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ERNEST FRANCISCO FENOLLOSA
AND THE QUEST FOR JAPAN
*Findings of a life devoted to the Science of Art*¹

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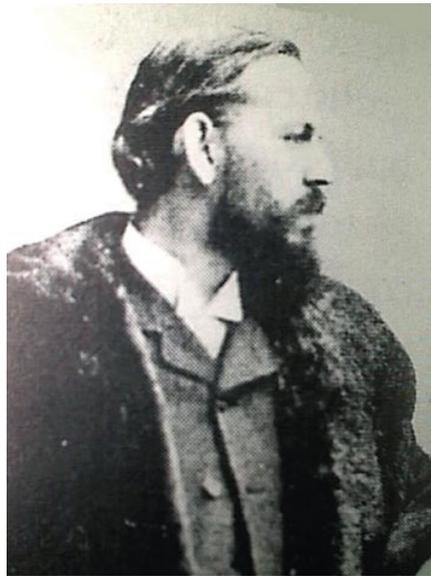


FIGURE 1. Ernest Fenollosa

Dedicated to the Memory of Odajima Nobuyuki 小田島信幸

Introduction²

From the early age of twenty-five, Ernest Fenollosa spent thirty years, that is, the greater part of his adult life, reflecting upon and edifying others about Japanese matters. In 1878, through the influence of Professor Edward

1 This article has been made possible by a postdoctoral scholarship awarded by the Secretary of Universities and Research of the Andalusian Government.

2 The system of transcription for unusual Japanese names is the Hepburn-*shiki* or spelling, with macrons (diacritical marks) representing long vowels. For Chinese names we have employed the Pinyin system.

Morse, he was called to the University of Tokyo, then just opening its doors to foreign instruction. He was appointed Professor of Political Economy and Philosophy. Thus he entered a veritable wonderland of new thought, influences and inspiration. From the first moment he felt himself at one with the Japanese spirit, and many of his students were men older than he.

It is important to stress that his ancestors were of Spanish origin³. His father, Manuel Francisco Ciriaco Fenollosa del Pino, was born in Malaga at the end of December 1818, to Manuel Fenollosa and Isabel del Pino. He was a professional musician who played the piano and violin and was also a member of the choir at Malaga's cathedral. At the age of fourteen, to avoid being drafted during the Carlist wars, he enrolled in a military band that was to serve as the naval band on board of a U.S. Navy frigate.

The band disembarked in the United States but stayed together for several years and was a great success. They gave a series of concerts and travelled overland in coaches and by boat from Washington State to Portland, Maine. They played music from the Italian school and from the new German school.

Finally, Manuel Fenollosa, along with other members of the band, settled in Salem, Massachusetts, where he was to marry Mary Silsbee, the mother of Ernest Francisco Fenollosa. However, they kept in touch with the Fenollosa family in Malaga, members of which occasionally visited America.

Thus, Ernest Fenollosa was brought up in an atmosphere of music and liberal arts that deeply influenced his thinking and character. Later in his studies, he devoted himself to Philosophical Aesthetics following in the wake of Hegel and Spencer. This is clearly evident in his seminal writing on Art that we will discuss later on.

1. The Japanese sojourn

When Fenollosa started teaching in 1878 in Japan, he was fortunate to be re-appointed every two years to his Chair at the University of Tokyo, first as Professor of Logic, and then as Professor of Aesthetics. From the very outset he had become deeply interested in an art that was completely new to him, the art of Ancient Japan and we can even say of Ancient China too, for at that time in Japan one could not be studied without the other.

³ The question of his Spanish ancestors is often referred to by Fenollosa, who met several members of his family from Malaga as a child; supposedly this fact gave some exotic flavour to his career, as was the norm among artists like Paul Gauguin who had a Peruvian uncle and lived with him until the age of eight. Another famous Spanish immigrant on the East Coast of America was Rafael Guastavino from Valencia.

Fenollosa came to Japan in an age in which collections of paintings, porcelains, lacquers, bronzes and prints were scattered, and when treasures that are now almost priceless could at that time be bought for a few yen. It was even said that among the extreme followers of foreign trends, some of these rare collections were burnt as rubbish. The abolition of Buddhism as a national religion, so to speak, came with the downfall of feudalism, and, as a consequence, the treasures of the temples fared only a little less badly than those of private homes and castles.

He then organised visits to the temples where antiquities and treasures were kept or enshrined. It was during these temple stays that his interest in Buddhism, both as a religion and as a constructive philosophy was aroused. Medieval art in Japan and in China is as closely linked with Buddhism as Medieval European Art is with Christianity.

In 1881 he established a small artists' club called Kanga-kai 観画会. In this effort, he was chiefly inspired by the artist Kano Hōgai, 狩野 芳崖 the last of the great artists from the Kano lineage. Fenollosa said of him: "Kano Hogai, the great central genius of Meiji, may be regarded as clearly striking a last note on the great instrument which Godoshi first sounded."

As early as 1882, his activities had already struck a chord with the Japanese aristocracy and Fenollosa was asked to assist in organizing the Bijutsu-kai. He opened a meeting with a fearless and inflammatory discourse in which he deplored the prevailing system of teaching American-style pencil drawing in Japanese public schools, and the study of oil-painting and modern marble sculpture under Italian instructors. His fiery speech resulted in a reawakening of national pride and interest in Japanese Art. The Japanese started calling him "The Bodhisattva of Art."

In 1885, after five months of deliberation, a special Arts Commission reported favourably upon professor Fenollosa's recommendation that purely Japanese art, with the use of Japanese ink, brush and paper, should be reintroduced into all schools. A new central Art School was instituted, with leading artists from the Kanga-kai as instructors, under the supervision of Professor Fenollosa, and plans for a National Art Museum begun.

In June 1886, Fenollosa was transferred from the University to the office of Commissioner of Fine Arts to be held under the Authority of the Imperial Household department for Museums. This included the titles of Manager of the Fine Arts Academy, Manager of the Art Department of the Imperial Museum and Professor of Aesthetics and the History of Art in the Fine Arts Academy. Later that year he was sent abroad with Kakuzo Okakura and another Japanese colleague to report on European methods of art⁴. This

4 But apparently they were not very impressed by what they saw in the West and, on their return to Japan, reinforced the ideals of reviving true Japanese Art.

commission visited all the great centres in Europe, and purchased large quantities of photographs and books for use in Japan.

In 1887, the Commission returned, and the Normal Art School of Tokyo was formally opened. Professor Fenollosa was now given nine Japanese experts in archaeology and art as assistants and was entrusted with the task of registering all the art treasures of the country, particularly those of temples. These years between 1886 and 1889 marked the height of his personal influence in Japan. However, upon his return, Fenollosa found that he would no longer be the sole person to direct affairs of art. Not surprisingly, Fenollosa rejoiced in the courage and intelligence of the Japanese spirit, which had so rapidly adapted and assimilated new thoughts and stimulated a renewed national growth.

2. Return to America

In 1890 Fenollosa received a proposition from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts to become curator of the newly established Department of Oriental Art and decided to accept. For five years he remained in Boston, re-arranging the Museum's Oriental treasures, many of which had once been his own.

In 1892, he gave his first series of public lectures. These were given in Boston with the title "Chinese and Japanese History, Literature and Arts". In 1893, he was appointed member of the Fine Arts Jury for the Columbian Fair, especially to represent Japan, since Japan was here for the first time, exhibiting her art among "Fine Arts" and not among "Industries"⁵. From then on, he began to give lectures in the larger cities of America.

By this time, the work of arranging and cataloguing the Oriental treasures of the Boston Art Museum was practically complete. Serious writing and lecturing now appeared to be the best means of furthering his teachings and thoughts⁶, and he published an important essay on the nature of Fine Arts.

3. The Nature of Fine Arts

Fenollosa's essay on "The Nature of Fine Arts" published in issues 9 and 10 of the magazine *The Lotos*, in 1896, when he had already left Japan, is an attempt to establish a new and sounder basis for Arts and Art teaching.

5 Okakura was the Official Commissioner of the Japanese Pavilion at this World Fair, the Hōden 鳳殿 (Phoenix Hall) a sort of replica for the homonymous hall at Byōdōin 平堂院 in Uji, built in Chicago by Japanese workers. He wrote all kinds of catalogues and explanations on Art, Architecture and Japanese customs, and an especially enchanting description of the mythical Asian bird, the Phoenix, its appearance and activities.

6 These conferences were attended by Orientalists in the making like Arthur Wesley Dow and the architect, and later collector of engravings, Frank Lloyd Wright.

In this fundamental essay we could comment on the following items.

He begins with a comparison of all the admitted forms of fine art and attempts to discover a practical principle which is common to them all. By discussing poetry, music and painting he comes up with a set of three propositions:

1. Art does not consist of usefulness, because usefulness is also a quality that belongs to what we call not-art.
2. For the same reason, art does not consist of the quality of skill, and art schools based on proficiency of superficial technique are ludicrous.
3. The essence of art does not consist of the quality of giving pleasure, because pleasure is a subjective feeling, and there may be many species of pleasure, some of them being totally out of the sphere of art.

On a second level, when pondering upon the true essence common to all types of art, he first argues that music is not defined by the science of acoustics or at least no more than painting is defined by the laws of optics: "The visibility of ugly forms is explained in the same way as the visibility of the beautiful".

In his sixth proposition, Fenollosa states that, "The values of discursive thought are not essential to the nature of art". He proves his affirmation with the fact that a written text is not present in instrumental music, which we call art, although he admits that up to the sixteenth century, what the painter thought about things was supposed to lend dignity to his art.

He then arrives at one of his boldest propositions: "That the nature of fine art is not in the least constituted by realistic representation". This would eventually lead to the appreciation of non-realist and non-naturalistic art, akin to what we might find in many Oriental works and also in abstract creations. He condemned the prevailing trend of art education in public schools at the time tending towards the imitative rather than the creative.

Fenollosa affirmed that the whole world might be against him in this respect but as, "Accurate representation has no place whatsoever in the sister art of music" he believed that he was right⁷.

After the former eliminations he attempted to complete his inductive argument "by proceeding to the identification of what remains in the several arts as the base for their aesthetic excellences."

Comparing poetry, music and architecture with painting he finds an attribute that is common to all the leading fine arts: "A unique beauty in the

⁷ Nowadays, however, we could speak of natural music made from natural sounds.

form of a fresh and self-defined individual idea, a formal beauty which inheres in the manner of expression and not in the eternal thing which is expressed". In other words, he seeks to create a pure idea and a beautiful expression. What the Japanese, according to Heidegger (see below), had called *iki* 粋.

For Fenollosa, the answer to the question of the nature of fine art lies mainly in the emotive capacities, not of the artist, but rather of the receiver of the work of art.

He sought further proof of his argument by producing a deductive theory. In this explanation, he defined three attributes or transcendental ideas that guide man as a perfectible being in his efforts at progress, namely, Truth, Goodness and Beauty. He found these three ideals illustrated in the famous saying of Christ, "I am the truth, the way and the life", the attribute of life corresponding to beauty in Fenollosa's scheme.

Truth and Goodness are both abstract universals but beauty is "a concrete universal which lies completely embodied in the substance of its particulars" and is comparable to "the spirit of woman who glorifies and consecrates our homes"

Finally, he conceived the sphere of art as an extension of the sphere of beauty in a similar manner to John Keats who, in his "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1818), said that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty"⁸ 美は真なり、真は美なり.

By virtue of the combination of both arguments he concludes that the most fundamental attribute of fine art is its power to express a pure, individual, non-ratiocinative idea in peculiar combinations of sensuous terms.

Art is then "the power to sheathe the universal and perfect in the fabric of the particular and the transitory" and the universal in the particular is the individual.

He compared his ideas with those of John Ruskin who persistently insisted on realism but declared that he was not "afraid of Ruskin" because Man is able to exercise his prerogative of creative imagination. In this sense, Fenollosa is clearly in favour of expression, emotion and creativity.

"The idea of art does not primarily conceive subjects at all, but the pure form of the language of their expression". Thus, as we have stated above, Truth is again Beauty.

In a second part of his essay on the same theme, that was published subsequently, he focused in greater detail upon what we would term "psychophysical ideas"⁹. He concentrated on the global impression transmitted by

8 The whole verse says, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty – that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know".

9 Psychophysical ideas in the sense that they were centered in the reaction produced by the work of art in the spectators' mind, one does not know if this issue bears some relationship with

the work of art, the idea of perfection as pertaining solely to the realm of arts, and the definition of art as a synthetic faculty.

In this synthesis for instance, pictorial art is the balanced interaction between line and *chiaroscuro*, understood as a differentiation in the quantity of light and colour.

But he warned that if one tried to practice this notion, even by stealth, we would feel, "As if we were on a mountain-top stifled with rarefied air", a metaphor that was later employed by the musician Arnold Schönberg¹⁰ and then again by the physicist Heisenberg when discussing the colour theories of Newton and Goethe.

This notion of synthetic impression must not be confused with conventional or decorative qualities because Fenollosa is referring always to the primal beauty of form. Though somewhat mystic in his explanations, such as when he referred to this new concept as a "self-luminous avatar", at the end of the discussion he was glad that he had "defined beauty in terms of beauty herself" and that his new idea was less vague than before.

In conclusion, he again called for truth and originality, in the sense that no two great works of art can ever repeat one another, and affirmed that only these two qualities combined could, in his words, "Hasten the coming of the Kingdom of Art."

4. Second stay in Japan

Fenollosa spent the late summer of 1896 in a Japanese villa on the banks of the river Kamo in Kyoto. Japanese artists, priests and poets began to frequent his residence. Fenollosa began studying Buddhism with Keien Ayari¹¹.

All the depth, wonder and romance of Japanese thought seemed to return to Ernest Fenollosa in an overwhelming wave. Now it was not art alone that he pursued, but religion, sociology, Nô drama and Chinese and Japanese poetry.

He delivered many lectures in various Tokyo schools and in art clubs and institutions, wrote articles for Japanese, English and American publi-

the theories developed on the matter on the other side of the Atlantic by Edmund Husserl the father of phenomenology.

10 In one of his first choral works he made the main character sing: "I feel the air of distant planets". Alpinists and explorers, Central Europeans like Heisenberg had always emphasized the role of tall mountains to allow for unrestricted intellectual perspectives although at the assumed risk of incomprehension; on the other hand there are plenty of theories about the *rarefied spaces* of Japan, like KareSansui 枯山水, dry gardens as in Ryoanji 竜安寺.

11 Ayari could translate as bishop

cations, and began a clear mapping out of his work, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*.

Fenollosa was deeply stirred by the splendid struggle of Japan in her war with Russia. Ten years before, at the end of the Sino-Japanese war he publicly stated that “Japan will yet hold Port Arthur 大連 (Dalian)¹², but she will reach it through seas of blood”.

The years 1905 to 1908 brought him wider audiences. These were years of increasing triumphs and, in the summer of 1906, he completed a pencil draft of his book.

5. Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Arts

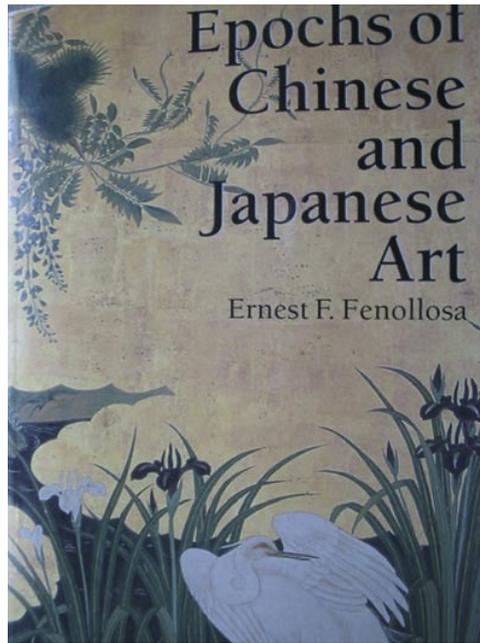


FIGURE 2. The cover of the famous book by E. F. Fenollosa

It was an almost supernatural book drafted in 1906 and published in 1912 by his wife Mary Fenollosa after his death in London. Due to these circumstances, the text had to be corrected under the supervision of Profes-

¹² In fact the Chinese name for Port Arthur is Lūshun but it has been absorbed by the more heavily populated city of Dalian.

sor R. Petrucci of the Sociological Institute in Brussels. In this book, Fenollosa is one of the first authors ever to establish parallels between the East and West from their most ancient origins¹³, and he advocated an eventual fusion of both scions of art, in an effort that would support a Universal Civilization and probably as a response to Rudyard Kipling's poem on East and West¹⁴.

His idea was quite objective and can be easily equated with the scientific positivism that would take shape later on. As he said, the purpose of the book was to contribute first-hand material toward a real history of East Asiatic Art. For Fenollosa, all types of art, whether Music, Poetry or Sculpture were only diverse perceptions of a common principle and so there could not be an independent theory for each variety, but a unified theory of composition for all.

Besides, the book conceives of the art of each period as a peculiar beauty which could not have been produced at another time and which permeates all the industries of its day.

The first volume is divided into nine interesting Chapters

1. Primitive Chinese Art. Pacific Influence.
2. Chinese Art of the Han dynasty. Mesopotamian influence.
3. Early Chinese Buddhist Art. From the Han dynasty to the Tang.
4. Early Korean and Japanese Buddhist Art. Suiko Period.
5. Greco-Buddhist Art in China. Early Tang.
6. Greco-Buddhist Art in Japan. Nara Period.
7. Mystical Buddhist Art in China. Tang Dynasty (Esoteric).
8. Mystical Buddhist Art in Japan. Fujiwara Period (Esoteric).
9. Feudal Art in Japan. Kamakura Period.

His vision suggested different lineages of influence in Eastern art and especially what he calls "Greco-Buddhist Art" which is the art developed in Northern India and Pakistan by Greek migrants who exerted a Hellenistic influence in kingdoms such as Gandhara or Kushan (called Khotan by Fenollosa).

In the second volume, as a continuation, we find the following chapters

10. Idealistic Art in China. Northern Sung (Song).
11. Idealistic Art in China. Southern Sung.

¹³ He seems to ponder over all kinds of provocative theories about the origin of Asian civilizations.

¹⁴ The ballad of East and West by Rudyard Kipling has a famous opening that says: "Oh, East is East, and West is West and never the twain shall meet". But Fenollosa believed passionately that they could, and indeed must if mankind was to move to a higher level of civilization.

12. Idealistic Art in Japan. Ashikaga.
13. Idealistic Art in Japan. The early Kano.
14. Modern Aristocratic Art in Japan. The Later Kano and the Korin school.
15. Modern Chinese Art. The Tsing (Qing) or Manchu Dynasties.
16. Modern Plebeian Art in Kyoto. The Shijo School.
17. Modern Plebeian Art in Yedo (Edo). Ukiyo-ye (Ukiyôe).

With a number of illustrations from many unknown or disappeared works.

The first volume spans the period between the primeval and obscure Asiatic origins to the XIII century and deals more with manufacturing, ceramics and sculpture, ending coincidentally with the progressive disappearance of the great schools of sculptors in Japan like Tankei and Unkei, a question that Fenollosa seldom seems to acknowledge¹⁵.

The second volume starts approximately from the XIII century and continues up to the XIX century. It is mainly dedicated to painting and can be considered as a *tour de force* within Fenollosa's mastery as an antiquarian and collector of art¹⁶.

There is an innovative treatment of Chinese and Japanese Art together, as a single aesthetic movement¹⁷, and thus, Fenollosa summarizes the vicissitudes of Chinese and Japanese painting in a diachronic graph at the beginning of the book that is presented here. In this graph, he sets a temporal scale to the right and plots the comparative heights reached by each Civilization¹⁸, placing great emphasis upon the cyclical ebb and flowering of

15 On this subject we have presented a Ph. D. Thesis about Sculpture and Image in Japanese Buddhist Culture.

16 He spent not negligible sums in collecting art and became a real connoisseur respected in the world of antiquities in Japan.

17 Watsuji said about the relations between Japanese and Chinese culture: "Notwithstanding, Japanese culture does keep alive the genius of the China that existed between the Chin and Song dynasties. By acknowledging this, the Chinese could restore the power and grandeur of their noble culture of the past, lost from the China of today. It is here that could be discovered the way out of the impasse in which the Chinese nature finds itself today. China revival must come. There must be a return to the greatness of Han and Tang culture, for the reconstruction of Chinese civilization is an integral and essential part of any new advances that world culture achieves. When China's people stand squarely by their own strength, then will begin the revival of her greatness." (1929).

18 It is similar to the well known graph on the evolution of the life of another famous Japonologist the German architect Bruno Taut.

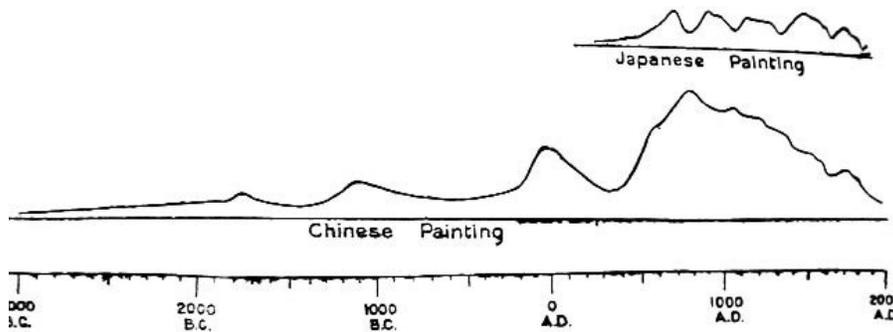


FIGURE 3. Graph showing the evolution of the periods of painting in China and Japan

successive periods and allowing a synoptic comparison of Japanese and Chinese talents.

When preparing this work, Fenollosa must have been aware of or at least imbued with the spirit that dictated the following paragraphs by Dilthey in the opening of *The Imaginative Power of the Poet* (1880).

“Art forms of every kind, of every age and nationality press in on us. Distinctions and conventions of literary forms all appear to have vanished. As if that were not enough, a primitive and formless literature, music and art bears down on us from the Orient. These arts are semi-barbarous; yet even now they are still replete with the sturdy-hearted vitality of the people among whom they were created, as if their spiritual struggle were being fought out in a long romance or on a twenty-foot canvas.”

“Amidst such absence of control, the artist is divorced from all convention and the critic is left with one standard of value only, reliance on his own emotions. Hence, here, the public takes charge. The crowds who elbow their way into vast exhibitions and theatres and lending libraries are the arbiters who make and break the artist’s name. This lack of control of taste shows an age in which new feelings are breaking down the forms and conventions observed hitherto and are giving shape to new art forms. But this is not sure to be lasting. One of the pressing tasks of the philosopher and the historian of art or literature today is to build anew a sound relationship between art and aesthetic thinking.”

These ideas apparently bear a more than remarkable resemblance with the notions which were to be defended some years later by Oswald Spengler in *The Decline of the West*, for instance ¹⁹:

“But *ipso facto* this second century will be one of *actually* Contending States. These armies are not substitutes for war – they *are* war, and they *want* war. Within two generations it will be they whose will will prevail over all the bourgeois. In these wars of theirs for the heritage of the whole world, continents will be staked – India, China, South Africa, Russia, Islam called out, new techniques and tactics played and counter-played. The last race to keep its form, the last living tradition, the last leaders who have all of this at their back will pass through and onward, victors.”

Let us now examine some of the most interesting observations contained in *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* in greater detail.

To begin with, Fenollosa attributes an almost mythical power to the question of “spacing” that today would be termed “composition”, so his argument is surprisingly modern.

“A universal scheme or logic of art unfolds, which as easily subsumes all forms of Asiatic and of savage art and the efforts of children as it does accepted European schools. We find that all art is harmonious *spacing*, under special technical conditions that vary. (Our italics).The spaces must have bounds, hence the union of harmonious shape with proportions.” ²⁰

He then added that “spacing” or “composition”, as we would say, was the most important question for art, and in this regard he also coined the term *notan* (濃淡) from the Japanese *aesthetics* ²¹ that could be interpreted as “contrast” in a loose translation, the meaning being composed of words for “thick and “thin”. This term usually applies to colour and light, but could also be used for flavors in cuisine. And thus:

“The relative quantities of light which they reflect to the eye become another differentiation in the spaces, and the harmonious arrangement of these values involves a new kind of beauty (*notan*) and a new faculty to create ideas in terms of it.” ²²

¹⁹ Spengler, in fact, wrote much more in this work about politics and tactics but we could easily transfer his thinking to the realm of Art.

²⁰ Introduction, p. xxiv.

²¹ The concept of *notan* is a Japanese term that Fenollosa gladly adopted to emphasize his high degree of otherness and probably to puzzle the layman in Asian Arts.

²² Introduction, p. xxiv.

“Delineation and its possible instruments re-establish wide ranges of quality; the significance of *notan* for modelling, for rendering planes of distance, and for local tone, is as vital as its decorative beauty; colour may also relate to hosts of physical facts.”²³

One could affirm that this notion of *notan*, formerly used in a rather mystical mood by Fenollosa in “The Nature of Fine arts”, can also be applied to Western art and is similar to the concept of *Iki* 粋, as discussed by Heidegger in *A Dialogue on Language between a Japanese and an Inquirer*. A relevant excerpt is presented here²⁴:

I: Of course. *He* could say in European languages whatever was under discussion. But we were discussing *Iki*; and here it was *I* to whom the spirit of the Japanese language remained closed – as it is to this day.

J: The languages of the dialogue shifted everything into European.

I: Yet the dialogue tried to *say* the essential nature of *East-Asian* art and poetry.

J: Now I am beginning to understand better where you smell the danger. The language of the dialogue constantly destroyed the possibility of saying what the dialogue was about.

(Later in the text, *Iki* is defined as “the gracious”, “the breath of the stillness of luminous delight” and more explicitly as “the sensuous radiance through whose lively delight there breaks the radiance of something supra-sensuous”)

Some other important ideas are:

In the section on *Early Japanese Buddhist Art* (Chapter 4), when describing the bronze Trinity of Horyūji, he presents a detail on the lotus halo in the following terms:

“These are curves of extreme tension, as of substances pulled out lengthwise with a force that has found its utmost resistance, lines of strain, long, cool curves of vital springing, that bear the strength of their intrinsic unity in their rhythms.”²⁵

23 Introduction, p. xxv.

24 This text apparently originated in some visits that Professor Tezuka of the Imperial University of Tokyo paid to Heidegger in 1953/54.

25 Vol 1, p. 72.

This gives one an idea of Fenollosa's passionate and vital tone which places a soul in even the most minute of details, as though, for him, the Arts were a kind of animistic religion.

Further on, when discussing Noami's painting of the XV century, he reveals part of his method of investigation, integrating himself with the places and the people where the work of art is to be found and was conceived, regardless of different religions or customs, for Fenollosa himself admits:

"I have lived with these kindly Zen priests of Tōfukuji for weeks at a time, and have had my artists privileged to copy for months many of these wonderful relics. No visit which does not imply residence can give a tittle of the solemn-sweet impression – particularly at night and morning-of cool sanded courts crossed irregularly with granite steps, and banked with Sung (Song) compositions of ancient shrubs and mossy stone, and the trickling stream of the nobly proportioned refectory with its low square tower and cool tiled interior; and of the beautiful high, light rooms set cornerwise between the courts and overlooking the lower wards of the city, where the kakemono were brought out for inspection. In those sweet days of the early eighties and accompanied by my student Mr. Okakura, I felt like an unworthy, degenerate Noami, privileged to revise the very treasures that had delighted his eyes 450 years before."²⁶

He then writes the specious dictum that:

"Art is the power of the imagination to transform materials – to transfigure them – and the history of Art should be the history of the materials through which it works. The supreme thing in the world of art is *conception*."

But his discourse recalls the religious element in many occasions as for instance:

"The analogy between Christ and Buddha has impressed the imagination of travellers in all ages. The Arabs, who believed in neither, carelessly identified them. These analogies should, to a broad mind, whether Catholic or Protestant, be beautiful illustrations of how the highest truths find natural adumbration in all pure souls".²⁷

²⁶ *Idealistic Art in Japan*, vol. 2, ch. XII, p. 70.

²⁷ *Idealistic Art in China*, vol. 2, p. 49.



FIGURE 4. The garden and refectory of Tōfukuji (Kyoto)

Or in another passage:

“The first creative outburst of the new art in Japan lies between 1394 and 1428. And how completely it is subject to the Zen influence which was dominating the land and Kyoto especially, with new religious fervour, can be seen from the fact that the great “quadrilateral” of Kyoto art schools lay in four great Zen temples: Kinkakuji in the north-west, Tōfukuji in the south-east, Daitokuji at the north, and Shōkokuji near the centre”.²⁸

By the end of the second volume he anticipates a somewhat frustrating conclusion probably based in his scepticism on the current state of the arts in Japan.

“Art begins in hopeful childishness and falls back to hopeless childishness. The only hope of the hopeless is to perceive itself to *be* hopeless. We may then come to discard it and begin anew. (The moment we notice, coddle and over-praise it, we do injury to all past and possible future creation. Let us not really lower our critical standards to suit a degenerate present)”.²⁹

28 *Idealistic Art in Japan*, vol. 2, p. 68.

29 Vol. 2, p. 141.

In short, we can see that his theories are rather intriguing, his concept of Art is like a tapestry teeming with the characters of History, but perhaps we could establish a series of caveats with reference to his work in this book as follows.

An important criticism is that Fenollosa could have failed to see the adoration that the Japanese people feel for Nature³⁰. This could have much to do with the ancestral practices of Shintoism, the vernacular religion, because as Professor Falero explains:

“For Shintoists, man is a part of nature, as well as any other existential being, and as a consequence, all his actions fall within the only frame of reference of the natural sphere.”³¹

Besides, Fenollosa’s attitude was somewhat impregnated with an anticlerical sentiment, failing to recognize the contribution made by the missionaries and, especially, by the accultured Jesuits with respect to the arts, principally in Nagasaki, Macao and Beijing. Consequently, he does not produce any explanations on Nanban Art or on Sino-European arts which were probably the origin of the artistic fusion that he sought.

For example, when he refers to the work of the Iberian Christians in Southern Japan he writes:

“Hideyoshi decides to expel the missionaries as disturbers of national loyalty. It is a decisive moment for the history of the whole East, and for the world. For had those arrogant and corrupt European Courts then succeeded in subverting Japan to their nominally religious exploitations, the great past of both China and Japan would probably have been crushed out of sight, the art certainly.”³²

30 Japan is the only country in the world where refinement and nobility in all aspects of life come directly from Nature and not from man-made creations or artifice. See for instance the Old Era classics like “Genji Monogatari” or “Makura no sōshi” to confirm this aspect in writing and poetry.

31 Falero continues: “That is why morality never goes beyond the natural domain and good and evil, human behaviour and non-natural events, human mistakes or offences as well as natural calamities, all fall within this one single frame of reference. Nature is moreover conceived of as a living organism endowed with a permanent capacity for self-regeneration, and, through this power, human offences are ritually removed. That is to say that man is restored by the healing power of nature. And this process of regeneration is repeated communally according to a ritual calendar, or privately according to particular circumstances. In such an understanding of Nature in itself lies, no doubt an important clue to understand Shinto’s optimism on human nature”.

32 *Idealistic Art in Japan*, vol. 2, p. 90.

“In how far Yeitoku (Eitoku) was influenced toward this by the many examples of European oil painting imported for the Christian daimyos we can only conjecture. There is no attempt at shadow in his work, and Hideyoshi was hostile to the European propaganda; but it may well be that Yeitoku got a hint of stronger mural power in colour from the glazed garments of pseudo-Venetian “Holy Families”, or portraits of popes.”³³

The former blatantly ignores the fact that the Jesuits had established Art Schools wherever they settled, and especially in Arima (Japan) and some places in China³⁴.

And yet he concedes that:

“The answer given here can only be outlined. It is that the reign of Kanhi (Kangxi), which started out most hopefully for Christianity and for China, ended in the gloom of the first Christian persecution. This was due to the pigheadedness of the Papal Court and its advisers, who were jealous of Jesuit success. The Jesuits had politically and broadmindedly tried to identify as much as possible of what was vital in Chinese life and thought with Christianity. Their Franciscan and Dominican opponents wished all Chinese thought and rite to be considered as the work of the devil³⁵. On the side of Europe it was the problem of tolerance or intolerance but for China it was Christ *versus* Confucius, it was the whole method of European thought *versus* the whole method of Confucian Thought. The stupid ignorance of Europe, which ignored the enlightened appeal of the Jesuits, merely joined forces with the Confucianists.”³⁶

Reading the former paragraph one feels tempted to quote the verses of Voltaire at the preface of a book on Confucius where he says:

“Confucius
De la seule raison salutaire intreprète
Sans eblouir le monde, éclairant les esprits

³³ *Idealistic Art in Japan*, vol. 2, p. 106.

³⁴ In fact the main paintings and artworks of Nanban Art displayed in Asia are to be found in Nagasaki, Kôbe and Macao, all places pertaining to the radius of action of Christianity.

³⁵ Here, he is quoting the much debated controversy of the Chinese Rites that reflects the acculturation promoted by Matteo Ricci by virtue of which some Confucian practices were accepted for instance in Christian funerals.

³⁶ *Modern Art in China*, vol. 2, ch. XV, p. 149.

Il ne parla qu'en sage, et jamais en prophète;
Cependant on le crut, et même en son pays”

“Of reason alone healthy interpreter
Without dazzling the world but lighting the spirits
He only speaks as sage but never as prophet;
However they believed him and even in his own country”

Epilogue

Astonishingly enough, Fenollosa carefully avoided the pitfalls that according to the late Edward Said, eternally menace the Orientalist's studies:³⁷

1. - An absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, underdeveloped, inferior. 2. - Another dogma is that abstraction about the Orient, particularly those based on texts representing a “classical” Oriental civilization, are always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities. 3. - A third dogma is that the Orient is eternal, uniform and incapable of defining itself; therefore it is assumed that a highly generalized and systematic vocabulary for describing the Orient from a Western standpoint is inevitable and even scientifically “objective”. A fourth dogma is that the Orient is, deep down, either something to be feared (the Yellow Peril, the Mongol hordes, the brown dominions) or to be controlled (by pacification, research and development, outright occupation whenever possible).

In contrast with what Said criticizes, it is surprising to hear how Fenollosa, in his great earnestness, when striving to demonstrate some difficult point of logic, would step down from the platform and go among his “boys”, as he affectionately called them, putting an arm about their shoulders and, by the power of sheer magnetism and intellect, reinforce his meaning.

On the eve of his first departure from Japan the Emperor granted him a personal audience, bestowing upon Fenollosa, with his own hand, a fourth decoration, the Order of the “Sacred Mirror”. Mary Fenollosa describes the scene vividly.

“It must have been a wonderful sight, the Court in full regalia, grave Japanese nobles and statesmen standing silently about, all eyes directed to the one foreigner in the great hall, an

³⁷ *Orientalism*, pp. 300-301.

American, still young, kneeling to receive the highest personal order yet bestowed, and to hear words spoken by the Emperor's own lips, "You have taught my people to know their own art; in going back to your great country, I charge you to teach them also."

Besides the works studied in detail in this article, Fenollosa published a number of other interesting essays for instance *Noh or Accomplishment* in collaboration with Ezra Pound. In this book, published in 1917, he explains the story of the famous piece Hagoromo 羽衣 (Wing Garment), in which an angel laments the loss of her ethereal garment that will inevitably lead to extinction as described in the Buddhist sâstras, until a peasant restores the magic cloth but only after she has danced for his delight.³⁸

Fenollosa produced his stupendous work on Japan probably convinced of the same assertion that Watsuji was to formulate around 1929.

"Perhaps the volatile Japanese climate might prove in the end more difficult to subjugate than the *bourgeois*. But we must remain conscious of the significance of, and love, our destiny to have been born into such a chosen people without a match in the world; but we can, by maintaining and fostering this destiny, make contributions to human culture of which no other people is capable. By such contributions we would first give real significance to the fact that every part of the world has its own distinctive character."³⁹

38 According to the *Abhidharma-mahāvibhâsâ-sâstra*, the five minor signals of the decay of an angel are as follows:

"When an angel soars and flies she is prone to emit a kind of music so wonderful that no choir or instrument could equal it, but when the end comes near the music fades and the voice turns dry and faint.

In merry times, by day and by night, from the inner soul of an angel shimmers a gleam without shades, but when death is close, the light suddenly titillates and the figure is surrounded by penumbra.

The skin of an angel is smooth and well anointed and even if she was to be immersed in a lake of ambrosia, it will repel the liquid like the lotus' leaf; but when death approaches, the water clings and will not come off.

It is said that an angel always moves as a whirl of fire, and is not arrested or detained in any place, it is seen here and there almost at the same time, disappears, seeps and escapes but when the moment of death comes near she dwells in only one place and cannot fly away.

An angel transmits an everlasting force but when the moment of death arrives the force vanishes and the teetering will not cease."

These images depict in our opinion the notion of an ethereal creature so attached to natural delight, that even the fact of the decay in an immortal is assumed.

39 Tetsuro Watsuji was greatly concerned about this issue and he dedicated his book *Sakoku*, which means "the closed country," (see bibliography) to this question.

But as Furukawa Tetsushi warns, Watsuji also considered that the most fatal of the defects of the Japanese people lies, in a word, in their want of a scientific way of thinking. This major and widespread defect of the Japanese is, according to the author, not an overnight phenomenon. Since they gave birth to a new science, European nations have spent three centuries allowing this scientific way of thinking to permeate every aspect of their way of life. The Japanese, on the contrary, closed their country to foreign influences at precisely the time of the birth of this new science, and for two and a half centuries all facets of this modern spirit were shut out by state authority. The rapid progress of science during these two hundred and fifty years ensured that Japan's loss could not be remedied by a subsequent hasty importation of the fruits of that scientific progress.

In his efforts to establish a true Science of Art as a new ethic, Fenollosa resented this narrowness of vision in a bitter-sweet way, and postulated:

“Within the coming century the blended strength of Scientific Analysis and Spiritual Wisdom should wed for eternity the blended grace of Aesthetic Synthesis and Spiritual Love.”



FIGURE 5. The entrance to Hōmyōin



FIGURE 6. The tomb of Fenollosa near the shrine of another orientalist, James Sturgis Bigelow in Hômyôin, Otsu (Kyoto).

When Fenollosa died in England the Japanese government sent a warship for his body, and the priests buried him in Hômyôin (法明院) within the sacred enclosure at Miidera (三井寺) in Otsu (大津) near Kyôtô, exactly the same place where he had dedicated himself to the study of Buddhism under Sakurai Ayari and Keien Ayari (the temple of Tendaiji Mon Shu).

Again, the words of his wife are inspirational and revealing:

“His ashes lie at Miidera, but his far-reaching thoughts and the ideals which he kindled cannot die. They will, it is my belief, continue to burn for many years.”

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Abstract

The life of Ernest Fenollosa (1858-1908) was the romance *par excellence* of modern scholarship. He went to Japan as a professor of economics. He ended up as Imperial Commissioner of Arts. He unearthed treasures that were unknown to the Japanese themselves.¹ It may be an exaggeration to say that he saved Japanese art for Japan, but it is certain that he did as much as any man could to restore native art to its rightful position of pre-eminence and to stop the imitation of European Art. He endeared himself to the Imperial government and laid the basis for a personal tradition.

Among other remarkable facets of his life, we could mention his famed relationship with Okakura Kakuzo (1862/3-1913) 岡倉 覚三 the renowned Taoist painter and author of "The Book of Tea"; and his rapport with several members of the recently founded University of Tokyo at which he taught. Usually these were men older than himself who became thinkers or even ministers in the Meiji Government 明治時代.

His work to spread the richness of Eastern Art had not been considered previously in Western Thought and this led him to a new universal synthesis; we should not forget that he was closely associated with Hegelian thinking and Logic. His efforts to see and discover as much as possible, despite the fact that he was not fluent in the Japanese language and even less conversant with the ever-present Chinese characters were, without doubt, outstanding.

His present reputation in the West rests upon the posthumous book *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*. In America, he was also known for his services to diverse museums, especially the Boston Art Museum. He wrote works on Japanese and Chinese literature that formed the basis of a new understanding of the East. This article seeks to elucidate upon his artistic ideas and the impact that his work had on the scientific study of the Orient.

Resumo

A vida de Ernest Fenollosa (1858-1908) foi, por excelência, o romance da erudição moderna. Partiu para o Japão como professor de Economia e acabou como o Comissário Imperial das Artes. Descobriu tesouros desconhecidos dos próprios japoneses. Poderá parecer um exagero afirmar que salvou a arte japonesa, mas sem dúvida que fez tudo para restaurar a arte nipônica ao seu devido lugar de proeminência e acabar com o hábito de imitar a arte europeia. As suas actividades agradaram ao governo imperial e estabeleceram os alicerces duma tradição pessoal.

Entre outras facetas extraordinárias da sua vida, podemos mencionar a sua conhecida relação com Okakura Kakuzo (1862/3-1913), o famoso pintor taoísta e

¹ Among them the famous Yumedono Kannon 夢殿觀音 one of the treasures of the Hall of Dreams at Hōryūji and that even today is only shown to the public on special days each January. After two hundred years of neglect, in 1884, Fenollosa unveiled the statue whose finest feature, the head, had a sharp Han nose, straight clear forehead and rather large –almost Negroid – lips on which a quiet mysterious smile played, not unlike Da Vinci's Mona Lisa (p. 51, Vol. I).

autor do “Livro do Chá”; para além dos seus laços com vários membros da recém criada Universidade de Tóquio, onde leccionava. Na sua maioria, estes homens, que se tornaram filósofos e até ministros do governo Meiji, eram mais velhos que Fenollosa.

O seu trabalho em prol da divulgação da riqueza da arte oriental, revelou aspectos que não tinham sido anteriormente considerados no pensamento ocidental, levando-o a uma nova síntese universal. Neste contexto, não devemos esquecer a sua proximidade à lógica e filosofia hegelianas. Foram notáveis os seus esforços para ver e descobrir tudo o que fosse possível, apesar de não ter um conhecimento fluente da língua japonesa e um ainda menor à vontade com os omnipresentes caracteres chineses.

A sua actual reputação no Ocidente decorre da sua obra póstuma *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*. Nos EUA também ficou conhecido pelos serviços prestados a diversos museus, particularmente ao Museu de Arte de Boston. Redigiu obras sobre a literatura japonesa e chinesa, que formaram a base para um novo entendimento do Oriente. Este artigo procura dar a conhecer as ideias artísticas de Fenollosa e o impacto que a sua obra teve na área dos estudos científicos sobre o Oriente.

要約

アーネスト フランシスコ フェノロサ (1858-1908) の生涯は近代研究を愛し続ける事だった。最初は東京大学教授として経済、政治、哲学を教えていた。隠れた宝を発見した。彼は日本のために日本の芸術を救った。フェノロサは日本の芸術を保護する事に情熱を傾けた。西洋の真似をする事をやめさせようと誰よりも働いた。日本の政府のための仕事をするかたわら彼自身のスタイルを形成させた。

彼の有名な友達は岡倉覚三 (1862/3-1913) だった。画家であり *The Book of Tea* の本の作者。彼の他の友人は東京大学の生徒たちだった。その後彼らは思想家や大臣になった。

フェノロサは西洋人の考えていなかった、東アジアの芸術を広める事を仕事とした。そのことで新しい理論を発見した。それは Hegel の哲学から学んだ。彼は日本の言葉や漢字を理解できなかったが彼のした事は偉大であった。

フェノロサのもっとも有名な本は *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* である。アメリカでは Boston Art Museum などの多くの博物館で働いていた。日本と中国の文学の論文を書いていた。私の論文でフェノロサの芸術理論を説明したい。そしてアジアの社会の興味深い結論を出したい。