.5 cm x 92.2 cm), Seiko boldly inscribes a short poem in massive characters, many of which are larger than the size of a stretched hand. In contrast to the virtuosic Reed Flowers in Autumn Wind, the brushstrokes employed in White Herons and Willows are noticeably rough and blatant: the edges of strokes are often fuzzy (possibly indicating the use of a coarse or slightly worn-out brush) and the brushwork displays limited variations. Moreover, some of the characters seem to have been smudged. What is most striking about this seemingly unsophisticated work is that traces of the artist’s hands fill the composition (Figures 1.13b-e). Perhaps Seiko’s hand touched the ink while it was still moist, and she kept leaning over the paper with her hand as she completed the work. In order to wield the
brush on this sheet of paper that is longer than her height (which is said to have been about 157 cm\(^95\)), it seems that Seiko spread the paper on the floor and leaned over it while supporting herself with her knees and left hand. In fact, Seiko is represented painting in such a manner in one of the many portraits of the artist that appeared in printed books on renowned individuals published in the 1880s. In a portrait contained in Teisō setsugi: Kokon meifu hyakushu (Virtue and Righteousness: A Selection of One Hundred Poems by Renowned Women of Ancient and Modern Times) from 1881, Seiko is shown in the midst of executing a painting of bamboo and rocks that is placed on a mat spread over the floor (Figure 1.14). She holds a long brush and stretches her arm to paint the upper portion of the painting, while steadying herself with her left hand placed outside the painting. Given the large scale, rugged brushwork, and careless treatment of the paper in White Herons and Willows, it seems likely that Seiko inscribed this work in front of an audience as an improvisational performance piece.\(^96\)

Seiko is known to have based her calligraphic style on that of Zheng Xie (1693-1765), an eighteenth-century Chinese literati artist who was appointed magistrate in northern China. After his disillusionment with bureaucracy forced him into early retirement, he settled in Yangzhou, a prosperous merchant community, where he became known as one of the “Eight Eccentrics.”\(^97\) Zheng was famous for his paintings of bamboo and orchids, as well as his unorthodox style of

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\(^95\) Seiko is said to have been over 5 shaku and 2 sun tall. Inamura, Okuhara Seiko, 136.

\(^96\) The final line of the inscription indicates that this scroll accompanied a separate painting of white herons and willows. The same poem appears in a painting by Seiko titled White Herons and Lotuses, which is now in the Koga City Museum of History.

calligraphy. In a work of calligraphy in the Shanghai Museum (Figure 1.15a), for example, the characters alternate between large and small, between vertically elongated and horizontally stretched. Not only the distortion of forms but also the quivering inflection of the brush, particularly visible in the diagonal strokes that flow from upper left to lower right, connote a sense of purposeful clumsiness. Zheng further creates a dramatic contrast between wet and dry ink within a single character, as seen, for instance, in the sixth character of the third column 鸟 (Figure 1.15b). The luscious ink deployed to delineate the left-hand side of the character contrasts with the dry, coarse brushwork that constitutes the “bird” radical on the right. Specifically, the blunt diagonal stroke executed on top of the “bird” radical carries so little ink that it leaves white streaks within the ink line in the “flying white” technique; the rest of the radical is composed of dry, fuzzy strokes rubbed against the fibers of paper, creating a texture that seems to evoke the fluffiness of a bird’s plumage. This type of interplay between the textures of brushwork and the semantic meanings of characters can also be found in the character for “cloud” 雲 in the first column (Figure 1.15c). The first two strokes are so wet and saturated with ink that they bleed into the paper, forming patterns that resemble the amorphous forms of clouds themselves. In other words, each character (or each part of a character) seems to assert its individuality, imbuing the entire work with a sense of purposeful awkwardness and playful improvisation. Amalgamating various forms of scripts, Zheng’s calligraphy defies to be categorized into a specific type. In fact, Zheng himself named his eclectic style of calligraphy liufenban or “six-and-one-half-tenths of the official style,” an extension of the clerical style, which also incorporated regular, running, and seal script elements. It is this untrammeled, unconventional quality of Zheng Xie’s calligraphy that might have inspired Seiko to create her

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own style of inscription. Seiko’s *Reed Flowers in Autumn Wind* thus displays characteristics similar to those found in Zheng Xie’s works, but her exuberant brushwork pushes Zheng’s “angular, syncopated” mode to its extreme, producing a powerful tapestry of calligraphic inscriptions.

Seiko, in fact, commented on her relationship to Zheng Xie’s style in a work of calligraphy that is now only available in a black-and-white reproduction (Figure 1.16). On the right-hand side of the horizontal ground, she boldly inscribes five large characters that read, “Mountains exhale clouds and clouds exhale mountains.” Although she writes the character “clouds” only once, she doubles its size and repeats the bottom half of the character so that it can be read twice. To the left of this playful calligraphy, she inscribes a short explanatory text, stating:

Seiko had the inspiration to create this calligraphy, which resembled [that of] Old Man [Zheng] Banqiao. Someone said that [actually] the Old Man resembles Seiko and that the viewer should keep this straight.

晴湖興到作此書如板橋老人 或曰老人似靜古 観者宜正之

The inscription thus claims that Seiko’s calligraphy happened to resemble that of Zheng Xie but that actually, it was Zheng Xie who resembled Seiko (although Zheng was active more than a century before her). The five-character calligraphy on the right further comments on this problem of originality and imitation, as it asks: is it a mountain that produces a cloud or is it a cloud that forms a mountain? The calligraphy thus suggests the continuous circularity of cause and effect, implicitly challenging the idea that Zheng’s calligraphic generated effected Seiko’s. In fact,

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99 McClintock, “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913),” 120.

100 This work is reproduced in Inamura, *Okuhara Seiko*, 98. Its current whereabouts are unknown.

101 This transcription is available in Ibaraki Kenritsu Rekishikan, ed., *Okuhara Seiko ten*, exh. cat. (Mito: Ibaraki Kenritsu Rekishikan, 2001), 32; it is also discussed in Inamura, *Okuhara Seiko*, 99.
Seiko is said to have claimed that her calligraphy had no stylistic adherence and that it was uniquely her own.\(^{102}\)

Despite her claim to originality, a survey of Seiko’s personal belongings including sketches, copies of paintings, books, and other items that are now preserved at the Koga City Museum of History reveals her interest in Zheng Xie’s works in particular and Ming and Qing paintings and calligraphy more generally.\(^{103}\) In addition to several copies of paintings by Zheng Xie, Seiko owned a copy of Zheng Banqiao ji, a four-volume collection of poems and other writings by Zheng Xie, which was reprinted in multiple editions.\(^{104}\) More importantly, she owned a copy of an album containing ninety-nine “bamboo branch” lyrics (Ch. zhužī; J. chikushi) that Zheng Xie composed and inscribed in running script.\(^{105}\) A number of books from Seiko’s library also survive, including various Confucian classics, anthologies of poetry, and records of Ming and Qing painting such as Molin jinhua (Recent Conversations in the Ink Forest) and Tongyin lunhua (A Discussion of Paintings in the Shade of the Tong Tree). She also had an 1872 edition of Yangzhou huafang lu (Record of the Painted Pleasure Boats of Yangzhou), a detailed record of the customs, famous sites, businesses, and renowned individuals in late eighteenth-century Yangzhou originally published in 1795. Further, Seiko collected Chinese paintings and works of


\(^{103}\) An inventory of these items is available in Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, ed., Okuhara Seiko funpon shiryō mokuroku (Koga: Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, 2002). The following discussion of works in her collection is based on this source.


\(^{105}\) Since the extant copy of the album made by Seiran contains transcriptions of the characters written in standard script to the right of each running-script character, it is possible that it was used for Seiran’s own practice or for Seiko’s instruction of students at her school. This album is discussed in Kawashima Junji, Gasan kara miru Okuhara Seiko (Tokyo: Rin Shobō, 1991), 910-912.
calligraphy, amassing more than one hundred works by the end of her life.\textsuperscript{106} An inventory of treasured scrolls (\textit{aigan zōfuku mokuroku}) that Seiko compiled after she retired to Kumagaya lists nearly fifty works by Chinese artists including the court portrait painter Yu Zhiding (1647-1816) and Zhang Qiugu, who visited Nagasaki in 1786, along with a few works by Japanese painters such as Ogata Kōrin (1658-1716) and Kano Tsunenobu (1636-1713). In addition, Seiko likely studied original works by Zheng Xie and other Chinese artists in her acquaintances’ collections. For example, Fukushima Ryūho, with whom Seiko interacted frequently and produced numerous joint works, is known to have treasured an ink painting of bamboo by Zheng Xie and a boneless-style painting of peonies by Lu Yuan (dates unknown) in his collection.\textsuperscript{107} Kido Takayoshi also possessed some Chinese paintings, including an album of plum blossoms by Jin Nong (1687-1763), another member of the “Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou.” In fact, Seiko owned a copy of this album, too, which was possibly made by Seiran (Figure 1.17). Although Seiko does not seem to have personally owned Zheng Xie originals, she seems to have used her network of contacts to study works by the “Eight Eccentrics,” while sharing her broader interest in Ming and Qing art with members of her circle.

Indeed, Ming and Qing paintings and calligraphy became increasingly accessible during the course of the Meiji period, particularly at \textit{sencha} gatherings, which came to serve as an important venue for displaying and appreciating newly imported objects.\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Sencha} practice was

\textsuperscript{106} Seiko mentioned that she owned more than one hundred Chinese paintings (tōga) during an interview with the writer Higuchi Den who visited Seiko in Kumagaya in 1911 and subsequently published an article based on his visit. See Higuchi Den, “Tōkai Seiko o toburau,” \textit{Shoga kōtō zasshi}, no. 36 (May 1911): 18. Some of the paintings recorded in Seiko’s inventory of treasured scrolls survive in the Koga City Museum of History. For their reproductions, see Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, \textit{Okuhara Seiko ten—botsugo 100-nen kinen}, 87.

\textsuperscript{107} Emori Ten’en, “Fukushima Ryūho,” \textit{Bijutsu no Nihon} 2, no. 10 (October 1910): 14.

\textsuperscript{108} On the reception of Ming and Qing paintings prior to the Meiji period, see, for example, James Cahill, “Phases and Modes in the Transmission of Ming-Ch’ing Painting Styles to Edo Period Japan,” in \textit{Aspects of Archaeology and Art History}, vol. 1 of \textit{Papers of the International Symposium on Sino-Japanese Cultural Exchange}, ed. Yue-him Tam (Hong Kong: Institute of Chinese Studies, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1985), 65-97; Itabashi Kuritsu
introduced to Japan through the Ōbaku sect of Zen Buddhism in the eighteenth century and emerged as an alternative to *chanoyu* (powdered green tea) among Sinophilic intellectuals.\textsuperscript{109} Just as *chanoyu* gatherings became forums for the display of scrolls, tea utensils, and other objects, particularly from the Song (960-1127), Yuan (1271-1368), and early Ming dynasties, the practice of *sencha* provided an arena where Ming and Qing paintings, calligraphy, ceramics, and lacquerware could be viewed, sometimes to the accompaniment of Chinese music.\textsuperscript{110} As Patricia J. Graham has noted, in the latter half of the nineteenth century “these exhibited objects gradually replaced tea consumption as the main focus of attention,”\textsuperscript{111} transforming “private *sencha* gatherings…into public art exhibitions,”\textsuperscript{112} a phenomenon facilitated by wealthy industrialists, art dealers, and politicians, including Kido Takayoshi, who deployed such gatherings to demonstrate their cultural sophistication and enhance their public profile.\textsuperscript{113} One of the largest *sencha* gatherings was held in Kyoto in November 1875 to commemorate the passing of the merchant Kumagai Naotaka (1817-1875), the seventh proprietor of the Kyūkyōdo stationery and incense shop. Twenty-five tearooms were prepared for this two-day event, in which more than four hundred scrolls were put on display, all of which were works of Ming and

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\textsuperscript{111} Graham, “*Karamono for Sencha*,” 124.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 127.

\textsuperscript{113} Buckland, *Painting Nature for the Nation*, 93.
Qing painting and calligraphy.\textsuperscript{114} The accompanying exhibition catalogue (\textit{meien zuroku}), which was titled \textit{Maruyama shōkai zuroku} and was published the following year, offers a detailed record of the interior décor in each room in both text and image, as well as an extensive list of exhibits that were gathered from various private collections throughout the country. Significantly, the list of works includes a number of paintings and works of calligraphy produced by the “Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou,” including six scrolls by Zheng Xie from private collections in Tokyo, Kyoto, and Sanuki (Kagawa Prefecture).\textsuperscript{115} Further, \textit{Seiwan meien zushi}, another catalogue of a large-scale \textit{sencha} gathering published earlier in 1875, indicates that a painting of tea utensils by Zheng Xie was brought from a private collection in Seishū (modern-day Mie Prefecture) to be displayed in Osaka in 1874.\textsuperscript{116} Although there is no evidence to support that Seiko saw the paintings by Zheng Xie in these particular private collections, the fact that works by Zheng Xie and his contemporary Chinese artists were collected even in remote regions speaks to the widely

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{114} Naritasan Shodō Bijutsukan, ed., \textit{Kindai bunjin no itonami} (Kyoto, Tankōsha, 2006), 77.
\item \textsuperscript{115} See Kumagai Kyūbē, \textit{Maruyama shōkai zuroku} (Kyoto: Kumagai Kyūbē, 1876), 1:1, 14, 22, and 31; and 2:13. The list of works in this catalogue is also transcribed and discussed in Takahashi Toshirō, \textit{Kindai Nihon ni okeru sho e no manazashi—Nihon shodōshi keisei no kiseki} (Kyoto: Shibunkaku, 2011), 243-257. Simultaneously, another commemorative event was held in Tokyo at the villa of Oku Randen who is credited with introducing the practice of \textit{sencha} gatherings from Kansai to the eastern capital. Kido Takayoshi, Kawakami Tōgai, and Chō Sanshū, among others, participated in this event, in which seventeen Ming and Qing paintings and calligraphy, including a work by the seventeenth-century literati painter Wang Jianzhang (dates unknown), were exhibited. A separate exhibition catalogue titled \textit{Kumagai Suikō kōji tsuifuku shoga tenkanroku} was published later that year. For a discussion of this event, see Miyazaki Shūta, “Meien zuroku no jidai,” \textit{Bungaku} 7, no. 3 (July 1996): 37-38. On the reception of Wang Jianzhang in Japan, see Itakura Masaaki, “Kinsei kindai Nihon ni okeru Chūgoku kaiga kanshō to gakazō no hen’yō—Ō Keshō no baai,” \textit{Bijutsu föramu} 21, no. 26 (November 2012): 126-132. On copies of landscape paintings by Wang Jianzhang in Okuhara Seiko’s personal collection, see Hirai Yoshinao, “Okuhara Seiko kyūzō funpon no shiryou-teki kachi—futatabi Ō Keshō hitsu ‘Tōjō jukkei-zu’ mohon o megutte,” \textit{Sagami Joshi Daigaiku kiyō}, no. 72A (March 2009): 1-19.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Yamanaka Kichirōbē, \textit{Seiwan meien zushi} (Osaka: Yamanaka Shunkōdō, 1876), 12. This event marked one of the earliest \textit{sencha} gatherings sponsored by an art dealer. For more on this gathering and the accompanying catalogue with illustrations by Tanomura Chokunyū, see Hasegawa Shōshōkyo, \textit{Sencha shi} (Tokyo: Benridō, 1965), 143; and Patricia J. Graham, \textit{Tea of the Sages} (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998), 176-177.
\end{itemize}

Just as Zheng Xie is known to have “positioned his calligraphy in direct opposition to the mainstream calligraphic methods established by the emperor’s preferences,”\footnote{Dun, “Calligraphic Style in Eighteenth-Century Yangzhou,” 284.} Seiko’s infinitely variable calligraphic style was also perceived as anomalous in Meiji-period Japan. In fact, it seemed so outrageously unconventional to some conservative viewers that it sometimes invited heated reactions.\footnote{Seiko’s bold, exuberant, and idiosyncratic style of calligraphy may have been perceived not only unconventional but also “unfeminine” at the time, particularly given that the style of penmanship had long been gendered since the Heian period (794-1185), a practice that came to be institutionalized during the Meiji period. For example, the writer and translator Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901) noted in his report of educational systems in Kyoto based on his visit to the schools there in 1872 that boys and girls between the ages of seven and fourteen sat in the same classroom to receive instruction in reading and arithmetic, but they were placed in separate rooms to study penmanship. Eiichi Kiyooka, trans., Fukuzawa Yukichi on Education: Selected Works (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1985), 73-74. In her discussion of Fukuzawa’s report, Anne Walthall has noted that “sex segregation was based on aesthetic values regarding what constituted appropriately feminine and masculine behavior…. Textbooks designated for girls from 1892 on show that twenty years after the inauguration of compulsory education, the Ministry of Education still authorized separate instruction in calligraphy.” Anne Walthall, “Women and Literacy from Edo to Meiji,” in The Female as Subject: Reading and Writing in Early Modern Japan, ed. P. F. Kornick, Mara Patessio, and G. G. Rowley (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2010), 226-227. On the construction of relationships between gender, genre, and styles of inscription at Heian court, see Chino Kaori, “Gender in Japanese Art,” in Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field, ed. Joshua S. Mostow, Norman Bryson, and Maribeth Graybill (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2003), 17-34.} Several anecdotes recounted in essays on Seiko published in the 1900s suggest how the artist responded to such vehement criticism. For example, in his memoir of Seiko, Komiya Mihomatsu (1859-1935), a prosecutor who enrolled in law school with Seiko’s financial support, discusses how the artist deployed her humor and wit to challenge her critics:

A certain baron, who was also a well-known scholar, came to Seiko to request a painting. Seiko painted a picture of “a moon and a cuckoo” right away and brushed an inscription with her distinctive calligraphy. When the baron saw the exceedingly eccentric style of the inscription, he became infuriated and confronted [Seiko] without giving her an honorarium, reprimanding, “Where did the style of your inscription come from? The
‘mouth’ radical of the character ‘call’ [啼] is enormous, while the character [on the right; 帝] is extremely small.” Witty Seiko immediately responded, “I know nothing of troublesome things like calligraphic styles. This is my own style. But it seems that there are no characters that are indecipherable. I am happy as long as the character ‘call’ can be read as ‘call.’ The cuckoo must have cried eagerly with a wide-open mouth.” On hearing this, even the baron was surprised by her shrewdness.120

Rather than directly responding to the baron’s question about the origins of her calligraphic style, Seiko pretends to have no stylistic adherence, claiming that her style is uniquely her own.121 She then shifts his attention away from the question of her propriety to the playful interpretation of the character itself, suggesting that it was the bird in the inscription rather than the calligrapher who distorted the shape of the character in question.122

Artists as Celebrities: The Commodification of Literati Culture

Despite such commentaries on the eccentricity of her style, sales of Seiko’s boldly inscribed paintings and calligraphy dramatically increased during the early years of the Meiji period. The accelerating demand for Seiko’s works is captured in an article that appeared in the newspaper Yūbin hōchi shinbun (Postal News) in 1875, which presents Seiko’s paintings and the intestinal medicine Hōtan as the “two things that had come to be sold nonstop in Tokyo since the Meiji Restoration” of 1868.123 In fact, several other sources indicate the extent to which Seiko’s works became must-have items in the first decade of the Meiji era. One of them notes that Seiko’s strange (fūgawari) and daring (rairaku) paintings and calligraphy were so valued that her

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120 Komiya, “Tōkai Seiko ni tsuite,” 19.

121 As Yukio Lippit has noted, “the claim to methodlessness was…a common refrain among East Asian literati painters.” Yukio Lippit, “Urakami Gyokudō: An Intoxicology of Japanese Literati Painting,” in Dialogues in Art History, from Mesopotamian to Modern: Readings for a New Century, ed. Elizabeth Cropper, Studies in the History of Art 74 (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2009), 181.

122 Contemporary critics’ emphasis on Seiko’s ability to defeat her detractors will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4.

123 “Fuka zappō,” Yūbin hōchi shinbun, September 29, 1875. Importantly, the reporter characterizes both Seiko’s body and her brushwork as virile and militaristic. His perception of the physical virility of Seiko’s paintings likely derived from the widely shared perception of the artist as a masculine woman, as will be examined in chapter 4.
work was deemed essential to making a proper drawing room (zashiki). Another source indicates that a long-standing sweet shop capitalized on Seiko’s fame by commissioning her to create designs to be printed on their wrapping paper. Further, striking photographic portraits of Seiko with cropped hair were sold next to photographs of other celebrities and famous places, suggesting that the figure of Seiko itself came to be commodified. Seiko was, in fact, an important part of this sweeping trend of the commercialization of literati culture in mid-nineteenth-century Japan. During this period, literati motifs came to decorate everyday commodities of various types. For example, the fashionable held white Western-style umbrellas with images of orchids and taihu rocks painted in a literati manner; fans with designs jointly created by multiple literati artists were so prized that they were reproduced in woodblock format. Further, the explosive popularity of literati art led to the proliferation of forgeries, including of works by Seiko; such works circulated even in remote regions, where people of various ranks—from mayors and nobles to peasants and children—smeared ink to paint the “four gentlemen” and inscribe Sinitic poems.

This commercialization and commodification of literati culture culminated in the shogakai banquets that became ubiquitous in the early nineteenth century and remained viable throughout the early Meiji period. Shogakai originated in the Kamigata region (Kyoto and Osaka) in the late eighteenth century as open forums for exhibiting recently created paintings and

124 Sase Tokuzô, Tôsei katsujin: Ichimei meishi to keishû, zokuzoku (Tokyo: Shunyôdô, 1900), 118-119.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Ômura Seigai, Bunjinga no fûkô (Tokyo: Kôgeisha, 1921), 1. The “four gentlemen” refer to the four seasonal motifs beloved by literati including bamboo, plum, orchid, and chrysanthemum.
calligraphy.\textsuperscript{130} In Edo, however, these gatherings increasingly became a means of profit-making and self-advertisement, featuring constellations of artists who produced paintings and calligraphy on site (sekiga) to be sold to the vying public.\textsuperscript{131} The shogakai thus “evolved into mammoth galas, open indiscriminately to any citizen able to afford a ticket.”\textsuperscript{132} As Andrew Markus has shown, during the height of their popularity in the Tenpō era (1830-1844), shogakai were held monthly, or even daily, in the city of Edo, attracting hundreds of participants.\textsuperscript{133} In order to hold a shogakai, the sponsor (kaishu) first set a date and reserved a large room at a rental facility (kashi-zakishi), often a restaurant. He then visited his celebrity friends and associates one by one, asking them to participate in his banquet as attractions for the general public. The names of luminaries scheduled to attend the event were advertised on handbills and marquees. The sponsor was also responsible for ordering food and hiring entertainers, as well as supplying fans, silk, and other gifts for the guests. On the day of the event, an admiring public, wishing to seize the opportunity to directly interact with artistic luminaries, purchased admission to the party, which became the main source of revenue for the host. The celebrity participants, too, earned income, as the guests were expected to offer a gratuity to each artist before or after requesting a sample work.\textsuperscript{134} What emerged as an amicable gathering for artistic exchange evolved into a commercial enterprise and a celebration of materialism. Perceiving the business potential of catering to the


\textsuperscript{131} On sekiga, see Alexander Hofmann, \textit{Performing/Painting in Tokugawa Japan: Artistic Practice and Socio-Economic Functions of Sekiga (Paintings on the Spot)} (Berlin: Reimer, 2011).

\textsuperscript{132} Markus, “Shogakai,” 136.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 145-146.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 138-139.
needs of *shogakai* fêtes, some firms even developed a niche industry. In the late Edo period, the fan shop Senmentei, for example, supplied paper, inkstones, carpets, and furnishings, “as well as a staff of uniformed, highly professional sword- and footwear-checkers to supervise the guests’ belongings.” Meanwhile, restaurants in the Ryōgoku and Yanagibashi entertainment districts provided spacious rooms for rent specifically to host such mammoth parties, in which the prominent presence of geisha became a common feature. By the mid-nineteenth century, these large-scale public *shogakai* came to be driven by egocentric motives: “a desire to publish one’s name, or inflate a mediocre reputation; the ambition to outdo one’s rivals in sheer numbers and ostentation; and most importantly, a craving to transmute the intangibles of talent and reputation into hard currency.” Further, a new definition of success as a celebrity emerged at these “autograph parties,” in which the presence and performances of luminaries were transformed into spectacles to be consumed by the anonymous masses.

The carnival-like mood that prevailed at these *shogakai* is best captured by Kawanabe Kyōsai (1831-1889), who produced numerous graphic representations of such parties. In the all-over composition of *Calligraphy and Painting Party (Shogakai no zu)*; 1876) in a private collection, Kyōsai shows several artists in the midst of executing works of painting or calligraphy, as nearly ninety spectators—men and women, young and old—gather to witness their performances (Figure 1.18a). Some artists seem deeply engaged in their creations, while others are busy declining people’s incessant requests for samples of their works. At center right, Kyōsai includes a portrait of himself swamped by a crowd of onlookers; he raises his eyebrows, opens his mouth widely, and splays his fingers as though to refuse the spectators (or possibly to

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135 Ibid., 143.
136 Ibid., 135.
137 Ibid., 136-137.
negotiate the price for his autograph). In the upper left of the image, the calligrapher Sase Tokusho (1822-1878) demonstrates his skill in manipulating a giant brush as he squats and pulls up his sleeve to inscribe characters on a massive sheet of paper; his younger attendant, too, exerts his muscles to rub a substantial ink stick on an enormous inkstone to make enough ink for the calligrapher. Food and sake are also served: below the calligraphic performance, a monk shyly receives a cup of sake from a geisha; elsewhere, men are so drunk that the front of their robes has become loose. The entire composition is filled with scattered pieces of paper and fans, as well as figures who are engrossed in the commercial exchange, producing an overarching sense of visual chaos. That sense is reinforced by the figures’ exaggerated gestures and widely opened mouths, which make the painting look as though it is reverberating with shouts and laughter.

Strikingly, the miniature paintings and works of calligraphy within this painting were executed, signed, and sealed by twenty-seven calligraphers and twenty-nine painters, including Okuhara Seiko. It has been suggested that Kyōsai created this scroll at an actual shogakai held at the restaurant Nakamuraruō in Ryōgoku on May 21, 1876, which featured, among other spectacles, Sase Tokusho’s calligraphic performance and drew a record number of participants—

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139 Based on the inscription and seal at the bottom of the sheet, this calligrapher is identified as Sase Tokusho. Born in Aizu (modern-day Fukushima), Tokusho began his study of calligraphy under Hoshi Kendō in his hometown. After visiting Nagasaki to intermingle with Qing merchant-artists there, he traveled to China in 1869 and pursued his study of calligraphy on the continent. Upon returning to Japan the following year, he established himself as a calligrapher who became well known for his large-scale works. See Naritasan Shodō Bijutsukan and Kawanabe Kyōsai Kinen Bijutsukan, Yōte sōrō, 106; Naritasan Shodō Bijutsukan, ed., Nihon no sho—Ishin-Shōwa shoki (Tokyo: Nigensha, 2009), 44-45.

140 Kyōsai produced another depiction of a shogakai in a similar composition titled Shogakai-zu in a private collection; it is reproduced in Naritasan Shodō Bijutsukan and Kawanabe Kyōsai Kinen Bijutsukan, Yōte sōrō, 38-39.

141 Clark, Demon of Painting, 36.
over three thousand. The miniaturized reproduction of works within Kyōsai’s scroll might even have been executed on site by the calligraphers, painters, and poets present at the gathering; it is also possible that the scroll was circulated among these luminaries to be inscribed individually at a later date.

Prominently displayed in the upper register are a painting of cranes by Seiko along with works by artists in her circle, including a calligraphic inscription of a poem by Ōnuma Chinzan, a picture of lotuses by Matsuoka Kansui, a landscape by Hattori Hazan, and a painting of orchids by Taki Katei (1830-1901) (Figure 1.18b). These artists were often highly ranked in contemporary rankings, suggesting the possibility that, as Timothy Clark has noted, Kyōsai’s arrangement of these miniature works indicates his conception of the artistic hierarchy of the time. Seiko seems to have frequently produced paintings of cranes at celebratory occasions during this period. One example of such a work can be found in the Naritasan Calligraphy Museum (Figure 1.19). With an oval for the body, a line for the beak, and a dot for the eye, these minimally rendered cranes were particularly suited to meeting the demands for quick improvisational sketches at festive events such as shogakai.

Although Seiko

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143 Naritasan Shodō Bijutsukan and Kawanabe Kyōsai Kinen Bijutsukan, eds., Yōte sārō, 40.

144 On Taki Katei, see Buckland, Painting Nature for the Nation.

145 Clark, Demon of Painting, 36.

146 I thank Yamazaki Akira and Yamamori Yayoi for providing me with the opportunity to study this painting and other works by Seiko at the Naritasan Calligraphy Museum.

147 As McClintock has argued, Seiko’s ungraceful cranes embody a sense of humor, possibly adding an ironic twist to this conventional motif of longevity and prosperity: “The ungainliness of the crane, in its large bulbous body and…impossibly thin neck pokes fun at the more serious constructs found at celebrations that emphasize the [cranes’] elegance in flight. [Seiko] has transformed a trite image into a memorably irreverent one.” McClintock, “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913),” 152.
is said to have disliked participating in *shogakai* after hosting one for her debut in 1865, she seems to have continued to attend them out of a sense of social obligation.  

Indeed, some contemporary critics have suggested that Seiko capitalized on this unparalleled popularity of literati art by producing numerous works with rough, bold brushstrokes in order to meet the accelerating demands of the market. By doing so, she appears to have accumulated substantial wealth, something frequently mentioned in contemporary sources. For example, the aforementioned 1875 article in *Yūbin hōchi shinbun* describes Seiko’s incomparably clever foresight: predicting that her paintings would become passé within the next five years, she deposited two thousand gold with her friend as savings for her eventual retirement. Similarly, Yoda Gakkai (1833-1909), a *kangaku* scholar, playwright, and critic, noted in his diary in 1885 that Seiko possessed several thousand gold and apparently confessed to him her intention to stop painting. Further details about Seiko’s finances can be found in the ledger that she kept from January 1882 to December 1900. It records, month by month, the names of individuals who purchased works from her, as well as the prices they paid. At the end of each year, Seiko listed the value of her possessions including bills, coins, and public bonds. She then calculated the total monetary value of her properties and added a line declaring that the money belonged solely to Seiko.

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149 See, for example, Ishii, “Okuhara Seiko,” 146.

150 “Fuka zappō,” *Yūbin hōchi shinbun*, September 29, 1875.


152 In addition to cash, the record indicates that Seiko owned ten thousand *yen* in public bonds by 1882. In 1894 she also acquired a military bond of 50 *yen*, whose value increased to one thousand seven hundred *yen* by 1900. This ledger is also discussed in Kojima Kaoru, “Kindai gaka to shite no Okuhara Seiko,” *Senseki*, no. 11 (2014): 5-6. Seiko’s financial success in early Meiji-period Shitaya contrasts with the economic hardship experienced by *bunjin* in early modern Negishi, a neighboring suburban retreat. As W. Puck Brecher has shown, during the Edo period
These sources seem to construct an image of Seiko as a merchant-trendsetter who knowingly amassed her wealth by producing works in quick, bold brushstrokes to feed the momentary rise in demand for literati art. Such an image might appear paradoxical given the ideal image of a literati artist as an autonomous, aloof individual who leisurely wields his brush only as a means of self-expression and self-cultivation. If Seiko was so deeply involved in the market economy, how did she reconcile the disconnect between the commercialism that was increasingly associated with her artistic practice and the literati ideals of aesthetic modesty and eremitism that she championed in works such as *Dreams of Cranes amid Windy Pines*? In other words, how did she recuperate literati ideals, and what did it mean for her to engage in literati art as a cultural practice?

**Reclaiming Literati Ideals**

One of the ways in which Seiko reclaimed literati ideals was to participate in elegant gatherings among pseudo-Chinese litterateurs—both in the world of representation and in actuality. As noted earlier, Kyōsai’s *Calligraphy and Painting Party* emphasized the contemporaneity of *shogakai* by highlighting the unruly interactions between artists and customers and by showcasing artistic performance as a commercially driven spectacle. Seiko, by contrast, produced a very different image of such a gathering in a hanging scroll dated 1880 in The Museum of Modern Art, Ibaraki (Figure 1.20). In contrast to the diverse range of participants in Kyōsai’s image, the figures in Seiko’s scroll all look alike: most of the figures seem vaguely Chinese as they wear black hats, long beards, and robes with broad sleeves. Unlike

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Negishi was marked by inconsistencies between its utopian image as an idyllic *meisho* and the residents’ actual struggles with the economic uncertainties surrounding aesthetic reclusion. W. Puck Brecher, “Down and Out in Negishi: Reclusion and Struggle in an Edo Suburb,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 35, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 1-35. I thank Hannah Shepherd for recommending this article to me.

I thank Nagamatsu Sachi for allowing me to study this and other paintings by Seiko at The Museum of Modern Art, Ibaraki.
the figures in Kyōsai’s image, who seem to have no shame in openly showing their acquisitiveness, Seiko’s figures leisurely and quietly engage in their activities of painting, writing, and viewing. In the foreground, a man inscribes characters on a large sheet spread on a mat before him, while a group of viewers focuses their attention on his execution. Behind them to the right, another group of men gathers around a calligraphic scroll, while two men on the left recline on the floor, perhaps taking a nap. Above them, another group of figures sits at a table, drinking tea or wine and quietly conversing. At the upper right, a scholar sits at his desk in front of a standing screen and engages himself in writing, while his admirers and younger servants attend to him. The uniformity of the figures’ appearance suggests that the gathering is not a gregarious congregation of a heterogeneous group of people, as in Kyōsai’s scroll, but rather an elegant gathering of like-minded literati.

Despite its evocation of a time and place distant from Meiji Japan, however, the painting shows a hanging scroll of cranes that a figure prominently displays near the center of the composition. Such an inclusion of an image associated with Seiko’s style or brand might be viewed as the artist’s attempt at self-advertisement or simply as a sign of her humor. More significantly, though, Seiko seems to make her image participate in this imaginary gathering of Sinitic literati, drawing a link between her image and the ideal world of cultivated men that she constructs in the painting. In other words, Seiko’s imagined shogakai constitutes an alternative universe, removed from the vanity and profit-oriented contemporary parties that Kyōsai visually mocked. In this sense, the act of pictorializing an amicable, cultivated gathering of Sinitic litterateurs might have served as a means for Seiko to recuperate ideals that were increasingly compromised by the rising tide of commercialism at the time. Importantly, such efforts to
recovered the degenerated ideals were not contained within the world of representation, but they were also enacted in the actual practice of Seiko and her peers, as shall be discussed shortly.

First, however, it may be useful to note that satirical commentaries in both word and image also served as an effective tool of challenging the vulgarization of literati art. The conservative poet Ōnuma Chinzan, for example, often voiced in his kanshi his discontent with the changes brought by the new era, including the debased condition of Sinitic poetry. In 1869 Seiko participated in the publication of Tōkeishi (Poems of Tokyo), a collection of thirty poems composed by Chinzan, which thematized the new customs of Tokyo largely from a critical perspective. Ten calligraphers inscribed three of the thirty poems each, while ten painters contributed images for one of those poems. Although the mockery of current affairs implied in the content seems to have made Tōkeishi the object of an inquisition by the Censorate (Danjōdai), it is uncertain to what extent Chinzan was involved in the production of this work, as a certain Tsuda Shinzen published the collection privately only in a small run. Many of the painters and calligraphers who participated in the publication were figures with whom Seiko interacted on a regular basis, including Fukushima Ryūho, Hattori Hazan, Taki Katei, Kawakami Tōgai (1827-1881), and Ichikawa Man’an (1837-1907).

Seiko contributed an image to the volume to accompany a poem inscribed by the calligrapher Kuwano Shōka (dates unknown). The poem reads:

Singing the poem of the “Night Mooring by the Maple Bridge,”
she conveys her longing in her playing of the three-stringed lute [shamisen].
Who would have expected that to the lines about the lonely traveler’s sorrowful sleep,
she would add a verse about a most alluring beauty?

\[154\] This is noted in the biography of Ōnuma Chinzan authored by Shinobu Joken, which is included in his Joken ikō, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Shinobu Junpei, 1918). A transcription of this biography is available in Satō Yōjin, “Kaidai,” in Tōkeishi, vol. 9 of Taihei bunko (Tokyo: Taihei Shooku, 1981), 4-6.

\[155\] Satō, “Kaidai,” 3; Buckland, Painting Nature for the Nation, 209, n. 165.
Chinzan’s poem refers to a genre of popular ditties called *dodoitsu*, which was developed in the late Edo period and remained a vital form of entertainment well into the Meiji era. Accompanied by *shamisen* and often thematizing love, *dodoitsu* consisted of twenty-six syllables arranged in a pattern of 7-7-7-5, but its texts varied in length and its melodies were rhythmically flexible.\(^{156}\) Sometimes a few lines from popular songs, plays, or *jöruri* narratives were inserted into the performance, a practice aimed at achieving the effects of witty spontaneity that began in the Ansei era (1854-1860). In the early Meiji period, which saw the unparalleled boom of Sinitic poetry discussed above, the practice of incorporating lines from classical Chinese poetry into a *dodoitsu* song emerged as a new style of popular performance.\(^{157}\)

More specifically, Chinzan’s poem comments on this contemporary form of entertainment, noting that the female performer sings a *dodoitsu* to her lute, while inserting lines from “Night Mooring by the Maple Bridge,” a well-known poem composed by the eighth-century poet Zhang Ji (*jinshi* 753). Zhang Ji’s original poem reads:

> While I watch the moon go down, a crow caws through the frost; under the shadows of maple-trees, a fisherman moves with his torch; and I hear, from beyond Suzhou, from the temple on Cold Mountain, ringing for me, here in my boat, the midnight bell.\(^{158}\)

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\(^{158}\) This translation is by Witty Bynner and is included in John Minford and Joseph S. M. Lau, eds., *From Antiquity to the Tang Dynasty*, vol. 1 of *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 852. Zhang Ji’s poem is included in the *Selections of Tang Poetry* (*C. Tangshi xuan; J. Tōshisen*), which was first compiled in China in the sixteenth century. Its reprint by Ogyū Sorai’s disciple Hattori Nankaku in 1724 became one of the best sellers in Japan at the time, facilitating the publication of other related books such as the illustrated version *Tōshisen ehon*. For more on *Tōshisen*, see Ariki Daisuke, *Tōshisen hanpon kenkyū* (Tokyo: Kōbun Shuppan, 2013).
Zhang Ji’s poem is composed from the perspective of a lonely traveler who is unable to fall asleep on his boat. The performer in Chinzan’s poem, however, unexpectedly juxtaposes this sorrowful image with the image of a beautiful woman, thereby transforming the solitary (male) traveler into an alluring beauty. The ingenuity of her performance thus lies in her creation of a dynamic interaction between the classical and the contemporary, the elegant and the erotic.\(^{159}\)

Given that the audience of such *dodoitsu* performances was most likely officials of the Meiji government familiar with the Chinese classics who reportedly held rowdy parties night after night, the performer’s demonstration of her skills in appropriating imagery drawn from classical Chinese poetry served as a way of stimulating her listeners’ knowledge and taste.\(^{160}\)

Seiko responded to this poem by visualizing the context in which such performances were often held at the time—that is, an extravaganza of dance and music amidst voracious drinking and eating (Figure 1.21). The image depicts nearly sixty figures engaged in a lively

\(^{159}\) As Kinoshita Hyō has discussed, an example of a *dodoitsu* song that incorporates lines from the “Night Mooring by the Maple Bridge” is found in *Tōshi zakana*, a five-volume collection of *kanshi dodoitsu* published in 1869. Kinoshita Hyō, *Meiji shiwa* (1943; Tokyo: Iwanami Bunko, 2015), 19. In this parodic song accompanied by an illustration, the lonely traveler on a boat in the original poem is replaced with a man in a *kago* palanquin returning home from the pleasure quarters. A complete transcription of the first volume of *Tōshi zakana* is available in Kubota, et al., *Waka Haiku Kayō Onkyoku*, 294-314.

party in a spacious room at a restaurant. In the middle of the room, a group of men and women twist their bodies to dance along the music, some with fans in their hands. To their left, a figure seems to be trying to stand on his hands, while another figure holds a newly imported Western-style “bat umbrella” (kōmori-gasa). Shamisen players surround the crowd, singing with their widely opened mouths. The figures depicted in the upper right watch this chaotic spectacle unfolding before them; the two figures on the left lie on their stomachs with female attendants and sake cups to their side. Seiko brushed the following inscription in the upper left, which seems to make her critical attitude more apparent:

On the Winter Solstice in 1869, Seiko suddenly created this picture when early plums first bloomed and their pure fragrance brushed against her desk.

己巳長至日 晴湖卒然作此圖 時早梅初放 清香擦案

In contrast to the pandemonium that the image represents, the inscription situates Seiko in an elegant setting in which early plums—one of the most celebrated symbols of literati virtue—sway their branches in the wind and send off their pure fragrance toward her desk. The artist thus creates a sense of disconnect between the subject of her painting and the context of her production. The bird’s eye perspective that she employs to depict the room in an uproar further suggests the cool distance she maintains between herself and the figures in the image. Seiko therefore offers an elaborate context to Chinzan’s succinct poem by situating female shamisen performers amidst a chaotic party, in which canonical Sinitic poetry is turned into an object of degenerate play. In other words, Seiko’s image seems to bring the satirical tone of the poetry into the forefront of the viewer’s consciousness.

The explicit nature of Seiko’s representation of Chinzan’s poetry becomes clearer when we compare her image to a picture by Taki Katei included in the same collection (Figure 1.22). The poem on which Katei’s picture is based reads as follows:

When the fireworks began to sparkle over the two provinces,  
the officials left their jobs for the cool pavilions.  
But the renowned geisha of Yanagibashi refused to join them;  
they were gone elsewhere, onto the boat of the elegant governor.162

烟火初番照二州 群公公退倚凉楼  
柳橋名妓多辭召 別赴風流太守舟

The poem discusses government officials who left their offices at 3 p.m. to attend the display of fireworks on the riverbank of Ryōgoku, but renowned geisha refused to serve them and instead attended to the “elegant governor,” who might refer to the former lord of the Tosa domain (today’s Kōchi Prefecture), Yamauchi Toyoshige.163 Chinzan’s poem seems to embody a satirical connotation since it is said that the Yanagibashi pleasure quarter was favored by former samurai and that high-ranking officials of the new government were not well received there.164 Despite this possible cynicism implied in the poem, however, Katei’s image does not explicitly pictorialize the content of the poem; rather, as Buckland has noted, it offers a distanced view of this popular entertainment district in the manner of meisho-e (views of famous places)165 complete with conventional visual motifs including a temple roof shrouded by clouds, a flock of geese flying in the air, and a view of Mount Fuji in the distance on the left. The apparent

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162 Translation by Buckland in Painting Nature for the Nation, 92.
164 Ibid., 43.
165 Buckland, Painting Nature for the Nation, 91-92.
neutrality and serenity of Katei’s image contrasts with Seiko’s pictorialization of the critical tone of the original poem.  

Seiko therefore visualized imaginary gatherings of Sinitic literati, while presenting a critical perspective on the contemporary vulgarization of literati culture. More importantly though, she enacted the literati ideals she shared with her peers by participating in a privately organized literati group called Hankansha (“The Society of a Half [Day] of Leisure”), which seems to have served as an antithesis to the commercially oriented *shogakai*. Hankansha was centered on the renowned Confucian scholar and *kanshi* poet Washizu Kidō (1825-1882) who came to serve in the Meiji judiciary shortly after the Restoration. The society’s code of conduct, which was authored by Kidō in the tenth month of 1874, offers a crucial insight into the ways in which such private literati groups were organized and functioned in the early Meiji period. According to the code, the members (who were restricted to five) met once a month to hold a tea gathering (*meien*), which began at two in the afternoon and ended at eight in the evening. The name of the group is thus based on the idea of spending half a day at leisure. The responsibility of hosting the gathering rotated among the members. The code also provides a list of scholarly paraphernalia necessary for holding the monthly meeting: “a dustless desk by a well-

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166 *Tōkeishi* also includes a poem by Chinzan that criticizes the degenerate state of contemporary *shogakai*; see Kinoshita, *Meiji shiwa*, 28; and Saitō, “*Tōkeishi* kaisetsu,” 35-37

167 Buckland has also noted the possibility that Hankansha was “formed as a reaction against the excesses of the large-scale calligraphy-and-painting parties.” Buckland, *Painting Nature for the Nation*, 100. I thank Dr. McClintock for encouraging me to examine the operation and function of Hankansha.

168 Born as the eldest son of the Confucian scholar Washizu Eksai in Owarai domain (modern-day Nagoya), Kidō (Norimitsu) studied under the eclectic Confucian scholar Ikai Keisho in Ise before entering Shōheikō, the shogunal academy in Edo, in 1845. After serving in Kururi domain (today’s Chiba), he returned to Owarai to become the head of the domainal academy, Meirindō. From 1871 he worked in the Meiji judiciary, ultimately becoming the chief secretary (*daishokikan*) in 1882. He was also made a member of the Tokyo Academy (Tokyo Gakushi Kaiin).

lit window, a stick of incense, and a flower in a vase,” as well as “brushes, inkstones, paper, and ink.”\(^{170}\) Kidō continues to suggest that the food and drink that the members consume, as well as the utensils they use, should not be of highest quality: “The tea need not be extremely fine, but sufficient to purify the spirit; the sweets need not be exceptionally beautiful, but enough to drink the tea. Braziers, teapots and teacups can be either old or new.”\(^{171}\) This sense of modesty is important, Kidō claims, because if one becomes too proud of one’s possessions, one would be subjugated to those implements, a phenomenon that lofty literati disdain.\(^{172}\) In other words, Kidō explicitly shows his desire to attain the status of high-minded literati by differentiating himself and the members of his group from the excessive materialism he associates with tea merchants, connoisseurs, and antiquarians.

Further, Kidō’s code suggests that the activities of Hankansha were fairly ritualized: when guests arrived, the host and guests would first drink one or two cups of tea. They would then look at old paintings and calligraphy from the members’ collections. They would not disparage or adulate but only present “fair opinions” (kōron). Whenever the fancy struck them, they would compose poetry or brush calligraphy and painting. When they became tired, they would sit or lie down. At five, as the evening sun poured through the windows, they would eat a meal and drink sake. Here again, the code stresses the significance of modesty, stating that the members would not consume more than three dishes and two or three bottles of sake. After they finished their meal in a state of slight intoxication, they would drink tea again, which signaled

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\(^{170}\) Nagai, Shitaya sōwa, 242.

\(^{171}\) Ibid.

\(^{172}\) Ibid.
the end of the gathering. Kidō presents Su Shi’s (1037-1101) saying that “things are shallow but sentiments are deep” as the guiding principle of Hankansha.\footnote{Ibid., 242-243.}

Importantly, the code prescribes the nature of the interactions among the members of the society. Specifically, it states that when an argument arises, it should last only for a moment; the members might banter but they should not ill-treat (or make fun of) each other. Further, it stipulates that debates on the correctness or wrongness or merits and demerits of a particular affair or a particular person should be detested and forbidden.\footnote{Ibid.} The code thus discourages the participants from making judgmental critiques and instead presents mutual respect as the desired basis of comradeship among the members of the group.

Although Kidō notes that the membership of Hankansha was restricted to five unspecified participants, lists of the society’s members provided in near-contemporary sources are inconsistent, indicating the possibility that the members were not strictly predetermined or limited to five individuals. Besides the chief organizer Washizu Kidō, Okuhara Seiko seems to have been a regular participant. Other members may have included the Confucian scholar Konagai Shōshū (1829-1888), the poet Suzuki Shōtō, and the calligraphers Ichikawa Man’an and Chō Sanshū (1833-1895); painters such as Kawakami Tōgai, Fukushima Ryūho, and Yasuda Rōzan (1830-1883) may also have participated in the society.\footnote{Inamura Ryōhei lists Washizu Kidō, Okuhara Seiko, Konagai Shōshū, Ichikawa Man’an, and Kawakami Tōgai as the members of Hankansha (Inamura, Okuhara Seiko, 74). Besides Kidō and Seiko, Nagai Kafū lists the painters Fukushima Ryūho, Watanabe Shōka, and Yasuda Rōzan as possible members (Nagai, Shitaya sōwa, 243). The literary historian Fujioka Sakutarō notes that the members were Tōgai, Rōzan, Seiko, Ryūho, and Kidō; see his Kinsei kaigashi, (Tokyo: Kinkōdō, 1903), 355. According to Koyama Shōtarō, ten artists participated in the society, including (besides Kidō and Seiko) Rōzan, Ryūho, Man’an, Chō Sanshū, and Suzuki Shōtō; see his “Senshi Kawakami Tōgai okina,” in Aoki Shigeru, Meiji yōga shiryō: kaisō hen (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Bijutsu Shuppan, 1985), 74.} Occasionally, non-members, too,
seem to have been invited to attend the group’s gatherings.\footnote{176 The literati painter Nishida Shunkō (1845-1910) notes that he was invited to attend a Hankansha gathering that seems to have been hosted by Ichikawa Man’an. Shunkō claims that all the members of Hankansha were his close friends. Nishida Shunkō, \textit{Kōshi shōshi} (Tokyo: Fūzoku Emaki Zukan Kankōkai, 1919), 23.} Since many of these scholars, poets, calligraphers, and painters who shared similar enthusiasm for Sinitic culture lived in the Shitaya district of Tokyo, they might have seen each other regularly outside the context of Hankansha. The ritualized behavior, modest banquets, and high aspirations that the members were encouraged to pursue in the society’s monthly meetings, however, may have provided an alternative space distanced from mundane social life, where participants could perform as, or even become, ideal literati. Their aspirational image of themselves might not have been far removed from the figures in Seiko’s painting of a literati gathering in which Sinitic litterateurs comfortably and congenially engage in painting, viewing, and conversing (Figure 1.20).\footnote{177 The organization of Hankansha by Kidō and others was part of a larger trend at the time. As Gōyama Rintarō has shown, many Confucian scholars who came to occupy prominent positions in the Meiji administration formed various societies that became a basis for their cultural activities. One of the largest of these private groups was Kyūshū, which was formed around 1872 and had more than fifty scholars and poets as members. A member of the society, Sakatani Rōro (1822-1881), published a detailed description of the group’s precepts written in Sinitic prose in \textit{Yūbin hōchi shinbun} (Postal News) on August 23, 1874. According to his record, the members of Kyūshū met on the fifteenth day of each month; they were required to pay a small fee (50 \textit{sen}) at each gathering. The precepts also included a series of prohibitions that proscribed certain activities such as calling on female entertainers, preoccupying themselves with the hierarchy of seating arrangements and making concessions to each other, bossing around servants and attendants, and becoming drunk and troubling others. Although the presence of female entertainers was forbidden at the society’s monthly gatherings, the precepts specifically stated that the members were free to spend an extravagant amount of money on their own to have a room full of entertainers, as long as they did so outside the context of Kyūshū. As Gōyama notes, this acknowledgement of the members’ pursuit of sensuality and sumptuousness suggests that the participants engaged themselves in such lavish entertainment on a regular basis. Gōyama, \textit{Bakumatsu Meiji-ki ni okeru Nihon kanshibun no kenkyū}, 29-38.}

For men such as Kidō who worked as government officials by utilizing their proficiency in literary Chinese, participating in private literati societies might have allowed them to identify themselves with Chinese scholar-officials who practiced painting, poetry, and calligraphy as a means of restoring an equilibrium between their public service and private pursuits. In other words, these private activities provided the participants with a temporary respite from everyday life, a means of recovering literati ideals that were threatened by commercialism. By taking part
in such activities, Seiko, too, might have identified herself with these male literati. At least in principle, Hankansha seems to have aimed at constructing an environment in which the members were discouraged from criticizing or insulting others and instead were encouraged to seek refined modesty and egalitarian friendship. Such an amicable environment, coupled with a set of ritualized behaviors, might have provided a safe haven for Seiko, whose masculine appearance and conduct increasingly became a target of public scrutiny and criticism, as will be discussed in chapter 4. Literati art therefore might have served as a way of constructing an alternative space where Seiko could claim possession of a new identity as a lofty literatus.

**Conclusion**

Okuhara Seiko positioned herself at the center of the literati community in Tokyo at a time when literati art was rising to unprecedented popularity in mid-nineteenth-century Japan. On the one hand, she actively participated in the commercialization of literati culture, creating dynamic ink landscapes and Zheng Xie-inspired syncopated calligraphy that met the accelerating demands of the time. Although she is known to have disliked large-scale public shogakai, Seiko nevertheless participated in them as a luminary whose success was measured by the level of her fame. Attaining celebrity status, both the figure of Okuhara Seiko and her works became an important part of the commercial expansion of literati art in the first decade of the Meiji period, as her striking portraits circulated widely and forgeries of her vigorous brush traces penetrated even to remote villages. Simultaneously, however, Seiko joined other poets, painters, calligraphers, and Confucian scholars in organizing private activities that served to retrieve literati ideals from the mercenary culture that increasingly characterized their artistic practice. Seiko and her peers’ embodiment of the persona of literati in their ritualistic private gatherings offered a temporary respite from materialistic everyday life. More significantly, those private
gatherings, which were in principle anti-materialistic and anti-hierarchical, played an important role in constructing an alternative space where Seiko could lay claim to a new identity and become an autonomous, lofty literatus.

Seiko’s paintings of reclusive themes might have played a similar function. *Dreams of Cranes amid Windy Pines*, the painting with which we began this chapter, can be seen as a product of the market demand for works on literati themes, for the eremitic protagonist of the painting is a figure with whom anyone can identify. Simultaneously, however, the work serves as an aspirational self-portrait of the artist, who leisurely dreams among pines and clouds in deep mountains where the sweltering heat of the human world—e.g., acquisitive consumers, boisterous party-goers, and critics of her transgressions—does not reach. Visualizing reclusion in painting and poetry and inhabiting the persona of a literatus in private gatherings, Seiko bridged the gap between the real world and the imaginary world of litterateurs, and thereby turning her actual identity into an extension of her imagined identity. Literati art therefore might have served as a trope for her to escape, or possibly transcend, the gender dichotomy, a construct that became increasingly rigid following the brief moment of openness soon after the Meiji Restoration.178 Blurring the boundary between real life experience and images of reclusion, *Dreams of Cranes amid Windy Pines* boldly makes a claim to an alternative reality.

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178 For more on this issue, see chapter 4.
Chapter 2

Beyond Bunjinga: Spring Colors on the Sumida River

The booming popularity of literati culture in the first decade of the Meiji period—a phenomenon on which Seiko capitalized by creating exuberant ink landscapes and idiosyncratic calligraphy—came to an abrupt end within the next decade. Due to its commercial success in the years following the Meiji Restoration, literati art became subjected to public condemnation and mockery by the early 1880s.¹ Such a critical perception of literati art is captured in the proliferation of the term “potato landscapes” (tsukuneimo sansui), which was used in contemporary sources to describe pejoratively literati paintings (bunjinga) brushed in coarse expressive strokes.² As bunjinga was falling from its former glory and was being transformed into the object of a series of discursive attacks, Seiko’s vigorously executed brushstrokes that had so captivated early Meiji viewers gradually disappeared from the surface of her works. This stylistic transformation can be seen, for instance, in a painting titled Birds on Withered Trees (Koboku gunchō; Figure 2.1) from 1883 in the Tokyo National Museum, which depicts five crows perched on withered branches over a stream. The kinetic, variegated brushwork that conveyed the dynamic movements of clouds, streams, and waterfalls in her earlier ink landscapes is here replaced with more restrained movement of the brush and subtle use of ink and color on silk. Different tonalities of ink applied with a thin brush convey the soft plumage of the puffed birds, while the small blue flowers, bright red maple leaves, and subtly tinted greenish-brown rock in the foreground quietly enliven the otherwise monochromatic wintry scenery. Numerous


² An article published in Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun (The Tokyo Daily Newspaper) in October 1882 is said to have popularized this term, as will be discussed below.
branches rendered in light ink fill the right-hand side of the composition, creating a delicate textile-like surface. The calligraphic inscription, too, appears more uniform and carefully brushed; this creates a contrast with the accentuated angularity and idiosyncrasy of Seiko’s earlier style, whose unconventionality astounded some critics.3

Four years later, in 1887, Seiko pushed this artistic experimentation further by producing a large-scale landscape painting titled Spring Colors on the Sumida River (Bokutei shunshoku-zu byōbu; Figure 2.2a), which was originally conceived as a set of sliding door panels (fusuma) and is now mounted as a pair of two-panel folding screens.4 Filled with symbolic vernal motifs of cherry blossoms and willow trees, it depicts a sweeping panorama of the Sumida River in Tokyo at the height of spring. Its minute details depicted in uniform brushstrokes, its profuse use of color and shell white (gofun), and its overall sense of gravitas depart dramatically from Seiko’s earlier landscapes brushed predominantly in ink on paper.5 Moreover, Spring Colors on the Sumida River has been singled out in accounts of her oeuvre for the sense of “modernity” that it embodies.6 At first glance, the painting seems to be founded on a sense of empirical observation; the viewer feels as though she is looking over the river from a vantage point located on the foreground bank. Despite the seeming uniformity of the composition and execution, however, there is something unsettling about this image. It seems to manifest a will toward naturalistic depiction, but at the same time, it feels highly conventional and mediated; the scenery appears to

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3 For a thorough analysis of Seiko’s stylistic change during this period, see Martha J. McClintock, “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913): The Life and Arts of a Meiji Period Literati Artist” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1991), 161-186.

4 I extend my profound gratitude to Kurai Naoko and Tateishi Takayuki for allowing me to study and photograph this work and related sources essential to writing this chapter at the Koga City Museum of History.

5 For a formal analysis of this work, see also ibid., 175-179.

6 See, for example, Ibaraki Kenritsu Rekishikan, ed., Okuhara Seiko ten, exh. cat. (Mito: Ibaraki Kenritsu Rekishikan, 2001), 46; Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, ed., Okuhara Seiko ten—Okuhara Seiko gashitsu Shūsai Sōdō ichiku kinen, exh. cat. (Koga: Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, 2010), 45; and idem, Okuhara Seiko ten—botsugo 100-nen kinen, exh. cat. (Koga: Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, 2013), 33.
be Japanese, but it simultaneously seems to engage with modes of representation associated with Chinese and Western art. As soon as we attempt to characterize the work in any particular manner, we become enmeshed in a web of intricately interwoven pictorial motifs, manners, and modes of representation. More significantly, the work conveys a distinctive sense of nostalgia—a yearning for a bygone past accompanied by a self-reflexive awareness of its unattainability.

What is it that makes the (modern) viewer’s relationship to this painting so puzzling? How and why did Seiko’s stylistic transformation occur at this particular historical moment? More broadly, how does the work intersect with the changing conceptions of Sinitic culture in mid-Meiji Japan?

In answering these questions, I hope to show how Spring Colors on the Sumida River is imbricated in a series of sociocultural transformations that took place in the 1880s and beyond, transformations that fundamentally destabilized the place of literati art in mid-Meiji society and had significant repercussions for the subsequent decades of Seiko’s career.

In order to situate Spring Colors on the Sumida River in the dynamically changing artistic and social landscape of mid-Meiji Japan, we shall first examine the visual paradoxes that the work seems to embody, as well as the specific circumstances of its commission, the most lucrative of Seiko’s career. We will also examine how the work perpetuates Edo-period modes of experiencing and representing the Sumida River, suggesting that these habits of engaging with the site continued to play an important role in the Meiji-period cultural imagination. When Seiko created this image in the late 1880s, however, the metropolitan art world was undergoing tremendous institutional changes, as manifested particularly in the discursive formation of the concept of art (bijutsu). During this process of institutional codification, painting, poetry, and calligraphy were differentiated and hierarchized, undermining the unity of the three arts, which had served as a defining principle of literati art since its origins in Song (960-1279) China.
Meanwhile, *bunjinga* was separated from the broader category of Sinitic painting and problematized for its vulgar amateurism, literary dependency, and expressive brushwork. The rhetorical degeneration of *bunjinga*, in fact, paralleled the broader social trend to break away from Sinitic culture, a trend that increasingly rendered Sinitic prose and poetry obsolete and inappropriate for the modern era. Although these paradigm shifts eroded the cultural foundations on which literati art flourished in the early Meiji period, they also seem to have posed a productive challenge to Seiko and her peers to explore other avenues and means of expression. Ultimately, this chapter shows that *Spring Colors on the Sumida River* employs the genre of depictions of real-world sites to create a new vision of literati art that balances Edo-period habits of representation, experimentations with Western-style techniques, and the changing conception of literati culture in the mid-Meiji period. Further, I suggest that the work embodies not only the artist’s stylistic metamorphosis but also her attitudinal or experiential transformation, establishing a new relationship with literati art that was only possible in late 1880s Tokyo.

**Visual Paradoxes of *Spring Colors on the Sumida River***

*Spring Colors on the Sumida River* depicts a sweeping view of the Sumida River from west to east (Figure 2.3). The grand vista extends from the Azuma Bridge in the south—barely visible at the right edge of the right-hand screen (Figure 2.2b)—to Mount Tsukuba far to the northeast of Tokyo (Figure 2.2c). In the foreground, the Matsuchiyama Hill dominates the lower right corner of the composition, while houses and trees densely fill the area to the left (Figures 2.2d and 2.2e). Separated by a large body of water that lies in the middleground, the eastern bank of the background is dominated by a far-reaching dike that gradually recedes to the upper right. On top of the bank, innumerable cherry trees are adorned with light pink blossoms—for which the Sumida River had been celebrated since the eighteenth century—infusing the scenery with
vernal haziness. The angular lines and dark ink that characterized Seiko’s landscapes in the previous decade are nowhere to be found in this painting; instead, minute dots in pink and shell white create amorphous clouds of cherry blossoms, while areas of color and a series of small horizontal dapples delicately brushed in light ink or colors constitute the trees, dikes, and hill. Despite the work’s large scale and solemn appearance, the careful attention paid to its details, which is perhaps best expressed in the delicacy of the individual strokes employed throughout the painting, seems to draw the viewer into intimate engagement with the landscape itself. Indeed, the painting is devoid of any depictions of actual human presence, showing no figures other than a few boatmen rendered in minute ink silhouettes (Figure 2.2f); rather, the presence of human inhabitants is only implied by the nestled houses and sailing boats. The lack of figures, combined with the sensitivity of execution, makes the audience’s relationship to the work personal, providing us with a privileged sense that we are the sole beholders of this vast vernal vista. The sense of intimacy the painting establishes with the viewer is key to understanding its original context of production, as will be examined shortly.

Among the most striking compositional features of this work, and what perhaps most immediately draws the viewer’s attention, is the use of a mode of depiction evocative of Western two-point perspective to render the eastern bank, which stretches dramatically across the middle of the horizontal composition. With its closest point placed near the center of the left screen, the eastern bank recedes to both sides, creating a clear, expansive view of the dike as it slowly diminishes to the right and a shorter, hazier view of the dike’s abrupt curve to the left. This use of two-point perspective situates us viewers in a single, specific site. The specificity and

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singularity of the viewpoint provides the viewer with a sense of empirical observation and fidelity to nature. It might lead us to imagine that we are on a vantage point—possibly a high hill—located on the western bank from which we might grasp this extensive scenery in actuality.\(^8\)

This illusion of immediacy and verisimilitude begins to crumble as we look closer at the image. While the eastern bank’s two-point perspective implies a fixed, singular viewing position, the foreground seems to be constructed around multiple perspectives that imply a mobile viewing subject.\(^9\) For example, the scale of the trees is inconsistent throughout the foreground; some are smaller than the surrounding houses, while others are many times taller than the roofs. Elsewhere, Seiko seems to emphasize certain motifs specifically to dramatize the landscape and to create a subjective relationship to it rooted in literati painting conventions and in preexisting modes of representing the Sumida River. For example, the group of trees in the center of the foreground forms a triangular shape that seems carefully calculated to draw our attention; further, each of the trees is depicted in a different stylized method of execution that recalls the typologies of trees often found in painting manuals—books, generally woodblock-printed, that provided numerous models for rendering motifs based on past masters’ works. Meanwhile, in the lower right-hand corner of the composition, a lush, lofty mountain—identifiable as Matsuchiyama by the cluster of temple buildings nestled among the trees on its peak—emerges from the mists below.\(^10\) In reality, Matsuchiyama is hardly a mountain but a hill merely ten meters in height.\(^11\)

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\(^8\) McClintock has mentioned the possibility that this painting might offer a view of the Sumida River from the Ueno hill. McClintock, “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913),” 176.

\(^9\) McClintock has noted the “curious juxtaposition of eastern and western perspective methods” that Seiko deployed to depict the two banks. Ibid., 179.

\(^10\) A legend holds that when a statue of the bodhisattva Kannon (Avalokiteśvara) appeared in the Sumida River (which is now housed in the nearby Sensōji temple), the ground in the compound of Matsuchiyama erupted overnight, while a golden dragon descended from heaven and coiled around the hill. See Suzuki Shōsei, “‘Edo
As the only tall landmark in the area, however, Matsuchiyama had served as a marker for sailors traveling on the Sumida River since the medieval period; during the Tokugawa era, it became codified as a famous site (meisho) of the city of Edo, and depictions of it frequently appeared in woodblock prints and guidebooks to celebrated places. By the early nineteenth century, there was indeed a convention of representing the site as a forested mountain, as seen, for example, in Illustrated Guide to Famous Places of Edo (Edo meisho zue; Figure 2.4) and Utagawa (Andō) Hiroshige’s (1797-1858) “View of Matsuchiyama” (Matsuchiyama no zu) in the series Famous Views of the Eastern Capital (Tōto meisho; Figure 2.5). In Spring Colors on the Sumida River, Seiko pushes this convention further, transforming Matsuchiyama into a majestic mountain in the tradition of the Chinese landscape paintings on which Japanese literati artists so often drew; in doing so, she adds a sense of otherworldliness to the otherwise ordinary scenery.  

In addition, while the houses throughout the foreground bank are depicted mostly from above and recede in depth, Matsuchiyama and the many trees that populate the bank are viewed horizontally, rendering the foreground simultaneously both flat and volumetric. These conventions of representation allow the viewer’s eyes to move both laterally across the image and in and out of depth without settling on one place. This multiplicity of perspectives in the foreground is typical of Sino-Japanese literati painting convention, which conceived of three types of depth to be captured in painting. From the eleventh century onward, painters sought to render “high distance,” “deep distance,” and “level distance”—in other words, a sense of height,
a sense of volume, and a sense of vastness. Such a conception of perspective consequently allowed the creation of landscape paintings that give a sense of a mobile viewpoint, allowing the viewer to engage with the landscape in more flexible, imaginative ways than fixed single- or two-point perspectives allow. The use of such a perspectival system contrasts starkly with the specificity of sight/site implied by the two-point perspective employed in rendering the eastern bank of the background.

Curiously, these zones of distinctly differentiated modes of representation are spatially separated by the large body of water that lies between the two banks, which seem to be linked only vaguely by the tiny boats sailing quietly between them. Indeed, the gulf between the two banks becomes ever more obvious, and puzzling, as we look more closely. While the eastern bank recedes to either side of the painting, the western bank in the foreground does not follow the curvature of the eastern bank; instead, it remains parallel to the picture plane. Further, the pseudo-mountain of Matsuchiyama dominates the lower right corner of the composition, obscuring our gaze over the southwestern side of the river. This blockage of view in the foreground contrasts with the sense of expansiveness created by the receding dike in the background, further emphasizing a sense of disconnect between the two banks.

These inconsistent, conflicting elements in the finished painting are almost entirely absent from the preparatory sketch that Seiko seems to have made prior to the production of the final image (Figure 2.6). Surprisingly, the sketch does not depict the dramatic curvature of the

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eastern bank. Further, the eastern dike in the sketch is not as high as it is in the painting, rendering the sketch less dramatic. The trees and houses on the eastern bank are proportionally larger than those in the painting, making the distance between the two banks feel closer and, hence, spatially more convincing. Similarly, the sketch depicts Matsuchiyama as a low hill rather than a lofty, fantastic mountain. Tall pine trees also appear in the sketch, but they are placed in the foreground rather than among the houses in the middleground, creating a sense of a more believable, observed view. In short, the sketch offers a more cohesive, naturalistic vista of the Sumida River, devoid of the tension between different perspectival systems that characterizes the final painting. The comparison between the unmediated, observed sketch and the seemingly empirical, yet highly contrived, painting suggests the possibility that the artist consciously appropriated and juxtaposed various pictorial conventions to create this complex landscape. Why did she employ exaggerated, theatrical, almost fictive elements and multiple, possibly multicultural, modes of representation to transform the more unified, naturalistic view she created in the sketch?

We might be tempted to hastily surmise that the *Spring Colors on the Sumida River* creates a dichotomous tension between premodern Eastern subjectivity in the foreground and modern Western empiricism in the background, thus giving direct expression to the Meiji-period Japanese familiarity with the Sino-Japanese painting tradition, as well as to the aspiration to attain the cultural modes of modernity that lay ahead. Such a dichotomous conception of Eastern subjectivity and Western objectivity appears, for example, in *Kinsei kaigashi* (History of Painting from Recent Times) authored by the influential literary historian Fujioka Sakutarō (1870-1910) in 1903. As will be discussed in detail in chapter 4, Fujioka presents literati painting (*bunjinga*) and Western painting (*seiyōga*) as antitheses: ink-based *bunjinga* values spirit
resonance and expresses the essence of objects subjectively, while color-based *seiyōga* prioritizes the direct observation of life and objectively captures the truth of forms.\(^{15}\) Although such a binary conception of East and West seems to have taken firm hold in Japan by the turn of the century, imposing this dichotomy onto *Spring Colors on the Sumida River* would arguably be anachronistic; as Chelsea Foxwell has recently shown, such notions were still largely in flux in the 1880s when the painting was produced.\(^{16}\) Instead, the coexistence of seemingly contradictory modes of representation in the work is better understood as a product of the complex interactions among multiple factors including the circumstances of patronage, Edo-period habits of picturing and imagining the Sumida River, Seiko’s experimentation with Western-style techniques in prints, and the shifting conceptions of literati culture in mid-Meiji Japan.

**The Context of Patronage and the Specificity of Viewership**

An examination of the specific context of the patronage of this painting is crucial to understanding the sense of intimacy the work evokes. In the upper right-hand corner of the composition, Seiko inscribes a relatively long Sinitic poem (*kanshi*) in archaic seal script that celebrates the beauty of famed sights along this section of the river and ends with a short record of the circumstances of this painting commission. Viewing the inscription from a distance, it appears that Seiko has used a controlled hand to carefully inscribe each Chinese character, employing lines of uniform thickness brushed at a slow, steady pace to create a sense of restraint and solemnity that echoes the sense of gravitas that the painting projects. On closer inspection, however, we realize that many of the characters are, in fact, brushed with unsteady, wavering strokes (Figure 2.2h); some of the lines are even composed of multiple choppy strokes of uneven

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thickness, unexpectedly imbuing the seal script calligraphy—a script that is conventionally smooth, steady, and highly controlled—with a sense of agitation and individuality. The poem reads:

The Lord of the East brings forth flowers on some trees; their red and white [blossoms] call to [invite] people, as the blue-green water swirls. Just beyond the Makura Bridge, we first laugh; next to the dike where Mimeguri Shrine stands are several patches of rosy clouds. In the distance, we see the peak of Mount Matsuchi, while an evening light creates shadows on the Kinryū Pavilion. Weeping willows lushly coat the front bank; the Sumida River is swollen [with spring water] where green willows and green waters merge. A thousand fragrant cheery trees bear countless flowers; they are known as the most beautiful flowers in the capital [literally, “Luoyang”]. Fluttering seagulls peck at flowers and float [on the water], as we walk leisurely along the ten-li bank. The sound of the bell at Mokuboji Temple slowly traverses the water, the colors of Mount Tsukuba appearing faintly as if shrouded by silk. The rosy clouds of dawn embrace the cherry blossoms, [creating] a colorful brocade; a bright full moon floats on the waves like jade with no spots. A white boat with green blinds carries a famed courtesan; the host and guest will [now] be able to drink twice as much. One hour of this spring night is worth a thousand pieces of gold; intoxicated, why should we refuse to continue when the crows cry in the morning? We look up at the new pavilion, which appears just as in a painting; let us buy more wine to become further inebriated as we listen to the zithers and lutes. In the eleventh month of the twentieth year of the Meiji era, at the request of Mr. Hasegawa Shiun, Tōkai Seiko painted and inscribed [this] at [her studio] Ink Spitting Mist and Clouds Pavilion.17

東君製出幾樹花 紅白招人緣水淮
纔過枕橋先一笑 三圍堤邊幾簇霞
遙看眞乳山頭景 金龍塔外夕照陰
垂柳複覆前岸 墨堤春漲緣交遮
芳櫻千株花無數 洛陽第一稱麗華
翩翩都鳥唼花泛 十里江塘步步除
木母鐘聲徐度水 筑波山色薄籠玊
朝霞櫻罩錦多彩 明月波浮玉無瑕
白舫翠簾載名妓 主賓酒量百分百加
春宵一刻千金價 醉後何辭到曉鴉

17 I express my deep gratitude to Prof. Satō Yasuhiro for helping me transcribe the inscription and to Prof. Manling Luo for aiding me in interpreting and translating this poem.
仰看新樓樓如畫 更沽快醉聽箏琶
明治二十年丁亥黃鐘月為
紫雲長谷川君雅嘱
東海晴湖寫併題於
墨吐煙雲樓

Each line of the poem lauds a different feature of the landscape along the Sumida River, praising its flowering trees, glorifying its grand temples and shrines, and singing of distant Mount Tsukuba as the landscape’s hues change from afternoon to morning. The poem opens with a scene of people gathering to view cherry blossoms on the dikes of the river. The poet and her companion begin their leisurely walk along the ten-li bank\(^\text{18}\) by crossing the Makura Bridge over the Genmori-kawa (Kita-jikken-gawa), a small river that runs into the Sumida River in the southeast (Figure 2.3). The beauty of the weeping willows and flowering trees, as well as the floating seagulls, that the poem describes correspond to motifs depicted in the painting (Figure 2.2d). The sound of a temple bell traverses the blue-green water on which a reflection of the full moon floats like a jade disk. The poem then situates the host and guest on an elegant boat, drifting drunkenly along the river and serenaded by the sounds of zithers in the company of a famed courtesan. The subsequent line of the poem—“one hour of this spring night is worth a thousand pieces of gold”—recalls a poem composed by the celebrated Chinese scholar-official Su Shi (1037-1101) titled “Spring Night,” which reads:

Spring night—one hour worth a thousand gold coins;
clear scent of flowers, shadowy moon.
Songs and flutes upstairs—threads of sound;
in the garden, a swing, where night is deep and still.\(^\text{19}\)

春宵一刻値千金 花有清香月有陰

\(^{18}\) The Meiji government determined in 1876 that one \(li\) equaled 36 \(chō\) or 2160 \(kan\) (3927.3 meters or 2.44 miles). For a history of weights and measures in Japan, see Koizumi Kesakatsu, Doryōkō no rekishi (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1977).

\(^{19}\) Burton Watson, trans., Selected Poems of Su Tung-p’o (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 1994), 19.
By incorporating a line from Su Shi’s “Spring Night,” Seiko’s poem evokes the elegant fragrance of flowers illuminated by the moon, as well as the faint sounds of music reverberating in a deep still night. This evocation of Su Shi’s poem is, in fact, key to analyzing how *Spring Colors on the Sumida River* engages with the preexisting protocols of experiencing and eulogizing the Sumida River and the Japanese landscape more broadly, a topic that will be examined in greater detail below. Significantly, Seiko’s poem ends with the poet’s gazing upon a new pavilion that appears “just as in a painting.” This poetic reference to a new pavilion is crucial to our understanding of the circumstances of the commission and reception of this work.

The final lines of the inscription indicate that the work was commissioned by Hasegawa Shiun (Hisaie; 1858-1896), one of Seiko’s most important patrons. The Hasegawas were a wealthy farming family (gōnō) who had served as landlords in Tsukanoyama (modern-day Nagaoka City, Niigata Prefecture) in northeastern Japan since the early seventeenth century. The main building (omoya) of the Hasegawa residence dates to 1716; as the oldest surviving vernacular house in Niigata Prefecture, it was designated an important cultural property in 1982. Seiko seems to have enjoyed a close relationship with the Hasegawas throughout her life, painting not only for Hisaie, his parents, and his son, but also for a second branch family of the Hasegawas. The Hasegawas were a farming family who had served as landlords since 1627 in Tsukanoyama, modern-day Nagaoka City, Niigata Prefecture. The main building of the Hasegawa residence dates to 1716; as the oldest surviving vernacular house in Niigata Prefecture, it was designated an important cultural property in 1982.

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Fortunately, thirty-four of the numerous letters that Seiko sent to the Hasegawas are preserved at the Koga City Museum of History, offering us invaluable insights into the circumstances of her various commissions for the family and providing vivid testimony to the close relationship between the artist and her patrons. Two of these letters seem to discuss the commission of *Spring Colors on the Sumida River* and point to its intriguing contradiction of earlier norms of literati painting.

A letter dated March 27 (possibly 1887) suggests that Seiko had been asked by Hisaie to execute a painting of the Sumida River with cherry blossoms and young willows in commemoration of the renovation of an annex building (*shin-zashiki*) at his residence in Tsukanoyama. The annex building of the Hasegawa residence was renovated in 1887—the year inscribed on *Spring Colors on the Sumida River* (Figures 2.7a and 2.7b). An oral tradition in the Hasegawa family holds that Hisaie originally intended to install Seiko’s painting as sliding door panels to separate the two adjacent rooms on the second floor of the building (Figures 2.8a and 2.8b). In order to prevent the painting from being damaged by the constant opening and closing of the sliding doors, Hisaie suspended it from the ceiling. The inscription on the ceiling board of the annex building indicates that the ceiling was replaced in 1887.

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22 An earlier landscape painting modeled after Huang Gongwang (1269-1354) that Seiko executed in 1879 at the request of the Hasegawas (*Tenchi sekiheki-zu*) is reproduced in Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, *Okuhara Seiko ten—Okuhara Seiko gashitsu Shūsui Sōdō ichiku kinen*, 43. On a painting of cranes Seiko produced for their branch family, see ibid., 48.

23 I am very grateful to Kurai Naoko and Tateishi Takayuki for providing me with access to these invaluable sources.

24 *Hasegawa-ke monjo*, no. 32, Koga City Museum of History. Seiko’s letters to Hasegawa Hisaie regarding the production of *Spring Colors on the Sumida River* are also discussed in Hirai Yoshinao, “Okuhara Seiko hitsu ‘Bokutei shunshoku-zu’ to Hasegawa-ke jūtaku—Meiji-ki nangaka no chihō sohōka jūtaku shōhekiga seisaku ni kansuru kenkyū 1,” in *Nihon interia gakkai dai jūsan kai taikai kenkyū happyō kōgaishū* (Narashino: Nihon Interia Gakkai Jumukyoku, 2001), 95-96. I thank Dr. Martha J. McClintock for pointing me to this article.

25 The inscription on the ceiling board of the annex building indicates that the ceiling was replaced in 1887. Bunkazai Kenzōbutsu Hozon Gijutsu Kyōkai, *Jūyō bunkazai kyū Hasegawa-ke jūtaku*, 93. See also Hirai, “Okuhara Seiko hitsu ‘Bokutei shunshoku-zu’ to Hasegawa-ke jūtaku,” 95.
closing of the doors, however, the family subsequently remounted the sliding door panels as a pair of two-panel folding screens.  

Seiko seems to have taken this intended space into consideration when creating the work. She employs a low horizon and inscribes the poem at the upper right edge, leaving a large empty space in the upper register of the work. In other words, the composition of the painting assumes a low viewing position, while its intricate details invite close, intimate engagement on the part of the viewer. Indeed, Hisaie likely enjoyed viewing the painting in the private setting of his upstairs studio; closing the painted doors, he would have sat on the woven straw mats (tatami) covering the floor to gaze at this expansive vista (Figures 2.8b and 2.8c). By installing the painted doors on the east side of the west room of the second floor of the annex and by secluding himself in that small space, Hisaie might have imagined himself in Tokyo, overlooking the Sumida River from west to east in the same direction as the painting depicts the site. It is also possible that Hisaie identified himself with the man on the boat mentioned in the poem, who enjoyed sake, music, and the company of a refined entertainer as he drifted along the river. Moreover, the pavilion described at the end of the poem might refer to the Hasegawas’ newly renovated annex building where the painting would have been displayed. Thus, the poem fictitiously situates the Hasegawa residence on the bank of the Sumida River in Tokyo, allowing

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26 McClintock, “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913),” 175-176; Hirai, “Okuhara Seiko hitsu ‘Bokutei shunshoku-zu’ to Hasegawa-ke jūtaku,” 95; and Tateishi Takayuki, “Myūjiamu korekushon,” Hongō, no. 21 (May 1991): n.p. This practice of remounting and repurposing paintings has been common in Japan since the medieval period. The process of transforming a sliding door panel into a folding screen usually leaves a trace: the area in which a door handle was originally installed leaves a dark circle in the middle of a vertical edge of the folding screen. Curiously, however, Spring Colors on the Sumida River bears no marks that indicate the removal of door handles. The Hasegawa oral tradition holds that this was because the handles were uniquely embedded in the wooden frame of the sliding doors, so that the handles would not obstruct the continuous landscape painting. Hirai, “Okuhara Seiko hitsu ‘Bokutei shunshoku-zu’ to Hasegawa-ke jūtaku,” 95.

27 I express my deep appreciation to Nitta Yasunori for allowing me to visit and photograph this room at the Hasegawa residence, which is normally closed to the public.
Hisaie, while seated at his house in Niigata, to take a “dream journey” (Ch.: woyou; J. gayū) through time and space to enjoy the riverscape in the capital.28

Seiko’s letters give us further insights into her precise process of producing the work, as well as her manner of dealing with her patron’s demands. In her letter from March 27, Seiko goes on to write that since the cherry trees would be in bloom for the next three weeks, she would arrange to take a boat ride along the river to sketch the scenery, carefully selecting sites to plan the final composition.29 A copy of a painting included in one of Seiko’s many sketchbooks suggests that Seiko did, in fact, go to the Sumida River to sketch the scenery when the cherry blossoms were in full bloom (Figure 2.9).30 The sails of three ships appear in the center of the foreground of this small horizontal pictorial field. The stone torii gate of the Mimeguri Shrine is shown on the left, and under it two small boats can be seen resting on the bank. To the right, figures stroll along the river and greet each other, while another figure is drawn by a rickshaw (jinrikisha)—a vehicular innovation created around 1869 that served as an important means of transportation for much of the Meiji period.31 The low viewing angle from which this site is observed and the close distance between the painter and the sails in the foreground suggest the possibility that the drawing depicts a view seen from a boat. More importantly, the depiction of

28 On the notion of the “dream journey,” a beloved practice of scholar-officials and an important impetus for the creation of literati painting, see especially Ogawa Hiromitsu, Gayū—Chūgoku sansuiga, sono sekai (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Bijutsu Shuppan, 2008).

29 Hasegawa-ke monjo, no. 32, Koga City Museum of History.

30 This drawing seems to be a miniature copy of a painting that Seiko executed and recorded in her book. I thank Prof. Itakura Masaaki for this insight. For more on Seiko’s bound sketch volumes, see McClintock, “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913),” 188-190.

31 Nihon Fūzokushi Gakkai, ed., Nihon fūzokushi jiten (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1979), 331-332. Although their origins are obscure, rickshaws quickly spread as a major means of transportation for commoners throughout Japan during the Meiji period, with as many as 210,000 rickshaws operating in the country by 1896. In the early twentieth century, they came to be gradually replaced by trains, taxies, buses, and bicycles. Japanese rickshaws were also exported to China, Southeast Asia, and Europe. For more on rickshaws, see Saitō Toshihiko, Jinrikisha no kenkyū (Tokyo: Miki Shobō, 2014).
the rickshaw and the chatting figures signal the contemporaneity of the painted scene. *Spring Colors on the Sumida River*, by contrast, is devoid of any signs of modernity, depicting no figures other than a few silhouetted boatmen. Further, the stippling application of light ink and color renders the entire scenery in pastoral haziness, making the painting look as though it is shrouded by a translucent veil. While a distinctively bucolic atmosphere infuses the landscape, the specificity of the site/sight conveys a will toward naturalistic representation. A subtle tension is thus established between the pastoral landscape and the empirical gaze cast upon it. It is this psychological distance between the world in which the viewer is situated and the bygone world that the painting represents that seems to evoke a sense of nostalgia, a wistful affection for the unattainable past.

Seiko ends her letter on March 27 by promising the swift completion of the work, noting that the final painting should be finished by the middle of May. Indeed, Hisaie seems to have promptly made payment for the work; the ledger Seiko kept from 1882 to 1900 indicates that the Hasegawas paid Seiko a substantial price of one hundred ryō in May 1887 (Figure 2.10). This was an astonishing fee at the time, especially given that the majority of the other commissions Seiko received during that year ranged between two and twelve ryō.32 *Spring Colors on the Sumida River* may well have been the most valuable commission Seiko ever received during her lifetime. However, she begins another letter dated June 29 (most likely 1887) by apologizing to her patron for the delay in completing the painting. She tells Hisaie:

I received your letter inquiring about the delay [in the production of the painting that] you requested. I suspect you must be waiting eagerly. I seem to have been suffering from beriberi since April and have only been able to take brief walks in the outskirts of Tokyo. Lately, I have been gradually

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recovering, but I have not been painting for a while. Upon resuming my work, I will certainly first paint the picture of the Sumida River you requested. Since I have already planned the composition in a small sketch, if I start working [on the project] and assiduously paint for ten days or so, it should be finished [soon]. I will definitely send it to you by the middle of next month.

一郵書被投高嘱遲延如何之義、蒙御尋問御待遠之至と在候。小生春晩之頃より脚気之気味ニ而、近在郊外ヲ逍遥ノミ致、昨今は漸ニ快方に成候共、右故ニ揮毫暫休作之処、不日相初可申候心組、第一ニ高嘱之墨上之景相認候つむり。豫位置結構は小図組立置候間、取掛り候ヘハ十日間も丁寧反復仕ヘハ落成見込候。然レバ来月中必御贈致可仕と存候。33

Seiko then adds a detailed note about the composition:

I have been taking [your] various considerations into account as I have been painting, but as you know, Mount Tsukuba is too far away, and there are no other mountains [nearby]. Since the white barracks of the Army Ministry are on the Kōnodai Hill and can be observed in the distance today, and since it is well known as the [historical] site of a subsidiary castle of the Satomi clan, I will depict [Kōnodai Hill] as the distant mountain [in the composition] instead.

色々相考且對写仕候共、御存とをり筑波は遠景ニ過外ニ山ナシ、依て鴻ノ台当時は陸軍省の兵営白ク遠望仕候往昔里見の枝城ニ而著名ナレハ、是ヲ淡しトシ遠山ニ換仕向とナリ…34

In other words, Hisaie seems to have specifically asked Seiko to include Mount Tsukuba in her painting. Seiko, however, claimed that Mount Tsukuba could not be seen from the banks of the Sumida River and instead proposes to depict the Kōnodai Hill (which is located near the center of the composition in the final painting; Figure 2.2g). This seemingly trivial comment about Seiko’s desire to replace Mount Tsukuba with the Kōnodai Hill is, in fact, one of the keys to understanding how the work engages with and departs from the preexisting conventions of representing the site. In order to understand the continuities and discontinuities of cultural

33 Hasegawa-ke monjo, no. 30, Koga City Museum of History; punctuation added by the author.
34 Ibid.; punctuation added by the author.
imagination and habits of representation the work embodies, let us examine how specific real-world sites such as the Sumida River were imagined and pictorialized during the early modern period.

The Sumida River in the Early Modern Cultural Imagination

Although the origins of planting cherry trees on the banks of the Sumida River are obscure, the eighth Tokugawa shogun Yoshimune (1684-1751), who transplanted cherry trees from his shogunal garden at Edo Castle to the Sumida riverbank, is credited with the establishment of the site as a famous place (meisho) for cherry blossoms.\(^{35}\) By the late eighteenth century, cherry blossom viewing along the river became a popular attraction; many of the trees, however, did not easily take root and a series of efforts were made to facilitate their growth in subsequent periods.\(^{36}\) In 1883, four years before Spring Colors on the Sumida River was completed, one thousand cherry trees—a phenomenal number—were planted on the riverside. The project was headed by the entrepreneur Ōkura Kihachirō (1837-1928) and the journalist and kanshi poet Narushima Ryūhoku (1837-1884) who attempted to revive the vanishing beauty of this famed site in the eastern capital.\(^{37}\) Seiko’s Spring Colors on the Sumida River, which visually and poetically celebrates the magnificence of the vernal riverscape, might embody a similar desire to resurrect the splendor of this scenic spot.


\(^{37}\) Sumida-ku Kyōiku linkai, ed., *Kaitei Sumida no bunkazai* (Tokyo: Sumida-ku Kyōiku linkai, 2011), 46-47. A stele commemorating this event was installed on the riverbank in May 1887. For a discussion of this stele, see Sumida-ku, *Sumida kushi*, 1:434-437. Ōkura Kihachirō was the founder of the Ōkura Museum of Art (Ōkura Shūkōkan), which opened in 1917. Narushima Ryūhoku, shortly after resigning his official post, relocated to the Mukōjima district. For more on Ryūhoku, see Matthew Fraleigh, “Kanshibun in Modernizing Japan: The Case of Narushima Ryūhoku (1837-1884)” (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2005).
Not only was the Sumida River eulogized for the clouds of blossoms on its banks in poetry, pictures, and plays, but it was also closely associated with the entertainment district that had been located on the western bank since the seventeenth century. In fact, the relationship between painting and poetry in *Spring Colors on the Sumida River*, as well as the directionality of the painting’s depiction of the river, make sense only if we take into consideration conventions of representing the Sumida River that were established during the Edo period and that continued to play a role in the Meiji era. As Wagatsuma Naomi has shown, the western and eastern banks of the Sumida River evoked contrasting images of urbanity and rurality in the cultural imagination of Edoites throughout the early modern period: while the western bank was seen as a continuation of the metropolis, the eastern bank was viewed as a suburb that city dwellers visited for leisure or where they established their own villas. Wagatsuma further argues that this contrasting perception of the banks led to the codification of different renderings of the riverscape; depictions of the river from east to west tended to emphasize Edo’s urban landscape, which lay on the western bank, while those from west to east came to be associated with the route taken by pleasure boats that sailed up the river from the Nihonbashi Bridge to Sensōji Temple and the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters. Thus, the eastern view of the river that Seiko’s *Spring Colors on the Sumida River* presents, as well as the wine, music, and famed courtesan mentioned in the poem, participate in this culturally codified way of representing the

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40 Wagatsuma, “Egakareta Sumidagawa,” 269-274.
site, evoking and reinforcing images of leisure and pleasure through the eastward gaze the painting casts on the river.

Indeed, Seiko seems to have been intimately familiar with the site’s association with entertainment. The diary of Kido Takayoshi (1833-1877), an influential politician-patron of literati art, mentions a party held on a villa in Hashiba on the west bank of the Sumida River during which Seiko, Kido, and their friends entertained themselves by practicing painting and calligraphy in a state of inebriation. Kido notes that on the eleventh day of the tenth month of Meiji 2 (1869):

I had an engagement with Tanaka Rentarō today, and took a boat with Dōrin and Seiho to a villa at Hashiba. It belongs to Rentarō’s younger brother…. Ōshima Jisui was also there; and Seiko came. We enjoyed ourselves with painting and calligraphy, as well as sakē [sic], through the day; two geisha from Yanagibashi came in to help serve the drinks. The party broke up after 10; and we took a boat back, and tied up at Ushigome. I returned here at midnight.41

Hashiba—one of the numerous docks along the Sumida River whose scenic beauty led to its being chosen as a site for the establishment of villas by feudal lords and wealthy merchants from the Edo period onward—is, in fact, located near the center-foreground of the composition in Spring Colors on the Sumida River; several boats are sailing toward it from the eastern bank. Another dock called Takeya no Watashi is depicted just below Matsuchiyama, which was linked to the Mimeguri Shrine by ferryboats. Since only five bridges were constructed along the Sumida River during the course of the Edo period, ferryboats served as an important means of crossing the river.42 As noted above, the poem inscribed on Spring Colors on the Sumida River embodies an experiential quality, for the poet extols the allure of the riverscape by walking, gazing, and


42 On the bridges and docks along the Sumida River, see Takeuchi Makoto, “Edo shimin to Sumidagawa,” in Edo Tōkyō Hakubutsukan, Sumidagawa, 258-260; Iida Masao, Hashi kara mita Sumidagawa no rekishi (Tokyo: Bungeisha, 2002).
drifting, intoxicated, on a boat along this section of the river. The poem can thus be seen as the artist’s aestheticization of her own memory and experience of the Sumida River.

The eastern bank of the Sumida River, which Seiko depicts with a strikingly sweeping perspective, largely remained underdeveloped during the Edo period; it was only in the early nineteenth century that it came to be treated as a site of visual interest in pictorial representations. As Suzuki Shōsei has shown, the section of the river north of the Azuma Bridge (on which Seiko’s painting focuses) came to appear frequently in pictures, plays, and literature from the late Edo period, as seen, for example, in the aforementioned *Illustrated Guide to Famous Places of Edo*, which was published in 1834 and 1836. Known as Mukōjima (literally, “the island on the other side”), this section of the eastern bank originally served as a shogunal hawking ground until the late seventeenth century, when the fifth Tokugawa shogun Tsunayoshi (1646-1709) prohibited falconry under the “Laws of Compassion for Living Beings” (*Shōrui awaremi no rei*). Farmland dominated most of the villages in Mukōjima, which became a major supplier of produce to Edo, whose population exceeded one million by the early

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44 Ibid.

45 The practice of falconry was initially associated with the imperial family and the aristocracy. In the medieval period, it was the powerful warlords who took control of hawking culture. The first Tokugawa shogun Ieyasu attempted to monopolize falconry by issuing regulations in 1603 that prohibited hawking among provincial daimyos. Legislation passed in the following year extended the ban to members of the aristocracy. Ieyasu and his successors created hawking grounds throughout the country, some of which were rented or “bestowed” upon daimyos and important retainers by the shogun. Thus, Ieyasu transformed falconry and hunting grounds into an effective tool to achieve national unification. Under the “Laws of Compassion for Living Beings” promulgated by Tsunayoshi, hawking practice was discouraged from 1682 onward and eventually banned. All the shogunal hunting grounds in both the eastern and the western regions of Japan were closed in 1693. As soon as Yoshimune became the eighth Tokugawa shogun in 1716, however, he attempted to revive the falconry system established by Ieyasu as a way of recovering shogunal authority, which had significantly deteriorated during the reigns of his predecessors. The falconry practice restored by Yoshimune continued throughout the rest of the Edo period. See Ōishi Manabu, “Kantō ni okeru takaba seido—Kyōhō kaikaku to chiki hensei,” in *Kyōhō kaikaku to shakai hensei*, ed. Ōishi Manabu, vol. 16 of *Nihon no jidaishi* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2003), 93-119, esp. 96-97. On Edo-and Meiji-period paintings of falcons, see Rachel Saunders, “Pursuits of Power: Falconry in Edo Period Japan,” *Orientations* 36, no. 2 (March 2005): 82-92; Imahashi Riko, *Edo no kachōga—hakubutsugaku o meguru bunka to sono hyōshō* (Tokyo: Sukaidoa, 1995), 213-278; and Foxwell, *Making Modern Japanese-Style Painting*, 157-171.
eighteenth century, making it the world’s largest city at the time.\textsuperscript{46} According to Suzuki, the emergence and proliferation of literary and pictorial imagery of Mukōjima in the late Edo period were partly facilitated by the Kansei reforms of the 1790s, when the popular Nakazu entertainment district (a strip of land along the southern side of the Sumida River reclaimed in 1771) was forced to shut down, encouraging literati and intellectuals to explore the Mukōjima region upstream for leisure.\textsuperscript{47} A pastoral landscape associated with this area is vividly captured in \textit{Spring View of the Sumida River} (\textit{Sumidagawa shunkei-zu byōbu}; Figure 2.11), a pair of four-panel folding screens painted in 1821 by Kuwagata Keisai (1764-1824) who, after working as a print designer under the name Kitao Masayoshi, was appointed official painter to Matsudaira Yasuchika (1752-1794), the feudal lord of Tsuyama domain (modern-day Okayama Prefecture) in 1794.\textsuperscript{48} In this expansive pictorial space, Keisai offers a bird’s-eye perspective of the Sumida River viewed from east to west. The eastern dike in the foreground runs horizontally to the picture plane, as though to encourage the viewer to physically move across the extensive stretch of Mukōjima, in contrast to the single viewpoint that Seiko’s use of two-point perspective presupposes. On top of the dike, minute figures are shown walking or riding horses under cherry blossoms and green willows. The sparseness of the trees, as well as their slanted or arched trunks, make them appear rather barren and feeble, qualities that contrast with the luxurious density of the vernal trees in Seiko’s painting. Further, Keisai employs ink wash and tiny dots to depict the extensive fields on either side of the eastern dike, emphasizing Mukōjima’s rustic emptiness. A

\textsuperscript{46} Conrad Totman, \textit{Early Modern Japan} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 153. For a history of Mukōjima and the surrounding region, see Sumida-ku, \textit{Sumida kushi}.


large number of buildings (most likely villas and restaurants) populate the other side of the river, behind which Mount Fuji emerges in silhouette near the center of the composition.

This contrast between bucolic Mukōjima and majestic Mount Fuji can also be found in a painting titled *Both Banks of the Sumida River* (*Sumidagawa ryōgan-zu*; Figure 2.12) produced by Tani Bunchō (1763-1840), one of the most prolific painters of late Edo-period Japan who synthesized various schools of Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Ryukyuan, and Western painting to create a remarkably eclectic style. This painting, in fact, encapsulates another important aspect of the culturally constructed habits of representing the site, habits that Seiko’s *Spring Colors on the Sumida River* seems to subvert. Bunchō’s *Both Banks of the Sumida River* depicts a large stretch of the Sumida River running from the middleground to the foreground, its translucent blue body contrasting vividly with the surrounding trees colored in rich mineral green. As can also be seen in Keisai’s screens, Bunchō clearly depicts a stretch of flat extensive fields in the protruding section of the eastern bank on the right, while the edges of the western bank on the left are covered with numerous buildings. More significantly, Bunchō carefully differentiates the two mountains shown on either side of the river in the distance by manipulating their size, shape, and color. On the left, Mount Fuji, whose dramatized scale emphasizes its magnificent presence, rises above a band of mist to project its characteristic three-peaked summit; the upper body of the mountain is tinted with white to indicate its snow-covered surface. The whiteness of the three peaks stands out against the light ink wash that subtly fills the area outside the gold contours of the mountain, making it look as though it is glowing. The monumentality of Mount Fuji sharply contrasts with the modesty of Mount Tsukuba on the right, whose height is so low that it seems

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to be embedded in the clouds and mists. While the white figure of three-peaked Mount Fuji is delineated by the surrounding gold ink wash, Mount Tsukuba bears a small two-peaked body colored in blue.50

Bunchō’s juxtaposition of the two peaks in Both Banks of the Sumida River gives crystallized expression to a mode of viewing the scenery from the banks of the Sumida River established by the early nineteenth century. As Ida Tarō has shown, Mount Fuji and Mount Tsukuba had been considered famous peaks of eastern Japan since antiquity; by the late Edo period, images of these two mountains, which could be observed from the Ryōgoku Bridge in the southern stretches of the Sumida River, came to be frequently paired in literature and the arts as cultural emblems with which Edoites often identified themselves.51 Ida further notes that this habit of contrasting the two peaks continued into the Meiji period: Bokusui nijūshikeiki (Poems on Twenty-Four Views of the Sumida River), a collection of poems composed by Yoda Gakkai (1833-1909), a scholar of Chinese learning who later became a playwright and critic, indicates that Gakkai and Narushima Ryūhoku debated which of the two mountains had a superior appearance when viewed from the Sumida River.52 Similar juxtapositions of the two peaks can be found in many other late Edo- and early Meiji-period paintings and poems, establishing a culturally prescribed mode of representing the site that is clearly manifested in Bunchō’s painting.


51 Ida, “Fuji Tsukuba to iu kata no seiritsu to tenkai,” 3.

52 Ibid., 3.
Although Seiko’s *Spring Colors on the Sumida River* incorporates various famous sites along the river (e.g., the Matsuchiyama Hill and Temple, Mimeguri Shrine, the Kōnodai Hill, and even Mount Tsukuba), the painting moves away from the Fuji-Tsukuba pairing and proposes a newly discovered gaze—a gaze that celebrates the river itself, relegating Mount Tsukuba to a barely discernible ink blot at far left (Figure 2.2c). In fact, as was examined earlier, Seiko’s preparatory sketch does not depict Mount Tsukuba; it is also important to recall that one of the letters Seiko sent to her patron suggests her intention to replace Mount Tsukuba with the Kōnodai Hill since she thought Mount Tsukuba was too far away. It is possible that the patron nevertheless insisted that Mount Tsukuba be incorporated into the final painting, and Seiko reluctantly painted the mountain to emphasize its fictive quality, mysteriously rising above the river as if it were a phantasm. Although we can only speculate why Seiko painted Mount Tsukuba in the way she did, the incorporation of the dramatic curvature of the eastern bank and apparitional Mount Tsukuba imbues the painting with an unsettling sense, oscillating between the real and the imaginary.

Within the mode of literati art, this desire to depict actual sites took shape in the eighteenth century, when Japanese literati artists sought to develop a genre known as the “true-view landscape” (*shinkei-zu*), the depiction of specific, real-world sites inspired by Chinese and Korean examples. In his pioneering essay on true-view landscapes, Tsuji Nobuo has noted that the term *shinkei-zu* came to be used in Japan by the late eighteenth century to refer to paintings of real-world sites based on artists’ actual visits to scenic spots. Since Edo-period *shinkei-zu*

tended to depict famous places, Tsuji argues that true-views constituted a new form of \textit{meisho-e} (pictures of famous sites) that employed recently imported Chinese painting techniques.\textsuperscript{54}

Despite the notion of the fidelity to nature that the term \textit{shinkei} implies, literati painters in eighteenth-century Japan did not necessarily pursue naturalism or verisimilitude when representing their chosen sites. Instead, as Satō Yasuhiro has shown, the production of these early true-views was based on and facilitated by the cultural imagination centered on Chinese painting and literature that was shared among Japanese Sinophiles.\textsuperscript{55} By means of this cultural imagination, familiar features of the Japanese landscape came to be associated with a celebrated site in China or an esteemed Chinese painting, thereby elevating the status of the former through allusion to the latter.\textsuperscript{56} To illustrate his point, Satō discusses the Kyoto-based literati painter Ike no Taiga (1723-1776), who participated particularly actively in this form of cultural play.\textsuperscript{57}

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\textsuperscript{54} Tsuji, “Shinkei no keifu—Chūgoku to Nihon ge,” 45.
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\textsuperscript{56} Ibid. This practice of associating Japanese \textit{meisho} with celebrated sites in China came to be condemned during the course of the Meiji period, particularly following the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) when Japan increasingly asserted its superiority over China by discursively eradicating its cultural dependence on the continent. For instance, in the special issue on “Newly Selected Famous Places in Tokyo” (Shinsen Tōkyō meisho zue) of \textit{An Illustrated Customs (Fūzoku gahō)} from September 1896, the author notes that there are many poets and literati in Japan who call Shinobazu Pond in Tokyo “Small West Lake” (Shō-Seiko), implying that Shinobazu Pond is small while the West Lake in China is grand. The writer claims that this custom should be “corrected” (kyōsei) since it is a way of subordinating Japan to China and thus concerns “matters of the nation” (kokutei ni kansuru koto). This article is reprinted in Miyao Shigeo, \textit{Shitaya-ku Ueno Kōen no bu}, vol. 3 of \textit{Tōkyō meisho zue} (Tokyo: Mutsumi Shobō, 1968), 254, and is discussed in Imahashi Riko, \textit{Akita ranga no kindai—Odano Naotake “Shinobazu no ike zu” o yomu} (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 2009), 214. In her recent article, Melissa McCormick has perceptively shown that in the context of sixteenth-century Japanese aristocratic culture, the use of visual and textual allusions to Chinese art and literature served, on the contrary, as a strategy of one-upmanship, a means of claiming ownership of the prestige and authority associated with Sinitic culture. Melissa McCormick, “‘Murasaki Shikibu Ishiyama mōde zufuku’ ni okeru shomondai—wa to kan no sakai ni aru Shikibu zō,” trans. Ido Misato, \textit{Kokka}, no. 1434 (April 2015): 5-21, esp. 9-12.
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\textsuperscript{57} Satō Yasuhiro, “Shinkei-zu to mitate,” 80-87. Ueda Sayoko notes that from around the late 1870s onward (when \textit{Spring Colors on the Sumida River} was produced), there was a renewed interest in Edo-period literati painters, such as Taiga and his contemporary Yosa Buson (1716-1784), who came to be frequently mentioned in art journals at the time. See Ueda Sayoko, “Meiji makki Taishō zenki no Yokoyama Taikan—Ike no Taiga, Yosa Buson no hyōka to Taikan ni okeru gafū no henka,” \textit{Lotus} 34 (2004): 62-80. I thank Prof. Satō Yasuhiro for bringing this article to my attention. For more on Taiga’s works, see, for example, Matsushita Hidemaro, \textit{Ike Taiga} (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1967);
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example, in his depiction of a familiar waterfall in Osaka in a hanging scroll entitled *Minoo Waterfall* (*Kizan bakufu-zu*, 1744; Figure 2.13), Taiga seems to employ the motif of the grass-covered hut and calligraphic inscriptions (which aestheticize the waterfall by likening it to “a curtain of crystal beads”\(^{58}\)) to allude to a waterfall on Mount Lu in China—a site celebrated by Chinese poets since the fourth century and yearned for by Taiga and his contemporary Japanese audience.\(^{59}\) This possibility seems likely, Satō argues, given that the practice of associating the waterfall in Minoo with that on Mount Lu was common at the time, a practice that can be seen, for instance, in the *Illustrated Guide to Famous Places of Settsu* (*Settsu meisho zue*) published in the late eighteenth century. Significantly, the image of the Minoo Waterfall contained in this gazetteer accompanies a poem that the Tang-dynasty poet Li Bai (701-862) composed to express his admiration for a waterfall plunging from Incense Stone, one of the peaks on Mount Lu (Figure 2.14):

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Sunlight streaming Incense Stone kindles violet smoke;
    far off I watch the waterfall plunge to the long river,
    flying waters descending straight three thousand feet,
    till I think the Milky Way has tumbled from the ninth height of Heaven.\(^{60}\)
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\(^{58}\) Melinda Takeuchi translates Taiga’s poetic inscription as follows: “The bejeweled immortal dances on the front eaves; [i]inside the cinnabar cave, ‘Luring the Phoenix’ is piped in the shao mode; [a]n autumn sunbeam glints beyond the earthly sphere; [h]anging high upon the cliff, a curatin of crystal beads.” Takeuchi, *Taiga’s True Views*, 11.


日照香炉生紫烟  遥看瀑布挂长川
飞流直下三千尺  疑是银河落九天

Li Bai’s poem creates a grand image of an infinitely extensive waterfall cascading straight from heaven amidst purple mist. Although the Minoo Waterfall is merely thirty-three meters long, by presenting Li Bai’s poem next to the title “Minoo Waterfall” at the upper right of the right-hand page, the book seems to encourage the reader to view and aestheticize the familiar cascade through the mediation of Li Bai’s awe-inspiring imagery of the colossal waterfall at Incense Stone.

Further, as Takeda Kōichi and others have shown, in his impromptu handscroll entitled *Wondrous Scenery of Mutsu* (*Rikuoku kishō zukan*, 1749; Figure 2.15), which supposedly depicts the landscape of Mutsu Province in northeastern Japan, Taiga subtly incorporates the culturally codified ways of representing the “Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers,” eight vistas in southwestern China beloved of Chinese literati painters and poets from the eleventh century onward. Specifically, Taiga incorporates motifs associated with the Eight Views such as a temple in the mountain, sailing ships, and a fishing village; simultaneously, he manipulates washes and amorphous pools of pale wet ink to convey the scenery’s damp, misty atmosphere. This manner of execution is evocative of images of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers such as *Returning Sails off a Distant Shore* (*Enpo kihan-zu*), a painting attributed to the thirteenth-century Chinese painter Muqi in the Kyoto National Museum. In other words, Taiga seems to visually establish a

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link between the views of Mutsu and those of Xiao and Xiang through the indexicality of wet ink. In doing so, he overlaps the image of these accessible sites in Japan with that of the inaccessible, imagined vistas of the continent. As Takeda has noted, Taiga’s construction of this double image further resonates with the contemporary practice of comparing Mutsu to Lake Dongting and West Lake in China.  

This practice of viewing, experiencing, and representing meishō through the lens of imagined continental vistas also played a significant role in shaping people’s relationship to the Sumida River in nineteenth-century Japan. The poetry of Ōnuma Chinzan (1818-1891), Seiko’s mentor of Sinitic poetry, suggests the extent to which this habit of experiencing a famous place through the mediation of Chinese literature and its imagery was internalized by kanshi poets at the time. In a poem from 1861, Chinzan mentions that on the fifth day of the first month of that year, he and his pupils visited a certain Mr. Takayama in Koume village in the Mukōjima district; there they entertained themselves with the delights of early spring, viewing plum blossoms along the Sumida River, waiting for the appearance of a crescent moon, and forgetting to return home. Importantly, Chinzan notes that he and his company composed twenty poems using the rhymes of a poem that Tao Yuanming (365-427) composed on a stream near his residence in Xunyang on the fifth day of the first month of 401. Not only does Chinzan’s composition create a series of parallels with Tao Yuanming’s poem—e.g., the date of composition and the structure and rhyme of the poetry—but it also seems to express Chinzan’s identification with the historical Chinese figure whose ambivalent attitude toward the politics of

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his time might have resonated with Chinzan’s own. As noted in the previous chapter, Sinitic prose and poetry became an effective means of expressing one’s identity during the turbulent period of the Edo-Meiji transition, particularly for Chinzan and Seiko’s generation of educated men and women who were trained in the Chinese classics. It is noteworthy that the Sumida River served as a site for Chinzan and members of his circle to identify with historical Chinese poets and articulate their own identities through the mediation of Sinitic literature.

It is significant to recall that the poem Seiko inscribed on Spring Colors on the Sumida River also incorporates a line from a verse by Su Shi to enrich her image of a spring night filled with floral fragrance and faintly reverberating music. Chinzan, in fact, wrote of his own experience of remembering the very same poem by Su Shi when walking along the Sumida River on a spring night. He notes that on the fifteenth day of the third month in 1862, Narushima Ryūhoku invited him and other poets and Confucian scholars to view cherry blossoms along the Sumida River. After drinking at a restaurant at night, they moored their boat to a bridge and walked along the riverbank; suddenly, Chinzan realized that the line “clear scent of flowers, shadowy moon” from Su Shi’s “Spring Night” captured a scenic moment just like the one he was experiencing at the Sumida River. Since Chinzan’s poem is included in the third volume of the collection of his poetry (Chinzan shishō) published in 1867, Seiko’s composition might have been inspired by Chinzan’s poetic response to his eureka moment; it is also possible

64 Ibid., 240. For discussion of Chinzan’s poetry in relation to his attitudes toward the changing sociopolitical circumstances during his lifetime, see Hino, Narushima Ryūhoku, Ô numa Chinzan, 332-343. On the reception of Tao Yuanming, see Wendy Swartz, Reading Tao Yuanming: Shifting Paradigms of Historical Reception (427-1900) (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008).

65 This poem is transcribed and annotated in Hino, Narushima Ryūhoku, Ô numa Chinzan, 247-249.

66 Ibid.
that the connection between the Sumida River and Su Shi’s “Spring Night” was a more broadly shared association in the cultural imagination of mid-nineteenth-century Edo/Tokyo.

In sum, *Spring Colors on the Sumida River* actively engages with the modes of gazing, experiencing, and representing the Sumida River that were established during the Edo period and continued to function into the Meiji era. The choice of the site itself, particularly its cherry blossoms, implied a continuity with the *meisho* of the Edo period whose scenic beauty was revitalized around the time Seiko executed the work. Although the eastward view of the river the painting provides was carefully calibrated to the direction of the intended space at the newly renovated annex of the Hasegawa residence, the eastern gaze directed at the Sumida River also connoted entertainments associated with the site, particularly the pleasure quarters located on the western bank, thereby reinforcing the pleasures of drunken drifting with a famed courtesan implied in Seiko’s poetic inscription. Further, Seiko’s incorporation of a line from Su Shi’s “Spring Night” into her poem indicates her (and perhaps her patron’s) internalization of the habit of expressing one’s experience by evoking imagery eulogized in Chinese literature, a habit that can also be found in earlier true-view landscape paintings. The traces of these modes of engaging with the scenery in *Spring Colors on the Sumida River* suggest that such conventions continued to play an important role in mediating people’s experience of the Sumida River even two decades after the Meiji Restoration.

At the same time, however, the work does not seem to be completely embedded within the fabric of Edo-period visual culture; instead, it conveys a will to pursue immediacy and verisimilitude. Further, Seiko’s desire to depict a naturalistic landscape—particularly visible in her treatment of Mount Tsukuba, which she initially rejected in her letter to her patron but which she ultimately incorporated into the painting as a mere ink smudge—suggests the work’s
departure from the common pairing of Mount Fuji and Mount Tsukuba in mid-nineteenth-century depictions of the site. In fact, these culturally constructed frameworks of engaging with the landscape, which served as the guiding principles in the production and reception of literati art, began to collapse precisely at the time when Seiko created 

*Spring Colors on the Sumida River.* Indeed, some elements in the painting, particularly its naturalistic yet nostalgic gaze noted at the beginning of this chapter, might be seen as the artist’s response to the dramatically changing circumstances of literati culture in mid-Meiji Tokyo.

**The Problem of Bunjinga**

Lit</no-image>erati art, which rose to unparalleled popularity in the 1860s and 1870s, transformed dramatically in the subsequent decades of the Meiji period. As was examined in the previous chapter, the Edo-Meiji transition saw the spread of literati culture to an ever larger sector of the populace throughout the archipelago, facilitating the democratization and commercialization of the three arts that were once considered a prerogative of the educated elite; public manifestations of this commercialization culminated in painting and calligraphy gatherings (*shogakai*), which were held frequently in Tokyo and often involved lavish banquets, abundant sake, profit-seeking participants, and even occasional fist fights.\(^67\) By the early 1880s, however, this commercial success turned literati art into an object of social satire and public denunciation.\(^68\) One of the most strident critiques of *bunjinga* was presented by Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908), a Harvard trained philosopher who was initially invited to Japan in 1878 as a government-funded foreign professor to teach philosophy and political economics at the Imperial University of Tokyo; he


\(^{68}\) Guth, “Meiji Response to *Bunjinga,*” 186.
also became an avid advocate for the preservation of Japanese antiquities, while simultaneously playing a major role in shaping the creation of Japanese-style painting (nihonga).  

Although Fenollosa’s critique is often credited as a catalyst for the subsequent “decline” of bunjinga, the diminishing demand for literati art had its root at a much more fundamental level—namely, the dissolution of the cultural grounds on which Sinitic painting, poetry, and calligraphy had flourished in 1870s Japan. It is only in understanding this artistic and sociocultural transformation of the mid-Meiji period that we can make sense of Seiko’s drastic stylistic change, as well as the place of “modernity” in her *Spring Colors on the Sumida River*.

In his well-known lecture titled “A True Theory on Art” (Bijutsu shinsetsu) delivered at the Dragon Pond Society (Ryūchikai) on May 4, 1882, Fenollosa criticized both bunjinga and oil painting as detrimental to forging a truly modern Japanese-style of painting.  

Claiming that bunjinga must first be purged in order to promote authentically Japanese painting techniques, he proclaimed that “[i]f bunjinga is the upper millstone, oil painting is the lower, between which Japanese painting is being ground to powder.”  

Reasons for his antagonism toward bunjinga become clearer when we examine this statement in relation to his formalist conception of ideal

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69 See especially Foxwell, *Making Modern Japanese-Style Painting*, esp. 68-73; and Yamaguchi Seiichi, *Fenorosa—Nihon bunka no sen’yō ni sasageta isshō* (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1982). As Foxwell has argued, originally nihonga “was not a discrete artistic movement but a term of discourse that initially bore no ties to a specific style, practitioner, or visual vocabulary, yet it proposed a vision of painting in Japanese materials that ultimately bound its raison d’etre to the state itself, seeking to become a ‘national school’ such as what was being called for in other countries at the time” (Foxwell, *Making Modern Japanese-Style Painting*, 9-10). Further, by “the end of the Meiji period, nihonga was on the way to being conceived as a single school unified by shared commitments to naturalism, originality, and tasteful propriety in color application and subject matter,” as its main audience shifted from foreign to domestic (ibid., 110).

70 The original English-language manuscript of this lecture does not survive, but it was recorded by Ōmori Ichū, a Japanese member of the audience, and was widely circulated. Ōmori’s transcription of Fenollosa’s speech is available in “Bijutsu shinsetsu,” in *Bijutsu*, vol. 17 of *Nihon kindai shisō taikei*, ed. Aoki Shigeru and Sakai Tadayasu (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989), 36-65. Ryūchikai was initially established on Benten Island in Shinobazu Pond, where Seiko hosted a gathering to introduce herself to the Shitaya literati community in 1865.

Inspired by the German philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), Fenollosa sought to differentiate painting (which was based on the special organization of visual elements) from poetry (which was concerned with temporality) and conceived of painting as an art form that was independent of literary associations. This formalist approach to painting was diametrically opposed to the unity of the three arts of painting, poetry, and calligraphy that had underpinned literati art since the late eleventh century. Further, in his other writings, Fenollosa also disparaged bunjinga for appealing only to a narrow audience—namely, those who had the knowledge and resources necessary to appreciate the literary allusions embedded in the work. This concern with the limited viewership of bunjinga might have seemed particularly important to Fenollosa not only because he himself lacked the linguistic skills essential to engage meaningfully with literati art (at least at this point in his life), but also because he ultimately sought “universal parameters through which Japanese art could be made visually accessible and meaningful to foreign viewers.” In other words, literati art’s pursuit of the creation of a localized community among like-minded litterateurs might have posed a challenge to Fenollosa’s effort to construct nihonga, which was to be devoid of excessive foreign influence, while simultaneously appealing to an international audience. Moreover, Fenollosa’s critical view of

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74 Fenollosa noted, for instance, that bunjinga sought “to please only the literary men.” Cited in Kobayashi, “Kindai bunjinga hihan no kōzō,” 108, n. 13.


76 Ibid., 72 and 97. On Japan’s paradoxical search for tradition and modernity in art, see also Alicia Volk, *In Pursuit of Universalism: Yorozu Tetsugorō and Japanese Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), esp. 22.
bunjinga resonated with the antipathy toward the “amateur” practitioners of literati art among Fenollosa’s associates; in particular, many Kano-school painters, who were deprived of the shogunal patronage they had enjoyed throughout the Edo period, were struggling with financial loss precisely when literati art was rising to popularity in the first decade of Meiji. Further, the problematic place of bunjinga addressed in “A True Theory on Art” also echoes the concerns raised by government officials who deemed literati art unserviceable for their effort to promote the exportation of Japanese art objects to overseas markets in the mid-Meiji period.

Indeed, another disparaging critique of bunjinga appeared later that year, on October 9, in The Tokyo Daily Newspaper (Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun), a state mouthpiece, shortly after the first Domestic Painting Competition (Naikoku Kaiga Kyōshinkai) opened in Ueno as the first governmentally sponsored competitive exhibition devoted to painting. In this oft-cited article, the reporter criticizes the works of bunjinga displayed at the exhibition as being nothing more than “potato mountains” (tsukuneimo no yama) with “pestle-like pine trees” (surikogi no matsu). Soon thereafter, the pejorative term “potato landscape” (tsukuneimo sansui) became a term

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78 Miyazaki Noriko, “Nihon kindai ni okeru bunjin bunka netsu to sono shōchō—zaibatsu no bijutsu shūshū o jiku ni,” in Kansai Chūgoku shoga korekushon no kaka to mirai, ed. Kansai Chūgoku Shoga Korekushon Kenkyūkai (Nishinomiya: Kansai Chūgoku Shoga Korekushon Kenkyūkai, 2012), 65. Satō Dōshin discusses the paradox of Meiji officials’ simultaneous private pursuit of literati culture and public implementation of policies to promote Japanese industries that were unsupportive of literati art; see his Meiji kokka to kindai bijutsu, 167.

79 “Kaiga Kyōshinkai no ki,” Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun, October 9, 1882, reprinted in Shinbun shūsei Meiji hennenshi, ed. Yamanaka Yasumasu (Tokyo: Zaisei Keizai Gakkai, 1934-1936), 9:254-255. Tsukuimo or tsukuneimo (also known as nagaimo) is a type of yam grown mostly in western Japan that has an irregular shape and slimy interior.
frequently employed to refer to the “degenerated” state of literati painting; its usage remained conspicuous throughout the rest of the Meiji period. Similarly, the official exhibition report of the first painting competition published in the following year provides an extensive critique of paintings submitted under the third category (dai-sanku), which included works of the “Southern school” (nanshū), the “Northern school” (hokushū), and the “synthesized Southern-Northern school” (nanboku gasshū). This category of paintings constituted two-thirds of all of the works submitted to the exhibition, suggesting the predominance of Sinitic styles. The report, in fact, acknowledges that there had recently been a craze for bunjinga, which constituted the majority of the works displayed under this category of paintings. The judges, however, denounce bunjinga as rough and vulgar (zatsu zoku), as they paradoxically present ugly and strange forms (soshū kikai no jo) as elegant and refined (gachi fūin). Significantly, the report does not dismiss Sinitic paintings entirely but rather targets its critique at bunjinga, particularly its disregard of the authenticity of kanga (Chinese painting).

These writings suggest an effort to define and divorce bunjinga from the broader category of Sinitic paintings and to singularize it as an object of denunciation. Such efforts can be seen most clearly in a book titled Meiji gaka ryakunden (Biographic Record of Meiji Painters)

80 For example, in his Kinsei kaigashī, Fujioka Sakutarō employs similarly pejorative terms to describe the roughness (sohō) and arbitrariness (hōjū) of degenerated bunjinga from the early Meiji period, calling them “paintings that were not paintings” (ga ni shite ga ni arazaru mono), filled with potato-like stones, oniony orchids, randomly dotted mountains, and indistinguishable animals. Fujioka, Kinsei kaigashi 344.

81 Nōshōmushō, Naikoku Kaiga Kyōshinkai shinsa hōkoku (Tokyo: Nōshōmushō, 1882), 13-18. This report is discussed in Kobayashi, “Kindai bunjinga hihan no kōzō,” 97-99. Four judges were assigned to each of the six categories of painting. The literati painter Taki Katei served as one of the judges for the third category. On Katei’s participation in domestic industrial exhibitions and painting competitions, see Buckland, Painting Nature for the Nation, esp. 102-108.

82 Nōshōmushō, Naikoku Kaiga Kyōshinkai shinsa hōkoku, 13.

83 Ibid., 13 and 17.

84 Ibid., 13 and 18.
published in 1883, which provides a brief description of each of the major schools of painting it discusses.\(^{85}\) Importantly, the author presents separate categories for nanshū-ha (Southern school) and bunjinga, claiming that the former is calm and graceful (chinchaku onga) and employs fine brushstrokes and rich colors (saihitsu nōsai), while the latter is a type of nanshū-ga that prioritizes poetry and inscriptions.\(^{86}\) He further notes that bunjinga originated as a form of leisure (yokō) among scholar-officials and that it does not pursue form-likeness (keiji) or painterly refinement (gakaku) but instead only esteems spirit resonance and brush dynamics (kiin hitsuryoku).\(^{87}\) The emergence of this distinction between fine and colorful nanshūga and dynamic and amateurish bunjinga, as well as the stigma attached to the latter, in the art world of 1880s Tokyo might have facilitated the dramatic stylistic transformation that can be found in Seiko’s works of the period, particularly her *Spring Colors on the Sumida River*. These rhetorical attacks on bunjinga suggest that the robust, expressive brushstrokes of her earlier ink landscapes, whose “masculine” quality captivated early Meiji audiences and led her to attain the status of a celebrity painter, came to be denigrated as coarse and vulgar by the early 1880s.\(^{88}\) Thus, the delicate movement of her brushstrokes, the meticulous application of color, and the will to a naturalistic sense of perspective in *Spring Colors on the Sumida River* might be seen as the artist’s attempt to remove the stigmatized visual features of bunjinga, to demonstrate her competence in employing techniques of sensitive chromatic rendering, and to propose a new vision of literati landscape painting, a vision that is both “calm and graceful.”

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\(^{87}\) Ibid., 13.

\(^{88}\) Given Seiko’s popularity in the early Meiji period, it is possible that these critics might have had Seiko’s simply executed works in mind when they discussed the “roughness” and “amateurism” of bunjinga.
Paradigm Shifts in Meiji Art Institutions

This new definition and problematization of *bunjinga*, however, was only one part of the series of tremendous changes that were taking place both within the metropolitan art world and the society at large in mid-Meiji Japan. These changes facilitated a fundamental reconceptualization of Sinitic painting, poetry, and calligraphy, a conceptual transformation without which Seiko’s *Spring Colors on the Sumida River* might never have been conceived. Particularly significant to this redefinition of literati art were newly constructed institutional frameworks, as well as the accompanying contestation of artistic categories and hierarchies.89 As Chelsea Foxwell has shown, these frameworks were manifested most vividly in the exhibition hall, which “staged and visualized the notion of a divide between premodern and modern art,” while providing a forum in which “[i]ndividual objects [could] challenge the categories or narratives to which they [were] assigned.”90

It is significant to recall that the first Domestic Painting Competition of 1882 was devoted solely to “painting” (*kaiga*). The coinage of the term *kaiga* itself, which implied the independence of painting from calligraphy and craft objects (*kōgei*), was antithetical to the tripartite relationship among painting, poetry, and calligraphy that had long been an underlying principle for all literati art.91 Prior to this event, the first two Domestic Industrial Exhibitions (Naikoku Kangyō Hakurankai) of 1877 and 1881 displayed works under the existing category of “calligraphy and painting” (*shoga*) in which literati art comfortably resided. Seiko, in fact,

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submitted a painting depicting auspicious themes in light colors (*Hyakuji joi no zu*) to the first Domestic Industrial Exhibition and another painting of peonies on silk (*Gyokudō fuki no zu*), which she collaboratively executed with two other painters in the Shitaya district (Matsuoka Mitsukuni [dates unknown] and Yamamoto Naohika [dates unknown]), to the second exhibition.92 Indeed, as a woodblock print designed by Utagawa Hiroshige III (1842-1894) representing the interior display at the Art Gallery of the Domestic Industrial Exhibition depicts, long sheets of calligraphy were framed and hung on the upper walls of the Western-style museum hall and were surrounded by paintings of landscape, still life, and portraits on similar mountings (Figure 2.16).93 The eclectic mixtures of various objects on display echoes the heterogeneous group of visitors in the foreground who include a Western couple, a Chinese man with a queue, and Japanese men with shaven pates or cropped hair. From the third Domestic Industrial Exhibition onward, however, paintings came to be submitted under the category of *kaiga*, while calligraphy (*sho*) was placed in a separate group along with prints, photography, and seal-engraving. Moreover, by the Fifth Domestic Industrial Exhibition of 1903, calligraphy was entirely removed from the categories of exhibits, signifying its exclusion from the domain of “art” (*bijutsu*).94

Kitazawa Noriaki locates in these institutional changes a desire for the “purification of painting” (*kaiga no junka*) by excising literary elements from its surface. This desire is given clear expression in the article “Sho wa bijutsu naraazu” (Calligraphy is not Art) authored by the

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oil painter Koyama Shōtarō (1857-1916) in 1882, the same year Fenollosa delivered his lecture on “A True Theory on Art.” Witnessing the coexistence of painting and calligraphy on the walls of the gallery at the Second Domestic Industrial Exhibition, Koyama famously proclaimed that calligraphy is not fine art. Calligraphy must be removed from the domain of art (bijutsu no kuiki), he argued, because it is merely a tool of communication or a system of inscribing linguistic signs, which is different from fine art (bijutsu)—that is, painting (toga) and sculpture (chōkoku)—that has the capacity to move its audience. In response, the art critic Okakura Kakuzō (Tenshin; 1862-1913), who is said to have once studied under Seiko, declared that not only is the composition of intelligible characters a “useful art” (jitsuyō bijutsu), but also “calligraphy reaches the domain of art” in “striving…to consider contextual balance, by taking into account the construction of each character, and pursuing cultivation.” Okakura accuses Koyama for not providing enough evidence to support his claim, but in the end he declines to provide a definitive assessment of calligraphy’s status, stating that “I will wait for another occasion to argue the question of whether or not calligraphy is art.” Although Okakura’s response suggests his ambivalent attitude toward calligraphy, it is important to recognize, as

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95 Kitazawa, Meno shinden, 264-269. See also Niigata Kenritsu Kindai Bijutsukan, ed., Koyama Shōtarō to “sho wa bijutsu narazu” no jidai, exh. cat. (Nagaoka: Niigata Kenritsu Kindai Bijutsukan, 2002); and Buckland, Painting Nature for the Nation, 102.

96 Koyama’s article titled “Sho wa bijutsu narazu,” was published in three installments in the journal Tōyō gakujutsu zasshi, nos. 8-10 (May-July 1882). The original article is reproduced in Niigata Kenritsu Kindai Bijutsukan, ed., Koyama Shōtarō to “sho wa bijutsu narazu” no jidai, 138-140. It is also reprinted in Aoki Shigeru, ed., Meiji yōga shiryō—kiroku hen (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Bijutsu Shuppan, 1986), 86-106.

97 Kitazawa, Me no shinden, 265.

98 Okakura’s article titled “Sho wa bijutsu narazu no ron o yomu” was also published in three installments in Tōyō gakujutsu zasshi, nos. 11, 12, and 15 (August, September, and December 1882). It is reprinted in Okakura Tenshin, Okakura Tenshin zenshū (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1980), 3:5-12. An English-language translation of the entire article is available in Okakura Kakuzō, “Reading ‘Calligraphy Is Not Art’ (1882),” trans. Timothy Unverzagt Goddard, Review of Japanese Culture and Society, no. 24 (December 2012): 168-175. I thank Nozomi Naoi for providing me with a copy of this issue of the journal.

99 Ibid., 174.
Kitazawa has argued, that both Okakura and Koyama are concerned with demarcating the boundary between “art” and “non-art.” Importantly, as the position of calligraphy was being rhetorically and institutionally destabilized, *bunjinga* was also being excluded from institutional structures in Tokyo. This movement culminated in 1887, the very year Seiko painted *Spring Colors on the Sumida River*: when the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, founded by the Ministry of Education on the recommendation of Fenollosa, Okakura, and others, was opened that year, it excluded both *bunjinga* and calligraphy from its curriculum.

Significantly, the discursive problematization and institutional exclusion of *bunjinga* in the capital occurred in tandem with the dramatic reconceptualization of Sinitic literature, which had been an essential component of literati art since its genesis in Song China. In fact, the distinction made in Japan today between art (*bijutsu*) and literature (*bungaku*) was beginning to take shape precisely in the mid-Meiji period. As was made clear in the previous chapter, the unprecedented florescence of literati culture in the early Meiji era was largely due to the democratization of proficiencies in reading and composing Sinitic poetry and prose (*kanshibun*), which—supported by both the Tokugawa institutional structure and the new media landscape of Meiji—swept through the archipelago in the mid-nineteenth century. This widely shared

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100 Kitazawa, *Me no shinden*, 267.

101 From around the same time, the members of the Dragon Pond Society problematized the close proximity between *bunjinga* and Chinese painting and began to proclaim the originality and superiority of Japanese art over Chinese art. See Kobayashi, “Kindai bunjinga hihan no kōzō,” 103. For the reception of *bunjinga* in the mid-Meiji period, see also Gunma Kenritsu Kindai Bijutsukan, ed., *Kindai nanga ten*; Buckeland, *Painting Nature for the Nation*, 97-125; and Hyōgo kenritsu Bijutsukan, ed., *Nanga tte nanda: Kindai no nanga Nihon no kokoro to bi*, exh. cat. (Kobe: Hyōgo Kenritsu Bijutsukan, 2008). Importantly, the situation of literati art in western Japan, particularly in Kyoto, seems to have been very different from that in Tokyo. See Kanzaki Ken’ichi, *Kyōto ni okeru Nihongashi* (Kyoto: Kyōto Seihan Insatsusha, 1929); Guth, “Meiji Response to Bunjinga,” esp. 187-192; and Tamaki Maeda, “Tomoioka Tessai’s Narrative Painting: Rethinking Sino-Japanese Traditions” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 2004).

educational background in Sinitic literature, which Seiko herself taught at her private academy (along with painting and calligraphy), served as a crucial cultural ground for early Meiji viewers’ engagement with literati art. In other words, the effectiveness of literati expressivity depended on this literary foundation, which was established by the Chinese classics and was shared between the artist and the viewer. Such a shared cultural foundation was essential for literati art to function, especially given that it was predicated on communal engagement despite its rhetorical reclusive disengagement.103 This literary core, however, began to dissolve in the third decade of Meiji (1887-1896). During this period, as Saitō Mareshi has shown, Sinitic prose (kanbun), which had been considered the superior and standard mode of writing, came to be identified as a local, foreign form of expression unique to “Shina” (China).104 The universality of kanbun was lost and its style rendered obsolete when it was replaced by kundokutai (a system of reading Chinese texts in the Japanese language).105 While kundokutai became the language of politics and scholarship as the “current language” (kintaibun) or “common language” (futsū bun), Sinitic poetry (kanshi) was separated from Sinitic prose to be redefined as literature (bungaku).106 In the subsequent decades, as Matthew Fraleigh has noted, “[s]hifts in the curriculum of the new national school system, as well as institutional realignments in higher education, would further erode the place of kanshibun, producing new generations of readers that came to regard what had always been an integral component of Japanese literary activity as something antiquated,

103 For the significance of communal engagement in early Meiji literati art, see chapter 1.

104 Saitō, Kanbunmyaku to kindai Nihon, 101-102. Saitō argues that the term “Shina” came to be used widely in the Meiji period as a means of objectifying China and of removing (or masking) Japan’s cultural dependency on China in its effort to search for uniquely Japanese “tradition.” Saitō Mareshi, Kanbunmyaku no kindai—Shin matsu=Meiji no bunkaken (Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 2005), 28-46.

105 Saitō, Kanbunmyaku to kindai Nihon, 102-112.

106 Ibid.
affected, and abstruse.” Indeed, by the third decade of Meiji, Seiko’s generation came to be called the “Elders of the Tenpō era” (Tenpō no rōjin), suggesting that those who were born during the Tenpō era (1830-1844) were perceived as outmoded, just like the language of kanshibun with which they were intimately familiar.

The shift away from kanshibun was crystallized in the genbun-itchi (unification of speech and writing) movement, which, rather than simply creating a written language that resembled actual speech, “developed a new mode of writing that forged the phantasmatic identity of a national language.” For example, in 1886 (a year before Seiko executed Spring Colors on the Sumida River), a Tokyo Imperial University professor, Mozume Takami (1847-1928), declared in his book Genbun-itchi (Unification of Speech and Writing) that “it is most desirable that we abolish the parrot-like, nonfunctional, conventionalized, written language, and that we directly transcribe the vigorous, living discourse that spontaneously and naturally flows from our mouths.” As Tomi Suzuki has noted, although Mozume admitted the superiority of the kanbun-based writing system, “he urged the Japanese to break away from this practice and its conventionalized perceptions and to adopt a more ‘spontaneous,’ ‘living language’ that ‘directly

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109 Tomiko Yoda, Gender and National Literature: Heian Texts in the Constructions of Japanese Modernity (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 48. Tomi Suzuki has noted that “the genbun-itchi movement was based on a belief in, and an aspiration to, the ‘directness, immediacy, efficiency, and impartiality’ of the phonograph—which was perceived to be an essential feature of Western civilization.” However, it “was not simply an attempt to turn the spoken language into a written form; it was a conceptual transformation of the written language.” See her Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 43-44. For more on genbun-itchi, see Karatani Kōjin, “The Discovery of Interiority,” chap. 2 in Origins of Modern Japanese Literature, trans. Brett de Bary (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 45-75.

110 Cited in ibid., 43.
transmits one’s thoughts and feelings.” At the turn of the century, the poet Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902) and his peers began the shaseibun (literary sketch or literary dessin) movement, suggesting “that a plain type of genbun-itchi style that avoided difficult or discordant Chinese loanwords would be appropriate for shaseibun.” This literary pursuit of “naturalistic” expression by removing the conventions associated with kanbun paralleled the rise of naturalism in the visual arts. As Satō Dōshin has shown, it was during the third decade of the Meiji era that the concept of shajitsu (naturalism or realism) came to be firmly established.

Western-style illusionism had already been widely practiced during the Edo period, as seen, for example, in the numerous floating world pictures (ukiyo-e) that employ techniques associated with Western art such as single-point perspective and chiaroscuro. It is important to note, however, that to many Edo-period viewers, the use of these techniques did not necessarily signify realism. Rather, the single-point perspectival system was often employed to dramatize or exoticize spaces of entertainment (e.g., restaurants and kabuki theaters), stimulating the audience’s visual interest. Similarly, shading was frequently applied to images of demons and monsters to accentuate and alienate, rather than naturalize, the monstrosity of such fantastic creatures. Further, pictorial illusionism was not linked solely to Western art, since many European visual materials were brought to Japan via China; some Japanese artists, such as Ike no Taiga, viewed European pictures and prints such as copperplate engravings of cityscapes by

111 Ibid.
112 Ibid., 46.
113 Satō, Meiji kokka to kindai bijutsu, 209-232.
114 Screech, The Lens within the Heart.
applying his knowledge of Chinese painting theory to these Western materials. The will to naturalistic representation was popularized by Taiga’s contemporary Maruyama Ōkyo (1733-1795), whose concealed brush dynamics—that is, signs of the artist’s bodily expression—were praised by eighteenth-century viewers for their (supposed) fidelity to observation of the real world. It was not until the Meiji period that illusionism became more strongly associated with Western art and that “the attainment of a perfect copy” of observed nature came to be perceived as “an end to be striven toward.” Furthermore, in “the mid-Meiji period, the will to natural depiction itself signified modernism in art and letters.” The resultant new conception of the legibility of pictorial language, as Foxwell has argued, “involved the widespread ideal of the transparent image, a work of art that would be equally accessible and praiseworthy to all viewers, regardless of background.” Given that this ideal of naturalistic, universally intelligible painting without any traces of convention, style, or the painter’s hand, was beginning to solidify in the mid-Meiji period, it is not surprising that the obscurity of bunjinga—due to its literary allusions and brush dynamics evocative of past masters—would be condemned by internationally minded critics and government officials. More importantly, though, the desire to define bunjinga as amateurish, literary, and expressive, as well as the rhetorical vulgarization and


119 Foxwell, Making Modern Japanese-Style Painting, 144.

120 As Foxwell has stated, it “was not so much that painting became realistic as that the idea of how a painting could be legible to its audiences changed.” Ibid., 143.

121 Ibid., 151.
alienation of these qualities, might be seen as a way of creating an antagonistic category of painting to be supplanted by a new, uniquely Japanese mode of painting. Just as the debate on calligraphy helped to formulate the concept of art by way of exclusion, this discursively constructed conception of *bunjinga* might have served as a means of defining the future course of modern Japanese art.

**Beyond *Bunjinga*: Seiko’s Xylographic Experimentation**

Living in the metropolitan art world and experiencing declining demand for her works, Seiko perhaps could not remain completely oblivious to these paradigmatic transformations, which were fundamentally destabilizing her career of painting and instruction. In fact, Seiko closed her private academy of Sinitic painting, calligraphy, and poetry in June 1882, only a month after Fenollosa delivered his lecture on “Bijutsu shinsetsu.” Although it is problematic to make a direct correlation between the two events, Fenollosa’s speech and the various other sociocultural changes examined above might have contributed to the closure of the school, which had been open for a decade. As Kawashima Junji has noted, according to the ledger Seiko kept, she received nearly six hundred commissions in 1882; within the next few years, however, requests for her works plunged, numbering less than one hundred by 1886. Indeed, Yoda Gakkai noted in his diary on December 14, 1885, that Seiko told him of her intention to quit painting; Gakkai laughed at this abrupt confession and convinced Seiko that her personal identity was inseparable from her artistic identity. This stagnating demand for the kinds of literati painting that had been so popular in the previous decade, then, may well have posed a productive challenge to Seiko and her peers, encouraging them to redirect their approach to picture-making.

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by exploring new avenues of creation. In fact, in the mid-1880s, prior to executing Spring Colors on the Sumida River, Seiko produced a series of woodblock-printed images of Japanese landscapes that, strikingly, engage with modes of representation associated with Western art.

Seiko’s print designs appeared in several books, the most important of which, particularly for our understanding of Spring Colors on the Sumida River, is entitled Bokusui sanjukkeishi (Poems on Thirty Views of the Sumida River), a two-volume book compiled in 1886, the year before Seiko completed the panoramic landscape.124 The book presents poems and commentaries on thirty famous sites along the Sumida River that the poet Mizoguchi Keigan (1822-1897), who studied kanshi under Ōnuma Chinzan, composed and compiled.125 Although Keigan served as a prefectural official (kenri) in Urawa, Saitama Prefecture (from 1875 to 1887), prior to his appointment he seems to have lived in the Shitaya district, where Seiko and Chinzan established their own residences along with many other literati artists.126 Each of the thirty sections is accompanied by a depiction of the site discussed; ten literati artists including Seiko and several painters in her circle were chosen to compose the images (Figures 2.17a and 2.17b).127 Seiko executed five images in the first volume, which begins and ends with a picture by her. It is possible that her patron Hasegawa Hisaie asked her to produce the large-scale Spring Colors on


125 Keigan notes in the preface that his publication was inspired by Yoda Gakkai’s Bokusui nijūshikeiki (Poems on Twenty-Four Views of the Sumida River) published in 1881. A modern reprint of Bokusui nijūshikeiki is available in Yoda, Bokusui nijūshikeiki.


127 In addition to Seiko, the painters who contributed designs for the book include Fukushima Ryūho, Kawamura Ukoku, Taki Katei, Watanabe Shōka, Sugawara Hakuryū, Atomi Kakei, Fukube Hazan, Tōdō Ryōun, and Suzuki Sairan. Atomi Kakei and Suzuki Sairan were both women artists. Some of these artists interacted with Seiko regularly and contributed to collaborative projects with her, as was discussed in chapter 1. On Atomi Kakei, see the epilogue to this dissertation.
the Sumida River after viewing these book designs. Nevertheless, her monumental painting contrasts starkly with these printed images of riverside sites. While the painting employs light colors, fine texture strokes, and thin ink lines to convey the soft, delicate qualities of the vernal riverscape, the book designs emphasize bold compositions, harsh lines, and the dramatic contrast between jet-black ink and white paper to generate a sense of audacity. Seiko’s striking depictions stand out among the images included in the book, which often use relatively thin lines and areas of light ink to create reserved, subtle, or subdued images, effects closer to Spring Colors on the Sumida River (Figures 2.17c and 2.17d).

In her design for the section titled “Chômeiji Temple under Clear Skies after Snow” (Figure 2.17a), Seiko employs single-point perspective to depict the entrance to Chômeiji Temple, which is located on the eastern bank of the Sumida River. Parts of the temple gate and walls are rendered in areas of black ink, while short, choppy, highly modulated lines suggest the contours of the roofs and trees softly covered in snow. These casual, deliberately clumsy lines create a sense of playful improvisation and suggest the artist’s bodily execution, adding an unexpected feeling of temporality and individuality to this reproductive medium. The abstracted forms also communicate a sense of lyrical imperfection that suffuses the image with warmth as though to convey the pleasant sunlight that bathes the blankets of snow. The density of this image contrasts with the emptiness of another picture by Seiko, which accompanies the section on “Floating Seagulls at Hashiba” (Figure 2.17b). Here Seiko turns the ground of the paper—which serves to evoke snow in the earlier image of Chômeiji Temple—into a large body of water on which a single rowboat and five seagulls leisurely float. Both banks of the river are relegated to the upper and lower edges of the image; the abbreviated forms vaguely suggest the river’s shoreline, the silhouettes of trees, and the shapes of houses. More importantly, streaks of ink
delineate the bank at upper right, while blotches of ink form clusters of trees at lower left. These xylographic elements replicate traces made by an actual brush, imbuing the woodblock-printed image with a sense of the artist’s personal touch.

Further, it is important to note that a seal-shaped signature bearing the artist’s name “Seiko” appears on each of her five designs, but each is carefully individuated by its style, shape, and characters. This is surprising given that the images made by other artists in the book are accompanied by small vermilion seals bearing their sobriquets—that is, seals of the type that they would normally use to imprint their names on simple sketches they painted (in addition to, or sometimes in place of, their signatures). Moreover, the shapes of Seiko’s “seals”—which were hand-written, carved by the woodblock artisan, and printed—are purposefully distorted to emphasize their chirographic quality. These personal marks thus mediate between seal and signature, while the images themselves oscillate between print and painting, in effect creating playful interactions between the notion of originality and that of mechanical reproducibility.

Seiko’s command of techniques associated with Western art can be seen even more clearly in an image included in another woodblock-printed book titled *Tōkyō meishō ekotoba* (Pictures and Poems on Famous Places in Tokyo), which was edited by the physician, government official, and writer Masuyama Morimasa (1827-1901) in 1887, the very year when she executed the *Spring Colors on the Sumida River*. Seiko’s image, which depicts the Dōkanyama Hill in Tokyo and the expansive landscape that lies to the northeast of the city, appears in the middle of the first volume of this two-volume book (Figure 2.18). The image

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128 For example, the image of Chōmeiji Temple bears the name “Seiko” in a square box, which is located at upper right and is written with Chinese characters (*kanji*). The picture of floating seagulls, on the other hand, shows her name written in the phonetic Japanese alphabet (*katakana*) inside a circle at lower right. Seiko, in fact, possessed numerous seals bearing her name, some of which were similar to the marks made on these designs.

conveys a naturalistic sense of depth by dividing the picture into three interconnected terrains—the Dōkanyama Hill in the foreground, rice paddies minimally suggested by thin, crisscrossing lines in the middleground, and a cluster of low mountains rendered in light-colored silhouettes in the background. Seiko’s familiarity with various pictorial methods becomes clearer when we look closely at the foreground. In her depiction of the hill, which stretches diagonally from lower right to upper left, she diminishes the scale of the trees and abbreviates the details as they move away from the viewer, accentuating the sense of spatial recession. Further, she manipulates the lines and areas of ink to shade part of the tree trunks, adding a sense of volume to the motifs and making the image as a whole look more three-dimensional. The sense of spatial expansion—evoked both by the hill stretching diagonally in the foreground and by the landscape extending in depth behind—contrasts with the sense of immediacy created by the towering tree on the right. The foreground is depicted from a uniquely low angle, which situates the viewer close to the ground. This low perspective dramatically crops the top of the trees, making the viewer focus on the thick tree trunks and the ground from which they grow. The use of pictorial frames to dynamically truncate motifs recalls late Edo-period landscape prints designed by Utagawa Hiroshige, a compositional technique that Meiji-period print designers such as Kobayashi Kiyochika (1847-1915) continued to employ in their depictions of changing landscapes in the modernizing era. At the same time, the dramatic shading and sketch-like marks that constitute the motifs seem to transform the familiar Japanese landscape into a pastoral view of the European countryside.

Seiko’s interest in Western modes of picture-making suggested by these xylographic landscapes becomes clearer as we read accounts written by those who had direct interactions.

with her. Komiya Mihomatsu (1859-1935), who received financial support from Seiko to study at law school and eventually served as a judicial officer, noted in 1911 that “not only did Ms. Seiko study East Asian painting [tōyōga], but she also secretly studied Western painting [seiyōga] and owned some oil paintings [aburae], numbering about fifty in total.”¹³¹ The most extensive biography of Seiko—which was published in 1929 by Inamura Ryōhei, whose father, Inamura Kan’ichirō, interacted with Seiko throughout her life—also offers insights into Seiko’s engagement with Western art.¹³² The biographer tells us that on June 22, 1878—the day after Seiko called upon one of the best-known Japanese statesmen of the time, Katsu Kaishū (1823-1899)—Seiko visited Kawakami Tōgai (1827-1881), a pioneering Western-style artist and literati painter who is credited with introducing European artistic concepts to Japan.¹³³ At Tōgai’s home, Seiko and Tōgai “studied yōga [Western painting] and bunjinga interchangeably. During that time, [Seiko] displayed yōga paintings in her living room and owned other yōga in addition to those [on display]. But she never used an [oil painting] brush [burasshi], and later in her life, she gave away all of the yōga that were in her possession.”¹³⁴ Further, one of Tōgai’s disciples, Koyama Shōtarō—the very individual who proclaimed that calligraphy was not fine art—showed his admiration for Seiko in his memoir of his teacher, recounting:

At the “Pavilion of Listening to Fragrance and Reading Painting” [Chōkō dokugarō; Tōgai’s studio], sixty percent of the students practiced yōga, twenty percent engaged themselves in what might be called “eclectic painting” [iwayuru sechūga], and another twenty percent practiced authentic literati painting [nanga]…. Although Ms. Seiko was a woman,

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¹³² Inamura Ryōhei, Okuhara Seiko (Tokyo: Seiko Shuppanbu, 1929).


¹³⁴ Inamura, Okuhara Seiko, 87.
she was so vigorous that no man could compete with her. She urged us to practice yōga at that time. We must acknowledge her remarkable farsightedness, given that even today, thirty years later, nihonga painters still detest yōga. Perhaps because of this, she and Master Tōgai agreed with each other.¹³⁵

This account raises an important point—namely, that Seiko encouraged some younger artists to study Western-style oil painting, rather than the literati art that she herself practiced. It furthers notes that students in Tōgai’s studio employed yōga, nanga, and an “eclectic style,” suggesting that they worked together despite these seemingly contradictory categories. These categories, however, do not seem to have been mutually exclusive, at least during much of Tōgai’s lifetime. Tōgai and his mentors’ artistic training was indeed highly eclectic: he initially studied under the painter Ōnishi Chinnen (1792-1851) who received training from students of both Maruyama Ōkyo and Tani Bunchō, whose oeuvre itself was highly diverse. In fact, Fujioka Sakutarō described Tōgai’s painting as having been composed of “Western skin and Japanese flesh,” its subject matter and composition being predominantly “Southern style” (nanshū).¹³⁶ Koyama’s antagonistic attitude toward nihonga, however, suggests that by the time he wrote this article in 1903, the binary conception of nihonga and yōga was firmly established.¹³⁷ It is also noteworthy that Koyama seems to associate Seiko with the nihonga camp and praises her promotion of oil painting as “remarkably farsighted.”¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Koyama Shōtarō, “Senshi Kawakami Tōgai okina 2,” Bijutsu shinpō 2, no. 6 (1903): 47.

¹³⁶ Fujioka, Kinsei kaigashi, 355.


¹³⁸ Seiko’s farsightedness was frequently commented on in contemporary sources although different authors employed the term to present different textual portraits of her. For more on this issue, see chapter 4 of this dissertation.
A more extensive, enthusiastic response to Seiko’s wide-ranging artistic interests seen especially in her xylographic landscapes appeared in *Chūō bijutsu* (Central Journal of Art)—one of the major art journals in early twentieth-century Japan—just four years after her death.

Writing in 1917, the painter, poet, writer, and critic Ishii Hakutei (1882-1958) praised the originality and level of sophistication he perceived in Seiko’s book designs. Commenting on *Bokusui sanjukkeishi*, he notes:

What I praise most about Ms. [Seiko] is that she was not one of those literati painters who simply imitated Chinese models [*Shina mohō no nangasharyū*]. … While [Taki] Katei and others show no new ideas [*shin ‘i*], each of her illustrations masterfully presents a unique concept and composition, revealing her superb skills at representing Japanese nature. Her depiction of Chōmeiji Temple in snow demonstrates the simplicity of her execution, as well as her ability to grasp the essence of the subject [*kan ni shite yoku yō o e*]. The highly ordered perspective is particularly worth praising; it even makes me wonder if it was produced by the hand of a modern yōga painter. For her signatures, she deliberately avoids using carved seals and instead inscribes [the Chinese kanji characters for] “Seiko” in a square here and [the Japanese kana characters for] “Seiko” in a circle there, suggesting her refined wit and boldness [*shadatsu hōtan*].

Hakutei extols the newness of Seiko’s ideas and the innovation of her compositions in contrast to what he perceives as mundane illustrations submitted by other artists. More significantly, the author finds Seiko’s deployment of “highly ordered perspective” (*enkin no totonoi taru*) so skilful that he wonders if a yōga painter produced the image. Hakutei thus celebrates Seiko’s modern sensibility and her ability to move beyond the strictures of the pictorial conventions of literati art. He further expresses his admiration for Seiko’s image of the Dōkanyama Hill in *Tōkyō meishō ekotoba*, stating: “The composition, which offers a view of the Mikawashima fields and Mount Tsukuba through the roots of several trees on the hill, is something that ordinary nihonga painters would never conceive of. I remember my father’s saying as he flipped

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the pages of the book, ‘This is Seiko—how daring!’ Ishii thus applauds Seiko for creating a unique composition that would be inconceivable for average nihonga painters. In other words, he reads Seiko’s images with his binary conception of nihonga and yōga in mind, and he celebrates her precisely for transcending that dichotomy.

These descriptions of Seiko’s work, particularly Ishii’s rhetorical adulation of her printed designs, construct a particular image of Seiko as a painter who held a broad, unprejudiced vision of art and who boldly attempted to transcend the binaries between Western and Japanese, or Western and Sino-Japanese, styles of painting, binaries that came to be codified only at the turn of the century. By retrospectively presenting her as a mediating figure whose attitude and artistic activities reconcile these dichotomous categories, Ishii conveys his own vision of Japanese painting, in which he (along with his generation of artists and critics) discovers an affinity with the Western avant-garde and whose future he locates in the synthesis of Eastern and Western art. More significantly, Ishii’s and Koyama’s association of Seiko with the nihonga camp

140 Ibid., 148.

141 On the blurring of the dichotomy between nihonga and yōga during the Taishō period, see Volk, *In Pursuit of Universalism*, 155, and 168-169.

142 On Ishii Hakutei’s artistic visions, see, for example, his “Kaigakai no genjō o ronji awasete sono shōrai ni oyo,” *Myōjō*, no. 2 (February 1906): 4-9; ibid., *Myōjō*, no. 3 (March 1906): 80-89; and ibid., *Myōjō*, no. 4 (February 1906): 109-117. See also Hirayama Mikiko, “Ishii Hakutei on the Future of Japanese Painting,” *Art Journal* 55, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 57-63; Ono Hiroko, “Ishii Hakutei no Mane juyō ni yoru kaigakan no seiritsu to sono eikyō,” *Gengo shakai*, no. 5 (March 2011): 269-284; and Volk, *In Pursuit of Universalism*, 164-165. During the early twentieth century, literati painting was reconceptualized as the quintessential “Eastern art” that could compete with Western art. The term *nanga* came to be used widely by artists and critics to refer to this newly conceived category of literati painting and to differentiate it from stigmatized bunjinga. As Aida-Yuen Wong has shown, both Japanese and Chinese critics came to emphasize and reconceive certain aspects of literati painting—e.g., expressivity, individualism, spontaneity, and “spirit resonance”—and identified similarities between literati art and the Western avant-garde, particularly Post-Impressionism and Expressionism, thereby claiming the modernity and progressiveness of literati art. In this process of reimagining, the “unruliness” of literati painting, a characteristic harshly criticized by Fenollosa and his supporters in the 1880s, came to be highly valued by modern critics. Aida-Yuen Wong, “A New Life for Literati Painting in the Early Twentieth Century: Eastern Art and Modernity, a Transcultural Narrative?,” *Artibus Asiae* 60 no. 2 (2000): 297-326; and idem, *Parting the Mists: Discovering Japan and the Rise of National-Style Painting in Modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006), esp. 54-76. Further, as Chiba Kei has examined, this Taishō-period revival of *nanga* was deeply interwoven with the political and ideological contexts of modern Japan. The discourse on *nanga*, in fact, related to the burgeoning desire of the Japanese state to pursue self-autonomy from the Western powers following the Sino-Japanese (1894-5) and Russo-
suggests that the Sinitic practice of literati art was subsumed within the overarching concept of Japanese painting by the early twentieth century, a concept that was still in the process of taking its shape in the 1880s.

Seiko’s printed landscape designs are thus better understood as an important aspect of her artistic experimentation formulated in response to the specific sociocultural circumstances of the 1880s, rather than as an attempt to transcend the nihonga/yōga binary, whose strict formal and conceptual division was absent at the time. The synthesis of various cultural modes of representation, which can be found in both Seiko’s book designs and her Spring Colors on the Sumida River, suggests the artist’s pursuit of new artistic visions beyond the stigmatized strictures of bunjinga. By renewing the genre of depictions of real-world sites, Spring Colors on the Sumida River proposes a new vision of literati art that balanced Edo-period habits of representation, experimentations with Western-style techniques, and the changing conception of literati culture in mid-Meiji Japan.\textsuperscript{143}

**Conclusion**

Literati culture, which proliferated throughout the archipelago in the 1870s, underwent major conceptual transformations over the course of the middle decades of the Meiji era. This metamorphosis was already beginning in 1880s Tokyo, when Japan’s art institutions were being established upon Western models and a series of efforts was being made to define the concept of

\textsuperscript{143} On the renewed interest in the genre of true-view landscapes by literati painters working in the institutional context of mid-Meiji Japan, see Ōkuma Toshiyuki, “Kindai nangashi kō,” in Kindai nanga ten, ed. Gunma Kenritsu Kindai Bijutsukan, exh. cat. (Tatebayashi: Gunma Kenritsu Kindai Bijutsukan, 1999), 10-16; and Tsurumi Kaori, “Kindai nanga—honten no shushi to naiyō,” in ibid., 85-91. See also the introduction to chapter 3 of this dissertation.
art. During this process of codification and hierarchization, *bunjinga* was divorced from the broader category of Sinitic painting and condemned for its coarse brushstrokes, deformed motifs, amateurish origins, and literary dependency—qualities that were deemed incompatible with the governmental policy of creating a universally accessible visuality of Japanese painting. Critiques of *bunjinga* were also implemented through the very structure of metropolitan art institutions at the time, the clearest manifestation of which can be seen in the exclusion of calligraphy and *bunjinga* from public exhibitions and from the curricula of art academies. Thus essentialized and alienated, *bunjinga* seems to have served as an antithesis to the evolving ideals of Japanese painting that artists, critics, and bureaucrats sought to promote. Moreover, the problematization of *bunjinga* paralleled the gradual disintegration of the widely shared educational background, based on the Chinese classics, that served as the foundation upon which Sinitic culture thrived in the first decade of Meiji. As *bunjinga*’s literary and stylistic allusions to past Chinese models were thought to alienate foreign audiences (thus rendering *bunjinga* unserviceable to the state-sponsored exportation of Japanese art objects), Sinitic prose and poetry, which were considered by many of Seiko’s generation as the most superior and suitable means of articulating one’s identities and addressing the transformations of the new age, came to be perceived as antithetical to Japan’s pursuit of modernity.

Seiko’s *Spring Colors on the Sumida River* was produced at the very moment that these sociocultural changes were beginning to destabilize literati culture as a whole. The artist’s stylistic metamorphosis that this work demonstrates might thus be seen as her attempt to excise the stigmatized visual characteristics of *bunjinga* from her work and to propose a new vision of literati landscape painting. Simultaneously, in its rendering of the riverbanks in vernal haziness and in its removal of signs of modernity, the painting infuses the Sumida River with a
distinctively bucolic mood. Ultimately, it is this nostalgic gaze that seems to differentiate the work from Seiko’s earlier paintings, as well as from the modes of engaging with literati culture that they presupposed. As was argued in the previous chapter, Seiko’s *Dreams of Cranes amid Windy Pines* audaciously visualized the reclusive ideals through which the artist and viewer could inhabit the persona of literati and imagine themselves into an alternative social world. Seiko also enacted these ideals in her real life, participating in ritualized private gatherings to blur the boundary between the real world and the ideal world of litterateurs. *Spring Colors on the Sumida River*, however, breaks away from this mode of engagement with literati culture. Specifically, its nostalgic gaze suggests a psychological distance between the world that the artist and the viewer inhabit and the pastoral world that is represented in the image. *Spring Colors on the Sumida River* thus implies that the alternative universe, which had seemed immediately accessible in the previous decade, is no longer attainable in reality but only through the fictional world of representation.
Chapter 3

Imagined Selves: Beauty by Plum and Window

The gradual dissolution of the cultural foundations on which literati art flourished in the 1870s fundamentally reshaped the landscape of literati art for the rest of the nineteenth century. When calligraphy, as a mere constellation of linguistic signs, was declared “non-art” and the newly defined category of bunjinga was institutionally excluded for its supposed textual dependency and amateurish coarseness, literati artists, particularly those who worked within the institutional framework, began to pursue the “purification of painting,” excising literary elements from their work.\(^1\) During the third decade of the Meiji period (1887-1896), a group of literati painters actively began to “modernize” their works in response to these changing demands for art. These artists re-evaluated the genre of true-view landscapes and created works that emphasized the will to naturalistic depiction, an effort that recalls Seiko’s approach to producing Spring Colors on the Sumida River. As Ōkuma Shigeyuki has argued, such an attempt to reform literati landscape painting was particularly visible among members of the Japan Art Association (Nihon Bijutsu Kyōkai)—the successor to the Dragon Pond Society, which hosted debates on realism (shasei shajitsu giron) from the late 1870s onward. The leading artists of the society, such as Tazaki Sōun (1815-1898) and Mori Kinseki (1843-1921), began producing landscapes of Mount Fuji and Mount Tsukuba that were devoid of expressive brushstrokes and calligraphic inscriptions, elements that had long been central to literati art but that came to be identified as “ills” of bunjinga (Figures 3.1 to 3.3).\(^2\)

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landscapes of Japanese landmarks, others, such as Taki Katei (1830-1901), focused on producing bird-and-flower paintings, a newly re-recognized genre of painting that was believed to have “the potential to function as a form of universal allegory, communicating messages that were assumed to be so obvious that they could pass unacknowledged” (Figure 3.4).³ Semantically transparent and immediately accessible, these landscapes that were stripped of their literati trappings and these bird-and-flower images that were ostensibly rendered universal were deemed appropriate for the modern era. Not only might they play a role in the drive to export Japanese art objects to foreign markets, but also they were seen to appeal to the new generation of Japanese who had begun to consider Sinitic prose and poetry (along with calligraphy and literati painting) difficult and obsolete. The emergence of these new “literati” paintings paralleled the codification of Japanese-style painting (nihonga), which accelerated in the 1880s and 1890s. Further, they anticipated the eventual absorption of literati painting by nihonga, a symbolic manifestation of which took place at the Bunten (Ministry of Education Art Exhibition) in 1907 when paintings were submitted as either nihonga or yōga, with no other category in between.⁴

These artistic and sociocultural transformations of the 1880s, particularly the declining demand for bunjinga, challenged Seiko to search for new modes of practicing literati art by experimenting and amalgamating different techniques and conventions of representation. This process of experimentation culminated in the production of Spring Colors on the Sumida River, which seems to suggest, through its nostalgic gaze, a self-reflexive awareness of the

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unattainability of the bygone past. Such an attitude presupposes the presence of a psychological distance between the observing subject and the painted landscape, a sense of disconnect that was entirely absent in her earlier ink landscapes, which sought to immerse both the artist and her viewer in the alternative world of reclusion they presented. Seiko’s period of experimentation, however, does not seem to have continued very long. In 1891, only four years after she completed *Spring Colors on the Sumida River*, she abruptly left the metropolitan art world for rural Kamikawakami in Kumagaya, Saitama Prefecture. The most immediate reason for her relocation seems to have been that a new railway (which became today’s Yamanote Line) was to be built through the area, a hub for literati artists where Seiko had lived and worked for more than twenty years. After successfully negotiating with the mayor of Tokyo to sell her entire property, Seiko initially lived in a different location within the same Shitaya district, but the following year, she moved to remote Kamikawakami, which had belonged to her home domain of Koga during the Edo period, far removed from the sociocultural changes that were subsuming literati culture in the capital.⁵

Seiko’s choice to retire to Kamikawakami might have allowed her to remain undisturbed by the institutional denunciation of *bunjinga*, the disintegration of Sinitic culture, and (as will be examined in the next chapter) the increasing, and increasingly public, problematization of her gender identity. Even before the construction of the railway, the Shitaya district itself might already have changed in appearance and atmosphere since its heyday as a center of literati activities; by 1891 Seiko had lost many of the members in her circle (some of whom lived in the same Shitaya community)—including Kido Takayoshi (1833-1877), Kawakami Tōgai (1827-

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⁵ The administrative documents concerning the purchase of Seiko’s property by the Tokyo Prefecture are reproduced and transcribed in Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, ed., *Okuhara Seiko ten—botsugo 100-nen kinen*, exh. cat. (Koga: Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, 2013), 80-83.
1881), Fukushima Ryūho (1820-1889), and Washizu Kidō (1825-1882)—with whom she interacted regularly during the first decade of Meiji, drunkenly brushing collaborative works and hosting ritualized gatherings for each other. Seiko’s neighbor and poetry mentor Ōnuma Chinzan (1818-1891), whose dominant position in mid-nineteenth-century kanshi circles had already been replaced by his rival Mori Shuntō (1819-1889), also passed away shortly after she left for Kumagaya. The loss of her friends in the collegial community might have been a poignant reminder that the literati ideals she and her peers internalized were no longer easily realizable in real life but were only possible in the imaginary world of representation. Indeed, it was in this solitary pursuit of literati ideals in her rural retreat that Seiko seems to have found a new mode of engaging with literati art.

A hanging scroll titled Beauty by Plum and Window (Baisō kajin-zu, private collection; Figure 3.5a) that Seiko executed in 1907 provides a crucial insight into the ways in which the artist appropriated and transformed the conventions associated with existing genres of painting—specifically, that of beauty painting (bijinga)—to propose a creative way of engaging with literati culture.  

More specifically, the work seems to thematize reclusion in a subtle, nuanced way that contrasts with the open celebration of eremitic ideals found in her earlier ink landscapes from the 1870s, such as Dreams of Cranes amid Windy Pines (Figure 1.1a). Juxtaposing a painting and a calligraphic inscription of a poem, Beauty by Plum and Window at first glance seems to uphold the classic literati ideal of the unity between painting, poetry, and calligraphy, an ideal that was undermined in Tokyo art institutions from the 1880s onward. The choice of this format alone might have signified an attempt to recuperate that paradigm. There is, however, a strong sense of disparity among the three components that comprise the work. The painting depicts a woman

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6 I extend my sincere gratitude to the owner of Beauty by Plum and Window for allowing me to repeated study and photography this work.
standing inside a room and looking out through a large circular window (Figures 3.5b and 3.5c); the use of thin, delicate lines, subdued vegetal colors, and minute details conveys a sense of sensitivity and privacy. By contrast, a bold and frenetic energy vitalizes the calligraphic inscription below, in which purposefully distorted characters appear in various sizes (Figure 3.5e). The content of the poem, which focuses on an old man’s admiration for plum blossoms, only complicates the picture further. What is the relationship among these seemingly unrelated elements in the work, and how do they interact to generate meaning? How does the work engage with the conventions of representing beautiful women and habits of viewing such images? What kind of mode of engagement does this work presuppose, and what was its significance for Seiko, particularly given the context of her withdrawal from the metropolitan art world to the quietude of Kumagaya?

This chapter will begin by analyzing how the painting in Seiko’s Beauty by Plum and Window stages the figure as a desirable object for visual delectation. A comparison between this painting and other images of beautiful women will illuminate the techniques of representation associated with this particular genre of painting. I will then analyze how the painting combines visual motifs and representational conventions to construct the figure’s persona as an isolated beauty who longs for her absent lover. The pleasure of viewing this work, I will suggest, lies in the way it situates the beholder in the position of the man whose presence is poignantly felt by the beauty who yearns for him. On the other hand, the composite nature of the poem inscribed below the painting, as well as the complex relationships it establishes with the painted beauty, open new possibilities for interpreting the scroll as a whole. Ultimately, I will argue that the assemblage of pictorial and literary conventions embodied in Beauty by Plum and Window activates the possibility of engaging with the work from multiple subject positions, allowing the
beholder to transgress gender and cultural boundaries into an imagined world removed from contemporary concerns.

**Framing the Beauty as an Object of Desire**

A close visual analysis of the image in *Beauty by Plum and Window* is first necessary in order to unpack its complexities and innovations.\(^7\) The painting depicts a single woman standing behind a balustrade and partially shrouded by a bamboo blind (Figures 3.5b and 3.5c). A green curtain with gold embroidery is draped to the right-hand side of the round window, while a plum tree enters the image from upper left and stretches its branches, whose white blossoms signify that the season is late winter. Strikingly, the image is constructed in such a way that the paper surface of the hanging scroll itself seems to act as a plastered wall into which the painted window is carved. A distinct contrast is established between the flatness of the paper of the pictorial support and the multi-layered depth of the painted world. The artist creates this illusion of depth by suggesting the thickness of the wall at lower-left boundary of the window and overlapping a series of motifs located both inside and outside the round frame.

Further, Seiko employs various framing devices so that the figure appears to be simultaneously concealed and revealed, confined and freed. The thick curtain is tied back with a red sash, dynamically drawing it to the right and opening the aperture of the window to make visible the interior space that the figure occupies. The curtain also reveals the lower-left corner of a square window, implying that another wall exists behind the figure. The woman thus seems to

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\(^7\) For a stylistic analysis of this work, see also Martha J. McClintock, “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913): The Life and Arts of a Meiji Period Literati Artist” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1991), 231-233. Other extant examples of paintings of women that Seiko produced include *A Woman Embroidering* (*Shūjo-zu*, 1870s-80s, Koga City Museum of History), which depicts a young woman embroidering a pair of mandarin ducks and anticipating her soon-to-come marriage, and *Peach-Blossom Face* (*Jinmen tôka-zu*, 1892, private collection), which illustrates a love story associated with the poem composed by Cui Hu (*jinshi* 796) of the Tang dynasty (618-907) known as “At the Homestead South of the Capital.” For reproductions of these paintings, see *Okuhara Seiko ten—Okuhara Seiko gashitsu Shūsui sōdō ichiku kinen*, 20-21.
occupy a shallow space sandwiched between the wall of the paper support and a second wall that lies within the circular window. In contrast to the right-hand side of the round window, which implies the infinite expansion of space (due to the presence of a window within a window), the left-hand side of the image seems more complex and difficult to penetrate visually. The figure approaches the bamboo blind and seems to be holding the lower portion of the half-rolled shade. Her body faces toward the blind to the left, but she twists her face away from it to the right; the viewer is thus given a clear view of her entire face, as well as her left shoulder clad in a white Chinese-style robe (whose collar, especially, calls to mind the costumes that young female attendants wore at the Qing court). Thin, short, tremulous lines in various tonalities of ink delineate her nose and eyebrows (Figure 3.5d). Fine lines trace the shape of her eyes, and a tiny dot in dark ink is applied in the middle to create her pupils. Her small, slightly protruding lips are outlined in ink and tinted with red. The whiteness of her face contrasts with her red lips and thick black hair, on top of which a small yellow and red ornament rests. The contour of her face is not defined by strong lines but only implied by the bundles of hair that appear behind the figure’s left cheek. Dark wet ink suggests the thickness of her hair; on the left, however, her hair is rendered in drier ink applied with a thinner brush, evoking the visual effect of looking at it through a translucent blind. The shade has been rolled up to the height of the openwork window lattice, revealing the lower half of the woman’s body through the balustrade, while shrouding most of her upper torso behind the translucent screen. The raised blind makes visible the ends of her brilliant red sash and a piece of jewelry hung from her waist, but the geometric patterns of the window lattice, which are outlined in dark ink, partially obstructs our direct visual access to the figure. The woman’s fluttering sleeves underneath the blind seem to imply the force of a
billoowing gust of wind or a sense of her motion as she rolls the blind, subtly imbuing the seemingly static scene with an unexpected sense of instantaneity.

Moreover, the branches of plum blossoms that enter the pictorial field from the upper left twist and turn to create a dynamic, angular movement. These branches make an abrupt turn to the upper right in front of the blind, forming a crown-like frame above the head of the figure before merging with the curtain to the right. Seiko uses dark, saturated ink to depict some areas of the branches; this heavier application of ink contrasts with the fine, sketchy, and quivering lines that she employs to depict the figure, blind, and window frame. In fact, the artist accentuates the sense of delicacy that these fine lines convey, as she applies gold pigment to minute details that can be discerned only through close observation under natural light—e.g., the ornaments the figure wears on her hair and at her waist, the strings that bind the bamboo blind, and the large circular designs embroidered on the green curtain. These delicate details and subtle, faint lines make the subject appear almost illusory, rendering our glimpse of the beauty both ephemeral and precious.  

Seiko’s _Beauty by Plum and Window_ thus employs several formal and motivic framing devices to simultaneously reveal and conceal the figure. After all, it is the window that offers the viewer a glimpse of the figure, but it is through the window that the figure herself also gains a view of the outside world. Yet the window itself encloses the figure entirely; together with other artificial elements such as the lattice and blind, the window perhaps ultimately serves to convey a notion of confinement, for the figure is, quite physically, contained within the bounds of the window frame. In this way, we might read the image as following the conventions of

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8 McClintock has observed that the combination of “informal” “sketch-like” quality created by the use of ink and light color “with the luxuriousness of gold heightens the delicately secretive mood of the work, that is reinforced by the pensive expression on the woman’s face.” McClintock, “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913),” 231-232.
representing beauties, employing layers of frames to display the visually captivated beauty for the viewer’s scrutiny and pleasure. The simultaneous revelation and concealment of the figure might function to titillate the viewer’s voyeuristic interest. The partial veiling of the figure heightens the notion of revelation, providing the viewer with a sense of privileged visual access—a sense that the viewer has captured a fleeting glance at the beauty as she casually twists her head to look outside the window.

**Beautiful Woman Painting**

Seiko’s painting draws directly on earlier depictions of beautiful women, particularly Chinese works and later Japanese paintings inspired by them. While the immediate models for Seiko’s *Beauty by Plum and Window* will be discussed in detail below, a brief overview of the genre itself may first help to contextualize the seemingly conventional nature of Seiko’s work. Moreover, although the genre of depictions of beautiful women has a long history, that history has not received thorough scholarly attention, particularly in English, until relatively recently.9

As Miyazaki Noriko has noted, the term “beautiful woman painting” (*meiren hua* or *meinü hua*)
had already been in use in China by the Six Dynasties period (220-589). Women depicted in contemporary guise occupied a prominent place in Tang-dynasty (618-907) painting, the existence of which is well attested in texts and in recently excavated archaeological materials. Particularly fine examples can be found in the early eighth-century murals depicting palace ladies clad in loose, colorful clothes excavated from the anterooms of the tombs of Prince Yide and Princess Yongtai (Shaanxi History Museum, Xi’an; Figures 3.6 and 3.7). While the figures’ facial features are rendered in fine, barely inflected lines, strong supple lines (tomb of Prince Yide) or thin flowing lines (tomb of Princess Yongtai) are employed to delineate the folds of drapery, subtly conveying a sense of motion and accentuating the vertical lift of the women’s tall slender bodies. These habits of representation seem to have reached their apogee in the work of Zhou Fang (act. eighth century), whose legacy was perpetuated by Zhou Wenju (act. tenth century) and others in the court of the Southern Tang kingdom (937-976). Explicit representations of contemporary women, however, nearly disappeared during the Northern Song (960-1127), when women tended to be represented in the context of literary themes or were concealed in images of landscapes, birds, and flowers. At the same time, however, the scholar-official Li Gonglin (1049-1106) and his contemporary literati painters began to depict female figures (such as the goddesses from the “Nine Songs” of the Songs of the South) in an archaizing mode of monochrome painting, known as baimiao (literally, “white drawing”; J. hakubyō),

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10 Miyazaki, “Chūgoku ni okeru josei byōsha no tenkai,” 177-178. Miyazaki notes that women in these paintings are more commonly referred to as shinü in China.

11 For more on representations of women in Tang-dynasty art, see Saitō Shigeru and Saitō Ryūichi, Daitō ōchō josei no bi, exh. cat. (Nagoya: Chūnichi Shinbunsha, 2004).

12 Miyazaki, “Josei no kieta sekai—Chūgoku sansuizu no uchi to soto.”
which eschewed color to compose forms solely in finely executed ink lines. During the following generation, many copies of Tang-dynasty paintings of palace ladies were produced at Emperor Huizong’s (1082-1035; r. 1100-1126) court, the best known and most exquisite extant example of which is the handscroll *Court Ladies Preparing Newly Woven Silk* in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Figure 3.8).  

The monochromatic and polychromatic modes of figural representation that developed between the Tang and Northern Song dynasties played an important role in the subsequent florescence of the genre of beauty painting during the second half of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), particularly in the Jiangnan region of southeastern China. For example, a small handscroll known as *Courtesan Wuling Chun Seated by a Stone Table* produced by Wu Wei (1459-1508) reveals a professional painter’s attempt to manipulate *baimiao*, a technique originally associated with the scholar-official class, to represent a contemporary courtesan as a female literatus (Figure 3.9). In portraying an actual woman, the painting departs from Song convention of representing female figures as fictional characters derived from myths or literature. Meanwhile, both professional and literati painters (the distinction between whom

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became increasingly blurred around this time) began to create figure paintings in rich colors, as seen in Tang Yin’s (1470-1524) *Court Ladies of the Former Shu* (Figure 3.10) and Qiu Ying’s (1494-1522) *Spring Morning in the Han Palace* (Figure 3.11). Moreover, Tang Yin’s experience of copying earlier figure paintings such as the *Night Revels of Han Xizai*, which depicts the Southern Tang official Han Xizai (902-970) and his male acquaintances in the company of two female entertainers, led him to explore the new theme of pairing a portrait of a scholar-official with that of a courtesan. These pairings were further developed by late Ming painters such as Chen Hongshou (1598-1652), as seen, for example, in the collaborative handscroll *The Pleasure Outing of He Tianzhang* (Figure 3.12). In that scroll, He Tianzhang, whose individualized face was rendered with modeling by the professional portraitist Li Wansheng, sits in his garden with writing implements—the essential attributes of a literatus—to his side, while a woman (possibly his wife or concubine) is seated on a bed of banana-palm leaves, grasping a fan on which a plum tree is depicted against a deep blue background. Importantly, a significant corpus of beauty paintings with (forged) signatures of Tang Yin and Qiu Ying were imported to and circulated in Edo-period Japan, a phenomenon attested by the copies of Chinese paintings made by Kano-school artists such as *Tanyū shukuzu* (Small Sketches by Kano Tanyū).


18 The fan painting the woman holds depicts a young branch with plum blossoms shooting out from an old contorted trunk. Since the trunk served as a heroic symbol of endurance and rejuvenation, it might be possible that this painted plum might serve as “a delicate allusion to [He’s] continuing vigor” as James Cahill has noted in *The Compelling Image: Nature and Style in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 120. For a thorough study of the formation of the tradition of plum painting in China, see Maggie Bickford, *Ink Plum: The Making of a Chinese Scholar-Painting Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and idem, *Bones of Jade, Soul of Ice: The Flowering Plum in Chinese Art* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1985).

The practice of painting women without explicit literary pretexts continued into the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), which saw the rise of interest, particularly at court, in employing Western-style pictorial techniques to depict illusionistic spaces.\textsuperscript{20} As Kristina Kleutghen has shown, it was during this period when “the textual and visual motif of the sexually available woman at a threshold engaging an outside viewer evolved to become a standard feature of beautiful women paintings.”\textsuperscript{21} Simultaneously, outside the court, the subgenre of paintings of women by a moon window juxtaposed with a botanic motif rose to widespread popularity.\textsuperscript{22} A comparison with a typical painting of this type, crafted just a few decades before Seiko’s \textit{Beauty by Plum and Window}, will illuminate how Seiko perpetuated and transformed the conventions associated with this subgenre of beauty paintings. \textit{Resting on a Window, Viewing Flowers (Yichuang guanhua tu)}, a work by the late nineteenth-century Yangzhou artist Chen Chongguan (1838-1896), utilizes the vertical format of the hanging scroll to capture a beauty in a botanic setting (Figure 3.13). A woman in a red outer robe, who holds a fan and leans on the lower edge of a moon window, is depicted in the lower center of the composition. The curtain hung inside her room is drawn to the side so that the figure is exposed for the beholder’s delectation, a conceit commonly found in beauty paintings that Seiko also employs as one of the framing devices in her work. In Chen’s painting, however, both the figure and the window are depicted from an angle above the figure’s line of sight so that the viewer can observe the entire scene without directly confronting the woman. The figure’s oval face and her slender fingers peeking from her broad sleeve are


\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 243. In fact, the notion of “enticing from the balustrade” (guolan) is a euphemism for prostitution (ibid., 245; and Cahill, \textit{Pictures for Use and Pleasure}, 33).

\textsuperscript{22} An extensive collection of Qing-dynasty beauty paintings, including those that depict women by a circular window, is housed in the Kampo Museum (Kanpōkan) in Shiga Prefecture. For reproductions of these paintings, see Kanpōkan, ed., \textit{Shinchō no bijinga}, exh. cat. (Gokashō-chō, Kanzaki, Shiga: Nihon Shūji Kyōiku Zaidan, 1997). I thank Prof. Satō Yasuhiro for bringing this catalogue to my attention.
composed of the finest lines, while more inflected lines in darker ink describe the folds of her robes. Modulated lines that delineate the window frame disappear in the upper left, turning the window into a muted background motif. This subdued depiction of the circular frame contrasts with Seiko’s image, which includes the entire window frame to create an illusionistic effect.

Above the implied window frame, a willow branch—a symbol of youthful femininity—enters the composition from the right and creates an arch to encircle the figure from above. A series of long frail lines drawn in light ink and faint blue describe the soft branches that fall upon the figure like light showers. The delicate linearity of the willow contrasts with the inky wetness of the foreground, where rocks rendered in wet variegated ink nestle among clusters of small dots in various tonalities of blue and ink, possibly conveying a damp atmosphere. Branches bearing tiny pink flowers intersect above the rocks in the lower left of the composition. Ultimately, it is to these flowers that the figure seems to cast her gaze. By picturing a woman in a moment of preoccupation, and thereby implying her obliviousness to the spying gaze, the image allows the viewer to scrutinize the figure at leisure. Moreover, the inclusion of the object to which the figure casts her eyes contains her gaze within the pictorial frame, encouraging the viewer to examine both the looking subject and the object of her attention. The visual scenario of the painted scene thus appears self-contained and self-explanatory; no mystery or ambiguity is permitted. The object of the figure’s gaze in Seiko’s image, however, is not explicitly pictorialized, rendering the context more ambiguous.  

This type of imagery that was popularized in the Qing was brought to Japan—both in paintings and in printed media—by the eighteenth century, inspiring the production of images of

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women by a circular window not only in the literati manner of execution but also in other modes of representation including those of the Maruyama-Shijō, Akita Ranga, and ukiyo-e schools. A particularly exquisite example can be found in Ike no Taiga’s (1723-1776) *Woman in a Round Window* (*Ensō shijo-zu*; Figure 3.14), which is said to have been produced around 1750. In this small image (measuring only 19.4 x 13.5 cm), a young woman stands next to a bright red table inside a barely defined round window. The contours of her face and neck are drawn in ink lines that are so fine and light that they barely touch the surface of silk. By contrast, irregular, discontinuous lines in darker ink delineate her robes, which are rendered in various shades of green, red, and blue. Her sloping shoulders are so narrow that her outer robe has slipped down to her arms. Four slender stalks of ink bamboo emerge among clouds in the foreground and softly envelop the woman with their leaves. The frailty of the lines constituting the bamboo stalks that appear and disappear as they rise in an arc seems to convey the delicacy of the maiden herself, just as Chen Chongguang created an intricate web of willow branches cascading down upon the figure like misty rain. A similarly close juxtaposition between a female figure and a botanic motif can be found in Seiko’s *Beauty by Plum and Window*, whose implications shall be examined shortly. Here Taiga seems to evoke sound to reinforce the connection between the figure and the bamboo: shifting her head and exposing her left ear, the woman appears to listen

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to the sound of the rattling leaves, as Hoshino Suzu has observed.\(^{26}\) By suggesting the figure’s concentration on her aural faculty, Taiga’s painting seems to capture the maiden in a state of self-absorption, just as Chen Chongguang’s image appeared to seize upon the moment of the beauty’s visual captivation.

Further, Taiga’s use of the motif of a round window is noteworthy, as it subtly thematizes the full moon implied by the window’s shape. In fact, on top of the red table inside the room (whose brightness demands the viewer’s attention) rests a small vase containing grass and large leaves. The presence of these objects might indicate that the painted scene refers to the Moon Festival (or Mid-Autumn Festival), a celebration of the harvest moon held on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month. Indeed, the entire scene appears to be bathed in moonlight (a phenomenon that is also evoked in the poetic inscription in the upper left): the yellow color is visible through the woman’s skirt and outer robe, making her colorful garments look as though they are being illuminated; similarly, the bamboo leaves are brushed in different tonalities of ink as though to suggest that they are reflecting the lunar light. Further, as Hoshino has noted, shading in yellow, blue, and light ink is applied inside the window frame, creating a sense of space inside the room or possibly suggesting that the woman is actually inside the moon, thereby transforming the figure into a celestial being.\(^{27}\) The implied or physical presence of the moon thus provides the artist with a pretext to picture the woman in a luminous environment, literally staging her with a celestial spotlight. Such a representation of the figure in the luminous interior against the largely monochromatic exterior recalls the conventions of representing the literary trope of “peeking through the fence” (kaimami), a scene frequently found in early Japanese court

\(^{26}\) Hoshino, “Taiga shiron,” 36.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 41. As Nakamachi Keiko has suggested, the combination of a moon and bamboo might refer to the image of Princess Kaguya from the Tale of the Bamboo Cutter (Taketori monogatari). Nakamachi, “Nihon ni okeru ‘Tō bijin’ no kaigaka to sono imi,” 37.
literature such as the *Tale of Genji*. As Melissa McCormick has noted, in *kaimami* scenes, “the character doing the spying, usually male, is often drawn toward a brightly lit interior that bathes the person inside with illumination.”

Thematizing the luminosity of a full moon, Taiga’s image thus suggests a playful appropriation of the motif of a circular window in creating an image of a woman. Such fascination with the shape of a round window can also be found in Seiko’s *Beauty by Plum and Window*, which seems to transform the circular frame into an entrance into the pictorial realm that lies behind the surface of paper.

**Constructing the Persona of a Beautiful Woman**

The production of Seiko’s *Beauty by Plum and Window*, in fact, seems to have been inspired by a specific Qing-dynasty beauty painting. A *funpon* copy of a painting with a similar composition, which was formerly in Seiko’s personal collection, survives in the Koga City Museum of History (Figure 3.15). The uniformity of the brushstrokes and the sensitive yet stiff application of color suggest that this sketch might have been made by Seiko’s principal disciple and life-long companion Watanabe Seiran (1855-1918). The inscription on the *funpon* indicates that this sketch is a copy of a work by Gai Qi (1774-1829), a Qing-dynasty painter and poet active in Shanghai who was known to have been particularly skillful in painting female court attendants and Buddhist icons. In his creation of a style that emphasized quality of line, he is seen as having followed the manner of painting developed by Li Gonglin, Zhao Mengfu (1252-28

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29 On the creative use of this motif by painters of the Akita Ranga school, see Imahashi, *Akita ranga no kindai*, 245-350.

30 McClintock first introduced this *funpon* in her “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913),” 231. She has also noted that this sketch was made by Seiran. On the significance of copying in Seiko’s work, see Martha J. McClintock and Victoria Weston, “Okuhara Seiko: A Case of Funpon Training in Late Edo Literati Painting,” in *Copying the Master and Stealing his Secrets: Talent and Training in Japanese Painting*, ed. Brenda G. Jordan and Victoria Louise Weston (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press 2003), 116-146. For more on Seiran, see chapter 1 of this dissertation.
1322), and Chen Hongshou. Drawing on his mastery of line, Gai Qi also produced woodblock-printed illustrations for the novel *Dream of the Red Chamber (Honglou meng)* that include several images of women with round windows. The presence of the *funpon* in Seiko’s possession suggests that she might have seen the original work by Gai Qi or perhaps a painted copy of it. The *funpon* depicts a female figure inside a moon window in a composition very similar to Seiko’s *Beauty by Plum and Window*. Several important visual differences, however, set Seiko’s painting apart from the model. A crucial distinction lies in the way Seiko’s image includes a complete circular window, as well as a thick ornamental curtain drawn to the right, while the right-hand edge of the window is cropped in the sketch. By containing the entire circle and curtain, Seiko’s image dramatizes the sense of revelation implied by the partially rolled blind in the *funpon*, while turning the paper support of the hanging scroll into a plastered wall in the painted world. Moreover, in the *funpon*, the branches of a tree enter the image from the upper left, creating zigzagging lines to form a triangular shape above the head of the figure, in a manner similar to the movement of the plum tree that frames the figure in Seiko’s painting. The tree depicted in the *funpon*, however, bears pink flowers and blue and green leaves. The replacement of this lush botanic motif (likely suggesting late spring or summer) with plum blossoms (the first flowers to open in the late winter) in Seiko’s image transforms not only the season of the pictured scene but also the identity of the figure herself.

The inscription on the *funpon*, in fact, offers information crucial to identifying the subject of this image. It reads: “Study of *Waiting for the Swallow’s Return by the Bamboo Blinds*, copied

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The title *Waiting for the Swallow’s Return by the Bamboo Blinds* seems to be a reference to a line from “Spring Evening” (Chun wan), a poem about a woman’s longing for her absent lover, which was composed by the late Southern Song poet Xu Yanfu (act. mid-thirteenth century). The line reads:

The thin bamboo blinds are half rolled up, as roseleaf brambles rain down; [she] stands for a moment at dusk, waiting for the swallow’s return.

The *funpon* modeled after Gai Qi’s painting thus represents the moment when a woman rolls up her blind on a late spring evening and looks out her window in a hope of finding her lover returning to her. The image of a woman yearning for her absent lover in solitude is a theme frequently evoked in beauty paintings. By appropriating the composition of Gai Qi’s painting and picturing a woman behind a bamboo blind, Seiko’s *Beauty by Plum and Window* thus seems to perpetuate this conventional image of a solitary woman desiring to be reunited with her lover.

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32 The original inscription reads: 試巻湘簾待燕歸仿明玉壐薌人筆.

33 The full poem reads:

By the closed gate, spring deepens; passing guests are few.
As verdant shade returns, some [dots] of red fly forth.
The thin bamboo blinds are half rolled up, as roseleaf brambles rain down; [she] stands for a moment at dusk, waiting for the swallow’s return.

門掩春深過客稀，緑陰時復數紅飛。
疎簾半捲茶蘼雨，小立黃昏待燕歸.

Beijing daxue guwenxian yanjiusuo et al., eds., *Quan Song shi* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1998), 63:39734.

34 A similar image of a longing woman can also be found, for example, in the *Tales of Ise* (*Ise monogatari*), a tenth-century Japanese tale in prose and poetry, which became one of the most frequently read and pictured works of literature in medieval and early-modern Japan. Numerous beauty paintings survive from the Edo-period that pictorialize Section 23 of the *Tales*, in which a man suspecting his wife of having a lover hides in the shrubbery to watch her. She then puts on makeup and composes a poem that expresses her longing for her husband. The man renews his love for his wife and ceases his visits to his other lover. On the development of images inspired by this scene from explicit pictorializations of the *Tales* to single standing beauty paintings, see Okudaira Shunroku, “Ensaki no bijin: Kabun bijin-zu no ichishikei o megutte,” in *Nihon kaiga-shi no kenkyū*, ed. Yamane Yūzo Sensei Koki Kinenkai (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1989), 647-690.
By replacing the lush leafy tree of the original painting with plum blossoms, however, Seiko’s image adds another important dimension to constructing the figure’s persona.³⁵

Specifically, this juxtaposition of a solitary woman with flowering plums evokes the trope of the “plum-blossom beauty,” one of the major figures in Chinese poetic and pictorial imagery of plum blossoms.³⁶ The plum-blossom beauty emerged during the Southern Dynasties (420-589) and became codified by the late Song. As Maggie Bickford has convincingly shown, the plum’s “singular ability to flower in earliest spring and the solitary situation of that flowering” led poets and painters to treat the plant as a marker of both “singular superiority and abject isolation.”³⁷ Further, the short life of plum blossoms, as well as their vulnerability to wind, rain, and snow, turned the motif into an emblem of ephemerality, which was “greeted with a spirit of tender ambivalence, embracing pleasure and regret.”³⁸ Such ambivalence was also transposed onto the figure of a lonely woman who embodied the notion of the brevity of physical charms. In this way, the flowering plum and the solitary woman coalesced into a unified aesthetic of transience.³⁹ A crystallized manifestation of this personified aesthetic appears in *Meifei zhuan* (A Biography of Meifei), which presents a fictionalized biography of the tragic heroine Meifei (d. 756), the “Plum-Blossom Consort” to Emperor Xuanzong (685-762; r. 712-756). In the story, Meifei is displaced by her rival Yang Guifei (719-756) in the emperor’s favor, cast into obscurity,

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³⁵ The tree with pink flowers depicted in the *funpon* does not seem to resemble roseleaf brambles mentioned in Xu Yanfu’s poem. Since there were many variants of this poetic theme of a lovelorn woman waiting for her lover’s return, Gai Qi’s painting might not necessarily represent Xu Yanfu’s original poem but a later variant of this literary trope.

³⁶ For a thorough study of the development of plum imagery in China, see Bickford, *Ink Plum*. The following discussion of the figure of the plum-blossom beauty is indebted to this work.

³⁷ Ibid., 50.

³⁸ Ibid., 53.

³⁹ Ibid., 55.
and eventually dies at the hands of rebels. Significantly, the biography presents the heroine’s solitude as a sign of her being abandoned by the emperor, while associating the ephemeral quality of plum blossoms with the loss of her youth, beauty, and imperial favor. These newly established connections between transience, solitude, and abandonment facilitated the subsequent development of the literary figure of the plum-blossom beauty, whose isolation came to signal her lover’s betrayal and neglect.

**Beauty Painting and Male-Male Relationships**

The solitary woman standing under a plum tree in Seiko’s *Beauty by Plum and Window* then might be seen as an embodiment of these pervasive metaphors associated with the plum-blossom beauty. Both the position and gesture of the figure—e.g., standing by a window, holding a half-rolled blind, and looking outside—seems to evoke the trope of a woman waiting for her lover’s return. By replacing roseleaf brambles with plum blossoms and pairing the flowering plum with a cloistered woman, however, *Beauty by Plum and Window* adds further complexity to the beauty’s identity. Viewed in light of the persona of the plum-blossom beauty, the figure’s expression, with her gaze cast to the lower left, might appear introspective, possibly contemplating the loss of her lover’s attention, just as Meifei spent “long, lonely hours by writing poetry in which she compared her fleeting moment of favor to plum’s blossoming and falling between dawn and dusk.” Ultimately, both the woman waiting for the swallow’s return and the plum-blossom beauty, whose images seem to coalesce in the figure Seiko’s depicts, point to the physical absence of a man who is poignantly present in the woman’s mind. Neglected by her lover, the lonely woman in Seiko’s painting might be seen as pathetic and helpless, as she

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40 Ibid., 55-56.
41 Ibid., 56.
42 Ibid.
can only hope for the man’s visit before her charms fade away along with the tree’s falling flowers. The painting thus seems to be as much about the man for whom the beauty longs as it is about the woman herself. One of the pleasures of viewing *Beauty by Plum and Window*, then, lies in the way the painting allows the producer and/or the recipient of the work to occupy the position of the beauty’s absent lover and to become the man of her yearning and devotion.\(^{43}\)

The practice of exchanging paintings within a community of literati artists served as an essential means of constructing their tastes, sharing their values, and solidifying their relationships throughout much of the history of literati art in both China and Japan.\(^{44}\) The act of sending paintings of beautiful women (or those disguised as seemingly neutral images of plants and flowers) seems to have played a particularly significant role in constructing a relationship between the artist and the recipient. An especially compelling example of a beauty painting that seems to have facilitated such interpersonal bonding is a work by Watanabe Kazan (1793-1841) entitled *Courtesan* (*Geigi-zu*, also known as *Kōsho-zu*; Seikadō Bunko Art Museum; Figure 3.16), and dated to the tenth day of the sixth month of 1838.\(^{45}\) The painting depicts a woman seated on the floor against an empty background in the lower half of the hanging scroll. Her body creates a slight diagonal that recedes in space, as she bends her knees, steadies herself with her left hand, and tilts her head to the left. She holds a translucent round fan in front of her chest with a string attached to her right pinky. This contrived pose exposes some of the sexualized parts of her body and clothes, such as her wrists, revealed by the rolled-up sleeves, and her neckline,\(^{43}\)

\(^{43}\) Lara Blanchard suggests that Emperor Huizong’s *Court Ladies Preparing Newly Woven Silk* functions in a similar manner in her “Huizong’s New Clothes,” 111-135.

\(^{44}\) For a perceptive analysis of the role of painting in facilitating literati relationships, particularly during the mid-Ming dynasty, see Craig Clunas, *Elegant Debts: The Social Art of Wen Zhengming, 1470-1559* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004).

which is tinted with shell-white to suggest the application of white powder. A red inner robe
dyed in a technique known as *shibori-zome* (tie-dyeing) is also visible at her neck, in front of her
chest, and inside her sleeves; more suggestively, the hem of her white under-robe is visible in
between her bent legs. In fact, her kimono appears to be draped loosely on her body: a black sash
seems to be tied at her lower waist, and the front of her robes appears to be pulled together at her
neck as though to prevent them from falling and revealing her chest. The shapelessness of her
kimono in conjunction with her contrived pose seems to accentuate, rather than conceal, the body
that lies underneath the disheveled robes. Further, the composition of the painting constructs a
close relationship between the woman and the gazer. The implied presence of the floor at the
bottom of the composition (suggested by the position of the figure’s body and its sense of
weight) seems to extend beyond the pictorial frame and continue into the beholder’s space,
creating a sense that the artist/viewer shares the same space with the woman in the painting. The
specificity of the figure, suggested by her subtly individualized facial features, indicates that it is
a portrait of a particular woman rather than a generic image of an idealized beauty, as Satō
Yasuhiro has observed.\footnote{Ibid, 74; and 80-82. As Satō has noted, *Courtesan* shows limited use of modeling on the face, a characteristic that contrasts sharply with Kazan’s extensive use of more naturalistic modeling in his portraits of men. Kazan’s effort to use different degrees of modeling to differentiate men and women parallels the strategy of discrimination that can be found in *The Pleasure Outing of He Tianzhang*. Ibid., 78}
The individuality of the rumpled figure and the intimacy of the setting imply the possibility for an erotic interaction between the woman and her gazer.

In fact, the extensive calligraphic inscription brushed on the upper left of the scroll makes
the context of this painting’s production explicit, while also providing crucial information about
the potential function of this image.\footnote{For a transcription and detailed analysis of this inscription, see ibid., 75-77. The following discussion of the inscription is based on Satō’s analysis.} Kazan begins the inscription by discussing the practice
among Chinese literati artists of expressing their character by painting their favorite subjects and

\[\text{\footnote{Ibid, 74; and 80-82. As Satō has noted, *Courtesan* shows limited use of modeling on the face, a characteristic that contrasts sharply with Kazan’s extensive use of more naturalistic modeling in his portraits of men. Kazan’s effort to use different degrees of modeling to differentiate men and women parallels the strategy of discrimination that can be found in *The Pleasure Outing of He Tianzhang*. Ibid., 78}}\]
then sending those paintings to others as gifts. Wen Tong (1019-1079), he notes, painted bamboo; Zheng Sixiao (1241-1318), orchids; and the monk Zhongren (ca. 1051-1123), plums. He then mentions that, conversely, some literati might be characterized as much by their dislikes as by their passions. For example, Wang Yan (256-311) abhorred money, Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072) hated mosquitoes, and Su Shi (1037-1101) disliked chess. Kazan notes that his predilections are similar to those of Tang Yin and Chen Hongshou, for he does not enjoy wine or share a dream without the company of a beautiful woman. Claiming that a man who lacks appetite and desire is not a man, Kazan states that he has painted a portrait of his beloved courtesan and is sending it as a gift to Kensai (Kazan’s painting disciple Hirai Kensai; 1802-1856), posing a rhetorical question about whether Kensai would share the same taste. The inscription concludes with Kazan’s statement that his woman, who is adorned simply due to the sumptuary laws, looks like a lotus bud after rain.48 Significantly, Kazan claims the courtesan as his own by using the phrase “my woman” (wa ga gi). The motif of the wet lotus bud that he employs to describe his lover simultaneously elevates and sexualizes her, as it likens the purity of the courtesan in the pleasure quarters to that of a lotus bud rising above muddy water,49 while the wetness of the bud likely carries a sexual connotation as well. In fact, the painting thematizes this sense of wetness by emphasizing the transparency of the water fan (mizu uchiwa) the figure holds.50 More strikingly, the woman lightly bits the upper edge of the fan with her two teeth, which are visible below her red upper lip,51 thereby directing the viewer’s attention to her mouth.

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 77.
50 A water fan is coated in lacquer and dipped in water before fanning, which allows droplets of water to evaporate, creating a cool sensation for the person fanned (ibid., 73).
51 Ibid.
At the same time, the courtesan is also likened to another plant: the four letters brushed on her sash read “Clear wind, high knots,” referring to bamboo, the favorite subject of Wen Tong. Importantly, this four-character calligraphy is accompanied by a (painted) vermilion square seal, suggesting that the courtesan is wearing an item of clothing on which her lover brushed calligraphy and placed his seal. This gesture of inscribing and pressing a seal on the courtesan’s clothes might be seen as the artist’s attempt to claim ownership over the woman’s body, an attempt also made explicit in the inscription. Courtesan, then, presents the painter as the ultimate gazer who enjoys the privilege of possessing the woman as his erotic object. By presenting this painting as a gift to his student Kensai, Kazan conveys his intention of sharing with Kensai his prized object, as well as his intimate moments with her. In other words, the work acknowledges that Kensai is entitled to have a close relationship with his master by receiving this scroll, which allows him to share his master’s taste and to witness—or possibly experience—he intimacy with his cherished possession. Ultimately, Courtesan serves to confirm the male-male relationship between the artist and his follower through the objectification of a woman.

Although Seiko’s Beauty by Plum and Window presents a figure who is more idealized than Kazan’s individualized, personalized courtesan, given such a precedent for the practice of employing a beauty painting as a tool for solidifying the relationship between the producer and the recipient, it might be possible that Seiko’s scroll functioned in a similar manner. In fact, the final lines of the inscription indicate that Beauty by Plum and Window was commissioned by

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52 Ibid.

Ono Sannosuke (1846-1923) of Yonezawa in Yamagata Prefecture, one of Seiko’s most important patrons along with the Hasegawa family (discussed in the previous chapter). Initially serving as a bodyguard for Uesugi Mochinori (1844-1919), the last lord of Yonezawa domain, Sannosuke went to Tokyo as a non-commissioned officer (*kashikan*) of the Tokyo Garrison (Tokyo chindai) in 1872. Although Seiko and Sannosuke are known to have met at a party hosted by Kido Takayoshi in 1870, it was in 1872 that Sannosuke first visited Seiko’s studio in Shitaya, Tokyo. He later embarked on a variety of new businesses in Yonezawa, including establishing the postal service, constructing a railroad, and reeling silk; he is also said to have been the first person to introduce the rickshaw to Yonezawa. The friendship between Seiko and Sannosuke continued throughout their lives; when Seiko traveled in northern Japan in 1900, she is known to have stayed at Sannosuke’s house in Yonezawa for twenty-two days.55

An explicit memento of the friendship between the painter and the patron, a handscroll dated 1909 that playfully recounts Sannosuke’s initial visit to Seiko’s studio, survives in a private collection (Figures 3.17a to 3.17f). The scroll begins with an image of Sannosuke dressed in officer’s attire and standing outside the door to Seiko’s studio, while two figures (possibly Seiko’s attendants) look out to greet him (Figure 3.17a). The inscription indicates that the image represents Mr. Ono’s first visit to Seiko in March 1872 when peach blossoms were in full bloom. Suddenly, however, we find the rolled edge of a handscroll painted within the actual scroll (Figure 3.17b). This intra-pictorial scroll transports the viewer to an imaginary world of Sinitic ancients. Here, an attendant fans his master as he sleeps on the floor, while another man seated at

54 To my knowledge, no written public record of Sannosuke’s life survives; this brief biography is largely based on my interview with his descendants on December 13, 2013, and December 28, 2014. I thank the Ono family for their generosity in sharing their family history with me. For a concise biography of Sannosuke, see also Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, ed., *Okuhara Seiko ten—Okuhara Seiko gashitsu Shūsui sōdō ichiku kinen*, exh. cat. (Koga: Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, 2010), 49.

55 Ibid.
a table prepares to paint as his servant grinds ink (Figure 3.17c). Then, we see two figures standing at the gate to a residence (Figure 3.17d). This scene is followed by a depiction of two old recluses who are accompanied by attendants carrying books, scrolls, and a canopy (Figure 3.17e). The picture concludes with an image of two figures enjoying a banquet (Figure 3.17f). The inscription toward the end of the scroll suggests that this handscroll was completed for Mr. Ono in the first month of 1909. By clearly marking the boundary between reality and fantasy—that is, beginning the scroll with a visual narration of an actual event and then painting a scroll within the physical scroll where figures and their activities are fantasized according to literary themes—Seiko seems to playfully showcase her performance as a recluse and invites her patron to join her imagination.

Given the close relationship Seiko seems to have enjoyed with Sannosuke and their shared desire to embody reclusive ideals, it is possible that in creating *Beauty by Plum and Window*, Seiko might have performatively inhabited the conventional persona of a literatus to become a subject who desires a woman and who shares that desire with the patron.56 In other words, Seiko might have employed the conservative motif of a solitary beauty to create a space where she could perform an alternative gender identity. The persona of the beauty and her relationship to the viewer, however, become more complex when the painting is viewed in relation to the extensive calligraphic inscription that fills the area beneath the painting. In fact, consideration of the inscription suggests that the painting scroll as a whole likely functioned in multiple ways at once.

56 I thank Prof. Melissa McCormick for this insight.
Multiplying the Modes of Engagement

The most prominent component of the entirety of the *Beauty by Plum and Window* hanging scroll, at least physically, is not the painting itself but the calligraphic inscription that dominates the lower two-thirds of the work (Figure 3.5e). An examination of the style and content of the inscription in relation to the painting opens up new possibilities for interpreting and engaging with the scroll as a whole. *Beauty by Plum and Window*, in fact, seems to embody a tension between the image and the text. The painting conveys a sense of delicacy through its use of thin lines, subdued colors, and minute details applied in gold. By contrast, a sense of vibrating energy invigorates the calligraphic inscription below: each character presents a distinctive appearance as each is brushed with variegated brushstrokes and different tonalities of ink. This stylistic contrast between painting and calligraphy differentiates Seiko’s *Beauty by Plum and Window* from the other beauty paintings examined above, in which the fine, flowing lines of the inscription seem to resonate with the frail delicacy of the painted figure, turning the entire work into a precious object—a phenomenon best exemplified in Taiga’s *Woman with a Round Window* (Figure 3.14).

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57 McClintock has noted the uniqueness of this composition in Seiko’s oeuvre, stating that *Beauty by Plum and Window* “is one of the few, possibly the sole, work where Seiko used a painting as an adjunct to a poem, as opposed to her more common use of a minor inscription in service to an overall painting structure.” McClintock, “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913),” 232.

58 The boldness and idiosyncrasy of this calligraphic style, however, begin to appear subdued when compared to the dynamic, Zheng Xie-inspired mode of calligraphy that Seiko employed in the early Meiji period. The inscription on *Beauty by Plum and Window*, in fact, displays the mature style of her Kumagaya-period calligraphy, which still retains the syncopated rhythm of Zheng’s calligraphy but no longer dramatizes the disparity of scale, the distortion of form, and the acrobatic movement of the brush, seen in works such as *Reed Flowers in Autumn Wind* (Figure 1.12a). Seiko began to develop this quieter mode of calligraphic inscription shortly before her relocation to Kumagaya in 1891. In *Beauty by Plum and Window*, the characters are largely square in shape and are relatively consistent in size; the absence of any upward tilt to the right removes the sense of kinetic energy that filled her earlier calligraphy. Although each character (or each part of a character) seems to have its own predilections, the slow speed of the brush imbues the entire calligraphy with a sense of deliberateness. On Seiko’s calligraphic style during the 1890s and early 1900s, see McClintock, “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913),” 210-211, 220-221, and 229-230.
Seiko’s inscription is based on a series of poems by Jin Nong (1687-1764), one of the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou, who was particularly renowned for his paintings of plum blossoms. The inscription might be translated as follows:

At my neighbor’s to the east, all the seats are filled, and the pipes and strings noisily play away; by the hut to the west, carriages and horses clatter all day long.

It is only this old man who covets a nap at midday;

after the plum blossoms bloomed, I have not opened my doors.

Wild plum blossoms are like thorns filling the river bridge;

but there is another scene that is unaffected by the spring.\(^{59}\)

I finish painting and look at my work, still cherishing [the painting or myself].

I ask the blossoms: after all, to whom shall I give [my painting]?

[The blossoms] cast slanting shadows on the western side of the old wall;

almost all of the blossoms have already opened.

This east wind is so deceitful,

randomly blowing, tumultuously felling [the blossoms], and causing them to be muddied.

Along the post road, the shadows of the plum blossoms hang upside down;

my feelings of separation intertwine with my yearnings [for my friend].

In recent days, my old friend has parted from me;

I break off a branch, [but] to whom should I send it?

Ninth day of the ninth month of 1907

Painted at the Shūsuisōdō [Seiko’s atelier in Kumagaya]

I borrowed and recorded this poem by Jin Shoumen [Jin Nong], and I refined and corrected it for Mr. Ono [Sannosuke].

Seiko Chō\(^{60}\)

東鄰滿坐管絃鬨 西舍朝終車馬喧

只有老夫貪午睡 梅華開後不開門

野槑如棘滿江津 別有風光不受春

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\(^{59}\) This line seems to imply that plum blossoms enjoy their own sense of timely seasonality that is unaffected by the spring. I thank Prof. Wai-yee Li for this suggestion.

\(^{60}\) This translation is based on the partial translation of the poem provided in Kim Karlsson, Alfreda Murck, and Michele Matteini, eds., *Eccentric Visions: The World of Luo Ping* (Zürich: Museum Reitberg Zürich, 2009), 280-281. I am very grateful to Profs. Wai-Yee Li and Manling Luo for helping me interpret and translate this poem. Parts of this poem appear in numerous paintings of plum blossoms by Jin Nong. For reproductions of these images, see, for example, Matteini, *Eccentric Visions*, 245; Jin Nong, *Jin Nong shuhua ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1996), figs. 18 and 29; and Jin Nong, *Jin Nong shuhua ji* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1998), figs. 83, 105, 115, 116, 130, 137, 203.
Surprisingly, the poem seems to be composed from the perspective of an old recluse. The male subjectivity of the poem is clear from the use of the term “old man” (Ch. laofu; J. rōfu) in the third line. Indeed, the first four lines of the poetry are crucial to interpreting the persona of the poetic subject. The old man is situated in a noisy, chaotic environment; he has been so disdainful of the world that he has not opened his doors since the plum blossoms bloomed. In other words, the poetic subject conveys his determination to seclude himself from the mundane world to pursue an eremitic life, a course of action that Seiko herself enacted in Kumagaya.

Jin Nong’s works often embody a stylistic tension between painted plums and inscribed poetry. For example, in his album of Plum Blossoms dated 1757 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, delicate plum blossoms rendered in fluid lines and dripped ink and rugged tree trunks painted with broad brushstrokes in wet ink contrast with the chiseled quality and blade-like sharpness of Jin’s characteristic script, which he developed around 1743 by drawing inspiration from the graphic nature of sixth-century northern stele inscriptions (Figures 3.18a and 3.18b). 62

61 I thank Prof. Wai-yee Li for this insight.

62 Bickford, Bones of Jade, Soul of Ice, 135; Matteini, Eccentric Visions; 242-245; and Jonathan Hay, “Culture, Ethnicity, and Empire in the Work of Two Eighteenth-Century ‘Eccentric’ Artists,” RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics, no. 35 (Spring 1999): 201-223, esp. 204. Hay argues that the “power and resonance of Jin’s new script lies in its willful difference from canonical norms, this difference in turn being conditioned by the cultural disturbance that the Qing state’s consecration of non-Chinese writing systems of different kinds created…. As a private engagement with empire…Jin’s script may perhaps be best understood as a utopian attempt to bring the Manchu-introduced writing systems within the orbit of Chinese writing. As such, it may be considered one of numerous efforts to preserve the comforting illusion that the Manchus were being sinicized, and that the Han Chinese cultural center could hold under the strain, not of conquest, but of Manchu dynastic success” (ibid., 206). Alfreda Murck has discussed the dichotomous meanings associated with the outlined and dripped-ink modes of
Although the deliberately idiosyncratic style of calligraphy with which Jin Nong’s poem is inscribed on Seiko’s *Beauty by Plum and Window* is very different from Jin’s crisply carved script, it might nevertheless represent an attempt to appropriate his differing approaches to painting and calligraphy within a single work. As was noted in the first chapter, Seiko owned a copy of an album of paintings of plum blossoms with calligraphic inscriptions by Jin Nong in the collection of Kido Takayoshi (Figure 1.17). The stylistic contrast between image and text in *Beauty by Plum and Window*, in fact, resonates with a series of tensions the poetic inscription embodies.

The pairing of an old solitary man with blooming plums mentioned in the first segment of the poetry points to another trope ubiquitous in plum painting and literature—that is, what Bickford calls the “flowering-plum recluse,” a figure that emerged as “an appropriate visual vessel for the scholar’s idealized self-image” during the Song dynasty. In contrast to the plum-blossom beauty who was united with fragile flowers in their shared notion of ephemerality, the flowing-plum recluse was associated with the branches and trunk of an old plum tree whose “ability to sustain damage, to send out young shoots from battered boughs, and to flower in old age” turned the tree into an emblem of endurance and regeneration. While the solitude of the plum-blossom beauty was seen as a result of neglect inflicted by a man, the isolation of the

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64 Ibid., 60.
flowering-plum recluse was upheld as a heroic act of resolute seclusion. The first four lines of Jin Nong’s poem inscribed on Seiko’s scroll appear, for example, in the eleventh leaf in his 1757 album of Plum Blossoms (Figure 3.18a). Appropriately, the image on this leaf depicts a thick rugged trunk in wet variegated ink that dynamically swerves in a chevron-like shape; thinner branches baring blossoms shoot out from either side of the trunk, evoking the idea of regeneration and reinforcing the identity of the old man in the poem as a flowering-plum recluse.

Since the first lines of the poetic inscription on Beauty by Plum and Window specifically identify the poetic subject as an old recluse, it is possible to read the rest of the poem through this persona of the flowering-plum hermit. The various (and seemingly contradictory) images of plums that the extensive poetic composition creates, however, point to the possibility of reading the poem from other perspectives. For example, there is a slight temporal disjunction within the inscription: while the first four lines indicate that the plum blossoms have already passed the peak of their season, the third segment seems to travel back in time as it notes that not all of the blossoms have opened. Moreover, the third segment of the inscription creates an image of partially bloomed blossoms whirling in the deceptive wind and becoming soiled on the ground; such an image is evocative of the fragility and transience of the plum-blossom beauty rather than the integrity and perpetual renewal of the flowering-plum recluse. Thus, although Jin Nong’s poem as it is inscribed on Beauty by Plum and Window begins by specifying the poetic subject as an old hermit, the internal inconsistencies of its imagery seem to challenge such a one-directional interpretation of the subject’s identity. Indeed, this plurality of poetic voice makes sense given that Jin Nong is known to have “developed a repertory of form-types and compositions [of plum painting], along with stock poetic and prose inscriptions, which he combined and recombined in

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65 Bickford calls these dichotomous tropes as “pathetic and heroic modes of representation” (ibid., 63).
work after work [so that no] matter how often he used them the result always seemed intended for the recipient alone.”  

In other words, the composite nature of his poetry might be seen as a result of his strategy of customization. It is unclear whether Seiko herself combined these particular lines from Jing Nong’s collection of poetry or whether this set of poems was available to her prior to her production of this scroll. Nevertheless, the inscription on Beauty by Plum and Window can be seen an amalgam of four separate poetic segments that seem to be composed from different perspectives.  

As a result, the hybrid nature of the poetic inscription on Beauty by Plum and Window opens up possibilities for engaging with the poem through multiple personas—e.g., male and female, old and young, and recluse and beauty. This instability of the subject position is particularly significant in interpreting the final four lines of the inscription, which concern the motif of a broken branch of plum. Since a blossoming plum branch “served as a symbol of failed or impossible communication, of unbridgeable separation of friends or lovers,” it is possible to read these lines from the perspectives of both the flowering-plum recluse and the plum-blossom beauty. If this section was read as a continuation from the first part of the inscription, then the figure holding a plucked branch of plum can be seen as referring to the old hermit who laments his inability to reach his parted friend. The same figure of longing, however, can also be viewed as a personification of the falling and soiled blossoms described in the third segment of the inscription. If these final lines are read in a feminine voice, then this poetic figure with a broken branch compellingly resonates with the painted beauty by the circular window, thereby reinforcing her sense of isolation, vulnerability, and melancholy caused by her lover’s betrayal.

66 Bickford, Bones of Jade, Soul of Ice, 134-135.
67 I am grateful to Prof. Wai-yee Li for this suggestion.
68 Bickford, Ink Plum, 68.
Seiko, in fact, owned a painting (possibly of Chinese origin) which depicts a woman standing by a circular window with a draped curtain, surrounded by plum blossoms and, most significantly, holding a broken branch of plum in her hand (Figure 3.19). It is likely that she had an image of a woman such as this in mind when reading and inscribing these particular lines of Jin Nong’s poetry.69

Moreover, the juxtaposition of the painted beauty with Jin Nong’s poem seems to facilitate new ways of interpreting the persona of the beauty herself. If the eremitic ideals described most explicitly in the first segment of the inscription are projected onto the woman in the painting, it becomes possible to read her solitude as a broader metaphor. Seen in this new light, the beauty no longer appears to be a mere object of an erotic gaze or a confirmation of a male-male relationship, but a noble subject with interiority with whom the beholder might identify. It was, in fact, not uncommon for male litterateurs to project their reclusive ideals onto women and to express their sentiments in a feminine voice. A poem known as “A Fair Lady” (“Jia ren”) composed by the Tang-dynasty poet Du Fu (712-770) is one of the best known examples of this poetic convention. In it, Du Fu describes a beautiful woman of a noble family who is forced into seclusion because of political circumstances (possibly a reference to the An Lushan Rebellion of 755, which devastated the poet’s own life); there she suffers from poverty, famine, and her husband’s betrayal, plucking flowers aimlessly and resting by bamboo in thin

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69 This painting in a fan shape is one of twelve fans mounted onto six-panel folding screen, which was originally in Seiko’s personal collection and is now housed in the Koga City Museum of History. The artist of this painting has not been identified. I thank Kurai Naoko and Tateishi Takayuki for letting me know about this work. The final four lines of Jin Nong’s poetry inscribed on Seiko’s scroll also appear in the ninth leaf of Jin Nong’s Plum Blossoms (Figure 3.18b). The focus of this leaf on plum blossoms clinging to the tips of branches contrasts with the emphasis on the tree trunk painted on the eleventh leaf (Figure 3.18a), which (as noted above) seems to suggest the integrity and determination of the old recluse in the inscription. The ninth leaf depicts thin intertwining branches cascading from the upper right to the lower left of the composition. Some of the flowers are outlined, while others are painted in the dripped-ink method, suggesting different tones of petals. The visual focus on the blossoms on thin swaying branches seems to convey a sense of fragility and ephemerality as though to suggest the vulnerability of the solitary figure who longs for a companion.
robes. As Wai-yee Li has observed, “the image of the beauty as a recluse [in Du Fu’s “A Fair Lady”] is a transparent analogue for the poet himself.” Poems such as this demonstrate the fluidity of gender identification in composing and interpreting poetry. A male recluse could, and seemingly often did, express his sentiments through the eyes of a secluded maiden. Further, as

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70 Du Fu’s “A Fair Lady” reads, in Stephen Owen’s translation, as follows:

There is a fair lady, the fairest of the age,  
who lives hidden away in a bare valley.  
She says she is the child of good family,  
lost and fallen among the trees.  
Before, when ruin befell Guanzhong,  
her brothers were slaughtered.  
Needless to say she was of a high official’s family,  
but could not get to gather their bones.  
The age hates those fallen in fortune,  
all things blow with a candle in the wind.  
Her husband was a man of shallow feeling,  
his new bride was lovely as jade.  
Even the close-at-dusk can tell the time,  
mandarin ducks do not spend nights alone.  
He saw only the new bride smiling,  
how could he hear the old wife weep?  
In the mountains the spring water is pure,  
leaving the mountains the spring water grows muddy.  
Her maidservant returns from selling her pearls,  
she pulls creepers to patch her thatched roof.  
She plucks flowers but doesn’t stick them in her hair,  
picked cypress always fill her hands.  
The weather is cold, her azure sleeves are thin,  
at twilight she rests by tall bamboo.

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71 I thank Prof. Wai-yee Li for discussing this poem with me.
Bickford has noted, although the flowers mentioned in Du Fu’s poem are unspecified, Song artists “inserted a flowering plum tree in [their] evocation of the poem because Song painters, like Song poets, recognized the kinship between solitary women and flowering plums. Thus late Song plum poetry abounds with allusions to Du Fu’s ‘Fine Lady,’ while contemporary pictures inspired by the poem include the flowering plum as a sympathetic attribute of his matchless beauty grieving alone in the wilds.”\(^2\) Given the canonical status of Du Fu and his poetry (at least in the traditional education based on the Chinese classics that Seiko and Sannosuke seem to have received), it is possible that the juxtaposition of a woman and a plum tree in Seiko’s *Beauty by Plum and Window* might have evoked Du Fu’s poem in the minds of Seiko and her patron. In other words, in creating and viewing the scroll, Seiko might have identified herself with celebrated Chinese poet-officials such as Du Fu to become a male subject who expresses his nuanced feelings through the image of a beautiful woman.

Such semantic multiplicity is indeed inherent to the art of plum poetry and painting, particularly the genre of “ink plum” (Ch.: *momei*) painting. As Bickford has argued:

> Whatever the dominant values assigned to *mei* [plum] in the scholar’s iconography of virtue, the tension between the heroic and pathetic, between the unyielding and vulnerable, between hope and despair, and between the ideal (or idealized self) and reality is characteristic of great *momei* painting and poetry…. [The] underlying feminine presence and potential access to it gives *momei* its peculiar capacity for expressive nuance, and that gives the painter who chooses plum the opportunity to embody both his idealistic convictions and his pressing vulnerability in flowering-plum branches and blossoms.\(^3\)

Seiko’s *Beauty by Plum and Window* therefore brings out the semantic nuance and complexity of plum imagery to its fullest potential by juxtaposing an image of a beautiful woman with a complex calligraphic inscription of poetic lines to generate new possibilities for engagement with

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\(^2\) Bickford, *Bones of Jade, Soul of Ice*, 49.

\(^3\) Ibid., 64.
the work as a whole. Ultimately, it is the agency of the assemblage of pictorial and poetic
conventions coalesced in the scroll that allows the viewer to engage with the object from
multiple different subject positions, thereby allowing her to transgress gender and cultural
boundaries.

This mode of artistic engagement, which allows the viewer to simultaneously inhabit
multiple subject positions or switch back and forth between them, seems to have held a particular
importance to Seiko’s secluded life in Kumagaya. In a two-part essay on his visit to Seiko
published in Kaiga sōshi (Journal of Painting) in 1901, the painter Watanabe Hakumin (dates
unknown) offers a rare glimpse into the intimate moments of Seiko’s solitary life.74 It suggests
the artist’s inner conflict between her desire to socialize with like-minded people in a convenient
urban environment and her abhorrence of the distractions accompanying city life. Seiko notes
that although she succeeded in averting vulgar visitors, the friends with whom she could discuss
calligraphy, painting, and poetry, too, did not frequent her rustic retreat. In order to entertain
herself in seclusion, she often took out antique scrolls of calligraphy and painting from her
collection and appreciated them, or she had them remounted. When the summer heat made it
difficult for her to paint, she abandoned painting and instead composed Chinese-style poems.
She says she produced between five and six hundred poems each year so that she could choose
and inscribe them on her paintings at a later date. She also took delight in punctuating and
critiquing her own poems. Most strikingly, Seiko claims that she constructed imaginary selves
with different sobriquets; these include the composing self (sakusha no watashi), the critiquing

74 Watanabe Hakumin, “Bushū kikō, fu Okuhara Seiko joshi hōmonki,” Kaiga sōshi 176 (1901): 6-7; Watanabe
Hakumin, “Bushū kikō, fu Okuhara Seiko joshi hōmonki (jozen),” Kaiga sōshi 177 (1901): 5-7. There articles are
discussed in greater detail, in relation to the construction of Seiko’s identity as a “true recluse,” in the next chapter.
self (hyōsha no watashi), and the observing self (bōkan no watashi).\textsuperscript{75} It is the imagined interactions between these multiple selves who play different roles in the process of producing poetry that seem to have given Seiko endless joy. She suggests that this mental role-playing allowed her to compose poems from multiple perspectives.\textsuperscript{76} Given her habit of engaging with her own poetry through constructed personas, it is likely that Seiko might have found pleasure in engaging with \textit{Beauty by Plum and Window} from the multiple subject positions constructed through both image and text.

**Conclusion**

Watanabe’s account was part of a body of writings on the figure of Okuhara Seiko that dramatically burgeoned in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this process of discursive construction, Seiko gained a new identity as a “true recluse,” suggesting that her retreat to Kamikawakami, following her success in the metropolis, came to be seen as an enactment of the literati ideal of eremitism—an ideal she profusely visualized in her paintings in 1870s Tokyo. Simultaneously, the “masculinity” that was perceived both in Seiko’s appearance and in her works became increasingly problematized in contemporary discourse on the artist. In this context, Seiko’s decision to remove herself entirely from the metropolitan art scene and to engage with literati art through imaginary personas seems to have served as a powerful means of disengaging with the actual world by claiming possession of an alternative universe.

Seiko’s decision to pursue a reclusive life contrasts with that of Noguchi Shōhin (1847-1917), another female literati painter who rose to prominence precisely around the time of Seiko’s retirement by effectively integrating herself into the newly constructed institutional

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 7.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.

Significantly, Shōhin instrumentalized her painted works and autobiographical essays to shape her public identity as a paragon of femininity, thereby participating in the state-sponsored construction of the “good wife, wise mother” paradigm (\textit{ryōsai kenbo}).\footnote{On \textit{ryōsai kenbo}, see, for example, Koyama Shizuko, \textit{Ryōsai kenbo to iu kihan} (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 1991), 14-24; an English translation of this book is available in idem, \textit{Ryōsai Kenbo: The Education Ideal of “Good Wife, Wise Mother” in Modern Japan}, trans. Stephen Filler (Leiden: Brill, 2013). See also Kathleen Uno, “Womanhood, War, and Empire: Transmutations of ‘Good Wife, Wise Mother’ before 1931,” in \textit{Gendering Modern Japanese History}, ed. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), 493-519.} Ultimately, she became the first woman painter to be appointed official artist of the Imperial Household (\textit{teishitsu gigei’in}) in 1904.\footnote{On Imperial Household artists, see, for example, \textit{Kindai bijutsu no kyojin tachi—teishitsu gigei’in no sekai}, exh. cat. (Tokyo: Santō Bijutsukan, 1996).} By the early 1900s, Seiko and Shōhin came to be perceived as gendered opposites—Seiko embodying “masculine strength and boldness” (\textit{dansei-tekino tsuyosa to futosa}), Shōhin representing “feminine weakness and fineness” (\textit{josei-tekino yowasa to hososa}).\footnote{Ishii Hakutei, “Okuhara Seiko,” \textit{Chūō bijutsu} 3, no. 7 (July 1917): 147. See also Umezawa Seiichi, \textit{Nihon nangashi} (Tokyo: Nanyōdō Honten, 1919), 994-995.} In other words, the figures of Okuhara Seiko and Noguchi Shōhin served as a platform where contested notions of masculinity and femininity, among other issues, could be debated and negotiated. It is to the discursive constructions of these artists in relation to the shifting conceptions of art and gender that we will turn in the next chapter and epilogue.
Chapter 4

Female Masculinity: Discursive Constructions of “Okuhara Seiko”

In 1875 an article in the newspaper *Yūbin hōchi shinbun* (Postal News) proclaimed that two things had come to be sold nonstop in Tokyo since the Meiji Restoration of 1868: Hōtan, a medicine for intestinal problems that was said to prevent cholera, and paintings executed by Okuhara Seiko.¹ According to the reporter, “Hōtan’s slogan that it is capable of reviving the dead is no empty boast.” Seiko’s Chinese-style paintings, meanwhile, were celebrated for the physical power that they were seen to exude: “It is said that the tip of her brush can wipe away one thousand armies, while her mighty arms can lift great weights. Thus, most other painters are overwhelmed [by her] and shrink away.”² Significantly, the reporter interprets Seiko’s brushwork and body in virile, even militaristic terms; her mighty brush, wielded by her even mightier arms, is capable of obliterating armies and intimidating her male peers. It seems, then, that it was a specifically masculine type of power that made Seiko’s paintings desirable at this transformative moment in the early Meiji period.

This reporter’s perception of the physical virility of Seiko’s paintings likely derived from the widely shared perception of the artist as a “masculine woman.” As was discussed in the previous chapters, from 1871 until 1882, she ran a school of painting, calligraphy, and Chinese studies in Tokyo, where she was celebrated for her dynamic ink paintings and her idiosyncratic

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¹ “Fuka zappō,” *Yūbin hōchi shinbun*, September 29, 1875.

style of calligraphy. Significantly, throughout much of her life, Seiko dramatically cropped her hair and audaciously dressed in men’s kimono. Renowned for acting and speaking like a “man,” she intermingled freely not only with other male artists but also with influential politicians. Yet in 1891, nearly two decades after this newspaper article was published, Seiko suddenly withdrew from the metropolitan art world and retired to the quietude of Kumagaya to pursue the life of a “true recluse,” the eremitic ideal celebrated in the tradition of East Asian literati culture examined in chapter 1.

Strikingly, the moment of Seiko’s retirement—that is, the moment when this “masculine” female painter who so fascinated early Meiji critics stepped out of the public eye—coincided with the rise to popularity of Noguchi Shōhin (1847-1917), a female literati painter who came to be esteemed as an epitome of feminine virtue. Unlike Seiko, who did not write about herself or directly intervene in the discursive construction of her public image, Shōhin actively participated in the creation of her artistic identity by frequently inscribing her femininity into the writings that she published in books, newspapers, and, most importantly, newly created women’s magazines. By the first decade of the twentieth century, Shōhin had secured a prominent place in the art world as a successful painter who was also celebrated as a gentle, modest, womanly woman.

What were the factors that contributed to the sudden displacement of the “masculine” painter Seiko by the quintessentially “feminine” Shōhin in the art world of the 1890s? How did these artists come to be perceived as gendered opposites? In other words, why did journalists, artists, and social critics capitalize on Seiko’s masculine character and Shōhin’s feminine modesty at the times that they did and to what ends? Further, how did the artists themselves respond to the construction of their public persona? More broadly, how was the relationship
between art and gender conceived, and how did that conception transform over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? 3

In this chapter and in the following epilogue, I argue that Seiko’s retirement and Shōhin’s rise to success were deeply imbricated with the new conceptions of art and gender that were taking shape at this transformative moment. Seiko capitalized on the unprecedented rise of literati art, as well as the open atmosphere, of the early years of the Meiji period, sporting short hair and men’s clothes and intermingling freely with other male literati. In the mid-Meiji era, however, the public denunciation of bunjinga coincided with the increasing restrictions against women’s political and social rights. Seiko’s departure from Tokyo in 1891, therefore, allowed her to escape such gendered constraints, while enabling her to embody the literati ideal of eremitism. Seiko’s absence from the metropolitan art scene, as well as her disinterest in actively constructing her persona in public writing, encouraged various journalists, artists, critics, and educators to create dramatic stories that sensationalized her masculine appearance and character. However, it was in the early twentieth century, especially after her death, that Seiko’s gender and sexual identity became problematized, as female masculinity came to be perceived as a pressing social issue within the context of the modernization of the Japanese nation. Indeed, social critics saw the rise in women’s wage employment following the economic deprivation of the 1910s as a sign of the increasing “masculinization of women,” while sexologists deployed the rhetoric of scientific knowledge to pathologize the female masculinity that they identified in Seiko.

On the other hand, as women became tied to the domestic sphere of the home, art came to be seen as essential to women’s fulfillment of their socially prescribed roles as wives and

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3 Martha J. McClintock has raised the important point that authors of personal reminiscences and biographical entries on Seiko never failed to mention her “masculine” qualities. I take this insight as the starting point of my analysis in this chapter. Martha J. McClintock, “Okuhara Seiko (1837-1913): The Life and Arts of a Meiji Period Literati Artist” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1991), 14.
mothers. Many cultural critics asserted that art enhanced women’s feminine virtues and refined their taste, enabling them to cultivate their homes as microcosms of the nation. Moreover, at the turn of the century, debates concerning women’s wage employment led some artists and educators to propose ways in which women could utilize art to contribute economically to the state; meanwhile, others sought to employ art to promote women’s financial independence as artists and art instructors. Importantly, Shōhin participated in these debates by appropriating the notion of women as “innate teachers” and extolling art instruction as a socially acceptable occupation for women. By analyzing how Seiko and Shōhin fashioned themselves and how their identities were publicly conceived and contested, I hope to reveal what was at stake in debates concerning the shifting relationships between art and gender during the Meiji and Taishō periods.

Conflicting Portraits of “Okuhara Seiko”

It may be best to begin with an investigation of images of Okuhara Seiko that were produced and publicly circulated during the peak of her popularity in Tokyo. The mid-1870s and early 1880s saw the proliferation of printed books on famous individuals of the early Meiji era. In these books, each page presents the portrait of a single figure, accompanied by a brief biography and a poem that he or she supposedly composed. Seiko appears in many of these books in strikingly different guises, suggesting that conflicting images of the artist circulated at the same time. By the mid-1880s, however, short hair became a defining characteristic of Seiko’s appearance in the public imagination. Significantly, these early representations in both text and image established templates for the public perception of the artist for decades to come, even after her retirement to Kumagaya in 1891.

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4 These books were modeled after collections of poems by historical figures published in large numbers at the end of the Edo period. See Tanikawa Keiichi, “Genkon eimei hyakushu kaidai,” in Genkon eimei hyakushu, ed. Numajiri Keiichirō, Ripurinto Nihon kindai bungaku 30 (Tokyo: Kokubungaku Kenkyū Shiryōkan, 2005), 111.
One of the first printed portraits of Seiko appears in a woodblock-printed book entitled *Meiji eimei hyakuei sen* (A Selection of One Hundred Poems by Famous People of Meiji, 1879), which was edited by the *gesaku* (playful fiction) writer Shinoda Senka (also known as the second-generation Ryūtei Senka; 1837-1884) and illustrated by the print designer Ikuta Yoshiharu (Utagawa Yoshiharu; 1828-1888). A comparison of the image of Seiko with those of both female and male artists contained in this book reveals how her public image was initially constructed. Strikingly, the book visually presents Seiko almost as a man; her hair is cropped and parted in the middle, while a men’s kimono is wrapped around her large body with a narrow sash tied at her lower waist (Figure 4.1a). The overcoat (*hifu*) that envelops her broad shoulders looks heavy and velvety as the texture of smeared ink—possibly created by rounding the edges of the woodblock—suggests. The abundant fabric of the overcoat creates numerous folds that cascade on either side of the figure, further grounding the seated artist. Seiko sits on the floor with her legs folded and her knees parted. She rests her left hand on her lap, exposing her thick fingers; she positions her right hand in front of her chest and manipulates two brushes simultaneously. Tilting her head toward the lower left, she seems to be in the midst of executing an ink painting spread before her on the floor. To the left lie painting paraphernalia—e.g., a brush basin, an ink cake, an inkstone, a paint plate, and painting brushes placed in a cylindrical container with a bamboo design. The substantial size of these implements seems to suggest that physically large Seiko employs stationery normally reserved for men. A concise biography of the artist appears in the upper register:

*She is the daughter of a feudal retainer of the Koga domain. Since her youth, she has been fond of painting and is versed in the Chinese classics. She exchanged poems with Wei Tai of China and discussed the intricacies of painting [with him]. She is unusually talented in creating landscape paintings; she is also an accomplished calligrapher who is...

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5 See the discussion of Atomi Kakei below for more on the gendering of implements in this illustrated book.
known as the “Zheng Banqiao [Zheng Xie] of the imperial country [kōkoku; Japan].” It is said that while she was traveling in the Western Capital [Kyoto], a certain wealthy merchant in Osaka paid one thousand gold to solicit a painting from her.6

Curiously, the text never mentions Seiko’s masculine appearance, the characteristic on which the image itself seems to capitalize; rather, the text begins by designating Seiko’s female gender, presenting her as the daughter of a feudal retainer. The author then quickly slips into the conventions of painterly biography, emphasizing Seiko’s familiarity with Chinese literature, as well as her ability to employ her poetic skills and knowledge of painting to communicate with a scholar in China. The text concludes by noting the high monetary value of her paintings, which were coveted not only in Tokyo but also in western Japan.7

The distinctively gendered nature of this visual depiction of Seiko comes into clearer relief when compared to other portraits in the same book. It is noteworthy that Meiji eimei hyakuei sen seems to visually emphasize Seiko’s masculine figure and comportment by juxtaposing her portrait with that of Atomi Kakei (1840-1926), a female painter and educator, who is presented on the adjacent page in a distinctively feminine guise (Figure 4.1b). Donning a woman’s coiffure and kimono, Kakei looks at a narrow slip of paper decorated with cut gold leaf, which she holds in her left hand. She rests her right elbow on the edge of a wooden desk placed diagonally in front of her and brings her right hand closer to her chin, showcasing slender fingers.

6 A Chinese-style poem supposedly composed by Seiko occupies the empty space in the lower register above the portrait of the artist: 秋月明光滿碧空，窓前娯楽一杯中，三更未寐今宵興，寂々虫声雜冷風.

7 This textual description of Seiko may have been based on an article titled “Ms. Seiko” published in Meiyo shinpō (New Report on Honors) in 1876. The essay begins with a concise biography of the artist, noting that Seiko was a daughter of a feudal retainer of the Koga domain; she had been intelligent since her youth and was versed in the classics and histories. She considered the technique of polychrome painting—e.g., flowers and plants, birds and animals—to be irresolute (isagiyoshi to sezu) and instead took particular delight in creating landscape paintings. People ceaselessly gathered in front of her gate to solicit her paintings, which came to be viewed by the highest-ranking men, making her work virtually unchallengeable by other painters in Tokyo at the time. Notably, the author mentions the extraordinariness (tenpin tokui) of the artist: Seiko put on no makeup, interacted with cultured men, heavily drank sake, and comfortably participated in discussions. The author concludes the article by calling Seiko a “strong woman” (onna jōbu). See “Seiko joshi,” Meiyo shinpō, no. 8 (May 1876): 6. This essay seems to have served as the basis for the subsequent visual and textual portraits of Seiko published in printed books.
that contrast with Seiko’s thick digits. Gazing intently at the decorative slip of paper, Kakei seems to be contemplating a poem to inscribe. Not only Kakei’s bodily form but also the writing implements placed on the desk before her seem significantly smaller than those surrounding Seiko, as though to suggest that Kakei’s petite, feminine body requires more delicate stationery. Further, by bending her elbows and bringing both of her hands close to her face, Kakei’s posture conveys a sense of containment and modesty in contrast to Seiko’s dynamic openness; indeed, Seiko seems to use her entire body to execute a painting directly on the floor. Notably, the two figures closely mirror each other’s postures, encouraging the viewer to visually compare the two women’s contrasting bodies, clothes, comportments, and contexts of artistic production (Figure 4.1c).

Further, the slanted eyes, tall nose, and elongated face that constitute Kakei’s face seem more generic and idealized than Seiko’s, which bears subtly individuated features such as double-lidded eyes, a large nose, a round face, and a double chin. Indeed, this printed portrait of Seiko displays some resemblance to a recently discovered photographic portrait of the artist that seems to have circulated around the same time (Figure 1.9). This albumen photograph mounted on a paper card captures a bust portrait of Seiko. Her closely cropped and parted hair, shaven eyebrows, double-lidded eyes, bulbous nose, and thick lips give her a distinctive appearance. Since the printed portrait of Seiko in Meiji eimei hyakuei sen presents facial features that seem to resemble those of her photographic portrait, it might be speculated that the illustrator Ikuta Yoshiharu depicted Seiko’s face based on such a carte de visite (or that he had studied the artist’s appearance in person).

More importantly, however, Ikuta’s illustrated portrait of Seiko—who is shown as the gendered opposite of Kakei—closely resembles that of the male artist Yasuda Rōzan (1830-
1883), who appears later in the book (Figure 4.1d). Rōzan—a contemporary literati artist who circumvented the Edo-period ban on traveling abroad and lived in Shanghai to study painting—came to be paired with Seiko as the two most celebrated literati artists of the early Meiji period. Not only do the portraits of Seiko and Rōzan in Meiji eimei hyakuei sen present the artists’ identical habits of painting on the floor, but also they show them in similar clothes and postures—e.g., holding a brush in the right hand and resting the left hand on the lap. Age, in fact, seems to be the only factor that distinguishes the two painters; although Rōzan was only seven years senior to Seiko, Seiko’s portrait appears significantly more youthful than that of Rōzan, who is shown with a long white beard and deeply engraved wrinkles on his face. Meiji eimei hyakuei sen thus presents Seiko as the gendered opposite of Kakei and as the youthful reincarnation of Rōzan, constructing a distinctively robust and masculine image of the artist. It was this masculinized image of Seiko that captured the public imagination in the subsequent period.

In sharp contrast to this masculinized portrait of Seiko, another woodblock-printed book published in the following year, Genkon eimei hyakushu (One Hundred Poems by Famous People of the Current Time, 1880), which was edited by the writer Numajiri Keiichirō (dates

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8 According to Joshua A. Fogel, Rōzan became “the first Japanese to settle in Shanghai for a considerable length of time.” Rōzan came from a family of samurai doctors from a village in Takasu domain, Mino (today’s Gifu Prefecture). He initially sought to make a living as a doctor in Iida village in Shinano domain, where he married Ihara Kyū (1847-1872), the daughter of a salt warehouse owner Ihara Shigebec. They moved to Edo before settling in Nagasaki in the late 1850s and early 1860s, where Rōzan studied literati painting with Hidaka Tetsuō (also known as Tetsuō Somon; 1791-1871), a priest at the Shuntoku temple, and the Chinese painter Xu Yuting (b. 1824). Rōzan eventually traveled to Shanghai in 1867 and studied painting under the prominent Shanghai painter Hu Gongshou (1823-1886). After a brief return to Japan in 1870, Rōzan and Kyū moved to Shanghai where they earned a living by selling paintings and calligraphy. Kyū continued to paint under the name Hongfeng nüshi (Ms. Red Maple Tree) until she passed away in 1872 at the age of twenty-five. Rōzan returned to Japan via Taiwan the following year. See Joshua A. Fogel, Articulating the Sinosphere: Sino-Japanese Relations in Space and Time (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 41-42 and idem, “Lust for Still Life: Chinese Painters in Japan and Japanese Painters in China in the 1860s and 1870s,” in Acquisition: Art and Ownership in Edo-Period Japan, ed. Elizabeth Lillehoj (Warren: Floating World Editions, 2007), esp. 158-159. See also Paul Berry, “The Meeting of Chinese and Japanese Literati: Hu Gongshou, Yasuda Rōzan, and the Controversy over National Style,” in Literati Modern, Bunjinga from Late Edo to Twentieth-Century Japan: The Terry Welch Collection at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, ed. Paul Berry and Michiyo Morioka (Honolulu: Honolulu Academy of Arts, 2008), 16-27.
unknown) and illustrated by Sensai Eitaku (Kobayashi Eitaku; 1843-1890), represents Seiko as an ideal woman (Figure 4.2a). Although this book was published nine years after Seiko is known to have cropped her hair, it presents her in a woman’s coiffure and flower-patterned robes. Instead of directly confronting a painting spread on the floor as shown in the earlier portrait of Seiko in *Meiji eimei hyakuei sen*, the figure in this image is depicted in a more modestly feminine posture.⁹ Seated on the floor, her body faces left, yet her head is twisted to the lower right, creating a subtle S-curve. She casts her gaze at the fan she holds with her delicate fingers, while clasping a brush in her right hand and resting it on her lap. The broad shoulders that characterize the earlier portrait of Seiko are here replaced with narrow sloping shoulders. Further, the soft smile she bears seems to convey a relaxed attitude that contrasts with the sense of vigor with which Seiko paints on the floor in the earlier image. The biographic information given in the upper register also seems to reinforce Seiko’s female identity:

Seiko is the daughter of a certain Okuhara, a retainer of the Koga domain in Shiōmsa Province. She has been fond of calligraphy and painting since her youth and is also versed in [Chinese] poetry and prose. Her sobriquet is Tōkai and she is exceedingly bright. She always socializes with high-ranking people and is widely known for her literati painting; her fame is widespread throughout society. This shall be known as the true honor of women.¹⁰

Significantly, the author genders Seiko’s talent and success by celebrating her intelligence, her friendship with the nobility, and her artistic fame as the “true honor of women” (*fujin no meiyo*).

Further, while *Meiji eimei hyakuei sen* contrasts Seiko with Kakei to emphasize Seiko’s masculinity, *Genkon eimei hyakushu* juxtaposes Seiko with the influential author, educator, and


¹⁰ The image in the lower register accompanies a Japanese-style *waka* poem supposedly composed by Seiko but more likely created by the producers of the book: うつしかた絵にかく竹の一節をよにハ高くも人に知られん。Tanikawa Keiichi notes the possibility that the poems contained in this book were largely created by its producers to conform to the images of the individuals presented in their short biographies. See Tanikawa, “Genkon eimei hyakushu kaidai,” 112-113.
translator Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901) as though to suggest her femininity (Figure 4.2b). In contrast to the feminine poise that this womanly image of Seiko conveys with her twisted pose and soft smile, the adjacent portrait of Fukuzawa looks somber, as he leans forward toward the desk and engages himself in the exacting task of reading a thick book; the illegible scribbles that run horizontally on the pages of the book indicate that it is written in a foreign language. He places his elbows on the desk and rests his chin on the palms of his hands, as though to suggest his deep contemplation. The sense of seriousness with which Fukuzawa reads contrasts with the air of ease with which Seiko paints on a fan (Figure 4.2c). Moreover, there is a sharp contrast between Fukuzawa’s cropped hair and Seiko’s Japanese-style coif. Comparing this image of Seiko with the photographic portrait of her mentioned above, this printed figure—represented both textually and visually as a paragon of femininity—seems to have no bearing to reality; instead, text and image work together to construct an entirely fictionalized feminine figure of “Okuhara Seiko.”

Such conflicting portraits of Seiko continued to be published and circulated in the following years (Figures 4.3 and 4.4).\footnote{Other portraits of Seiko can be found in Meiji eimei hyakuninshu (One Hundred Poems by Famous People of Meiji; 1881); and Konjin meiyo hyakushu (One Hundred Poems by Honorable People of the Current Time; 1884).} Not only do these books present divergent images of Seiko, but also they juxtapose her images with portraits of various other individuals, encouraging the viewer to identify different aspects of her appearance, deportment, and character by comparing them to those of the figures depicted on the adjacent pages. Some of the producers of these books did not refrain from making major modifications in later editions. For example, in the subsequent editions of Genkon eimei hyakushu, Meiji eimei hyakuninshu (One Hundred Poems by Famous People of Meiji), and Teisō setsugi—Kokon meifu hyakushu (Virtue and Righteousness: A Selection of One Hundred Poems by Renowned Women of Ancient and
Modern Times), Seiko’s hair is either cropped or shortened, suggesting that short hair came to
serve as a defining feature of Seiko’s appearance in the public imagination by the mid-1880s
(Figures 1.14, 4.5, and 4.6).

Given this widespread fixation with Seiko’s cropped hair, a series of important questions
seems to arise. What did it mean for a woman to wear cropped hair and items of men’s clothing
during the Meiji period? How was Seiko’s appearance perceived and discussed at the time? In
fact, women’s new sartorial and tonsorial practices became a hotly contested issue in the early
Meiji period, as the Meiji government attempted to regulate people’s bodily expressions by
implementing a series of misdemeanor ordinances concerning grooming and clothing beginning
in 1872. In order to situate Seiko’s act of cropping her hair and wearing men’s clothes in the
social context of the early Meiji period, it is necessary to examine how journalists, policymakers,
and social critics responded to what they perceived as women’s vestimentary transgression
during Japan’s revolutionary transition to modernity.

The Gendering of Customs in Meiji Japan

Another recently uncovered photographic portrait seems to suggest that Seiko had
already cropped her hair by the fourth month of 1871 (Figure 1.8). Taken by the pioneering
photographer and lithographer Yokoyama Matsusaburō (1838-1884), the photograph presents a
waist-up portrait of Seiko against an empty background. Placing her left hand inside her right
sleeve and holding her right hand to support her face, she tilts her head slightly to the upper right
and looks down on the camera. Her hair seems to be cropped above the shoulders, and she
appears to be wearing a modified version of the cape-like inverness coat of Victorian England
(commonly known in Japan as tonbi), which came to be worn by men over kimono during the
Meiji period. According to the inscription on the box that contains the photograph, the portrait was taken on the twentieth-seventh day of the fourth month of 1871 (June 14, 1871) while Seiko was intoxicated at Bakutorō, a restaurant located next to Yokoyama’s studio, Tsūtenrō, near the Shinobazu pond.

A few months later on the ninth day of the eighth month of 1871 (September 23, 1871), the Meiji government issued an edict “announcing that people were now free to cut their hair short, dress as they choose, and leave their swords at home except on formal occasions.” Since this edict did not specify that it was directed only at men, some women went ahead and cut their hair, as well. Soon thereafter, women wearing short hair—and items of men’s clothing—

12 For a history of the popularization of the inverness coat in Japan, see Sakikawa Naoko, “Wasōyō inbanesu no fukyū o megutte,” Kokusai fukushoku gakkaishi, no. 18 (November 2000): 70-83.

13 Okatsuka Akiko, “Meiji-ki no shashin—hyakka ryōran no jidai,” in Ukiyoe kara shashin e—shikaku no bunmei kaika, exh. cat. (Kyoto: Seigensha, 2015), 175-176. I am very grateful to Fujishiro Jōichi for bringing this photograph to my attention and to Koto Sadamura for making this exhibition catalogue available to me.

14 Suzanne G. O’Brien, “Splitting Hairs: History and the Politics of Daily Life in Nineteenth-Century Japan,” The Journal of Asian Studies 67, no. 4 (November 2008): 1325. In this edict (commonly known as sanpatsu dattō rei or danpatsu rei), the authorities criticized the backwardness of topknot (hanpatsu) styles by calling them unreasonable (as they did not protect the head), unnatural (as shaved heads were associated with prisoners in other countries), and uneconomical (as a waste of time and money). The Meiji-period practice of haircutting—particularly, men’s unshaven, short-cut zangiri style—had long been seen as a sign of modernization, Westernization, as well as the state’s ability to enforce a new custom on the populace. However, as Suzanne G. O’Brien has argued, haircutting served “as a site of political and social contestation” in the early Meiji period, where meanings of “civilization and enlightenment” were constantly contended. O’Brien further notes that it was the local authorities, rather than the central government, that ultimately disseminated haircutting practices. In an effort to enforce the order as a way of exerting their own power, some local officials propagated unshaven or short styles as a restoration of Japan’s native styles. The governor of Wakamatsu prefecture, for example, even levied taxes on those who did not cut their hair and used the money as funds to establish new institutions and services. See ibid., 1324-1328; Oka Mitsuo, “Meiji shonen no danpatsu josei,” Fūzoku techō 8, no. 4 (October 1969): 20; and Ishii Kendō, Meiji jibutsu kigen: zōho kaietei ban (Tokyo: Nihon Hyōronsha, 1969), 58.

15 As David L. Howell has shown, “For men in Tokugawa Japan, hairstyle served as a general indicator of legal status”—e.g., a topknot with the shaved pate and shaven face marked samurai and commoners, a shaved head for monks and doctors, and unbound hair for some outcasts. Howell argues that “this system of signification collapsed along with the early modern status system after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Accordingly, soon after the Restoration, the authorities began to encourage men to wear their hair in a ‘cropped’ (zangiri or sanpatsu) style that was not associated with any particular early modern status group…. [Although] officials initially took care to distinguish between cropped and Western styles, …by the late 1870s, haircuts in an unmistakably Western style had become standard for men throughout the country.” By contrast, a woman’s hairstyle in the early modern period “reflected its wearer’s age, wealth, marital status, economic means, and interest in fashion,” but “a woman’s coiffure did not necessarily signal its wearer’s legal status. As a result, the dismantling of the Tokugawa status system did
became an object of heated public debate. Some commentators praised the economy and rationality of women’s tonsorial and sartorial reforms, while others condemned the blurring of the distinction between men and women that their new appearances suggested. For example, an article published in Chiba shinbun (Chiba Newspaper) in November 1871 applauds women who sported the cropped style (danpatsu), claiming that it was more economical and convenient than traditional coiffures. More specifically, the author notes that short hair removes the need for ostentatious decoration (kyoshoku) with hairpins and combs, as well as the necessity of pomading and binding hair with cords. He further recommends the reform of women’s clothes—discarding the pocket-sleeves (tamoto) of kimono, wearing shortened trousers (hakama), and replacing a wide sash with a narrow obi. The writer claims that such vestimentary reforms would significantly reduce extraneous expenses (mueki no hi), implying that women’s self-adornment is essentially worthless.

Although such arguments concerning economy and rationality were frequently mobilized in favor of women’s cropping their hair and wearing men’s clothing, these tonsorial trends inevitably became the object of intense critiques concerning the necessity of preserving women’s femininity through self-embellishment. Such critiques suggested that gendered appearances ought to be immutable. An article in the Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun (Tokyo Daily) in February 1872, for example, discriminates between the tonsorial habits of men and women. The author

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17 Ibid.

18 “Yugen issoku,” Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun, no. 5 (February 25, 1872). I thank Koto Sadamura for bringing this article to my attention.
states that not only does the practice of cropping men’s hair restore ancient Japanese customs, but also it conforms to universal convention (bankoku ippan no fūzoku). The donning of cropped hair by women, on the other hand, has no precedent in Japan or the West. Since it is customary for women in all countries to adorn their figures (yōbō o kazaru), they should keep their hair long and beautify their appearance. Although the author seems to accept the idea of women cutting their hair and taking the tonsure at the death of their husband, he excoriates married women who crop their hair with the pretension that their new hairstyle represents a civilized appearance (bunmei no sugata). Ultimately, the writer asserts that the wearing of short hair by women is as deplorable (asamashiki) as a nun returning to lay life, constituting a disgrace unheard of in the world (bankoku mimon no shūtai).¹⁹

A similarly explicit critique of women’s transgressive appearance appeared in Shinbun zasshi (News and Miscellany Gazette) the following month. The author describes the sight of women with short hair as ugly (shūtaï), indecent (rōfū), and unbearable to see.²⁰ Noting again that women’s haircutting practice can be found in neither the Japanese nor the Western tradition, the author claims that it is the universal custom (bankoku no tsūzoku) for women—who ought to be obedient and gentle (jūjun onwa)—to have long hair and apply ornaments. He criticizes short-haired women for thinking that their hairstyle represents enlightenment (kaika no sugata) or that it desexualizes them (iro o hanaruru). Further, the writer extends his criticism to female students of Western learning who go about in men’s trousers and wooden clogs (geta), carrying Western books with their sleeves rolled up. According to the author, these girls’ transgressive behavior indicates that they have already strayed from their path of study and lost the fundamental

¹⁹ Ibid.
²⁰ Shinbun zasshi, no. 35 (March 1872): 3.
principles of women’s education. Calling such transgressions the “ills of civilization and enlightenment” (bunmei kaika no hei), the author ultimately condemns these women’s fathers and elder brothers for failing to instruct the girls.\textsuperscript{21}

Importantly, these articles denounce women’s act of cutting their hair by claiming that it runs counter to both Japanese and Western customs. The authors’ underlying anger and anxiety, however, seem to stem from their preconception that women lose their femininity by cutting their hair, since long black hair had served as an emblem of feminine beauty at least since the Heian period (794-1185).\textsuperscript{22} The article in Shinbun zasshi even associates women’s long hair and self-adornment with their obedience and gentleness, drawing connections between hair and beauty, femininity and embellishment, exterior decorum and interior modesty. Further, it is noteworthy that the article in Tokyo nichinichi shinbun differentiates between married women and tonsured women, claiming that it is acceptable for women to cut their hair upon the deaths of their husbands. This argument is based upon the premodern conception of nunhood in which tonsured women, through their act of renouncing their hair as an outward marker of femininity, symbolically withdrew from an overtly sexual identity to attain a certain degree of androgyny.\textsuperscript{23} Moreover, both authors emphasize women’s compliance with universal customs (such as their obligatory self-adornment) as a way of supporting their argument for the preservation of feminine propriety, an argument that contrasts with the reasoning proposed by reformers of women’s fashion who stressed the rationality and economy of women’s new hairdressing and

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{22} For a history of the relationship between the conceptions of beauty and hair in Japan, see, for example, Hiramatsu Ryūen, Kurokami to bijo no Nihonshi (Tokyo: Suiyōsha, 2012).

\textsuperscript{23} Barbara R. Ambros, Women in Japanese Religions (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 73. Ambros further notes that “[t]hrough this monastic masculinization, women were occasionally able to act legally on a par with men in the public sphere” in Heian Japan.
clothing practices. At the same time, these articles suggest the possibility that there might have been some women who cut their hair in an effort to achieve civilization or to desexualize themselves—or who might have employed the rhetoric of civilization or desexualization to rationalize their physical transformation.

First commented upon in newspapers, the sight of women with short hair quickly became the object of governmental concern, as well. On April 3, 1872, the Tokyo prefectural government submitted a document of inquiry to the central government, asking for instructions on how to handle this misguided behavior among women.\(^24\) It notes that although the haircutting edict was meant to be applicable only to men, there were some women who misunderstood the regulation and sported cropped hair (zangiri). In the eyes of Tokyo bureaucrats, this was problematic because “women’s clothing and hairstyles must be distinguished from those of men.”\(^25\) Their document thus asks whether the authorities should intervene to prevent women from misinterpreting the haircutting edict. Shortly thereafter, the government issued such a notice, proclaiming that women must keep their hair long as before.\(^26\) The idea that dress and hair

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\(^{24}\) This document is available at the National Archives of Japan. It is reproduced and transcribed in Koga Rekishi Hakubutsukan, Okuhara Seiko ten—botsugo 100-nen kinen, 74. It is also discussed in Kurai Naoko, “Koga hisutorī—sanpatsu dattō rei to Okuhara Seiko,” Kōhō Koga, no. 98 (November 2013): 24.

\(^{25}\) Ibid.

\(^{26}\) This was widely reported in contemporary newspapers. See, for example, Shinbun zasshi, no. 40 (April 1872); Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun, no. 44 (May 14, 1872); and Nichiyō shinbun, no. 19 (1872). This edict is often interpreted as the government’s effort to deny women access to “civilization and enlightenment” assuming that short hairstyles signaled this concept. Sharon L. Sieves claims, “To the extent that women cutting their hair can be viewed as a real, if spontaneous, attempt to join the progressive forces trying to create a new Japan, the government’s denial of their right to do so was also a denial of their right to participate and contribute actively to that change. In, fact, it can be seen as a symbolic message to Japan’s women to become repositories of the past, rather than pioneers with men, of some unknown future.” See Sharon L. Sieves, Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 15. David L. Howell and Suzanne G. O’Brien, however, suggest that the motivations behind the edict and women’s cutting their hair might have been more complex. Specifically, Howell argues that the primary target of the government’s prohibition against women cutting their hair was those “who cut their hair either as a sign of Buddhist piety on the deaths of their husbands or because they preferred not to bother with—or could not afford—the considerable trouble, expense, and physical hardship of wearing the elaborate coiffures.” See Howell, “The Girl with the Horse-Dung Hairdo,” 204; and O’Brien, “Splitting
should serve as outward markers of sexual difference between men and women repeatedly appears in newspaper articles that circulated in Tokyo at the time. As Gregory M. Pflugfelder has argued, “the officially endorsed hairstyle erased the immediately visible signs of age (and class) hierarchy among males” that existed in the Edo period, but significantly, “it reinforced the gender dichotomy of male and female.”

Although this amendment to the haircutting edict was widely announced in contemporary newspapers, it might not have had an immediate impact. Later that year, *Shinbun zasshi* published a collection of “various oddities and weirdoes” (*shushu no ifū hentai*) who could be found on the streets of Tokyo at the time (Figure 4.7). A brief text accompanies a double-page illustrated group portrait consisting of twenty figures whose sartorial and tonsorial peculiarities are carefully labeled. Strikingly, a woman with cropped hair appears prominently in the center foreground on the first page; she wears an inverness coat and holds a Western-style “bat umbrella” (*kōmori-gasa*). Behind her is a Western man with a beard who proudly stands in kimono with swords at his waist. Another female figure appears in the upper left; in contrast to her elaborate coiffure with long hairpins and a comb, she wears trousers and rides a horse. Both the woman and the horse abruptly turn their heads to the left as though to encourage the viewer

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27 For example, a report published in *Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun* on April 11, 1872, describes a certain Iseya, a wealthy merchant who sent his son to a school of Western learning and had his concubine crop her hair (*danpatsu*). He then tried to make his wife cut her hair, which she declined. Even though his wife grieved at the prospect of losing her hair and continuously refused to have her hair cropped, Iseya insisted and, in the end, forcefully cut her hair by himself. The reporter emphasizes the wife’s anguish, noting that she felt as though she has been robbed. A short commentary that follows the report notes that the act of cutting women’s hair was incomprehensible and that men and women should be distinguished by the length of their hair. See “Kōko sōdan,” *Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun* 14 (April 11, 1872). I thank Koto Sadamura for making this source available to me.


29 *Shinbun zasshi*, no. 70 (November 1872): 5-6.
to move to the next page, which depicts a whole new range of vestimentary hybridism. All of these figures are conflated into one large mass as though to overwhelm the viewer with the eclectic hodgepodge of various clothing items and cultural habits of dressing. The visual chaos seems to evoke an air of jubilation.

Coincidentally (and rather ironically), in the same month when Shinbun zasshi published this anarchic image of “oddities and weirdoes,” regulations on haircutting and cross-dressing were formalized in a series of petty-misdemeanor ordinances (ishiki kaii jōrei) that was first promulgated in Tokyo by the Ministry of Justice (Shihōshō) on November 8, 1872, and later enacted in each prefecture in a slightly different form.30 As David L. Howell has discussed, these ordinances categorized crimes into two groups: those under the ishiki ordinances carried larger fines—75 to 150 sen (or ten to twenty lashes for those who could not afford to pay)—while those under the kaii ordinances carried a lighter penalty—6.25 to 12.5 sen (or one to two days of incarceration).31 The prohibitions ranged widely—from issues of public decorum (public urination) to public safety (riding a horse-carriage on a narrow street) and public health (selling spoiled food). A relatively small number of regulations concerned the body, including bans on public nakedness, tattooing, and mixed bathing.32 The prohibition against the cropping of hair by women without reason (fujin nite iware naku danpatsu suru mono) was included among the kaii ordinances.33 The ban on cross-dressing was added in the following year to the list of more

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31 The fine for violations of the kaii ordinances was raised in 1875 from 5 to 70 sen. Howell notes that these fines were substantial, if not ruinous, given that the average daily wage of a carpenter in 1874 was 40 sen. See Howell, Geographies of Identity, 159.

32 Ibid., 159.

33 Ogi, Kumakura, and Ueno, Fūzoku sei, 18.
serious *ishiki* ordinances. This prohibition applied to men who dressed as women (*otoko nite joshō*), women who dressed as men (*onna nite danshō*), or those who dressed strangely and presented a disgraceful appearance (*kikan no funshoku o nashi te shūtai o arawasu mono*). However, kabuki actors and women who wore trousers were exempted from this regulation, anticipating the spread of trousers as a uniform for girls at elite urban schools during the 1880s. Since the legal language is laconic, simply listing the types of activities to be governed, it is difficult to discern the reasoning behind each ordinance. Nevertheless, these regulations suggest the Meiji government’s effort to prohibit bodily expressions of gender-bending by calling such acts “disgraceful.”

In contrast to the prominence accorded to the short-haired woman in *Shinbun zasshi*’s portrait of the oddly dressed, the numbers of people prosecuted for these tonsorial misdemeanors suggests that violations were rare. In 1875, a total of 10,960 people were penalized for violations

34 Ibid., 12.

35 Ibid. Howell notes that “there was both classical and recent precedent for court women wearing [trousers], and...women’s *hakama* quickly evolved into a form clearly distinct from men’s *hakama*...[W]hen the fad for things Western was at its height in the 1880s, *hakama* and dresses dominated at elite urban schools, but in the conservative 1890s, school administrators put aside their earlier misgivings and dressed their charges in regular kimono. Nevertheless, *hakama*—particularly maroon ones—became indelibly associated in the public mind with female students.” See Howell, “The Girl with the Horse-Dung Hairdo,” 205. For more on the changing costumes of female students in the Meiji period, see Rebecca Copeland, “Fashioning the Feminine: Images of the Modern Girl Student in Meiji Japan,” *U.S.-Japan Women’s Journal*, no. 30/31 (2006): 13-35.

36 The term “disgraceful appearance” (*shūtai*) is also used to describe other activities that were made illegal in the misdemeanor ordinances. In the prohibition against public nudity, people who are fully or partially naked are called “disgraceful,” while the ordinance concerning freak shows (*misemono*) bans the display of “disgraceful” exhibits such as male and female sumo wrestlers and snake charmers. The Meiji officials’ concern over public decorum derives from their assumption that “outward customs lay at the very heart of the Western conception of civilization” (Howell, *Geographies of Identity*, 158). Gregory M. Pflugfelder has argued that cross-dressing came to be perceived as a matter of concern for the state since “it blurred gender distinctions and made it more difficult to regulate the identities and movements of its citizens”; see his *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 151. Further, “the frequent incidence of cross-dressing, across boundaries not only of gender but also of age and class, contributed to the atmosphere of the carnivalesque that Meiji officials were bent on containing within the bounds of ‘civilized’ order” (ibid., 151). For instance, in “1873, the Ministry of Doctrine (Kyōbushō) pronounced the ‘corrupt custom’ (heijū) of ‘men and women exchanging their appearance’ (*danjo shishō o kae*) at Buddhist and Shinto festivals to be ‘disgraceful’ (*shūtai*) and ‘blasphemous to the gods and bodhisattvas’ (*shinbutsu no waitoku*)” (ibid., 151-152).
of all types of these misdemeanor ordinances. 4,495 people were punished for public urination, 2,727 for public disturbance, and 2,091 for public nudity; but only eight people were punished for cross-dressing, while fourteen women were caught for having cropped hair.\textsuperscript{37} In order to avoid double jeopardy, these women who were punished for sporting short hair were required to carry a special certificate until their hair grew back to the appropriate length. A separate, longer-term permit was issued for women who cut their hair to take the tonsure or those who had ailments that required them to keep their hair short.\textsuperscript{38} Seiko, in fact, carried such a certificate that was issued by the police on January 4, 1875 (Figure 4.8). Significantly, the document states that Seiko was exempt from the haircutting edict because she suffered from “reverse upward flushing of the blood” (\textit{gyakujō no shō})\textsuperscript{39}—a medical condition that was sometimes likened to congestion of brain (\textit{nōjūketsu}) and whose common symptoms included headaches, ringing in the ears, and lightheadedness or vertigo.\textsuperscript{40} In other words, Seiko was officially allowed to maintain her short hair because of her supposed chronic illness. A few years later, a woman named Shibata Taki also petitioned the authorities to receive a haircutting permit using the same rationale (\textit{gyakujō no shō}) for the appeal, suggesting the possibility that this particular medical condition might have been deployed commonly by women who attempted to obtain haircutting certificates.\textsuperscript{41}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{37} Ogi Shinzō, “Kaisetsu 1,” in Ogi, Kumakura, and Ueno, \textit{Fūzoku sei}, 468.

\textsuperscript{38} Ishii, \textit{Meiji jibutsu kigen}, 66.

\textsuperscript{39} This translation of \textit{gyakujō no shō} is taken from Yu-Chuan Wu, “A Disorder of Ki: Alternative Treatments for Neurasthenia in Japan, 1890-1945” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University College London, 2012), 42. I thank Prof. Shigeëisa Kuriyama for pointing me to this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{40} One of the recommended treatments was to cool the head with water or, preferably, ice. See, for example, Kishida Ginkō, \textit{Eisei tebako} (Tokyo: private publication, 1890), 91-92 and 136.

\textsuperscript{41} This petition, dated January 1878, is reprinted in Ishii, \textit{Meiji jibutsu kigen}, 68. The petition indicates that Taki submitted a medical certificate along with her request to the authorities in order to verify her ailment. In nineteenth-century France, too, the only official reason for granting cross-dressing permits to women was certified medical necessity—e.g., those with thick beards or other mysterious deformities. See Gretchen van Slyke, “The Sexual and Textual Politics of Dress: Rosa Bonheur and Her Cross-Dressing Permits,” \textit{Nineteenth-Century French Studies} 26, no. 3/4 (1998): 321-335. Since there is no extant evidence that indicates that Seiko truly suffered from such an
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any case, a *Shinbun zasshi* article from March 1873 suggests the effectiveness of the gendered haircutting decree, reporting that thirty percent of men in Tokyo wore short hair (*zanpatsu*), while the number of women who had unbound hair (*sanpatsu*) greatly decreased.\(^{42}\) Seiko, however, is known to have carried the haircutting permit in a small hand-made pouch with her whenever she went out, and she seems to have kept her hair short throughout the rest of her life.

Although women’s vestimentary practices came to be regulated through these newly instituted ordinances, heated debates on women’s “proper” appearance and conduct continued to appear in newspapers and journals throughout the rest of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. On the one hand, some progressive thinkers criticized the gender inequality embedded in the haircutting edict and argued that both men and women should have the freedom to cut their hair.\(^{43}\) On the other hand, women’s “masculinized” manners and customs continued to concern gravely some conservative critics who denounced such practices as a “national disgrace” (*kokujoku*).\(^{44}\) Indeed, the sight of “masculinized women” appeared so unsettling to the educator Atomi Kakei that she spent the next several decades seeking ways to improve the demeanor of girls gone wild. Strikingly, in her reminiscences of her early career in Tokyo, Kakei singularly names Seiko as an example of the corrupted women whom she detected in the new

\(^{42}\) *Shinbun zasshi*, no. 81 (March 1873): 5. It was not until the late 1880s that most men began to cut their hair short. See Ishii, *Meiji jibutsu kigen*, 52.

\(^{43}\) Sakatani Shiroshi, “Joshoku no gi,” *Meiroku zasshi*, no. 21 (November 1874): 6-8, esp. 8.

\(^{44}\) For instance, in a letter to the editor of *Yūbin hōchi shinbun* published in 1874, an anonymous author infuriated by the sight of women in men’s trousers compares the wearing of trousers by women in Japan with the practice of foot binding in China, claiming that girls in trousers are a “national disgrace.” Further, not only does he blame parents for letting their daughters sport men’s clothes, but also he even goes so far as to claim that these girls might consider imitating men as a virtue and will consequently begin to stand while urinating. See “Tōsho,” *Yūbin hōchi shinbun*, no. 239 (January 15, 1874).
capital. A close analysis of Kakei’s writings will illuminate how conservative educators such as Kakei perceived women’s loss of femininity as a moral crisis and how she and other educators reacted against women’s masculinized customs by implementing a series of instructional reforms.

**Critiques of Seiko’s Masculinity**

In her essay titled “Female Students in the Early Years of Meiji” published in *Jiji shinpō* (News of the Times) in 1907, Kakei describes the pitiful condition of Tokyo soon after she moved there from Kyoto in 1870: “People cared so little for art…and there was nothing elegant about women’s appearance.” As an example, Kakei discusses Okuhara Seiko as a female artist whose painting was skillful yet exceedingly rough—which, Kakei claims, was precisely why Seiko’s works were well received at the time. Kakei continues on to note that Seiko sported cropped hair (*karikiri no atama*), tied a three-foot sash (*sanjaku obi*) around her waist, and wore an inverness coat (*tonbi gappa*) even indoors. Not only Seiko but also her disciples Okuhara Seisui (1852-1921) and Watanabe Seiran (1855-1918) painted and received guests while wearing similar outfits. Kakei describes Seiko and her students to exemplify her point that there were very few womanly women (*onna rashii hito*) in Tokyo at the time. In another article published in the magazine *Fujin no tomo* (Women’s Friend) five years later, Kakei presents a similar critique of women’s unfeminine customs in Tokyo in the early Meiji period, noting that she was disturbed to find a number of women with cropped hair (*zangiri*); some women even wore men’s *hakama* (unlike the feminine trousers that Kakei later created as a school uniform), making their

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46 *Sanjaku obi* is a type of men’s sash made of inexpensive cotton and is much shorter than the sash regularly worn by women.

47 Atomi, “Meiji shonen no joseito,” 62.
appearance almost indistinguishable from that of men. Their boorish (araarashii) behavior similarly astounded the author. In these retrospective critiques, Kakei seems to exaggerate her anguish over the masculinization of women in 1870s Tokyo. Such exaggeration serves to emphasize not only the necessity of her subsequent educational and customary reforms but also the culture shock she experienced upon moving to the eastern capital; further, it allows her to idealize the traditional courtly customs that, she claims, women in Kyoto carefully preserved. In fact, Kakei declares that women’s customs of the past were superior as they were more feminine (onna rashiku), elegant (yūbi), and beautiful (kirei). Alarmed by the dearth of feminine women and impelled by an acute sense of moral crisis, Kakei made a resolution to immediately find a way to reform girls’ education and improve public morals.

Seiko’s disciple and adopted daughter Okuhara Seisui, whom Kakei criticizes in her article in Jiji shinpō, notes in a 1911 autobiographic essay published in the magazine Fujin gahō (Ladies’ Illustrated) that she indeed cropped her hair while she was studying under Seiko in the 1870s and 80s. Seisui stresses, however, that she cut her hair out of necessity: because she worked so assiduously in studying painting, she contracted an eye disease that necessitated the washing of her hair every day. Since Seiko already wore cropped hair, which required an official permit, Seisui kept her hair slightly longer and tied it closely in the back. When the police stopped her on the street, she claimed that her hairstyle was not a cropped style but was instead a chignon or “swept-back hair” (sokuhatsu), a hybrid Japanese-Western hairstyle that was popular

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49 Ibid.
50 Atomi, “Ishin zengo no onna fūzoku,” 54.
51 Idem, “Meiji shonen no joseito,” 62.
at the time, and she was released.⁵³ When she left Seiko’s atelier to work independently in the early 1880s, Seisui (at the recommendation of Seiko) began to keep her hair longer in order to arrange it in a real sokuhatstu style so that she would gain a more “normal appearance” (futsū no nari).⁵⁴ This essay seems to suggest that Seisui felt the need to retrospectively rationalize her act of cropping her hair in her youth; significantly, she does so by appealing to the discourse on medical necessity, just as Seiko seems to have done strategically to acquire a haircutting permit.

Kakei explains in the rest of her article in Jiji shinpō how she, upon witnessing the horrific sight of manly Seiko and her entourage, implemented a series of reforms for young women.⁵⁵ Using her connections to aristocratic families and her experience of running a private school (juku) in Osaka and Kyoto, Kakei opened a private academy in Tokyo to which many noble families sent their daughters. As Kakei’s fame spread, the number of her students increased exponentially, leading her to establish the Atomi Women’s School (Atomi Jogakkō) in Sarugaku-chō in Tokyo in 1875.⁵⁶ In order to correct (aratameru) the disorderly manners of society, Kakei endeavored to make her students look and behave womanly. The students were required to tie their hair up in a children’s hairstyle (chigomage) and either wear purple trousers or tie their sash diagonally in the back (tachiya no ji). On formal occasions, they wore long-

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⁵³ As David L. Howell notes in his thorough study of “swept-back hair,” sokuhatstu “refers to the gathering of the hair into a bun at the back of the head.” In 1885 Watanabe Kanae, an army physician, and Ishikawa Eisaku, the editor of the Tokyo keizai zasshi (Tokyo Economist), founded the Women’s Chignon Society (Fujin Sokuhatstukai) in order “to promote the adoption of Western or hybrid Japanese-Western hairstyles for women,” a reform that was deemed necessary to liberate women from the burdens of uncomfortable, uneconomical, and unhygienic Japanese-style coiffures. Howell further notes that despite the rise and fall of its popularity, the swept-back hairdo came to be “naturalized as an unremarkable fashion choice for relatively affluent urban women” by the early twentieth century. See Howell, “The Girl with the Horse-Dung Hairdo,” 210.

⁵⁴ Okuhara, “Watakushi wa gan to shite nanga yori ugokanu,” 47.

⁵⁵ Atomi, “Meiji shonen no jōseito,” 62.

sleeved kimono (furisode) and scarlet trousers when, according to Kakei, even daughters of upper-class families dressed plainly and did not wear red.\textsuperscript{57} She believed that maintaining such a modest and pure form (tsutsumashiku shitoyaka na minari) would help the students cultivate graceful hearts (yūbi na kokoro).\textsuperscript{58} Moreover, in order to halt the girls’ untidy manners (ranzatsu na kyoshi), she created a special ceremony and a dance exercise (undō odori), both of which were inspired by ancient Japanese court performance. The sight of the girls dancing in sync was so graceful, Kakei proudly notes, that even an observer from the Ministry of Education (Monbushō) came to the school to appreciate the performance. She further claims that after she began implementing these educational reforms, children with the chigomage hairstyle came to be seen on the streets, assuring her that she was able to succeed in improving women’s customs.\textsuperscript{59} When this article was written in the early twentieth century, Kakei was participating actively in the debate on the shifting relationship between art and womanhood that was taking place at the time, a debate that will be examined in the epilogue.

Despite the anxiety with which Seiko’s masculine appearance was perceived by Kakei and others, Seiko remained one of the most celebrated artists in Tokyo throughout the 1870s and 80s. For example, in a ranking (banzuke) of calligraphers and painters published in 1875, Seiko is listed as one of the masters (meika), occupying a prominent place in the top left register of the single-sheet print (Figure 1.7). Significantly, Seiko’s name appears alongside other male painters, including some in her circle such as Fukushima Ryūho (1820-1889) and Hattori Hazan (1827-\textsuperscript{57})

In order to refine the character of female students, Kakei created trousers by hybridizing men’s horse-riding trousers (umanori bakama), which were popular at the time, and trousers that female attendants to the empress wore at court. Kakei took particular care to design the trousers so that the girls’ legs would not be revealed when walking. See Ato mi Kakei, “Fujin to fūzoku,” Fūzoku gahō, no. 443 (March 1913): 5.

\textsuperscript{58} Idem, “Meiji shonen no jōseito,” 62.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
In later rankings, however, Seiko is often confined to the category of women artists (whose works are variously referred to as *keishū bokugi, fujin shoga*, and *joshi seimitsu shoga*), which tended to be relegated to the bottom of the sheets, implying that female artists fell outside the normative (male) framework of painters and masters. A ranking printed in 1877 (Figure 4.9a), for instance, lists Seiko as a specialist of ink painting under the heading of talented women (*keishū*) along with Nakabayashi Seishuku, Atomi Kakei, and Noguchi Shōhin (Figure 4.9b). Similarly, “A Price List of Japanese Calligraphy and Painting” (*Nihon shoga kagakuhyō*; Figure 4.10a) published five years later presents Seiko with Atomi Kakei as the highest-ranked practitioners of “intricate calligraphy and painting by women” (*joshi seimitsu shoga*) (Figure 4.10b). Despite this gendered categorization, almost none of the paintings and calligraphy Seiko produced after the 1860s seems to bear any mark that specifically identifies the painter as a “woman.” Most obviously, whereas Seiko often signed her earlier works as “Ms. Seiko” (*Seiko joshi*), inscribing her female gender directly onto her works, after she established herself in Tokyo, Seiko entirely removed the gendered title “Ms.” (*joshi*) from her signature. Such a decision contrasts with the choice of contemporary women painters including Noguchi Shōhin, who continued to sign many of her works as “Ms. Shōhin” (*Shōhin joshi*) throughout her career. Nevertheless, even as late as 1889, Seiko was listed as one of the top eight authorities (*taika*) of painting in Tokyo along with seven other male artists including Fukushima Ryūho.

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60 This ranking is discussed in Nakamachi, “Bokuto en’unrō no onna bunjin,” 5. A similar ranking with minor modifications was reprinted as *Kōkoku meiyo shoga jinmeiroku* three years later in 1878.

61 The average price of Seiko’s work is listed as seven gold yen, the same price which is assigned to works by Kawanabe Kyōsai and Hattori Hazan; it is below the value given to paintings by several male artists such as Tanomura Choken (twelve yen) and Watanabe Shōka (nine yen) but above the price of works by numerous other male and female artists including Kawakami Tōgai (six yen), Inose Tōnei (four yen) and Noguchi Shōhin (two yen).

62 Early modern and modern Japanese women artists were often addressed by the gendered honorific “Ms.” (*joshi*), which women themselves often used in their signatures. Seiko also signed her early works as “Ms. Unkin” (*Unkin joshi*), which was one of her earliest sobriquets.

63 I thank Yamamori Yayoi for this suggestion.
Taki Katei (1830-1901), and Sugawara Hakuryū (1833-1898) (Figure 4.11), indicating her continued prominence in the metropolitan art scene in the mid-Meiji period.64

The Life of a Recluse in Kamikawakami

In 1891, however, Seiko abruptly left Tokyo for rural Kamikawakami in Kumagaya, Saitama Prefecture. The most immediate reason for her relocation seems to have been that a new railway (which became today’s Yamanote Line) was to be built through the area where Seiko had lived and worked for more than twenty years. After successfully negotiating with the mayor of Tokyo to sell her entire property, Seiko initially lived in a nearby district in Shitaya, but within a year, she moved to remote Kamikawakami, which had belonged to her home domain of Koga during the Edo period. Seiko’s sudden departure from the art scene of Tokyo seems to have cast the artist into near obscurity. In fact, Tokutomi Sohō (1863-1957), an influential journalist, historian, and social critic, noted in 1908 that some people thought Seiko was already dead even though she was, in fact, still alive and well, enjoying an elegant, leisurely life in Kumagaya.65

Seiko’s retirement to Kumagaya in 1891 coincided with a dramatic shift in the legal and social conditions of women in the Meiji period, a shift that began during the previous decade and that likely precipitated her departure from the capital. The 1872 prohibition against haircutting directed only at women already removed “the wide-open atmosphere that had prevailed so briefly during the years immediately after the Restoration,”66 but in the 1880s, the Meiji

64 These and other rankings that list Seiko’s name are reproduced in Segi Shin’ichi, Edo, Meiji, Taishō, Shōwa no bijutsu banzuke shūsei—shoga no kakaku hensen 200-nen (Tokyo: Ribun Shuppan, 2000), 37, 39, 41, 43, 48-49, and 57; and Hayashi Hideo and Haga Noboru, eds., Banzuke shūsei (Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobō, 1973), 79, 82, 116, 117, and 121-123.
government imposed a series of restrictions that increasingly curtailed women’s activities in the public sphere. In 1883, for example, Article 7 of the revised Newspaper Law (Shinbun jōrei) limited the ownership, directorship, editorship, and printing of newspapers and other print media to Japanese males over the age of twenty, “with the result that the inspirational stories about strong-willed women…that appeared in the press were always filtered through the male gaze.” More significantly, the City Code (Shisei) and the Town and Village Code (Chōsonsei) of 1888, which was ratified by Prime Minister Itō Hirobumi (1841-1909) and Home Minister Yamagata Aritomo (1838-1922), established that only a taxpaying adult male could qualify as a “public person” (kōmin) who could exercise the “civic rights” to vote and serve in assemblies, rendering women essentially as “non-public persons.” Furthermore, the Law on Assembly and Political Association (Shūkai oyobi seishahō) promulgated in 1890 prohibited women from joining political organizations and from speaking, sponsoring, or even attending political meetings. It was only in 1922 that the ban on women’s attending political meetings was

67 Sheldon Garon notes that the new Meiji “government initially devoted little attention to formulating a policy toward the involvement of women in public life.” For example, the Assembly Ordinance (Shūkai jōrei) of 1880, in which women were not treated as a single category, did not prohibit women from joining political groups or attending political meetings. In rural areas, some women were even allowed to vote and hold elected office as long as they fulfilled the same taxpaying requirements as men. Garon further argues that the “initial absence of gender-related restrictions on women was primarily an oversight, not a conscious recognition of women’s rights.” See Sheldon Garon, “Women’s Groups and the Japanese State: Contending Approaches to Political Integration, 1890-1945,” The Journal of Japanese Studies 19, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 10.


71 Marnie S. Anderson, A Place in Public: Women’s Rights in Meiji Japan (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010), 35. These codes are reprinted in Ichikawa, Seiji, 102-103.

overturned; nevertheless, although universal male suffrage was instituted in 1925, women’s suffrage was not realized until much later, in 1946. It is significant to note that these regulations that the Meiji government instituted from the early 1880s onward defined women by way of exclusions and, as Marnie S. Anderson has argued, “framed women as a group whereas men were differentiated primarily by their class.” In other words, gender became a “decisive factor determining access to political power.”

It seems likely that the enforcement of these new gendered laws and the subsequent changes in the political and social circumstances surrounding women made it increasingly challenging for Seiko to continue to live in the way she did in the early years of the Meiji period. The establishment of the railway that was to run through her property no doubt served as the direct cause of her relocation, but by secluding herself to rural Kamikawakami, where state policy might not have penetrated, Seiko may have been able to escape legal restrictions, political discrimination, and the inquisitive eyes of the public, while gaining a new transcendental identity as a recluse and continuing to enact literati ideals.

Despite Seiko’s retirement from the metropolitan art world, she seems to have remained at least somewhat present in the critical imagination. Over a decade after Seiko left Tokyo, several essays appeared in art journals that discussed the authors’ visits to Seiko in Kamikawakami. The interviews with the artist that these essays present are no doubt mediated by the intervention of the author-interlocutors; nevertheless, since Seiko virtually wrote nothing about herself publicly, these dialogues serve as crucial sources to understand how she spent the

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73 For detailed discussions of law and gender in modern Japan and its colonies, see Susan L. Burns and Barbara J. Brooks, eds., Gender and Law in the Japanese Imperium (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014).

74 Anderson, A Place in Public, 54.

75 Ibid.
later years of her life. In his two-part essay on his visit to Seiko published in *Kaiga sōshi* (Journal of Painting) in 1901, the painter Watanabe Hakumin (dates unknown) provides a fascinating account of how Seiko entertained herself in her rural retreat.\(^76\) At the beginning of his essay, Watanabe aestheticizes Seiko’s eremitism, citing hearsay (*denbun*) that Seiko led a secluded life far away from the mundane world, enjoying the fragrance of plum blossoms in the morning and listening to the sound of wind blowing through the pine trees in the evening, thereby associating Seiko with the conventional image of an ideal recluse. Watanabe tells the reader that he decided to visit Seiko because she was a benefactor (*onjin*) of the late Sugawara Hakuryū, a painter under whom Watanabe himself once studied. More importantly, the author states that he hoped to listen to Seiko’s “usual eccentric words and exuberant speech” (*rei no kigen kaiwa*),\(^77\) suggesting that he approached Seiko with this particular expectation in mind, while at the same time, stimulating the reader’s desire to discover the artist’s wit in the interview that follows.

Watanabe’s essay attempts to reconstruct in colloquial language what Seiko supposedly told him about her life in Kamikawakami. She complains about the exceeding inconvenience of eremitism: since vegetables are the only things she can obtain in the area, other foods, drinks, and everyday necessities have to be brought from Kumagaya City. Here Seiko gives voice to the dilemma that she faced between her enjoyment of urban convenience and the realities of rural reclusion; in fact, Seiko notes she considered the possibility of moving to a more convenient city, but that would have required her to endure the hustle and bustle of urban life, which discouraged her from leaving the countryside. Seiko further recounts (jokingly) that she lets the grass grow

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wild in front of her gate as a way of preventing vulgar visitors from approaching her residence (kōjin yoke or zokubutsu yoke), claiming that those who refuse to visit her simply because they have to walk through a sea of deep grass to reach the gate are “vulgar” and should not visit her in the first place.\footnote{Ibid.} Statements such as this might have satisfied the interviewer’s (and possibly the reader’s) expectation of hearing the “eccentric words and exuberant speech” for which Seiko was widely known.

Seiko continues on to note, as discussed in the previous chapter, that although she succeeded in averting vulgar visitors, her friends with whom she could discuss calligraphy, painting, and poetry, too, do not frequent her rustic retreat. In order to entertain herself in seclusion, she constructs imaginary selves with different sobriquets so that she can compose and critique her own poems from multiple subject positions, thereby enacting virtual communal engagement with literati culture while remaining physically isolated.\footnote{Ibid., 7.} Watanabe’s account thus offers a rare glimpse into the intimate moments of Seiko’s solitary life. It suggests the artist’s inner conflict between her desire to socialize with like-minded people in a convenient urban environment and her abhorrence of the distractions accompanying urban living. In the end, Seiko chose to lead a secluded life in her grassy retreat, enacting the life of a recluse who took pleasure in appreciating antiques and creating imagined poetic gatherings.

Ten years later in 1911, the writer Higuchi Den (dates unknown) published an essay on his visit to Seiko in Kamikawakami in \textit{Shoga kottō zasshi} (Calligraphy, Painting, and Antiques), a magazine for which the author himself served as the editor and publisher.\footnote{Higuchi Den, “Tōkai Seiko o toburau,” \textit{Shoga kottō zasshi}, no. 36 (May 1911): 17-18.} Higuchi first emphasizes the size of the artist and her environment, likening Seiko to a retired grand champion
sumo wrestler (yokozuna no inkyo) and her residence to the mansion of a local minister (inaka no daijin no oyashiki). He also provides a detailed description of Seiko’s appearance and manner—sporting cropped hair like a man (danshi no gotoku danpatsu), weighing nearly two hundred pounds, and constantly smoking tobacco from an ivory pipe decorated with a gold ring. Further, Higuchi calls Seiko an amusing person (yukai na hito) whose manner of speaking is smooth (enkatsu), lively (kaikatsu), and extremely candid (kiwamete sharaku). As though to emphasize the directness of her speech, Higuchi simply lists, in the main body of this brief article, short, direct statements that Seiko supposedly made without adding any transitions:

My painting teacher Hirata Senseki [Suiseki] was my relative. He was a scholar and studied [Watanabe] Kazan and [Tachihara] Kyōsho a great deal, but he was bad at painting. I first came to be known by Marquis Kido [Takayoshi] and then became acquainted with Lords Yamauchi Yōdō [Toyoshige] and Nabeshima Kansō…. I supported many people including Mr. Komiya Mihomatsu, and I am happy that he became successful. Haruki Nanmei was my acquaintance…. I also know Suzuki Gako. It seems that he used to speak ill of me, and he vehemently attacked me for some time, but one day he came to me to apologize for what happened in the past and to establish a friendship. Ōnuma Chinzan was my mentor of Sinitic poetry [kanshi]. He was an expert of Japanese chess [shōgi]. This is not widely known. Hakuryū and Shūden are my disciples. Ms. Noguchi Shōhin also wanted to become my student, but I declined [her request] and told her to pursue [painting] by herself since painting should not be practiced with the intention of studying under a teacher; even after that, she still visited me periodically…. I painted in front of the empress only once and received frequent invitations afterward; I was also invited by the prince, but that was too overwhelming [osore ō] for a crude person [sohō no jinbutsu] such as myself, so I returned the entrance permit [to the court]. I like Chinese paintings [tōga] and own over one hundred scrolls. I am innately an epicure [kui dōrakū]. My friends who know this send me a variety of foods from all over Japan, so that I can endure life in this countryside. I used to drink nearly three quarts of sake when I was young, and I still drink a little.

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81 The author claims that Seiko weighed twenty-three to twenty-four kan, which is about eighty-six to ninety kilograms. The Law of Weights and Measures (doryōkō-hō) of 1891 determined that one kan equaled one quarter of fifteen kilograms (3.75 kg). For a history of weights and measures in Japan, see Koizumi Kesakatsu, Doryōkō no rekishi (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1977).

82 Higuchi, “Tōkai Seiko o toburau,” 17-18.

83 The original Japanese reads one shō and five gō, which is about 2.7 liters, since one shō equals 1.80391 liters and is ten times more than one gō.

84 Higuchi, “Tōkai Seiko o toburau,” 17-18. Seiko’s painting teacher is known to have been Hirata Suiseki. In November 1872, Seiko was invited to the imperial palace along with two other women—Atomi Kakei and the poet
The first half of Seiko’s speech focuses on her acquaintances, listing her mentors and supporters, as well as those who benefited from her or who criticized and later befriended her. Seiko also describes her love of food, sake, and Chinese painting. Importantly, she suggests that Noguchi Shōhin initially wished to study painting under her; this is particularly noteworthy since Shōhin’s approach to painting and self-fashioning sharply contrasted with that of Seiko. For instance, Seiko’s use of language, as presented in this essay, is simple, unpretentious, and straightforward; she shows virtually no interest in providing a carefully constructed account of her life and work to contrive a particular image of herself. Shōhin, by contrast, refrained from using a direct manner of speech in order to demonstrate her feminine modesty; further, she repeatedly narrated particular events from her childhood to suggest her innate talent and devotion to painting. We shall examine how Shōhin actively deployed the medium of autobiography to shape her public image in the epilogue.

Higuchi returned to Seiko’s retreat on April 14, 1912, and published another short memoir based on his visit in the same journal.85 Notably, he mentions that Seiko disliked photography and had not been photographed for the past thirty years, but he implored her to let him photograph her and succeeded. Seiko, however, refused to have her portrait published. Higuchi thus only provides a brief description of Seiko’s manner and appearance: despite her age (she was about to turn seventy-five), Seiko’s robust appearance (kakushaku taru fūbō) makes her look as though she were still in her fifties. The way she wears cropped hair and an over-robe (hifu) on her heavy body makes her look like a man; her manner of speech, too, is equally manly.

and scholar of national learning (kokugaku) Mamiya Yasoko (1823-1891)—to demonstrate their arts in front of the empress. An article in Shinbun zasshi reported this event, noting that there are numerous women who succeed in life because of their physical beauty (yōshoku), but it is rare for women such as Seiko and Yasoko to receive imperial favor because of their talent and art (saigei). See Shinbun zasshi, no. 69 (November 1872), 4-5.

In place of Seiko’s portrait, Higuchi reproduced a photograph of himself standing in the mulberry bushes in front of Seiko’s residence in Kamikawakami (Figure 4.12). In August 1913 shortly after Seiko’s death, Higuchi finally managed to publish Seiko’s photograph, which became the defining image of the artist in subsequent periods, as will be examined shortly.

Watanabe’s essay presents Seiko’s new identity as a true recluse, suggesting that her retreat to Kamikawakami, following her success in the metropolis, came to be seen as an enactment of the literati ideal of eremitism. On the other hand, Higuchi’s accounts capitalize on Seiko’s masculine figure and comportment; he even insists on recording her extraordinary appearance photographically, revealing his desire to present her as an object of sensational reportage. Such a desire to dramatize Seiko’s masculinity was, in fact, shared by other contemporary writers who participated in the retrospective construction of the discursive figure of Okuhara Seiko in the 1900s. These writings created the shared terminology, as well as the shared set of anecdotes, that were used to describe the artist and her works in distinctly masculine terms throughout the early twentieth century.

**Sensationalizing Female Masculinity**

Among the earliest and most influential of these sensationalized accounts of Seiko’s transgressive character was presented by the calligrapher and journalist Sase Tokuzō (also known as Sase Suibai; 1863-1917) in his book, *Tōsei katsujinga* (Pictures of Living People of the Current Time), published in 1900. He begins, seemingly, by celebrating the artist’s former popularity, noting that Seiko’s strange (*fūgawari*) and daring (*rairaku*) paintings and calligraphy

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86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
were previously so valued that her work was deemed essential to making a proper drawing room (zashiki).\textsuperscript{89} However, the author then questions whether it really was Seiko’s virtuocic painting ability that allowed her to achieve such fame; instead, he attempts to locate the reason for her previous popularity in the artist’s character and conduct. Specifically, Sase relates several anecdotes that emphasize masculine traits that the author traces to Seiko’s childhood. He notes, for instance, that since her youth, Seiko had a strong physique that surpassed that of boys; she once demonstrated her vigor by throwing a boy during a sumo wrestling, an event that astonished the boys to such an extent that no one subsequently challenged her. Seiko also practiced martial arts, excelling especially in equestrianism (bajutsu), swordsmanship (gekiken), and the chained sickle (kusarigama), for which she possessed a license (menkyo); her martial skills made her widely known as a strange woman (kijo) even outside her home domain of Koga.\textsuperscript{90} Further, while Seiko was studying calligraphy and painting in her early twenties, she carved her hairpin into a seal, an event that suggests to the author her dislike of feminine accessories.\textsuperscript{91} Sase goes on to suggest that Seiko demonstrated her martial techniques even after she moved to Tokyo: one day on her way home from a painting gathering in Ueno, Seiko encountered a drunkard who took Seiko as a mere woman and tried to act disrespectfully toward her. Seiko could not help but execute the “secret of martial arts” (jūjutsu no ōgi) on him. This astounded Hattori Hazan who was accompanying her to such an extent that he ran away, screaming, “Terrible!”\textsuperscript{92} Moreover, the author presents Seiko as a voracious eater and insatiable drinker (taishu kentan) who held a sake cup in one hand and sweet bean jelly (yōkan) in the other. During the peak of her popularity,\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 118-119.\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 119.\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 122.
he says, Seiko invited geisha to her studio from morning onward and painted vigorously while drinking; the guests were amazed to watch her create rough and disorderly (rōzeki) ink landscapes on paper before their very eyes.\footnote{Ibid., 119-120.}

Although many of the anecdotes that Sase relates sensationalize Seiko’s physical virility, particularly her mastery of martial arts, he also stresses other aspects of Seiko. For example, Sase tells the reader that bold and daring (gōhō rairaku) Seiko disliked attending formal occasions. Thus, when she was invited to the imperial court to demonstrate her art, she slipped in the palace garden, which was wet after a rain, and smeared the only formal clothes she owned with dirt; only after her robes had dried was she able to remove the dirt and proceed to paint in front of the empress. After that, Seiko declined all imperial invitations.\footnote{Ibid., 120.} Further, the author notes that Seiko was generous with money; when a carpenter informed Seiko that she paid him twice as much as he asked for, Seiko simply told him to keep the extra money as a reward.\footnote{Ibid., 121.} More importantly, Sase discusses the farsightedness (senken) that set Seiko apart from other literati painters: recognizing early on that her paintings fell outside the newly created category of art (bijutsu), Seiko abandoned the audacious manner of execution that characterized her earlier work and began painting more earnestly; by the time other literati painters were complaining about the declining demand for literati painting, Seiko had already sold her house in Shitaya at a high price and enjoyed a comfortable retirement (rakuinkyo) in her rural retreat.\footnote{Ibid., 123-124.}
To a certain degree, Sase’s essay appears arbitrary and fragmentary, listing numerous sensationalized anecdotes to dramatize Seiko’s eccentric character and conduct. Ultimately, though, the author seems to attribute Seiko’s previous prominence to her “vulgar wisdom” (zokusai). This wisdom, he suggests, led Seiko to seize upon the opportunities of the time and, with the politician Kido Takayoshi’s backing, to vigorously produce rough paintings and calligraphy that were received with great applause (daikassai) when the brutal atmosphere (satsubatsu no kifu) of the Restoration was still lingering. Although Sase pejoratively calls Seiko’s wisdom “vulgar,” many other authors praised her ability to anticipate and respond to the demands of the time; Seiko’s farsightedness, in fact, became one of the key terms used to characterize the artist, as was mentioned in chapter 2 and as will be examined in greater detail below. Moreover, the dramatic, sensationalized image of Seiko constructed in Sase’s account was reproduced almost faithfully by the writer Hayami Fusen in his Keishū gaka keirekidan (Discussion about the Careers of Women Artists) the following year, further disseminating this set of anecdotes and vocabularies that cement a distinctively bold and daring image of Seiko in the reader’s mind. 

While Sase discussed Seiko’s exceedingly masculine character, eccentric conduct, and vulgar wisdom to make sense of her previous popularity, Seiko’s acquaintance Komiya Mihomatsu (1859-1935), a prosecutor who served as the vice minister of the Korean Imperial

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98 Ibid., 123.

99 Hayami Fusen, Keishū gaka keirekidan (Tokyo: Tōyōsha, 1901), 73-83.
Household (Chōsen kunai jikan), presented Seiko’s beauty and intelligence, in addition to her unconventional character, as keys to her former success in an essay published in *Shoga kottō zasshi* in 1911. Although Komiya mentions in the conclusion that Seiko’s financial support made it possible for him to study at the law school of the Ministry of Justice, his account is far from a simple celebration of his benefactor, but rather it is an extensive elaboration of her extraordinary character. Komiya begins by noting that although Seiko was raised in a particularly strict family, she was a strange woman (*fūgawari no onna*) who, in her late teens, drank sake and enjoyed entertainment without learning housework or needlework. Seiko’s eccentricity vexed her family so much that they eventually expelled her to Edo with only one attendant and little money. Seiko thus struggled to make ends meet, sipping rice porridge in an impoverished house in a back alley. The author then implies that it was Seiko’s ability to establish close relationships with influential men such as the politicians Yamauchi Toyoshige and Kido Takayoshi that made her success possible. Komiya provides a detailed account of how Seiko managed to make a sensational debut in early Meiji literati circles thanks to Yamauchi, a key figure in them. In order to attend a prestigious literati gathering hosted by Yamauchi, Seiko visited the members of the gathering with a gift of sweets and asked them to introduce her to the host. Infatuated by Seiko’s beauty and wit, everyone agreed to help her participate in the event. On the day of the event, Seiko intentionally arrived late to tantalize Yamauchi who heard the rumor that Seiko was a woman of unmatched beauty (*zessei no bijin*); when Seiko finally appeared, Yamauchi was captivated by her beauty, while everyone else was surprised by her uncaring (*mutonchaku*) appearance. Komiya claims that Yamauchi cherished Seiko because of

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101 Ibid., 18.

102 Ibid.
her beauty and brilliance (*saiki*). Kido, too, adored Seiko’s extraordinary intelligence, repeatedly remarking that if Seiko were a man, she would have become a first-class minister plenipotentiary (*zenken kōshi*).  

It is important to note that Komiya presents Seiko’s intelligence and physical allure as the two qualities that made her win Yamauchi’s favor, which in turn led to her prominence and success as a painter. Komiya’s emphasis on Seiko’s physical charm seems to recall the idealized portrait of her in *Genkon eimei hyakushu* examined above, which presents her as a feminine beauty. These images of Seiko as a beautiful woman, however, contradict many other descriptions of the artist that tend to stress Seiko’s masculine vigor. Although Komiya never explicitly calls Seiko manly or masculine (at least in this article), he nevertheless finds a reflection of a strong woman (*onna jōbu no omokage*) in Seiko as she constantly tapped the edge of a charcoal brazier with her tobacco pipe made of pure gold. The act of tapping a tobacco pipe was considered ill-mannered particularly among women, as an 1889 essay titled “Onna reishiki” (Women’s Etiquette) suggests. The essay dictates that “it is rude to tap a tobacco pipe directly against the edge of an ashtray” (*dako*, a bamboo container for discarding ash) not only in front of one’s superiors but also one’s peers. Instead, “one should place the ash in her hand first. If one must tap, be careful not to make a loud sound.” Thus, Seiko’s act of vigorously tapping a brazier might have been perceived as unfeminine by contemporary readers.

Komiya further notes that Seiko is fond of cock and bull stories (*horabanashi*) rather than serious discussion and that she often makes her listeners convulse with laughter (*hōfuku zettō*).  

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103 Ibid., 18-19.  
104 Ibid., 20.  
More notably, he describes Seiko’s ability to employ humor to reverse people’s insults; he even asserts that he has never met a person as astute (tonsai) as Seiko.\textsuperscript{106} To demonstrate his point, the author recounts a story (discussed in chapter 1) in which a certain baron who commissioned Seiko to produce a picture of a moon and a cuckoo was infuriated by the eccentric style of her calligraphic inscription, especially the unbalanced configuration of the character ‘call’ (naku 喋). Rather than directly responding to the baron’s question about the origins of her calligraphic style, Seiko pretends to have no stylistic adherence, claiming that her style is uniquely her own. She then shifts his attention away from the question of her propriety to the playful interpretation of the character itself, suggesting that it is the bird in the inscription rather than the calligrapher who distorted the shape of the character in question. Komiya briefly describes another event that also suggests the artfulness of Seiko’s speech: when an extremely drunken Kawanabe Kyōsai stormed into Seiko’s house, demanding that Seiko reveal her front since she was “not a woman,” Seiko said a single word (ichigon) and Kyōsai went home laughing.\textsuperscript{107} Unfortunately, the author does not provide details about what exactly Seiko said to Kyōsai to placate him. Nevertheless, by incorporating this brief story, Komiya seems to emphasize Seiko’s skillfulness in employing language and wit to defend herself from insult.

Seiko’s ability to silence her opponents is also presented in the form of anecdotes in other writings on the artist. For example, in his 1908 book Kanwa kyūdai (To Return to the Subject), Tokutomi Sohō describes the following event as the most marvelous (ki) incident among Seiko’s many interesting exploits.\textsuperscript{108} One day at a calligraphy and painting party (shogakai), the Confucian scholar Chō Baigai (1810-1885) rebuked Seiko for being unfeminine and told her to

\textsuperscript{106} Komiya, “Tōkai Seiko ni tsuite,” 19.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 20.

\textsuperscript{108} Tokutomi, “Tōkai no Seiko,” 108.
create works that were more womanly (onna rashii) and gentle (yasashii). Seiko thanked Baigai but told him that his son Sanshū (1833-1895), in fact, wrote calligraphy in a manner that was unmanly (otoko rashiku mo nai), gentle (yasashii), and weak (koshi no yowai); although such a style might be the calligraphic style of Baigai’s family, she continued, she wished that men would write men’s characters since such an unmanly style was extremely unseemly (mittomonai). On hearing this, Baigai blushed and could not say a word. This story seems to suggest a strategy Seiko might have deployed to treat the question of her gender. Importantly, in this anecdote, Seiko does not respond directly to Baigai’s criticism of the masculinity of her works—and by implication, the masculinity of herself. Instead, she calls into question the femininity of his son’s—and his family’s—calligraphic style, thereby deflecting Baigai’s attention away from the gender of herself and her works. In other words, Seiko challenges the logic underlying Baigai’s criticism: if women should produce womanly creations as Baigai claims, then men should create manly works; since the calligraphic style of his family is not appropriately masculine, he is in no place to criticize her lack of femininity. Further, by deflecting Baigai’s attention away from herself, not only does Seiko succeed in silencing her opponent, but she also obviates the need to define her gender identity. In narrating these stories, both Tokutomi and Komiya seem to stage the criticism of Seiko’s “eccentric” and “masculine” style of inscription for her powerful refutation itself, emphasizing her ability to defeat her detractors.

These accounts of Seiko by Sase, Komiya, and Tokutomi consist of a series of short, often fragmentary anecdotes that dramatize Seiko’s extraordinary persona. Both Sase and Komiya attempt to trace Seiko’s unconventionality to her childhood, claiming that her masculine vigor frightened the neighboring boys and that her fondness for sake and entertainment led to

109 Ibid.
expulsion from her family. Despite the dubious truthfulness of these sensationalized stories, they nevertheless suggest possible ways in which Seiko might have exercised her agency in achieving her artistic success. Sase’s account reveals how Seiko deployed her foresight (which Sase pejoratively calls “vulgar wisdom”) to paint in a manner that met the demands of the early years of the Meiji period. Komiya, too, discusses how Seiko used her intelligence to gain support from powerful politician-patrons of literati art. More importantly, both Komiya and Tokutomi present stories that suggest Seiko’s skillfulness in manipulating language to reverse people’s insults or to deflect their attention away from the question of her gender identity. Such a strategy of deflection might have been necessary particularly at the time when female masculinity was becoming a contested social problem, as will be examined later in this chapter. Before we situate the problematization of Seiko’s masculinity in the broader context of Taishō society, however, let us first analyze a few crucial sources whose textual and visual portraits of Okuhara Seiko served to define the image of the artist in subsequent periods.

**Establishing the Terms of Discourse**

One of the most influential descriptions of Seiko appeared in a book entitled *Kinsei kaigashi* (History of Painting in Recent Times) authored by the literary historian Fujioka Sakutarō (1870-1910) in 1903. While writers such as Sase, Komiya, and Tokutomi focused on Seiko’s extraordinary character to make sense of the fervor with which she was received in the early years of Meiji, Fujioka attempted to offer a broader picture of why literati art gained such momentum following the Restoration. In *Kinsei kaigashi*, Fujioka identifies three reasons why literati painting (*bunjinga*) dominated the art world despite the “dark age of painting” (*kaiga no ankoku jidai*) that characterized the first decade of the Meiji era.\(^{110}\) First of all, he considers the

early Meiji popularity of literati painting to be a continuation of an earlier fascination with *bunjinga*, which he locates in and around the Tenpō era (1830-1844). Secondly, he notes the persistent presence of people with a literati disposition (*bunjin kishitsu*) in Japan even after the Meiji Restoration. He states that although the Restoration gave a victory to national learning scholars (*kokugakusha*) and followers of the slogan “revere the emperor and expel the barbarians” (*sonnō jōi*), many of these scholars and loyalists were educated in Chinese studies (*kangaku*). Further, the general educational system in the first decade of Meiji continued to employ Sinitic prose (*kanbun*) as the basis of learning. The author thus asserts that if literati and *kangaku* scholars led the Restoration and subsequent reforms, it is not surprising that *bunjinga* continued to flourish into the new era. Lastly, Fujioka argues that literati painting matched the spirit of the period (*jidai seishin ni tōgō sesshī*). In relation to this point, he identifies a seemingly paradoxical yet interrelated phenomenon: when people came to admire Western material culture, they simultaneously took delight in paintings that privileged spirit resonance (*kiin seidō*)—which the author also refers to as sublimity (*shin’in*) or expressions of superior spirits (*takubatsu naru kigai*)—rather than the virtuosic techniques of brushwork and coloring associated with Western art. This, he argues, is because in the aftermath of the great transformation (*daihendō*), the Japanese still respected the resolute disposition of stalwart youth (*sōshi*) who disdained the ornate. To the author’s dismay, however, literati painters became increasingly inclined to the extreme, essentially creating “paintings that were not paintings” (*ga ni shite ga ni arazaru mono*), filled with potato-like stones, oniony orchids, randomly dotted mountains, and indistinguishable animals.  

111 Surprisingly, during a brief craze, these “non-paintings” came to be regarded as

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111 Ibid. An article published in *Tokyo nichinichi shinbun* two decades earlier in 1882 is credited with disseminating (if not inventing) the expression “potato landscapes” (*tsukuneimo sansui*), a pejorative term used to refer to roughly executed literati paintings produced at the time. The article is dated October 9, 1882, and is reproduced in Yamanaka Yasumasa, ed., *Shinbun shōsei Meiji hennenshi* (Tokyo: Zaisei Keizai Gakkai, 1934-1936), 9:254-255.
“divine works” (*shinpin*), and people competed to display them on their walls. This situation suggested to the author that both paintings and people’s hearts had become rough (*sohō*) and arbitrary (*hōjū*).112

Fujioka then presents Okuhara Seiko and Yasuda Rōzan as the two most celebrated literati painters of Tokyo in the early Meiji period. He describes Seiko as having a bold disposition (*seishitsu gōhō*) and a manly appearance (*fūsai danshi no gotoku*); she also practiced martial arts (*bujutsu*).113 Following the style of Zheng Xie, she employed robust brushstrokes (*rakuhitsu yūken*) and excelled in painting landscapes and the “four gentlemen”; she abbreviated her brushwork and expressed her ideas through painting, seeking to grab people’s hearts (*hito no shintan o ubawan to su*).114 Further, Fujioka declares that Seiko was learned and highly perceptive (*shikiken hanahada takaku*). Many students of painting came to her to ask for guidance, but she mostly declined. When a particularly earnest student came to ask for instruction, Seiko again refused; she suggested that if he wished to establish himself as a painter, he should look carefully at the changes in the current time and instead practice realistic Western painting, since literati painting would not appeal to later generations. Fujioka mentions the oil painter Koyama Shōtarō (1857-1916) as the source of this account.115 Koyama, in fact, discussed this event in his memoir of his teacher Kawakami Tōgai (1827-1881) published in *Bijutsu shinpō* (Art News) in the same year (as was noted in chapter 2). Koyama claims that “although Ms. Seiko was a woman, she was so vigorous that no man could compete with her.”116 Koyama then

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112 Fujioka, *Kinsei kaigashi*, 344.
113 Ibid., 345.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid., 346.
116 Koyama Shōtarō, “Senshi Kawakami Tōgai okina 2,” *Bijutsu shinpō* 2, no. 6 (1903): 47.
expresses his admiration for Seiko’s discernment as she urged young aspiring painters, including himself, to practice oil painting in the 1870s. He declares: “We must acknowledge her remarkable farsightedness (hijō na takken), given that even today, thirty years later, nihonga painters still detest yōga.”

While writers such as Sase discussed Seiko’s farsightedness in economic or material terms, emphasizing her attainment of leisurely retirement as a result of her acumen, Fujioka and Koyama stressed Seiko’s capacity to foresee artistic developments—in particular, the “decline” of literati painting and the rise of Western-style oil painting. Fujioka’s explicit admiration for Seiko’s acuity is, however, interwoven with his own visions of art. In the subsequent section of Kinsei kaigashi, Fujioka discusses literati painting (bunjinga) and Western painting (seiyōga) as antitheses: ink-based bunjinga values spirit resonance and expresses the essence of objects subjectively, while color-based seiyōga prioritizes the direct observation of life and objectively captures the truth of forms. Fujioka claims that although both styles of painting were practiced simultaneously before and after the Restoration, bunjinga continued into the modern era because it retained the “residual strength of the past” (kako no yoryoku), while seiyōga represented a “forerunner of future trends” (shōrai no ryūkō no kai). Fujioka therefore deploys Seiko’s “farsightedness” as a means of validating his own vision of artistic development. Nevertheless, the particular phrases that Fujioka employed to characterize Seiko

117 Ibid.
118 See, for example, Sase, Tōsei katsujin, 123-124; Suzuki Mitsujirō, Gendai hyakka meiryū kidan (Tokyo: Jitsugyō no Nihonsha, 1903), 112-113.
119 Fujioka, Kinsei kaigashi, 352.
120 Contrary to Fujioka and Koyama’s emphasis on Seiko’s ability to discern the decline of literati painting and anticipate the rise of Western painting, Seiko is recorded in Watanabe Hakumin’s article mentioned above as saying that the current absence of literati painters in Tokyo does not translate to the fall of their style; she asserts instead that if skillful painters of the Southern school (nanshū-ha) appear, literati painting will rise to popularity again. She further encourages Watanabe and other young literati painters to “endure hardships and to establish their names in

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and her work—e.g., bold disposition, manly appearance, robust brushstrokes, and high perception—played a key role in the subsequent reception of the artist, establishing a set of masculine terms repeatedly attributed to her. Indeed, when Seiko died of pleurisy on July 28, 1913, these very same compound expressions came to be reproduced in the descriptions of Seiko in the many brief, repetitive obituaries of her.  

More significantly, Higuchi Den reproduced a photographic portrait of Seiko in *Shoga kottō zasshi* in August 1913 that played a lasting role in the public imagination of the artist’s image (Figure 4.13). This photograph is, in fact, the most frequently reproduced image of Seiko today. Higuchi notes in the accompanying essay that the portrait was taken when he visited Seiko with a photographer the previous year (April 14, 1912) and that Seiko refused to have this portrait published during her lifetime. Indeed, the photograph seems to convey Seiko’s hostility toward the camera. She sits on tatami mats behind a low table with her feet thrown to

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121 These expressions appear in obituaries of Seiko including “Seiko joshi no fu,” *Yorozu chōhō*, no. 7199 (July 30, 1913); 3; “Okuhara Seiko joshi no fu,” *Kensei bijutsu* 7, no. 8 (August 1913: 39-40; and “Okuhara Seiko joshi no fu,” *Bijutsu shinpō* 12, no. 11 (September 1913): 32. They can also be found in sections on Seiko in dictionaries of artists such as Fukuma Kenshū, *Taishō gaka retsuden: Meiji gashi* (Tokyo: Tomita Bunyōdō, 1913), 14; Ishii Hakutei et al., ed., *Bijutsu jiten* (Tokyo: Nihon Bijutsu Gakuen, 1914), 858-859; and Matsumoto Ryūnosuke, ed., *Meiji Taishō bungaku bijutsu jinmei jisho* (Osaka: Tachikawa Bunmeidō, 1926), 176. Although *Miyako shinbun* (Capital News) published a more extensive obituary in three installments, it is essentially a compilation of the earlier essays examined above, appropriating especially Komiya’s essay and adding more embellishment and rhetorical drama. See “Joketsu Seiko 1 (Bushū Kumagaya zai ni inkyo seikatsu),” *Miyako shinbun* (July 31, 1913); “Joketsu Seiko 2 (Gozen de jokan o odorokasu),” *Miyako shinbun* (August 1, 1913); “Joketsu Seiko 3 (Bannen no seikatsu),” *Miyako shinbun* (August 2, 1913).


123 Higuchi, “Tōkai Seiko no omokage,” 16.
the left. The table is placed at a slight angle, yet Seiko’s upper body directly confronts the camera. She leans forward and places her elbows at the edge of the table; she brings her right hand close to her chin, while concealing her left hand inside (or behind) her right sleeve. Further, she ducks her head, raises her shoulders, and stares straight at the camera with narrowly squinted eyes. A piece of Chinese-style furniture with open latticework can be found in the dark background; on top of it seem to rest some books and a plant with spiky leaves in a pot. Perhaps the photograph was meant to capture Seiko at her site of reclusion surrounded by Chinese-style furniture.\footnote{In fact, Seiko’s Sinophilia was so well known that a reporter of \textit{Miyako shinbun} noted that even her toilet slippers were Chinese in style. “Joketsu Seiko 3,” 3.}

Seiko expresses her antagonism toward the camera even more clearly in another photograph that seems to have been taken on the same occasion (Figure 4.14). It shows Seiko seated in a room with Watanabe Seiran and Inamura Kan’ichirō on the right. The edge of a low table is found in the lower left, while a folding screen with a sheet of calligraphy pasted on each panel is displayed in the background. The base of a building (most likely Seiko’s residence in Kamikawakami) is seen in the foreground, suggesting that the photograph was taken from the outside looking into Seiko’s private space. Both Seiran and Inamura politely pose for the camera, sitting on their heels with their hands tightly crossed and placed on their thighs; Seiran even lowers her chin and smiles softly. By contrast, Seiko, who occupies the most recessed space, is captured in the midst of smoking; she holds a cigarette in her left hand and brings it closer to her mouth, while throwing her right hand in front of her (possibly crossed) legs. Further, she squints her eyes and casts a sidelong glance at the camera, as though to express her exasperation at the photographic intrusion. Although this photograph did not circulate as widely as the single
portrait, both photographs seem to convey a sense of hostility that might have been read by later viewers as a sign of Seiko’s unfeminine character.

These photographic intrusions might have constituted precisely the kind of disturbance caused by “vulgar visitors” that Seiko so abhorred, as Watanabe’s essay discussed. The fact that Seiko prevented Higuchi from publishing her photographic portrait during her lifetime further attests to her desire to shield herself from public attention. Indeed, it was shortly after this photograph was published that her masculine appearance and comportment came to be seen as not only sensationally eccentric but also socially problematic. A close analysis of how and why Seiko’s masculinity became problematized at this particular moment reveals a broader picture of how the conceptions of gender and sexuality were transformed in early twentieth-century Japan.

The Problematics of Gender Ambiguity

Not only did Seiko’s masculinity continue to be a topic of discussion well after her death, but also it gained new significance as conceptions of gender transformed at the turn of the century. The renewed interest in and increasing problematization of Seiko’s gender were deeply interwoven with the shifting debates on gender, particularly female masculinity, in the late Meiji and early Taishō periods. Specifically, the first decades of the twentieth century saw the rise of women’s education and wage employment, as well as the women’s liberation movement; these social transformations culminated in the emergence of new women (atarashii onna) who proposed visions of womanhood that challenged the conventional conceptions of gender roles and relations. The increasing visibility of women in the public sphere spurred debates on what was perceived as the “masculinization of women,” as well as the “feminization of men,” phenomena that were excoriated and pathologized by journalists, educators, and sexologists at the time. Before we examine the broader social context in which the figure of the “masculine
woman” became the object of heated debates as a symbol of modern female transgression, let us first analyze the process by which Seiko’s gender ambiguity was problematized. Two essays on Seiko published shortly after her death by the artist and writer Ishii Hakutei (1882-1958) and the nativist scholar and art critic Umezawa Seiichi (1871-1931), in particular, marked a new phase in the reception of Okuhara Seiko, as they presented ways of conceptualizing her gender that markedly departed from the earlier sensationalization of the artist’s masculinity.

In his 1917 article on Seiko published in the journal *Chūō bijutsu* (Central Journal of Art), Ishii provides a particularly vivid account of his first impression of Seiko’s striking appearance: “I saw Seiko in person only once. It might have been the summer of 1896…. Upon first glance, [my brother and I] did not think she was a woman. Her hair was cropped (zangiri); she had glasses and wore a man’s sash on her large body. Neither her appearance, with the black *haori* jacket that she wore, nor her voice, with which she said one or two words to us, were those of a woman.”125 Ishii continues on to note that when Seiko visited his father Teiko (a painter and print designer; 1848-1897), another male visitor mistook Seiko for a man, addressing her as the “older brother” (*oniisan*) of Teiko; he was astounded when Teiko told him after Seiko left that “that was Seiko.”126 Although Ishii simply presents these events as telling tales of how unwomanly (*onna rashiku nakatta*) Seiko was,127 these episodes are crucial for understanding how Seiko was perceived during her lifetime, for they suggest that Seiko might have passed as a man, at least on certain occasions.

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126 Ibid., 142-143. By 1896, Seiko had already retired to Kamikawakami, but Ishii notes that she was visiting Seisui in Tokyo then. Seiko, in fact, told Watanabe Hakumin in 1901 that she visited Tokyo twice soon after she moved to Kamikawakami. See Watanabe, “Bushū kikō, fu Okuhara Seiko joshi hōmonki (jōzen),” 6.

127 Ishii, “Okuhara Seiko,” 142-143.
More significantly, Ishii mentions a rumor (uwasa) that Seiko was not a mere woman (tada no joshi) but was hensei, or “metamorphically sexed”—that is, she was afflicted by the pathological degeneration or deformation of sexual organs that was thought to result in the desexualization (musei) or blurring of the distinction between male and female. In seeming support of this rumor, Ishii then presents the following anecdote as a “marvelous story” (kidan): “One day at a calligraphy and painting party held at Nakamurāō, a man named Yamawaki Tōshō suddenly tried to feel Seiko’s breasts from behind. Seiko became flushed, stretched her long arms, and threw Tōshō on top of the table.” This story recalls the anecdote presented in Sase’s account, in which Seiko executed the “secret of martial arts” on a misbehaving drunkard, an act that frightened away her male escort Hazan. Both of these anecdotes are brief yet graphic, dramatizing the physical strength that Seiko demonstrates to prevent male offenders from exploiting her body. Ultimately, it is the author and reader who produce and consume such textual exploitations of Seiko’s masculinity, but their curiosity is transposed onto the figure of the male intruder, who acts on the collective desire to inspect Seiko’s body and dramatically fails in his attempt.

Ishii’s treatment of the anecdote, however, departs from Sase’s handling of the similar story. Sase simply recounts the episode and abruptly moves on to another topic, leaving the reader’s interest suspended and preventing him or her from contemplating the meaning or

128 Ibid., 148. For a contemporary conception of hensei, see, for example, Sawada Junjirō, Kagaku yori mitaru danjo no kankei (Tokyo: Teiryūsha, 1907), 40-41. In a book published seventeen years later, however, Sawada provided a different definition of hensei, noting that the term refers to individuals who are both physiologically and sexually transformed into the opposite sex. He further claims that women with a masculine figure and character tend to be homosexuals (dōsei seiyokusha). See Sawada, Senmei saretaru sei no shinden (Tokyo: Bunkōsha, 1924), esp. 275-283. Sawada was one of the most prolific writers of popular sexological books in modern Japan. For a discussion of his works, see Pflugfelder, Cartographies of Desire, 254-312.


130 Sase Tokuzō, Tōsei katsujin, 122.
implications of the story. In other words, Sase’s primary purpose in presenting the story seems to lie in sensationalizing Seiko’s supra-masculine strength, which is reflected in her ability to defeat and frighten the two men. Further, the feminized image of Hazan, who, upon witnessing Seiko’s martial skills, screams with fear and runs away, seems to add a comic element to this highly theatrical narrative. By contrast, Ishii employs a more serious tone of voice in his presentation of the anecdote. Rather than simply sensationalizing Seiko’s virility, he frames the story by presenting it immediately after his introduction of the rumor that Seiko was hensei—that is, sexually abnormal. In doing so, Ishii presents Yamawaki’s attempt to feel Seiko’s breasts as an effort to discover her “true sex” in response to such a rumor. Yamawaki’s failure to inspect Seiko’s body, therefore, serves to reinforce the collective anxiety about the ambiguity of Seiko’s sexual and gender designation. As though to alleviate such unease, Ishii attempts to offer a tentative explanation of Seiko’s problematic masculinity, claiming that “even if she might have been truly female physiologically” (tatoe seiri-tekii wa shin no joshi de atta ni shitemo), she must have been “a woman with a frank disposition whose masculinity was exceedingly strong” (dansei no hijō ni katta kishō no sappari shita josei).131 Significantly, this short passage encapsulates the author’s desire to explain, rather than to merely dramatize, Seiko’s masculinity by separating her female physiology from her masculine psyche. His use of language is, however, far from definitive, using the phrase “even if” (tatoe) to suggest his uncertainty about Seiko’s sexual designation. The sense of ambivalence embedded in the language might have stirred anxiety in the reader’s mind, inviting the reader to share a sense of collective uneasiness with the author as well as the men who failed in their attempts to examine Seiko’s physical attributes.

Following Ishii’s characterization of Seiko, Umezawa Seiichi also presented a double image of the artist in his *Nihon nangashi* (History of Japanese *Nanga*) published in 1919.  

His final chapter on the development of literati painting in the Meiji and Taishō periods synthetizes some of the essays examined above. First reiterating Fujioka Sakutarō’s three reasons why *bunjinga* flourished during the first decade of the Meiji period, he presents Seiko and Rōzan as the two most representative painters working in Tokyo at the time. He then notes that Seiko’s pursuit of reclusion after achieving success in Tokyo was a life trajectory appropriate for a Southern-school painter, a course of life that was rare even among men. He further calls Seiko lofty (*kōfū*) and presents her as an ideal literatus, for she did not curry favor with the powerful nor covet fame. Umezawa’s exaltation of Seiko as a lofty recluse contrasts with Sase’s earlier portrayal of her as a worldly painter whose vulgar talent and sensational character and conduct allowed her to attain monetary success.

On the other hand, however, Umezawa follows Ishii’s problematization of Seiko’s masculinity and compiles several rumors concerning her sexual and gender ambiguity. For example, Umezawa presents the following event as a story he heard from Koyama Shōtarō: one day when Seiko was leisurely going down the Hakusan slope in a rickshaw, another pair of rickshaw pullers passed by her. Upon glancing at Seiko, they started singing, “We don’t know whether it’s a male or a female” (*osu daka mesu daka wakaranai*). Umezawa notes that such ridicule was directed at Seiko because her cut hair (*kirikami*) made her look as though she had

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133 Ibid., 930-932. Elsewhere, however, Umezawa attempts to correct some of the observations that Fujioka made in his *Kinsei kaigashi*.

134 Ibid., 937.

135 Ibid.
(men’s) cropped hair (sanpatsu), thereby implicitly dismissing the speculation that Seiko was male.  

While Ishii’s essay suggests the possibility that Seiko might have passed as a man at least occasionally, stories such as this indicate the extent to which Seiko’s appearance was deemed transgressive and was subjected to public curiosity and mockery. More significantly, Umezawa states that the nihonga painter Takamori Saigan (1847-1917) once told him with a serious face that Seiko was a hermaphrodite (danjo ryōsei) and that people such as Seiko were protected as national treasures in Russia. Umezawa then quickly moves on to cite the graphic tale of Yamawaki Tōshō discussed in Ishii’s article and introduces another story of a similar kind, which involves an even more audacious male intruder, Morita Hōtan. Umezawa narrates the episode as follows: “Morita Hōtan also tried to test Seiko. One evening he invited her for a party and had her stay at his house overnight. During the third hour [11pm-1am or 12am-2am], he covered himself in black clothes and secretly went into her bed. Seiko jumped at once, grabbed his neck, and—without giving him a chance to say a word—threw him. Seiko was experienced in the martial arts.”

The trajectory of this anecdote closely parallels that of the story of Yamawaki Tōshō: a man attempts to examine Seiko’s body but she prevents it by physically defeating him. Although Morita’s act appears more calculated than Yamawaki’s seemingly impulsive behavior, both stories suggest the fixation of these men (as well as the authors) on the

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136 Ibid., 935-936.

137 Miyako shinbun also reported that passersby looked back at short-haired Seiko, finding her to appear like a “strange monk” (kimyō na bōzu). See “Joketsu Seiko 3,” 3. As Pflugfelder has argued, “Because of the convention that gender should match sex, males who assimilated feminine gender, as well as masculine-identified females, faced considerable ridicule and curiosity as to their anatomical makeup…. In Tokyo, such gender-anomalous males [and females] were referred to as ‘men-women’ (otoko-onna or onna-otoko).” See Pflugfelder, Cartographies of Desire, 166-167.

138 Umezawa, Nihon nangashi, 936.

139 Morita sold the very same Hōtan medicine whose dramatic increase in sale in the early years of Meiji was compared to that of Seiko’s paintings in Yūbin kōchi shinbun, noted at the beginning of this chapter.

140 Ibid., 936-937.
question of Seiko’s anatomy. In other words, the figure of the intruder seems to inspect Seiko’s body in an effort to verify that nothing other than male anatomical attributes concealed beneath her masculine clothes could explicate her virility—a quality that is, in turn, demonstrated precisely by Seiko’s throwing the intruder to prevent his incursion.141

After listing these anecdotes, Umezawa concludes, “I visited Seiko twice in her place of retirement in Kamikawakami, Kumagaya, and closely observed her appearance and manner: she was physiologically a woman (seiri-teki ni wa josei), but she was an extremely masculine woman (kiwamete dansei-teki naru josei). Her bold disposition (gōhō naru kifū) was rare even among men, and she was heroic among women (kinkakusharyū no gōketsu).”142 Umezawa thus represents Seiko as a physiological woman with a supra-masculine character, recalling Ishii’s binary conception of Seiko’s physiology and psyche. Umezawa, however, employs more definitive language than Ishii, using his direct observation of Seiko as a means of supporting his characterization.

The rumors, anecdotes, and personal observations discussed in Ishii’s and Umezawa’s essays suggest the extent to which Seiko’s masculinity came to be seen as not merely an object of curiosity but a source of anxiety that demanded an explanation. Most noticeably, these texts suggest the creation and circulation of new terminology to describe Seiko’s sexual and gender ambiguity, as the authors present rumors that Seiko was hensei or danjo ryōsei. Further, Ishii’s and Umezawa’s presentation of anecdotes in which men fail in their attempt to examine Seiko’s body reveals their own desire to search for Seiko’s essential sex rooted in her anatomy. This

141 In her study of the reception of the nineteenth-century French female painter Rosa Bonheur (1822-1899), Gretchen van Slyke argues that if “anyone should be accused of fetishism, it would be those individuals who insisted on seeing [Bonheur’s] trousers…as if to confirm their suspicion that only a hidden phallus could explain her accomplishment.” See Slyke, “The Sexual and Textual Politics of Dress,” 332.

142 Ibid., 937. Kinkaku literally means women’s hair accessories used in China.
fixation on the body as the site for determining one’s sexual designation is based on the modern conception of sex as an anatomically fixed entity, as the science of biology taught that “one was either a woman or a man and, given enough investigation, the truth of either claim could be determined.” In the end, both Ishii and Umezawa conclude that despite her masculine character, Seiko was physiologically female, thereby dismissing the daunting possibility that she possessed a hermaphroditic body, which would have rendered her socially unintelligible during her lifetime. As Gregory Pflugfelder has shown, in the Meiji period, the differentiation of individuals, particularly intersexed (haninyō) infants, into male and female became an issue of utmost concern to the state since sexual classification was made legally and socially necessary for determining one’s sex-specific rights, duties, and privileges—e.g., marriage, succession, inheritance, enfranchisement, and military service. Yet Ishii’s and Umezawa’s characterization of Seiko as a physiological female with abundant masculine traits seems to connect to the contemporary notion of the quasi-hermaphrodite (jun-han’in’yōsha)—an individual with “a discord between the sex of the reproductive organs and the outward appearance.” Further, such a conception also seems to resonate with the trope of compound sex (fukusei)—a framework employed by contemporary sexologists to explain same-sex desire—that dictated that “all individuals were a composite of male and female” and that “the designation ‘woman’…signified a predominance of the feminine over the masculine rather than an exclusion


144 Pflugfelder, Cartographies of Desire, 151.

145 Algoso, “Thoughts on Hermaphroditism,” 561. Algoso importantly notes that “in the same way that the existence of the categories male and female necessitate the existence of the hermaphrodite…the classification of hermaphrodite creates and solidifies the boundaries of those very categories by erased dangerously ambiguous bodies, leaving only those that reinforce the normative definitions of male and female…. The male-female dichotomy and the remainder category of hermaphrodite endlessly reinforce each other, each by defining what the other is not.” See ibid., 559.
of the masculine.”¹⁴⁶ In order to understand these changes in the conception of gender and sexuality in the discursive construction of Okuhara Seiko, particularly the authorial desire to explain her masculinity, it is necessary to examine the broader contemporary discourse on the shifting definitions of femininity and masculinity—debates that were beginning to intensify at the time, as the rising visibility of working women (shokugyō fujin) and new women (atarashii onna) became a source of anxiety about the increasingly blurred boundaries between male and female.

**The Rise of “Masculinized Women” in Taishō Society**

The 1910s and 20s—when Ishii and Umezawa’s essays on Seiko were produced and circulated—saw a proliferation of writings on the “masculinization of women” (josei no danseika or joshi no danka) and the accompanying “feminization of men” (dansei no joseika or danshi no joka) as a worsening social problem. Donald Roden has argued that “the sex roles that had been so carefully delineated in Meiji civilization grew ever more blurred and confused in Taishō culture…. [A]fter the turn of the century and especially during the 1920s, the expression and representation of gender ambivalence captured the imagination of a cross section of the literate urban populace in a manner that was simply unthinkable in the heyday of ‘civilization and enlightenment.’”¹⁴⁷ In what social phenomena did journalists, critics, and writers identify such gender confusion? How did they understand the factors that contributed to the masculinization of women? What was so problematic about female masculinity in the eyes of these critics? How did they attempt to tame the threat posed by what they perceived as women’s

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infringement on masculine authority? An examination of essays on the “gender troubles” that multiplied during this period is crucial to understanding how and why female masculinity became a subject of grave concern in Taishō Japan. More importantly, such an analysis will allow us to make sense of why the discursive construction of Okuhara Seiko shifted from the sensational dramatization of her manly character to the more serious problematization of her excessive masculinity during this period.

Many social critics and journalists in the 1910s and 20s discussed the “great trend” (daikeikō) toward the masculinization of women as a detestable yet inevitable consequence of “livelihood difficulties” (seikatsunan). Kuroiwa Shūroku (Ruikō; 1862-1920), a journalist and novelist who founded the popular newspaper Yorozu chōhō (Comprehensive Morning News) in 1892, encapsulated such a situation in his book Yo ga fujikan (My View of Women) published in 1913, the year Seiko died.148 He notes that economic deprivation at the time prevents men from taking wives, producing single women who must engage in wage-earning occupations to support themselves. Further, even when men take wives, they tend to prioritize women who can work to supplement the family’s income. Moreover, education raises women’s self-awareness while strengthening their sense of independence; because of this, it is not rare for women to get married while continuing to work.149 The author laments such a situation, claiming that women’s competition with men at work would not bring happiness to women and that it would be ideal for women to develop their feminine qualities (josei-teki seishitsu) instead. Nevertheless, he predicts

148 Kuroiwa Shūroku, Yo ga fujikan (Tokyo: Heigo Shuppansha, 1913), 220.

149 Ibid., 220-221. The Meiji government introduced four years of compulsory education for both girls and boys in 1872, but only a little over thirty percent of eligible girls were actually attending school by 1890. In 1899 the government promulgated another decree that mandated the establishment of at least one school of higher education for girls in each prefecture. See Sharon H. Nolte and Sally Ann Hastings, “The Meiji State’s Policy toward Women, 1890-1910,” in Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 157.
that women will continue to become more masculinized (danseika) or neutralized (chūseika) in the future.\textsuperscript{150} In other words, Kuroiwa associates women’s masculinization with their increasing engagement in wage employment and their rising sense of self-reliance. Although the author deplores female masculinity, he identifies the masculinization or neutralization of women as a phenomenon that will continue to expand in the future.

Indeed, the first decades of the twentieth century saw a significant increase in the number of middle-class working women in Japan. As Margit Nagy has shown, this was partly due to economic necessity: the middle class faced financial trouble “as the price of rice and other staples mounted and the Tokyo housing shortage pushed up rents…. [T]he necessities of life consumed most of their household income…[and] the income of the household head alone was insufficient to meet expenses.”\textsuperscript{151} At the same time, the steady growth of the tertiary sector created numerous clerical and sales jobs, while women’s higher education and specialized training expanded, improving women’s “chances for employment that required more mental ability than physical strength.”\textsuperscript{152} Indeed, the term shokugyō fujin (working women) connoted “white collar” labor, referring to women who engaged in clerical or specialized work in the tertiary sector—e.g., teachers, nurses, typists, telephone operators, and office workers.\textsuperscript{153}

Although women were often hired as cheaper replacements for men, female employment was

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 222. The educator and child psychologist Takashima Heizaburō (1864-1946) also deplored the loss of femininity among women. In his article on “Masculinizing Recent Women” published in 1912 in Fujin zasshi (Women’s Magazine), Takashima declares that women’s bodily masculinization is a consequence of their mental masculinization—e.g., thinking like men and engaging in men’s activities. He warns that if women excessively focus on intellectual activities, they will gradually lose their loveliness (kawaige). Takashima Heizaburō, “Danseika suru ima no onna,” Fujin zasshi 27, no. 5 (May 1912): 15.

\textsuperscript{151} Margit Nagy, “Middle-Class Working Women During the Interwar Years,” in Bernstein, Recreating Japanese Women, 204-205.

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 207-208.

both endorsed by and reinforced women’s aspirations for independence. It was these advancements in women’s employment and self-reliance that rendered working women a dangerous emblem of female masculinity in the eyes of many social critics.

Further, this perceived rise in masculinized women was sometimes discussed in relation to the simultaneous phenomenon of the feminization of men. For instance, the Buddhologist and social critic Takashima Beihō (1875-1949) expressed such a concern in his 1917 essay on “The Masculinization of Women.” He begins by echoing other writers’ anxiety that the present economic conditions have forced both men and women to remain single and self-sufficient, while increasing the number of working women. Not only does he detect masculinization among young women (e.g., in the way they “imitate sumo wrestlers” by wearing kimono with large patterns, which were formerly worn only by sumo wrestlers or as nightgowns); but also he criticizes men who paint their faces, make their hair shiny, and wear undivided, skirt-like trousers (andon bakama), all of which he sees as signs of their feminization.

As women

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154 Nagy, “Middle-Class Working Women During the Interwar Years,” 206-209.
156 Ibid., 13-14. Such images of effeminate men contrasted with the ideal image of masculinity that was defined by the military conscription during the Meiji era. As Sabine Frühstück has shown, the physical examination that began to be administered to all conscripted recruits in the modern era created a new standard of evaluating manhood based on bodily criteria, constructing a new ideal of masculinity. See Sabine Frühstück, Colonizing Sex: Sexology and Social Control in Modern Japan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 27-33. According to the Conscript Decree, which was promulgated on November 28, 1872, as an imperial edict, soldiers were to be drafted from all over the country to form the Imperial Army. Every year, all twenty-year-old Japanese men underwent a thorough medical examination in which “their age, height, chest circumference, lung capacity, and weight” were carefully documented; the conscripts were then categorized in one of five classes according to their fitness for service (ibid., 28). Since recruitment implied a loss of life or labor at home, there were frequent incidents of draft evasion; eventually, however, being drafted as a class A soldier came to be “considered a mark of status and an acknowledgement of top physical condition” (ibid., 33). Teresa A. Algoso further argues that since the conscription exam involved an inspection of sex organs for the presence of venereal disease, the exam “led to the ‘discovery’ of individuals with sexual characteristics perceived as abnormal” (Algoso, “Not Suitable as a Man?,” 249). In other words, “because the rights and responsibilities of citizenship were assigned based on a scientifically measurable masculinity—a masculinity defined in accordance with military requirements—individuals with bodies that did not conform to this new definition of masculinity were legally or socially marginalized” as “the feeble, the physically deficient, [and] the hermaphroditic” (ibid., 257). Simultaneously, the figure of the male youth (seinen) came to be upheld as a new symbol of masculinity, particularly following the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). As Katō Chikako has noted, the ideal youth was to be sturdy and indomitable (gōken fukutsu), while effeminate men
became masculinized and financially independent, they stopped bowing to men, while men became more effeminate and began submitting themselves to women. Takashima denounces such an inversion of the gender hierarchy, asserting that the idea of having women in political power is “strange” (hen) and “unnatural” (fushizen) and that it is more fortunate for a woman to raise a great person (ijin) as a mother than to become a great person herself. Takashima thus defines a woman’s happiness within the home as a mother whose duty is to nurture superior children. He further demarcates the workplace outside the home as a male domain, claiming that women’s attainment of political power is unnatural and undesirable.

Other writers presented an even more pessimistic vision of the future of male authority. In a 1912 essay, the journalist and social critic Kayahara Rentarō (Kazan; 1870-1952) likens the power dynamic between men and women to a scale and argues that the recent rise in the position of masculinized women parallels the declining authority of feminized men. Claiming that women have a stronger resistance to economic crisis than men, the author predicts that the number of women will naturally surpass that of men in Japan. He further projects his perception of deteriorating male authority onto the image of a decaying camellia flower and declares that in this economically distraught time, formerly angelic women are becoming were criticized for their despondency (iki shōchin), extravagance (shashi), and weakness (nanjaku). Some of the youth groups that emerged throughout the country even resorted to violence to punish “unmanly” young men; their use of force was legitimated in the name of expelling the effeminate. Katō further mentions that the creation of the concept of youth as an ideal of masculinity led to their sense of superiority over the Other—e.g., women and elders—who were considered weak and cowardly. See Katō Chikako, Kindai Nihon no kokumin tōgō to jendā (Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Hyōronsha, 2014), esp. 109-110.

158 Ibid., 15.
160 Ibid., 256-257.
Skeptical of realizing the ideal of equality between men and women, Kayahara considers the rise of women as an inevitable consequence of economic deprivation, but he demonizes women as devils who will bring about the demise of men.

While Kayahara lamented the erosion of male authority by the masculinization of women, the journalist and literary critic Chiba Kameo (1878-1935) offered an intriguing alternative explanation for gender reversals in an essay published in the journal *Taiyō* (The Sun) in 1925. Treating the masculinization of women and the feminization of men as a global phenomenon, Chiba argues that because men consider women inferior, women try to conceal their femininity and instead emphasize their masculinity in order to demonstrate that they possess talent and bravery comparable to those of men. On the other hand, men are becoming feminized as they put on makeup and pluck their eyebrows in order to satisfy their vanity; their taste, too, is feminine (*josei-teki*), as it is delicate (*senkō*), colorful (*shikisai-teki*), and intuitive (*kankaku-teki*). The author thus implies that all individuals are a composite of masculine and feminine elements, suggesting his internalization of the notion of compound sex (*fukusei*). After citing several theories that propose reasons for the inversion of the sexes, Chiba claims that such sexual confusion is unnatural (*fushizen*) and proposes equal rights (*byōdō kenri*) as a solution to this anomalous situation. His conception of equality, however, seems ambiguous as he asserts that men are biologically complete (*seibutsugaku-teki ni kansei*), while women are still in the process of becoming a totality. He further declares that women’s masculinization is only a stage of
preparation (junbi) or experiment (shiken) in the process of their development and that women will never become complete in the same manner as men. In other words, the author presents women’s masculinization as a temporary state in their transformation into complete women, thereby dismissing the idea that the phenomenon of female masculinity will continue to grow, a fear expressed by other writers including Kuroiwa and Kayahara.

While many social critics saw women’s masculinization as a despicable yet inexorable effect of modern society, Nogami Toshio (1882-1963), a professor of psychology at Kyoto Imperial University (Kyoto Teikoku Daigaku), proposed a more forceful solution to contain female masculinity, calling for a social reform to restore the strict division of duties between the sexes. In his essay on “Contemporary Life and the Convergence of the Sexes” published in the socialist journal Kaizō (Reconstruction) in 1920, Nogami discusses women’s increasing engagement in wage labor as a global phenomenon. He notes that when most men in Europe and the Untied States were drafted during World War I, women demonstrated their ability to engage in occupations that were formerly dominated by men. The author, however, disapproves of this situation, arguing that since men and women have immutable sexual differences, they must engage in divided duties (bungyō) that are innate to each sex; for example, he notes women’s biological imperative (seibutsugaku-teki shimei) to preserve and improve the human race. Nogami thus proclaims that what needs to be reconstructed (kaizō) most urgently is the economically distraught society, particularly its industrial structure, which takes wives

166 Ibid.
168 Ibid., 196.
169 Ibid., 187-188 and 192-193.
from their home and mothers from their children.\textsuperscript{170} Thus, Nogami’s call for social and economic reform is guided by his preconception that irreversible biological distinctions between men and women necessitate the strict division of duties between the two sexes. For him, it does not matter whether women are capable of fulfilling duties previously designated to men; rather, the fundamental problem lies in the economic and social structure that prevents women from performing their biologically designated tasks as wives and mothers.

In sum, at the time when the figure of Okuhara Seiko was being retrospectively reimagined in the 1910s and 20s, the masculinization of women came to be perceived as a vexing social phenomenon. Many social critics identified the economic hardship of the first decades of the twentieth century as a condition that necessitated women’s engagement in employment and their attainment of financial independence. These writers saw women’s advancement in their careers and their accompanying sense of self-reliance as revealing signs of their masculinization. Perceiving female masculinity as a threat to male authority, some writers demonized such women, while others attempted to tame women’s masculinization by presenting it as a temporary stage in their pursuit of biological completion. Still others resorted to the rhetoric of nature to present women’s engagement in occupations as deviations from natural law, while advocating the “restoration” of the strict division of duties “intrinsically” assigned to each sex. This societal problematization of masculinized women served as an important context that affected the ways in which Ishii and Umezawa expressed the need to question and explain Seiko’s masculinity. However, this widely shared perception of the rise of masculinized women was not the only factor that rendered the question of Seiko’s gender and sexual identity controversial. A more alarming denunciation of female masculinity came from popular

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 197.
sexologists who constructed and disseminated “scientific knowledge” as a means of educating the populace about “sexual normalcy.” Given this changing discursive framework, Seiko’s masculinity could no longer remain simply an object of curiosity; instead, it had to be reconceived as a problem that demanded scientific scrutiny and intervention.

**The Figure of the “Masculine Woman” in Sexological Discourse**

Some of the most excoriating condemnations of female masculinity can be found in sexological discourse, where the rhetoric of biological knowledge was deployed to pathologize women’s gender transgression. Seiko, whose gender remained a subject of sexological commentary long after her death, was not spared from such condemnation. The popular sexologist Tanaka Kōgai (Yūkichi, 1874-1944) wrote especially extensively on the topic of masculine women; his works provide a convenient lens onto contemporary sexological conceptions of gender and will be introduced in detail below. He primarily discussed two types of female masculinity—women who were masculinized because of their involvement in employment and the women’s liberation movement, and those who were pathologically masculine due to their biological “abnormality.” Significantly, he presented Seiko as an example of a pathologically masculine woman.

In his 1921 essay on “The Masculinization of Women” (Concerning the Women’s Liberation Movement) published in the journal *Katei shin-chishiki* (New Knowledge of the Home), Tanaka discusses the emergence of masculinized women as an anomalous phenomenon caused by the defective social and economic structures of modern material culture. Recalling other writers’ claims discussed above, Tanaka describes the recent masculinization of women as

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a result of their attainment of economic independence. More significantly, he asserts that in a true civilization (shin no bunmei), the distinction between men and women becomes more pronounced, allowing each sex to manifest its unique qualities endowed by nature. Women’s pursuit of self-reliance and their inability to accomplish their great task (tainin) of childbearing and rearing is therefore an “anomalous and perverse phenomenon” (hensoku bentai no jishō). Tanaka continues on to assert that women are physically and psychologically inferior to men. Even if, as new women (atarashii onna) argue, women can attain physiological and intellectual capabilities comparable to those of men, there is a fundamental reason why women cannot achieve parity with men and succeed in academics, politics, and economics—namely, the influence of gonads (seishokusen) unique to women. Citing the German pathologist Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902) as an authority, Tanaka claims that women’s feminine qualities (e.g., the

172 Ibid., 60-61.

173 Ibid., 61. This was an argument frequently made by sexologists in early twentieth-century Japan. See, for example, Ōsawa Kenji, Seirigakujō yori mitaru fujin on honbun (Tokyo: Ōkura Shoten, 1908), 11. Ugaki Kazushige (1868-1956), a general in the Imperial Japanese Army, also perceived sexual convergence as a sign of regression. He wrote in his diary in 1921 that “the feminization of men and the masculinization of women and the neutered gender that results is a modernistic tendency that makes it impossible for the individual, the society, or the nation to achieve great progress. Accordingly, since the manliness of man and the femininity of woman must forever be preserved, it is imperative that we not allow the rise of neutered people who defy nature’s grace” (trans. in Roden, “Taishō Culture and the Problem of Gender Ambivalence,” 52). However, other writers such as the philosopher Kuwaki Gen'yoku (1874-1946) proposed an alternative perspective on the transgression of gender boundaries. Kuwaki noted in an essay published in the journal Fujinkai (Women’s World) in 1922 that “the development of culture is prone to a reduction of the previously existent distinctions between male and female culture” (trans. in ibid., 54). More explicitly, as Algosó has examined, in his 1922 book on Hannannyókó (Thoughts on hermaphroditism), the journalist Miyatake Gaikotsu (1867-1955) saw parity between men and women as “the telos of human evolution [which] will eventually resolve in physiological evolution.” Thus, according to his vision, “the human race will completely evolve into true, that is, physiological, hermaphroditism” (Algosó, “Thoughts on Hermaphroditism,” 570). Gaikotsu concludes with the rhetorical question: “Won’t the hermaphrodites that are today called abnormalities someday come to call single-sex (tansei) men and women abnormalities?” (trans. in ibid., 571). Such a vision of hermaphroditism as a sign of evolutionary progress contrasts starkly with sexological efforts to medicalize and pathologize hermaphroditic individuals. “The paradigm of hermaphroditism as an alternative to the sex/gender binary,” argues Leslie Winston, “provides a view of a counter-discourse that competed with that of sexology and medical science.” See Leslie Winston, “Performing the Hermaphrodite: Counter-Discourse to Gender Dimorphism in Tokuda Shûsei’s Arakure (Rough Living, 1915),” in PostGender: Gender, Sexuality and Performativity in Japanese Culture, ed. Ayelet Zohar (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 75.


175 Ibid., 62.
inclination to be emotional and intuitive) results from their possession of ovaries, which secrete hormones to create a distinctively feminine body and mind. Because of the presence of these female gonads and the accompanying “obstacles that hinder their activities” (katsudō o sogai suru mono), such as pregnancy and menstruation, the author asserts that women remain far inferior to men.176

Tanaka directs his attack particularly against women of the liberation movement (kaihō undō) whom he criticizes for intruding into the male domains (danshi no ryōbun) of law and politics and for attempting to obtain a social status equal to that of men. He declares that such activities constitute women’s suicide (joshi no jisatsu) and instead encourages women to manifest their intrinsic characteristics (honrai no tokushitsu) of passionate love and self-sacrifice.177 Tanaka further claims that the differences in biological and psychological abilities between males and females should be reflected in the different responsibilities, social status, and rights granted to each sex. Thus, he asks, “Where can we find true freedom and equality if we destroy the natural disparity between the two sexes?”178 Although he acknowledges the need for women’s economic self-sufficiency, he maintains that they should only pursue occupations that are suitable for their feminine qualities; specifically, the male spheres of science, politics, and law should not be infringed upon by women. He concludes by warning women to be more prudent and to avoid recklessly attempting to compete with men.179 Tanaka’s gonad-centric view of sex therefore ties women to their “biological nature,” which he perceives to be inferior, immutable, and inescapable. His vision of society, composed of strictly divided domains and

176 Ibid., 63-64 and 67-68.

177 Ibid., 66-68.

178 Ibid., 71.

179 Ibid., 71-73.
duties of femininity and masculinity, is based upon his conception of the “intrinsic biological disparity” between the two sexes. Importantly, the author specifically locates female masculinity in the women’s liberation movement and pathologizes its participants as abnormally deviating from “nature.”

Tanaka further condemns female masculinity in his Yūseigaku to jinsei (Eugenics and Life) published two years later in 1923. He claims that women have unknowingly become masculinized as they achieve economic independence and enjoy widened opportunities for wage employment. He declares, however, that the development of women’s occupational training is simply a reflection of the economic distress of modern society, rather than a result of women’s self-awakening, thereby dismissing the question of women’s agency. Tanaka then asserts that sexual differences between men and women are created by nature for the preservation of their race (shuzoku keizoku) and that the value of women’s existence lies in their reproductive capacity. In order to accomplish their unavoidable biological task (seibutsugaku-teki ninmu) of childbearing and rearing, it is natural for women to receive financial support from men. The author again rebukes proponents of the women’s movement (fujin undō)—who argue that women cannot achieve freedom without becoming financially independent from men—for choosing independent occupations and avoiding natural tasks (shizen no ninmu) to achieve parity with men. Tanaka further proclaims that because women’s imitation of men’s career advancement outside the home is unnatural and illogical (hishizen fugōri), the problems of

181 Ibid., 196-197.
182 Ibid., 198-199.
women’s suffrage and occupation should be treated as subjects of social pathology (shakai byōrigaku).\textsuperscript{183}

In order to prevent young women from becoming masculinized and to instead make them into good wives and wise mothers (ryōsai kenbo) who will nurture superior offspring (yūryō naru kōkeisha), Tanaka asserts that the conventional system (inshū seido) must be reformed, so that women’s character and freedom can be acknowledged and so that women will be welcomed as equal constituents of society.\textsuperscript{184} Although he acknowledges the social convention of disparaging women, Tanaka never seems to provide concrete advice on how to rectify this convention. Instead, the author quickly moves on to discuss the harmful effects of the women’s liberation movement. Specifically, he cites the British physician Havelock Ellis (1859-1939), among others, to support his claim that women’s liberation leads to increasing incidents of mental disorder, alcoholism, and criminal activities; he further proclaims that women’s masculinization may cause sexual perversions (seiyoku tōsaku) such as homosexuality (dōseiai).\textsuperscript{185} As Pflugfelder has argued:

\begin{quote}
Since the strengthening of bonds between women was a fundamental part of feminist coalition-building, those who opposed women’s efforts to organize themselves would label excessive intimacy between females as symptomatic of a pathological physiology or perverted psychology, lending useful scientific ammunition to their rhetorical armory. … In Japan, as in America and Europe, various observers connected the rise of the women’s movement with an ostensible rise of ‘same-sex love’ among the female population.\textsuperscript{186}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 200-201.

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 205.

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid., 206-207. Another popular sexologist, Habuto Eiji (1878-1929), also asserted that masculine women who possess a manly appearance and character tend to be obsessed with same-sex love (dōsei no ai ni fukeru). See Habuto Eiji, “Fujin no hendai seiyoku,” Koi oyobi sei no shin-kenkyū (Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1912), 312-334, esp. 322. A similar essay was also published as “Fujin no hentai seiyoku—dansō fujin to dōseiai no jitsuurei ni tsuite,” Fujinkai 5, no. 1 (January 1921): 52-57.

\textsuperscript{186} Gregory M. Pflugfelder, “‘S’ is for Sister: Schoolgirl Intimacy and ‘Same-Sex Love’ in Early Twentieth-Century Japan,” in \textit{Gendering Modern Japanese History}, ed. Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), 169. Pflugfelder further argues that “the emergence in the late nineteenth century of the new sexological model, with its theoretical equation of male and female ‘same-sex love,’ played a key role in
Linking women’s movement to crimes, mental illness, and sexual perversion, Tanaka declares that women’s masculinization thus signals their own self-destruction (josei jishin no jimetsu), as well as racial suicide (shuzoku no jisatsu).\textsuperscript{187}

Tanaka further pursued the idea of female masculinity as a sexual perversion that required scientific scrutiny in a 1924 essay entitled “Dansei-teki joshi (ginandorîru)” (Masculine Women [Gynandry]) that appeared in the magazine Hentai seiyoku (Deviant Sexual Desire) for which the author served as the chief editor.\textsuperscript{188} It was in this essay that he presented Seiko as an example of a woman who was afflicted with such an abnormal condition. First, Tanaka defines a masculine woman (dansei-teki joshi) as an anomalous woman (ikei no joshi); she might also be called a gynandroid (ginandorîru) or virago (uirago).\textsuperscript{189} The body of a masculine woman resembles that of a man (e.g., having developed muscles, small breasts, a narrow pelvis, a laryngeal prominence, and facial hair); she is active (kappatsu) and lacks feminine tenderness (onna rashii yasashimi). She dislikes feminine activities such as sewing and cooking and instead elevating the visibility of female-female erotic relations within the social imaginary, and accorded them for the first time in the history of Japanese erotic discourses an integral place within authoritative cultural mappings of sexuality.... Within just a few decades, female ‘same-sex love’ appeared to sexological authorities to be ubiquitous.... As the early decades of the twentieth century progressed, ‘same-sex love’ was gendered increasingly as a female phenomenon” (ibid., 141-142, and 149). Although schoolgirls constituted a minority among all cases of female same-sex suicide, they received a disproportionate amount of press attention due to their high socioeconomic status (ibid., 158-9). Indeed, a key incident that brought female same-sex love to national attention was the love suicide of two higher girls’ school graduates in Niigata in 1911. As Michiko Suzuki explains, “same-sex love was construed through...a dualistic continuum”—the adolescent romantic friendship, which was deemed pure and platonic, and the sexual deviancy practiced by degenerates. While the former adolescent relationship was legitimized as “rehearsal for entry into adulthood,” the latter one relationship came to be perceived as an abnormality in which a woman of a masculine character controls (or potentially corrupts) the other woman, signifying “an unnatural deviation from the proper trajectory of maturity, a failure to enter correctly into heterosexual normality.” Thus, discourses about female-female love “often oscillat[ed] between ideas of purity and innocence and those of sexuality and deviance.” Michiko Suzuki, Becoming Modern Women: Love and Female Identity in Prewar Japanese Literature and Culture (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 24-25 and 27.

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 208.

\textsuperscript{188} Tanaka Kōgai, “Dansei-teki joshi (ginandorîru),” Hentai seiyoku, no. 4 (March 1924): 104-110.

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 104.
enjoys smoking and drinking; she tends to be engrossed in politics, economics, and sciences, and likes to dress as a man. More significantly, Tanaka identifies underdeveloped sexual organs as the primary cause of female masculinity and claims that masculine women never or rarely menstruate. Although they are either indifferent or extremely cold to the opposite sex, they tend to have ardent affection for the same sex. Because the author conceives of a couple as a pair of opposites based on a masculine-feminine binary, he categorizes masculine women who have no sexual desire for either sex as a “third sex” (dai sansei). In other words, by conceiving of love as a desire between gendered opposites, the author marginalizes asexual women as individuals who fall outside the normative two-sex paradigm. Tanaka therefore defines female masculinity as a sexual abnormality caused by defective sexual organs that transform women into men both physiologically and psychologically, leading them to have inverted sexual desire for the same sex. Further, by delineating the physical features and predilections of masculine women, he creates an essentialized definition of masculinity itself.

In the essay, Tanaka presents Okuhara Seiko as “a good specimen of a masculine woman” (dansei-teki joshi no kōhyō hon). In order to illustrate his point, he recounts an anecdote that

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190 Ibid. As Fujita Kazumi has shown, the conception of women’s act of smoking transformed during the course of the Edo and Meiji periods. The smoking of pipe tobacco was common among women of all classes in early modern Japan. In the early Meiji period, tobacco smoking was considered polite, and the practice of smoking was encouraged among women along with performance of the tea ceremony and flower arrangement. From the mid-1890s, when cigarettes became popular, however, smoking in public spaces gradually came to be regulated. At the same time, with the spread of scientific knowledge, smoking came to be understood to cause various illnesses. Significantly, as home hygiene was increasingly defined as a female responsibility, women’s act of smoking began to be seen as a transgression from ideal motherhood, as a smoking woman symbolized an infertile body. Indeed, in Taishō-period literature, the figure of the smoking woman was used as a sign of the wicked woman (akujo). See Fujita, “Kindai Nihon ni okeru josei no kitsuen kihan no seiritsu,” 5-13. For more on the images of smoking women in modern Japanese literature, see Matsuura Ine, “Meiji, Taishō, Shōwa no shōsetsu no naka no josei no kitsuen to kihan,” in Josei to tabako no bunkashi: jendā kihan to hyōshō, ed. Tachi Kaori (Yokohama: Seori Shobō, 2011), 287-312. Given this constructed link between smoking and deviation from motherhood, it is not surprising that sexologists such as Tanaka associated female masculinity with habits of smoking.


192 Ibid., 107.
supposedly reveals Seiko’s indifference to the male gaze. When Seiko was staying in Kyoto, several painters visited her at her inn. She was taking a bath at the time, but she eventually got out of the bath; when Seiko appeared in front of the visitors, she stood completely naked with a wet towel hanging on her shoulder. Showing no sign of shame, she turned her back, sat with her legs crossed, and began cooling herself.\textsuperscript{193} By discussing Seiko together with other women such as Takaba Ranko (Osamu; 1831-1891), an educator and a doctor whom the author describes as an asexual masculine woman, Tanaka implies that Seiko also belonged to the “third sex” category of masculine women who lack sexual desire for either sex and instead devote themselves to the pursuit of the arts, religion, or politics.\textsuperscript{194} The author concludes by citing Havelock Ellis to reinforce his idea that the congenital incomplete development (\textit{senten-teki hatsuiku fukanzen}) of the female gonads causes insufficient internal secretion of the ovaries, resulting in the absence of secondary sex characteristics unique to females.\textsuperscript{195}

In sum, Tanaka pathologized masculine women by identifying defective sexual organs as the cause of sexual abnormality. On the other hand, by linking the masculinization of women with the rise of new women and the women’s liberation movement, he criminalized and abnormalized their thoughts and activities, declaring that such movements could lead to sexual

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., 107-108.

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 107.

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 109. Tanaka notes that Freudian psychoanalysis should also be used for cases in which the deficient growth of gonads cannot explain female masculinity (ibid., 110). Tanaka’s gonad-centric theory of female masculinity contrasts with the work of other contemporary writers, such as Kure Shūzō (1865-1932)—a professor of psychiatry at the University of Tokyo and the founder of modern psychiatry in Japan—who claimed that both feminized men (\textit{joka danshi}) and masculinized women (\textit{danka fujin}) were products of unhealthy families (\textit{fukanzen naru katei no sankutsu}) and that such “abnormalities” were caused by the genetic disorders and drinking habits of individuals’ parents. See Kure Shūzō, “Joka danshi to danka fujin,” \textit{Hentai shinri} (August 1920): 145, reprinted in \textit{Senzenki dōsei ai kanren bunken shūsei}, ed. Furukawa Makoto and Akaeda Kanako (Tokyo: Fuji Shuppan, 2006), 3:141.
perversions, as well as alcoholism, mental disorders, and criminal acts. The figure of Okuhara Seiko, therefore, became implicated in the societal problematization, as well as the sexological pathologization, of female masculinity in early twentieth-century Japan. It was the anxiety concerning the widespread perception that the boundaries between female and male were becoming obscure that catalyzed modern writers such Ishii, Umezawa, and Tanaka to retrospectively inspect, explain, and contain Seiko’s (imagined) masculinity.

**Conclusion**

We have thus examined the processes through which the figure of Okuhara Seiko, particularly her masculinity, was constructed and contested in the changing socioeconomic contexts of the Meiji and Taishō periods. Significantly, these writings on Seiko consisted primarily of graphic anecdotes about the artist’s virility that were assembled, disseminated, and reinterpreted over the course of her lifetime and after her death. Initially, many authors deployed such stories to dramatize and sensationalize Seiko’s extraordinary character, presenting her masculine vigor as part of the artist’s eccentric persona. By the early twentieth century, however, her masculinity came to be seen as not only sensationally outlandish but also socially controversial. The increasing problematization of Seiko’s transgressive gender connects to the contemporary debate on the widely perceived phenomenon of the masculinization of women, a phenomenon that journalists and social critics identified in the emergence of self-sufficient working women. Simultaneously, sexologists employed the rhetoric of scientific knowledge and sexual normalcy to pathologize female masculinity as a biological defect, transforming “masculine women” such as Seiko into an object of medical scrutiny.

196 Tanaka further explored the biological causes of female masculinity in the following essays: “Joshi no danseika no gen’in ni kansuru shin-chiken,” *Hentai seiyoku* 5, no. 1 (July 1924): 1-7; and “Joshi no danseika no byōri-teki gen’in ni kansuru chiken hoi,” *Hentai seiyoku* 5, no. 6 (December 1924): 255-257. Tanaka also wrote about feminine men. See his “Josei-teki danshi,” *Hentai seiyoku* 2, no. 2 (February 1923): 49-60. I thank Eric Swanson for making these articles available to me.
The societal problematization of female masculinity that shaped the discursive formation of the figure of Okuhara Seiko, however, was only part of the broader reconceptualization of gender and the place of women artists in modern Japan. The figure of the masculinized woman, in fact, served as an antithetical example in the process of constructing the notion of ideal womanhood in late Meiji- and Taishō-period society, the quintessential manifestation of which appeared in the state-sponsored “good wife, wise mother” paradigm. Strikingly, Noguchi Shōhin capitalized on the new definition of ideal femininity, deploying autobiography as an effective tool to construct a particular self-image that directly intervened in the construction of modern Japanese womanhood. Seiko’s departure from the metropolitan art scene in the 1890s, in fact, paved the way for Shōhin to quickly rise in public prestige by proposing a diametrically opposed image of a female literati painter. An examination of the processes through which Shōhin shaped her public persona in relation to the new conceptions of the relationship between art and femininity is crucial to gaining a broader picture of the shifting debates on art and gender in modern Japan.
Epilogue

Feminizing Art: Noguchi Shōhin (1847-1917) and Changing Conceptions of Art and Womanhood

The previous chapter demonstrated how the discursive transformation of Okuhara Seiko intersected with the societal problematization of female masculinity during the course of the modern era. When this highly masculinized image of Okuhara Seiko was being constructed at the turn of the century, the diametrically opposed image of another female literati artist, Noguchi Shōhin, emerged in numerous essays, most of which appeared in newly published women’s magazines (Figure 5.1). These texts portrayed Shōhin as the epitome of feminine virtue—a woman who stood in stark contrast to the transgressive behaviors of masculinized women. In the magazine Katei to shumi (Home and Taste), for example, one commentator claimed that Shōhin’s distinctively feminine traits, which the author identified in her faithfulness (shisō kenjitsu), humility (kenson), and earnestness (majime), were “far superior to those of new women.” Indeed, Seiko’s masculinity was often defined in opposition to Shōhin’s femininity. In his 1917 essay on Seiko, Ishii Hakutei (1882-1958) interpreted the two artists’ works in gendered terms, declaring that Shōhin’s painting represented “feminine weakness and fineness” (josei-teki na yowasa to hososa), while Seiko’s work embodied “masculine strength and boldness” (dansei-teki no tsuyosa to futosa). Further, Umezawa Seiichi’s (1871-1931) Nihon nangashi presented Seiko and Shōhin as complete opposites: “Seiko remained single, but Shōhin had a spouse. The former was bold and carefree (gōhō fuki), while the latter was gentle and obedient (onryō jūjun). One was a recluse who was out of office (zaiya no in’itsu); the other was an Imperial Household

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1 Bunju Anshu, “Ko Noguchi Shōhin joshi to Shōkei joshi,” Katei to shumi 4, no. 1 (January 1918): 25. In this obituary of Shōhin, the author discusses the artist in a manner that asserts the cultural superiority of Japan over the West, as he declares that Shōhin demonstrated the “unique womanliness of our country” (wagakoku koyū no fujinsei), whose character was “far superior to those of new women who are infatuated with Western culture.”

Artist. The way their dispositions and characteristics contrasted made them conspicuous in the world of Meiji literati painting.”³ Importantly, Seiko’s retirement to Kumagaya coincided with Shōhin’s rise to public recognition in the 1890s, leading the journalist Ido Reizan (1859-1935) to proclaim that Seiko’s departure from the metropolitan painting world in 1891 provided Shōhin with the perfect opportunity to secure her fame, which eventually culminated in her being the first female painter to attain the title of Imperial Household Artist (teishitsu gigeiin) in 1904.⁴

What were the factors that led to the abrupt displacement of “masculine” Seiko by “feminine” Shōhin in the art world of the 1890s? How was the image of Noguchi Shōhin as the quintessential feminine artist constructed, and how did Shōhin herself participate in the creation of such a self-image? What does Shōhin’s phenomenal rise to renown at the turn of the century tell us about the shifting conceptions of art, femininity, and womanhood during this transformative moment? I argue that Shōhin’s success was deeply imbricated with the new conceptions of art and womanhood that were taking shape at this moment. As women became tied to the domestic sphere of the home, art came to be seen as essential to women’s fulfillment of their socially prescribed roles as wives and mothers. Many cultural critics asserted that art enhanced women’s feminine virtues and refined their taste, enabling them to cultivate their homes as microcosms of the state. Moreover, at the turn of the century, debates concerning women’s wage employment led some artists and educators to propose ways in which women could utilize art to contribute economically to the state; meanwhile, others sought to employ art to promote women’s financial independence as artists and art instructors. Importantly, Shōhin participated in these debates by appropriating the notion of women as “innate teachers” and

extolling art instruction as a socially acceptable occupation for women. By analyzing how Shōhin fashioned herself and how her identity was publicly conceived and contested, I hope to reveal what was at stake in debates concerning the shifting relationships between art and gender during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.  

**Fashioning Femininity**

It may be best to begin with an investigation of the intersection of autobiography and hagiography in the narrative of Shōhin’s life. Significantly, Shōhin wrote extensively about her life and work from the 1890s until her death in 1917, repeatedly describing certain events, particularly from her childhood, in an attempt to craft a very specific public image. Many of these self-narrated events came to be reproduced by numerous other writers in their own descriptions of her, blurring the boundaries among autobiography, biography, and hagiography. Indeed, it is most likely that she wrote her autobiographical accounts at the recommendation—and possibly with the mediation—of the reporters and journalists who published them. Shōhin herself noted in 1907 that a number of newspaper and magazine reporters had recently visited her to ask about her life story at the very moment when women’s education was becoming a subject of public debate. In crafting her autobiography, then, Shōhin likely considered the

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6 Autobiographical accounts of Shōhin can be found, for example, in “Noguchi Shōhin joshi (nanshū-ha),” in *Keishū gaka keirekidan*, ed. Hayami Fusen (Tokyo: Tōyōsha, 1901), 60-72; idem, “Ware wa ika ni shite gaka to narishi ka 2,” *Shin kobunrin* 3, no. 2 (February 1907): 223-226; idem, “Gajin no shōgai wa ita no ma no gakushō yori hajimaru,” *Shoga kōtō zasshi*, no. 48 (May 15, 1912): 25-29; idem, “Gaka ni naru made no kushin,” *Fujin zasshi* 4, no. 2 (August 1915): 60-64.

7 Idem, “Ware wa ika ni shite gaka to narishi ka 2,” 226.
possibility that her accounts would be looked upon by readers as the life trajectory of an exemplary woman. Examining these autobiographical accounts in some detail will lay the groundwork for making sense of how and why Shōhin was elevated as an ideal, feminine painter in the late Meiji period.

In “A Painter’s Life Begins with Playful Writing on a Wooden Floor,” a particularly detailed autobiographical account from 1915 published in the magazine Shoga kottō zasshi (Calligraphy, Painting, and Antiques), Shōhin begins by telling the reader that she was born in Osaka in 1847. Her father Matsumura Shuntai was a doctor from Tokushima, while her mother was a member of the Iwahashi family in Kyoto. Shōhin had apparently been fond of painting since childhood. She recounts:

When I was still a crawling baby, our maid, who was about to wipe a corridor, accidently splattered water on the wooden floor. I crawled to the water, dipped my index figure in it, and drew triangles and circles in imitation of painting—or so I was told. I began to hold a brush when I had a mild case of smallpox at the age of four. My family was indulging my wishes because I was sick, so I demanded a brush, ink, and paper very fretfully and began sketching in imitation of painting in bed. No one taught me how to paint; it all came from my infant brain. Of course, these pictures are probably not worth looking at now, but at that time, I forgot about my illness and assiduously took up the brush, saying, “This is a chrysanthemum!,” or “This is a plum!”—or so I have heard. 8

Shōhin creates vivid images of herself as a crawling infant eagerly experimenting with drawing in water on the floor and as a sick child painting so earnestly in bed that she forgets her illness. By narrating these particular childhood events, Shōhin conveys her innate interest in painting, an interest that she showed from the earliest stages of her life. Significantly, the author narrates these incidents as she heard them from family members who witnessed them, imbuing these possibly embellished stories with a seeming sense of authenticity.

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Shōhin continues on to note how quickly she learned the Japanese *kana* syllabary consisting of forty-seven characters and numbers at the age of five. Inspired by *Hyakunin isshu* (One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each), she even created poem-like compositions with thirty-one syllables and proudly shared them with her father, who found her “promising, as she was different from ordinary children.”

Shuntai, who worried that Shōhin might be exposed to maleducation at a private school (*terakoya*), decided to educate his daughter at home, beginning with the Confucian classics. Shōhin also learned how to play the *koto* zither from her mother at the age of six. She gradually came to focus her attention on painting, enjoying it so intensely that she occasionally forgot to eat and frequently stayed up late to paint under the dim light of a lantern. The author again describes these events as stories that she heard from her family, thus indirectly presenting herself as having been a child prodigy whose talent and intelligence were first recognized by her father.

That Shōhin conveys such a sense of intimacy between Shuntai and herself—in particular, noting Shuntai’s intellectual investment in educating his daughter, as well as his appreciation of her talent—only intensifies the tragedy that follows in Shōhin’s self-narrative. When Shōhin was fourteen, her family traveled to Nagoya where Shuntai suddenly fell ill and, despite his family’s devoted care, passed away. Since her family had no money, it fell to Shōhin to console her mother while finding a way to eke out a living. She barely managed to support them by painting

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10 Ibid., 26-27.
at gatherings held at the residences of wealthy individuals in Nagoya. Unsurprisingly, other writers emphasized this episode, presenting Shōhin as an exemplary filial daughter.

In 1862, when sixteen-year-old Shōhin was still living in Nagoya with her mother, they both were invited to a gathering hosted by Katsuta Sansetsu, a doctor of the Nagoya domain. The gathering provided the context for another major incident in Shōhin’s autobiography, one that she discussed frequently and that other writers consequently invoked to suggest her youthful talent and unwavering resilience. Shōhin narrates the event in detail, as though to reconstruct the circumstances as precisely as possible:

When our conversation turned to painting, I said I could paint one thousand paintings within twenty-four hours. The others laughed at me and said it was impossible. I promised that I would complete the paintings and show them…. I completed five hundred paintings right away. It was late at night; I said I would stay up all night to finish painting, but my mother and others stopped me since it might be harmful to my health. So we recorded the time with a chronometer (an old clock) and restarted it the next morning. I ended up completing the paintings a few hours before the time limit. That was indeed the greatest joy of my life. There was probably not a single painting that was worth viewing, since my skills were still immature at the time and the paintings were merely rough pictures executed on site. So when I think back now, it makes me sweat. A relative of Mr. Katsuta surnamed Tanaka helped me impress seals on my paintings, but he said his fingers became pained and red by the end.

Shōhin’s sense of having triumphed in completing these one thousand paintings is palpable, but it is noteworthy that she carefully adds a note of humility toward the end, suggesting that she feels ashamed for having ultimately created unworthy pictures. Intriguingly, Shōhin seems to have visually commemorated this tour de force painting demonstration at the Katsuta residence.

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11 Ibid., 27-28.
13 Noguchi, “Gajin no shōgai wa ita no ma no gakusho yori hajimaru,” 28-29.
in a hanging scroll titled *Elegant Gathering at Chishun’en* (*Chishun’en gashū-zu*, Figure 5.2a).\(^{14}\) Just as the author’s self-satisfaction is hidden behind the language of humility in the autobiographical text, her self-portrait in the painting also seems to mediate between pride and modesty, suggesting that her attempts to construct her self-image were unified across multiple media. Depicting herself near the center of the composition, Shōhin appears distinct because of her young age and female gender, signified by her coiffure. Yet she is significantly smaller than the fourteen men who surround her; her body is even partially obscured by the head of another figure, diminishing her presence (Figure 5.2b). The small space she occupies is, in turn, enclosed by other figures and objects, confining her to a niche-like area within the otherwise open composition. In this small, secluded spot, Shōhin leans her upper body forward and concentrates on painting a plum on a fan. *Elegant Gathering at Chishun’en* thus seems to suggest Shōhin’s performative humility: the artist conveys her seriousness in her pursuit of art by visualizing herself as a young woman who is engrossed in the act of painting; however, Shōhin confines her self-portrait to a circumscribed enclave, rendering her own presence simultaneously conspicuous and camouflaged. In other words, the painting seems to draw the viewer’s attention to the artist’s self-portrait precisely because of the way she represents herself as subdued and self-effacing.\(^ {15}\)

According to her autobiographical essays, after spending three years in mourning in Nagoya, Shōhin went to Kyoto with her mother and began studying painting under the literati painter

\(^{14}\) The painting is dated 1862. Chishun’en refers to the name of the residence of the host of the gathering, Katsuta Sansetsu.

\(^{15}\) Shōhin’s unassuming self-portrait might have been a gesture of deference to her patron, since *Gathering at Chishun’en* was originally owned by the Katsuta family, who hosted the event. In 1928 this painting entered the possession of Shōhin’s daughter Shōkei. Significantly, Shōkei created a detailed record of the provenance (*yurai*) of the scroll, in which she recounts the circumstances that led to her mother’s creation of one thousand paintings in a manner that closely follows that of Shōhin’s own narrative. Shōkei concludes her record by noting that this scroll “shall be preserved forever as a family treasure” (*eikyū ni kahō to su*). The transcription of Shōkei’s record is available in Moriya Masahiko, “Sakuhin kaisetsu 5,” in *Noguchi Shōhin*, exh. cat. (Kōfu: Yamanashi Kenritsu Bijutsukan, 1982), n. p.
Hine Taizan (1813-1869). After both her teacher and her mother died, Shōhin moved first to Tokyo and then to Kōfu in Yamanashi, where she married Noguchi Masaaki, the son of a family of sake brewers, in 1877. Their daughter Ikuko (Shōkei) was born the following year. Masaaki soon incurred large debts when his beer brewery failed and he was dismissed by his father.\textsuperscript{16} Shōhin, however, invariably refrained from publicly making any negative comments about her husband, saying only that Masaaki entrusted the family business to his younger brother and retired young (waka inkyo) since he was naturally uninterested in business.\textsuperscript{17} In 1882 the family moved to Tokyo, at which point Shōhin became her family’s breadwinner,\textsuperscript{18} although she never explicitly says so in her public writings. Shōhin’s wifely devotion, in fact, became one of her virtues most celebrated by cultural critics.

As Patricia Fister has argued, Shōhin successfully integrated herself into the changing artistic context in Tokyo, participating actively in newly instituted exhibitions and art organizations and employing these public arenas to increase her public recognition.\textsuperscript{19} She regularly submitted paintings to domestic exhibitions, where they received numerous prizes, and she served as a judge in others.\textsuperscript{20} She also entered paintings in world expositions; the “true-view” landscape painting (Yashū Shiobara Tenguīwa shinkei) she submitted to the Chicago World Exposition at the request of the Japan Women’s Association (Nihon Fujinkai) won an award and was subsequently presented to the American government—“an honor,” a Japanese reporter noted in \textit{Kaiga sōshi} (Journal of Painting), “not only to Ms. [Shōhin] alone but also to the art of our

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Noguchi, “Gajin no shōgai wa ita no ma no gakusho yori hajimaru,” 25.
\item Fister, \textit{Japanese Women Artists, 1600-1900}, 167.
\item Ibid., 168.
\end{enumerate}
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Further, Shōhin taught painting both privately at home and publicly as Professor of Painting (gagaku shokutaku kyōju) at the Peers’ Girls School (Kazoku Jogakkō) from 1889 to 1893. She also received the favor of the imperial family and was appointed painting instructor to the Higashi-Fushimi Princess in 1899 and to Princesses Tsunemiya and Kanemiya three years later. Shōhin, in fact, attempted to transform art instruction into an appropriate feminine occupation in the early twentieth century, when the pros and cons of women’s wage employment were hotly debated, a topic that will be investigated in detail later. Ultimately, she became the first female artist to be appointed official artist of the Imperial Household in 1904, a title that undoubtedly boosted her already rising public esteem.

In the autobiographical accounts that recount her accomplishments, Shōhin often includes a rhetorical gesture of modesty, emphasizing how grateful and humbled she feels to have received such distinctions. Shōhin’s posture of humility, in fact, can be found in almost all her writings. She even explicitly notes—possibly as an admonishment to proud women—that she was received well in the art world precisely because she never acted arrogantly as a female artist.

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21 “Shōhin joshi sekai hakurankai no hōshō o uku,” Kaiga sōshi, no. 96 (1895).
22 Shōhin resigned from her position due to illness in 1893.
24 Noguchi, “Gajin no shōgai wa ita no ma no gakusho yori hajimaru,” 29.
Indeed, Shōhin stressed not only her modesty but also her female identity in her public writings. The opening passages of an article entitled “My Connoisseurship is Limited” are particularly telling. She writes:

I, as a woman, feel extremely ashamed to join this group of male masters in discussing connoisseurship, but since you have taken the trouble of asking me, I will only say what I believe…. My connoisseurial eye is exceedingly limited; the only works that I believe I am capable of judging without error are those by my teacher, [Hine] Taizan. It is impossible for me to judge a wide range of works as other painters do. It might be that I am timid and cannot make bold judgments about originals and fakes because I am a woman…. 26

Notably, Shōhin begins the essay by showing her feminine diffidence, presenting herself as a timid woman who is incapable of confidently discriminating paintings as other (male) painters do. She seems to imply that connoisseurship—particularly, the act of publicly sharing one’s connoisseurial knowledge—is a masculine endeavor that female painters such as herself should refrain from engaging in, at least in public writing. It was, above all, this feminine modesty that Shōhin carefully cultivated in her public persona that cultural critics came to praise so ardently.

**Shōhin as a Feminine Ideal**

Seizing on the feminine virtues that Shōhin projected in her public writings, many articles celebrating Shōhin as an epitome of femininity began to appear in newly published magazines that were directly targeted toward girls and women. 27 The rise of Shōhin’s public fame in the 1890s, in fact, coincided with the emergence and proliferation of these new women’s magazines, which almost always presented the artist as an exemplary woman. For example, “Visiting the Lady of the House (Okusama hōmon): Ms. Noguchi Shōhin,” an article published in the

_25_ Idem, “Ware wa ika ni shite gaka to narishi ka 2,” 226.


_27_ These magazines include *Jogaku zasshi* (Women’s Education Magazine), *Shōjokai* (Girls’ World), *Fujin zasshi* (Women’s Magazine), *Fujin shūhō* (The Woman’s Weekly), and *Katei to shumi* (Home and Taste).
magazine *Hōmu* (Home) in 1907, begins by celebrating Shōhin’s fame as a female painter, claiming that there is no one who is uninformed about the countless prizes and prestigious titles that she has received.\(^{28}\) The article then notes that despite her renown, Shōhin maintains her feminine reserve, a quality that, according to the reporter (and the editors of this magazine), makes her an ideal woman. The author tells us:

> However, she never shows any sign of scholarly arrogance when she interacts with other people. Among those who have met her at least once, no one fails to be impressed by her graceful and modest femininity (*shitoyaka de onna rashii*), which she never loses…. Whenever she receives a guest, she always sits together with Mr. Seishō (Masaaki), but it seems that she would never dare to interrupt his speech or argue against him.\(^{29}\)

More significantly, the reporter states that Shōhin ought to be called “a model for Japanese women” (*Nihon fujin no kagami*) for she is “knowledgeable, humble, and submissive to her husband.”\(^{30}\) The article thus contrasts Shōhin’s eminence as a professional painter in public with her submissiveness as a dutiful wife at home, extolling her for the latter quality as a paragon of femininity.\(^{31}\) Such an image of Shōhin as an exemplary, dutiful wife held a particularly significant meaning in early twentieth-century Japan when conceptions of home and womanhood, among other things, were highly contested.

Shōhin’s public identity as an embodiment of ideal femininity also affected the ways in which her paintings themselves were received during her lifetime and after her death. For


\(^{29}\) Ibid.

\(^{30}\) Ibid.

\(^{31}\) Shōhin’s quintessential femininity, particularly her wifely devotion, was also celebrated by other writers including Atomi Gyokushi (1859-1943), a contemporary female artist of the Shijō school who frequently witnessed Shōhin’s deferential attitude toward her husband. Gyokushi presents Shōhin as a flawless woman who “never showed any sign of self-esteem or boasted of her generosity.” To illustrate Shōhin’s faithfulness to her husband, Gyokushi describes how Shōhin, despite enjoying such exceptional public esteem, always bowed carefully at the gate of her house whenever she left or returned home, a sign of chastity and modesty (*teishuku onjun*) that ordinary women would find difficult to imitate. See Atomi Gyokushi, “Shōhin san no omoide,” *Chūō bijutsu* 3, no. 4 (1917): 25-26.
instance, in “Ms. Noguchi Shōhin’s Art,” an article published in Chūō bijutsu (Central Journal of Art) in 1917, the literati painter Kosaka Shiden (1872-1917) emphasizes the feminine qualities that he perceives in Shōhin’s art. Kosaka calls Shōhin’s paintings “flawless,” for they are exceedingly moderate and harmonious (onken enman) without showing any sign of exceptional harshness. Her works may not be superb or magnificent, but every stroke in her every work is carefully executed. Although she studied literati art under Hine Taizan, Shōhin added her own unique qualities to this foundation, infusing her works with a sense of womanly kindness (josei no yasashimi) that Taizan lacked. The author further notes that Shōhin’s style remained largely consistent throughout her career, bearing witness to her firm resolve (sōshu kenko), which should also be considered one of the artist’s virtues (biten). The language that Kosaka employs to describe Shōhin’s paintings—particularly terms such as “moderate,” “flawless,” and quintessentially “feminine”—recalls the language that was used by other writers to describe the artist herself, suggesting that critics were more concerned with the self-image constructed by and for the artist than with her actual paintings themselves.

**Shifting Conceptions of the Relationship between Art and Women**

Significantly, the images of Noguchi Shōhin presented in these accounts seem to have been constructed directly in dialogue with important transformations in the conceptions of both art and womanhood between the 1890s and 1910s. As the ostensibly “masculine” Okuhara Seiko retired from Tokyo and the “feminine” Shōhin rose to popularity in the 1890s, the relationship between art and women—and the societal role of the female painter—became a topic of

33 Ibid., 23.
34 Ibid., 24.
35 Ibid., 24-25.
continuous contestation. Strikingly, these debates intersected with discussions concerning other increasingly problematized issues including, among others, women’s social and political status, the role of the mother, the relationship between the home and the state, female education and employment, and war and patriotism. To make sense of Shōhin’s rise in popularity requires a thorough investigation of these contexts.

Writers approached the intersection of art and womanhood primarily from three different yet interrelated perspectives. A first group of cultural critics explored women’s “innate artistry,” constructing and naturalizing the affinity between art and femininity. Others further reified this constructed kinship by focusing on the role of art in women’s fulfillment of socially prescribed domestic responsibilities. Proponents of this approach argued that artistic practice elevated women’s taste and improved their ability to carry out their duties in the home as mothers and housewives. In contrast to this private vision of the role of art in women’s lives, a third group of writers shifted attention from the domestic sphere of the home to the (semi-)public domain of work. This new perspective, which was the subject of intensified debate particularly during the economic recession following the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), presented art as a potentially suitable occupation for women. In the context of the rising demands for women’s participation in the workforce and for their contributions to the state economy, advocates of this approach emphasized the productivity of their labor for the betterment of the state, thus implicating women and art in a discourse on patriotism. The debates concerning art as an occupation for women, however, were not confined to the realm of patriotic ideology. Some

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writers, including Shōhin herself, actively searched for ways to transform artistic practice into a socially acceptable profession for women.

**Art and Femininity**

Discussions of women’s connection to the arts seem to have developed from debates concerning the unique virtues of Japanese women, a topic of intense interest throughout the Meiji period that was widely discussed in newspapers, journals, education manuals, and other texts. As Marnie S. Anderson has shown, debates about women initiated by male journalists, intellectuals, and policymakers “allowed the Japanese to feel as though they were moving toward a level of civilization on par with the West, while at the same time preserving their unique traditions.”

Thus, as debates on women’s rights (*joken*) intensified in the 1880s, the emphasis on women’s virtuous femininity and moral capacity allowed activists, politicians, and social critics “to reconcile ideals and principles about human rights with the preservation of gender distinctions.”

By the 1890s, women activists began to deploy the rhetoric of feminine virtue to their own “subversive ends,” marking a significant transition in strategies of female activism.

More specifically, Kathleen Uno has identified the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) as a major catalyst in the creation of a new definition of modern womanhood that focused on possible ways in which women could benefit the state. Prior to this, in the 1880s the Meiji government increasingly imposed a series of restrictions that curtailed women’s activities in the public sphere,

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38 Ibid., 97.

39 Ibid., 85.

culminating in the denial of civil rights to women in 1888, as discussed in the previous chapter.\footnote{Sheldon Garon, “Women’s Groups and the Japanese State: Contending Approaches to Political Integration, 1890-1945,” \textit{The Journal of Japanese Studies} 19, no. 1 (1993): 10; and Anderson, \textit{A Place in Public}, 35.} Although these gendered restrictions remained in place until well into the twentieth century,\footnote{It was only in 1922 that the ban on women’s attending political meetings was reversed; although universal male suffrage was instituted in Japan in 1925, women’s suffrage was not realized until 1946.} a new discourse concerning women emerged in the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War.

Emphasizing “the positive contributions that women could make to national affairs,” this rhetoric gave rise to the “good wife, wise mother” (ryōsai kenbo) paradigm that appeared in official discourse by the late 1890s.\footnote{Uno, “Womanhood, War, and Empire,” 502.} This new vision of womanhood stressed, for instance, women’s innate capacity for benevolence and morality—qualities essential to instructing their children. Importantly, art became a vital part of these shifting debates on womanhood, as it increasingly came to be seen as a practice that both refined and reinforced certain qualities unique to women, qualities that Shōhin and her supporters also emphasized in their accounts of her life and work.

\textit{Saishin Nihon shōjo hōten} (The Latest Handbook for Japanese Girls), a book edited by the children’s book author and poet Iwaya Sazanami (1870-1933) and the educator Numata Tōji (1881-1936) in 1912, after decades of debates concerning art and femininity, includes a particularly clear and concise summary of the importance of art for women.\footnote{Iwaya Sazanami and Numata Tōji, eds., \textit{Saishin Nihon shōjo hōten} (Tokyo: Seibunkan, 1912), 455-457.} Quite simply, the editors encourage young female readers to practice painting since they deem it the most important and suitable art for young women. Not only do girls’ innately gentle (onwa), graceful (yūbi), and meticulous (menmitsu) qualities suit them to paint, but also the act of painting itself...
enhances those particularly feminine traits (*joshi no seishitsu*).\(^{45}\) This handbook thus claims that girls will naturally become more feminine by engaging in painting.

Other writers added the broader concept of civilization to the emerging equation of art with femininity. For example, in his brief essay on “Women and Art” from 1911, the journalist and politician Shimada Saburō (1852-1923) argues that art is necessary in order to make a truly civilized country (*bunmeikoku*).\(^{46}\) Indeed, art is especially important for women since it naturally elevates their spirits, enhances their enjoyment of the home, and enables them to have a positive influence on the nation’s people. As a self-proclaimed supporter of the equality of humanity (*jinrui heitō*), Shimada proposes that women should attempt to elevate their social status and have their value acknowledged (by men) by developing their skills in arts and crafts and by thus demonstrating their ability to lead civilization.\(^{47}\) His idea of equality, however, is based on the notion of divided duties (*bungyō*) between the two sexes—the idea that men and women, who have immutable sex differences and gender roles, hold separate yet complementary duties that should not be infringed upon by the opposite sex. By linking art and civilization, and civilization and women, Shimoda thus seems to present civilization, as symbolized by art, as a potential domain for women to cultivate.

Cultural critics at the time also took interest in the historical dimensions of the relationship between art and femininity, and significantly, some writers attempted to address the question of why Japanese women artists were so few even though they ostensibly possessed an innate talent for art. In his book *Katei to rinri* (Home and Ethics) published in 1905, the

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 456.


\(^{47}\) Ibid.
theologian Ishikawa Kisaburō (1864-1932) asserted that women do, indeed, possess the intrinsic capacity to become great artists.48 Prefiguring Linda Nochlin’s canonical discussion of the dearth of great women artists, he argues, within a decidedly essentialist framework, that there have been no great Japanese women artists since their academic or artistic talents have long been considered useless or even a hindrance to their fulfillment of socially prescribed obligations.49 Because society expected them to be dependent on men, women consequently lost their ability to lead independent lives. Ishikawa argues, therefore, that if women devoted themselves to art, they would inevitably become great artists (ichidai bijutsuka).50 Foreshadowing Iwaya and Numata’s statements in Saishin Nihon shōjo hōten, Ishikawa’s argument is grounded in his belief that women’s feminine characteristics are compatible with the qualities required for artists; unlike men, women’s meditative, considerate, and introspective capacities (seishi jukkō no seisatsu-ryoku) are well-suited to the practice of art, particularly music, painting, and sculpture.51 Ishikawa thus encourages women to practice art not simply for recreation or to cultivate taste but instead as a means of displaying their natural gifts (tenbu or tensei), which heretofore have been suppressed by social expectations.52 Although Ishikawa’s belief in women’s capacity to become artistic masters seems more progressive than many other contemporary conservative writers who denied that possibility outright, there exists a tension between his desire to bring women’s

48 Ishikawa Kisaburō, Katei to rinri (Tokyo: Seikyōkai Henshūkyoku, 1905), 30-35 and 124-130.
49 Ibid., 31-32. In her pioneering feminist account of art history, Linda Nochlin argues that there have been no great women artists because women painters have been socially and institutionally deprived of the means of becoming professional painters. Specifically, Nochlin discusses the place of the nude in nineteenth-century European art. The study of nude models was established by the academy as the essential means of training aspiring male painters, but women painters were systematically denied access to nude models, creating “the automatic, institutionally maintained discrimination against women.” Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,” chap. 7 in Women, Art, and Power: And Other Essays (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).
50 Ishikawa, Katei to rinri, 31 and 129.
51 Ibid., 32-33.
52 Ibid., 33.
previously ignored capacities to fruition and his treatment of femininity as an immutable entity. In other words, by essentializing the notions of “artist” and “femininity,” the author seems to impose limitations on both.

Further, Ishikawa’s belief in women’s intrinsic artistry seems to be based upon his observation that women manifest their aesthetic sense in their everyday lives—such as in the way they dress themselves by juxtaposing clothes with different patterns and colors, or the way they arrange flowers, which the author likens to sculpture. Ishikawa therefore uses women’s proficiency in fashion and flower arrangement as an example to support his argument that women are inherently inclined to pursue art. This argument, which is clearly written from the biased perspective of a member of the middle class, is a reversal of the more frequent claim that women should practice art in order to cultivate artistic skills and sensibilities that can be applied to fashion, interior décor, and childrearing—that is, their essential domestic duties as “good wives and wise mothers,” a figural type exemplified by Noguchi Shōhin.

**Motherhood, Artistic Taste, and the Cultivation of the Home**

Indeed, perhaps the most important factor that solidified the assumed affinity between art and women was the reconceptualization of female virtue at the time—specifically, the new vision of the virtuous woman as a mother, homemaker, and educator of children. The conception of motherhood as the nurturing of the next generation of citizens only came to be celebrated in the Meiji period; women’s educational manuals from the Edo period, for example, emphasized the importance of women’s obedience to their husbands and parents-in-law, while entrusting

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51 Ibid., 34-35.
children’s education to the hands of their fathers. Meiji-period educational texts for girls, by contrast, reconceptualized the mother as the educator of children and nurturer of future subjects of the state. Further, leading educators and the Meiji emperor himself “endorsed educated motherhood for the sake of the nation,” creating a vision that “great mothers equal great children, and great children equal a great nation.” At the same time, the home (katei or hōmu) came to be posited as the foundation of the state and housewives (shufu) as its “veritable officers,” thus drawing a direct link between women’s domestic labor and the creation of a strong Japanese nation-state. This assignment of value to women as mothers and home-managers provided women with a certain level of agency, but the institutionalization of ryōsai kenbo as state policy simultaneously confined women to the domestic sphere and limited their access to higher education, employment, and the political sphere.

The Meiji government introduced four years of compulsory education for both girls and boys in 1872, but only a little over thirty percent of eligible girls were actually attending school by 1890. The importance placed on mothers, who were thought to be directly responsible for the upbringing of the next generation of Japanese citizens, led to the idea that women as mothers

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55 Ibid., 25-35.

56 Uno, “Womanhood, War, and Empire,” 499; and Koyama, *Ryōsai kenbo to iu kihan*, 38-39. For example, the educator Nakamura Masanao (1832-1891) who later became the principal of Tokyo Women’s Higher Normal School (Tokyo Joshi Shihan Gakkō) proclaimed in 1875 that “we must invariably have fine mothers if we want effectively to advance the people to…enlightenment and to alter their customs and conditions for the good. If the mothers are superb, they can have superb children, and Japan can become a splendid country in later generations.” The Meiji emperor is also known to have declared, “How children grow up depends on how their mothers bring them up, and this is matter of supreme importance.” See Uno, “Womanhood, War, and Empire,” 498.


58 Ibid., 157.
deserved a solid education. The government thus promulgated another decree in 1899 that mandated the establishment of at least one school of higher education for girls in each prefecture, while also proclaiming that the purpose of women’s higher education was to foster “elegant and refined manners” as well as “docility and modesty”—qualities necessary to develop female students into “wise mothers and good wives.” As a result, this law increased the number of schools for girls but simultaneously limited the scope of women’s education; after all, as Uno has noted, the “creation of a separate secondary education track for girls as well as its emphasis on moral education and homemaking skills channeled young women toward a domestic destiny rather than wage employment, cultural and intellectual pursuits, or political activities in the public sphere.” During this process of tying women to private labor at home, art came to be seen as an effective means of improving women’s ability to fulfill their destined domestic duties.

From the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, a number of writers in varying positions—including artists, journalists, educators, and social critics—advocated the significance of art in refining women’s taste for the improvement of the home, the microcosm of the state. For example, in his 1902 book *Saika shōkun* (Small Lessons on Household Management), Tsukagoshi Yoshitarō (1864-1947), a writer, historian, and editor of the magazine *Katei zasshi* (Home Magazine), stresses the importance of art for women, drawing a clear link between art and motherhood. He calls for “artistic cultivation” (*bijutsu-teki shūyō*) among women, since high arts such as painting, poetry, and music can foster their character, elevate their dignity, and

59 Uno, “Womanhood, War, and Empire,” 497.


serve as important tools by which to instruct their children. For Tsukagoshi, it does not matter whether women paint pictures themselves or acquire and appreciate paintings made by others; more importantly, women should employ paintings at home for the purposes of self-refinement, interior decoration, and children’s education. Further, since children are naturally inclined to enjoy pictures, it is their mother’s duty to provide them with moral instruction by using pictures as effective educational devices (yūryoku naru kyōju kikai).\textsuperscript{64}

The nihonga painter Okamoto Fuhō (1869-1940) expressed a similar opinion when serving as an instructor of female students at the Second Prefectural Women’s Higher School (Furitsu Daini Kōtō Jogakkō) in Tokyo. In an interview published in Kaiga sōshi in 1909, Okamoto laments the lack of interest in painting among women.\textsuperscript{65} He argues that if women possess developed artistic thought (bijutsu shisō), their taste in fashion and interior décor will naturally become sophisticated (kōshō) and their everyday lives will be elevated. He further claims that art influences a woman’s spirit or mood without her noticing, increases her dignity, and even beautifies female virtue (joshi no toku o utsukushiku suru).\textsuperscript{66}

These ideas that art refines women’s taste and that a tasteful home is essential to the wellbeing of children, families, and the state are ubiquitous in the writings on art and women produced during this period. Such writings make use of a shared vocabulary—including terms such as “taste in art” (bijutsu shumi), “refinement” or “sophistication” (kōshō), “home management” (kasei), and “home education” (katei kyōiku)—creating a series of connections among these concepts that ultimately promoted the “cultivation of the home” through women’s

\begin{footnotes}
\item[64] Ibid.
\item[65] Okamoto Fuhō, “Joshi to kaiga,” Kaiga sōshi, no. 276 (1909): 11.
\item[66] Ibid.
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practice of the arts. The underlying assumption is that the home is “the root of the state, but the quality of the housewife (shufu) determines the quality of the home.” Art thus came to be domesticated and implicated in the discourse on “good wife, wise mother,” helping women elevate the cultural sophistication of their home, and by extension, the state.

**Art and Women’s Productivity**

Women, however, were not always tied to the private sphere of domesticity, nor was the concept of “good wife, wise mother” consistent throughout the Meiji and Taishō periods. As we saw above, the Sino-Japanese War led many Japanese policymakers and educators to seek to improve the security and strength of the state by cultivating women’s wifely and motherly qualities. The political turmoil and the postwar economic recession in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War had an even greater impact on the reconceptualization of womanhood and the paradigm of ryōsai kenbo itself. As the financial distress of widows and children of deceased and disabled soldiers became an ever more pressing social problem, debates on women’s wage employment intensified. Some artists and art educators, including Shōhin, participated actively in these discussions. Their debates on the intersection of art and women’s occupations centered primarily on three vocational paths: wage laborers, artists, and teachers. As we shall see later, Shōhin in particular championed art instruction as an appropriate feminine occupation.

The war gave rise to a new nationalistic, largely economic conception of the relationship between art and women, a vision that is crystallized in an article published in Shoga kottō zasshi in 1906 that presents an interview with the oil painter Koyama Shōtarō (1857-1916)—that same

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68 Uno, “Womanhood, War, and Empire,” 503.

artist who proclaimed that calligraphy was not art and who praised Seiko’s foresight (as was examined in chapters 2 and 3).\footnote{Koyama Shōtarō, “Joshi no jitsuyō-teki gigei kyōiku,” Shoga kottō zasshi, no. 19 (November 5, 1906): 1. Koyama was to become the head professor of painting (toga shunin kyōju) at Tokyo Higher Normal School (Tokyo Kōtō Shihan Gakkō) the following year.} In the article, Koyama identifies three problems concerning women’s contemporary vocational status. First, he claims that urban middle- and upper-class Japanese women are unproductive (fuseisan-teki) in contrast to the productive women in the countryside who engage in sericulture and agriculture or the women in foreign countries such as England who work for their families and states. Secondly, Japanese men currently occupy jobs that might be deemed more appropriate for women, including editing and coloring photographs and making underdrawings for prints; adding facial features to dolls, he claims, is particularly suitable for women since “women cherish dolls from childhood.”\footnote{Ibid. On the gendering of handcraft (shugei) in modern Japan, see Yamazaki Akiko, Kindai Nihon no “shugei” to jendā (Yokohama: Seori Shobō, 2005).} Finally, Koyama notes that there are not enough institutions that offer vocational training for women. Providing women with necessary training and allocating jobs to them will benefit not only the women themselves—for art-related jobs will help them develop civilized taste (bunmei-teki shumi)—but also the Japanese nation-state as a whole.\footnote{Ibid.} Koyama thus advocates the assignment of what might be considered minor or supplementary jobs to urban higher-class women, as well as the instrumentalization of this new workforce to improve the state’s economy. In other words, Koyama promotes the practicality of women’s training in artistic skills in order to turn them into a productive national asset, implying that women do not need to learn high art but only the basic skills necessary to complete minor tasks.
As though to confirm Koyama’s emphasis on the importance of practicality of women’s work in the arts, an anonymous article titled “New Directions in Women’s Art Education” published the following year in the same journal mentions the practical or vocational turn in women’s art education, particularly following the Russo-Japanese War.\(^73\) It notes that at the Women’s Art School (Joshi Bijutsu Gakkō)—Japan’s first private art school for women, which was founded in 1900—the most popular department among incoming students was artificial flower-making (zōka), followed by embroidery and sewing; Japanese-style painting (nihonga) and Western-style painting (yōga) departments, by contrast, were declining in demand. The writer speculates that the painting departments were unpopular because their program was longer than the other programs and it was difficult for women to make a living as professional painters. On the other hand, the sewing department had consistently drawn a large number of applicants since sewing was a skill necessary for household management. Nevertheless, the reporter identifies a rising interest among women to study art in order to achieve financial independence, a situation necessitated by the economic hardship inflicted on widows following the war. The reporter adds that many widows were actually enrolled at the Women’s Art School at the time this article was written.\(^74\)

Koyama was certainly not alone in tying women and art to patriotism. The female painter and educator Atomi Kakei (1840-1926), who vehemently criticized Seiko’s masculine appearance and comportment (as noted in the previous chapter), pushed Koyama’s nationalistic vision of women’s relationship to art even further. In her numerous writings, Kakei draws a

\(^{73}\) “Joshi bijutsu kyōiku no shin-keikō,” *Shoga kottō zasshi*, no. 13 (November 1, 1907): 4.

\(^{74}\) Ibid. Another article published in the same journal earlier in 1907 notes that among the four hundred forty-two students who had graduated from the Women’s Art School, eighty-five women became teachers and thirteen women held other occupations, while the majority of graduates were married or stayed at home, studying or helping with housework. See “Keishū bijutsuka—Joshi Bijutsu Gakkō sotsugyōsei no sono go,” *Shoga kottō zasshi*, no. 5 (March 1, 1907): 2.
direct link between home economics and the national economy and warns women who indulge in opulence that their lavish lifestyles could lead to the decline of the state. In order to improve the economy at both the micro and the macro levels, she argues that middle- and upper-class women should dispense with their leisure activities and instead engage themselves in home occupations (naishoku). More specifically, the author encourages women to use their dexterous hands to create export goods such as paintings, so that women might contribute to paying back Japan’s foreign loans and saving the state. Kakei discourages women from becoming independent (that is, unmarried and childless) professional artists, but promotes painting as a suitable occupation for the housewife, since such employment benefits the state while also making women frugal and industrious, qualities that the author values most. As an unmarried and childless educator, Kakei embodied a tension between who she was and what she advocated, a tension she attempted to resolve through the act of writing. We shall examine Kakei’s strategy of self-justification in relation to Shōhin’s shortly.

**Art and Women’s Occupations Outside the Home**

The question of art as a female vocation, however, was not addressed solely within the context of such patriotic discourse that presented art-related jobs primarily as domestic occupations that women could perform for the sake of the nation. Many books and articles published around the same time, including some written by Shōhin, explored the possibilities for women to work as professional artists and art instructors outside the private confines of the home.

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75 Kakei discusses these ideas in various articles. See, particularly, Atomi Kakei, “Shōrai no Nihon fujin wa ika ni subeki ka,” Kōdō, no. 262 (December 1913): 57-60; idem, “Joshi no bijutsu kyōiku,” Shoga kōtō zasshi, no. 68 (February 1914): 5-7; and idem, “Taishō no fujin to sono sekinin,” Kōdō, no. 294 (January 1915): 41-44.

76 Idem, “Shōrai no Nihon fujin wa ika ni subeki ka,” 58-59; idem, “Joshi no bijutsu kyōiku,” 7; and idem, “Taishō no fujin to sono sekinin,” 43.


78 Idem, “Taishō no fujin to sono sekinin,” 43.
An article published in the “Miscellaneous Reports” section of Kaiga sōshi in 1905 addressed the “new problem” of painting as a possible profession for women. The reporter notes that the question of suitable occupations for women is an important yet unresolved issue in the context of debates about the usefulness of women’s education, the productivity of the country, and the social status of women. He disagrees with Shōhin, who claimed in the popular newspaper Yorozu chōhō (Comprehensive Morning News) that it is difficult for women to pursue painting professionally since their practice is often interrupted by marriage and childrearing. The reporter asserts instead that women should devote themselves to the study of painting between the ages of ten and twenty before they marry; even after they get married, they should still have two or three hours each day to work on painting. The real question for the author is not whether women can become painters but, rather, whether women could succeed as painters, since painting requires specialized skills, the acquisition of which is accompanied by many difficulties.

In fact, painting came to be listed as an appropriate career option for women in the various guidebooks on women’s occupations that circulated at the beginning of the twentieth century. For example, in Joshi shokugyō annai (A Guide to Women’s Occupations), published in 1906, the author Kondō Shōichi presents a rather optimistic vision of the place of women artists in early twentieth-century Japan. He states that although it was rare for women to paint in the past, the number of women painters has grown since the early nineteenth century; he even claims that painting has become an occupation shared by both men and women and that there is no sex-based distinction within the profession. However, this bright picture quickly becomes grim.

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80 Ibid.
81 Kondō Shōichi, Joshi shokugyō annai (Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1906), 136-150.
82 Ibid., 140.
when Kondō turns to the discussion of income, which he notes to be extremely unstable. He recommends that aspiring painters focus on studying without expecting to receive income for the first several years; after establishing relationships with clients, they might eventually earn thirty to forty yen per month. Although this guidebook may have provided its readers with some hope of pursuing a career in painting, the instability of artists’ income implied that this profession was largely limited to women of affluent families.

Some guidebooks to women’s careers list the names of individual studios and schools where women could receive the training necessary to become professional artists. During the Meiji period, art education became increasingly institutionalized for both women and men, but women were largely cut off from access to the institutional academic training available to men.

As Kokatsu Reiko and Yamazaki Akiko have shown, when the Technical Art School (Kōbu Bijutsu Gakkō) was established in 1876 as the first government-operated art school in Japan, female students were admitted, shortly after men, to study art. Until the school’s abrupt closure in 1883, seven women—including the icon painter Yamashita Rin (1857-1939) and the Western-style painter Ragūsa Tama (1861-1939)—received education there. However, when the Tokyo School of Fine Arts (Tokyo Bijutsu Gakkō) was founded in 1887 as the only specialized art school in the country (which excluded bunjinga and calligraphy from its curriculum), the school denied admission to women, as did other state-sponsored schools. This meant, as Yamazaki

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83 Ibid., 143-146; 149-150. Another Guide to Women’s Occupations also mentions the difficulty to having a high stable income as a painter. See Ochiai Namio, Joshi shokugyō annai (Tokyo: Daigakukan, 1903), 347-359.


argues, that women were virtually deprived of access to institutional art education at the time that the Western-style art academy was first being established in Japan. It was only in 1946 that the Tokyo School of Fine Arts finally opened its doors to female students. In order to increase the opportunities for women to receive specialized art education at the institutional level, the Women’s Art School was established as the first private art school for women in the country in 1900, the year which saw the founding of several other educational institutions for women. Significantly, the mission statement of the Women’s Art School declared that its goals were to develop the unique virtues of women, to open paths for women’s independence, and to train students to become female instructors who could teach at women’s schools in order to fill the shortage of teachers.

Art instruction was, indeed, often seen as a more realistic and acceptable occupation for women than that of the financially unstable—and, possibly, morally questionable—artist. Western-style oil painting, which involved the study of nude models, was considered particularly injurious to women’s decorum. Moreover, the early twentieth century saw a rising demand for

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86 Yamazaki, “Meiji-ki ni okeru josei to bijutsu kyōiku,” 291. This institutional discrimination in modern Japan resonates with the denial of women’s access to academic training in the nineteenth-century European academy. See Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,” 145-178.

87 Among a large number of applicants, thirty-seven female students passed the entrance exam and entered the school. See Kokatsu, “Kindai Nihon ni okeru josei gaka o meguru seido,” 19, n. 4.

88 These schools included the Women’s English College (Joshi Eigaku Juku) and Tokyo Women’s Medical School (Tokyo Joi Gakkō). See Yamazaki, “Meiji-ki ni okeru josei to bijutsu kyōiku,” 291.


90 Kokatsu, “Kindai Nihon ni okeru josei gaka o meguru seido,” 19; 20, n. 42. Nochlin has argued, in the context of in nineteenth-century European art, that the institutional denial of female painters’ access to nude models, the ultimate subject of artistic training at the academy, played a role in “the automatic, institutionally maintained discrimination against women.” Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,” 158-164.
art instructors. A report on the Women’s Art School entitled “Art Suitable for Women” published in Shoga kottō zasshi in 1910 mentions that new women’s schools for the arts (joshi gigei gakkō) were being built in provincial areas, creating a larger demand for art teachers whose average monthly salary was said to be about twenty-five yen per month. As examined above, the “good wife, wise mother” paradigm emphasized mothers’ innate capacity to educate their children. As an extension of their destined duty as home instructors, women were said to make ideal schoolteachers—particularly at the elementary level, since elementary education required less skill than higher education and since women could be hired at a lower salary than men. Further, some educators insisted on the need for women to gain a few years of teaching experience before their marriage in order to prepare them to instruct their own children, thus directly connecting women’s careers in school education to the domestic domain of the home.

Strategies of Self-Justification: Noguchi Shōhin and Atomi Kakei

Noguchi Shōhin contributed frequently to the debates on women and art instruction after rising to national fame at the turn of the century. In an article published in 1915, she, too, asserts that “painting instruction is one of the most suitable career paths for women.” But she laments that women often quit painting when they get married or have children. Thus, she recommends, “We should now open a new avenue by appointing female painting teachers in the departments of painting at women’s schools and by making [painting instruction] a promising career for women.”

91 “Joshi ni muku bijutsu,” Shoga kottō zasshi, no. 25 (June 20, 1910): 4. Around the same time, (male) provincial teachers are known to have earned 40 yen a month. Civil service workers earned twenty-five to forty yen, while bankers earned as little as ten to twenty yen. See James H. Huffman, Creating a Public: People and Press in Meiji Japan (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1997), 316.

92 Anderson, A Place in Public, 75; Iwami Teruyo, Hiroin-tachi no hyakunen—bungaku, media, shakai ni okeru joseizō no hen'yō (Tokyo: Gakugei Shorin, 2008), 37.

93 Koyama, Ryōsai kenbo to iu kihan, 76.

women in the future.” In fact, two hundred fifty women’s schools of higher education (jogakkō) were in operation by 1911. By the time she wrote this article, Shōhin had taught painting at the elite Peers’ Girls School and had served as a painting tutor for princesses. In a sense, then, Shōhin might have attempted to rationalize her own career choice, painting instruction, as an ideal womanly occupation. Her effort to transform painting instruction into an appropriate feminine occupation resonates with contemporary efforts made by conservative women activists, such as Shimoda Utako (1854-19136) and Tsuda Umeko (1864-1929), who considered teaching an acceptable profession for women and who pursued careers as educators themselves, while simultaneously supporting the state-sponsored doctrine of “good wife, wise mother.” In other words, Shōhin’s act of advocating for the hiring of female painting teachers conformed to the newly constructed gender norm whereby women were seen as “natural teachers.” Characterized as innate instructors, female art teachers did not present a threat to the male-dominated art world, nor did they run the risk of being labeled masculine. The figure of the female instructor also seems to have resolved the dilemma held by many social critics who acknowledged the necessity of working women during the time of economic deprivation but problematized women’s self-sufficiency as a deplorable sign of their masculinization (as examined in the previous chapter). If women continued to work as teachers, however, were they lifted from the obligation to get married and raise children? Shōhin does not seem to have provided a definitive answer to this question, but other women such as Atomi Kakei directly addressed this problem.

Kakei’s response to this question is rooted in the premise that there are two different groups of women in Japan—the ordinary and the extraordinary. In her article on “The Life of

95 Ibid.
Single Women” published in 1915 in the journal Kōdō, Kakei expresses her concern over the growing number of single women in Japan.96 Single workingwomen, Kakei claims, are (socially) acceptable if they excel in art or education or if marriage would interfere with their ability to serve their parents, superiors, or the state. However, ordinary women (ippan no fujin) should not remain single because “the ultimate goal of women is to become good wives and wise mothers.”97 In order to pursue this goal, women, unlike men, cannot focus on a single profession. Even if they are determined to pursue a profession, women are too busy supporting their husbands, educating their children, and taking care of their parents-in-law. Kakei thus claims that women should abandon their irrelevant fantasy (yokei na kūsō) of pursuing an independent life and instead get married after completing their education—specifically, “education that develops women into good wives and wise mothers.”98 Kakei concludes by noting that some women today, including her cousin Atomi Gyokushi (1859-1943), remain single in order to pursue their career, but the author warns that it is dangerous for ordinary women to imitate such exceptional individuals.99

In fact, Kakei herself remained single and childless throughout her life. Sharply distinguishing between the “ordinary” single women whom she criticizes and the “extraordinary” single women (including herself and her cousin) whom she exalts, this polemical article, therefore, might be seen as offering a justification of her own choices and existence. Indeed, the idea that Kakei embeds self-justification in what appears to be social critique becomes clearer when we read this article against other texts by Kakei published in the same magazine, to which

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97 Ibid., 38.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., 38-39.
she was a regular contributor. Two years prior to the publication of this article on single women, Kakei wrote an essay in which she discussed how she came to spend her entire life working as an educator.\(^{100}\) Kakei notes that when she was four or five years old, her parents lamented the decline of the Atomi family and entrusted her with the task of reviving the family’s prestige. Taking her parents’ words to heart, she devoted her entire life to the development of women’s education without ever entering into marriage. She states that she never felt a need to marry since she regarded her students as her own daughters.\(^{101}\) Just as Shōhin’s self-described childhood events—events that led her parents to perceive her as a child prodigy—were repeatedly presented by other writers as signs of her talent and dutifulness, the childhood story that Kakei narrates here and elsewhere came to be reproduced by other authors, blurring the boundaries among autobiography, biography, and hagiography.\(^{102}\) More importantly, this earlier article seems to serve as a preface to her later discussion of “The Life of Single Women,” as the text specifically explains the rationale behind her career choice and her status as a single woman—namely, Kakei pursued her career as an unmarried educator in order to fulfill her obligation to her parents to restore her family, thus transforming her into an exemplar of the extraordinary woman. Reading these texts side by side, they together justify Kakei’s life as a single workingwoman.

The attentiveness with which Shōhin constructed her self-image and the assiduousness with which Kakei justified her identity attest to the extent to which workingwomen were perceived with suspicion and scrutiny in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japan. Both women employed the medium of writing as a way of taming the tension that lay within their

\(^{100}\) Atomi Kakei, “Jiko no keiken yori etaru kyōkun,” Kōdō, no. 252 (March 1913): 35-38.

\(^{101}\) Ibid., 35-36.

\(^{102}\) See, for example, Tajima Norie, Shukujo kagami (Tokyo: Bun’eikan, 1914), 99-107.
identities. Shōhin’s identity as a successful female professional painter and the breadwinner of her family could have been perceived as transgressively masculine, a stigma often attached to workingwomen (a phenomenon discussed in chapter 4). As though to counteract the threat of masculinization, Shōhin constructed a distinctively feminine image of herself that fulfilled the demands of the shifting conceptualizations of ideal womanhood. Kakei, on the other hand, embodied a different kind of tension—the tension between Kakei as a single, childless workingwoman and Kakei as an educator who endorsed the paradigm of “good wife, wise mother.” In order to reconcile who she was with what she encouraged other women to be, Kakei employed a strategy of self-justification by way of patriotism, presenting herself as an exceptional woman who was responsible for leading the way for ordinary women for the advancement of the state.

The Masculinity of a Woman Painter

Shōhin’s public image as a successful yet submissive woman, which the artist herself consciously constructed, however, was not entirely consistent, particularly after her death. Notably, a series of obituaries published in the art journal Kaiga seidan (Pure Conversation on Painting) in 1917 presents conflicting images of the painter. The issue contains fifteen short eulogies for Shōhin written by artists, art critics, and scholars, as well as Shōhin’s daughter and her students. Most of the essays describe Shōhin as an exemplary woman. One author claims that “virtuous Ms. [Shōhin] did everything she could as a wife,”103 while another author calls her “faithful and sensitive as a wife” and “benevolent and caring as a mother,”104 evoking the “good wife, wise mother” paradigm examined above. Several authors mention that Shōhin executed

every work with care and sincerity, never creating trashy paintings (dasaku)\textsuperscript{105} or overproducing rough works (ransaku).\textsuperscript{106} Further, the artist Kawai Gyokudō notes how reticent Shōhin was: although she served as an exhibition judge, she never voiced her opinions “since she was a lady.”\textsuperscript{107} However, two of the women who contributed eulogies present completely different images of Shōhin. A certain Mrs. Koyama notes:

Ms. Shōhin had a lively disposition like split bamboo. Her speech was extremely clear, and she was masculine (dansei-teki). She was indifferent to money to an unusual degree…. She studied under Hine Taizan before she married Mr. Noguchi. Around the time that her mother passed away, Ms. Shōhin cropped her long black hair, dressed as a man, and traveled through various domains to paint.\textsuperscript{108}

Wakayagi Kichitoyo (1877-1954), a dancer who was once Shōhin’s student, presents a similarly striking image:

Since Ms. Shōhin was obviously slender and frail (kyasha na yowayowa shii), she looked like a gentle woman (yasashii josei). However, she was, in fact, masculine (dansei-teki), lively (kaikatsu), and extremely zealous (hijō ni haki no atta). She also had a creative mind (dokusō-teki zunō)…. She is said to have been adorable when she was little, but when her mother passed away, …she cut her hair, dressed as a man, and traveled through various domains.\textsuperscript{109}

These writings construct portraits of Shōhin that are sharply removed from the many other accounts that present her as an unthreatening feminine ideal. These writers tell us that not only did Shōhin have a masculine personality, but she also dressed as a man when she was young. In

\textsuperscript{105} Yagioka, “Shin ni fushussei no keishū gaka,” 72.

\textsuperscript{106} Kawai Gyokudō, “Ransaku no nai hito,” \textit{Kaiga seidan} 5, no. 2 (February 1917): 70. It is noteworthy that this characterization of Shōhin’s attitude toward painting contrasts starkly with the way Okuhara Seiko’s approach to painting was described at the time; having a bold disposition (seishitsu gōhō) and wielding robust brushstrokes (rakuhitsu yūken), Seiko was known to have rapidly produced numerous rough paintings during the peak of her popularity, accumulating wealth that she later used to lead a leisurely retirement. See Fujioka Sakutarō, \textit{Kinsei kaigashi} (Tokyo: Kinkōdō, 1903), 345. Ishii, “Okuhara Seiko,” 146.

\textsuperscript{107} Kawai, “Ransaku no nai hito,” 70.

\textsuperscript{108} Koyama fujin, “Dokusō-teki no e o ichiya ni hyakumai,” \textit{Kaiga seidan} 5, no. 2 (February 1917): 75-76.

\textsuperscript{109} Wakayagi Kichitoyo, “Onna no michi wa nani kara nani made seitsū,” \textit{Kaiga seidan} 5, no. 2 (February 1917): 76-77.
fact, an extant photograph shows Shōhin dressed as a young samurai (Figure 5.3). In this studio photograph, Shōhin sits back on a chair with her back bent slightly forward. Her hair seems to be closely tied in the back, and her legs, clad in men’s trousers, are spread widely. She places her right hand on her lap, while holding a long sword in her left. She casts her eyes to the left of the camera, her mouth hanging slightly open. Her slack, inexpressive face adds to the sense of disconnect between her unaggressive attitude and the supra-masculine attire in which she is clothed, as though she has been made to pose in men’s attire for the camera. Women camouflaging themselves as men while traveling were not uncommon in early modern Japan. As Laura Nenzi notes, “Temporary but drastic changes of appearance were among the most common methods resorted to in order to acquire mobility when mobility was not an option.”\textsuperscript{110}

It is possible, then, that after losing her parents, Shōhin disguised herself as a man and traveled throughout the country to paint. More importantly, both of these female authors call Shōhin “masculine.” Wakayagi even emphasizes the disparity between Shōhin’s frail appearance and her zealous personality.\textsuperscript{111}

The journalist Ido Reizan (1859-1935) took up these masculinized images of Shōhin and employed them to bolster his gendered conception of the artist in an article on Shōhin published in 1917 in \textit{Shodō oyobi gadō} (Calligraphy and Painting), a journal that the author himself founded the previous year.\textsuperscript{112} He begins his article with a social critique, denouncing other

\textsuperscript{110} Laura Nenzi, \textit{Excursions in Identity: Travel and the Intersection of Place, Gender, and Status in Edo Japan} (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 86. For example, in 1832 a twenty-five-year-old woman named Tatsu impersonated a man and climbed to the top of Mount Fuji, defying the precept of \textit{nyonin kinsei} (the barring of women from sacred sites) (ibid).

\textsuperscript{111} It is difficult to discern in these short writings how these women conceptualized masculinity or whether they considered manliness to be a desirable quality for a female painter. There were, however, some women among Shōhin’s students who self-identified as “new women” (atarashii inna), suggesting the possibility that they regarded Shōhin’s resolute “masculine” personality as a positive quality. I thank Yamamori Yayoi for this suggestion.

\textsuperscript{112} Ido Reizan, “Noguchi Shōhin no gaikan hyō,” \textit{Shodō oyobi gadō} 2, no. 4 (April 1917): 47-54.
journalists and writers for blindly celebrating Shōhin purely on the basis of her prestigious titles without considering her paintings, which he deems to be unskillful and “merely possessing a sense of embellishment and coquettish charm” (shibun bubī) that he contrasted with Seiko’s “divinely transcendent” (fūjin chōitsu) works. He then lists a few of Shōhin’s qualities that should be emulated by aspiring women artists, such as diligence, punctuality, and obligation to her mentors. Citing the obituaries examined earlier that describe Shōhin as “masculine” as evidence to support his claim, Ido then presents a bold statement: “Women must remember that they cannot become true painters unless they endeavor to transform their distinctive qualities into those of men.” He concludes by stating, “I feel the need to pose this difficult problem to those who aspire to become women painters or calligraphers in the future.” The way Ido champions Seiko’s “transcendent” works over Shōhin’s “embellished” paintings is telling; in doing so, the author seems to confirm his theory that the more masculinized a woman painter is, the closer she is to artistic excellence, which is, of course, gendered masculine. In other words, Ido implies that women can attain artistic virtuosity only by discarding their femininity and transforming themselves into men; but in doing so, women are inevitably deprived of their identity as women. In short, Ido dismisses any possibility of female artists’ achieving artistic mastery as “real” women. This emphasis on the necessity of masculinization for female painters to attain artistic excellence is telling; in doing so, the author seems to confirm his theory that the more masculinized a woman painter is, the closer she is to artistic excellence, which is, of course, gendered masculine. In other words, Ido implies that women can attain artistic virtuosity only by discarding their femininity and transforming themselves into men; but in doing so, women are inevitably deprived of their identity as women. In short, Ido dismisses any possibility of female artists’ achieving artistic mastery as “real” women.

113 Ibid, 47 and 51.
114 Ibid., 54.
115 Ibid.
116 This discussion of a dilemma that Ido claims to exist among women artists resonates with the discourse on women painters in nineteenth-century America. For example, the sculptor F. Edwin Elwell made a similar remark in 1905: “It is rare indeed that one finds a desire on the part of a woman to wish to learn the brutal strength of thought in a man, despite the fact that it is this very quality, so despised by the dilettante and feeble art-worker, that is the essential element in the make-up of a great female artist.” In her analysis of critics’ commentaries such as this, Sarah Burns identifies a gender asymmetry in the reception of male and female American artists, arguing that “brutality unsexed [women artists], but without it they would always remain second-rate.... Whereas male artists could incorporate, control, and exploit the ‘feminine’ without compromising their masculinity, the female artist was
virtuosity might be seen as a counterattack on the efforts made by other cultural critics and Shōhin herself to feminize the realm of art.

**Conclusion**

Late nineteenth-century Japan saw the emergence of new conceptualizations of art and gender, in which the feminization of art became a vital part of the shifting conception of modern womanhood. Strikingly, art increasingly came to be perceived as a practice appropriate, or even essential, to women’s cultivation of their femininity. As women’s domestic roles as nurturers of the next generation of citizens and managers of the home-as-state gained importance, art came to be posited as an effective means of improving women’s capacity to educate their children and refine the cultural sophistication of their domestic sphere. Further, when the wartime patriotism and economic recession of the 1900s solidified the emerging vision of female labor as an underexploited national asset, cultural critics asserted the use of women’s artistic production as a means of contributing to the state’s economy. At the same time, a number of women acquired artistic training at the newly established art schools in order to attain financial independence as artists and instructors. The modern discourse on art, therefore, was deeply interwoven with the shifting conceptions of gender, education, employment, the home, and the state.

As these debates naturalized the affinity between art and femininity, Okuhara Seiko, whose masculine appearance and virile brushwork so captivated the early Meiji critics, abruptly departed the metropolitan art scene to pursue a secluded life in rural Kumagaya. There Seiko acquired a new identity as a “true recluse,” enacting the literati ideal of eremitism in her own life. Noguchi Shōhin, by contrast, capitalized on this transitional moment by inhabiting the newly

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*patently unable to contain and dominate the masculine, which took over and inexorably deformed her.” See Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 171-173; 182. I thank Prof. Melody Barnett Deusner for recommending this book to me.*
defined feminine roles and contributing to the rhetoric of ideal womanhood. While Seiko wrote almost nothing about herself, Shōhin actively employed the medium of writing to inscribe her femininity in the construction of her public persona. By carefully fashioning her self-image and participating in debates on the changing relationship between art and women, Shōhin played an important role in shaping the ideals of femininity, while creating a new vision of the female artist—a competent yet unthreatening painter who is simultaneously a dutiful wife and a benevolent mother. In the end, the figure of Noguchi Shōhin served as an ideal site through which cultural critics and the artist herself debated and promoted new conceptions of art and gender in modern Japan.
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Chapter 1

1.1a Okuhara Seiko, *Dreams of Cranes amid Windy Pines (Shōfū kakumu-zu)*, ca. 1870s, ink on paper, hanging scroll, Koga City Museum of History
1.1b Detail: Okuhara Seiko, *Dreams of Cranes amid Windy Pines (Shōfū kakumu-zu)*, ca. 1870s, ink on paper, hanging scroll, Koga City Museum of History
1.1c Detail: Okuhara Seiko, *Dreams of Cranes amid Windy Pines (Shōfū kakumu-zu)*, ca. 1870s, ink on paper, hanging scroll, Koga City Museum of History
1.1d Detail: Okuhara Seiko, *Dreams of Cranes amid Windy Pines (Shōfū kakumu-zu)*, ca. 1870s, ink on paper, hanging scroll, Koga City Museum of History
1.2 Portrait of Kido Takayoshi, undated, photograph
1.3 Katsu Kaishū, Matsudaira Yoshinaga, Kido Takayoshi, Sanjōnishi Suetomo, Chō Sanshū, Yamanaka Tenshin’ō, Washizu Kidō, and Haruki Nanmei, Collaborative Work by Famed Painters and Calligraphers (Shomeika yoseiga), ca. 1876, ink on paper, hanging scroll, private collection
Okuhara Seiko, Taki Katei, Hattori Hazan, Fukushima Ryūho, and Matsuoka Kansui, *Collaborative Work by Literati (Bunjin yosegaki)*, 1877, ink and light color on silk, hanging scroll, Kōsetsu Memorial Museum of Jissen Women’s Educational Institute
1.5a Okuhara Seiko, Fukushima Ryūho, Hattori Hazan, Ono Kozan, et al., *Collaboratively Painted and Inscribed Tea Pot (Gassaku kyūsu)*, ceramic teapot with designs in overglaze enamels, Kumagaya City Library
1.5b Okuhara Seiko, Fukushima Ryūho, Hattori Hazan, Ono Kozan, et al., *Collaboratively Painted and Inscribed Tea Pot (Gassaku kyūsu)*, ceramic teapot with designs in overglaze enamels, Kumagaya City Library
1.5c Okuhara Seiko, Fukushima Ryūho, Hattori Hazan, Ono Kozan, et al., *Collaboratively Painted and Inscribed Tea Pot (Gassaku kyūsu)*, ceramic teapot with designs in overglaze enamels, Kumagaya City Library
1.6 Portrait of Okuhara Seiko and her students, 1870, photograph, Koga City Museum of History
1.7 Calligraphers and Painters at a Glance (Shoga ichiran), September 1875, ink on paper, single-sheet print
1.8 Yokoyama Matsusaburō, portrait of Okuhara Seiko, 1871, photograph, private collection
1.9 Portrait of Okuhara Seiko, 1870s-1880s, albumen photograph mounted on paper card, private collection
1.10 Okuhara Seiko, *Landscape (Sansui-zu)*, 1870, ink on paper, hanging scroll, Ibaraki Prefectural Museum of History
1.11 Okuhara Seiko, *Landscape (Sansui)*, 1874, ink on paper, hanging scroll, Tokyo National Museum
Okuhara Seiko, *Reed Flowers in Autumn Wind*, 1874, ink on paper, hanging scroll, collection of Dr. Kawashima Junji
1.12b Detail: Okuhara Seiko, *Reed Flowers in Autumn Wind*, 1874, ink on paper, hanging scroll, collection of Dr. Kawashima Junji
1.12c Detail: Okuhara Seiko, *Reed Flowers in Autumn Wind*, 1874, ink on paper, hanging scroll, collection of Dr. Kawashima Junji
1.12d Detail: Okuhara Seiko, *Reed Flowers in Autumn Wind*, 1874, ink on paper, hanging scroll, collection of Dr. Kawashima Junji
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