**Final DRAFT**

**Forgotten Japonisme**

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This talk will be in three sections. First, I should like to discuss the terminology and the various interpretations of ‘*Japonisme*’. Second, I should like to present to you the key issues which arose from a research project called ‘*Forgotten Japonisme*’ and finally I should like to introduce actual examples of this project.

Let us start with the terminology. The term ‘*Japonisme*’ was used probably for the first time by Philippe Burty, a French critic and collector of Japanese art, in a series of articles entitled ‘*Japonisme*’ published in 1872-73 in the journal *La Renaissance littéraire et artistique.* It has also been pointed out that Jules Claretie used the term ‘*Japonisme*’ in a 1872 book *L’Art Francais en 1872*. So, we could say this term started to get used in France from about 1872 onwards. As Gabriel Weisberg’s research shows, Burty played an important and influential role in the development of *Japonisme* in France. He wrote extensively on Japan and *Japonisme*, knew most of the *japonistes* of the day and was a recognized authority on the subject. Therefore, his use of the term is of considerable importance for us. In a later article published in Britain he defined ‘*Japonisme*’ as ‘the study of the art and genius of Japan’ (1875: 150). In Burty’s case the aim of such a study was not so much to pursue academic research but to promote Japan and to disseminate more information about it. This he considered beneficial to the West, for he saw Japan as an unspoilt society superior aesthetically to France. His concern extends from the study of Japan itself to the reception of Japan and Japanese art in the West, a topic he discusses extensively. In Burty’s writings Japanese art played a central role, but it is significant that his discussion goes beyond art to include general cultural matters such as the customs of the country, its literature, etc. He does not confine himself to purely stylistic and artistic concerns. If one looks at Burty’s use of the term ‘*Japonisme*’ and his own activities as a writer and collector, one sees that *Japonisme* must be defined quite loosely as a pro-Japan attitude and its manifestations in the West.

Let us investigate the term ‘*Japonaiserie*’. This was probably used for the first time by the Goncourt brothers. It appears in a famous English phrase in a letter of 1 August 1867 from Jules de Goncourt to none other than Philippe Burty as ‘japonaiseriefor ever’. Again it occurs in later editions of the Goncourts’ novel *En 18 …* as a substitute for the ‘*chinoiserie*’ used in the 1851 first edition. To change *chinoiserie* to *japonaiserie* keeps the sound picture of the word in tune. Here the term *Japonisme* wouldn’t work. Goncourt brothers’ *Journal* for 23 February 1878 employs the term ‘*japonaiserie*’ to refer to actual Japanese works of art and objects displayed in the house of the artist de Nittis. The *Journal* entry for 19 April 1884, however, uses the term ‘*japonisme*’. Here Edmond de Goncourt is discussing Japanese artistic characteristics and their adaptation by Western artists, but it is used quite loosely.

Another Japanophile who uses the term ‘*japonaiserie*’ is the artist van Gogh. His usage refers back to Jules de Goncourt, since he quotes the phrase ‘japonaiseri*e* for ever’ in a letter (no. 437) of 1885. If we look at the context, we see that, unlike Goncourt, van Gogh is applying the term to what he had seen on his walks along the docks and quays in Antwerp. Not a single Japanese object is mentioned. In another letter (no. 540) van Gogh writes of ‘*paquet de japonaiseries et autres*’ he had received from his brother Theo. According to Fred Orton this package contained Japanese prints and the first two issues of *Le Japon artistique* (1978: 22). The use of the term is again closely related to Japanese prints in van Gogh’s three paintings entitled *Japonaiserie: The Flowering Plum Tree, Japonaiserie: The Bridge in the Rain* and *Japonaiserie: Oiran*. These are free copies of Japanese print sources. These examples make it clear that van Gogh used the term ‘*japonaiserie*’ in several different ways.

*Japonisme* and *Japonaiserie* are not the only terms used. ‘*Japonnerie*’ with one or two ‘n’s seems to be at least as common. How were these terms then used by scholars to describe and interpret the phenomenon?

One of the most influential but also notorious use of these terms as interpretative tools was proposed by Mark Roskill in 1970 in his book *Van Gogh, Gauguin and The Impressionist Circle*. Let us see what he says:

The term ‘Japonaiserie’ … means an interest in Japanese motifs because of their decorative, exotic or fantastic qualities... ‘Japonisme’ on the other hand, means that the incorporation into Western art of devices of structure and presentation which match those found in actual Japanese works. (Roskill 1970: 57)

It could be useful to distinguish between these two types of adaptation, but as we have seen, there is little historical justification for using these two terms to characterise them. Roskill maintains that ‘both terms were already used, the meanings they are given here, in the late 1870s and 1880s’ (1970: 254) Again as we have seen, this simply is not true.

Let us see another comment by Mark Roskill. He states that ‘*Japonaiserie* exists as a necessary antecedent of *Japonisme* – leading up to the latter and in due course giving place to it’. (1970: 77) We have already established that the historical use of the terms ‘*Japonisme*’ and ‘*Japonaiserie*’ cannot bear any consistent meaning given here, but even when we accept that these two types of adaptation existed Roskill’s thesis that one always happens before the other again, first sounding very reasonable, is just simply not true.

The American artist James McNeill Whistler was at the centre of the nascent taste for things Japanese in Paris during the late 1850s and early 1860s and became to be seen already at the time as the artist who connected Japan with that of the Aesthetic Movement of art for art’s sake. I have already argued in 1981 that Whistler’s early series of etchings have shown at the latest by 1861 strong and many stylistic adaptations of Hiroshige’s compositional devices with not a single Japanese motif appearing in them. Then suddenly immediately after this for about two years he was obsessed with overtly Japanese looking pictures, the so-called Oriental painting phase, created in London. I have argued that the etchings were closely related to the birth of etching revival in Paris, where we know Japanese *ehon*, illustrated books, were available and much discussed and that for the Oriental painting phase, Whistler’s new friendship with Dante Gabriel Rossetti was instrumental. In this case Roskill’s ‘*Japonisme*’ starts before his ‘*Japonaiserie*’. As for the cases of ‘*Japonaiserie*’ appearing after ‘*Japonisme*’, there are numerous cases, even perusing Roskill’s book illustrations. Particularly in female portrait paintings decorative use of Japanese fans or kimonos can be observed even well into the 20th century.

What is fascinating about examining Roskill’s rather shaky theory of *Japonisme* is that it represents one of the last gasps of Modernist art history. What I mean by Modernist art history here is that it is heavily Euro-centric or even Paris-centric. Japanese art is seen only as something, which is serving the great Modernist masters.

It is also a single narrative story. For them the history of modern art has only one main story. One that has been created in Paris by the Realists, such as Courbet, then handed over to the Impressionists, then to Post-Impressionists, etc. until modern art crossed the Atlantic to flourish in New York leaving Paris behind. All others are side shows.

However, for me one of the most interesting aspects of Roskill’s modernist interpretation of *Japonisme* is that it is based on the theory of cultural progress. With this type of interpretation, superficial ‘*Japonaiserie*’, which is *only* interested in surface decoration (notice the pejorative view of decoration as an art form), moved to a deeper ‘*Japonsime*’, which used Japanese pictorial devices rather than motives. Here ‘*Japonisme*’ is better. Therefore it has to come after the more inferior ‘*Japonaiserie*’.

Why is a pictorial device better than a pictorial motif? In my view this is based on the a-historical and ant-regional aspect of Modernism. For many Modernists what they created transcends period and geography. Formal values, such as the composition, colour, character of lines are more important than any historical or regional characteristics. Therefore, for modernist art historians van Gogh’s landscapes of South of France featuring strong flat colour surfaces and thick black outlines without any Japanese motivic association are seen as superior to his *Japonaiserie* paintings, where van Gogh is attempting a dialogue with the Japanese printmakers.

Let us go back to the history of the use of these terms. I see the key date for this is 1980. In a history of terminology it is rare to have such a clear-cut date. This is because in this year four key publications came out at the same time and they all included *Japonisme* or its German equivalent term ‘*Japonismus*’ in their titles. They are *Japonismus in der westlichen Malerei 1860-1920* by Klaus Berger, *Japonisme in Art: an International Symposium* edited by Chisaburo Yamada, *Japonismus. Ost-Asien – Europa. Begegnungen in der Kunst des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* by Siegfried Wichmann and *Japonisimu* by Seiji Ôshima. They all use the same term and not a *Japonaiserie* in sight! I believe this is because of the problematic modernist interpretation of the term *Japonisme* as superior to *Japonaiserie* has by now permeated the scholarship.

However, in more recent scholarship there are signs that the supremacy of the term ‘*Japonisme*’ is getting challenged. Now more or less all parts of what we might call the West seem to have their own version of Japonisme and not just the French. I have two PhD students at the moment conducting such research, one investigating Polish and the other Czech Japonisme. I myself started to examine Victorian Japonisme in Britain as long ago as 1975, when such topic was rarely discussed. Also in Spain Professor Pilar Cabañas and a group of scholars from Madrid and Zaragoza are spearheading the study of Spanish Japonisme! Thus the geographical scope of Japonisme studies has widened considerably and not only that but also the range of material for which Japonisme could be applied to has widened. Not only the Japonisme of paintings and prints, but also architecture, design, craft and photography are now routinely discussed.

Can this revisionism of the notion of Japonisme also be expanded chronologically to cover a much longer period of the 20th century, going beyond the early part of this century? This question now forms a major part of my second section of today’s talk.

Edward Said said Orientalism is about ‘Orient’s special place in European Western experience’ and if Japonisme is also part of this Orientalism, what would be Japan’s special place in 20th-century European Western experience? A major one for the West was of course the World War II, but this war just doesn’t come up much in the Japonisme discourse. I should like to divide the 20th century Western experience and attitudes to come to terms with what is Japan into three phases. The first one is 1910s into 1920s, the last phase of what the classic Japonisme from mid-19th century to early 20th century, the second from about the 1920s and 30s when the relations started to get soured leading to the WWII and its immediate aftermath and finally the period of Japan’s recovery from about the early 1960s to the end of the century.

When I initially examined these phases, they don’t seem to relate much to each other. We have phase one which is more or less the petering out of the Japan mania, which raged during the 1870s and 80s in particular. Then we have phase three, which seems to start with a bang in 1964 with the Tokyo Olympics. Now we have the bullet train, Sony walkman, Toyota cars, etc., which could be characterised as high-tech Japonisme. In the middle we have a black hole of the War period, when a taste for things Japanese seemed out of the question. Then, what is the relationship between phase 1 and 3? The situation seems very unclear.

I felt this was an important issue, which needed to be investigated. As it so happened, at my TrAIN Research Centre, that is Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation at the University of the Arts London, four members of the Centre had similar concerns. So we came together and applied for funding. The Arts and Humanities Research Council then awarded us about half million pounds, which also had a PhD studentship attached. We called the project ‘Forgotten Japonisme: Taste for Japanese Art in Britain and the USA, 1920s – 1950s’.

To call something ‘forgotten’ is a rather a risky strategy, as in most such cases, whatever it is, was probably justifiably forgotten. However, we thought the term ‘forgotten’ was justified for two reasons. First, we were convinced that the forgetfulness came from a stereotypical reaction: ‘one can’t have a taste for Japanese things while a war is going on against Japan’. This made people stop looking for any possible evidence. Second, we were certain before we started the project that in two specific areas there were already such evidence. These two were the Mingei Movement, the Folk Crafts Movement’s impact in the West, and the modernist interior design. In both cases there is a continuous development from the 1920s to the 1950s. The question we set out to examine was: ‘are these two exceptions or is there a more general phenomenon for taste for Japanese art which spans the trans-war period?’.

This three-year project came to an end a year ago. At the end we organised an international two-day conference at the Victoria & Albert Museum and we are intending to publish a book of collected papers on this topic. Immediately after the conference we had a workshop just with the members participating in the book to discuss issues further, which was very fruitful and my paper today is really heavily dependent on the discussions we had then. I felt a lot of cobwebs were blown away, but also that new issues were coming up all the time.

One such cobweb turned out to be the title of the project: ‘Forgotten Japonisme: Taste for Japanese Art in Britain and the USA, 1920s – 1950s’. When we discussed what the title of the new book should be, we had quite a heated discussion and hardly any of the terms from the original title survived. I should explain this change, from the old project title to the new book title, more in detail, as I think that this shows how such a project can change our assumptions and also that this change really is in many ways the story of our research in a nut shell.

First of all, quite soon after we started the project, I realised that ‘the USA’ in the project title was a mistake. I forgot about Canada, which I shouldn’t have, *mea culpa*, but it was too late! Now we call this part ‘North America’. For example, when we examine the many Japanese gardens created during the 20th century across the West Coast of North America, it is clear that this is a phenomenon crossing the border of Canada and USA.

However, the new title, which I will tell you shortly, does not just say ‘Britain and North America’ but now includes Japan. This was an important advance in our methodology, as we recognised that for the phenomenon of Japonisme, Japan was an important agent. It actively participated in the formation of this taste. Also, many of the key events took place in Japan, such as Laurence Binyon’s trip to Japan in 1929 financed by the Japanese to the 1950s’ gaudy souvenir shops in the military port of Yokosuka aimed at the GIs. In fact, I myself grew up in Hayama, a neighbouring town to Yakosuka and the American officers and GIs were part of my childhood memory.

The next victim of the initial title was the time span ‘1920s to 1950s’. We have expanded it now from the 1910s to the 1960s. Perhaps one of the most important event for the history of Japanese art in Britain took place in 1910, the Japan-British Exhibition at the White City in Shepherd Bush, London. Millions of British people could see at the fine art exhibition there for the first time a much wider range of Japanese art than the ukiyo-e prints, lacquerware and ceramics, which were the staple diet for Victorian Japonisme. Now everybody could see that Japan indeed had ‘Fine Art’. Also for the latter end the key date was the 1964 Tokyo Olympics and it is much more accurate to see the period under discussion to include the 1960s at least the first half of it. I remember the Olympics well! I was first year University student and worked as an interpreter for the German TV. For me the move from a high school pupil to becoming an adult university student, getting to know the big metropolis of Tokyo just on my own and the new get up and go atmosphere of the modernised city, all coincided and made an everlasting impression. I know part of our research findings is the realization that culture doesn’t change totally from one day to the other. However, for me 1964 did feel like a fresh start.

Our group also discussed the main title of ‘Forgotten Japonisme’. This was catchy and also indicated the issue of cultural choice of selective memory and forgetfulness. However, the term of ‘forgotten’ itself has negative connotations and is basically a hindsight view. ‘It existed but we forgot’. In order to give agency to the actual phenomenon, we are now using the term ‘trans-war’. This is in a way more positive, giving recognition to this period as spanning the war rather than separating the periods before and after. In our project we are trying to examine the period in a fresher way to see continuity as well as discontinuity during the period from the 1910s to the 1960s.

The next and perhaps the greatest casualty of the initial project title was the term ‘Japonisme’. You might find it strange for a Japonisme project to throw out the term Japonisme, but, yes, we have decided to call our phenomenon not ‘Japonisme’ but ‘Japanism’ with an ‘a’ rather than an ‘o’ and without an ‘e’ at the end. We felt that what we have investigated was still about taste in things Japanese, but a lot was quite different from the so-called classical period Japonisme. To give the term in English also gives agency to the phenomenon itself, which took place mainly in the English-speaking world of Britain and North America. The Japanese art historian Tanita Hiroyuki, a Victorian art specialist, has campaigned for some time for the use of the term Japanism to indicate what was going on in Britain. To use the English term also neutralises somewhat the effect of the French term, which could be interpreted as representing French centrality within the history of not only Japonisme but also of modern art. In both there is a feel about the idea of seeing French culture at the core and the rest simply being marginalized. The French certainly played a major role in the development of Japanese taste in the West, but by calling the phenomenon under discussion as Japanism, we are also trying not to privilege origin. Our phenomenon was sufficiently far removed from that of the French and can manifest its own identity.

Now we have ‘Trans-War Japanism’ instead of ‘Forgotten Japonisme’. The last issue to be debated extensively was the term ‘taste’. This was quite a difficult one. Some project participants felt this term is a rather hierarchical and even elitist one, like in the case of the expression ‘man of taste’. However, this was not necessarily accepted by all. We then came up with the solution to call it ‘shaping taste’. In this way we could also indicate that much of our research focused on the process rather than just on the outcomes of the taste. It also gives an element of plurality by indicating that taste formation has many participants.

In the end the original title of ‘Forgotten Japonisme: Taste for Japanese Art in Britain and the USA, 1920s – 1950s’ metamorphosed into ‘Trans-War Japanism 1910s – 1960s: Shaping Taste in Britain, Japan and North America’. I have detailed the process of changes in our project title, because there you can see the research dynamics at work and the changes were not arbitrary but touched core issues of the project. For the rest of my paper I should like to give just a taster of some of the individual papers of our volume, concentrating on those which highlight some key issues.

First, let us pick up the two areas where we were sure from the beginning that there was Trans-War Japanism: the Mingei movement and the Modernist interior design. Within the development of the British Studio Pottery the major role played by Mingei-related artists, such as Bernard Leach and Shôji Hamada, is well known. The framework of 1910s to 1960s fits well within our period, but what is less well known is that for the earlier period of its development in Britain, it was William Staite Murray who led the innovation in the art of pottery seeking inspiration from both Japan and contemporary fine art. Indeed, according to research conducted by one of our members, Dr Julian Stair, in 1924 State Murray received lots of reviews in the press, but Bernard Leach received none. Particularly for the early history of the relationship of British Studio Pottery it was Staite Murray who lead the way, though very soon the situation reverses and Leach becomes the guru of the British Studio Pottery. Here you see a piece designed by Staite Murray and what strikes one is its modernity. Indeed he did not wish to stay just within the Arts and Crafts mode of the potters and was very much interested in what the avant-garde fine artists were doing at the time in Britain. He participated in an exhibition at Lefevre Galleries in 1925, which also included work by Jacob Epstein and Paul Nash, cutting edge contemporary fine artists. Another potter who was interested in fine art environment was Hamada Shôji. Hamada also was interested in the fine art context and his exhibition at Paterson gallery in 1923 was the first solo exhibition by any potter in a fine art gallery in Britain whether Japanese or British. Another fascinating aspect Stair’s research showed was that Hamada was riding on the rising fashion for Chinese ceramics at this time. So here the taste for Japan was related but subservient to that of China. Subsequently, Leach became the central person in Britain to push the Mingei ideology. Then during the post-war period in the 1950s the guru of Mingei theory, Yanagi Muneyoshi and others toured the USA and made a huge impact on the craft world there.

Our second example is that of Modernist interior design. Here I rely on the research conducted by Dr Anna Basham, the AHRC Research Fellow of the project. Her PhD focused on the works of Wells Coates. He is one of the leading architects and designers of British Modernism, but actually grew up in Japan until he was 17 years old. His aesthetics is imbued with Japan, as you see here in Coats’s interior conversion published in *Architectural Review* in July 1932, actually made into a logo of our project. Simple span of white walls, sliding doors, circular openings and windows, built-in furniture and even tokonoma, an alcove for the aesthetic focal point of the interior, are all elements Coats used. While Basham investigated this, she came back to me again and again telling me that she found yet another quote from a Modernist architect about Japan. It became clear that many Modernist architects in Britain and North America were deeply affected by the interior design of Japan. Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Frank Lloyd Wright are both known for their love of Japan, but these were not exceptions but more a norm during the period from early 20th century onwards. When we consider architecture, we usually look at the outer shape, almost like a piece of large sculpture, whereas the interior of a building is often regarded of secondary importance. But if you live in a house, it is the interior, that is the part of architecture, which you experience most. After reading these numerous quotes, a remarkably coherent view of what a great number of Modernist architects thought such interior should be emerged. It is also not only interior but how such interior should relate to its immediate environment, where Japan seems to play an important role, like we can see in Frank Lloyd Wright. I just show you an illustration, which appeared in a book on modern garden design b y Christopher Tunnard published in 1938, which contains illustrations of a modern garden by Horiguchi Sutemi. This view continued persistently in many cases and was broken only by the post-modernists in the 1960s and 70s.

Our team examined many other issues and case studies. Yasuko Suga examined the role of Kôgei Shidôsho (Industrial Arts Research Institute, IARI) and how it tried to intervene in the taste for Japanese things in the West. Yuko Kikuchi then investigated how the American Russel Wright tried to guide the taste for Asian Modern though his official role not only in Japan but across East and Sough East Asia. He took Japanese bamboo craftsmen, they were men, to Vietnam to revitalize the bamboo industry there. Then there were collectors, museum curators and dealers. Sachiko Oguma’s paper on the Yamanaka Shôkai and other Japanese dealers in North America gave us a picture that many people in North America may have disliked the Japanese, particularly during the war period, but never lost their likings for Japanese art. There are many more papers in our volume dealing with these issues but I cannot do justice to them with just short summaries. Finally I should like to bring up one further issue of who are the carriers of this Japanese taste. This is also part of our investigation of how far we could stretch the definition of Japanism or for that matter Japonisme.

My own contribution to this volume deals with this problematic of complicating the definition of Japanism as western taste for things Japanese by the examination of garden design relating to the Japanese-Americans in North America. I looked at three such gardens: first, the gardens at Manzanar Internment Camp in Owens Valley, California; second, the Queen Lili’uokalani Garden in Hilo, Hawaii and finally California Scenario, at Costa Mesa in the suburb of Los Angeles designed by Isamu Noguchi.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, President Franklin D Roosevelt authorised on 19 February 1942 the relocation and internment of about 120,000 Japanese Americans. The Manzanar Internment Camp or War Relocation Camp was the earliest and one of the largest of such camps and held 11,070 Japanese Americans during the War. It was hastily set up in Owens Valley at the foot of the Sierra Nevada mountain range. The whole site covered about 6000 acres with about 550 acres used for housing. When I visited the site in February last year what struck me was the astonishing beauty of the place. The snow-capped Sierra Nevada mountain range dominated the scenery and there was an eerily silence at this near desert place. The barracks were then cleared and only very few structures remains. At least 14 gardens at this site have been identified and even competitions were held. All these gardens are evidence for humanising the harsh environment and make the hard life of these inmates just that little bit more tolerable. The Japanese Americans here were by no means a unified group. There were the first generation isseis without American Citizenship, the second generation niseis with American citizenship but some with and some others without Japanese citizenship. There were even third generation sanseis born in the camp. Then specially at the beginning there were divisions between Okinawans and Non-Okinawans. What distinguishes Manzanar gardens from most other Internment Camp gardens is that most seem to have been created by professionals. They were allowed to go into the Sierra Nevada mountain range in search for suitable rocks with a military escort. Some of the excavated sites show a range of different rocks, such as granite not available on site. Elaborate water structures were also built. These gardens were created during the war period by the Japanese-Americans for the Japanese Americans.

Queen Lili’uokalani Garden at Hilo on the Big Island in Hawai’i was inaugurated in 1917 and the name of the Queen was given to the park because the much-loved last Queen of Hawai’i died in that year and it was named to honour her. The garden was situated close to where a large number of Japanese Americans lived and it suffered two major devastating tsunamis. This garden is the major tourist attraction of Hilo and is maintained by public authorities as a county amenity. It was created, redesigned and maintained mostly by local Japanese Americans. It shows a number of complex identity issues. These are identities of Hawaian, American, Japanese, Japanese-American and even *Kenjinkai*, the associations of Japanese prefectures. All these identities overlapping here both as producers and consumers.

My final example is California Scenario at Costa Mesa by the Japanese American Isamu Noguchi completed in 1982. His design for a tycoon within a large shopping mall area was built in a most inauspicious space between two skyscrapers and a large garage! Unlike the other two discussed today, this is a highly intellectual modernist single-author garden design. In spite of this, its design is still very much focused on local identity, this time that of California. In my view this garden has strong associations with the garden of Tôfukuji Hôjô of 1939, designed by Shigemori Mirei, who introduced a quarry in Shikoku to Noguchi, who then set up a workshop near that quarry in Mure. Thus this design does not directly hark back to old Zen gardens, but its modern manifestation by Shigemori. Here Noguchi is exploring identities of Japan, America and California.

In all three cases it seems to me the central issue is Japanese-Americanness rather than Japaneseness. These are the cases where we have stretched the definition of Japanism most. Can these still be called Japanism, where the bearers of production and/or consumption are often not Caucasians. What we are doing here is shaking hard at the definition of the very word ‘West’. Surely if we accept that America is a multi-racial society, American Japanism cannot be just confined to that of white Caucasian Americans. What I am saying is that ‘the West’ is not just white but multi-coloured.