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## The Pre-Raphaelites in Meiji Art Circles

In recent years Japan has hosted many exhibitions of Victorian paintings – including works by the Pre-Raphaelites, and also an exhibition on William Blake, who is connected to the Pre-Raphaelites via Romanticism.<sup>1</sup> From 1991 to 1992 a large-scale exhibition entitled *Japan and Britain: An Aesthetic Dialogue 1850-1930* was held in both London and Tokyo. This was designed to be a search for the artistic links between Britain and Japan. As a result of these exhibitions, there has been considerable progress in the study of the relationship between British and Japanese fine arts.

Previously scholars investigating the acceptance of foreign art in Japan after the Meiji Restoration gave priority to the French influence. This was because Kuroda Seiki (1866-1924) and Kume Kei'ichirô (1866-1934), who taught the Western-Style Painting Course at the Tokyo Art School, and who had organized the new artists' group Hakubakai, had studied under Raphael Collin (1850-1917) in France. Nevertheless, British art had been appreciated by some artists in Japan. Takahashi Yuichi (1828-94), a Western-style painter in the early Meiji era, had been taught by Charles Wirgman (1832-91), a reporter and illustrator for *The Illustrated London News*. Also, Kunisawa Shinkurô (1847-77), who left for England in 1869, returned to Japan in 1874 and in the following year established a private art school called Shôgidô. There he taught using many books brought from England (Miwa 25-32).

As an excerpt from Ishii Hakutei's autobiography illustrates, in the late 1890s and early 1900s some young painters were intent on following British art, especially the Pre-Raphaelites. In October 1904 a painter named Ishii Hakutei (1882-1958) recollected his life as an art student at the Tokyo Art School in his autobiography (134):

I have done a work in watercolor at Otanohara. In the foreground I placed Sugita Unai, standing in front of his ea-

sel. I used some body-color, just as in the Pre-Raphaelites' paintings. I took great care in depicting each of the leaves on the branches in the foreground . . .<sup>2</sup>

First, I would like to examine the way that British art, including the works of the Pre-Raphaelites, was introduced to Japan. Despite the efforts of Takahashi and Kunisawa to adopt and teach the English approach to painting, British art had a low profile in Japan. In this regard, it is perhaps instructive to refer to a lecture entitled "The Truth about the Arts," given by Ernest Francisco Fenollosa (1853-1908) in May of 1882. In a discussion of the superiority or inferiority of Japanese Western-style paintings and traditional Japanese-style paintings, Fenollosa referred to *Japonisme* in British art, explaining that in England some famous artists had adopted a Japanese style (Aoki and Sakai, 17:56). Next, in May of 1890, Hayashi Tadamasa, in a lecture for the Meiji Bijutsukai, said that James McNeill Whistler (whom he imagined to be English) had executed a painting with no figuration, which he named "color music," which was exhibited in London and caused a stir among artists (161). Hayashi referred to the symbolic titles of Whistler's works.

We should not overlook the first mention of John Ruskin (1819-1900) in this period. In "Bijutsu no Shôrei o Ronsu [A Discussion of the Encouragement of Fine Arts]" that was printed in the *Dainihon Bijutsu Shimpô* (15 January 1885), Tanemi Sukio wrote of the famous connoisseur John Ruskin. In the same magazine (issues 37 to 39, 1886), Tsubouchi Yûzô (Shôyô) listed Ruskin along with Joseph Addison, William Hogarth, Edmund Burke, and Alison. He thought Ruskin was an aesthete of the analytic school engrossed in the pursuit of beauty (37: 4-8).

Elements of British art which gradually filtered into Japan were introduced by Iwamura Tôru (1870-1917) and the poet Ueda Bin (1874-1916) around