Historiography and Iconography in Ogata Kôrin's Iris and Plum Screens

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Introduction

Any explanation of Kôrin's Iris Screens (Kakitsubata-zu)[1] and Red and White Plum Blossom Screens (Kôhakubai-zu)[2] invariably begins with the statement that they are his representative works—his incomparable masterpieces. While, one hand, this phrase is a conventional lead into the writer's own exegesis of the works; it is, in spite of its banality, true to the extent that Kôrin's place in modern cultural memory exists through these screens. In fact, the story of both sets of screens is easier scripted from a modern point of view, because there is no knowledge of their existence or use prior to the previous century. Documentary evidence on the commissions is not extant in either case. Both were most likely purchased in the twentieth century from the collections of the original owners. The Iris screens were purchased from Nishihongan-ji temple in the early part of the Showa period by Nezu Kaichiro whose collection forms the Nezu Museum of Art in Tokyo. The Plum screens were purchased from the descendants of the daimyô of Tsugaru by Okada Mokichi in 1954.[3] The MOA Museum in

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[1] Kakitsubata-zu byôbu, pair of six panel screens, colours on gold foil over paper, Nezu Museum of Art, Tokyo.

[2] Kôhakubai-zu byôbu, pair of two panel screens, colours on gold and silver foil over paper, MOA Museum of Art, Atami.

[3] Nezu purchased the Iris screens before they were designated a national treasure in Showa 26 (1951). Okada started negotiations to obtain the screens in 1953 and they were delivered to him early in 1954.

Atami houses Okada's collection, including these screens.

Today the screens are the celebrities of the Japanese art-loving world. Both have been designated national treasures and are honoured with an exceptional display and viewing practice. Usually during the Golden Week holidays at the end of April and beginning of May, the Iris screens are exhibited for the hoards of visitors, well surpassing the number any other time of year, who inch by with rapt appreciation. The Plum screens are displayed for about one month in late winter when their botanical counterparts are in bloom and attract equally impressive crowds.

The experience of the image does not stop with the paint, for the grounds of both museums include a garden homage. At the Nezu, visitors may stroll around the Yatsu Hashi no Ike (Yatsu Hashi Pond). At the MOA, they may walk through a garden reproduction of the composition with three hundred and sixty plums blooming on two hillocks separated by a meandering path of steps. Thus, both at the Nezu and the MOA the link of the screens to high literary culture is reinforced: At the Nezu by the name of the pond and at the MOA by the number of plum trees planted for the number three hundred and sixty is not arbitrary; it is exactly the number said to have surrounded the shrine of Japan's adopted plum blossom poet Lin Bu.[4]

Similar to the MOA garden construction, the opening segment of

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[4] The Plum Garden was finished in 1951 and Okada had it made using mature trees over a hundred years old, because young ones do not have a strong scent. These were transported from various parts of Japan and it took more than four years to find enough to fill the order for 360. Okada also constructed the Azalea Hill garden after Kôrin's painting of Azaleas. See *The Light from the East: Mokichi Okada*, vol. 2, Atami: MOA Productions, 1986, pp. 68-69.

NHK's 1999 historical drama *Chushingura* used a computer animated version of Kôrin's Plum screens. It formed the background for the programme's credits, which preceded airing of the famous Genroku story in forty-five minute segments once a week. The water rushed backwards into the television screen as if to pull the viewer into the past. However, the past of screens is of modern making and the scripts of the memory are fed by layers of interpretation. Uncovering their messages enables understanding of how the screens have come to assume prominent places in Rimpa and in the history of Japanese art. As such, this article will examine these interpretations in order to consider their relationship to the roles of the screens in the modern period.

Neither Kakitsubata-zu byôbu nor Kôhakubai-zu byôbu are dated. Among Kôrin's oeuvre, only three works include dates.[5] There is little doubt, however, that both were produced in the latter half of Kôrin's life after he received the honorary title *Hokkyô* (Bridge of the Law) in 1701. Yet considering the relatively limited period during which Kôrin worked as an artist, Kakitsubata-zu is a significantly earlier work and Kôhakubai-zu among the artist's final creations. Yamane Yûzô has researched in detail the development of Kôrin's painting style. By comparing the seals and signatures with dated documents from the Konishi family archive and comparing stylistic changes occurring in works with different seals and signatures, Yamane has managed to produce a convincing chronology, which has been broadly accepted.[6] According to Yamane's investigations, the seal and signature on Kakitsubata-zu make it difficult to make clear judgements about its period of production. Both sides of the screen have the 'Hokkyo Kôrin' signature and the 'iryô' seal. From stylistic considerations, Kôrin is likely to have painted these screens around Genroku 10 (1701), shortly after receiving the Hokkyô. The Hokkyô Kôrin signature is, however, similar to that on works produced in the artist's final years. Although reservations have been raised over the seal, Yamane asserts that Kôrin, acting on the advice of his brother Kenzan, used that particular seal for a period just after he received the Hokkyô.[7] The signature, with the seal, appears once on each screen.

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[5] Yamane Yûzo, 'Kôrin no gafû tenkai nitsute,' *Kôrin Kenkyyû*, Tokyo: Chûo Kôron bijutsu shuppansha, Heisei 7 (1995), pp.109–112. First published in *Rinpa ega zenshû*: Kôrin-ha I, Nihon keizai shinbunsha, Showa 54 (1979). These works are the Portrait of Nakamura Kuranosuke (1704), Shiki kusahana-zu maki (1705), and the image of a pine (Matsu tsuru-zu) on a six-sided dish (1710).

From the style and form of the signature, the technique, and composition, Yamane dates Kôhakubai-zu to Shotoku 4 (1714) or 5 (1715), the final year of the artist's life.[8] Both screens include the seal 'Hôshuku',[9] but the signatures differ on each: That on the left reads 'Hokkyô Kôrin,' while that on the right screen reads 'Sei Sei Kôrin'. 'Sei Sei' is a name that Kôrin started to use after his return from Edo.[10] The trips to Edo were made between 1704 and 1709.

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[6] Yamane, op. cit., pp. 109-127.

[7] Yamane op. cit., p. 122.

[8] Yamane, op. cit., p. 136.

[9] The characters are the same, but different seals were used.

[10] Yamane, 'Rakkan to inshô,' *Kôrin Kenkyû* I, p. 62. First appeared in Tanaka Ichimatsu (ed.), *Kôrin*, Nihon Keizai Shinbunsha, Showa 34 (1959).

Pre-War Interpretations

These screens were first published and exhibited in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Neither work appears in any Edo period publications, including Sakai Hoitsu's *Kôrin Hyaku-zu* or Ikeda Koson's *Shinsen Kôrin Hyaku-zu*. It also appears that the compositions were not copied by Edo Rimpa artists, which ironically suggests that these works — now considered Kôrin's greatest — may not have been known to the artists who studied and promoted Kôrin's style.

Kakitsubata-zu first appeared in the journal *Kokka* in 1904 with a colour print of one screen and a monochrome of the other.[11] The publication of Kôhakubai-zu appeared three years later in 1907.[12] The screens were both exhibited for the first time publicly in 1915 for an exhibition to mark the 200th anniversary of Kôrin's death.[13]

These early discussions in *Kokka* of the Iris and Plum screens begin with statements of Kôrin's talent, particularly emphasizing his genius for design. The entry (the author's name is not recorded) about Kakitsubata-zu states that the conception and purpose of Kôrin's work are essentially characterized by a decorative (*sôshokuteki)* quality and design (*zuanteki*) aspects, but the final product is not calculated or over-measured. Indeed Kakitsubata-zu is a work which is highly unified with a decided pattern. Yet it is not monotonous, because Kôrin applied his designs more naturalistically. In conclusion, the writer states that in Kakitsubata-zu, Kôrin benefited from the study of many styles to produce a work that should be considered as Nihonga.[14]

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[11] 'Ogata Kôrin hitsu Kakitsubata-zu,' *Kokka* 165, Meiji 37 (1904), pp. 179–180.

[12] 'Ogata Kôrin hitsu baika-zu byôbu nitsuite,' *Kokka*, no. 201, Meiji 40, 1907, p. 564.

[13] Yamada Naosaburo (ed.), *Kôrin zu ryoku*, Tokyo: Geikadou, Taisho 4 (1915). Both works are illustrated in this publication to commemorate the exhibition.

The *Kokka* article on the Plum screens discusses Kôrin's propensity for unique designs, as displayed in Kôhakubai-zu — a supreme example of a decorative work of art. To support these statements, it is noted that western viewers recognise Kôrin as a world class artist. Only Hokusai among Japanese artists, the writer concedes, is better known. The beauty of the screens derives from change and contrast between the elements in the composition, as well as from the particular use of techniques and materials. Both Kakitsubata-zu and Kôhakubai-zu are described as combining decorative treatment with a tendency towards naturalism.[15]

Aimi Kôu and Fukui Rikichirô started to present research on Kôrin, including the documents concerning the Ogata family which were originally held by the Konishi family. Their exegesis of Kakitsubata-zu and Kôhakubai-zu differ from the earlier writings in *Kokka*. Neither Aimi nor Fukui discusses the 'decorative' aspects of the works. Aimi does, however, assert that Kôhakubai-zu is the most beautiful painting in the world and Fukui in Kôrin Ko, quotes Gonse's remark that Kôrin is 'le plus Japonaise des Japonaise'.[16]

Aimi and Fukui introduced another element to the study of Kôrin, which gains prominence in the writing of scholars working after the Second World War. That is, the artist's relationship to Sôtatsu, mentioned in discussions of Kakitsubata-zu and Kôhakubai-zu. The quality of decorativeness in relation to an interest in nature is not discussed. Fukui only suggests the idea of Kôrin's competition with Sôtatsu through a defensive-sounding denial of the possibility: While Kôrin was influenced by Sôtatsu, he was not an imitator,because ultimately' a genius makes his own environment'.[17]

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[14] 'Ogata Kôrin hitsu Kakitsubata-zu,' *Kokka* 165, pp. 178-179.
[15] 'Ogata Kôrin hitsu baika-zu byôbu nitsute,' *Kokka* 201, p. 569.
[16] Fukui Rikichirô, '*Kôrin* Ko III,' Geibun, 6-8, Taishô 4 (1915), p. 57.

Aimi, however, strongly articulates the idea that Kôrin was in competition with Sôtatsu in his writing on Kôhakubai-zu. He states that Kôrin made the screens in a competitive spirit determined to excel over Sôtatsu.[18] However, later in the passage, he dilutes the statement: He is not certain whether or not Kôrin was in competition with Sôtatsu, but that Kôrin could only go beyond Sôtatsu by using colour and light as he did in these screens. The result, Aimi asserts, is the most beautiful painting in the world. About Kakitsubata-zu, Aimi writes that, while doubting that Kôrin was competing with Sôtatsu, when these screens are compared to the Sôtatsu innen seal Ivy Path screens, Kôrin's work achieves a better contrast between the colours.

These writings, as the first wave of interpretation, introduce aspects of the works that may, in Panofsky's categorization, be termed pre-iconographic, primary, or descriptive. While the judgment of Kôrin's style combines both decorative and naturalistic elements, it may also be seen to occur at an intuitive level that requires specific knowledge in order to make comparisons to the work of Kôrin's predecessors in various traditions. Such knowledge allows them to state authoritatively that Kôrin was an artist who moved beyond the styles he studied to produce works that embody both decorative and naturalistic elements. Both Fukui and Aimi suggest the possibility that Kôrin competed to surpass Sôtatsu.

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[17] Fukui, *Fukui Rikichiurô bijutsu-shironshû,* vol. I , Tokyo: Chûo Kôron Bijutsu shuppansha, p. 141.

[18] Aimi Kôu, *Aimi Kôu shû I*, Nihon sho shi gaku daikei 45 (1), Tokyo: Showa 60 (1985), p. 149.

In these interpretations there is very little discussion of iconography or meaning in the screens. Aimi does, however, state without elaboration that by omitting the bridge Kôrin cuts out the literary aspect of the Ise *Monogatari* and ends up producing a flower painting.[19] Another pre-war statement about Kakitsubata-zu's relationship to the Ise Monogatari was made by Sato Ryo. In comparing Kakitsubata-zu with Yatsuhashi, Sato formed the theory that Kôrin moved from a literary composition to a reduction of the elements, in other words he moved from a work inspired by illustration to a symbol of that work.[20] The final point which both Fukui and Aimi suggest is that Kôrin competed to surpass Sôtatsu. The scholar Masaki Tokuzo observed in Kôhakubai-zu that the depiction of the stream allows the viewer to imagine the beginning of the river at a distance and the end of the river in the foreground, as suggested by the big curve and the spreading out of the form.[21]

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[19] Aimi, p. 153.

[20] Quoted in Yamane, 'Kôrin no gafû tenkai nitsute,' *Kôrin Kenkyyu*, p. 107.

[21] Tokuzô Masaki, *Ogata Kôrin hitsu ume-zu*, Showa 8, 1933.

Trends and Additions in Post-War Scholarship: Composition of Kakitsubata-zu

A great deal has been written about both sets of screens by post-war art historians. This section will look first at the considerable volume of commentary and consider the pre-war strains that continue to be developed. Pre-war scholars, in spite of statements about Kôrin's design genius, did not consider very deeply the nature of this genius or, more particularly, the complex mechanics and interaction between the elements of the compositions. However, it may be seen that more analysis of the core physical aspects of composition has been applied to Kakitsubata-zu than to Kôhakubai-zu.

The most in-depth work on the structure of the composition in Kakitsubata-zu was written by Kosugi and published in 1960.[22] In this article, Kosugi explains that Kôrin seemed to have used the same form as if it were a cut-out pattern or stamp, but absolutely not to allow the viewer to realise it, for every aspect conspires towards this end. The physical qualities of the composition are also a main point in Nishimoto's writing on Kakitsubata-zu.[23]

The use of a stamp and a composition of clusters of flowers on screens covered in gold-leaf are both typical techniques of Sôtatsu School artists who preceded Kôrin. Kôrin's own arrangement of the flower groups on the Fuyuki *kosode*[24] illustrate the technique. Examples of the application of an actual stamp may be seen in the collaborative works of Sôtatsu and Kôetsu of hand scrolls. Kôrin, however, exploited and disguised his use of these Sôtatsu style techniques. For example, in contrast to these works, including the *kosode*, the arrangement of the flower clusters in Kakitsubata-zu forms a linear continuation on each screen with a tuft of leaves acting as a transition between the two sides. The use of linearity would accentuate the repetition of the linear form and draw attention to its stamp-like character, thus making the job of disguising the repetition more difficult. It is as if he has deliberately invented an exercise to test his skill at camouflage.

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[22] Kosugi, 'Kakitsubata byôbu ni mirareru kata no shiyou,' Sansai 138, *Sansaisha*, 1960 and Yamane,' Kôrin geijutsu no tokushitsu to sono sakufû tenaki no ishigi,' p. 186.

[23] Nishimoto Shûto, 'Kakisubata-zu kô,' pp. 361–385.

[24] Fuyuki *kosode*, early eighteenth century, colours on white satin, Tokyo National Museum.

As Kosugi explains, colour produces a large part of the camouflage in Kakitsubata-zu.[25] The contrasting colours and gleaming gold are so beguiling as if to blind the viewer to the simplicity and repetition. While the flower shapes remain the same throughout, the distribution of lighter and darker blue to indicate the back and front of the flower petals varies. Furthermore, the flowers are under-painted with *sumi*, while the leaves are depicted in *tsuketate* (without under-painting).

Motion and depth also work in the operation. In contrast to the round, fixed or static flower shape, the leaves—painted in a single vertical line—convey a feeling of motion, fluidity, and impromptu calligraphic execution. The format of the screens when they are folded also profoundly alters the appearance of the composition, breaking into the centre of many of the 'stamped' clusters and causing them to stand in forward or backward relationships with each other. In its proper folded state, the work gains a third dimension which belies the flatness associated with a stamp.

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[25] Kosugi, 'Kakitsubata byôbu ni mirareru kata no shiyou', 1960.

Kakitsubata-zu also presents a visual disjunction. Although the two sides of the work are clearly linked together by the tuft of leaves which divides at the inner corner of each screen and the uniformity of the iris motif, the screens do not present a unified view. In other words, they are not just physically separated, but also have different internal structures to present different ways of seeing. The band of irises sweeping across the right screen and culminating in the tuft of leaves on the far right panel of the left screen could be read as existing at a distance behind the irises on the left. This way of viewing is, however, an allusion and assumes a uniform way of seeing. In fact, the right screen gives a bird's-eye-view, while the left screen offers a close-range frontal view.

Just as the visual point of view differs for each screen, so too do the details on the flowers.[26] The blue on the flowers on the left is deeper and appears sharper, whereas that on the left seem flatter and thicker. The most curious difference is that only the flowers on the left screen have *kindei*, or gold lines, to indicate the veins on the middle petals. Of course, it is possible that the gold on the right screen could have been rubbed off with time, especially if the right screen were used more than the left. However, the only doubt cast on this hypothesis is that, in fact, more blue and green pigment has peeled off the left screen than off the right. This observation provides evidence that Kôrin may have only applied the gold lines to the left screen. It is also possible that the lines were added by a later artist to just one screen.

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[26] Nishimoto discusses some of these points, pp. 372–373.

Another difference noted between the two screens is that they are dominated by different material aspects. The subject of the right is certainly the blue and green irises. They are placed in the centre of the work and are framed by the gold. Moreover, the flowers are presented in their entirety and do not fall out of the picture space. On the left screen, by contrast, the irises vie with a much wider expanse of gold than is seen on the right and the flowers drop below the lower frame such that most of them are cut off. This contrast, wherein the groups of flowers dominate on the right and the open gold space dominates on the left, may be seen in the Sôtatsu School Poppy screens.[27] It cannot be ascertained whether or not Kôrin actually saw this work, but the Iris screens relate as a mirror image.

Theme and Iconography: Irises

Although the screens are rich in visual detail, despite the apparent simplicity of the motifs, these physical aspects of the composition are rarely the focus of scholarly inquiry. Rather the study of iconography attracts much more attention. Traditional interpretations seeking to find content in the subject matter of the Iris screens centre overwhelmingly on the Ise *Monogatari*, a tenth century compilation of poems loosely bound by a narrative. Many of the episodes in the Ise *Monogatari* involve the amorous adventures of an unnamed ideal poet and courtier who, in the history of Ise interpretation came very early on to be identified as Ariwara Narihira (825-80).[28] Many of the poems were either written by Narihira or came to be attributed to him though association with the text. The episodes are characterised by disappointment and longing. Narihira's disappointment was, in part, politically determined. As pointed out by Helen Craig McCullough in the Introduction to her translation, despite Narihira's perfect demeanour, his career was held back because of the Fujiwara family's monopoly on high positions.[29] As such, Narihira's discontent is a foil for the resplendence of the imperial court, which gives him added poignancy as both writer and subject.

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[27] Kôno Motoaki, *Ogata Kôrin*, Nihon bijutsû kaiga zenshu, vol. 17, Tokyo: Shûeisha, 1976, p. 133 and Nishimoto, pp. 373–374.

For artists in the Sôtatsu style, including Kôrin and his followers, this poignancy carries special resonance, since the theme of the *Ise* was one with other court connected themes, which could only be depicted by non-court associated artists since the time of Sôtatsu and Koetsu who were among the first non-aristocrats to treat these subjects. Sôtatsu and Koetsu were in fact behind the first publication of classic texts, known as the *Saga-bon*. The *Ise Monogatari* was among these printed works and included illustrations. Rimpa's connection with these themes, which has become synonymous with the style, was born out of historical changes in the power and fortune of the court and thrust Sôtatsu, Koetsu and their followers into the position of being able to depict courtly literary themes for a plebeian clientele.

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[28] Richard Bowring, 'The *Ise monogatari*: A Short Cultural History,' *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 52, No. 2, December 1992, p. 419.

[29] Helen Craig McCullough(trans.), The Tales of Ise: *Lyrical Episodes from Tenth-Century Japan*, Stanford University Press, 1968, p. 42. Also see Michele Marra, 'A Lesson to Leaders: *Ise Monogatari* and the Code of Miyabi,' in *The Aesthetics of Discontent*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991, pp. 35–53.

The treatment of *Ise* themes by any artist, including Kôrin, has to acknowledge the heavy history of interpretation behind the literary work and the relationship of the emerging images to this history. Bowring defines this history of interpretation, which includes both visual and written work, as a process of trying to remove the anxiety from the text. He describes the tale as an anxious text because of the transparency of the hero and the relationship between the prose and poem elements. The *man* is transformed into Narihira and the prose into a narrative.[30]

Images before the *Ise Monogatari* was released from the cloistered world of the court were not incidental adjuncts, but responded to the need to reduce the anxiety of the text by offering readable and increasingly standardised images of each event which reached a zenith in the *Saga-bon* where, in Bowring words, Narihira and the Ise became 'visual rather than linguistic events.'[31] That visual readability occurred with the move to a wider audience, coinciding with a period of particular popularity in the 1680s, is noteworthy. About half a century after the publication of the Saga-bon version, the occurrence of the boom indicates that both artists and audience alike had absorbed the material. Kôrin who had established himself as an artist by the turn of the century was working exactly in the wake of this boom; the *Ise* must have been a firm part of his aesthetic disposition on both conscious and unconscious levels.

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[30] Bowring, p. 402.

[31] Bowring, 449 and 447 for discussion of the *Ise* boom.

Kôrin produced many works relating to the *Ise Monogatari*, including several of the Yatsu Hashi episode. In this first section of episode 9, the man with a couple of friends leaves the capital and goes East. After a time, they come upon Mikawa no Kuni, the site of Yatsu Hashi, where they sit down for a meal. Seeing the irises blooming on the water's edge, one travel companion asks 'Narihira' to make an acrostic poem using the letters for Kakitsubata. The hero's poem on the spirit of travel expresses his longing for his longlost love in the capital. So moved are the travellers that they weep causing their dried rice to swell. As this is the extent of the action, depictions of the scene at their most complex can only be comprised of a few main elements: The figures with the rice, the irises, the bridge, and the marshy river. The Yatsu Hashi illustration in the 1608 printed edition of the *Ise Monogatari* is a typical example and contains all these elements, though only four of the eight planks of the bridge and the beginning of the fifth are depicted.

Yamane divided Kôrin's work which includes irises into three categories:[32]

1. Irises as a plant of the four seasons
2. Irises in connection to the *Ise Monogatari*
   A. Illustrations of the narrative, including the figures, the bridge, and the irises
   B. Symbolic representations of the story, including the bridge and

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[32] Yamane 'Ogata Kôrin hitsu Kakitsubata-zu nitsute,' *Kokka,' 1068, Showa 58 (1984), p. 6.*

    the irises
  C. Suggestion of the story through the design of irises with an oblique reference to the bridge, such as a zig-zag composition
3. Irises as an independent subject

Kôrin produced one extant painted version of the scene, which may be listed under type A.[33] Yamane dates this work to Genroku 14 (1701), or just before Kôrin received the Hokkyo.[34] This means that the work would have been produced shortly before Kakitsubata-zu. The figures, not the irises, occupy the central role in the composition.

Yamane's type B works, presenting only the irises and the bridge or a part of the bridge, are more symbolic and less narrative; they include Yatsu Hashi byôbu (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), a round found (Hatakeyama Collection, Tokyo), a round picture of irises and a bridge (Osaka City Museum), and a *tsuribako* (Tokyo National Museum). Type C, as a symbol of Yatsu Hashi, is represented by the Nezu screens.

The iris with its vivid and contrasting colours is a potent image and lends itself to the qualities of symbolism. It is easy to move through this list of works and arrive at Kakitsubata-zu as the ultimate distillation of the scene. The opinion put forth by Sato Ryo stated that Kôrin moved from the 'literary thing' to only the form in a graphic tendency to reduction. In other words, Kôrin started with the whole painted scene (the work in 2A) and then eliminated other elements in various compositions (the works in 2B) until he arrived at Kakitsubata-zu (2C), the ultimate paring down of Yatsu Hashi. This process has, however, been challenged by Yamane himself when he convincingly argued that Kakitsubata-zu preceded Yatsu Hashi.[35] This revelation produced a rupture in interpretation which, on the whole, resulted in the establishment of other logical bases for the connection to the *Ise Monogatari*.

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[33] Yatsu hashi scene, hanging scroll, colours on paper, Tokyo National Museum.

[34] Yamane, 'Kôrin no gafu tenkai nitsuite,' Kôrin Kenkyu I, pp. 119. Although the work includes the 'Hokkyo Kôrin' signature, Yamane believes that it was added at a later date. The two characters for Hokkyô are rather tightly compressed. The style of the work itself also suggests a pre-Hokkyo date.

To strengthen the *Ise* connection, Yamane himself cites a painting of irises in the Osaka City Museum. This piece is thought to have been the painting for *chigaidana* (staggered shelves). Kakitsubata-zu and the *chigaidana* painting were probably done within one year of each other, but Yamane believes that the *chigaidana* very slightly preceded Kakitsubata-zu.[36] The *chigaidana* composition may be considered either a work showing only irises (category 3) or a composition of irises with the suggestion of the bridge made through the actually shelving (category 2C). In this way, with different evidence Yamane reestablished the argument he had made such that Kôrin could have moved from this more concrete reference or presence of the bridge to its absence in Kakitsubata-zu.

Yamane has, moreover, made a case for a reference to the bridge in Kakitsubata-zu itself. He noted that, while the bridge is absent, the clumps of irises divide into eight groups to suggest the eight-planked bridge.[37] The wit behind this conceit lends the observation credibility in a tradition that valued both visual and verbal puns, or *mitate*. Yet the idea is not wholly convincing, because the groups — while they can be counted as eight — allow for other configurations as well.

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[35] Yamane, ‘Kôrin no gafu tenkai nitsute,’ *Kôrin Kenkyû* I, Chûokôron bijutsu shuppan, Heisei 7, p. 105.

[36] Yamane, ‘Ogata Kôrin hitsu Kakitsubata-zu nitsute,’ *Kokka,*’ 1068, Showa 58 (1984), p. 5. (5–24)

Kôno's extended study on the influence of Nô on Kôrin's work allows Kakitsubata-zu to be read as a literary symbol developing from the play *Kakitsubata*. Kôno states that the leap to the use of irises only to symbolise the *Ise Monogatari* was made possible by Kôrin's familiarity with Nô drama and, in particular, this play. Kôno argues that the composition of the screens relates to the *jo*, *ha*, *kyu* (overture, intensification, finale) organisation of a Nô play.[38] Kôno makes the point not to suggest that Kôrin consciously applied these organising principles, but to show that he was so imbued with the ideas of No that the system worked within his subconscious.

The play itself, while based on the episode in the *Ise Monogatari*, is interwoven with passages that adopt the theories and interpretations originating in the old commentaries, as Bowring outlines in his study which traces how Narihira became the Boddhisatva for music and the God of conjugal love.[39] The spirit woman (shite) when she dons the foreign robe mentioned in the acrostic poem along with Narihira's hat, becomes

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[37] Yamane,, 'Kôrin geijutsu no tokushitsu to sono sakufû tenkai no ishigi,' *Kôrin kenkyu* II, p. 192.

[38] Kono, 'Kôrin to Noh,' *Bijutsu shi ronsô*, no. 10, 1994, pp. 41–69. The discussion of the division of the composition into parts corresponding to *jo, ha, kyû*, p. 58.

[39] Bowring, pp. 455–456.

Narihira's lover (Takako), Narihira (as lover, Bodhisattva, and God), and the spirit of the flowers. Thus, in the play Narihira's romance transcends its human restrictions and 'plants and things insentient are led to Buddhahood.' Shimazaki, a No scholar, described the play as 'a drama of visual beauty where a subtly overlapping image is presented against the backdrop of the iris "blooming in beautiful profusion."' Kôrin's screens do present such a 'profusion' in a 'tint … of a deeper purple than ordinary flowers.'[40]

The tint of his sentiment he left behind and (waki)
A part of the distant past Narihira has become, but (Shite)
His momento, the flowers (Waki)
Now bloom here. (Shite)
Ariwara's
Past, don't screen it out, kakitsubata
Past, don't screen it out, kakitsubata (Chorus)[41]

The work impinges on the viewer, just as the words in the play suggest, to keep Narihira's memory alive through the spirit of the iris.

No one seems, however, to have challenged the validity of the statement that a reduction of the theme had to occur in steps that were taken first in paint. In other words, that the Nezu screens were created before the Yatsu Hashi screens in the Metropolitan Museum is not in itself a compelling reason to have thought that the theory of the *Ise* connection needed to be abandoned unless further visual evidence could be found. The very prominence of full narrative versions in the artistic field around Kôrin could have been inspiration enough to reduce the image to iris flowers. While works by Sôtatsu or followers of Sôtatsu on the *Ise Monogatari* are numerous, there are not extant versions of Yatsu Hashi. However, the Inen seal work 'Ivy Pass' [42] offers what may be interpreted as a similar treatment of the 'Utsuyama' section of the episode that follows Yatsu Hashi:

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[40] Shimazaki Chifumi, Noh, volume 3, Tokyo: Hinoki Shoten, p. 75 and p. 82.

[41] Shimazaki, pp. 86–87

> Continuing on, they reached the Province of Suruga. At Mt Utsu the road they thought to enter was quite dark and narrow, grown over with ivy and maples. Their minds were wandering aimlessly in such uneasy surroundings when they met a travelling ascetic priest.[43]

These two sections of episode 9, which with the concluding Fuji section, have more illustrations than any other chapter, can both be symbolised by a plant without any figures. However, any ambiguity over the symbolism in Ivy Path is removed by the calligraphy on the screen that refers to the narrative.

Challenge to a literary meaning in Kakitsubata-zu

Kakitsubata-zu is almost unanimously given a culturally bound iconographic reading connecting the screens to the *Ise Monogatari* either directly or through the Nô play. One challenge to this interpretation has been a move in the opposite direction, that is towards a non-literary reading, rejecting the text all together. Nishimoto has put forward a fully developed and radically different interpretation which states that in the minds of Kôrin's contemporaries, Kakitsubata did not have to symbolise the Yatsu Hashi episode from the *Ise Monogatari*. Indeed, according to Nishimoto, the irises signify nothing and are meant to be quite simply a design of irises. She maintains that to read them as *Ise*-inspired requires excessive effort. On a general level, she dismisses the Ise connection because there is no descriptive space to permit the introduction of the viewer's emotion, which would be essential for narrative inspired works.[44] Her study, in essence, advocates the study of the screens in a pre-iconographic or primary sense. In other words, Nishimoto would alter Yamane's list to include more works in category 3, depictions of the iris as an independent subject.

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[42] Sôtatsu (Inen seal), Utsu no Hosomichi-zu, early 17th century, pair of six panel screens, colours on gold foil over paper, Manno Museum of Art, Osaka.

[43] H. Jay Harris (trans.), *The Tales of Ise*, Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1972, pp. 46–47.

Nishimoto argues that the iris as a design theory is valid for two main reasons. First, even in literary history, the iris was independent of the story. In the Manyoshu, which predates the *Ise Monogatari*, irises appeared as a summer flower and were used as a pillow word for the beauty of the flower. This image was translated into crafts designs in makie by the Momoyama period. The appearance later of the *Ise Monogatari* only gave the iris new importance as a motif, but did not eclipse the flower's earlier function.

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[44] Nishimoto, p. 364.

Second, the dual life of the iris as literary symbol and as a simple seasonal marker continued through the Edo period. *Kosode* hinagata, books of designs printed on the shape of a *kosode* garment, are an important resource for the study of motifs which were popular in the Edo period. Indeed these publications are virtual catalogues of designs and one can identify literary themes, as well as designs of flowers, including irises, but also chrysanthemums, plums and cherry blossoms. According to Nishimoto's investigations of these sources, only when the irises are presented with a bridge is the design labelled 'Yatsu Hashi'. In cases where an actual bridge is not depicted, then the characters for 'Yatsu Hashi' appear and/or the zig-zag shape of the planks is recreated with other motifs, such as bamboo or fans.[45] Thus, in hinagata, Nishimoto argues that designs of iris flowers did not simply equal a reference to Yatsu Hashi.
Kôrin's own oeuvre, as well as in *kosode* designs with which Kôrin had an intimate familiarity, provides its own evidence. Works by Kôrin, which may be taken to have no explicit literary implications include a sketch of irises[46] and works in the genre of four seasons depictions, such as summer grasses screen[47] and the four seasons emaki-e[48] — all are works which use the iris with other flowers as a seasonal marker, as in Yamane's category 1.

Although Nishimoto does not make this point, extant works depicting irises by Sôtatsu or Sôtatsu School artists do not include any which can be conclusively designated as Yatsu Hashi, but a few which can with certitude be defined otherwise. A narrative rendition is notably absent from the *shikishi* paintings of the *Ise Monogatari*, though it seems likely that one must have been produced, whether or not it existed in Kôrin's time. Moreover, there is a painting of a duck with irises by Sôtatsu.[49] The presence of the duck guarantees that the work has no connection to the *Ise Monogatari*. The Konishi archival materials include a very similar duck.[50] Kôrin's duck is so similar to the earlier work that it is difficult to dismiss the idea that Kôrin saw and copied it. Though the irises are not present in Kôrin's picture, he certainly would have registered them. Irises also appear on one of the fans in the Sôtatsu school work Grasses and Flowers screen of mounted fans.[51]

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[45] Nishimoto, pp. 366–367.

[46] Sketch of irises, private collection.

[47] Summer grasses screens, pair of two panel screens, colours on gold foil over paper, Nezu Museum..

[48] Flowers and Grasses hand scroll, 1705, colours on paper, private collection.

Another compelling piece ― attributed to Sôtatsu ― is 'Kakitsubata kanze sui zu byôbu'. The painting of irises is attributed to Sôtatsu and the waves, which were originally on the back, to Kôrin.[52] The arrangement of the two clusters appears identically in the Nezu screens and the cluster on the right, as in the right screen, depicts the full length of the flowers; while the cluster on the left, as in the left screen, cuts some of the stems at the base. Without being able to examine the original, it is impossible to judge, but it is difficult to believe that one of the works did not derive from the other. Whether or not the work is by Sôtatsu does not change the significance of the pairing of waves — not a bridge — for the back of the screen.

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[49] Sôtatsu, duck with irises, hanging scroll, *sumi* on paper, private collection.

[50] Duck, Konishi archives.

[51] Sôtatsu, fans mounted on a screen, colour and gold, private collection.

[52] The portion of the work attributed to Sôtatsu is no longer extant. On the lower right corner of the iris screen, there was an evaluation by Ishida Yutei (1756-1815) which certified that the work was painted by Sôtatsu. Yutei was the son of the painter Ishida Yutei (1721-1786) whose works are in Daigo-ji's Sambo-in, from which fact is deemed conceivable that he did have some familiarity with Sôtatsu. Since Yutei, the son, was a contemporary of Hoitsu and lived during a period when interest in arts of Sôtatsu and Kôrin peaked, one also has to have some suspicion. The work could have been done to assert Sôtatsu-Kôrin lineage. Yet it does not appear in Hoitsu's *Kôrin hyaku-zu*. The portion of the work attributed to Kôrin is in the Idemitsu Museum, Tokyo.

A consideration of other evidence also leads Nishimoto away from iconographic meaning to conclude that the work suggests Kôrin had more interest in developing a motif into a design. For instance, she cites a Sôtatsu work which provides as compelling a piece of support for her theory as the Ivy Path[53] Inen seal work offers the *Ise Monogatari* theory. The Sôtatsu school Poppy screens[54] have never been considered to embody a narrative connection. The two works do share one unique pointin common in that they both present the flowers from a different point of view on each screen and one screen presents the flowers with stems in their entirety, while the other cuts the stems out of the picture space. Kôrin's arrangement is just the reverse of that of Sôtatsu. However, because of the accruement of meaning associated with the iris, Kôrin's work — unlike that of Sôtatsu — could not be immune from the application of iconographic meaning. Where the Sôtatsu style work is accepted as a depiction of flowers presented from two different points of view, Kakitsubata-zu is not permitted such a primary reading. Nishimoto[55] also believes that the idea for the iris composition developed from the composition in Akikusa zu byôbu which Yamane dates to just before Kakitsubata-zu.[56] What Kôrin either failed to realise in the earlier work or, after completion, saw as a starting point, he applied in the second. The repeating design and paper cut out pattern hint at his intention. This quality of repeating pattern is not evident in the later Yatsu Hashi work in the Metropolitan Museum, New York.

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[53] Sôtatsu, Utsu no hosomichi-zu, early 17th century, pair of six panel screens, colours on gold foil over paper, Manno Museum of Art, Osaka.

[54] Inen seal, Poppy screens, eight panel screen, colour on gold leafed paper, private collection.

These pieces of evidence should at least invite reconsideration of unquestioning acceptance of Kôrin's Kakitsubata-zu as a reference to *Ise Monogatari* or even the Nô play *Kakitsubata*. In the literary tradition as well as the pictorial tradition — as shown in printed and popular *hinagata-bon*, as well as in paintings and objects — the iris maintained a dual life as a floral seasonal marker and as a component in the sign of Yatsu Hashi. However, Nishimoto's rational challenge and rejection of the idea that the irises are a symbol at all has not really weakened the force of the screens' literary connection in scholarly endeavour.

Composition and Autobiography: Plum Screens

The iris screens have been shown to present on each screen a different mode of vision. Each screen may in fact stand on its own as a coherent whole. In Kôrin's much later Red and White Plum Blossom screens, he has produced a pair of screens which must not only be viewed together but in their properly folded manner. Otherwise, the composition fails to make sense. It is from this observation that it may be said the Kôrin intended to express three-dimensionality. The two points where the branches overlap the stream also have to be considered for the roles they may play in this goal. The overlap of the white plum tree branch falls at a central point in the stream and acts as a point of reference informing the viewer's perception. It suggests that the tree is standing vertically upright with one branch dipping down into the horizontally positioned stream. Masaki, writing in some of the earliest modern discussion of the screens, observed that the depiction of the stream allows the viewer to imagine the beginning of a river at a distance and the end, as suggested by the big curve and the spreading in the foreground.[57] This method is, of course, a common way of expressing the third dimension in a two dimensional space.

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[55] Nishimoto, p. 370.

[56] Yamane, 'Kôrin no gafû tenkai nitsuite,' *Kôrin Kenkyû* I, p. 118. Akikusa-zu byôbû, pair of six fold screens, colours on gold leafed paper.

The red plum tree branch overlaps at the top most narrow part of the stream. Barely within the picture space, the presence of this overlap may easily be missed. In contrast to the overlap of the white branch, which perfectly conforms to the reality of perception it suggests, that of the red plum branch is more complex. The stream would flow logically into the distance, as Masaki describes, between the two trees locked in the foreground were it not for that single overlap. Is it possible, according to the laws of perception, for a branch on a tree in the foreground to appear to touch a distant point on the stream? Or does this overlap act as a rupture in logic that forces the attentive viewer to accept that the position of the stream in the viewer's field of vision changes as easily as its malleable shape?

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[57] Masaki Tokuzô, *Ogata Kôrin hitsu ume-zu*, Showa 8, 1933, pp. 133-148.

Other than the early work of Masaki, Hayashi is the only scholar to focus his interpretation on the vision presented in these screens.[58] He suggests that the stream may be seen to express the idea of distance in relation to height, because the stream is flat and denies depth. In other words, the stream may be perceived in a manner not unlike a waterfall whose vertical flow is in essence flat or two-dimensional even in nature. Yet from the depiction of the ripples on the water, the stream also offers a bird's-eye-view, for only from above could a viewer see flat ripples on the surface of the water. The collisions and movement in various directions give the water a ponderous thick quality, which could also suggest a shallow stream. In short, where the Iris screens present two separate but coherent ways of seeing one subject, the plum screens offer in a single picture space various fragments or slices of vision.

Iconography in the Plum Screens

Most writing on Kôhakubai-zu does not, however, focus on the vision of the painting. It may be seen to move in the opposite direction to that of Kakitsubata-zu; the discussion of pre-iconographic or primary features of the composition is developed to make specific statements about the artist's persona, while the grounds for iconographic interpretation are less developed but more varied.

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[58] Hayashi Susumu, 'Haru no Raigo — konpûta gazô shori niyoru Kôrin hitsu Kôhakubai-zu byôbu no shinkaishaku,' *Yamato Bunka*, no 80, September 1988, pp. 42.

The most influential point about the composition of the Red and White Plum Blossom screens, as articulated by Yamane, centres on its two panel screen format and builds on Aimi and Fukui's tentative remarks about Kôrin's artistic relationship to Sôtatsu. Kôrin, Yamane states, was conscious of Sôtatsu's Gods of Wind and Thunder and produced a copy of the earlier artist's work As such, he would have had a very intimate internalized understanding of the composition. The concept of the composition had a profound influence on Kôrin's conception of the Plum screens and encouraged him to seek original treatment of the two-panel screen format. Indeed, Sôtatsu's Gods and Kôrin's Plums share not only the same format, but also a similar organization in that both comprise two related but not identical elements ― gods of a different function and plums of a different hue ― posed at extreme ends of each screen. That Kôrin was intrigued by the format is further indicated by other extant works in the same format, namely T'ai Kung-wang fishing,[59] Waves,[60] and Pea Fowl.[61]

Yamane goes so far in this reading of Kôhakubai-zu to state that the screens are not merely influenced by Sôtatsu's Gods, but Kôrin's penultimate response to them.[62] That is to say, the plum trees in Kôrin's composition may be viewed as the counterparts of Sôtatsu's Gods, or

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[59] T'ai Kung-wang fishing, two panel screens, colour on paper, Kyoto National Museum.

[60] Waves, two panel screen, colour on paper, Kyoto National Museum.

[61] Pea fowl, two panel screen, colour on gold foil over paper, private collection. Yamane, 'Kôrin geijutsu no tokushitsu to sono sakufû tenkai no ishigi,' *Kôrin kenkyu* II, Tokyo: Chuo Koron bijutsu shuppansha, Heisei 9 (1997), pp. 223-224. Originally appeared in *Kokka*, 1104, Showa 62 (1987).

[62] Yamane, *Sôtatsu to Kôrin*, p. 219.

Kôrin's allusive variation emerging from the act of copying Sôtatsu's masterpiece. Yamane considers this idea for its relevance to the composition of the Plum screens, not for the implications it makes about an 'anxiety of influence' on Kôrin's part.

Yamane states that Kôrin was transferring the composition and intended to show two plum trees separated by an expanse of gold. The difference, however, between the Sôtatsu's work and Kôrin's plums—aside from the motifs themselves—is that where Sôtatsu left open gold space, Kôrin could not control the space or found it unsatisfactory. Consequently, he inserted a 'strange water shape'.[63] Thus, where Sôtatsu's Gods are separated by a bright heavenly space, Kôrin produced a Cimmerian form whose significance, Yamane contends, extends beyond the physical aspect of the composition to indicate the artist's emotional state.

In this regard, Yamane has described the composition of Kôhakubai-zu as a study in oppositions on both physical and psychological levels. The power of the work is conveyed by the contrasts between the motifs: red and white blossoms; one tree dominated by its arching and retreating trunk, and the other by a vigorously advancing branch; one trunk split at its base with a sense of being hollowed out and the other solid and heavy like a rock; the trees in a fixed certain space next to the amorphous and expanding stream. The composition includes bright gold and tarnished silver, powerful tree trunks and delicate blossoms, the angular straight lines on the branches and the smooth curved lines of the water. As recorded in the

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[63] Yamane, *Sôtatsu to Kôrin*, p. 219.

1907 *Kokka* article, Yamane too notes that, in spite of these almost violent oppositions, the composition is perfectly balanced. The rearrangement of even one small element, such as a branch, would disrupt or destroy the entire work.[64]

This unification of opposites acts as a metaphor for the conflicts that exist in and define one man and artist, Kôrin. In other words, Yamane correlates the list of physical aspects of the painting to contrasting qualities in Kôrin himself. Correlations between the physical aspects of the composition and Kôrin's personal qualities include: glory and decay, boldness and prudence, knowledge and feeling, inflexibility and pliancy, purity and impurity.[65]

The dark stream, at the centre of the work, is the locus of these emotional qualities. It indicates, in particular, the artist's deepest inner thoughts about the troubled period he had spent in Edo, intermittently between 1704 and 1709. The stream and the general quality of contrast further suggest the tensions in Kôrin's artistic relationship with Sôtatsu. In comparison to Sôtatsu's Gods of Wind and Thunder, the Red and White Plum screens exert an eerie pressure, which makes the viewer aware of the distance Kôrin travelled as an artist to reach this peak in his creation. Thus, though Yamane never makes such a simple statement, Kôrin's treatment of the elements in the Plum screens expresses or implies his desire to surpass Sôtatsu in making a masterpiece. As such, they are the outcome of a competition initiated by Kôrin to surpass his predecessor. Yamane also suggests that the work may reflect Kôrin's complex feelings about his patron and friend Nakamura Kuranosuke. Kôhakubai-zu was produced around the time that Kuranosuke was punished by the Bakufu for alleged involvement in a treasury scandal.[66]

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[64] Yamane, *Sôtatsu to Kôrin*, p. 108.

[65] Yamane, *Sôtatsu to Kôrin*, p. 8.

The writing of other scholars on the Plum screens is almost unanimously in agreement with these ideas expressed by Yamane. Kono concurs in a statement that *Kôhakubai-zu* is a transmigration of Sôtatsu's work and that 'the opposing elements in the composition are in violent rivalry, but the composition has a very strict solemn uniformity which reaches perfection of plasticity and decorativeness.' He does extend his analysis of these oppositions beyond the expressions in the composition itself, moving outside Kôrin's emotional state in further noting that the red and white plum trees are the product of realism and the water is the culmination of formalized stylisation. The red plum tree inherits the tradition of Yamato-e, while the white plum tree is informed by the long history of T'ang style painting.[67]

Although David Pollack works in the field of Japanese literature not art history, it is interesting that he too assigns a similar role to the elements: the trees as nativized China and the stream as Japan. He writes in the *Fracture of Meaning* that around 1700 'Chinese and Japanese concerns — which is to say the antithetical pressures of external form and internal passion — had arrived at a balance point.'[68] He takes Kôrin's screens as a :

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[66] When Kôrin was in Edo and Kôhakubai-zu being produced around the time of Kuranosuke's punishment for the alleged involvement in a reminting scandal for which he was expelled and his property was confiscated in Shôtoku 4 (1714), see Yamane, 'Zoku Kôrin to Nakamura Kuranosuke — Kôrin no kôhansei, Hoei Shôtoku nenkan o chûshin ni,' *Kokka*, 1167, Heisei 5 (1993), pp. 19–42.

[67] Kôno Motoaki, *Ogata Kôrin*, p. 133.

> visual analogue of the structure of Genroku aesthetics … with its absolutely native central motif of a meandering stream in purely abstracted swirls, framed by two very assimilated plum trees painted in a decorative Chinese style adapted from Kano-school stylization.[69]

The idea that the dark elements in Kôrin's work are expressions of the artist's brooding side appears frequently in the writing of Mizuo. He acknowledges a competitive element with regard to Sôtatsu: Kôrin had 'Sôtatsu in mind and ever bent on outdoing him, achieved all this with his work.'[70] However, he applies another strand to this reading, stating that K ôrin had a 'certain feeling of repugnance toward things, a cynicism and vein snobbery bordering on contempt.'[71] 'Their strength and straight-forward treatment, are in some way a transference of sublimation of the deeply personal protest that is so much a part of Kôrin.'[72]

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[68] David Pollack, *The Fracture of Meaning*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 225.

[69] Pollack, p. 213. Pollack does not mention the association of white plum blossoms with China and red with Japan, or Yamato painting.

[70] Mizuno Hiroshi, *Edo Painting*: *Sôtatsu to Kôrin*, vol. 18, The Heibonsha Survey of Japanese Art, trns. By John M. Shields, New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill/Heibonsha, 1972, p. 108. Originally published in Japanese as *Sôtatsu to Kôrin*, Nihon no bijutsu 18, Tokyo: Heibansha, Showa 40 (1959).

[71] Mizuo, p. 109.

[72] Mizuo, ibid., p. 155.

Kobayashi Taichiro also asserts that the oppositions in the composition express rivalry and that the main elements function as visual analogues.[73] Kobayashi, however, rather than stressing the relationship with Sôtatsu focuses on Kuranosuke. Documents in the Konishi archives make clear that Kuransouke was an important friend and patron to Kôrin. From the account in Kanazawa Tokyo's Okina-gusa (with a preface dated 1776) comes the well-known story about the costume contest at Higashiyama, in which Kôrin designed a costume for Kuranosuke's wife.[74] Kôrin's will, dated 1713, records that his own son was adopted through Kuranosuke's auspices into the Konishi family. Konishi Kikokuro, like Kuranosuke, was an official in the Ginza. Kuranosuke's daughter was also betrothed to Junichiro. In July 1702, Kôrin and Kuranosuke early agreed on her future, since Kôrin reared her until she was five years old. Yamane asserts that this decision reflects Kôrin's desire for a closer connection to Kuranosuke and Kuranosuke's intent to support Kôrin on the pretext of providing expenses to foster his daughter.[75] Kuranosuke is also credited with introducing Kôrin to important potential patrons in Edo, namely the Tsugaru daimyo family who commissioned the scroll of flowers and the Plum screens, the Sakai family whose descendant Hoitsu would act as Kôrin's first full-scale promoter, and the wealthy merchant Fuyuki family who commissioned the Kosode, the only extant Kosode whose production can be directly linked to Kôrin.

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[73] Kobayashi, pp. 78–79.

[74] Mizuo, pp. 111-112.

[75] Yamane, 'Zoku Kôrin to Nakamura Kuranosuke — Kôrin no kôhansei, Hôei Shôtoku nenkan o chûshin ni,' *Kokka*, 1167, Heisei 5 (1993), pp. 41–42.

Not unreasonably, Kobayashi — like Yamane — quite logically concludes from this information that Kôrin's connection with Kuranosuke was not a superficial one, but exerted a profound influence on Kôrin's life and art. Indeed, according to Kobayashi, most of Kôrin's output is an expression of his feeling for Kuranosuke. Kôrin painted Kuranosuke's portrait with a gentle loving hand and includes, for a connection to Kôhakubai-zu, a fan with an image of a plum branch.[76]

The composition of the Plum screens may, according to Kobayashi, be understood as a sexual *mitate* forming the character *noboru* (to tease). The radical components of the character are engaged in a menage à trois with the three elements comprising the composition symbolizing actual persons: the White Plum tree is Kôrin, the Red is Kuranosuke, and the form separating them is the mistress San who was the mother of Junichiro. In the branches and curves of the stream, Kobayashi identifies all the essential body parts of the three participants and describes the actions being performed. Kuranosuke, as the red plum, is positioned at the woman's posterior whereas Kôrin, in the guise of a vigorous white plum tree, dominates her at the front. Kuranosuke, the red plum, is in his manifestations the feebler. As such, Kobayashi's interpretation embodies the idea of rivalry between the two men over a woman, but also implies a relationship between Kôrin and Kuranosuke.[77]

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[76] Plum and bamboo screens, pair of two panel screens, gold leaf and colour over paper, Tokyo National Museum.

[77] Kobayashi Taichirô, *Kôrin to Kenzan*, Kobayashi Taichirô chosakushû 6, Nihon geijutsu ronhen Ⅱ, Tankôsha, 1974, pp. 78–80.

Kobayashi also interprets the Bamboo and Plum screens' composition as representing exactly the same tripartite relationship.[78] In this case, there are two bamboo trees (again Kôrin appears as the thick tree and Kuranosuke as the thin). As in Kôhakubai-zu, San again stands between the two. She is depicted in the guise of a plum tree who is, in this composition, not a passive recipient of strokes and jabs from the branches, but the active player. Again, the composition is thought to depict the character *noboru*.[79]

Behind the Words of Interpretation

It has to be said that much of the writing on the composition of the Red and White Plum screens is less oriented to explain the visual effects the work achieves or to analyse these effects in relation to potential iconographical meanings than to treat them as an autobiographical document with real players in costume disguises. With Kobayashi being only the most extreme, the passions detected in Kôrin's life somehow tint the ink of scholars. This situation contrasts remarkably to the case of the Iris screens with tamer more measured prose rising at most to liken the vivid colour scheme to Kôrin's quintessential Genroku character. But such statements are never more than a sentence or two long. Even Kobayashi confines himself to one passage in which he contrasts the simplicity of Kenzan's small painting of Yatsu Hashi painting[80] to Kôrin's

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[78] Kobayashi, p. 81.
[79] Kobayashi, p. 81.
[80] Kenzan, Yatsu hashi, hanging scroll, ink and colours on paper, private collection.

Kakitsubata-zu through different musical qualities evident in each work. He imagines from Kenzan's work a modest outing to view irises with one male servant. The bass may be heard in the eight planked bridge drawn in *sumi*, the soprano voice rings in the purple and green of the irises, and the alto is heard from the fun detail of the calligraphy. Kôrin's work, on the other hand, suggests an outing of one master accompanied by a myriad of women who parade before him, keeping time to the tune of his heart.[81]

It may be seen that Yamane's description and interpretation of the screens has become an *idêe reçu*, in that it has not so much been discussed as accepted as a departure point for further study of concrete influences and sources of meaning.[82] It is not that these ideas are not provocative, but it is regrettable that few have elaborated on them, particularly those concerning Kôrin's relationship to Sôtatsu, or suggested a theoretical structure in support.

In fact, contradictions do exist in this description of the composition. On one hand, it is so well calculated that the rearrangement of just one small element would disrupt the entire balance of the work.[83] Yet, Yamane states that the inclusion of the river was not the original intention, but something which happened because Kôrin could not master the technique of Sôtatsu. How can this be true if Kôrin really failed to realise his intention? Between these emotional passages about Kôrin's dark mood, Yamane acknowledges that it was not just the subconscious that willed this dark form, but that the conscious of the artist created it because he liked it and that this water is an important aspect of the composition.[84]

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[81] Kobayashi, pp. 55–56.
[82] Kono, *Ogata Kôrin*, pp. 130–132.
[83] Yamane, ibid., p. 108.

New Layers of Meaning for the Plum Screens

Hayashi is the only scholar to offer a challenge to this idea by arguing that the stream had to be a part of the original conception. In analyzing the painting using a computer, he established a convincing order in which the elements of the composition were painted.[85] Parts of the water had to have been painted first, then the white and red plum trees. Even with the naked eye, it would seem that at least certain branches of the plum trees must have been painted after the water, because they overlap the water. Hayashi also suggests that each screen may have been painted separately: the water on the left, then the white plum tree; followed by the water on the right and the red plum tree. He notes that the two halves of the screen do not actually match. The whirls of water on the left are smaller than those on the right and the edges do not match. Furthermore, the method of applying the silver differs slightly on each screen. From these points, Hayashi concludes that the water was painted separately and not to be united.[86] The crucial point is that it would appear from the physical evidence that the 'strange water form' was not an afterthought, but a part of the original conception. Kôrin may have been influenced by Sôtatsu's

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[84] Yamane, ibid., p. 219.

[85] Hayashi Susumu, 'Haru no Raigô — konpûta gazô shori niyoru Kôrin hitsu *Kôhakubai-zu byôbu* no shinkaishaku,' *Yamato Bunka*, no 80, September 1988, p. 41.

[86] Hayashi, p. 42.

Gods of Wind of Thunder in a general sense, but his Red and White Plum Blossom screens are not, according to Hayashi, a transformation of Sôtatsu's composition.

A second contradiction concerns the marginalisation of Kobayashi. It is certainly true that his analyses can always be criticised justifiably on scholastic grounds. Unfortunately, he failed to corroborate his graphic descriptions with sufficient circumstantial and iconographical evidence. While this criticism alone could sufficiently account for the fact that Kobayashi has, at best, been ignored, it is not an entirely fair attack since the other interpretations of the screens as representing Kôrin's dark feelings after being in Edo, as a visual analogue for Sôtatsu's Gods, as metaphors for Japan's absorption of and ease with things Chinese may also be criticised on just the same grounds used to attack Kobayashi. Subjective judgement with weak substantiation, the assignment of roles and the belief that the painting makes direct statements about Kôrin's psychological state are common points in many of these interpretations. While the lack of restraint in describing the perceived sexual content obviously gives a less than scholastic cast to Kobayashi's writing, it does not excuse the fact that other equally weak — if less outrageous — arguments are hardly challenged.

This problem highlights the point that Kobayashi is not just criticized for sexual reading of the Red and White Plum Blossom screens. Yamane in the first half of his article on Kôrin and Kuranosuke belittles Kobayashi's belief that Kuranosuke exerted the deepest influence on the life and art of Kôrin and as such the artist's major works convey this feeling.[87] Yet in the sequel article, Yamane concludes that the Plum screens may reflect the artist's inner sentiments about his long-standing friendship with Kuranosuke.[88] Thus, both Yamane and Kobayashi come to exactly the same conclusion, except that for Yamane the relationship between the artist and his patron is termed 'friendship' and for Kuranosuke there is an explicit sexual aspect. The documentary materials contained in the Konishi archives only record legal acts. Thus further ideas about the exact nature of their relationship seem destined to remain a matter for conjecture. Whether friends or lovers, Kobayashi and Yamane both see the Red and White Plum Blossom screens as an expression of a relationship.

Many of the compositional analyses would give readers a distorted view of the artist. They tend to ignore the influence of a history informing Kôrin's aesthetic disposition, as well as the reality that the screens were probably commissioned. In short, even if the subconscious is at work in the painting, the idea that they are fundamentally autobiographical is difficult to accept.

Precedents for the Theme

While the grounds for iconographic interpretation are less developed, there is a clear tradition for the choice of composition that can support concrete or generalized icongraphic meanings. Though it is not possible to ascertain exactly which works Kôrin may have seen, precedents for the combination of plum trees (sometimes both red and white blossoms) with a stream are numerous enough to assert that the theme was not unusual, but in fact treated by artists of most schools and affiliations. It is the theme of many Kano school works, with which Kôrin would certainly have had a familiarity, as well as on make-e boxes. Examples include screens[89] by Kao Koi (c. 1569-1636) and another pair[90] in Koson-ji dating to the first part of the Edo period. The handscroll[91] recording the wall paintings for Edo castle also includes the theme for the middle section of the second room in Nishinomaru Palace. A make-e box[92] from the sixteenth century, also presents the theme. Another late work[93] by Kôrin shows a plum branch against the indication of a moon. This kind of composition is frequently seen in Chinese literati style paintings. In the painting, Kôrin's moon appears out of negative space. In terms of iconography, the plum as a flower of night under the dim light of the moon, often with a stream, appears to be the most common presentation.

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[87] Yamane, 'Kôrin to Nakamura Kuranosuke — Kôrin hitsu Nakamura Kuranosuke-zô wo chushin ni,' *Kokka* , 1023, Showa 54 (1979), p. 9.

[88] Yamane, 'Zoku, Kôrin to Nakamura Kuranosuke — Kôrin no kôhansei, Hôei Shôtoku nenkan wo chûshin ni,' *Kokka*, 1167, Heisei 5 (1993), pp. 39–40.

Although in Kôrin's screens the moon has no physical representation, its presence is indicated by the silver and the dark quality of the *sumi*. Itakura, in an article about depictions of night or darkness, states that the use of silver and indigo was a convention first appearing in T'ang and Song

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[89] Kanô Kôi, bird and flower screens, pair of six panel screens, gold leaf and colour on paper, Honolulu Museum of Art.

[90] Kôhakubai-zu, early Edo period, pair of six panel screens, Kôson-ji.

[91] Kanô Shôsen, painting for Second Room, Office, middle section, Nishinomaru Palace, Tokugawa Museum of Art.

[92] Plum and moon image on maki-e box, 15th/16th century, Tokyo National Museum.

[93] Moon and plum painting,sumi on paper, private collection.

Dynasty painting.[94] The use of silver to suggest night was the technique most favoured by Yamato-e artists. Itakura notes that the media to indicate the darkness of evening differed according to whether the work was polychrome or monochrome; silver and blue were media applied to polychrome paintings, while in monochrome works only *sumi* could be used, but it was applied in tonal gradations to suggest the effect of darkness. Tamamushi also studied the association of silver and darkness with particular emphasis on the emotional connotations of night and its expression.[95] Kôrin employed both silver and *sumi* to produce a work, which — though technically polychrome — has a monochrome cast. The tarnished silver conveys the sense of reflected moonlight on blue-black water.

Night plums also have a long poetic tradition, which informs the visual arts. The idea of the plum blossom's scent occurs in a well-known poem by the Chinese poet Lin Bu (967-1028), which Matsushita Takaaki first suggested as a key to uncovering the meaning in Kôrin's screens.[96] Maggie Bickford in her study of plum imagery notes that the taste for flowering plum in China really began with Lin Bu and his influential associates.[97] Lin Bu's position as the quintessential plum poet transferred to

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[94] Itakura Masaaki, 'Kara Sô kaiga ni okerû yû yakei hyôgen,' *Bijutsushi*, 134, Vol. XLII, No. 2, March 1993, pp. 133–148.

[95] Tamamushi Satoko, 'Gin to tsuikai *Genji monogatari* e-maki kara Natsu aki kusa-zu byobu wo musubu mon,' in Kôno Motoaki et. al(eds), *Nihon bijutsushi*, Tokyo: Pelican sha, 1993, pp. 10–41.

[96] Matsushita Takaaki, 1979.

[97] Maggie Bickford, *Ink Plum: The Making of a Chinese Scholar-Painting Genre*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 153.

Japan. He is himself also often the subject of paintings with his attributes of plums and cranes. Kôrin painted the subject as well. Lin Bu's poem, *Small Flowering Plum in the Garden on the Hill* reads as follows:

When other fragrant plants have withered,
it alone is lovely,
It holds a monopoly on charm in the small garden.
Its sparse shadows are horizontal and slanted —
the water is clear and shallow;
Its hidden fragrance wafts and moves —
the moon is hazy and dim.
A frosty bird, about to alight, first eyes the tree stealthily;
A powdered butterfly, if it could now it, would be spellbound.
Luckily I have a little song with which to approach it,
No need for the beat of sandal wood clappers or shared
drinks in golden cups.[98]

The crucial lines from the poem which link plums to darkness, the moon, and the stream are: 'Its sparse shadow are horizontal and slanted — the water is clear and shallow,' and 'Its hidden fragrance wafts and moves — the moon is hazy and dim.' Hayashi whose article on Kôrin's screens expands on Matsushita's work identifies a dish[99] by Kenzan which includes a line from the poem and a branch of flowering plum 'horizontal and slanted' over the image of the water.[100] The treatment of the overlap is very similar to that in Kôrin's screens. In Sôtatsu's oeuvre, as well, there is an image[101] of a plum branch over water, though without the poem.

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[98] Bickford, p. 165.
[99] Kenzan, dish in blossom shape, private collection.

It must be highlighted that Matsushita's link to Lin Bu's poem was not much discussed until Hayashi looked at the sexual connotations of plum blossoms. He shows how the idea of night plums seems to have had some currency. From Lin Bu's poem which is not an aberration in the tradition, it is easy enough to understand how the imagery (dark, shadow, hidden, fragrance) can carry a sexual connotation or have developed such an implication in both China and Japan.

The plum itself functions as a prompt for remembrance of a past affair and as an indication of romantic advances. Plum blossoms appear, for example, in section four of the *Ise Monogatari* as the prompt for Nari hira's poignant reminisces of an affair from the year before. He stared at the flowers from every angle, but could not recapture the past. Then he recites the poem:

The moon: is it not …
The spring: is it not … last year's
Spring yet unchanged? No,
This body of mine alone
Seems the same as once before.[102]

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[100] Hayashi, p. 51.
[101] Sôtatsu, painting on a fan shape of stream and plum blossoms, Muto family, Hyogo
[102] From *The Tales of Ise*, translated by H. Jay Harris, p. 40.

The common illustration for this scene portrays a courtier on a veranda looking at a plum in the moonlight. The scene is illustrated in this way in the Saga-bon edition and there are various Rimpa painted versions with the same treatment. Plum blossom also features in Lady Ise's poem collection (*Ise Shû*). According to the preface the Empress asked the assembled to compose poems on a particular subject. Lady Ise was 'to imagine a man using plum blossoms as a pretext for making advances.'[103] The same language also applied in homo — erotic poems — a point which Kobayashi could have mentioned to support his impression that the screens depict both ways of love. Since the Japanese language lacks genders, many verses are not clear. Ki no Tsurayuki's (c. 868-945) poem in the Hyakuninn isshu is such an example. The preface to the poem explains that the poet used to stay with a certain person when he was in that village. Returning after a long passage of time, the owner sent this message: 'As you can see, there is always lodging for you,' and Ki no Tsurayuki then broke off a branch of plum and composed this poem:

> With people, well,
> you can never know their hearts;
> but in my old village
> flowers brightly bloom with
> the scent of the days of old.[104]

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[103] Quoted in Bowring, p. 413. Original in *Shinpen Kokka Taikan*, Kadokawa shoten, 1985, p 46.

[104] Quoted in Joshua S. Mostow, *Pictures of the Heart: The hyakunin isshu in Word and Image,* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996, pp. 120 and 246.

The sex of the person with whom the poet stayed is not specified, but the poem, as Mostow writes, has a long tradition of being interpreted as having been written to another man.[105] Hishikawa Moronobu (1618-94) in his Sugata-e hyakunin isshu[106] picked up on this reading and extended it by illustrating a man comparing a youth to a branch of flowering plum.

The plum in Nanshoku yamaji no tsuyu appears as the prompt for a man's wish to meet a handsome youth.[107] This book appeared about 1730 with illustrations by Nishikawa Sukenobu who may also have written the text. Unlike in the Ise monogatari, this man's desires are answered and a handsome youth appears. Iwatsutuji, an anthology of homo-erotic poems over several ages, also shows the plum, in this case, frequently featuring with the nightingale.[108] Plums are also referred to, again in combination with the nightingale, in *Nanshoku ookagami* (Great Mirror of Male Love, 1687). A youth appears before the lord and 'one by one his other qualities became apparent, from his nightingale voice to his gentle disposition, as obedient and true as a plum blossom.'[109]

Plum imagery, similar to that of Kôrin's screens, appears in at least two works, one in connection with each expression of love. Hayashi uses one, the initial print in a *shunga* set by Moronobu as evidence that Kôhakubai-zu could be read as carrying sexual overtones connected with night plums.[110] The couple is shown before a screen depicting plum branch and a steam under the moon. While there is nothing immediately explicit occurring between the couple, the juxtaposition of the couple's modest embrace and the screen in the background would seem to charge the print with implication, alerting the viewer to coming attractions. It is difficult to believe that Moronobu, who could have decorated the screen with any number of motifs, was unaware of these implications. An illustration of two plum trees separated by a stream appears with the story in Nanshoku *yamaji no tsuyu*, mentioned above.

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[105] Mostow, p. 246.

[106] Hishikawa Moronobu, Ki no Tsurayuku from *Hyakunin isshû*, woodblock print.

[107] Nankei Rinrin, 'Nanshoku yamaji no tsuyu,' *Nihon Edo bungakusen*, Nichirinkaku, 1978, p. 180.

[108] Iwatsutsuji was compiled by Kitamura Kigen in 1676, but it was not published until 1713.

[109] Paul Gordon Schalow, 'The Invention of a Literary Tradition of Male Love,' *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 48, no. 1, Spring 1993, p. 247.

The Influence of No on the Plum Screens

Both Hayashi and Kono consider the Nô as a probable informant for the Red and White Plum screens and an important overall aesthetic informant in Kôrin's work in general. Plums feature in plays, but they are not ever a virtual character or focus of a play, in the way that the iris is in *Kakitsubata*. Hayashi, in his article rich in possible sources of meaningfor Kôrin's Plum screens, states that the section of the red plum overlapping the water brings to mind the imagery in the play *Eguchi*.[111] Kôno, whose research on Kôrin may be said to centre around the connection of his paintings to the world of Nô, argues rather that the most probable influence is from the play *Tôboku*.[112] Both plays include plum imagery. In

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[111] Hayashi, p. 46.

[112] Kôno, 'Kôrin to Nô,' *Bijutsushi ronsô*, no. 10, 1994, pp. 50.

Eguchi a priest, before the grave of Eguchi no Kimi (a prositute), recites a poem by Saigyo about her. Then, a woman — announcing that she is the ghost of Eguchi no Kimi — appears to answer the poem. The priest prays for her soul when some pleasure boats carrying women singing and dancing appear. Eguchi no Kimi is among them. She is transformed into the goddess Fugen and the boat becomes a white elephant on which she rides up into the white clouds which emit brilliant rays of light. The time in the play is dusk and the scene occurs on a winding river on which the moonlight would be shining. On the edge of the river, stands a solitary plum tree with flowering red blossoms.

In the play *Tôboku*, a priest visiting from the East is attracted to the plum blossoms at Tôboku-in. He learns from a peasant girl that the tree was planted by Izumi Shikibu. In the growing darkness, the girl reveals her true identity as the spirit of the plum blossom. In this play, the plum blossoms appear with water. Moreover, the play ends at night.

These plays are thought to be relevant to Kôrin’s work, because it is known that he acted in at least one of them. This possibility, as much as the imagery, makes these two works candidates. The Nijô family held its first Nô performances of the New Year on the 20th day of the first month. In Shotoku 4 (1714), it is recorded at Kôrin participated in the event. As it turns out, however, there are two different records of the event: One in *Nijô-ke nainai gobansho nijiki* and one in *Nijô Tusnahira kôki*.[113] In the former the programme indicates that Eguchi was performed, whereas in the latter — while all the other plays are the same — *Tôboku* takes the place of *Eguchi*. Kôno believes Tsunahira's account is most likely to be the correct one, since it would have been recorded by Tsunahira himself, whereas the other record would have been made by officers of the Gobansho. Kôno also points out that *Eguchi* was a work associated with autumn, but *Tôboku* was a play for spring which would have made it a more appropriate choice for the New Year programme.

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[113] Kono, ‘Kôrin to Nô,’ discusses this point in detail, pp. 50-51.

The work of Kôno and Hayashi has advanced the study of the Red and White Plum Blossom screens and shows that there is a tradition for Kôrin's choice of composition. A *Nara e-hon* with an image of Tanabata[114] suggests another avenue of influence for the composition. Tanabata is also, it should be noted, a night scene. It may be said that the selection of motifs and the dark quality of the painting achieved through the use of silver and *sumi* fit more sensibly into a wider cultural tradition than they act as an autobiography of the artist's psychological or sexual state.

One Meaning or a Multiplicity?

One of the important dividing issues in interpretations made of these two screens concerns the meanings of botanical images. The Iris screens have attracted two main interpretations which are thought to be mutually exclusive; either the irises symbolise Yatsu Hashi or they stand as seasonal flowers. The weight of printed articles favours the former. But it is curious that, as Yamane's list of categories of iris depictions indicates, there is only one extant painting of a narrative version of Yatsu Hashi by Kôrin, the hanging scroll in the Tokyo National Museum. Although the figures in Kôrin's other *Ise* images are placed in more, dominant, developed, and clearer landscape settings than in the case of Sôtatsu's figures, they are still clear and present allusions to the story. The iris, by contrast, features much more frequently without any figures. Perhaps these works point less to the creation of an enigmatic symbol than to a lack of desire or even a notion to commit the iris to only one significance at a time.[115] In other words, does admitting the possibility of non-literary association necessarily negate the possibility of any influence from it? Must Kakitsubata-zu be confined wholly to either one or the other? Kôrin's evident concern with the reality of irises, as indicated by care in rendering the parts of the iris — types of petals, pistil, and calyx — does not make it a botanical study, realistic, or *shajitusuteki*. In the same way as the work may be termed both 'realistic' and 'abstract,' may it not also, for example, embody the idea of the real irises in Yatsu Hashi? Just as it seems a fallacy to assume that the process of simplification necessarily has to be recorded in extant works and that it could not have taken place in the mind of the artist, so too it seems unwise to insist that Kôrin had to follow a strict procedure either in acknowledging or rejecting the literary meaning associated over centuries with the iris. There may not necessarily be such a clear distinction between the two. While the work does not have to be a conscious or concrete reference to the *Ise Monogatari*, nor does it have to deny the potential layer open to viewers past and present.

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[114] Tanabata image, Nara e-hon, Kyoto University Library.

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[115] Timon Screech, *Sex and the Floating World: Erotic Images in Japan 1700-1820*, London: Reaktion Books, 1999, p. 157 suggests that Japanese symbolism does not seem to lock signifier to signified.

The Plum screens have, by contrast, been much more open to the possibility of multiple meanings, even as these tend to be explored against a tide of writing about personality. From their malleable symbolism, the Plum screens have attracted bold — even audacious — interpretations, unlike the Iris screens. In particular, a sexual interpretation such as Hayashi makes could, in fact, as easily be made of the Iris screens, because evidence for more salacious readings is as conceivable as that for the Plums. First, since the *Ise Monogatari* is a tale of one man's amorous encounters, it is itself rich in potential sexual connotations that have been gleaned in both literary and visual interpretation. Such connotations derived from literary interpretation of the tale are reflected in the Nô play wherein Narihira is lover, Bodhisattva of Music, and God of Conjugal Love. In the play, all of these, as well as Narihira's lover, are embodied in the spirit of the *kakitsubata*. Furthermore, the visual arts of the period are well stocked with mitate on the *Ise Monogatari*. Second, with the narcissus, the iris — like the plum — has a *nanshoku* meaning as a symbol for a young man. As Screech explains, 'in shunga, this will contract to an indication of their sexuality and libidinous value and would often mean males whose sex was for sale'.[116] Kôrin's revivalist, Sakai Hoitsu, would appear to have been aware of this meaning when he painted a single iris stem inscribed with the following *haikai* poem:

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[116] Timon Screech, pp. 149–151.

> When he sells these flowers,
> Even the voice which calls
> Is it the fragrance of the wind — iris seller.[117]

But the fact is that only in Kôrin's Plum screens is the symbolism given a sexual cast.

The question remains: What did Kôrin, along with his audience and commissioning patrons, want to see in the iris and the plum? What did they think when they saw an image of these flowers? As elements from nature, these botanical images acquired moods and connotations from their seasons, which spoke for the hearts of lovers in poems. Their inherent flexibility seems the point of their appeal, but also the source of their 'anxiety,' or difficulty in reading. Even in the eighteenth century, the Iris screens may well have meant Yatsu Hashi to one person, a design of irises to another, or both to still another viewer. Likewise, the Plum screens cannot be considered sublimated shunga, but the sexual link to the plum need not be absolutely denied, just as there can be a link, but not as subject, between sexuality and poetry in classical *waka*.[118] Now, removed from the time of production and the first few waves of appreciation, the significances we endow may be too hard and inflexible. In part, this is an inevitable outcome of what has been called the 'scholastic point of view'. As Bourdieu explains:

> … the contemporary native, in contrast to the interpreter,

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[117] This translation was made by Timon Screech.
[118] Bowring, p. 419

> invests in his comprehension practical schemas which never crop up as such in consciousness.[119]

Conclusion

If the scholastic point of view had merely resulted in the attribution of too much conscious intention, the interpretation of these screens would not have achieved anything unusual in the field of art history. It is rather that interpreters have given each screen, not just the elements in the Plum composition, separate and distinct roles in telling the drama known as Rimpa discourse. Coded in the Plum screens is the idea that the style is a dialogue with the past. The dialogue is conducted through the act of copying the work of past masters. The Plum screens with Sôtatsu's Gods of Wind and Thunder and Kôrin's copy of the latter stand as the cornerstone of this discourse. The master created a masterpiece, which is then copied by the next artist asserting his claim to the mantle of master. Then, the new master creates a masterpiece which becomes an original response to his mentor's creation. Certainly, Kôrin was influenced by Sôtatsu and in particular by the idea of a composition of two elements on opposite sides of a pair of single fold screens. It is also true that the idea of the copy gained momentum as the weight of meaning increased with each new version of an earlier composition. However, the composition of the Red and White Plum screens do not figure among copies of Kôrin's works made by post-Kôrin artists. Kôrin's Plum screens as the challenge to Sôtatsu's

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[119] Pierre Bourdieu, The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field, Susan Emanuel(trans.), Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996, p. 314.

Gods screens appear to be essential only to the modern conception of Rimpa.

The second point essential to Rimpa, as we know it, is its connection with Yamato-e, or what is considered native Japanese style painting. Kakitsubata-zu symbolise this aspect perfectly when they are related to the *Ise Monogatari.* Nishimoto makes this statement that the Iris-Ise association is pursued in order to promote Kôrin's affiliation with Yamato-e.[120] Unfortunately, she offers little discussion or analysis of this provocative point. Moreover, the Yamato-e connection with what is quintessentially Japanese figures prominently in general work on Rimpa and Kôrin. Whether or not Sôtatsu, Kôrin, or other Rimpa artists considered themselves to be working in the Yamato-e tradition or whether or not they were considered by their patrons to be Yamato-e artists may be open to debate, but it is clear that they have become exemplars of the style. In this way, the works are two halves of a story, together outlining a Rimpa discourse and defining the place of the style in the spectrum of Japanese art through the works of the pivotal artist, Ogata Kôrin.

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[120] Nishimoto, p. 369 mentions this point, but does not discuss it in depth.