

# East-West Cultural Exchange in Art – France and the Orient in the 1880's – (Part 3)

By Takashina Erika

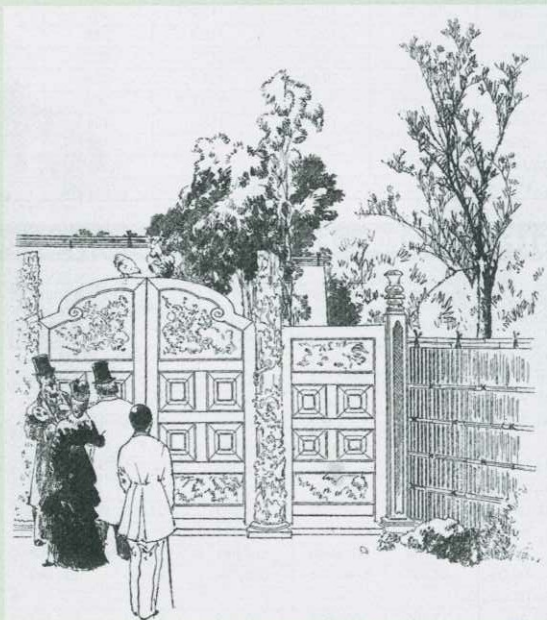
## Paris, 1878 – Japonisme and the Expo

Yamamoto Hosui, whose exhibition was held in Paris in 1885, was born in Akechi-mura, Ena-gun, Gifu Prefecture in 1850. He was a first-born son, and his parents were in farming and sericulture. At a very early age he acquired an interest in painting, and it is said that by the time he was 10 years old, he could not help but draw reproductions of any painting that he came across. At the age of 15, he obtained a copy of *Hokusai Manga* (Hokusai's Random Sketches) and was so impressed that he vowed to become a painter. Later, he went to Kyoto and received instruction in *Nanshu-ga* (paintings of the Southern School) from Kubota Sekko, but he felt that in order to pursue the serious study of painting, he would have to go to China. So he set out for Yokohama, where he stayed at the home of a silk trader. In his spare time, he painted *Kacho-ga* (paintings of flowers and birds) and *Sansui-ga* (landscapes) to save money for his travel

expenses. Fundamentally inquisitive and fond of innovation, Hosui happened upon a western-style painting one day, and changed his mind, deciding instead to become a painter in the western tradition. He then began training under the guidance of a western-style painter by the name of Goseda Horyu. At the time, materials such as paper, pencils and paints were very expensive. They were not readily available, so he had to ask foreign traders to give him some. Of course, sketches using live models as subjects were unheard of at the time.

Hosui later moved to Tokyo and traveled extensively to further his training. In time, his talent became widely known, and he was commissioned to paint portraits of Kishida Ginko, Maejima Hisoka and

Plate 2

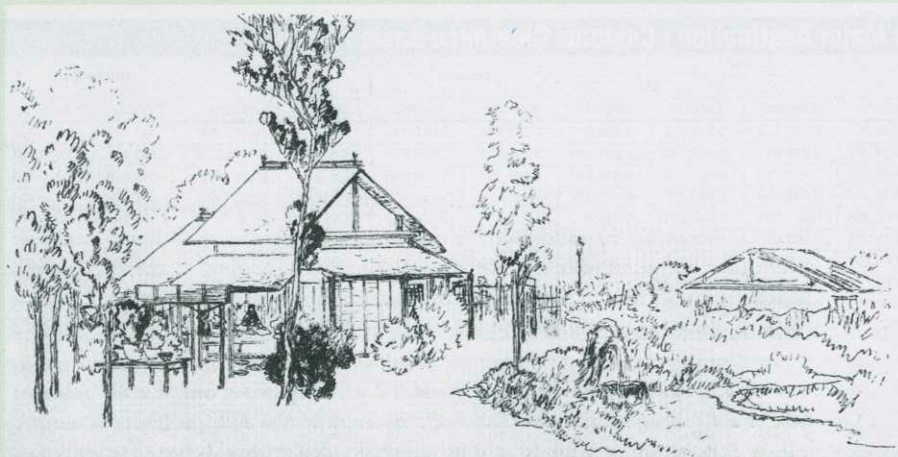


Watanabe Seitei, *Porte de la Ferme japonaise (Gate of a Japanese Farmhouse)*, *Les chefs-d'oeuvre d'art à l'Exposition Universelle 1878*

the like. And in 1876, he accompanied Yamagata Aritomo on a fact-finding expedition to Hokkaido. In those days, the concepts of "art" and "artists" were not widely recognized in Japan, and western painters were conceived of as those who could make realistic depictions of things. Photography was not yet in practical use in the early part of the Meiji era, and it was the job of these painters to create lifelike portraits of political leaders and accurately illustrate Japanese scenery. I suppose one could say they filled the role that is now served by photographers.

The year 1876 saw the establishment of the Koku Art School (Art School of the Imperial College of Engineering), Japan's first national art school, in Tokyo. Hosui enrolled at the School and commenced his full-fledged studies of oil paintings under the careful guidance of Antonio Fontanesi, an instruc-

Plate 1



Watanabe Seitei, *La Ferme japonaise du Trocadéro (The Japanese farmhouses at the Trocadéro)*, *Les chefs-d'oeuvre d'art à l'Exposition Universelle 1878*



Plate 3



Watanabe Seitei, *Europeans viewing the bronze incense burner exhibited by Kiryu-Kosho-Kaisha, Les chefs-d'oeuvre d'art à l'Exposition Universelle 1878*

by those foreign intellectuals who stayed in the Dejima (small island to which all interaction between Japan and other countries was confined) area of Nagasaki during Japan's period of national isolation. Among the most well known of these intellectuals were Engelbert Kämpfer, a German physician, and a Dutch physician, P.F. von Siebold. Kämpfer, who twice had audiences with the shogun at Edo (now Tokyo) and wrote about these experiences, also authored an English book *The History of Japan*, which was published in 1727. Siebold amassed a large collection of Japanese paintings, woodblock prints, crafts, plant samples and mounted specimens, which he took back to Leiden. In the 1830's, he published a book on the natural history of Japan.

After Japan opened itself to the world in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, items such as *ukiyo-e* (woodblock prints), lacquer craft, furniture, ceramics, tea utensils and folding screens began to be exported to the West in large numbers. And in 1862, Sir Rutherford Alcock, the British Consul General in Japan who penned a diary during his posting that came to be known as *The Capital of the Tycoon* exhibited over 600 pieces of his collection of Japanese goods and created a

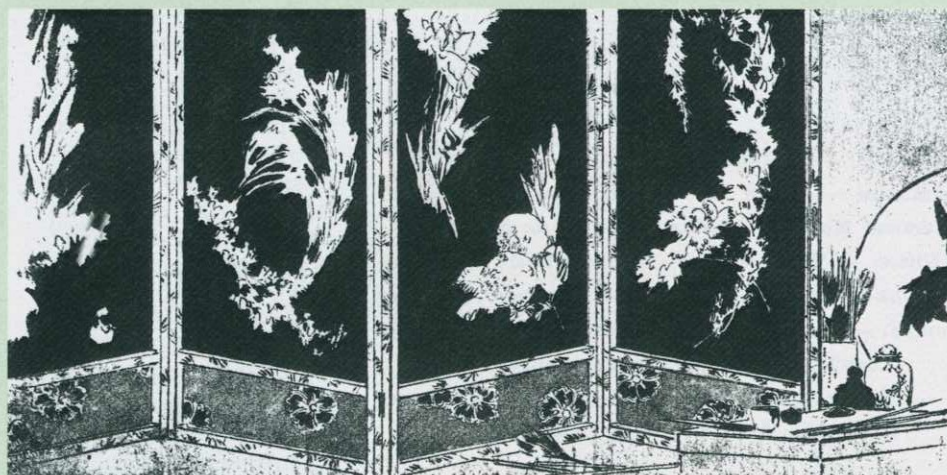
sensation at the London Expo. In the same year, Madame E. Desoye opened a shop on Rue de Rivoli in Paris specializing in Japanese antiques. Moreover, museums such as the South Kensington Museum (present day Victoria & Albert Museum), the Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston began to acquire Japanese artifacts and expand their collections. Individual collectors grew in number, and in 1868, the arts and entertainment section of a French newspaper listed the painters James Tissot, Alphonse Legros, Edouard Manet, Claude Monet and Henri Fantin-Latour; the painter and printmaker Félix Bracquemond, and the writers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, Jules Champfleury, Ernest Chesneau and Philippe Burty as being among France's most prominent collectors of Japanese art. Furthermore, in the 1870's, academicians and collectors like Henri Cernuschi, Théodore Duret, Emile Guimet, Edward Morse, Ernest Fenollosa, William Bigelow and Edoardo Chiossone began traveling to Japan for the purpose of procuring art.

The Philadelphia Expo of 1876 featured a vast exhibit that had been transported from California using 50 rail cars. But the popularity of Japonisme reached its climax at the Paris Expo of 1878 where a lot of medals were

tor from Italy. In time, Hosui developed an earnest desire to study in Europe, the birthplace of western art, and through his persistent efforts and with the help of his connections, he was able to board a France-bound ship in February 1878. "Employee of the Paris Expo Secretariat" was the title he was given. The Expo was scheduled to take place in Paris from May to November of 1878, and Hosui was to become a member of the Secretariat, which was headed by Matsukata Masayoshi. Sailing via Hong Kong, Singapore, Aden and Suez, he disembarked at the port of Marseilles. And on March 29, he arrived at Lyon station.

The Expo of 1878 in Paris was the fourth in which Japan officially participated, following the Paris Expo of 1867, the Vienna Expo of 1871 and the Philadelphia Expo of 1876. The art and culture of Japan had already been introduced to the western world in measured amounts

Plate 4



Watanabe Seitei, *Le Paravent japonais (Japanese folding screen), Les chefs-d'oeuvre d'art à l'Exposition Universelle 1878*



awarded to the Japanese exhibits. A traditional Japanese farmhouse with a magnificent gate was constructed at the Trocadéro, and inside, there was a display portraying a typical scene including the inhabitants of such houses. In the art exhibition hall, antiques presented by Kiriu-Kosho-Kaisha, a Japanese government-run export company, were displayed along with the artifacts of French collectors. Ernest Chesneau, a critic, wrote in the same year an article entitled “*Le Japon à Paris*” (Japan in Paris) in which he stated that the penchant for Japanese art was, without doubt, taking root in Paris through the hands of French painters, and that the enthusiasm was spreading like a fire over a fuse into studios everywhere. The Expo in which Hosui participated was, as here described, a catalyst in the dramatic explosion of Japanese art in France.

In commemoration of this Expo, a large two-volume book called *Les chefs-d'oeuvre d'art à l'Exposition Universelle 1878* was published in Paris. And the four illustrations – *La Ferme japonaise du Trocadéro* (The Japanese farmhouses at the Trocadéro; Plate 1), *Porte de la Ferme japonaise* (Gate of a Japanese Farmhouse; Plate 2), *Europeans viewing the bronze incense burner exhibited by Kiryu-Kosho-Kaisha* (Plate 3) and *Le Paravent japonais* (Japanese folding screen; Plate 4) – in the Japanese chapter were drawn by Japanese painter Watanabe Seitei, who worked at the Paris Expo alongside Hosui. It is likely

Plate 5

M. Leloir. — De Madrazo. — Manet. — Ad. Marie.  
 eissonier. — John Everett Millais. — Ad. Mor  
 Edmond Morin. — Munkacsy. — A. de Neuville.  
 Nittis. — Tony Noël. — Léonce Petit. — Phle.  
 de Chavannes. — Rafaelli. — Régamey. — Ren  
 ouard. — Rico. — G. Rochegrosse. — Féliçien Rops  
 Sei-Tel Watanabe (peintre japonais).  
 — A. Stevens. — Vierge. — Vollon. — Worm  
 Yamamoto (peintre japonais). — Zichy.

The list of collaborators in the first issue of *La Vie Moderne*

that both shared the same duties at the Expo, and their names can be found in the list of collaborators that appeared in the magazine *La Vie Moderne*. In the list of collaborators printed in the first issue, these two were the only men among the painters specially described in parentheses as “*peintre japonais*” (Japanese painters)” after their names. This was probably intended to be a kind of advertisement touting the magazine’s progressive style. (Plate 5)

*La Vie Moderne*, a new illustrated art magazine based on works by splendid writers and painters, was first published in April of 1879. Every weekly issue included wide-ranging contents true to the magazine’s advance publicity. The magazine was originally conceived by Georges Charpentier, an art-lover who was the first to discover Impressionism, as a venue for such artists as Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Manet and Monet, who had yet to be popularly acclaimed, to present their works and opinions. However, the collaborators were not limited only to Impressionists, and included Academic Classicists like Léon Bonnat and Paul Baudry as well as others, such as Alphonse Daudet, Théodore de Banville and Jean Moréas, who represented a variety of styles. The magazine covered interests that exceeded all borders, as evidenced by

the fact that Spanish and German painters were also among the collaborators. Emile Bergerat was its managing editor and had just begun his career as a writer and critic. It is believed that through his work at the Expo, he befriended Seitei, and subsequently, Hosui was asked to be an associate.

At that time, the Charpentier residence was a center of great social activity, and Judith

Plate 6



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Madame Charpentier con i figli* (Madame Charpentier and Her Children), 1878, 154 x 190 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Gautier and Robert de Montesquiou, who would later be associated with Hosui in Paris, and the family of Pauline Ménard-Dorian, who would go on to marry the grandson of Victor Hugo and then receive art instruction from Hosui, were all frequent guests at the Charpentier salon. One could say that all of Hosui’s associations in Paris were somehow linked to this salon.

In 1878, Renoir painted *Madame Charpentier con i figli* (Madame Charpentier and Her Children; Plate 6), which featured a Japanese folding screen in the background, at the Charpentier’s Japanese style room. As I mentioned in part 2 of this series (cf. May/June 2003 issue of *JTI*), Renoir’s younger brother, Edmond, who regularly wrote articles for *La Vie Moderne* and would later become the magazine’s executive editor, had authored a review on Hosui’s one-man exhibition, so it is possible that Hosui and Renoir met each other at the Charpentier salon. At the very least, Renoir, through his brother, must have known of a Japanese painter by the name of Yamamoto. **JTI**

*Takashina Erika is an associate professor at the Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University. She specializes in the history of modern art and the history of cultural exchange in art between Japan and the West.*