

Yamato-e: Illuminating a Concept through Historiographical Analysis

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<https://doi.org/10.5109/1917883>

出版情報 : Journal of Asian Humanities at Kyushu University. 3, pp.39-56, 2018-03. Kyushu
University, School of Letters, Graduate School of Humanities, Faculty of Humanities

バージョン :

権利関係 :



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Introduction

PRESENTED as a long-standing artistic genre that embraces a variety of themes, styles, and formats, *yamato-e* stands as a central yet confounding concept in the field of Japanese art history. Generally understood as a type of Japanese painting, scholars widely acknowledge that a certain amount of confusion surrounds the precise parameters of *yamato-e*, yet many nevertheless employ the term uncritically in their works. Tracing the twentieth-century historiography of *yamato-e*, this article contends that current understandings of the term—diverse though they may be—are based on contrasting studies that were born in an era of imperialism and haphazardly synthesized into a single narrative. This is not an attempt to redefine *yamato-e* itself, but rather to clarify modern factors for the nebulous understanding of *yamato-e* and its conflicting applications and connotations.

In recent decades, historiography has emerged as an important tool for examining the late-nineteenth-century roots of Japanese art history and the post-Meiji concerns about national identity that have directly impacted the field.¹ A discourse on Japanese art his-

tory—one that included elements of nationalistic ideology—already existed in the nineteenth century, thanks to the efforts of pioneers like Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908) and Okakura Tenshin 岡倉天心 (1862–1913).² Yet neither the category nor concept of *yamato-e* was central to the field until several studies published in the 1930s and 1940s cast a spotlight on it. Individual essays on *yamato-e* may seem convincing, but taken as a whole, scholarship on the subject is both inconsistent and contradictory. One of the most confounding aspects is that multiple written forms of the term *yamato-e* appear in these studies but are not well-characterized. Another is the lack of consensus regarding the early history of *yamato-e* during the Heian period (794–1185), leading scholars to date the origin of the phenomenon to different centuries. Scholars have also

is also due to Yamamoto Satomi for her invaluable feedback. All quotations and poems are translated by the author unless otherwise indicated.

1 Satō Dōshin has been at the forefront of this research. See Satō, *Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State*; Satō, 'Nihon bijutsu' no tanjō; Kitazawa, *Me no shinden*; and Tōkyō Kokuritsu Bunkazai Kenkyūjo, *Ima, Nihon no bijutsushigaku o furikaeru*.

2 Okakura promoted nationalism through art historical discourse by claiming that each culture held its own values and should foster its own character to encourage creativity among its members. Tanaka, "Imaging History."

The author would like to thank the two anonymous readers for their insightful and detailed comments. Much appreciation

Table 1. Major *yamato-e* studies.

Year	Japanese Title	Transliteration of Title	Author
1933	やまと絵序説 ³	<i>Yamato-e josetsu</i>	Tanaka Ichimatsu
1941	平安時代の「唐絵」と「やまと絵」: 上	“Heian jidai no ‘kara-e’ to ‘yamato-e’: Jō”	Akiyama Terukazu
1942	平安時代の「唐絵」と「やまと絵」: 下	“Heian jidai no ‘kara-e’ to ‘yamato-e’: Ge”	Akiyama Terukazu
1944	大和絵史研究	<i>Yamato-e shi kenkyū</i>	Shimomise Shizuichi
1944	唐絵と大和絵	<i>Kara-e to yamato-e</i>	Shimomise Shizuichi
1946	上代倭絵全史 ⁴	<i>Jōdai yamato-e zenshi</i>	Ienaga Saburō
1976	大和絵の研究 ⁵	<i>Yamato-e no kenkyū</i>	Minamoto Toyomune
1994	やまと絵の形成とその意味	“Yamato-e no keisei to sono imi”	Chino Kaori
2009	平安時代の「倭絵」: その成立と展開	“Heian jidai no ‘yamato-e’: Sono seiritsu to tenkai”	Kobayashi Manabu

disagreed on what constitutes *yamato-e*, and whether it appears in large formats such as folding screens (*byōbu* 屏風) or in small formats such as album leaves and picture scrolls (*emaki* 絵巻). This article will reveal that the conflicting narratives and characterizations result from the reality that early twentieth-century studies of *yamato-e* historicized it from two different perspectives using incompatible methods: as paintings that featured Japanese subject matter based on textual sources only, or as art that constituted a distinctive pictorial style using extant artwork as examples.

In this article, I first address the semantics of *yamato-e* by examining how various scholars defined this term in their studies, and I show that the lack of uniform employment of the term has contributed to our present confusion regarding *yamato-e* as a putative genre. I then trace and critique the modern history of *yamato-e* studies as well as the methodologies deployed in them. Finally, I address the broader issue of the significance of *yamato-e* in the history of Japanese art and what is at stake in recognizing its current definition as a modern invention.

Yamato-e Semantics

Before delving into scholarship on the putative genre of *yamato-e*, let us first consider the term in question. Although this term has only one transliteration in English scholarship, three main written forms (i.e., three different sets of kanji or hiragana and kanji) of *yamato-e* appear in Japanese scholarship (倭絵, 大和絵, and やまと絵). Table 1 shows the most frequently occurring examples.

Even a cursory glance at this list discloses the lack of scholarly consensus regarding terminology. The obvious question that arises is whether word choice signifies nuances in meaning or different historical backgrounds for the artistic phenomenon. Although none of the scholars explicitly defined *yamato-e* or explained their preferences, and to further complicate matters, Tanaka, Minamoto, and Ienaga introduced multiple versions of the written form *yamato-e*, we can still map a general pattern by analyzing the historical and conceptual characteristics that each scholar associated with the term. Since my premise is that the modern definition of *yamato-e* is inadequate, we must start anew by stripping the word of all accreted meanings. We may do well to forget everything we think we know about *yamato-e* and treat it as an empty vessel to be labeled then filled with connotations and denotations based on how each scholar characterized the art historical phenomenon in their study.

3 Note that in his study Tanaka also used 大和絵 to refer to *yamato-e*.
4 Note that in his study Ienaga also used 大和絵 to refer to *yamato-e*.
5 Note that in his study Minamoto also used 倭絵 to refer to *yamato-e*.

Three of the seven scholars listed in table 1 used *yamato-e* written with the Japanese characters 倭絵 within their discussions (two in their titles), and each applied the term differently. For Kobayashi Manabu, 小林学 *yamato-e* denoted a pictorial style in use from the tenth to the twelfth century that included both large-format media such as folding screens and small-format media including picture scrolls.⁶ Minamoto Toyomune 源豊宗 (1895–2001) used this written form of *yamato-e* to define Heian-period works with a clear Japanese subject matter.⁷ For Ienaga Saburō 家永三郎 (1913–2002), the same term represented only folding screens painted with Japanese subject matter, a genre of art that he claimed first appeared in the ninth century and lasted until the beginning of the medieval period (*chūsei* 中世). Ienaga also introduced a second kanji rendering of *yamato-e* 大和絵 when referring to paintings in the medieval period.⁸ This second form of *yamato-e* denoted an artistic style distinguished by a more realistic mode of depiction in works of art painted on picture scrolls and portraits.⁹

Three other scholars also used this second rendering of the term yet they defined it differently. For Shimomise Shizuichi 下店静市 (1900–1974), *yamato-e* is defined by Heian-period screens and picture scrolls in a Japanese pictorial style.¹⁰ Minamoto argued for a pictorial style of *yamato-e* in the Heian period on small-format media using this same term.¹¹ Tanaka Ichimatsu 田中一松 (1895–1983) also associated a particular decorative style (i.e., a pictorial style *sōshokuteki naishi moyōteki* 裝飾の乃至模様の) in the Heian period with these same kanji (大和絵) for *yamato-e*.¹²

Curiously, Tanaka also used a combination of hiragana and kanji (*kana-majiri* 仮名交じり) for *yamato-e* やまと絵, to define paintings from the Heian period that contained Japanese subject matter.¹³ Likewise, Akiyama Terukazu 秋山光和 (1918–2009) used this written form when he declared that *yamato-e* artwork extended only to Heian-period screens featuring Japanese subject

matter without explaining his semantic choice.

In 1994 Chino Kaori 千野香織 (1952–2001) surveyed the history of *yamato-e* using as her heading the *kana-majiri* form of *yamato-e* やまと絵. According to Chino, *yamato-e* during the Heian period were artworks that depicted Japanese subject matter, but after the Kamakura period (1185–1333)—when Song- (960–1279) and Yuan-dynasty (1271–1368) paintings from China were imported to Japan—*yamato-e* became associated with the pictorial styles of Japanese paintings that had been created since the Heian period, and later the concept of artistic lineages such as the Tosa school were also incorporated into its meanings.¹⁴ Chino noted that the use of the *kana-majiri* form has become common practice among researchers when discussing the general history of *yamato-e*.

There are two conclusions one can make regarding the semantics of *yamato-e* in secondary scholarship. First, the employment of the written form of *yamato-e* in these studies does not reflect the historical usage of the term *yamato-e* in the primary sources. For example, Akiyama used やまと絵 consistently throughout his study but his primary texts clearly employed other written forms of *yamato-e* including 倭絵, 倭画, 和絵, and やまと絵. Minamoto explained that the association of *yamato-e* (he used 大和絵) with pictorial style does not go further back than the Ashikaga period 足利時代 (1336–1583) even though the term cited in his primary source was 倭画 for *yamato-e*. To further confuse the matter, Minamoto argued that a pictorial style had existed since the Heian period shortly after declaring that the pictorial style of *yamato-e* could not be traced before the Ashikaga period, all the while using the same written form 大和絵.¹⁵ Second, even though the choice of the term *yamato-e* in the individual studies may not faithfully reflect the historical employment of this term in primary sources, the chosen written form of *yamato-e* within the confines of those studies remained consistent, and this is especially visible when scholars, such as Ienaga and Minamoto, introduce multiple renderings of the term to distinguish between certain historical characteristics, signifying that there is a different connotation to each of the written forms of *yamato-e*. It is only when read against the other studies that the inconsistencies associated with each writ-

6 Kobayashi Manabu's 2011 dissertation reexamined the characteristics of *yamato-e* during the Heian period. Kobayashi, "Heian jidai 'yamato-e' no saikōsei."

7 Minamoto, *Yamato-e no kenkyū*, p. 5.

8 Ienaga, *Jōdai yamato-e zenshi*, p. 471.

9 Ibid., p. 487.

10 Shimomise, *Kara-e to yamato-e*, p. 6.

11 Minamoto, *Yamato-e no kenkyū*, p. 6.

12 Tanaka, *Yamato-e josetsu*, p. 59.

13 Ibid., p. 5.

14 Chino, "Yamato-e no keisei to sono imi," pp. 488–89.

15 Minamoto, *Yamato-e no kenkyū*, p. 6.

Table 2. Semantics of *yamato-e* in Japanese scholarship.

Author and Work(s)	倭絵	大和絵	やまと絵
Tanaka (1933, <i>Yamato-e josetsu</i>)		Pictorial style, Heian period	Subject matter, Heian period
Akiyama (1941, “Heian jidai no ‘kara-e’ to ‘yamato-e: Jō’”); (1942, “Heian jidai no ‘kara-e’ to ‘yamato-e: Ge’”); (1964, <i>Heian jidai sezokuga no kenkyū</i>)			Subject matter, large-format medium, Heian period
Shimomise (1944, <i>Kara-e to yamato-e</i>)		Pictorial style, both large- and small-format medium, Heian period until medieval period	
Ienaga (1946, <i>Jōdai yamato-e zenshi</i>)	Subject matter, large-format medium, Heian period until medieval period	Pictorial style, small-format medium, medieval period	
Minamoto (1976, <i>Yamato-e no kenkyū</i>)	Subject matter, Heian period	Pictorial style, small-format medium since Heian period	
Chino (1994, “Yamato-e no keisei to sono imi”)			Subject matter in Heian period, pictorial style and painting lineages in medieval period
Kobayashi (2009, “Heian jidai no ‘yamato-e’: Sono seiritsu to tenkai”)	Pictorial style, large-format and small-format media, Heian period (tenth–twelfth century)		

ten form become visible and the precise meaning of *yamato-e* becomes blurred. In other words, although scholars understood why a certain written form of *yamato-e* was chosen, it remained a personal preference not shared across the field. Today, the common practice is to use the *kana-majiri* form of *yamato-e* やまと絵, but in this article, I will argue that the wide deployment of やまと絵 to represent the entire history of the art historical phenomenon buries the consistencies as well as the inconsistencies, and contributes to our confusion about the concept by obfuscating important distinctions concerning time period, medium, subject matter, and pictorial style that were carefully conveyed by the characters for *yamato* (倭 and 大和) in early *yamato-e* studies. Another consequence of using やまと絵 is the

facilitation in streamlining various avenues of scholarship into a single historical narrative.¹⁶ Given the persistent confusion regarding the nature of *yamato-e*, a vital first step is to acknowledge the existence of these different written forms of the term and the limits each *yamato-e* scholar attached to them. This is a critical point not only in Japanese scholarship but also when writing about *yamato-e* in English because the diverging meanings and historical parameters associated with

16 The term 倭 is understood as a pejorative historical Chinese reference to Japan, while 大和 embodies nationalistic sentiments. However, the author has yet to find any scholarly articles that address the connotations of the term *yamato* in any of its iterations.

these different terms disappear into the same phonetic rendering of *yamato-e*, conveniently concealing the nuances outlined above. These nuances are summarized in table 2.

▪ *Yamato-e* as Heian-period Artwork with Japanese Subject Matter

The multiple usage of different written forms of the term *yamato-e* across different studies echoes an even larger problem: that our current narrative of this phenomenon results from various approaches that are ultimately methodologically incompatible. One school of *yamato-e* scholarship presented *yamato-e* as Heian-period artwork that contains Japanese subject matter, including paintings of seasonal themes (*tsukinami-e* 月次絵), paintings of annual Japanese customs (*nenchū gyōji-e* 年中行事絵), and works that celebrate famous Japanese places (*meisho-e* 名所絵). Such scholarship relied exclusively on textual sources such as courtier diaries, poetry anthologies, and protocol manuals for its definitional standards.

The earliest study using this method was Tanaka's 1933 *Yamato-e josetsu* やまと絵序説 (A *Yamato-e* Introduction). He wrote, "According to the contemporary textual examples of 'yamato-e' from the Heian period, it stood in opposition to 'kara-e' から絵 (Chinese pictures) and represented paintings featuring Japanese subjects and customs."¹⁷ Tanaka mentioned a screen from Kannin 寛仁 2 (1018)—which he called a "*yamato-e* screen"—but did not elaborate on its subject matter.¹⁸ In 1942, Akiyama Terukazu provided a more systematic analysis of primary sources from the Heian period, including diaries, protocol manuals, and fictional tales in his two-part article, "Heian jidai no 'kara-e' to 'yamato-e'" 平安時代の「唐絵」と「やまと絵」 (Kara-e and Yamato-e of the Heian Period). According to Akiyama, the term *yamato-e* first appeared in the diary *Gonki* 権記 (Yukinari's Diary) of Fujiwara no Yukinari 藤原行成 (972–1027).¹⁹ An entry dated the

thirtieth day of the tenth month of Chōhō 長保 1 (999) reads:

I [Yukinari] traveled to Nishi no kyō, to brush poetry on the poetry sheets [*shikishigata*] of a *yamato-e* folding screen, four *shaku* in height, that featured paintings by the late [Asukabe no] Tsunenori.²⁰

Akiyama provided corroborating evidence from two other contemporary diaries—Fujiwara no Michinaga's 藤原道長 (966–1028) *Midō kanpaku-ki* 御堂関白記 (Diary of the Midō Regent, eleventh century) and Fujiwara no Sanesuke's 藤原実資 (957–1046) *Shōyūki* 小右記 (Record of the Ononomiya Minister of the Right, eleventh century)—and argued that the screen was part of the furnishings provided for the presentation of Michinaga's oldest daughter, Fujiwara no Shōshi 藤原彰子 (988–1074), to the imperial court.²¹ Akiyama identified two poems from *Eiga monogatari* 栄花物語 (A Tale of Flowering Fortunes, eleventh century), composed by high-ranking courtiers for a screen that would be sent to the palace with Shōshi. He then cross-referenced them with poems composed for the same occasion that appear in the oeuvre of Fujiwara no Kintō 藤原公任 (966–1041).²² Based on descriptions in Kintō's poetry anthology, *Kintō-kyō shū* 公任卿集 (Collected Poems of Lord Kintō, eleventh century), Akiyama was able to determine the contents in the six panels of Shōshi's screen. He noted that the first panel features a pine tree and plum blossoms standing adjacent to a house and a person playing a flute in front of some bamboo blinds. The second panel contains a scene of flowers and trees next to a house and a lady with an ink stone. The third panel depicts a wisteria vine intertwined with the branches of a pine beside a house. The fourth panel shows a flock of cranes near a residence. The fifth pictorially captures the comings and goings of

17 Tanaka, *Yamato-e josetsu*, p. 5.

18 Ibid., p. 6. Tanaka did not elaborate on the subject matter of *yamato-e* in his work because his primary objective was to trace the pictorial style of *yamato-e* during the Heian period. I will introduce his arguments in the section "*Yamato-e* as Pictorial Style from the Heian period."

19 Akiyama mentioned an earlier textual instance of *yamato-e* found in *Songshi* 宋史 (History of the Song Dynasty, fourteenth century),

in which a *yamato-e* screen was among the objects presented to the Song imperial court by the Japanese monk Chōnen 僊然 (938–1016) via his disciple Kain 嘉因 in Eien 永延 2 (988), during the reign of Emperor Ichijō 一条 (r. 986–1011). Yet Akiyama considered this source to be unreliable. See Akiyama, "Heian jidai no 'kara-e' to 'yamato-e': Jō," pp. 377–78.

20 *Shaku* 尺 is a measure of length, roughly 30 centimeters. 内内參西京、書倭繪四尺屏風色帟形、故常則絵, as quoted in Akiyama, "Heian jidai no 'kara-e' to 'yamato-e': Jō," p. 378.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., p. 379.

people through the gate of a seaside residence. Finally, the sixth panel illustrates a mountain setting with passersby gazing at birds in the yard of a house as smoke rises from its chimney.²³

The second-oldest reference Akiyama noted was the same screen from 1018 that Tanaka had offered as evidence. According to Akiyama, it was painted by Oribe Sashinnosuke 織部佐親助 (n.d.) and was intended for a New Year's banquet. "A four-*shaku* tall, twelve-panel *yamato-e* screen was brought out. The artist was Oribe Sashinnosuke. Chinese poetry and *waka* poetry appeared on the poetry sheets."²⁴ Akiyama scoured *Eiga monogatari* to ascertain the screen's pictorial content. Among the eighty poems recited on this occasion, Akiyama identified nine that contained seasonal motifs and annual customs, and hypothesized that the panels of the 1018 screen corresponded with scenes from the twelve months of the year.²⁵

Although Akiyama was able to provide concrete pictorial evidence for only Shōshi's screen, and offer an educated guess regarding the contents in the Oribe screen, he identified a total of fifteen references to *yamato-e* in Heian-period sources, dating from 999 to the middle of the twelfth century.²⁶ From these sources, Akiyama noticed that all references to *yamato-e* denoted large-format works such as folding screens, leading him to conclude that *yamato-e* was not used by Heian-period writers when referring to paintings on other media such as picture scrolls or album leaves, nor to any distinguishable pictorial style.²⁷

In 1946, four years after Akiyama's article, Ienaga Saburō contributed his thoughts on *yamato-e* in *Jōdai yamato-e zenshi* 上代倭絵全史 (The Complete History of Yamato-e in the Classical Period). Ienaga offered examples of Japanese nouns with the prefix "*yamato*" 倭 (Japan) or "*kara*" 唐 (China) as arguments that Heian-period audiences made distinctions between what is native and what is not, thereby allowing him to argue that *yamato-e* 倭絵 was understood as "paintings of Japan."²⁸ Following this semantic rubric, Ienaga

surveyed textual references to landscape paintings, portraiture, and illustrated tales that contained ostensibly Japanese themes as examples of *yamato-e*.

In 1964, Akiyama Terukazu revised his 1940s articles for his book *Heian jidai sezokuga no kenkyū* 平安時代世俗画の研究 (Research on Heian-period Secular Paintings). This effectively marks the historiographical end of scholarship that frames *yamato-e* in terms of subject matter. Scholars thereafter typically direct readers to Akiyama or Ienaga for references on *yamato-e* history and its applications. Akiyama's contribution was particularly influential. Chino Kaori's 1994 introduction of *yamato-e* to a new generation, "Yamato-e no keisei to sono imi" やまと絵の形成とその意味 (The Formation and Meaning of Yamato-e), published over fifty years after Akiyama's articles, defined Heian-period *yamato-e* in close alignment with Akiyama's conclusions as paintings with Japanese subjects found on screen panels and sliding doors (although not on scrolls or album leaves).²⁹

▪ *Yamato-e* in Poetry Anthologies

Although these four scholars (Tanaka, Akiyama, Ienaga, and Chino) all traced the first textual appearance of *yamato-e* (as a screen with Japanese subject matter) to the late tenth or early eleventh century, they insisted that *yamato-e* screens had existed since the latter half of the ninth century. By locating references to screen paintings with Japanese subject matter in imperial poetry anthologies, each scholar thus presented different examples of the earliest *yamato-e*.

Tanaka chose a Japanese poem (*waka* 和歌) composed by Ariwara no Narihira 在原業平 (828–880) in the *Kokin wakashū* 古今和歌集 (Collection of Japanese Poems from Ancient and Modern Times, also called *Kokinshū*; ca. 905).³⁰ Although he did not identify its number in the anthology, it is commonly known as *Kokinshū* 294 and, according to its headnote, the screen "showed autumn leaves floating down the Tatsuta Riv-

23 Ibid.

24 四尺倭繪屏畫工織部佐親助、色紙形、有詩並和歌, as quoted in Akiyama, "Heian jidai no 'kara-e' to 'yamato-e': Jō," pp. 379–80.

25 Ibid., p. 380.

26 Although Akiyama's articles cited here list only thirteen sources, he includes fifteen references in his book. Akiyama, *Heian jidai sezokuga no kenkyū*, pp. 39–40.

27 Akiyama, "Heian jidai no 'kara-e' to 'yamato-e': Ge," pp. 21–22.

28 Ienaga, *Jōdai yamato-e zenshi*, pp. 67–68.

29 Chino, "Yamato-e no keisei to sono imi," pp. 488–89.

30 Tanaka, *Yamato-e josetsu*, p. 6. The original, which is not reproduced by Tanaka, is: ちはやぶる神世も聞かずたつた河から紅に水くゝるとは。Kojima and Arai, *Kokin wakashū*, p. 99. Rodd and Henkenius translate the poem as: "unheard of even / in the stories of the age / of the awesome gods— / the waters of Tatsuta / stream dyed a Chinese red." Rodd and Henkenius, *Kokinshū*, p. 131.

er.³¹ To Tanaka, the headnote explained that the poem was composed when the Nijō empress Takaiko 二条后高子 (842–910) was known as Harunomiya no Kisaiki 春宮妃.³² This led him to date this poem prior to the Jōgan 貞観 era (859–878).³³

Akiyama considered two different poems from the *Kokinshū* as the earliest evidence of *yamato-e*. The first poem he cited is commonly known as *Kokinshū* 930, by Sanjō no Machi 三条町 (d. 866):

田村御時に、女房の侍にて、御屏風の絵御覧
じけるに、滝落ちたりける所面白し、これを
題にて歌よめと、侍ふ人に仰せられければ、
詠める

思せく心の内の滝なれや落つとは見れどをと
のきこえぬ³⁴

During the Tamura period, ladies-in-waiting were serving the emperor as he looked upon a folding screen and said to those in attendance, “The cascading waterfall is quite enchanting. Use this topic to compose poems about it.”

Could this be / the waterfall of the feelings /
stopped up in my heart? / Though I can see it fall, /
I cannot hear its sound.³⁵

Akiyama dated the Tamura period to the reign of Emperor Montoku 文徳天皇 (r. 850–858).³⁶ Akiyama—and Chino, later—also selected *Kokinshū* 293 by the poet Sosei Hōshi 素性法師 (active early Heian period):

二條の後の、東宮の御息所と申しける時、御
屏風に立田川に紅葉流れたる繪を書けりける
を題にて詠める

もみぢ葉の流れてとまるみなとには紅深き浪
や立つらん³⁷

On the topic of autumn leaves floating down the Tatsuta River as painted on a screen seen at the residence of the Nijō Consort when she was known as Mother of the Crown Prince.³⁸

Down at the harbor / where the flow of autumn leaves / reaches its end, / could there be a deep crimson tide / that crests upon the waters?³⁹

The headnote of *Kokinshū* 293 states that it was composed when Empress Takaiko (the poem’s “Nijō Consort”) was known as “the mother of the crown prince.” The crown prince ascended the throne as Emperor Yōzei 陽成天皇 (r. 876–884) in 876, thus Akiyama dated the poem to between the reign years Jōgan 11 and 18 (869–876).⁴⁰

Ienaga looked to two poems in the *Shūi wakashū* 拾遺和歌集 (Collection of Gleanings, often abbreviated as *Shūishū*; ca. 1005). In “Miscellaneous Autumn” (*Zasshū* 雑秋), the seventeenth volume of the *Shūishū*, a poem composed by Taira no Sadafumi 平定文 (d. 923) responds to a screen from the Ninna 仁和 reign period (885–889):

仁和御屏風に、七月七日、女の河浴みたる所

水のあやをおりたちて着む脱ぎちらしたなば
たつめに衣かす夜は⁴¹

31 龍田川に紅葉流れたるかたをかけりける, as quoted in Tanaka, *Yamato-e josetsu*, p. 6. This orthography differs slightly from Kojima and Arai, *Kokin wakashū*, p. 99. Although Tanaka treated this headnote as one belonging to *Kokinshū* 294, it is actually shared with *Kokinshū* 293.

32 Tanaka, *Yamato-e josetsu*, p. 6.

33 Ibid.

34 Kojima and Arai, *Kokin wakashū*, p. 280. Akiyama included both the headnote and poem in Akiyama, “Heian jidai no ‘kara-e’ to ‘yamato-e’: Ge,” p. 11; however, there are misquotes in both, so the correct version from SNKT is offered here.

35 Sorensen, *Optical Allusions*, p. 67.

36 Akiyama, “Heian jidai no ‘kara-e’ to ‘yamato-e’: Ge,” p. 11.

37 As quoted in Akiyama, “Heian jidai no ‘kara-e’ to ‘yamato-e’: Ge,” p. 11. The headnote and poem, in a slightly different orthography, appear in Kojima and Arai, *Kokin wakashū*, p. 99. The Nijō empress mentioned here is the same empress mentioned by Tanaka when he introduced the poem about the Tatsuta River composed by Ariwara no Narihira.

38 Rodd and Henkenius, *Kokinshū*, p. 131.

39 Sorensen, *Optical Allusions*, p. 72.

40 Akiyama, “Heian jidai no ‘kara-e’ to ‘yamato-e’: Ge,” p. 11. Tanaka Ichimatsu’s dating of *Kokinshū* 294, which also concerns Takaiko, to before the Jōgan era differs from Akiyama’s conclusion. It is unclear how Tanaka arrived at his conclusion.

41 The poem is numbered 1091 in *Shūi wakashū*. Komachiya, *Shūi wakashū*, p. 313. The headnote in Ienaga’s version mistakes the twentieth day of the seventh month for the seventh day of the seventh month. Ienaga did not provide the poem itself, as he was more interested in the information given in the headnote. Ienaga, *Jōdai yamato-e zenshi*, p. 71.

Table 3. First appearance of *yamato-e* in poetry anthologies

Author and Work	Poetry Anthology	Poem Number	Date of Poem
Tanaka (1933, <i>Yamato-e josetsu</i>)	<i>Kokinshū</i>	294	Before 859
Akiyama (1941, “Heian jidai no ‘kara-e’ to ‘yamato-e: Jō’”); (1942, “Heian jidai no ‘kara-e’ to ‘yamato-e: Ge’”); (1964, <i>Heian jidai sezokuga no kenkyū</i>)	<i>Kokinshū</i> <i>Kokinshū</i>	930 293	850–858 869–876
Ienaga (1946, <i>Jōdai yamato-e zenshi</i>)	<i>Shūishū</i> <i>Shūishū</i>	1091 1257	885–889 885–889
Chino (1994, “Yamato-e no keisei to sono imi”)	<i>Kokinshū</i> <i>Kokinshū</i>	293 294	869–876 869–876

A screen [produced] during the reign of the Ninna emperor shows a scene of women bathing in a river on the seventh day of the seventh month.

I will wear a robe woven in the patterns of the waters in which I wade, and then will lend it to the Weaver Maiden on her special night.⁴²

The second poem, numbered 1247 in *Shūishū*, appears in the nineteenth volume on “Miscellaneous Love” (*Zat-suren* 雑恋). It is composed by Ōnakatomi no Yorimoto 大中臣頼基 (886–958), and is based on another screen from the Ninna era.

仁和の御屏風にあま汐たる所に鶴なく⁴³

しほたるゝ身は我とのみ思へどもよそなる鶴も音をぞ鳴くなる⁴⁴

On a screen from the Ninna reign period, there are crying cranes and a diving woman soaked with water.

42 My translation of the poem is adapted from a translation by Edward Kamens (personal communication by email, 12 July 2015).

43 As quoted in Ienaga, *Jōdai yamato-e zenshi*, p. 71; it appears in a slightly different orthography in Komachiya, *Shūi wakashū*, p. 362.

44 Once again, Ienaga did not provide the actual poem in his article, as his focus was on the headnote. The poem quoted here appears in Komachiya, *Shūi wakashū*, p. 362.

I thought I was the only one soaked in salty drops, but distant cranes are also crying in sorrow.⁴⁵

Chino Kaori chose two *Kokinshū* poems already introduced above by Tanaka and Akiyama as examples of the earliest *yamato-e*. She dated the two poems about the autumn leaves on the Tatsuta River (*Kokinshū* 293 and 294) to between 869 and 876.⁴⁶ Table 3 above summarizes the earliest examples of *yamato-e* according to the scholars.

▪ A Critique of the Methodology

Although Tanaka, Akiyama, Ienaga, and Chino all treated *yamato-e* as Heian-period screens with Japanese subject matter, this idea has not been definitively proven by their studies. Tanaka defined *yamato-e* as screen paintings depicting Japanese customs and subject matter, but he failed to explain the process of arriving at that conclusion (nor did he discuss what might be construed as “Japanese” in the 1018 Oribe screen). Akiyama was able to clarify the contents of Shōshi’s screen (999), but he did not declare it as irrefutably Japanese. When we review the content of the screen as outlined by Akiyama, there are references to pines, plum blossoms, wisteria, and cranes, but there are no descriptions of overtly Japanese landmarks or customs. Although

45 Poem translation adapted from that by Edward Kamens (personal communication by email, 12 July 2015).

46 Chino, “Yamato-e no keisei to sono imi,” pp. 491–92.

pinces and cranes tend to be associated with Japan, are they always exclusively Japanese subjects? There were references to geographical locations within Japan in the nine poems from 1018, but Akiyama did not prove that those poems were the basis for the pictorial subjects in the Oribe screen. Akiyama's assumption that *yamato-e* screens must contain Japanese subject matter was more evident when he argued that even though the Oribe screen contained Chinese poetry (*kanshi* 漢詩), which is conventionally understood to suggest the presence of Chinese subject matter, by 1018 Chinese poetry was no longer considered foreign. Thus, Japanese topics could also be expressed using Chinese poetry, increasing the likelihood that Japanese subject matter appeared in this *yamato-e* screen.⁴⁷ Ienaga made the most explicit link between *yamato-e* and Japanese themes by defining the term as "paintings of Japan." At the same time, Ienaga's understanding of what constituted "paintings of Japan" reveals a logical conundrum. He framed the waterfall featured in *Kokinshū* 930 as "without a doubt, a Japanese landscape" and treated it as an example of *yamato-e* because, according to him, waterfalls frequently appear as a subject of *yamato-e* landscape paintings.⁴⁸ Yet he did not introduce any external evidence that supported a Heian-period connection between *yamato-e* and landscape paintings, thus revealing a methodological obstacle that none of the scholars of the early subject matter were able to fully overcome. But by the time Chino was writing at the end of the twentieth century the notion that *yamato-e* was a Heian-period artistic development featuring Japanese themes was so widely accepted that she did not need to address it.

***Yamato-e* as a Pictorial Style from the Heian Period**

Moving from subject matter to pictorial style, the scholars working in this camp deployed completely different methods and used alternative resources to argue that *yamato-e* was a featured pictorial style during the Heian period. It bears noting that scholars attempting to trace the pictorial style of

yamato-e during the Heian period must overcome two challenges. First, they must establish that a pictorial style known as *yamato-e* actually existed at this time. Second, they must find illustrative evidence from a period that, as the scholars themselves have admitted, lacks surviving examples of *yamato-e*. Consider Tanaka who, as we have seen, framed *yamato-e* as artworks featuring Japanese subject matter, and did so by using extant works of art as examples of *yamato-e* pictorial style. But he first addressed the emergence of *yamato-e* in the Heian period by citing a passage from the *Masakane-kyō ki* 雅兼卿記 (The Diary of Lord Masakane, twelfth century), as quoted in an annotation of *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語 (The Tale of Genji, early eleventh century) called *Kachō yosei* 花鳥余情 (Lingering Sentiments for Flowers and Birds, 1472): "Kanaoka folded mountains into fifteen layers, Hirotaka [painted] five layers."⁴⁹ According to Tanaka, this passage alluded to the evolution of landscape painting, specifically how the depiction of mountains transformed into a native style from the time of Kose no Kanaoka 巨勢金岡 (active ninth century) to Kose no Hirotaka 巨勢弘高 (active eleventh century).⁵⁰

To demonstrate this change in pictorial style during the Heian period, Tanaka turned to several stories about Kose-family artists preserved in the mid-thirteenth-century *Kokon chomonjū* 古今著聞集 (A Collection of Tales Written and Heard in Ancient and Modern Times). One story noted that "before Kintada [公忠], painted pictures showed subjects as if they were living things, but after Kinshige [公茂], they became what they are now."⁵¹ This passage does not explicitly describe a change in pictorial style, but Tanaka reasoned that a shift in pictorial style, "from the realistic to the decorative, from the majestic to the elegant, from depiction to expression," must have occurred.⁵² The reason was rather simple: the Kose patriarch Kanaoka, the father of both Kintada and Kinshige (also known as Kinmochi 公望), painted in a realis-

47 Akiyama, "Heian jidai no 'kara-e' to 'yamato-e': Jō," p. 380.

48 Ienaga, *Jōdai yamato-e zenshi*, pp. 70–71. Decades later, Chino Kaori was less convinced of the *yamato-e* nature of this waterfall and chose other poems as her evidence. Chino, "Yamato-e no keisei to sono imi," pp. 491–92.

49 金岡疊レ山十五重、廣高五重也, as quoted in Tanaka, *Yamato-e josetsu*, p. 29. This passage, appearing in a slightly different orthography, can be found in Ichijō, *Matsunaga-bon kachō yosei*, pp. 28–29.

50 Tanaka, *Yamato-e josetsu*, p. 29.

51 公忠よりさきは畫きたる繪生きたる物の如し、公茂以下今の體にはなりたるとなん, as quoted in Tanaka, *Yamato-e josetsu*, p. 45. Both Kintada and Kinshige were active during the mid-tenth century.

52 Ibid.

tic manner, as evidenced by another *Kokon chomonjū* story about a painted horse in a Kanaoka mural that escaped the painting each night to destroy nearby rice fields.⁵³ Tanaka then shared a remark from Kinshige to his grandson Kose no Hirotaka about a painting by his brother Kintada in which he said the field and pine in the screen were not comparable to what Hirotaka could make.⁵⁴ From this, Tanaka concluded that the pictorial transformation in painting style must have occurred during the time of Kinshige, around the Tenryaku 天曆 reign period (947–957).⁵⁵

Tanaka turned to a picture competition in *Genji monogatari*, where Akikonomu's 秋好 team presented paintings of scenes from *Taketori monogatari* 竹取物語 (The Bamboo Cutter's Tale, late ninth to early tenth century) featuring illustrations by Kose no Ōmi 巨勢相覽 (ca. late ninth century) and calligraphy by Ki no Tsurayuki 紀貫之 (868–945). The rival team chose paintings from *Utsuho monogatari* 宇津保物語 (The Tale of the Hollow Tree, late tenth century) brushed by Asukabe no Tsunenori 飛鳥部常則 (active mid-tenth to early eleventh century) with calligraphy by Ono no Michikaze 小野道風 (894–967). Paintings from *Utsuho monogatari* were praised as “modern” (*imamekashi* 今めかし), which for Tanaka indicated a more recent date of creation for *Utsuho monogatari* paintings, and also that the court painter Asukabe no Tsunenori had employed a new pictorial style.⁵⁶ In another story about the artist, Tsunenori supposedly critiqued a painting by Kinshige on a partitioning screen (*tsuitate shōji* 衝立障子) owned by Ononomiya Sanesuke 小野宮実資 (also known as Fujiwara no Sanesuke, the author of *Shōyūki*), claiming that the pine tree resembled a furry potato but could not be criticized otherwise.⁵⁷ Tanaka argued that such a statement was more than a mere critique of artistic skill, and in fact reflected a changing pictorial style from the dominant mode of Tang (618–907) China to a “Japanese” manner (*nihon-teki* 日本的).⁵⁸

As mentioned earlier, Tanaka recognized *yamato-e* of the Heian period as works on folding screens, but the

paucity of extant examples from the period presented him with a roadblock.⁵⁹ To move beyond this, Tanaka argued that while screens were a part of the public lives of Heian period aristocrats, picture scrolls and other small format artworks were from their personal lives and represented Japanese creativity and artistry.⁶⁰ Therefore, he turned to picture scrolls, including the *Genji monogatari emaki* 源氏物語絵巻 (The Tale of Genji Picture Scroll, twelfth century, Tokugawa Art Museum and Gotoh Art Museum) to highlight features of the pictorial style of *yamato-e*.⁶¹ Tanaka focused on the thin lines used for eyes and hooks for noses known as *hikime kagihana* 引目鉤鼻, and the roofless viewing of interiors (*fukinuki yatai* 吹抜屋台) in the picture scrolls and identified these elements as stylistic characteristics of *yamato-e*.⁶² The lack of individualization in faces rendered by the *hikime kagihana* technique served as a prime example of Fujiwara aesthetic tastes; for Tanaka, it lent a sense of elegance and peace free from foreign influences and was the purest form of *yamato-e*.⁶³

In 1944, Shimomise published two books on the history and characteristics of *yamato-e* called *Kara-e to yamato-e* 唐絵と大和絵 (Kara-e and Yamato-e) and *Yamato-e shi kenkyū* 大和絵史研究 (Study of Yamato-e History). Although Shimomise believed that *yamato-e* was rooted in Chinese paintings, he also used the account noted above from *Kachō yosei* of Kose no Kanaoka painting fifteen layers of mountains and Hirotaka painting only five layers to illustrate a major difference between *yamato-e* and Chinese paintings, namely, the simplification of the pictorial composition.⁶⁴ Shimomise dated the shift in *yamato-e* pictorial style to after the era of Kintada through another passage from *Kokon chomonjū*: “This Hirotaka was the great-grandson of Kanaoka, the grandson of Kinshige, and the son of Fukae. Before Kintada, [who was] Kinshige's older brother, paintings resembled actual things. After Kinshige, they became what they are now.”⁶⁵ Shimomise interpreted this passage to mean that before Kintada's

53 Ibid.

54 この野筋この松汝及ぶべからず, as quoted in Tanaka, *Yamato-e josetsu*, p. 46.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., pp. 45–46.

57 かしら毛芋に似たり、他所難なし, as quoted in Tanaka, *Yamato-e josetsu*, p. 46.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid., p. 44.

60 Ibid., p. 47.

61 Ibid., pp. 47–50.

62 Ibid., pp. 50–53.

63 Ibid., p. 53.

64 Shimomise, *Kara-e to yamato-e*, pp. 30–31.

65 此弘高は、金岡が曾孫、公茂が孫、深江が子なり。公忠公茂兄よりさきは、かきたる絵、生たる物のごとし。公茂以下、今の体には成たるとなん, as quoted in Shimomise, *Kara-e to yamato-e*, p. 30.

time, artistic practice dictated that people, animals, tall mountains, and deep valleys were rendered realistically.⁶⁶ Shimomise then proceeded to explore the differences between Chinese and Japanese paintings, contrasting features including the classically Chinese knobby trees with the simple pine trees of Japanese paintings, the complex mountain formations found in Chinese paintings to the simpler hills in Japanese works, and the mushroom-like clouds that proliferated in Chinese paintings with the misty patches known as *yarikasumi* やり霞 that covered Japanese paintings, ultimately concluding that the primary characteristic of Chinese works was complexity while the foremost characteristic of *yamato-e* was simplicity.⁶⁷ He praised the innovative *fukinuki yatai* technique and the heightened psychological drama infused into *Genji monogatari emaki* by the *hikime kagihana* technique.⁶⁸ Shimomise considered both screens and picture scrolls as valid media for *yamato-e* (as did Tanaka, due to a lack of pictorial examples), but he also turned to literary sources for corroborating evidence on Heian-period *yamato-e*. These included the *Kokinshū* for lists of screens with Japanese subject matter, the *Tsurayuki-shū* 貫之集 (Collected Works of [Ki no] Tsurayuki, mid-tenth century) for lists of screens of the four seasons, and the *Shūishū* for screens of famous places.⁶⁹

▪ A Critique of the Methodology

Tanaka and Shimomise argued for a change in pictorial style, leading to the formation of *yamato-e*, during the Heian period, but here too we can detect methodological loopholes. First, although the excerpts that they presented from the *Kokon chomonjū* and other textual sources seem to suggest artists working in different pictorial styles, these stories do not explicitly state that *yamato-e* was the result of any pictorial shift. For example, Kinshige's statement (to Hirotaka in front of Kintada's screen) that "this field and pine cannot compare with yours" meant to Tanaka that Kinshige was alluding to a new and native pictorial style. The remark could also, and more simply, be an assessment of artistic skill.

The lack of direct supporting evidence of any surviv-

ing pictorial work regarded as *yamato-e* dating from the Heian period presents a more critical problem. Shimomise contended that *yamato-e* developed from Chinese paintings, and thus it was possible to trace its development by remaining sensitive to Chinese elements in extant works of art. Yet he never satisfactorily explained which stylistic features representing *yamato-e* in extant paintings should be recognized as characteristic of *yamato-e* in the Heian period as well. In other words, without evidence that proves surviving pictorial examples were also considered *yamato-e* in the Heian period, we are left with only early twentieth-century insistence of how tenth-century examples of *yamato-e* should have appeared.

Tanaka and Shimomise seem to have held set assumptions regarding the appearance of *yamato-e* prior to seeking corroborating evidence, and those preconceived notions would have influenced their selections. It is revealing that they both pointed to *fukinuki yatai* and *hikime kagihana* as examples of *yamato-e* without explaining how these stylistic characteristics would have been considered aspects of a distinct form or genre of painting, or *yamato-e*, by a Heian-period audience, or how they became associated with *yamato-e*.

▪ *Yamato-e* as *Onna-e* and *Tsukuri-e*

In the latter half of the twentieth century, Minamoto Toyomune and Kobayashi Manabu turned to explore the relationship between picture scrolls and the concept of *onna-e* 女絵, or "women pictures," in their pursuit of the elusive Heian-period *yamato-e* pictorial style.

At the outset of his *Yamato-e no kenkyū* 大和絵の研究 (A Study of Yamato-e), Minamoto acknowledged that the earliest reference to *yamato-e* in association with a pictorial style dates to the fifteenth century. According to *Sekiso ōrai* 尺素往来 (Compendium of Short Writings, fifteenth century) by Ichijō Kaneyoshi 一条兼良 (d. 1481):⁷⁰

The sliding-door panels are colorful *yamato-e* showing the four seasons; [painters from] the

66 Ibid., pp. 30-31.

67 Ibid., pp. 42-118.

68 Ibid., p. 106.

69 Shimomise, *Yamato-e shi kenkyū*, pp. 215-95.

70 *Sekiso ōrai* is a compilation from the Muromachi period (1392-1573) that contains lists of annual customs and the names of plants and animals, as well as terms for paintings. Ichijō Kaneyoshi is also the author of the aforementioned *Kachō yosei*.

painting bureau were called to [my residence to] paint them.⁷¹

Minamoto explained the lateness of this first reference to *yamato-e* (as a pictorial style) in terms of the lack of a necessity to distinguish between native and foreign pictorial styles until the great influx of ink paintings from China after the Kamakura period before proceeding to trace the pictorial style of *yamato-e* during the Heian period.⁷² Highlighting the female authorship (Sanjō no Machi) of the aforementioned waterfall poem (*Kokin-shū* 930), Minamoto argued that Heian women honed their sense of refinement by viewing art and composing *waka*.⁷³ In other words, as Chinese influences receded, court women expressed themselves by celebrating their world—a world of Japanese aesthetics, desires, and identity.⁷⁴

Tales (*monogatari* 物語) were popular in the tenth century, and it was at this time that the genre of art known as illustrated tales (*monogatari-e* 物語絵), which Minamoto claimed was closely associated with women, most likely appeared.⁷⁵ Fujiwara no Onshi 藤原温子 (872–907), consort of Emperor Uda 宇多 (r. 887–897), commissioned poems based on stories from *Yamato monogatari* 大和物語 (Tales of Yamato, 951) and perhaps even made small-format paintings herself.⁷⁶ In the Yomogiu 蓬生 chapter of *Genji monogatari*, a female character named Suetsumuhana 末摘花 kept various illustrations of old tales in her cabinet.⁷⁷ Minamoto reasoned that the experience of listening to stories while looking at accompanying illustrations inspired court ladies to create their own pictorial works, and this laid the foundations for *onna-e*.⁷⁸ Since noble ladies were unencumbered by the historical painting traditions that limited court painters, they were able to create their own styles according to their refined sensibilities.⁷⁹ The resulting pictorial style manifested in paintings via a technique called *tsukuri-e* つくり絵 (also written as 作絵), which

involved applying layers of richly colored pigments to a painted surface. Minamoto considered *tsukuri-e* as a fitting mode of representation that reflected the vibrant lifestyle of the Heian period.⁸⁰

Features of *onna-e*, as defined by Minamoto, include *hikime kagihana*, *fukinuki yatai*, and a unique sense of perspective. Rather than viewing the *hikime kagihana* technique as restrictive or unrealistic in style, Minamoto argued (as Tanaka had) that the simplification of style in expressionless faces provided a glimpse of the ideal elegance of the Fujiwara period between the tenth and twelfth century.⁸¹ Further, *fukinuki yatai* was created as a result of the increasing number of stories that took place indoors and required a creative solution to allow viewers access into buildings.⁸² For Minamoto, a key distinction of *onna-e* was the injection of the artist herself into the narrative environment of the pictorial subject. She was no longer a mere bystander.⁸³ *Onna-e* showed both visual scenes and the emotional state of the characters—known as *mono no aware* 物の哀れ, or the sadness of things—via the intimate, small format of the medium rendered through *tsukuri-e*.⁸⁴ All of this, Minamoto argued, reveals that *onna-e* is the essence of *yamato-e*.⁸⁵

Writing in 2009, Kobayashi Manabu focused on the history of *tsukuri-e* as the key to unlocking the stylistic mystery of *yamato-e* via *onna-e* during the Heian period in his article “Heian jidai no ‘yamato-e’” 平安時代の「倭絵」 (Yamato-e of the Heian Period). For Kobayashi, the earliest references to *tsukuri-e* appeared in the Wakana 1 若菜上 and Suma 須磨 chapters of *Genji monogatari*.⁸⁶ In Wakana 1, on the occasion of Genji’s fortieth birthday, a folding screen showing spring and autumn motifs was called a *tsukuri-e* screen. In the Suma chapter, Genji painted pictures to fill idle time during his exile. When his attendants beheld his works, they wished that Chieda 千枝 or Tsunenori could complete them as *tsukuri-e*.⁸⁷ Chieda is lost to history, but Kobayashi discovered that Asukabe no Tsunenori had been responsible for painting and decorating the frontispieces of several sutras for a memorial to the late

71 障子者彩色四季之倭画紹絵所令図之, as quoted in Minamoto, *Yamato-e no kenkyū*, p. 6.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid., p. 12.

74 Ibid., p. 14.

75 Ibid., pp. 16–17.

76 Ibid., p. 16.

77 Ibid., pp. 16–17.

78 Ibid., pp. 20–22.

79 Ibid., pp. 23–24.

80 Ibid., p. 27.

81 Ibid., p. 25.

82 Ibid., pp. 25–26.

83 Ibid., p. 26.

84 Ibid., pp. 26–27.

85 Ibid., p. 29.

86 Kobayashi, “Heian jidai no ‘yamato-e,’” p. 26.

87 Ibid.

mother of Emperor Murakami 村上天皇 (r. 946–967), Fujiwara no Onshi 藤原穩子 (885–954), in Tenryaku 8 (954).⁸⁸ Because Tsunenori held the official title of Minor Officer of the Gate Guards of the Right (Uemon Shōshi 右衛門少志), Kobayashi concluded that he was a painter from the Imperial Painting Bureau (Edokoro 絵所).⁸⁹ According to *Kokon chomonjū*, “Tsunenori was called the [artist with] greater skill, [Kose no] Kinmochi was the [artist with] lesser skill.”⁹⁰ Kobayashi ultimately concluded that Tsunenori likely worked in the Imperial Painting Bureau along with Kinshige, and that they—or painters like them—probably invented the *tsukuri-e* technique in the tenth century.⁹¹

To reconstruct the appearance of *tsukuri-e*, Kobayashi relied on the description of Genji’s painting process in the Suma chapter. He explained that first, the monochromatic ink outlines must be set down. Then, a professional painter such as Tsunenori would add layers of color to complete the work.⁹² In the Wakana 1 chapter, Kobayashi believed that the term *tsukuri-e* referred to the colorful artistic technique used to create the spring and autumn folding screen.⁹³ Analyzing the usage of the term *tsukuri* 作 in textual sources, Kobayashi noted that the term appeared in *Ise monogatari* 伊勢物語 (The Tales of Ise, early tenth century) in the context of women applying makeup, thus reinforcing the link between the layering of colorful makeup on women’s faces and the layering of bright pigments on paintings.⁹⁴ He concluded that, in the narrowest sense, *tsukuri-e* denotes a technique of layering colors to create a work of art, while its broader definition refers to a work of art created through this technique.⁹⁵ The medium for *tsukuri-e* included screens, handscrolls, and album leaves.⁹⁶

Kobayashi found references to *onna-e* produced during the Heian period through literary sources including the late tenth-century diary *Kagerō nikki* 蜻蛉日記 (Gossamer Diary) and the Agemaki 総角 chapter

of *Genji monogatari*.⁹⁷ In *Kagerō nikki*, an *onna-e* work was transported inside someone’s clothing, indicating that it was physically small enough to be carried in this manner. The content of this *onna-e* was described as a vignette from a love story.⁹⁸ Likewise, in the Agemaki chapter, an *onna-e* was among the paintings scattered around the living quarters of Lady Ōgimi 大君; this painting also depicted a scene from a love story.⁹⁹ Encouraged by these two examples, Kobayashi believed that the term *onna-e* indicated a work in a picture scroll or album leaf featuring paintings from tales or *monogatari*.¹⁰⁰ Although the above references do not describe the pictorial style of *onna-e*, Kobayashi cited a passage in the *Murasaki shikibu nikki* 紫式部日記 (Diary of Murasaki Shikibu, early eleventh century) that described a frantic scene of ladies-in-waiting dressing and painting their faces in order to be presentable before a visit by Emperor Ichijō 一条天皇 (r. 986–1011). Murasaki Shikibu 紫式部 (ca. 973–1014) even mused that the vignette before her resembled *onna-e*.¹⁰¹ From this passage, Kobayashi hypothesized that *onna-e* in the early eleventh century referred to beautiful artworks displaying the *tsukuri-e* technique of layering bright, thick colors, and showing Japanese women without individualized features.¹⁰²

After exploring the pictorial styles of *tsukuri-e* and *onna-e* during the Heian period, Kobayashi used the Fujiwara no Yukinari diary entry from 999 to remind the reader that Asukabe no Tsunenori was the painter responsible for Lady Shōshi’s *yamato-e* screen.¹⁰³ Believing that Tsunenori was the painter who likely invented the *tsukuri-e* technique in the mid-tenth century, Kobayashi argued that the *tsukuri-e* painting style became known as *yamato-e* by the end of the tenth century, and was recognized by the aristocratic elites as something unique to Japan.¹⁰⁴

88 Ibid., pp. 26–27.

89 Ibid., p. 27.

90 常則をば大上手、公望をば小上手とぞ世は稱しける, as quoted in Kobayashi, “Heian jidai no ‘yamato-e,’” p. 27.

91 Ibid., p. 27.

92 Ibid., pp. 27–28.

93 Ibid., p. 28.

94 Ibid., pp. 29–30.

95 Ibid., p. 28.

96 Ibid.

97 Ibid., pp. 30–31.

98 Ibid., p. 31.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid.

101 The diary entry is dated to the sixteenth day of the tenth month of Kankō 寛弘 5 (1008). Ibid., p. 32.

102 Ibid., pp. 32–33.

103 Ibid., p. 33.

104 Ibid., pp. 33–34.

▪ A Critique of the Methodology

Minamoto and Kobayashi both dated the development of the pictorial style of *yamato-e* to the tenth century, but their theories on who invented this type of painting diverged. Minamoto attributed the technique to court ladies whereas Kobayashi gave the credit of invention to Asukabe no Tsunenori and the court painters of the Imperial Painting Bureau. Neither scholar, however, offered any direct evidence from the Heian period that definitively connects the colorful technique of *tsukuri-e* or the larger category of *onna-e* to *yamato-e*. Kobayashi's sole link between *tsukuri-e* and *yamato-e* rests on the tenuous argument that Fujiwara no Shōshi's *yamato-e* screen was painted by Asukabe no Tsunenori in the *tsukuri-e* style, but this is not certain. Even if we accept Kobayashi's hypothesis that Tsunenori invented the *tsukuri-e* style, it is plausible to expect that a skillful painter of the Imperial Painting Bureau had more than one artistic style in his arsenal, and he must have painted in another style before he found *tsukuri-e*. Yet we do not know whether Tsunenori painted Shōshi's screen before or after his alleged development of *tsukuri-e*, and thus it remains impossible to determine the precise pictorial style of Shōshi's screen. In summary, the relationship between *onna-e*, *tsukuri-e*, and *yamato-e* remains circumstantial, with little direct evidence that Heian-period writers considered the first two as examples of the third.

As the foregoing reveals, scholars who sought to identify *yamato-e* as works with a pictorial style faced many logistical challenges. Not only did they have to suggest changes in pictorial style during the Heian period, but they also had to indicate *yamato-e* features in surviving works while contending with the widely acknowledged fact that few examples of *yamato-e* survive from the Heian period. Most scholars turned to the *Kokon chomonjū*, which provides circumstantial anecdotes about the Heian-period painters and serves as the primary literary source for these scholars. However, this text was compiled in the mid-thirteenth century, roughly three hundred years after the alleged formation of *yamato-e*. Perhaps the more critical obstacle for this group of scholars as they attempted to trace the pictorial style of *yamato-e* is the lack of supporting evidence that verifies the *yamato-e* status of any surviving works of art from the time of the genre's alleged formation in the Heian period.

The Significance of *Yamato-e* Today

This historiographical examination of *yamato-e* has revealed two primary avenues of inquiry: *yamato-e* as subject matter and *yamato-e* as pictorial style. Yet the methods by which scholars arrived at these conclusions are mutually exclusive. Scholars who emphasized subject matter, such as Akiyama, dealt solely with Heian period textual references to *yamato-e*, which made no mention of pictorial styles. This led them to conclude that it was possible to speak definitively only about *yamato-e* themes depicted on Heian screens and sliding doors but impossible to determine the pictorial style of those works. Pictorial-style scholars such as Shimomise focused on extant artworks that allegedly illustrated formal features native to Japan even though these paintings lacked secure provenance and documentation as examples of *yamato-e* before the modern era. In other words, among many other things, we do not know how far back in history artworks framed today as *yamato-e* were regarded as such—including during the Heian period.

The scholars discussed here laid the foundation for today's dual understandings of *yamato-e*. It was within widely disseminated books targeting a general readership and published throughout the twentieth century, however, that the confounding definition of *yamato-e* was created and refined through a process of streamlining disparate conclusions regarding *yamato-e* into a single historical narrative. Japanese publications that introduce *yamato-e* as works of art that contain Japanese subject matter—and that are painted using a distinct Japanese pictorial style—appear as early as 1949.¹⁰⁵ In sum, *yamato-e* scholars of the early twentieth century argued for a definition of *yamato-e* characterized by either a pictorial style or by subject matter. Akiyama did not agree that a Heian-period *yamato-e* pictorial style is demonstrated in contemporaneous textual sources, while other scholars such as Shimomise and Minamoto attempted to retrieve the lost pictorial style of the Heian period *yamato-e* via extant artworks. Later textbooks created a single definition that included both

105 Fujikake, *Nihon bijutsu zuroku*, p. 24. Fujikake's book is an illustrated compendium of Japanese art. In 1954, this composite definition of *yamato-e* as both subject matter and pictorial style appeared in a reference book for teachers and students of Japanese art. See Mochimaru and Kuno, *Nihon bijutsushi yōsetsu*.

pictorial style and subject matter without regard to the origins, methods, and reasoning behind disparate theories or definitions by the *yamato-e* scholars. This is not surprising given the compressed and generalized nature of textbooks. Let us also recall that the modern preference for the *kana-majiri* form of *yamato-e* (やまと絵) also helped obscure the convoluted history of a phenomenon that is represented by a term with various written forms and studied using opposing methods. All of this is also a bleak reminder of the impossibility of defining the current art historical genre *yamato-e* because it is no longer a faithful reflection of any single source of scholarship. This streamlining of *yamato-e* characterizations and facts also crossed language barriers: the earliest English-language publication on *yamato-e*, namely the 1942 article “The Rise of Yamato-e” by Alexander C. Soper (1904–1993), characterized it as something possessing both Japanese subject matter and pictorial styles—a faithful synopsis of a composite conclusion supported by evidence from both scholarly camps.¹⁰⁶

▪ *Yamato-e* and Japanese Identity

The definition(s) and applications of Heian-period *yamato-e* have been so thoroughly complicated by its own historiography that ultimately it may prove impossible to identify its precise characteristics. It is beyond the scope of this article to trace the evolution of the concept of *yamato-e* throughout the post-Heian periods, but what stands out in the twentieth century is the conviction that *yamato-e* originates in the Heian period and represents the beginning of true Japanese painting, or even Japanese artistic identity. This mode of interpretation hints at the greater ideological forces that shaped conceptualizations of *yamato-e* and drew many Japanese scholars to study it. Ienaga, for example, revered *yamato-e* as a representation of Japan, a vehicle for discovering the fundamental spirit of the national culture. In the introduction of *Jōdai yamato-e zenshi*, he wrote:

Originally, our ancestors fervently sought out foreign cultures, and at times were so focused on absorbing them that some might have suspected

[these ancestors] to have been blind to all other things. Finally, using those [foreign] elements, they created a Japanese culture so unique that it can no longer be called “foreign.” Needless to say, through a process of repetition, this became an important characteristic of Japanese cultural history. Japanese painting may be called the most typical example [of this phenomenon]. Just as laid out in this book, the Japanese began to learn painting techniques from traditions that came from the continent, but at some point, our ancestors completely internalized these foreign skills and finally created the unique painting style called *yamato-e*, which cannot be found anywhere on the continent. Furthermore, the *yamato-e* thus developed is not only a cultural product that should be esteemed throughout the world as a highly valuable art form with an abundance of unique sensibilities, but its line of development is unbroken, and to this day in the Shōwa period [1926–1989], [*yamato-e*] remains the origin of Japanese painting and continues to support the art and life of the modern people. Therefore, we should be doubly grateful. The author hopes that the reader remembers that the author’s strong historical interest in *yamato-e* is based on these reasons; because of them, the author’s *yamato-e* research begins from the perspective of a historian who attempts to thoroughly understand the country’s culture and spirit, [which makes] my perspective different from the existing books and so-called art history books.¹⁰⁷

In the preface to *Kara-e to yamato-e*, Shimomise noted that “*yamato-e* is a term that conveys a deep, familiar resonance for us because *yamato-e* are paintings that possess the clearest artistic representation of our Japanese personality.”¹⁰⁸ In the opening paragraph of *Yamato-e shi kenkyū*, Shimomise shared his motivation for studying *yamato-e*: it is “the most Japanese form [of art]” and “representative of this incomparable venerable nation.”¹⁰⁹ Shimomise also lamented that the “lack of recognition by foreign cultures of our venerable imperial culture’s uniqueness is due to insufficient understanding and perspective.”¹¹⁰ Minamoto similarly

¹⁰⁶ Soper, “The Rise of Yamato-e.”

¹⁰⁷ Ienaga, *Jōdai yamato-e zenshi*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Shimomise, *Kara-e to yamato-e*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁹ Shimomise, *Yamato-e shi kenkyū*, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

characterized *yamato-e* as a “painting style that best expressed the technical prowess and unique spirit of the Japanese people.”¹¹¹ Even in Soper’s English article, he singled out *yamato-e* for discussion as “the purest presentation in art of [Japan’s] national traditions and preferences.”¹¹²

Let us briefly consider the significance of the nationalistic overtones in these interpretations of *yamato-e*. Before 1933, *yamato-e* was not emphasized in Japanese scholarly circles. The term (written as 倭絵) appeared as a chapter heading in the 1850 compilation of artworks known as *Koga bikō* 古画備考 (Considerations of Old Paintings) by Asaoka Okisada 朝岡興禎 (1800–1856), but it was not lauded as a uniquely Japanese form of art.¹¹³ The concept of *yamato-e* was nowhere to be found in the government-sponsored art catalogue compiled for the 1900 Paris World Fair.¹¹⁴ Even Okakura Tenshin, who greatly influenced modern perceptions of Japanese art as culture, did not hold *yamato-e* in high esteem in his writings. He did not mention *yamato-e* at all in his 1903 book *Ideals of the East*, and noted only in passing that “*yamato-e* landscape paintings” developed during the Kamakura period in his book *Nihon bijutsushi* 日本美術史 (Japanese Art History).¹¹⁵

Given the politically charged environment of the 1930s and 1940s, one can easily imagine how *yamato-e*, a term that historically existed in the Heian period, could be refashioned as the heart of a thousand-year-old artistic tradition. One must wonder whether *yamato-e*’s enduring prominence was also aided by the personal attention from this group of influential scholars, most of whom were towering figures in the field of Japanese art history, who taught generations of Japanese art historians and reached an even wider audience through their numerous publications.¹¹⁶

Yamato-e continues to demonstrate cultural longevity in the postwar period as the foundation of Japanese painting in art-historical narratives. Consider, for example, the 2012 publication of a special edition of the prominent art history journal *Bessatsu taiyō* 別冊太陽, entitled “*Yamato-e: Nihon kaiga no genten*” やまと絵: 日本絵画の原点 (*Yamato-e: The Origin of Japanese Paintings*). The primary editor Murashige Yasushi writes:

With the decline and annihilation of China’s Tang dynasty at the beginning of the tenth century, our country lost its dominant model [for political and cultural emulation], and was confronted by the necessity of creating its own culture through its own efforts. This hastened the process of domestication, and the establishment and development of “*yamato-e*” may be understood in this context.

Needless to say, even without the annihilation of the Tang, it could have been foreseen that Japan’s cultural development during this period inevitably would become independent and unique. Leaving the Nara area, which was influenced heavily by the continent, the capital was moved to Kyoto, and with the making of the new capital and the beginning of the Heian period (at the end of the eighth century), there was great momentum to develop a national culture unique to Japan centered on this location. It was the self-awakening of our inherent sensibilities that allowed us to realize a Japanese-style culture by pursuing the ideals that befitted our tastes, instead of the unconditional admiration for, and emulation of, continental culture that had persisted up to that time.

The Japanese script known as *kana* was invented, Japanese *waka* poetry was born, and narrative stories were created based on subjects found in our

111 Minamoto, *Yamato-e no kenkyū*, p. 5.

112 Soper, “The Rise of Yamato-e,” p. 351.

113 Asaoka’s *Koga bikō* was revised and enlarged upon its publication in 1904. See Asaoka, *Zōtei koga bikō*.

114 The only mention of *yamato* in the catalogue had to do with geographical markers for Nara Prefecture. Kojita, *Nashonarizumu to bi*.

115 The term in the 2001 edition of the book was *yamato-e sansui* 大和絵山水. See Okakura, *Nihon bijutsushi*, p. 138. He developed his book from lectures he delivered to students between 1890 and 1893 at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. It first appeared in *Tenshin zenshū* 天心全集 (Complete Works of [Okakura] Tenshin) in 1922. It was published as an independent volume in 2001.

116 Tanaka served as the ninth Director General of the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties (Tōkyō kokuritsu kenkyūjo shochō 東京国立文化財研究所所長) between

1953 and 1965, and was editor in chief of the Japanese art journal *Kokka* 国華 from 1965 to 1977. Akiyama, Shimomise, Minamoto, and Chino were all professors of art history at prominent Japanese universities. Alexander Soper was an influential American scholar who specialized in Asian art and taught in the United States. Japanese historian Ienaga taught at the university level and published widely. His introductory book on *yamato-e*, distributed by Heibonsha, is one of the few English-language sources on the topic. See Ienaga, *Painting in the Yamato Style*.

country. And in the world of art, indigenous paintings derived from familiar and original Japanese stories, landscapes, and customs gained favor over the formerly popular “*kara-e*” [Chinese pictures], which showed Chinese things and customs. These were “*yamato-e*,” and the pictorial style was appropriately soft, delicate, and distinctive. These paintings were primarily done on folding screens and adorned both sides of sliding doors.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

Our understanding of *yamato-e* is clearly more a reflection of modern concerns than of tenth-century sentiments. Early twentieth-century scholars have focused intently on excavating the meaning of *yamato-e* in the Heian period, ignoring the fluctuating meanings of the term throughout its history and seemingly unaware of how contemporary attitudes affected their interpretation of the more distant past.¹¹⁸ As the historiography of Japanese art history comes to be recognized as a critical component of research in contemporary art history—both within and outside Japan—this is changing.¹¹⁹ Scholars in other fields such as Japanese literature have effectively explored the influence of eighteenth-century nativist writings on modern perceptions of ancient Japanese writings.¹²⁰ The time is ripe for a similar approach to be taken in art history concerning *yamato-e*. One potentially fruitful avenue of inquiry is the artistic group Yamato-e Revival (Fukkō Yamato-e 復興大和絵) active in the early nineteenth century, whose conception of *yamato-e* and attitude toward it has yet to be thoroughly explored. I have avoided the concept of *kara-e*, which is often paired with *yamato-e* to explain the development of Japanese art in the tenth century. In addition to the fact that there is even less scholarship on

kara-e than *yamato-e*, the concept of *kara-e* warrants a similar historiographical review as *yamato-e*. Since *kara-e* is most often introduced as a foil for *yamato-e*, embodying everything *yamato-e* is not, this raises another important issue that has yet to be sufficiently interrogated in Japanese art history: the extent of the binary cultural constructs that frame Heian-period society in terms of “Japanese” and “non-Japanese.” What did *yamato* really mean to a Heian-period audience? And what does *yamato*, and by extension *yamato-e*, mean to the artists, writers, and scholars who have invoked these terms since? These are questions that deserve further exploration, which is only possible when we recognize that our contemporary definition of *yamato-e* is a modern invention formulated during extraordinary times and propagated under unusual circumstances. Understanding *yamato-e*—its reception, transmission, and evolving meaning for artists and scholars throughout history—is a large task, and this short study will, I hope, become a small contribution.

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- 117 Murashige, “Yamato-e: Nihon kaiga no genten,” p. 6.
- 118 By the end of the twentieth century, Chino Kaori was aware of the different forms of the term *yamato-e* and the difficulties in defining it. She further attributed the modern confusion of *yamato-e* to the fact that *yamato-e* meant different things in different time periods. She did not, however, offer any citations or pursue this avenue of inquiry. Chino, “Yamato-e no keisei to sono imi,” pp. 488–89.
- 119 Trede, “Terminology and Ideology.”
- 120 Two recent publications that delve into this topic are LaMarre, *Uncovering Heian Japan*, and Yoda, *Gender and National Literature*.

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