PART FOUR

ART, SEXUALITY, AND NATIONAL EROTICS
FROM MADONNA TO FEMME FATALE: GENDER PLAY IN JAPANESE NATIONAL PAINTING

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A major concern of Meiji cultural reforms was the restructuring of visual arts into a tool for national image building. After enthusiastic attempts at importing Western art education, the success of Japanese exportware on the world market stimulated a reverse course of native art promotion. As a remedy for the threat of Westernization, the conception of New Japanese Painting (Shin-Nihangai) evolved during the 1880s under the guidance of the American philosopher Ernest F. Fenollosa (1858-1908), and was made into an academic discipline by his disciple, Okakura Kakuzo (1863-1913), director of the Tokyo Art Academy between 1889 and 1896. While Fenollosa prophesized that—contrary to the hopes of supporters of Western-style painting (Shin-ga)—only the synthesis of Asian and Western painting would push Japan to the forefront of world art, Okakura elaborated the principles that burdened Ashige artists with the task of re-investing conventional techniques and motifs with the spirit of the times.

One of the most pressing tasks for national representation consisted in the severance of the female image from the “floating world” of Edo popular culture. The long-standing affiliation of female beauty with the courtesan—celebrated into the 1890s as the epitome of refined sensuality, everyday elegance, and erotic charm—contrasted sharply with the ideal Meiji woman who was supposed to embody the womanly and motherly virtues thought essential to the “good wife and wise mother” (shinsetsu kankei) doctrine. In the early Meiji era,


the quest for historic exemplars of respectable women that could serve as symbols of nationhood posed serious problems. Yet, around the turn of the century, the ajigasa courtesan, who was celebrated as the epitome of feminine erotic charm by the last ajigasa masters such as Taisei Yoshitoshi (1839-1892), was giving way to the visual cliché of the sexually passive housewife and daughter. All sorts of print media, such as newspapers, magazines, posters, ads, and postcards, commoditized the stereotype of the domestic middle-class bijin ("beauty"), fashionably dressed in traditional kimono, but replete with romantic sensitivity and sentimental pathos, no matter whether represented with naturalistic detail, or modeled on the decorative style of art nouveau. When the Nihonga-yōga divide became institutionalized in the governmental Bunten salon, initiated in 1907, "pictures of beautiful women" (bijin) established itself as the generic antithesis to yōga nudes, which were displayed in a special room (tobaketen-shita) and accessible only to a privileged male elite of intellectuals and connoisseurs who were supposed to be capable of discriminating between voyeuristic pleasure and sexually disengaged aesthetic judgment. As a result, the controversy over the difference between Japanese and Western standards of artistic judgment amounted to a war for and against the gendering of the male gaze.

As Donald Roden has noted, gender ambivalence pervaded Taishō popular and high art, producing such examples as the all-female Takaarazuka theater (founded in 1913), and more refined versions in the visual arts. Yet, the visual arts have so far rarely been investigated with regard to gender categories such as femininity and masculinity and their impact on the Ajigasa and yōga configurations of womanhood. Gender ambiguity is a factor to be reckoned with in the field of pictorial symbolism when analyzing the visible and invisible strategies of creating Nihonga "high art."

The Western philosophy of "high art" enabled the appropriation of a symbolic meaning of womanhood and the allegories of the spiritual and physical principles of love as symbolized by the Madonna and Venus. Caricatured by the anti-pornography campaign of governmental censorship, and faced with Victorian sexual double-standards, Nihonga painters the virgin/whore dichotomy amounted to another touchstone for creating indigenous symbols of femininity.

My chapter approaches the issue of gender by examining allegorical representations of womanhood in outstanding Nihonga works of the Meiji and Taishō eras. In Section One and Two I contend that Kannon, the Bodhisattva of Mercy, provided into the 1920s a paradigm of the "third gender," offering an escape from the boundaries of gender difference. While Kanō Hōgai (1829-1888), the canonized pioneer of New Nihonga, created Merryfyl Kannon (Hibo Kannon) in 1888 as a masculine manifestation of motherhood, Nibi Woman (Rif), submitted in 1920 by Murakami Kagaku (1888-1939) to the Association for the Creation of National Painting (Kokuga ōsoku kyōkai), represents an allegory of the "eternal woman" in the guise of the "third gender" of Kannon. The last two sections of my essay will explore the work of Kainoshō Tadao (1894-1978), a guest member of the Kokuga Society and a paragon of Nihonga decadent painting. Starting in 1918 with Tōkōshū and inspired by his amateur training as an onnagata performer, Kainoshō extended Nihonga painting of women towards the ambiguous erotism of the Westernized femme fatale and prostitute. It is my contention that in response to Buddhist concepts of transgender, Western theories of sexual perversion, and fin-de-siècle decadence, the notion of the "third gender" entered the


imagery of the New Woman as a nationalistic alternative to female symbols of empowerment.

1. Katsū Hōgai’s Merciful Mother

Canonized in 1955 as an “Important Cultural Treasure” (jūjō bunkazai), Katsū Hōgai’s Merciful Kannon (Tokyo National University of Fine Arts Museum) is considered a landmark in the history of the Nihonga movement (Figure 9.1). The title Hīko Kannon, literally, “Merciful Kannon,” was given to this monumental hanging scroll by Okakura Kakuzō in an article published in kokka (February 1899) in commemoration of Hōgai’s death the previous year. According to Okakura, Hīko Kannon was conceived of as a representation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Japanese, Kannon; Chinese, Quan Yin) in his “aspect of human maternity.” Okakura justified this interpretation by reporting the master’s lament about his year-long struggle to come to terms with his idea of an “ideal mother” (rō-leki na hakurei):

Once, the master told a man: “Concerning human compassion, there is nothing that compares with a mother’s love for her children. Kannon is the ‘ideal mother.’ Out of his enormous compassion he gives birth and nourishes all ten thousand things, and this is the origin of creation.
For years I have tried to picture this idea but have not yet achieved perfection.”

In the same Kokka article, Okakura expanded upon the “excellent idea” (myōhyō) of Hīko Kannon, which allowed him to place the painting on the same level as famous Western masterworks such as Michelangelo’s Creation of Man in the Sistine Chapel. Although challenging the value system of Western art history, Okakura had no problem

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relating *Hiko Kannon* to Buddhist as well as basic Christian doctrines, such as the Virgin Birth and God the Creator.\(^{10}\)

In *Ideals of the East* (1905) Okakura again explained the meaning of *Hiko Kannon* for Western readers:

The last masterpiece of Kano Hôgai represents Kannon the Universal Mother, in her aspect of human maternity. She stands in mid-air, her triple halo lost in the sky of golden purity, and holds in her hand a crystal vase, out of which is dropping the water of creation. A single drop, as it falls, becomes a babe, which, wrapped in its birth-mantle like a nimbus, lifts unconscious eyes to her, as it is wafted downwards to the rugged snow-peaks of the earth rising from a mist of blue darkness far below. In this picture a power of colour like that of the Fujiwara epoch joins with the grace of Maruyama [Okyo], to afford expression to an interpretation of nature as mystic and reverent as it is passionate and realistic.\(^{11}\)

Likening the milky nectar of immortality (smita) dripping from the bottle in Kannon’s right hand to “the water of creation,” Okakura maintains that the transparent bubble with the child is floating downward toward the alpine mountain desert of our planet. Typologically, however, the composition recalls the “Rapid Descent of Amida” (Hayarai) with Amitabha Buddha rushing down to earth with his attendants Kannon and Seishi (Mahasthamaprapta) at the very moment of the believer’s death. Why did Hôgai reverse the raigô motif, having Kannon sending a child down to earth instead of taking the reborn human soul in the Western Paradise? Contrasting with the statuesque figure of Kannon, the naked child in his embryonic bubble evokes anything but happy anticipation about his landing on the rocky landscape below. Most disturbing, however, is the small mountashi that contrasts with the benign smile and Madonna-like downcast eyes of Kannon. If meant to symbolize a mother’s solicitude for her child, why did Hôgai represent Kannon as a male, or at best, an androgynous deity? The gender ambiguity of Kannon jeopardizes the concept of “Kannon as ideal mother” right from the outset.

Hôgai’s pains over the work’s completion are documented through various sketches drawn between his first Kannon painting created in

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1883 (Frer Gallery) and 1888. They show numerous naked or partly veiled female figures reminiscent of winged angels as well as of Buddhist heavenly maidens (senjô). These hybrid creatures look down on clouds and waves that sometimes enclose a globe or moon. Detailed studies of headdresses and faces worked without doubt to give *Hiko Kannon* a more feminine expression, emulating Western prototypes.\(^{12}\)(Figure 9.2). Shinya Jun points to the notable similarity between Madonna images and the devotional look typical not only of Hôgai’s *Merciful Kannon*, but also of Meiji “beauties” in general.\(^{13}\)

Yet, Hôgai not only discarded his sketches of female celestials, but surprisingly also dismissed the female prototypes among the thirty-three manifestations of Kannon as described in *Lotus Sutra*.\(^{14}\) Martin Colcutt rightly observes that indigenous icons, such as Hariti (Kushinoin, Kariteime), or so-called “Maria-Kannon” figures, secretly worshiped and transmitted by “hidden Christians” from the seventeenth century onward, would have yielded ideal indigenous models of the mother-and-child motif.\(^{15}\) What, then, was Hôgai’s concept of “maternal compassion”?\(^{16}\)

Recent studies regard the gender ambiguity of *Hiko Kannon* as a prerequisite of the painting’s political symbolism. Painting to the socialization of women in Meiji Japan, Wakakuwa Mihori maintains that Hôgai conceived of *Hiko Kannon* as a protective deity and an allegory of the reproductive and educational mission of women in Imperial Japan.\(^{17}\) Chiba Kei has conversely argued that the painting

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symbolizes the parental double function of the Japanese Emperor, who in his capacity as father and mother of the nation was supposed to spread his grace on his children in times of peace as well as in war.  

In view of Meiji body politics, it is tempting to see *Merciful Kannon* as a symbol of the Japanese Emperor. However, would Hōgai really have dared to conceive of Meiji Tenno as a Buddhist deity, given the government's forcible separation of Buddhism and State Shinto? The government, at least, showed no interest in Hōgai's talent as painter of Buddhist figures. When prime minister Itō Hirobumi (1841-1909) at last commissioned a painting from Hōgai in 1888, he proposed the theme: "An Eagle, Grasping the Five Continents" (tsubaki asobi), or "The Decisive Battle of the Nation". Probably inspired by the heraldic symbols of Western nation-states, Itō's order resulted in a more-than-three-meter-high hanging scroll of a huge eagle.

Considering that *Nihonga* works met with little demand on the domestic market, Fernald's financial sponsorship and his advice to adapt traditional subject matter and design to the taste of the Western audience cannot be taken lightly. The revival of Buddhist themes in the spirit of the Hegelian *Idea* was one of the main issues discussed by Fernald in his lectures delivered to the Society for the Appreciation of Painting (Kangakai) from 1884 until his departure from Japan in 1900. Back in America, Fernald profited from his art historical knowledge not only as a writer, but also as a dealer of his own collection of Japanese art. Significantly, in 1902 he managed to sell *Kannon*, the original version of *Hiko Kannon*, to Charles Freer, convincing him of the work's historical importance. In fact, Hōgai created

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Kannon for the second, rather unsuccessful exhibition of Japanese painting held in May 1884 in Paris, from whence it went into the possession of Fenollosa. In *Epics of Chinese and Japanese Art*, edited by his widow in 1912, Fenollosa speculated that the idea of Kannon derived from Guanyin with Fish Basket (Guanyin Kanon), a painting bought by Freer from the art dealer Yamakawa in 1904 and one that Fenollosa mistook for a Song copy of a masterwork by the Tang painter Wu Daozi (active 710-760). As a result, the putative correlation between Guanyin with Fish Basket and the Freer Kannon and Hiko Kanon has haunted art historical hermeneutics up to the present. I have argued elsewhere that, conversely, the Guanyin with Fish Basket is likely a Meiji fake based on the model of the Hiko Kanon, yet, the similarities between both Kannon figures sheds light on the interplay of art history writing, reveal art production, and the expectations of Western collectors of Japanese painting in the 1880s.

Gyōrin Kannon is the most popular manifestation of Kannon in a female guise. Chinese accounts of the Bodhisattva Guanyin’s facility of transforming into a woman rest on the Song and Ming popular identification of “Mr. Ma’s Wife” (Ch., Ma-lang f. Jp., Merōjo) with the “Woman from Yen-chou,” a beautiful maiden living in the Tang dynasty, who sold her body on the fish market so that men tormented by sexual desire could attain enlightenment. In Edo Japan, tales about manifestations of Kannon as a prostitute yielded comparisons with the “floating world” of Yoshiwara, the most famous example being the Eguchi theme and its adaptation in popular art. The equation of Kannon with courtesans lasted into Meiji literature as proven by Natsume Sōseki’s famous novel *Bokushin* (1906), in which he features a beautiful prostitute who bears the nickname “Kannon.” One might speculate, then, that Hōgai equipped his Hiko Kanon with a moustache in order to exclude any association with the female manifestation of Gyōrin Kannon and its connection with prostitutes.

When seen in the context of Nōhōge historicism, in form and content *Merciful Kannon* complied with Hōgai’s efforts at reconstructing the style and meaning of the lost art of such famous Chinese masters as Wu Daozi. As an image that reflects Meiji gender politics, on the other hand, the work underscores patriarchal domination over the nation’s offspring in guise of Buddhist iconographic conventions. In as much as *Merciful Kannon* attributes the mystery of childbirth to a male “mother,” it challenges the basic facts of biological motherhood, and thus represents an Anti-Madonna, or even, as Chiba Kei puts it, a “phallic mother” and a symbol of the castration anxiety induced by the rise in the empowerment of women.

Among later Nōhōge painters, the gender puzzle of *Merciful Kannon* yielded a fascination with the transgender symbolism of Gyōrin Kannon, the Buddhist epiphany of the holy whore. Shimomura Kanun (1873-1930), a pupil of Hōgai and member of the Tokyo-based Japanese Art Academy (Nihon bijutsuin), founded in 1898 by Okakura, conceived several versions of Gyōrin Kannon. The first one, created in 1910, is an allusion to the famous Daitoku-ji triptych *Cone, Kanon and Monkey* by the Zen painter Muqi (active late 13th c.), showing in place of Kannon an Indian beauty with a basket walking to the fish market. In 1928 Kanun created one more version of Gyōrin Kannon, presenting the legendary Tang maiden in the guise of Mona

* 27 Cossant, *Das Geheimnis,* p. 352, see Collett, p. 2, 3, on the Freer Guatian Kannon. Gyōrin Kannon used to be depicted as a beautiful woman, but never as Avalokiteśvara holding a fish basket and floating on clouds, as one of the canonical thirty-three manifestations of Kannon (sanju-san kannon) she is pictured riding on a large fish. See Kikuchiko kankokuzi, ibid. (Beijin: engi sōsho, 1959). Dictionary of Buddhist figures, First edition (1698). Tokyo: Kiyotaka, 1972, p. 48.
* 31 Yokohama bijutsukan, ed., *Tatsun to Kanon* (Exhibition of Tatsun and Kannon) (Tokyo: Nihon keizai shimbunsha, 1990), fig. 23/78, pt. 81. The hanged scrolls *Cone, Kanon and Monkey* (late 13th century), attributed to Mu Qi, are preserved in Daihokoku Temple, Kyoto.
Lisa. At this stage, as we will see below, the Gisconda's smile was broadly understood not only as indicating erotic induction, but also as a signifier of the androgynous charms of the "third sex."

2. Murakami Kagaku's "Eternal Woman"

In the Taishō era, Nihonga painters aimed not only at a systematic exploration of Western period styles and canonized masterworks from the Renaissance to modernism, but also to demonstrate that Meiji-period moral scruples had given way to a conscious effort to conquer modernism. Guided by the Francophile art historian Nakai Sōzō (1879-1966), in 1918 five Kyoto painters, among them Murakami Kagaku (1888-1939), organized the Association for the Creation of National Painting (Kokuga sōsaka kyōkai) with the intention of staying independent of governmental control over aesthetic matters.

The statement of purpose of the Kokuga Society, presented to the press in 16 January 1918, starts with the sentence "Concerning the founding of the Kokuga sōsaku kyōkai, we want to establish right away that our purpose is the production of pure art (jushin naru geijutsu) and, by making this art available to the public, to contribute to the development of Japanese art in general." The five founding members specialized in traditional painting genres such as landscape, flower and trees, or paintings of women that they sought to westernize by emulating European masters from the Renaissance to French Post-Impressionism. Mostly mounted as Western-style tab-

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leau paintings, these works were possibly meant to decorate the reception rooms of Western-style houses.

The Kokuga painter Murakami Kagaku chose Italian Renaissance painting and religious themes as his model, but still adhered to the lumping together of Buddhist and Western ideals of womanhood. His Nade Woman (Rafu), submitted in 1920 to the third Kokuga exhibition, depicts a slightly veiled, half-naked Indian woman adorned with necklaces and earrings, sitting on a well close to a tray with lotus flowers (Figure 9.3). In his essay "The Eternal Woman," written in 1920, Murakami commented on the allegorical meaning of his Nade Woman:

In all human beings, whether they like it or not, there is a longing for beauty. I believe that this is what the Eternal Woman (bijin no jou) symbolizes. But neither normal women nor men can attain our ideal of a perfectly virtuous woman. I think the reason is that this ideal transcends sexuality and resides only in what is called the "third sex" (shokujin). Assuming that we take Kannō as the perfect incorporation of the good and the beauty that embodies all human ideals and longings in his physical appearance, then we may be right to consider the "third sex" as something also essential to the Eternal Woman.

He goes on to explain:

At this point the fundamental difference between the Western world and Asia comes to the fore. European thought from Greece to Hellenism and Hebraism stresses the rarely-surmounted antagonism between body and spirit that corresponds to the usually unending battle between soul and flesh. Yet in Asia, and especially in India, such a binary did not exist. There, I believe, body and spirit were unified and harmonized. What was considered flesh was at the same time spirit. While in Europe culture developed in opposition to nature, Indian culture developed out of nature. While in Europe humanity is conceived as the other of nature, in India man and nature are commonly understood to be one.

The year before last, when I undertook to paint Nade Woman as an aspect of the Eternal Woman which is the beginning and end of man's eternal longing (although being aware of my poor talent and numerous shortcomings), I simultaneously wished to express the purity of Kannō and Kanzeon Bosatsu through the woman's eyes as well as

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— See Jordan Sand, "The Cultured Life as Concreted Space: Dwelling and Dis-
course in the 1920s," in Elise K. Tipton and John Clark, eds., Being Modern in Japan: Culture and Society from the 1870s to the 1930s (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), pp. 99-130.

— See Szenát, pp. 337-340 on the reception of Nade Woman and a caricature by Okamoto Ippei (1920).
through her swelling breasts. What I wanted to visualize was the beauty of the Eternal Woman that lies in flesh as well as in spirit, in hair as much as in the mouth, in arms as well as in feet, a beauty that encompasses all the so-called virtues in harmony.30

With his first—and to my knowledge, only—painting of a naked woman, Murakami seemingly complied with the market-oriented strategy of Utagawa artists who had explored erotic subject such as geishas and prostitutes since the society’s first exhibition in 1912. Yet, Murakami’s concept of an Asian Venus took inspiration from Japanese Buddhist art and Ajanta murals. What remained certainly not unnoticed by the educated public was the painting’s source in Indian Buddhist art: while reminiscent of the voluptuous body of a female yakshini, Nude Woman emulates the gesture of a Bodhisattva holding a lotus flower—a sign of enlightenment and purity well known from the famous fresco with Avalokiteśvara (Padmapani) in Ajanta Cave 1 (Figure 9.4).

In his notes written between 1919 and 1939, Murakami expanded repeatedly on the relation between religion and art, claiming that he practiced painting like a “prayer in the closet” (miyukibun no inori).31 His early articles echo the debate about the Platonic dichotomy between the carnal and spiritual aspects of Eros—among Taishō intellectuals apparently an issue that fueled speculation about the distinction between male and female sexual desire. In a note written in 1919, Murakami described his infatuation with the gilded statue of Shō-Kannon, created in 1226 by Jokei II and still extant in Kurama-dera north of Kyoto.32

If I were to keep this statue in my home, I would adore it from morning to evening. This figure possesses a completely feminine shape. Every inch of it makes me think of the body of Venus (although there are different types of it), and the red color gives an impression as if real blood was running through the body, encased in a beautiful skin. The half-closed eyes (hachi fuu no uchi) look as if they knew everything about human fate from beginning to end. I believe that his love (a) is

30 Murakami Kagaku, "Kozen no jōrui: [The Eternal Woman], in Murakami Kagaku, Gunzai jōrui bijutsu shuppansha, 1972, pp. 51-52.
31 Murakami Kagaku, Gunzai, p. 27.
Why did Murakami contrast the “half-closed eyes” of this Bodhisattva statue to the “suspicious” gaze and smile of Mona Lisa (Figure 9.11)? Was he acquainted with the writings of purveyors of fin-de-siècle aestheticism such as the art historian Walter Pater (1839-1894), who called Mona Lisa, due to her eternal wisdom, a “vampire” and “symbol of the modern idea”?26 I assume what intrigued Murakami at first was the semantic congruity between the smile of Mona Lisa and the “archaic smile” of Buddhist figures, a phenomena also noted by Fenollosa regarding the facial features of the Kōzō Kinron.27 Considering that the enlightened state of transcending gender division through non-discrimination (mukōbutsu) manifested itself in the “archaic smile” of bodhisattva images, the smile of the exemplary Western beauty Mona Lisa was critically at odds with conventional gender norms. In his comment on Nādi Woman, Murakami, therefore, arrived at the amazing compromise that “we may be right to consider the ‘third sex’ (chūin) as something also essential to the Eternal Woman.”28

Murakami was most certainly familiar with the writings of the English anthropologist Edward Carpenter (1844-1929), who argued in his study on the “intermediate sex,” published in 1907, that the cultivation of male-male love amounted to the highest achievement of samurai knighthood. Carpenter maintained that, similar to Dorian Greece, the “samurai way of love” (shahi, nansoku) fostered true comradeship and loyalty to the Emperor. Thanks to the cultivation of homosexual love, the Japanese army remained victorious in her war

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against Russia. Carpenter's conviction of homoeroticism and samurai ethics was perhaps not unknown to sexologists such as Habuta Eiji and Savada Jun'jiro, who started around 1915 to explore the psychology behind what they called the "mystery of same sex love." But, interestingly, Carpenter owed his popularity to the initiative of the feminist Yamakawa Kikue (1890-1980), a social critic and member of the Bluestockings (Serio), who in 1914 published an abridged translation of his text in the journal Seirō. Of course, feminist fascination with homosexuality was not apt to change Murakami's line of thought: while denying women the power of matching the sublime longings of men, he localized the ideal woman in India as the origin of Asian culture, and thus, implicitly, signaled his dismay with the emergence of the New Woman in modernizing Japan.

With *Nude Woman* Murakami visually extrapolated the "eternal woman" from Japanese territory and located the Asiatic Venus in the exotic mysteries of India. As we shall see below, it would appear that Murakami's *Nude Woman* constituted a hypothetical counterpart to the concept of the "fallen woman" as conceived by his younger colleague and protégé, Kainōshō Tadaso (1894-1977), in his *Yokogushi*, the first picture of a Japanese female fatale.

3. Kainōshō Tadaso's Queering of the Female Image

Between 1918 and 1920, the Kokuga Society used the broad effectiveness of Tokyo and Kansai department stores to test the consumer's willingness to buy a surrogate modernism of "pure art," manufactured in Japan's old political center, Kyoto. Images of prostitutes, in particular, underlined the "modernity" of Kyoto Nihonge. In December 1918, the Kokuga Society organized its first exhibition

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in the Tokyo department store Shirokiya. Kainōshō Tadaso recollected later that in preparation for this event the prestigious member Murakami Kagaku encouraged him to join as a guest. The then twenty-three year old graduate from Kyoto City Specialized School for Painting (Kyōto shiritsu kaiga senmon gakkō) had already established his reputation as a painter of kabuki actors and courtesans, developing a painting technique that enabled him to render the corporeality of bodies of Western oil painting with the opaque mineral pigments of Nihonge. The first extant example of his new style is the partly overpainted tableau *Yokogushi* (Hiroshima kokuritsu kindai bijutsukan), submitted to the 1st Kokuga exhibition in 1918, but probably conceived or already executed in 1915 as Kainōshō's graduation piece for the Specialized School of Painting (Figure 9.5). The title *Yokogushi*—literally "Side-Comb"—stands for Otomi, the quintessential "evil woman" (ahōbō) of kabuki domestic pieces (o-namamu), in the play *Seifū* (Kabuki) by Kawakami Mokuami (1816-1895). *Seifū* is a gender-crossing remake of *Karae* (also called *Tokusa* (Teiwa) nosei uta wa yokogushi), written by Segawa Jōki III (1806-1881), and staged for the first time in 1855 at Edo's Nakanuraza theater. In Mokuami's 1864 version, in place of the male hero, now Otomi, the mistress of a brothel proprietor, falls victim to her patron's jealousy and the patron sets out to end her love affair with Yosa by mutilating her with knife cuts all over her face. Otomi and her lover try to commit suicide, but are rescued. Bereft of her beauty and her lover, Otomi marries "Bat Yatsu" (Kānōrimo no Yatsu), a former servant of her patron. She meets Yosa again after years of separation, but now being a disfigured and aged woman, she takes revenge upon her patron by blackmailing him and exorbing
Figure 9.5. Kaimoshō Tadao (1894–1977), Folksong, 1910, mounted painting, color on silk, 164.5 × 74.4 cm; Hiroshima Prefectural Museum of Modern Art. A color plate of this illustration can be found in the color section on pp. xvi-xvii.

Figure 9.6. Kaimoshō Tadao, Folksong, circa 1916 (?), mounted painting, colors on silk, 193.0 × 84.0 cm; Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art.
money, and moreover, kills her greedy husband, Yasa, so that her former lover is able to redeem his heirloom sword. 83
Several shibai-e triptychs, printed about 1864, depict the climactic murder scene by staging it in a graveyard with Yosa at the left and Otomi brandishing a kitchen knife at “Bat” Yasa at the right. On a print by Toyohara Kunichika (1835-1900), we see Otomi characterized as a Fukagawa courtesan, with a chic boxwood comb worn askant the side of her head and a checkered black-and-white hata-jacket thrown over her shoulders (Figure 9.7).

Two decades after the first performance of Sufume Otomi, the depravity of the “evil woman” was no longer symbolized through her criminal acts such as blackmailing, robbery, and murder, but was put on a level with pornographic offences against public morals. This change can be seen in a hanging scroll by Kobayashi Eitaku (1843-1890), datable to around 188546 (Figure 9.8). The scroll’s subject is simply given as A Woman in a Danjuro Role, but the boxwood comb and bath robe imprinted with the crest of the actor Ichikawa Danjuro suggest a certain affinity to the kabuki heroine Otomi. Posing as a “beauty after her bath” (ju-guri bijin), the figure exposes her private parts in an overt manner.47 While actor prints foreground the narrative context with Otomi as a furious murderess, Eitaku generalizes the connection between kabuki and prostitution. Eitaku was one of the few Nihonga painters who sought to exploit the nude for didactic purposes, shortly before the anti-pornography campaign of 1889 prohibited painters from depicting naked woman.48 The Taisho-period painter Kainoshô Tadao, on the other hand, presented

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85 The design of a sickle (kasa), a circle (asa), and an arrow (character) as painted on the mound are read “kanawaama,” translatable as “I don’t care.” The pattern is said to have been invented by Ichikawa Danjuro VII (1791-1839), though its relation to the painting is not clear. See Luise, New Kabuki Encyclopaedia, p. 262.
86 See the chapter by Jacqueline Berndt in this volume.
87 Kaisen Tadao, (1997), p. 25 When Kaisen restored the painting in the 1920s, he replaced the actor-portrait with a large cartouche with a calligraphic inscription that certified that the work had been displayed at the first Kobayashi exhibition of 1918.

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Figure 9.7: Toyohara Kunichika (1835-1900), Sufume Otomi, 1864, woodblock print; Waseda University.
wears a kimono decorated with four heads of Kabuki actors. Spread under her feet on the floor is a white fabric with a red Danjurō-pattern that points to her relation with kabuki (Figure 9.5). As if pasted on the peony screen in the background was a large actor-print depicting an onnagata in the role of Otomi with a “horse tail wig” (uma no shippo) and a checkered kimono, the face and arms heavily mutilated by scars.

In another recently discovered version of Tokugushi (Kyoto National Museum of Modern Art), the kimono pattern symbolically underlines the depravity of Otomi; holding hellish punishment against heavenly joy, her fancy dress is painted with a devil riding on flames and Buddhist angels (tenjin) flying over the blue collar20 (Figure 9.6). The woman’s white-powdered face and red-lined eyes suggest a morbid condition, reminiscent of the pale make-up of Western actresses known from theater and cinema. This slightly larger version may have been created on private commission after the color postcards had spread the fame of the original Tokugushi all over Japan.

Many years later, Kainoshō recorded the circumstances that made him conceive Tokugushi. He maintained that in summer 1915 he attended a performance of Kimura Otomi at the Minami-za in Tokyo together with his brother’s wife. Deeply impressed by the performance of Sawamura Gensousuke IV (1859-1936), back home he cross-dressed as an onnagata, competing with his sister-in-law in their impersonation of Otomi.21

In the original version of Tokugushi, the juxtaposition of the corporeal image of Otomi with her impersonator on the actor-print raises questions concerning the gender identity of the “evil woman.” Should we read Tokugushi as the portrait of a contemporary woman in fancy dress performing as Otomi, or did Kainoshō draw a self-portrait of onnagata guise, playfully staging a Westernized Otomi modeled after the Mona Lisa? The artist’s fascination with onnagata cross-dressing is documented by numerous photographs taken during amateur per-

20 Kainoshō Tanbo (1901), p. 21.
21 See Kainoshō Tanbo (1901), pp. 128-129, for references to Kainoshō’s rather contradictory recollections of the genesis of Tokugushi. The play Kimura Otomi with Sawamura Gensousuke’s IV (1859-1936) in the role of Otomi was staged in July in Kyoto prior to the Minami-za production running from 31 August to 15 September 1913. Since Kainoshō’s three-years died in Tokyo on 26 August 26 1913, it is unlikely that he would have visited the kabuki performance during mounting. See Letter, Nō Kabuki Encyclopedia, p. 306.
performances in the painter's studio. Dateable to about 1920, one picture shows Kainoshō in umagata guise as he mimics the Mona Lisa smile in front of one of his numerous Otomi bust portraits (Figure 9.10).

The gaze at the beholder endows Yokogushi with an iconic persuasiveness, also found on an actor-print created by Natori Shunsen (1866-1900) in 1917. Figure 9.9. Shunsen designed this small taza print for the publisher Watanabe Shōzaburo (1885-1962), the initiator and export manager of the Shin-Hanga movement of Nō Ukiyo-e woodblock prints. Patterned on an off-stage photograph of the famous umagata Onoe Baiko VI (1870-934) in the role of Otomi, but deviating from this photograph, the umagata gazes invitingly at the viewer as if mimicking a Western woman, like those portrayed by the Shiōna actress Matsui Sumako (1886-1919), who played Nora in Ibsen's The Doll House, staged in Japan in 1911.

Yokogushi and Shunsen's actor-print attest to the influence that Western portraiture and portrait photography exerted about 1915 on the image of the typical "sexy" woman. As a rule, female sitters in Japan avoided looking straight into the camera, whereas courtesans established eye contact as a sign of seduction, as demonstrated by photographs taken of famous Tokyo geisha in the late 1880s. Also offending against seemly decorum is the alluring gaze of poster girls on ads of the Mitsukoshi department store and other product posters for beer, sake and cosmetics that developed from 1913 in collaboration with the flourishing printing industry. Renowned poster designers such as Hashiguchi Goyo (1880-1921), who graduated in 1905 in Western-style painting from the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, and

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64 See footnote 74.
Fig. 9.10: Kanso, performing as an ema, in front of a painting, photograph, ca. 1920.

Fig. 9.11: Leonardo da Vinci (1479-1519). Portrait of Mona Lisa, 1503-1506. oil on wood, 77.0 x 55 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.
the Osaka painter Kitano Tsumetomi (1880-1947), an influential member of the Kansai "decadents" and guest member of the Kokuga Society, drew freely on Western rather than on indigenous prototypes of female beauty. In contrast to Kitano’s child-like beauties, however, the smiling Yokogushi calls masculine dominion into question as she suggests, with her knowing look, an intellectual superiority to male desire.

About two years after his debut at the first Kokuga exhibition, Kainoshō painted the half-length portrait of A Woman of Shimabara (Shimabara no onna), showing a woman with the hairstyle of a top-rank Edo courtesaan (yakusha) with four tortoiseshell pins and silver ornaments, her face and neck covered with white make-up (Figure 9.12). Wearing a simple, dark blue kimono with white cherry pattern over red and pale blue under-robcs, she looks down thoughtfully at a colorful hair ornament (kanzashi) in her right hand, something that normally graced the coiffure of maiko apprentices. The portrait emulates the Louvre painting St. Anne, Mary, and Child, another famous work by Leonardo, the cartoon of which had been reproduced in the influential art journal Shirakaba in November 1914 (Figure 9.13). The downcast eyes and the contemplative smile give the courtesan the benign expression of St. Anne, the mother of the Virgin.

At this stage, we can only speculate that Kainoshō was familiar with the role that St. Anne, Mary, and Child played in Freud’s famous treatise on Leonardo da Vinci’s childhood, published in 1910. In this treatise on the pathological workings of the unconscious, Freud construed a connection between St. Anne in the Louvre painting and Leonardo’s affection for his "phallic" stepmother, whom Freud made responsible for the artist’s oedipal complex. More momentous, however, is the fact that Kainoshō shared his admiration of Leonardo

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34 See the chapter by Jacqueline Berndt in this volume, figure 10.12.
36 While Woman of Shimabara represents the motherly type of courtesan, about 1921 Kainoshō elaborated a grimacing, demoniac type of Edo courtesan. (Kainoshō Tadashō, 1997), pp. 44-57.
37 Sigmund Freud published Die Frau und die Unterwasser in 1910. For an English translation, see Sigmund Freud, Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood, Art & Literature, Penguin Freud Library, 14 (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965). On the presumption that creativity is rooted in the experience of early childhood, Freud identified St. Anne with Leonardo’s stepmother. Growing up under the wing of his "phallic mother,” Leonardo is supposed to have developed an at least latent homosexual erotic orientation.
with the vanguard of contemporary yōga painters. An exemplary case
is the painter and poet Murayama Kaita (1886-1919), whose life and
literary work have been impressively researched by Jeffrey Angles.60
Murayama Kaita admired Leonardo to the extent that he imagined
him as his rival in matters of love. In his short novel *The Beast of the
Beautiful Young Salaine*, written circa 1913 to 1914 but published post-
humously in 1921, Murayama records a dream in which he saw
himself competing with Leonardo for the love of a beautiful disciple.61
In the same piece, Leonardo himself is said to bear the “boyish,”
mysterious smile of Mona Lisa. Angles also notes that after his return
from France in 1909, the sculptor Takamura Kōtarō (1883-1956)
introduced the *Mona Lisa* as a poetic metaphor of lost love. This artist
likened the facial expression of Yoshiwara prostitutes to the “hidden
smile” (la sourire caché) of the intimidating and unapproachable lady.62

Commensurate with gender inversion, the art and life of Leonardo
provided opposing modes of artistic self-expression to gay yōga and
Nihonga painters.63 While Murayama Kaita articulated his homosexual
fantasies by likening the *Mona Lisa* to the charms of beautiful boys
(bishōnen), Kainoshō projected the transgender aesthetics of Leon-
ardo’s figures onto his phantom images of the Westernized dangerous
woman. Through his training as a kabuki female impersonator,
Kainoshō might have resorted to the gender play of the snagata who
represents, according to Leiter, “an abstraction or symbolization of
the image of Japanese womanhood, both on a physical and emo-
tional level.”64 Yet, while experiencing the feminizing “gender train-
ing” of the female impersonator, as a specialist in the painting of
women, Kainoshō assumed a masculine, at times clear-cut, minogy-

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60 See Jeffrey Matthew Angles, *Writing the Law of Love: Representations of male-male
desire in the literature of Murayama Kaita and Edogawa Rampo* (unpublished Ph.D.
dissertation, Ohio State University, 2004); http://[sourceRepository.edu/1/1/\view?acc_num=\tou0115335744.
62 Angles, p. 35.
63 In the early 1920s a patron of Kainosho, a resident of Kobe, instructed Kain-
osho and his long-time partner, the painter Sakakibara Shihō (1895-1969; a young-
er brother of the Kakegawa founding member Sakakibara Shishū), in the way of
64 Leiter, *New Kabuki Encyclopedia*, p. 300.
nistic perspective towards the female body. The projection of Leonardo’s androgynous saints onto Japanese prostitutes betrays a destructive rather than celebratory exploitation of the European ideals of beauty. In this regard, Kainoshō anticipated the computerized “self-portraits as art history” by the post-modern artist Morimura Yasumasa (born 1950).48

The leading Kokuga painter, Tsuchiya Bakusen (1887-1936), envisaged Japan as an earthly paradise, alive with various types of Japanese women, such as pearl divers, Obara peasant women (Obara-nes), maiko, and bath-house girls (jans), but significantly void of male partners, who might suggest the pleasures (and perils) of erotic encounter.49 Between Bakusen and Kainoshō the painting of women remained a contested field, especially after Kainoshō tried his hand at nude painting, a genre up till then under taboo, but at last tolerated as a subject of Kokuga decadent “pure art.”

Kokuga exhibitions were suspended between 1921 and 1924 due to the main members’ trip to Europe. The direct encounter with European art resulted in the appointment of the Kyoto painter Umehara Ryūzaburō (1888-1986), a follower of Renoir, as head of the newly established Kokuga jiga section.46 It appears to have been the prospective competition between Yōkanga and jiga oil painting that stimulated Kainoshō to submit to the 5th Kokuga exhibition of 1926 two nude paintings labeled Woman with Balloon (also called Chōchō) (Figure 9.14) and Nude (Ryōs) (Figure 9.15).46 Today only a photograph of Woman with Balloon remains, depicting a semi-nude woman, veiled in a dark, transparent bath-rope, holding a fetishistic balloon. Presiding over the selection committee, Bakusen disqualified Woman with Balloon, not on the ground that is was kitch, but for being a

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49 Sato, pp. 405 ff.
50 Kokuga Shōka eigo Retrospective, plates 37 and 38; Kainoshō Tetsuō (1997), p. 48 and p. 113. The venue of the 5th Kokuga exhibition, March 7 to 27, was an exhibition hall in Ueno Park, Tokyo.
“filthy picture” (ikitanai-i). Accepted for display together with *Nani* was *Singing Geisha Girl* (Kagayō), a work that again underlined the gender ambivalence of the prostitute (Figure 9.16). This is made clear by the genesis of both paintings: Kainoshō in both cases used photographs taken of models posing for him in his atelier, yet for *Singing Geisha Girl* he employed a slender cross-dressing man with the pale complexion and composed looks of a male prostitute, holding a shamisen. (Figure 9.17). The choice of a male double suggests that Kainoshō rated the androgynous charms of a cross-dressed man higher than the exemplariness of a female geisha.

Today, Kainoshō is acclaimed as the paragon of Taishō aestheticism (taishō shugi) and a “genius of bijinga” (bijinga no kiai). The English introduction to the Kyoto exhibition catalogue of 1997 praises his “straightforward paintings of women” for catching “more directly the inescapable karma that exists within women.” Whatever the “inescapable karma of women” might be, the current rehabilitation of Kainoshō as a bijinga specialist is certainly not in tune with the genre’s accepted definition. One of the chief proponents of academic bijinga, the female Kyoto painter Uemura Shōen (1875-1949), claimed that she intended to dissipate any indecent thoughts about the other sex as her works visualized the dreams and longings of women in accordance with truth, morality, and beauty. Kaburagi Kiyokata (1878-1972), a follower of the adyo artist Yoshitoshi, defined the principles of bijinga as “attractive beauty but not indecency, sweetness is fine but not low class: the person who paints bijinga has to keep this equilibrium very much in mind.” Successfully marketed in

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52 Kainoshō Tadakoto, in *Kainoshō Tadakoto* (1997), p. 102. In the 1940s Kainoshō switched from painting to kabuki theater and cinema, assisting the film director Miosouchi Kenji as art consultant. After 1952 he worked on a comeback as painter.
Figure 9.16. Kainosho Tsunetane, Singing Geisha Girl (Kagi), 1936, detail of 6 panel screen, 178.5 × 248.8 cm, colors on silk, private collection.

Figure 9.17. Photograph of a male geisha model.
America from the 1920s until the present, even among Western connoisseurs the Shim-Young prints of “beautiful women” (bijin) are held to constitute “a palliative to the ugliness of the modern world” and to the threat of female sexual liberation, epitomized by the modern jūrō (mugai).  

In fact, contemporary visitors to Kōkuten exhibitions, such as the ōji-gata painter Kishida Ryūi (1891-1929), did not classify Kansai painting of women as bijin, but as a sort of misunderstood appropriation of fin-de-siècle decadence. In 1921 Kishida denounced the “decadent” products of Nihonga painters from Kyoto and Osaka that flooded the art scene as “sick and sweetish images of prostitutes, maiko, and cats.” 26 Warning against conflating pornography with the objectives of “true” decadent art, Kishida noted that Kansai Nihonga painters were far from measuring up to Western artists such as Beardsley and Klimt. 27 Yet, in 1927 a somewhat appreciative voice ventured a comparison between literature and art, calling Kainoshō “the Tanizaki Jun’ichirō of painting.” 28 This author might have sensed a genuine affinity between Yotsuya and literary exemplars of 


6 Kishida referred to works by Kansai painters, in particular the woman painter Shima Setsu (1833-1910), denouncing the “women like ghosts” (kake no yu asumi) recently on display in the Kōkuten and Tetsuen exhibitions Kishida Ryūi-zōshi (Tokyo: Ishikawa shoten, 1979), vol. 2, p. 25. Exhibiting with the Kegon Society as guests were the Osaka painter Kintaro Tsunetomi (1880-1947) and the Kyoto painter Okamoto Shōzō (1884-1903). In the 1920s they were classified as non-conformists for taking prostitutes as models. Kanzaki, Ken’ichi, Kyoto u shita Nihonga de [History of Kyoto Nihonga] (Kyoto: Seibon inseikusha, 1939), p. 223.  


muge such as Naomi, the Westernized heroine of Tanizaki’s novel Naomi (Chinju no ao) of 1924. 29 It thus appears that the Taishō art world was well aware of the correlation that existed between prostitution, gender queering, and the phantasm of muge as the proxy of the Western femme fatale.

Conclusion

The project of creating modern “national art” revealed its reactionary objectives most clearly in the efforts to shape Japanese womanhood as the Other of Western models. As Kanō Hōgai’s Naka Kannon of 1888 was readily accepted as a masculine symbol of maternal love and compassion, the mother-child motif proved incompatible with the patriarchal surveillance of procreation. Similarly, Murakami Kagoku questioned the erotic power of the “Eternal Woman,” declaring her Indian Venus a manifestation of Kannon. Performative identification with the amagusa, on the other hand, enabled Kainoshō Tadao to intertwine homoerotic inversion with the nature of the modern Japanese femme fatale. Common to all three examples is the denial of the female principle as the Other of masculinity.

Recent literary studies have argued that, in the colonial context, cross-dressing may assume a culturally constructive meaning that not only supports the official suppression of deviant sexualities, but entails the homoerotic aura of Japan’s cultural singularity. 30 It appears that


in the visual field, too, gender ambivalence did not indicate a category crisis, but, on the contrary, lent itself to function as an outlet for lost possibilities of artistic self-expression. If we seriously consider the fact that Japanese society faced the trauma of compulsory heterosexuality during the early Meiji era, and linking that to the tidal wave of sexual perversion theory that swept through the Taisho art world, one might draw the conclusion that gender ambivalence was in fact a catalyst that converted artistic self-expression into national representation. In the particular ideological conjuncture of Nihonga modernism, elite male practitioners strategically defended masculine hegemony against the construct of the bijin, and thus subjected the nightmare of the “modern girl” to sexual perversion theory. As the “third gender” was brought into the debate about gender and sexuality, homosexual sublimation provided the intellectual counterpart to the women-oriented ideal of the romantic bijin. It is in the market-oriented trans-cultural masquerade of Nihonga modernism that we see this phenomenon most clearly.

Footnote: Majorie Garber argues that gender blurring offers a third sex or third term as a possibility to subvert or at least unveil a failure of definitional distinction of social categories. After World War II cross-dressing indicates a “category crisis” induced by compulsory male-female gender division and functioned universally as a critique of the dichotomy of Asian and Euro-Americas culture, high and low art, bourgeoisie straight and underground gay art. Majorie Garber, Veiled Intertwined: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety (New York: Knopf, 1992), pp. 9.

NATIONALLY NAKED: THE FEMALE NUDE IN JAPANESE OIL PAINTING AND POSTERS (1890s-1920s)
Jaqueline Berndt

Introduction

Nude painting was appropriated by Japanese elites in the late nineteenth century as part of the canon of modern Western knowledge they were eager to master. The academic genre of the nude appeared significant to them precisely as it was beginning to lose its significance for European art; incidentally, this lag put Japanese male artists on a par with European women artists. What the latter had been denied by academicians, the former were about to discover at a time when the independence of their country was in danger. Accordingly, the Japanese study of European art was closely tied to issues of national identity. Until the early twentieth century, Japanese painters as well as their fellow countrymen positioned oil painting nationally as non-Japanese (in the sense of “non-native” or “non-traditional”) and, paradoxically, at the same time utilized it in the process of creating a modern national culture. The genre of nude painting attracted attention mainly in two respects: on the one hand, regarding the capability of the medium of oil painting to realistically render corporeality and, by means of that, suggest the actual reality of the new nation; on the other hand, regarding the power of fine art to transform the image of a naked body, that is, nature, into the carrier of profound meanings, in other words, culture. The depiction of naked female bodies within the framework of fine art allowed, among other things, for a visualization of national accomplishments, especially with respect to modernization. Assigning such value to the nude, however, did not necessarily result in a visually discernible national identity.

As I am well aware of the amount of convincing analyses published by art historians about the correlation between academic nude painting and gender, I will focus less on representations of female bodies rather than on how female bodies mediated representations of nationality. Concentrating on Japanese oil paintings and posters