

Selections from NDL collections

The Rimpa School and Its Influence as Seen in Books: From the small digital exhibition "Kaleidoscope of Books (No. 20)"

This is a partial translation of the small digital exhibition in Japanese of the same title.

1. Introduction

The National Diet Library (NDL) regularly introduces a variety of materials held in its collections by means of small digital exhibitions on its website, entitled "Kaleidoscope of Books." The 20th Kaleidoscope of Books is titled "[Tracing the path of the Rimpa school and its surroundings through books](#)" and has been available in Japanese since November 19, 2015.

2015 marks the 400th anniversary of the launching of an artistic community in Kyoto by Hon'ami Koetsu. After its founding by Koetsu, Tawaraya Sotatsu, Ogata Korin, and SAKAI Hoitsu all contributed to its further development, and the Rimpa school was handed down at different times and in different places through a unique style, in which the student learns on his or her own, following the model of a master. The bold designs of Rimpa school artists have strong decorative appeal and are well known both in and out of Japan.

This exhibition is intended to present some of books that were indispensable to the transmission and development of the Rimpa school, and to provide some unique insights that only a librarian would have into this subject matter by introducing selected items from the exhibition.



Image 1: Red apricot tree on the right-side screen of the national treasure *Kohaku Baizu Byobu*; (Kanai Shiun (ed.), *Geijutsu Shiryo*, 1, vol.11, Unsodo, 1941 [NDL Call No. K231-35] Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#))

2. Forms that were created by the Rimpa school and passed on through books

Ogata Korin (1658-1716) was a representative painter and craftsman of the Rimpa school, who created exemplary works in a number of media, including paintings, folding screens, and the design or *maki-e* in which gold or silver powder was sprinkled on lacquerware, such as inkstone cases. Together with his brother Kenzan (1663-1743), he also created square plates. He is well known for his dynamic designs, one of the best examples of which is a masterpiece from his later years, the *Kohaku Baizu Byobu* (folding screen with images of red and white Japanese apricot blossoms) [Image 1], in which he depicted waves using a combination of small and large curves as well as apricot blossoms in silhouette with simplified petals in rounded shapes or showing only the stamens and pistils.

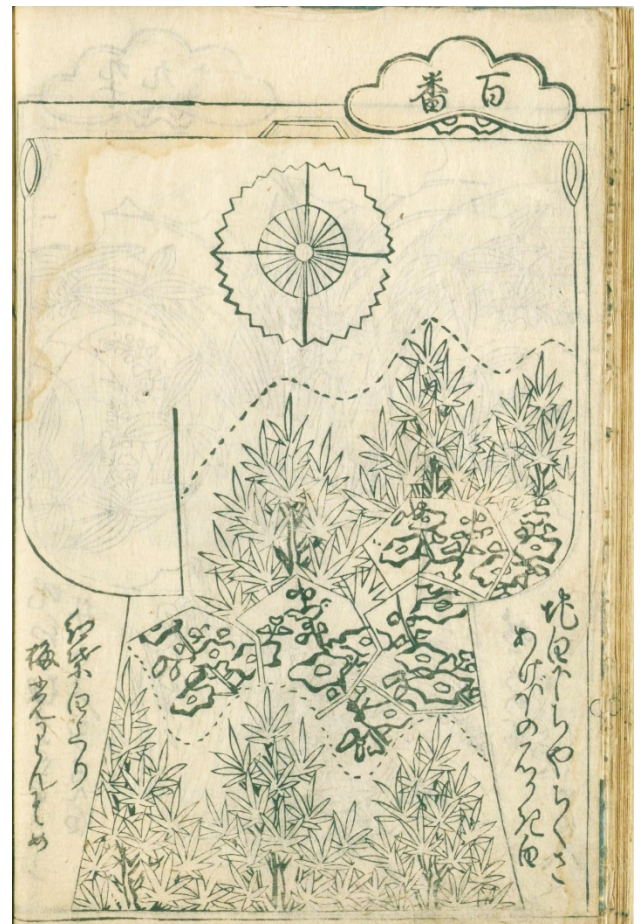


Image 2: Korin patterns in a *kosode-bon* (Nishikawa Sukenobu (paint), *Hiinagata Miyako Fuzoku*, 2, Tanimura Sebei et al., 1716, [NDL Call No. わ-94] Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#))



Image 3: partial expansion of Image 2

Although the Rimpa school started in Kyoto, it spread widely to ordinary people in Edo and other cities through books. In 1815, Sakai Hoitsu (1761-1828) held an exhibition in Edo of Korin's works to commemorate the 100th anniversary of his death. *Korin Hyakuzu* (One-Hundred Designs by Korin) and *Ogataryu Ryakuinpu* (Catalog of 16 Ogata Artists) were published during this exhibition. The cover to the first edition of *Korin Hyakuzu* featured a decorative pattern modeled after chrysanthemums, and that of *Ogataryu Ryakuinpu* had one based on the Japanese iris. Korin was noted for both patterns, and *Korin Hyakuzu* was republished numerous times by a variety of publishers.

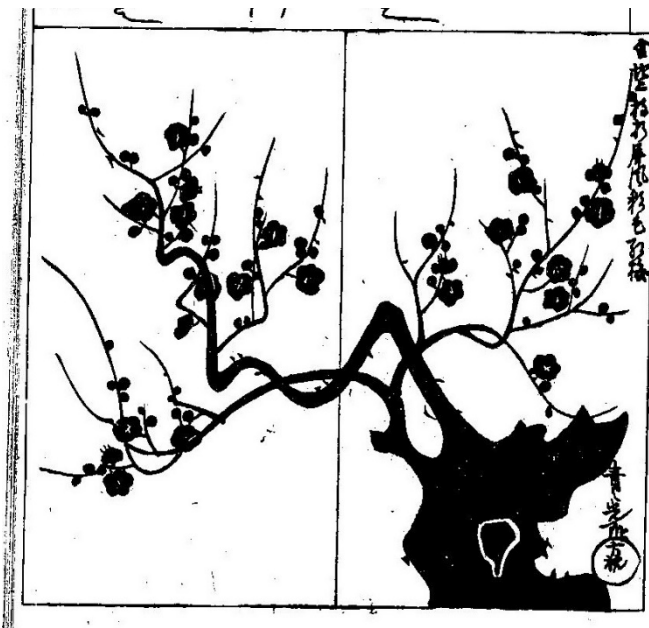


Image 4: Painting of a red apricot tree in *Korin Hyakuzu* (Ogata Korin (paint), Sakai Hoitsu (ed.) *Korin Hyakuzu*, first part, Hakubunkan, 1894 [NDL Call No. 特 67-186]) Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)

3. The Rimpa school crosses the sea

The Rimpa school is an aspect of Japanese cultures that had a strong effect on artists in Europe, particularly those involved in Japonism, which in turn was an antecedent of Art Nouveau. With Japanese culture being held in such high regard in throughout Europe, the Rimpa school was soon reevaluated in Japan, as well. In this chapter "The Rimpa school crosses the sea," we introduce some of the

individuals who discovered the Rimpa school during the late Edo and Meiji periods.

(1) Philipp Franz Balthasar von Siebold

Although Japan had closed itself off to most of the rest of the world during the late Edo period, it did maintain a trade relationship with the Netherlands, although direct contact was limited to the small, artificial island of Dejima in Nagasaki (related digital exhibition: [Japanese-Netherlands Exchange in the Edo Period](#)). Thus, the Netherlands played a major role as a window to Japanese culture from overseas. Philipp Franz Balthasar von Siebold (1796-1866), a doctor dispatched to Japan by the Netherlands to conduct scientific research in Japan, brought back from Japan a collection of materials, including multiple volumes of *Korin Hyakuzu*, part of which is still held by the Museum Volkenkunde (Netherlands) and Bibliothèque nationale de France.



Images 5 (top) and 6 (bottom) show fan designs from *Korin Hyakuzu*: a lotus design and a chrysanthemum design, respectively. Korin gained acclaim in Europe while Japonism was in vogue, and artists there took ideas from his fan designs. (Ogata Korin (paint), Sakai Hoitsu (ed.) *Korin Hyakuzu*, first part, Hakubunkan, 1894 [NDL Call No. 特 67-186]) Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)

(2) Ernest Francisco Fenollosa

Ernest Francisco Fenollosa (1853-1908) was one of a number of foreign engineers and professors who were invited to Japan by the Meiji government. He not only taught politics, economics, and philosophy at university, but also researched Japanese painting and wrote a general treatise on oriental art, entitled *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* or *Toa Bijutsushi ko*. He was a pioneer who systematically organized works from the Rimpa school, evaluating them highly as a true form of Japanese impressionism. The [Museum of Fine Arts](#), Boston, holds

part of Fenollosa's collections, which include *Matsushima-zu Byobu* (Waves at Matsushima), a folding screen by Korin that is worthy of the national treasure designation.



Image 7: Photos on a page about the Rimpa school and Kano school: a painting by Korin and pottery by Kenzan (Ernest Francisco Fenollosa et al. *Toa bijutsushi ko*, second part, Fenollosa Shi Kinenkai, 1921 [NDL Call No. 509-1] Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#); the original title is Epochs of Chinese and Japanese art: an outline history of East Asiatic design [NDL Call No. K141-A16])

(3) Impact on Japonism and Art Nouveau

Japanese fine art spread to Europe through a variety of international expositions held in Vienna and Paris during the latter half of the 19th century, and Japonism was soon a popular trend. Composition using patterns of plants and the use of patterns using natural forms had a tremendous impact on Europeans and were soon evident in the works of Impressionists. The decorative nature of works from the Rimpa school can be seen in the developments in European art that led to the emergence of the new form of design that became Art Nouveau.



Image 8: Catalog of the exhibition "Exposition de la gravure japonaise (Exposition on Japanese Woodcuts)" planned by Samuel Bing (real name: Siegfried Bing), central figure in the development of Art Nouveau (From catalog of the exhibition "[Japan and the West—Intersection of Images](#)" held at the NDL in 2012)

(4) Art Nouveau and Rimpa school in modern Japan

Asai Chu (1856-1907) and Kamisaka Sekka (1866-1942) are two artists who were typical of those influenced by the Rimpa school but through the importation of Art Nouveau to Japan. Asai was a prominent painter who helped introduce European painting techniques during the Meiji period. In addition to producing European-style paintings, he also created numerous handcraft designs. His handcraft designs show the influence of Rimpa school in their motifs and rounded patterns.



Image 9: Asai's handcraft design shows the influence of Rimpa school (Ishii Hakutei (ed.) *Asai Chu gashu oyobi hyoden*, Unsodo, 1929 [NDL Call No. 553-116]) Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#)

In contrast, Kamisaka, who is considered the founder of the modern Rimpa school, absorbed the Rimpa school as an example of traditional Japanese art but maintained a negative view on Art Nouveau. As a handicraft designer, he displayed great skill in decorative design of products for everyday use, including kimonos, pottery, and lacquerware. Kamisaka was also known as a pioneer in modern woodblock prints, and the design album, entitled *Momoyogusa* (A World of Things, three volumes, Yamada Unsodo, 1909-1910, [NDL Call No. 406-32]), is considered the culmination of his design work. This work contains Kamisaka's characteristic woodblock print design, featuring sophisticated composition, exaggeration, and a wide variety of subject matter, including animals, plants, and scenes from daily life.



Image 10: Puppy (*Momoyogusa*, vol.2
Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#))

Links:

- Small digital exhibition Kaleidoscope of Books (20) [Tracing the path of Rimpa and its surroundings through books](#) (in Japanese)
- Digital exhibition of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (National Library of France): [France-Japan, an encounter, 1850-1914](#) (in French (Japanese version is also partly available))



Image 11: Morning glory (cover of *National Diet Library Monthly Bulletin*, 651, July 2015; the original is in *Momoyogusa*, vol.1 Available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#))

Related articles from the National Diet Library Newsletter:

- [Exhibition "Japan and the West — Intersection of Images"](#) (No. 188, April 2013)