

## THE PRE-RAPHAELITE CRAZE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY JAPANESE PERIODICALS

Thomas J. Tobin

The late-Victorian mania for all things Oriental produced Japanese decorative screens for the English drawing room, Oriental-style pottery for the English table, Aubrey Beardsley's angular "japanned" prints for English parlour walls, and Gilbert & Sullivan's *Mikado* for English entertainment halls. The adoption of the mannerisms of the East by the West is well documented in English periodicals in the 1890s: popular nineteenth-century periodicals helped to create and to sustain what *Punch* called the "Oriental Craze."

However, in Japan, there was another craze going on: Pre-Raphaelitism. The Japanese were discovering the poetry and paintings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his Pre-Raphaelite brethren; many Japanese periodicals reflected the medieval aesthetic of Rossetti, Swinburne, and Tennyson. As quickly as the West was absorbing Eastern motifs and attitudes, the Japanese were learning to admire and imitate the Pre-Raphaelites. This, too, was fuelled by periodical literature, and in much the same way as it was happening in England.

This essay serves as a means of investigating the role played by the popular periodicals in Japan in creating and sustaining an "Aesthetic Craze." I will briefly examine the demand for *japonisme* as it was published in the British periodical press and compare it with the demand for English Aestheticism as seen in the Japanese periodical press. Both of these crazes for foreign art and aesthetics may be traced to the political and economic trends of the time. Expanding markets and closing borders (reported in both countries' newspapers) served to create tension between expansionist merchants and jingoist bureaucrats in each nation. The affectation of foreign tastes as fashionable, facilitated by the English and Japanese periodical presses, helped to break down barriers to international trade and communication.

If we take as a definition of *japonisme* a western interest in the culture and art of the East, then it is tempting to date the beginning of this phenomenon in