

Okakura Kakuzō's Art History: Cross-Cultural Encounters, Hegelian Dialectics and Darwinian Evolution

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Abstract

Okakura Kakuzō (1863-1913), the founder of the Japan Art Institute, is best known for his proclamation, "Asia is One." This phrase in his book, The Ideals of the East, and his connections to Bengali revolutionaries resulted in Okakura being remembered as one of Japan's foremost Pan-Asianists. He did not, however, write The Ideals of the East as political propaganda to justify Japanese aggression; he wrote it for Westerners as an exposition of Japan's aesthetic heritage. In fact, he devoted much of his life to the preservation and promotion of Japan's artistic heritage, giving lectures to both Japanese and Western audiences. This did not necessarily mean that he rejected Western philosophy and theories. A close examination of his views of both Eastern and Western art and history reveals that he was greatly influenced by Hegel's notion of dialectics and the evolutionary theories proposed by Darwin and Spencer. Okakura viewed cross-cultural encounters to be a catalyst for change and saw his own time as a critical point where Eastern and Western history was colliding, causing the evolution of both artistic cultures.

Key words

Okakura Kakuzō, Okakura Tenshin, Hegel, Darwin, cross-cultural encounters, Meiji

In 1902, a man dressed in an exotic cloak and hood was seen traveling in India. He looked out of place; possibly Chinese, perhaps a Daoist sage of some sort. Accompanying him was Surendranath Tagore, a nephew of renowned Bengali poet, Radindranath Tagore (1861-1941).¹ The strange man was a guest of the Tagore family, Japanese art critic and founder of the Japan Art Institute (日本美術院 *Nihon Bijutsu in*), Okakura Kakuzō (1863-1913). While in Calcutta, Okakura met the frail Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and his disciple, an Irish woman known as Sister Nivedita (1867-1911) as well as members of Anushilan Samiti, a secret Bengali anti-British organization.² Okakura's travel through India and his interactions with Bengali intellectuals confirmed his conviction that India and Japan shared a common artistic heritage. Shortly after this trip, Okakura published his influential book entitled *The Ideals of the East* with its famous opening sentence: "Asia is One."³

Originally published in English, this famous phrase and his connections to Bengali revolutionaries resulted in Okakura being remembered as one of Japan's foremost Pan-Asianists.⁴ Okakura's writings were popularized during the 1930s and 1940s since his proclamation of Asian unity appeared to provide ideological support for the Japanese war effort that claimed to "liberate" fellow Asians from Western colonial control and establish the "Greater

¹ For an interesting discussion of Okakura's choice of dress, see Christine E. Guth, "Charles Longfellow and Okakura Kakuzō: Cultural Cross-Dressing in the Colonial Context," *Positions* 8, no. 3 (Winter 2000): 605-6.

² For more information, see Rustom Bharucha, *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), Peter Heehs, "Foreign Influences on Bengali Revolutionary Terrorism 1902-1908," *Modern Asian Studies* 28, no. 3 (July 1994): 533-56; and Okakura Koshirō. *Sofu Okakura Tenshin* 祖父岡倉天心 (My Grandfather, Okakura Tenshin) (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Bijutsu Shuppan, 1999), 87-149.

³ Okakura Kakuzō, *The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan* (London: J. Murray, 1903), 1.

⁴ For example, in *Ajia shugi wa nani o katarunoka: kioku kenryoku kachi* アジア主義は何を語るのか: 記憶・権力・価値 (What Does Pan-Asianism Tell? Memory, Power and Value) ed. Matsuura Masataka 松浦正孝 (Tokyo: Mineruva Shobō, 2013), Prasenjit Duara discusses briefly about Okakura's contribution to Pan-Asian Movement. In the same book, Nakajima Takeshi 中島岳志 demonstrates Okakura's influence on Ōkawa Shūmei 大川周明, another prominent Pan-Asianist. Both Duara and Nakajima include Okakura's connections to Indian intellectuals such as Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda.

East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere (*Dai To-A kyōei ken* 大東亜共栄圏).” He did not, however, write *The Ideals of the East* as political propaganda to justify Japanese aggression; he wrote it for Westerners as an exposition of Japan’s aesthetic heritage. After his sojourn in India, he served as a curator of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, splitting his time between the United States and Japan (mostly in Izura 五浦, Ibaraki Prefecture) as he sought to preserve and promote Eastern artistic heritage. Much has been written about Okakura’s idea of the Eastern unity or his role in Pan-Asianism, but little has been said about his perception of the West, Western art, or world art history as a whole. Hegel’s influence on Okakura, especially that of “realization” or “manifestation” of the “Idea,” has been recognized, but relatively little has been said about the influence of Hegelian dialectical formula: thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Close examination of Okakura’s views of both Eastern and Western art and their history reveals that he was greatly influenced by Hegel’s notion of dialectics and the evolutionary theories proposed by Darwin and Spencer. Indeed, Okakura viewed cross-cultural encounters to be a catalyst for change and saw his own time to be the critical point where Eastern and Western history was colliding, causing an evolution in both artistic cultures.

OKAKURA, FENOLLOSA AND HEGEL

Okakura Kakuzō, more commonly known among the Japanese as Okakura Tenshin 岡倉天心, was born in Yokohama in 1863.⁵ His father, Okakura Kan’emon 勘右衛門, was a samurai of the Fukui clan, but by order of his lord, was running a silk trading business in

⁵ When he wrote in English, he used his given name, Kakuzō instead of pseudonym, Tenshin 天心, which means “the heart of heaven.” There are numerous biographies of Okakura available both in English and Japanese, including Horioka Yasuko, *The Life of Okakura Kakuzo: Author of “the Book of Tea”* (Tokyo: Hokuseidō, 1963); Saitō Ryuzō 齊藤隆三, *Okakura Tenshin* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Hirobumi kan, 1960); and Okakura Kazuo 岡倉一雄, *Chichi Okakura Tenshin* 父岡倉天心(My Father, Okakura Tenshin) (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1971).

Yokohama when Kakuzō was born. Yokohama was one of the ports opened for foreign trade in 1859, and as a result, it had become an enclave where the English language was widely spoken. Consequently, Okakura, who grew up in a shop whose customers were mainly foreigners, was exposed to the English language from the earliest stage of his life.

Okakura met Ernest Fenollosa when he was a student at Tokyo Imperial University in the late 1870s. A graduate of Harvard, Fenollosa was hired to teach Western philosophy, including that of Hegel, Darwin, and Spencer.⁶ While in Japan, Fenollosa discovered Japan's artistic heritage and was so deeply impressed by it that he became a connoisseur and collector of Japanese art. His student, Okakura, used his excellent English language skills to serve as an interpreter for Fenollosa outside of the college classroom. Close collaboration between Okakura and Fenollosa continued even after Okakura graduated from Tokyo Imperial University and entered the service of the Ministry of Education. In 1884, Okakura and Fenollosa established *Kangakai* 鑑画会 (Painting Appreciation Society) in an attempt to preserve traditional Japanese art styles, especially of the Kanō and Tosa Schools.⁷ In 1886-1887, Okakura and Fenollosa traveled to the United States and Europe as part of an Imperial Art Commission investigating the state of art education in Europe and America. Shortly afterward, based on Okakura and Fenollosa's recommendation, the Tokyo Bijutsu Gakkō 東京美術学校 (Imperial Art School) was created. Okakura served as the president of the school from 1890-1898, while Fenollosa, albeit briefly, served as a highly paid faculty member.⁸ Around the same time, in

⁶ Satoko Fujita Tachiki, *Okakura Kakuzo (1862-1913) and Boston Brahmins* (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1986) discusses Okakura's interaction with Bostonians, including Ernest Fenollosa.

⁷ In 1886, Ernest Fenollosa came to be recognized as a certified art connoisseur by the Kanō 狩野 School and received the Japanese name, Kanō Eitan 狩野永探 (the eternal quest). See Michael Sullivan, *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 124-39.

⁸ Technically, the first president of the Tokyo Bijutsu Gakko was Hamao Arata 濱尾新 (1849-1925) but his role was limited.

1889, Okakura and Fenollosa launched an art magazine, *Kokka* 國華 (National Flower). Between 1889 and 1898, Okakura also served as director of the Imperial Museum.⁹ As these activities indicate, Okakura and Fenollosa worked closely together, though not always in agreement, and established themselves as the foremost authorities on Japanese art, until Fenollosa decided to take a position as the chief curator of Japanese art at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in 1890.¹⁰

Both Fenollosa and Okakura were greatly influenced by Hegel and Spencer. According to J. Thomas Rimer, Fenollosa’s May 1882 lecture to Ryūchikai 龍池会 (The Dragon Pond Society) entitled *Bi-jutsu Shinsetsu* 美術真説 “An Explanation of the Truth of Art” was

⁹ For more information on Okakura’s impact on Japanese art, see Victoria Weston, *Japanese Painting and National Identity: Okakura Tenshin and His Circle*, vol. 45 of *Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2004).

¹⁰ One major disagreement between Okakura and Fenollosa revolved around the issue of Greek influence on South and East Asia. Fenollosa clearly recognized the Greek influences on Asia, especially on Buddhist art, in his book, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art; An Outline History of East Asiatic Design* (1912). Fenollosa’s book contains chapters such as “Greco-Buddhist Art in China: Early Tang,” and “Greco-Buddhist Art in Japan: Nara Period.”

Before his trip to India in 1902, Okakura seemed to have agreed with Fenollosa, and recognized the Greek influences on Buddhist art. For example, in his lectures on the History of Japanese Art delivered in 1890-1892, he recognized the Greek influence on Buddhist art resulting from Alexander’s invasion (See “Nihon Bijutsu shi 日本美術史 [Art History of Japan],” in *Okakura Tenshin zenshū* 岡倉天心全集 [The Complete Works of Okakura Tenshin] [Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1979], 4:44-45). One can also observe the same line of thought around 1897-98, when he wrote “Essays from Japan: A Painting of the Nara Epoch,” where he notes, “interesting hints of Greco-Buddhist influence prevalent towards the end of the Six dynasties.” See Okakura Kakuzō, *Okakura Collected English Writings* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1984), 2:31.

After his visit to India, Okakura came to deny Greek influences on India or Buddhism. For example, in *The Ideals of the East*, Okakura states: “In India the art of this early Buddhism was a natural growth out of that of the Epic age that went before. For it is idle to deny the existence of pre-Buddhistic Indian art, ascribing its sudden birth to the influence of the Greeks, as European archeologists are wont to do (74).” As for Gandharan arts, Okakura comments, “. . . a deeper and better-informed study of the works of Gandhara itself will reveal a greater prominence of Chinese than of the so-called Greek characteristics. . . The Alexandrian invasion means rather the extension of Persian influence than Hellenic cultures (78).” Similar comments can be found in lectures given on East Asian Art history in 1910 (see “Taitō kōgei shi 泰東巧藝史 [Eastern Art History]” in *Okakura Tenshin zenshū*, 4:277-78). Indeed, he came to be convinced that the British government promoted the idea of Indo-European connection in order to justify British control over India (See “Shigakukai sekijō no Indo kenkyū-dan 史学会席上の印度研究談 [India Lecture Delivered to Historical Society],” [1902] in *Okakura Tenshin zenshū*, 3:269).

Hegelian in a sense that he emphasized manifestation of “the Idea.”¹¹ Likewise, Okakura’s emphasis on the spirit of art over realism is also strikingly similar to Hegel. According to Hegel:

What distinguishes art from other things made by man is, first of all, that it is made for man’s *sensuous* appreciation in such a way as to address itself ultimately to his *mind*, which is to find a spiritual satisfaction in it. The sensuous shapes and sounds of arts present themselves to us not to arouse or satisfy desire but to excite a response and echo in all the depths of consciousness of the mind. The sensuous can be thus *spiritualized* in us because in art, it is *spiritual* that appears in sensuous shape. A man-made sensuous thing is a true work of art, in other words, only in the measure that it has been brought into being through mind, by genuinely spiritual productive activity.¹²

This theory of art developed by Hegel resonates in Okakura’s emphasis on the spirit of art that speaks directly to the viewer. Compare the above statement by Hegel to Okakura’s following statement:

Who of the recognized great painters either in the West or the East has not directly appealed to us despite the distance of time and race? Their language is necessarily different. Some may be in the Confucian sequence of the white, some in the Italian sequence of the brown; others again in the French sequence of the blue, but behind the veil is the mind, always eager to tell its own story.¹³

Hegel’s influence on Okakura can be also clearly seen in *The Ideals of the East*, when Okakura spoke of “the three terms by which European scholars love to distinguish the past development of art.” The three terms or eras are directly from Hegel’s theory of aesthetics in which he divided the art history into 1) Symbolic or Formalis-

¹¹ J. Thomas Rimer, “Hegel in Tokyo: Ernest Fenollosa and His 1882 Lecture on the Truth of Art,” in *Japanese Hermeneutics: Current Debates on Aesthetics and Interpretation*, ed. Michael Marra (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 97-108.

¹² Henry Paulucci, *Hegel: On the Arts*, 4.

¹³ Okakura Kakuzō, “Modern Problems in Painting,” in *Okakura Collected English Writings*, 2:62.

tic, 2) Classic and 3) Romantic eras.¹⁴ He applied this "Western" theory to Japanese art history, and explained many of the similarities between Eastern and Western art were due to the parallel development of the two societies: "the kinship between Japanese work of this period [the Nara period] and that of the Greco-Roman is due to the fundamental resemblance of its mental environment to that of the classic nation of the West."¹⁵

What exactly Fenollosa taught Okakura at Tokyo Imperial University cannot be ascertained, but Hegel's influence on Okakura is undeniable. Several authors, including, Karatani Kōjin, John Clark, and Okakura Koshirō, Okakura's grandson, have pointed out Hegelian aesthetics underlining Okakura's view, but not much has been said about the role of Hegelian dialectics.¹⁶ Karatani even goes so far as to state:

Okakura was Hegelian in the sense he grasped the history of Asia as art history seen as the self-actualization of the idea. In an indirectly way, however, Okakura reversed Hegel's Eurocentrism and also targeted Hegel's dialectics. In Hegel, contradiction plays an important role since it engenders struggle and causes history to develop. In contrast, Okakura brought into play the Indian philosophical notion of Advaitism (non-dualism), or the oneness of what is different and manifold. As a result, the expression "Asia is One" came about.¹⁷

This study demonstrates Okakura's embracement of Hegelian dialectics by examining Okakura's understanding of both Eastern and Western civilizations, their art histories and associated concepts. For him, a meeting of two difficult cultures resulted in formation of

¹⁴ Okakura, *Ideals of the East*, 163-66. Henry Paulucci, *Hegel: On the Arts: Selections from G.W. F. Hegel's Aesthetics or the Philosophy of Fine Art*, 2nd ed. (Smyrna, DE: Bagehot Council, 2001).

¹⁵ Okakura, *Ideals of the East*, 65.

¹⁶ Karatani Kōjin, "Japan as Art Museum: Okakura Tenshin and Fenollosa," in *A History of Japanese Aesthetics*, ed. Michael F. Marra (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 43-52; John Clark, "Okakura Tenshin and Aesthetic Nationalism," *East Asian History* 29 (June 2005): 1-38; Okakura Koshirō, *Sofu Okakura Tenshin*, 153-56.

¹⁷ Karatani, 47.

new trends, much like the meeting of thesis and antithesis resulted in synthesis in Hegelian dialectics.

OKAKURA'S EAST AND WEST IN ART HISTORY

In order to understand Okakura's interpretation of art history, it is imperative to define his delineation of East and West. This is a rather difficult task since Okakura was not consistent with his usage of terminology. Indeed, Okakura's understanding of East and West shifted depending upon the nature of his work. Most of Okakura's writings dealt with the arts, but he also wrote some works with political overtones, such as *The Awakening of Japan*, and *The Awakening of the East*.¹⁸ As a political thinker, Okakura associated the West with imperialism or the "White Disaster" while identifying the East as the victim of imperialism.¹⁹ In his political writings, he used the Ural Mountains to define a line, where the West included Western Europe, Russia and the United States, while the East included the vast expanse of land stretching from Ottoman Egypt to the Kuril Islands and possibly beyond to "the Pacific isles" and "the Carolines."²⁰ When it comes to art history, however, the line dividing East and West was located along the Indus River. Thus,

¹⁸ Okakura Kakuzō, *The Awakening of Japan* (New York: Century Co, 1904); Okakura Kakuzō, *The Awakening of the East*, in the first volume of *Okakura Collected English Writings*. *The Awakening of Japan* was not translated into Japanese until the 1920s. *The Awakening of the East* is a hand written manuscript found by Okakura's grandson in 1938. Coming to light during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), this politically charged document called for a Pan-Asian military uprising against the West, and was immediately published in 1938 both in its original English and a Japanese translation.

¹⁹ Okakura generally depicts the United States in a very favorable light. In *The Awakening of Japan*, when speaking of Commodore Perry, Okakura comments: "Our sincere thanks are also due to the American admiral, who showed infinite patience and fairness in his negotiations. Oriental nations never forget kindness, and international kindness is unfortunately extremely rare. The name of Commodore Perry has become so dear to us that, on the fiftieth anniversary of his arrival, the people erected a monument at the spot where he landed." This complimentary attitude was probably due to his primarily American audience and his lengthy sojourns in the United States. See Okakura, *Awakening of Japan*, 122.

²⁰ Okakura, *Awakening of the East*, in *Okakura Collected English Writings*, 1:138-39. Okakura was not always consistent in his usages of the terms. Okakura's inconsistency can be seen even within the same book, most notably in *The Ideals of the East*.

when Okakura declared “Asia is One,” he was mainly referring to Asia east of the Indus River, with India and China serving as “the two great poles of Asiatic Civilisation.”²¹

It should be also noted that Okakura’s understandings of East and West in art history tended to cluster around the two ends of Eurasia. One indication of this view can be seen in his usage of terms when he was writing or speaking in Japanese. In referring to East and West, Okakura appears to have used the terms Taisei 泰西 (Extreme West) and Taitō 泰東 (Extreme East) more frequently than the generic Seiyō 西洋, the Japanese equivalent of the Occident, and Tōyō 東洋 or the Orient. This intentional distinction can be seen in Okakura’s own translation of the title *The Ideals of the East* as *Taitō risō ron* 泰東理想論 instead of *Tōyō no risō* 東洋の理想, which became the standard translation of this title.²² Okakura’s word choice of Taitō implies that his book was only concerned with the Far East.²³ Therefore, even though he talked about the unity of Asia and saw a connection between Japan, China, and India, Okakura’s discussion was essentially East Asia centered, while India was included to recognize the great influence of “Indian” Buddhism on the art and culture of East Asia. Okakura perceived the close connection between the arts of China and Japan, but he felt that Japan was the only place where both Chinese and Indian elements truly melded together. His view was that the influence of the two great civilizations moved from west to east, ultimately causing Japan to become “a museum of Asiatic civilization” where “the historic wealth of Asiatic culture can be consecutively studied.”²⁴

²¹ Okakura, *Ideals of the East*, 19.

²² Okakura’s letter to Koike Motoyasu, May 17, 1913, in *Okakura Tenshin zenshū*, 7:250-51. Another translation given to this title is *Tōhō no risō* 東邦の理想. The term Tōhō denotes “Eastern region.” *The Ideals of the East* was never translated into Japanese during Okakura’s lifetime.

²³ For example, he identifies Taitō as specifically China, Japan, and Korea in “Taitō kōgei shi,” in *Okakura Tenshin zenshū*, 4:259.

²⁴ Okakura, *Ideals of the East*, 6-7.

OKAKURA'S EAST

For Okakura, Japanese art history was inconceivable without the contributions of China and India. He did not consider the possibility that there could exist “pure” Japanese arts; instead, he perceived all Japanese artistic heritage as an amalgamation and synthesis of indigenous and foreign elements. He commented in a speech to the *Kangakai* (Painting Appreciation Society): “Is there such a thing as uniquely Japanese art? Art was unknown in the earliest stage of Japanese history. It is impossible to determine what is truly Japanese, since Japanese art has changed so many times over the course of history. The art of the *Tenpyō* era was based upon the art of three Korean Kingdoms, and those of *Enki* era were influenced by the art of the Tang dynasty in China . . .”²⁵ Okakura considered the sixth century to be the true start of Japanese art history since that was the beginning of Japan’s contact with foreign cultures. Okakura recognized these “foreign contacts” to be the chief catalyst for change when he stated: “Indeed it is not impossible to say that our country’s arts are almost entirely derived from foreign lands . . . although there is no need [for the Japanese] to feel ashamed since the Japanese were able to take something foreign and make it their own.”²⁶ Okakura’s emphasis on cross-cultural encounters as the catalyst for change resonates Hegel’s thesis-antithesis synthesis.

Among the most important elements introduced to Japan in the sixth century was that of Buddhism which came through the Korean Kingdom of Paekche. In fact, Okakura recognized Bud-

²⁵ Okakura Kakuzō, “Kanga kai ni oite 鑑画会に於て (Speech Given to Kangakai) (1887),” in *Okakura Tenshin zenshū*, 3:177. Translated from . . . 日本固有なる者は果して何処に在る乎。日本美術上古はいざ知らず、美術が始めてその形をなしたる時より今日までの沿革を考ふるに、変化万端にして孰れを日本固有と定むる能はず。天平の美術は其の淵源を三韓に取り、延喜の美術之を唐朝の文化に受く。

²⁶ Okakura Kakuzō, “Nihon bijutsu shi,” in *Okakura Tenshin zenshū*, 4:15. Translated from . . . 実に我邦美術の原因は、其の大部殆ど外国より来れるを云ふも恐らくは不可なからん。斯く云えば、我邦の美術は甚だ価値なきが如し。然れども外国より伝来せるものにして、之れを受くる能く渾化せば、蓋し其の国のものにして亦辱づべきにあらず。

dhism to be the most important force behind the beginning of Japanese art when he wrote: "Our national art was in its infancy until the sixth century, when the rise of the newly introduced Buddhism suddenly called it into flower and created what is known as the art of Nara."²⁷ Okakura understood that the Buddhism introduced into Japan was not a pure form, but a version that had been morphed and altered as it filtered through Chinese and Korean lenses. He considered the period of instability following the fall of the Han Dynasty (known as the Six Dynasties) as the critical point, since this was when "the three basic elements of East Asian art" (*Tō-A bunka san dai genso* 東亞文化三大原素), Confucianism, Daoism (more accurately what Okakura called "Laoism"), and Buddhism came together.²⁸ Here, one should note that Okakura used the rather specific geographical designation of *Tō-A* or "East Asia" in his discussion rather than the broader and less specific Asia or the East. Buddhism was surely an important element as it brought inspiration for sculpture and new architectural styles. These new styles were by no means purely "Indian," but instead, an amalgamation of the three teachings into one package.

It should be pointed out that these three philosophical systems are what Chinese refer to as the "three teachings" (*san jiao* 三教, Jp. *san kyō*), and not "Japanese," which would have included Shinto instead of Daoism. Shinto, the indigenous religion of Japan, was not considered a significant enough artistic element in Okakura's mind for specific mention. According to Okakura, "Shintoism is the national religion of Japan, but it has done very little for art. It has aimed at simplicity. Except for the images of ancestors and

²⁷ Okakura Kakuzō, "Essay from Japan: A Painting of the Nara Epoch: Eight Century (1897-1898)," in *Okakura Collected English Writings*, 2:30.

²⁸ The term, *Tō-A bunka san dai genso* appears in Okakura's "Nihon Bijutsu shiron 日本美術史論 (Japan Art History Theory)," in *Okakura Tenshin zenshū*, 4:141. Okakura usually differentiated between Daoism (Taoism) and Laoism. He defined "Taoism" as religious Daoism that sought to attain the secret of immortality or elixir of life. He used the term Laoism for the philosophical Daoism derived from Laozi and Zhuangzi. The only book in which he did not differentiate between the two was *The Book of Tea* (New York: Duffield, 1906). It may be hypothesized that Okakura's American editor suggested he use the standard "Taoism" rather than his neologism, "Laoism."

gods, it has done almost nothing.”²⁹ The only element of Shinto that Okakura considered as contributing to the development of Japanese arts was its tendency “to inculcate purity in everything—especially in architecture. The Shinto architecture, with its undecorated, plain wooden construction, everything being concentrated in beauty of proportion,—is an entirely distinct thing from any other products of Asiatic art.”³⁰ This general de-emphasis on “indigenous” Shinto seems to be in accord with Okakura’s view that no Japanese art existed apart from foreign influences.

Since Okakura’s understanding of Japanese art history was so closely connected to the three teachings of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism, there is no wonder why he saw China and India as the two great centers of civilization and why he saw the unity of Eastern civilization through Buddhism. The concept of unity within “Buddhland” is most clearly expressed when he stated: “Buddhism, introduced into China and the farther East during the early centuries of the Christian era, bound together the Vedic and Confucian Ideals in a single web, and brought about the unification of Asia.”³¹ Interestingly, Okakura identified Buddhism as “Vedic,” thereby presenting Buddhism as a version of the Hindu tradition. Hinduism, therefore, in an indirect way, was considered a part of the element that constituted the Asian unity of which Okakura spoke.³² This unity of Asia, according to Okakura, was destroyed by the Mongols: “By the Mongol conquest of Asia, Buddhland was rent asunder, never again to be reunited.”³³ More importantly, Okakura blamed the Turkish-Mongolian conquerors of India who adopted Islam as the true cause of the division of “Buddhland” since “Islam

²⁹ Okakura Kakuzō, “Religions in East Asiatic Art,” in *Okakura Collected English Writings*, 2:142.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Okakura, *Awakening of Japan*, 8.

³² Sister Nivedita, who wrote the introduction to *The Ideal of the East* interpreted this as “Indianising of the Mongolian mind” but this appears to be her India-centric interpretation and does not seem to correspond to Okakura’s East-Asia centered vision. See Sister Nivedita’s “Introduction,” in Okakura, *Ideals of the East*, xviii.

³³ Okakura, *Awakening of Japan*, 13.

interposed a barrier between China and India greater than the Himalayas themselves."³⁴

As for the other two elements that constituted "the three basic elements of East Asian arts," Okakura considered Daoism or "Laoism" to be more important than Confucianism. Okakura perceived China as being divided into two regions, the northern region along the Yellow river and the southern region along the Yangtze River. He felt that Confucianism was a product of the northern section while recognizing the southern section as the home of the free and independent spirit of Daoism. While he did not feel that Confucianism had made the same level of contribution as Daoism, he did acknowledge the emphasis it placed on interpersonal matters and cosmic harmony through rituals, etiquette, and music. He recognized the bronze vessels used for ancestor worship and mirrors used "to correct" disagreeable facial expressions as examples of artifacts inspired by Confucianism.³⁵ He repeatedly described Confucianism as being "communistic," while describing Buddhism and Daoism/Laoism to be "individualistic."³⁶ It seems like this was Okakura's way of explaining the Eastern collective mentality, but he still felt that the individualistic tendency of the East far outweighed any tendency toward collectivism.

Okakura generally considered Eastern art and its civilization to be characterized by a spirit of individualism, freedom, independence, and peace. As if to refute the conventional understanding of Eastern civilization, Okakura made constant references to these concepts in his writings. Philosophical Daoism, which he refers to as "Laoism," was referenced as a major factor contributing to Eastern individualism and the spirit of freedom. In a lecture Okakura stated:

³⁴ Okakura, *Awakening of Japan*, 12.

³⁵ Okakura, "Religions in East Asiatic Art," in *Okakura Collected English Writings*, 2:134-37.

³⁶ In "Religions in East Asiatic Art," Okakura commented that Confucianism's source was "the communistic ideal of ancient China." See *ibid.*, 2:134.

Laoism aimed at independence and individuality, wishing to play with the universe, not to bow down to it. Thence arose a great conception. Nature was more than man; man was only a small part of nature. Just see how poor, how trammelled [sic], how ridiculous we are! Look at nature, with its freedom, its vast intent! The Laoist wished to live in nature, and so in fine arts gave up e.g. figure painting, and devoted themselves to landscape and birds and flowers.³⁷

“Laoism” which arose in the Yangtze River Valley, was also associated with poetry, something Okakura dearly loved. Acquaintances of Okakura included many famous poets, including Rabindranath Tagore and Priyamvada Devi Bannerjee. Okakura was a poet himself and composed poems in classical Chinese, Japanese, and English. He particularly loved to compose Chinese style poetry (known as *Kanshi* 漢詩) and left approximately 130 poems written in classical Chinese. He felt that the poetic spirit of Laoism was an essential part of Eastern aesthetics and that it emphasized freedom and individualism. Speaking of the Chinese poet Qu Yuan 屈原 (Jp. Kutsu Gen, 340-278 BCE) Okakura comments: “This poetry, as exemplified in Kutsu Gen, of tragic memory, abounds in the intense adoration of nature, the worship of great rivers, the delight in clouds and lake-mists, the love of freedom and assertion of self.”³⁸

“Laoism” was also a vital element in the Japanese tea ceremony, which, to Okakura, was the ultimate expression and example of the Eastern aesthetic ideal. Okakura considered Zen Buddhism, from which the tea ceremony arose, to be the “legitimate successor”³⁹ of Laoism as it emphasized “individualism.” As he states: “Zennism, like Taoism, is a strong advocate of individualism. Nothing is real except that which concerns the working of our own mind.”⁴⁰ Okakura saw both Zen Buddhism and “Laoism” to be philosophies that recognized the beauty found within ordinary things

³⁷ Ibid., 2:142.

³⁸ Okakura, *Ideals of the East*, 44.

³⁹ Okakura, *Book of Tea*, 50-51.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 65. In *The Book of the Tea*, Okakura does not differentiate between Taoism and Laoism. Considering his other writings, it may be assumed he is referring to the philosophical tradition expounded by Laozi (“Laoism”) and Zhuangzi.

or customs, with the tea ceremony, or "Teaism," constituting the embodiment of such an ideal put into practice:

A special contribution of Zen to Eastern thought was its recognition of the mundane as of equal importance with the spiritual. It held that in the great relation of things there was no distinction of small and great, an atom possessing equal possibilities with the universe... The whole idea of Teaism is a result of this Zen conception of greatness in the smallest incidents of life. Taoism furnished the basis for aesthetic ideals, Zennism made them practical.⁴¹

The tea room and its décor, such as arranged flowers and simple works of art, create a sense of harmony that expresses the ideal of beauty in small and insignificant things. For example, the tea room is typically a small rustic cottage characterized for its simplicity and certainly lacks apparent extravagance, but "a good tea-room is more costly than an ordinary mansion, for the selection of its materials, as well as its workmanship requires immense care and precision."⁴² The extreme simplicity of the tea room often makes it appear barren, but Okakura explained that this level of simplicity was intentional since "it is left for each guest in imagination to complete the total effect in relation to himself."⁴³

It was in these qualities that Okakura found Eastern art expressing the concepts of individualism, freedom, and independence. Viewing and appreciating art, as Okakura understood it, was "a game to be played by two persons."⁴⁴ The empty space in a tea room or the lack of background in many East Asian paintings allows individuals the freedom to impose their own images and conceptions upon the framework provided, creating an opportunity for each viewer to add a little of themselves into what they are viewing, thus increasing their appreciation of the item or room at hand:

⁴¹ Ibid., 68-69.

⁴² Ibid., 77.

⁴³ Ibid., 95.

⁴⁴ Okakura Kakuzō, "Nature in East Asian Painting," in *Okakura Collected English Writings*, 2:148.

The artist only gives the suggestion for the spectator's imagination to indulge and revel in. In leaving things unsaid art invites the beholder to come in and fill the gap, that he may feel the joy of joining in this artistic banquet[sic]. Nothing is more condemned among us as a painting which leaves no play for the beholder's imagination. . .⁴⁵

Okakura continued:

Another point of distinction about Eastern art, is that it is not interested in beauty as such. The quest of art is not the beautiful but the interesting. In the world range of eastern criticism you will rarely find a painting praised because it is beautiful, but always because it is aesthetically interesting. The Japanese term for artistic, "Omoshiroi" is not an equivalent of the word "interesting," but is derived from a word which means "white-faced."⁴⁶

Leaving it up to the viewer to complete the image was a major departure from most Western art where no part of the canvas was left unpainted. Conventional Western art tries to create a complete picture in such a manner as to convey the artist's complete image to the viewer and completely controls the viewers' impression. The opposite is true of Eastern art, according to Okakura, since it seeks to form only a partial image and invites the viewer to interpret freely the image or object as he/she sees it, allowing for a sense of openness and freedom not found in Western art. Okakura also presented the idea that while Western art tended to be enjoyed by the social elite, the simple but elegant pleasures of Eastern art, as represented by the tea ceremony, were enjoyed by rich and poor alike, representing the "true spirit of Eastern democracy."⁴⁷

Okakura associated the East with peace, while associating the West with war and aggression. Okakura's viewpoint on Western aggression must be viewed through the filter of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 when Japan first started to emerge as a major power in East Asia. Despite the fact that Japan had a long history of

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Okakura, *Book of Tea*, 4.

the martial tradition and had been recently involved in foreign wars, Okakura still tried to present an image of Japan, and the East in general, as being characterized by peace. Perhaps as a reaction to the popularity of Nitobe Inazo's book, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* published in 1900, and a lack of true appreciation of Japanese culture among most Westerners, Okakura commented:

He [an average Westerner] was wont to regard Japan as barbarous while she indulged in the gentle arts of peace: he calls her civilized since she began to commit wholesale slaughter on Manchurian battlefield. Much comment has been given lately to the Code of the Samurai,—the Art of Death which makes our soldiers exult in self-sacrifice; but scarcely any attention has been drawn to Teism, which represents so much of our Art of Life. Fain we remain barbarians, if our claim to civilization were to be based on the gruesome glory of war. Fain would we await the time when due respect shall be paid to our art and ideals.⁴⁸

This contrast of Teism as an "Art of Life" and Bushido as an "Art of Death" is interesting considering Okakura's somewhat militant tendencies. Indeed, *The Awakening of Japan*, published in 1904, was Okakura's attempt to explain recent Japanese history and to justify Japan's actions during the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars. In his mind, war was something that the West had taught Japan, and Japan was resorting to war only to preserve its own independence and peace. Okakura justified the invasion of Korea because he considered Korea to be "originally a Japanese province, and in the Tokugawa days paid tribute to the Shogunate."⁴⁹ Furthermore, Okakura and many Japanese of his time considered the control of the Korean peninsula essential for Japan's continued survival:

Any hostile power in occupation of the peninsula might easily throw an army into Japan, for Korea lies like a dagger ever pointed toward the very heart of Japan. Moreover, the independence of Korea and Manchuria is economically necessary to the preservation of our race, for

⁴⁸ Ibid., 7-8.

⁴⁹ Okakura, *Awakening of Japan*, 209.

starvation awaits our ever-increasing population if it be deprived of its legitimate outlet in the sparsely cultivated areas of these countries.⁵⁰

As far as Okakura was concerned, even in the midst of a war, he still considered Japan and the rest of the East as representing peace and harmony and concluded his book by asking, “Europe has taught us war; when shall she learn the blessings of peace?”⁵¹

OKAKURA’S WEST

Upon examination of Okakura’s activities both in Japan and the United States, it is clear that Okakura’s main concern was the East and its artistic heritage. The *Kangakai* (Painting Appreciation Society) and the *Nihon bijutsu in* (Japan Art Institute) both encouraged Japanese artists to preserve an Eastern essence in their work, while his three books written for a Western audience sought to educate and inform the reader about the East from an Eastern perspective. As a result, Okakura spent a relatively small amount of time discussing the West and its art, but it is important to look at a few examples of his views on Western art to gain insight into his thoughts. A series of lectures that Okakura gave on Western art history delivered at the Imperial Art School between 1890 and 1892 serves as a major source of information.⁵² Other references to the West and Western arts appear sporadically in his writings as he compared and contrasted East and West.

For Okakura, the West was the “antithesis” of the East with a distinctively different history and evolution. According to Okakura, both Eastern and Western art histories developed in parallel and

⁵⁰ Ibid., 208.

⁵¹ Ibid., 223.

⁵² See Okakura Kakuzō, “Taisei bijutsu shi 泰西美術史(Western Art History),” in *Okakura Tenshin zenshū*, 4:171-255. Okakura’s lectures were the first lectures on Western art history in Japan. His source materials are unknown, but the Imperial Art School possessed numerous foreign publications, including 18 books donated by William Bigelow, a wealthy Bostonian physician, who supported Okakura’s work. See explanatory notes on “Taisei bijutsu shi” in *Okakura Tenshin zenshū*, 4:527-29.

have roots that can be traced back to ancient times, but the two forms developed contrasting artistic traditions and ideals. Comparing the Chinese bronze vessels of the Zhou era to Greek art, Okakura commented: “Indeed, these together constitute, like the calm and delicate jade, compared with the flashing individualistic diamond, the antithesis of ideals, the two poles, of the decorative impulse in East and West.”⁵³ The fact that he used the term “antithesis” indicates a level of influence from the Hegelian dialectics.

In his lectures on Western art history, Okakura equated the West (Seiyō or Taisei) with Europe (Ōshū 歐洲), but in tracing the Western art heritage, he found it impossible to stick strictly to Europe.⁵⁴ He believed that the origin of Western art was to be found in ancient Egypt, and furthermore, that Western artistic traditions have a close connection to Asia. This “Asia” was not synonymous to “East”; instead he simply used the term to refer to the areas that were conventionally considered to be part of Asia such as Anatolia, Persia, and Mesopotamia. He divided Western art history into three periods, Ancient (before c. 395), Medieval (c. 395-1500) and Modern (after c. 1500), and he saw this connection between European art and Asia to be especially strong in the ancient period. He classified Egypt as “the oldest country in the West,” although he did not consider the Egyptians to be Europeans, Asians or Africans.⁵⁵ Mesopotamia (Assyria, Babylonia and Chaldea), Persia, and the Eastern Mediterranean (Phoenicia and Judea), were also included in Okakura’s list of cultures that contributed to development of the Western art in the ancient world. As discussed earlier, the line dividing East from West in Okakura’s art histories was the Indus River. Okakura argued that when the Greeks under Alexander conquered Persia, they returned home with new ideas and concepts that they had been exposed to in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and

⁵³ Okakura, *Ideals of the East*, 31.

⁵⁴ Okakura Kakuzō, “Taisei bijutsu shi,” in *Okakura Tenshin zenshū*, 4:171-72.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 178, reads “Egypt is the oldest state in Seiyō (translated from 埃及は西洋にては最旧の国なり).” He also stated “Egyptians are a unique race . . . They are different from the Aryans of Europe or the Mongoloids of Asia. They are also not dark like Ethiopians or Africans” (Translated from 埃及は一種特有の人種なり. . . 欧州のアリアン人種、亜細亜の蒙古人種とは一種異なれり。亦エチオピア、亜非利加土人の如く黒からず).

Persia, and incorporated many elements into Greek heritage. Okakura argued that it was the Greeks that truly started “European art,”⁵⁶ but he still saw a clear connection between Greek art and Asian art. For example, Okakura commented that the lion gate of Mycenae was based upon an “Assyrian style,” and that there is no doubt that Greek sculpture derived from “Asia.”⁵⁷

The second stage Okakura identified in Western art history was the Middle Ages which he defined as starting with the division of the Roman Empire and ending around 1500. He identified Early Christian (including that of the Byzantine Empire), Arab-Islamic, Romanesque, and Gothic to be the main artistic styles of the medieval period. He recognized the importance of the interaction between Europeans and Arabs in the development of Western art and technology, as well as acknowledging Arab contributions to European music, astronomy, math, and fountain making technology.⁵⁸ Okakura believed that Gothic architecture was derived from a European imitation of Islamic architecture, as he explained:

. . . these crusades continued for a long time and [their participants included] Louis, the King of France, and Richard, the King of England. Upon their return, they praised the Arabian style [architecture] and tried to replicate it. This was the beginning of the Gothic style which combined the Romanesque and Arabian styles.⁵⁹

The fact that one of the most impressive examples of Islamic architecture, the Alhambra, is found in Spain may also have helped shape his view that an Arab-Islamic element had become part of

⁵⁶ The word used here is *Ōshū bijutsu* 歐洲美術 (European Art). Okakura Kakuzō, “Taisei bijutsu shi,” in *Okakura Tenshin zenshū*, 4:92.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4:203.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 4:222-23.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4:223-24. Translated from 此等の十字軍は漸次相継続し、仏王ルイ、英王リチャードも亦其の中にあるにありしが、帰国後大いに亜拉比亞風を称美せされ、遂に之れを行はるるに至る。之れ即ちゴシック美術の起る基にして、全くローマネスクと亜拉比亞風の相混じたるものなり。As for Romanesque style, the outline of his lecture seemed to suggest Okakura may have thought of it as a combination of Early Christian and Arab-Islamic elements. But he does not go into detailed discussion of influence of the Arabic elements in the main body. See *ibid.*, 4:177.

the European heritage. Indeed, Okakura may have even considered the Arabs to be “Europeans.” In his *Book of Tea*, he states, “The earliest record of tea in European writing is said to be found in the statement of an Arab traveler, that after the year 879 the main sources of revenue in Canton were the duties on salt and tea.”⁶⁰ Unfortunately, there are no footnotes in his *Book of Tea* to indicate the source of this rather ambiguous statement. Overall, Okakura appears uncertain of how to fit the Arab-Islamic traditions into his East and West worldview, so he mentions it without ever fixing it into either category.

The third stage that Okakura identifies in Western art history is the Modern era which started around 1500. Here, Okakura’s discussion comes to focus almost exclusively on Western Europe, but even then he attributes the beginning of the Renaissance to the Turkish conquest of the Byzantine Empire and subsequent migration of “Eastern Romans” to Italian cities.⁶¹ It is also this time period when he comes to include “Northern Europe” (i.e. Germany and France) and the Low countries in his discussion.

Okakura describes many Western art styles to be realistic (*shasei teki* 写生的), but he felt they lacked spirit (*seishin* 精神).⁶² This Western emphasis on realism was one of the areas that Okakura found to be fundamentally different between Eastern and Western art. He explained that Eastern painters did “not draw from models, but from memory,”⁶³ while Western artists did just the opposite. Okakura reasoned that truly good art directly appealed to the heart of the viewer, clearly in line with Hegel’s theory on aesthetics. He did not believe that working from models and producing realistic images was the true goal of art. Hence, of all the Western painters, Leonardo da Vinci seemed to be held in the highest

⁶⁰ Okakura, *Book of Tea*, 13-14.

⁶¹ Okakura, “Taisei bijutsu shi,” in *Okakura Tenshin zenshū*, 4:226.

⁶² One example of such comment is “realistic but lacking in spirit” (translated from 写生的のみにして、精神的ならざるや). See *ibid.*, 4:211.

⁶³ Okakura, “Nature in East Asiatic Painting,” in *Okakura Collected English Writings*, 2:150.

regard by Okakura. The “Last Supper” was especially praised by Okakura for its depth of human emotions:

The subject matter [of the “Last Supper”] is Jesus, knowing there is a betrayer amongst them, is asking questions of his disciples. [The painter masterfully] depicted a wide range of emotions such as sorrow, anger and doubt [in Jesus’ disciples]. Among the disciples was Judas, resting on his elbow in front of Jesus as he incessantly denied he was the betrayer. Yet, Judas’s mind was in agony, and [Leonardo da Vinci] was able to convey Judas’ distress. [He] was able to capture the subtle nuance of [this complex] feeling masterfully.⁶⁴

Okakura also rated favorably other Western painters such as Rembrandt (1606–1669), Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796–1875), and Jean Francois Millet (1814–1875), since they emphasized “spirit” over purely realistic representations of objects.⁶⁵

Okakura also thought that the representation of human beings and the human body was a distinctive feature of Western art. He traced the origin of this “humanism” to the Greeks and expressed that such a concept was contrary to Eastern (especially to Daoist) traditions, as he explained to a Western audience:

Portraiture has never obtained such a prominent place in our art. Why should we perpetuate this evanescent thing, this cradle and nest of lust and mean desires. We have no desire to glorify the human body as the Greeks did, or give special reverence to man as the image of God. The nude does not appeal to us at all. We have not, therefore, conceived an ideal type of human body... The outward man is not more important than other manifestations of outward nature,—trees, rocks, waters.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Okakura, “Taisei bijutsu shi,” in *Okakura Tenshin zenshū*, 4:236–38. Translated from 其の図題は耶蘇が其衆徒弟に向て己を密告せし人あるを知て、反問者を誰何するの状なり。其の中には或は之れを憂ふう状、怒る相、疑ふる状等千様万状を画き尽せり。然るに其等の中独りジューダーなるもの耶蘇の前に肘付きて此の衆徒中誰か反するものあらんやと、頻りに其の否を語る所の形状あれども、其の心中煩悶を保ちしを以て自然其の顔容に憂苦の状を表はしたるは、其の妙を写し得たりと云うべし。

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 4:252, 255.

⁶⁶ Okakura, “Nature in East Asiatic Painting,” in *Okakura Collected English Writings*, 2:147.

While Okakura considered Michelangelo to be one of the Western world’s greatest artists, he felt that Michelangelo was excessively faithful to human anatomy (*kaibō teki* 解剖的) and that this led him to create figures Okakura felt were unnatural.⁶⁷ Raphael’s “Madonna,” on the other hand, was praised for its elegance, although Okakura considered Michelangelo to be a superior artist to Raphael.⁶⁸ Okakura considered Peter Paul Rubens’ works to lack *hin* 品, which can be variously translated as grace, dignity, or refinement.⁶⁹

Okakura considered the High Renaissance, the world of Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael to be the highest point of Western art history. From the seventeenth century forward, Okakura saw a decline in Western art. The seventeenth century saw a change in popular painting styles and subjects (*fuzokuga* 風俗画 or *ukiyo-e* 浮世絵) to include a great number of decorative paintings, such as landscapes, flowers, animals, and still-life, which Okakura felt was a step backwards from earlier Western art. By the nineteenth century, the elements of Greek revivalism were gone, replaced by an artistic style almost exclusively concerned with realistic representation of objects.⁷⁰

Worse yet, with industrialization and the development of a middle class society, Okakura perceived Western art’s further decline. For him, industrialism and subsequent commercialism meant a complete lack of individuality and creativity. He felt that this period degraded Western art to nothing more than mere decoration or display of wealth:

⁶⁷ Okakura, “Taisei bijutsu shi,” in *Okakura Tenshin zenshū*, 4:238-40.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 4:240-51. Raphael is oftentimes thought to be the favorite of Okakura, as his friend, William Bigelow and J. E. Lodge stated in their reminiscence “He liked Raphael and disliked Rubens.” (*Okakura Collected English Writings*, 3:227-32). But upon closer examination of Okakura’s works, he rated da Vinci the highest among the giants of the High Renaissance. In his travel diary in Europe (1887), one can also observe some negative comments on Raphael, such as “Perugino ceiling in Sistine chapel fine. Raphael mediocre,” and “Vatican gallery and paintings, Carlo Crivelli superb, Raphaels Ascension awful.” See Okakura’s *Europe Travel Diary* (1887), “Ōshū shisatsu nisshi 欧州視察日誌” (1887), in *Okakura Tenshin zenshū*, 5:310-11. His travel diary is written in a combination of English and Japanese.

⁶⁹ Okakura, “Taisei bijutsu shi,” in *Okakura Tenshin zenshū*, 4:252.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4:250-55.

We of the East often wonder whether your society cares for art. You seem not to want art, but decoration,—decoration in the sense of subjugating beauty for the sake of display. In the rush for wealth there is no time for lingering before a picture. In the competition of luxury, the criterion is not that the thing should be more interesting, but it should be more expensive. The paintings that cover the walls are not of *your* choice, but those dictated by fashion.⁷¹

Okakura was repulsed by Western society's obsession with the "vulgar display of riches."⁷² He criticized Western architecture, interior decorations and even the use of flowers "to be a part of the pageantry of wealth."⁷³

The development of a mass consumer driven society resulting from industrialization meant artists lost their freedom to express their own ideas and emotions. What was considered desirable art became dictated by the market, generating an environment detrimental to artistic creativity:

Competition imposes the monotony of fashion instead of the variety of life. Cheapness is the goal, not beauty. The democratic indifferences of the market stamps everything with the mark of vulgar equality. In place of the handmade works, where we feel the warmth of the human touch of even the humblest worker, we are confronted with cold blooded touch of the machine. The mechanical habit of the age seizes the artist and makes him forget that his only reason for existence is to be the one, not many. He is impelled not to create but multiply. Painting is becoming more and more an affair of the hand rather than of the mind.⁷⁴

Bearing in mind Okakura's feelings about the steep decline in Western art, it is understandable when he criticized those Japanese who simply accepted everything Western as superior to anything Japanese. He argued that the Western art introduced to Japan during the 19th century was "at its lowest ebb" and was not worthy of

⁷¹ Okakura, "Modern Problems in Painting," in *Okakura Collected English Writings*, 2:74.

⁷² Okakura, *Book of Tea*, 98.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁷⁴ Okakura, "Modern Problems in Painting," in *Okakura Collected English Writings*, 2:80.

imitation.⁷⁵ Okakura feared that cultural imperialism would cause Eastern art to be abandoned in favor of anything and everything Western. Worse yet, this form of cultural imperialism was not being imposed by Westerners, but propagated by the Japanese themselves. He harshly criticized those Japanese who blindly adopted everything Western: "That eagerness and profound admiration for Western knowledge which confounded beauty with science, and culture with industry, did not hesitate to welcome the meanest chromos as specimens of great art ideals."⁷⁶

For Okakura, the history of Eastern and Western art had taken two completely different courses and he felt that they should remain as two separate and distinct artistic heritages. He feared the complete destruction of the Eastern artistic heritage since he saw it as possessing higher artistic ideals than that of the West. He translated "modernization" to mean "the occidentalization of the world,"⁷⁷ and in such a world, he feared the great Eastern artistic tradition would be overcome by the inferior Western version, and Eastern sensibilities would completely lose their place: ". . . it would appear that in fundamental nature the two arts are so widely different that, except in a few important points they can never grow into one. And it would be a calamity should the great art of the Asiatic past be lost."⁷⁸

A MEETING OF EAST AND WEST: THESIS-ANTITHESIS-SYNTHESIS

Even though Okakura saw a clear division between Eastern and Western artistic traditions and tried to preserve Eastern ideals, he did not reject Western concepts completely. As has been demonstrated, Hegel's influence on Okakura is especially notable. Additionally, he was greatly influenced by the evolutionary theories

⁷⁵ Okakura, *Ideals of the East*, 226.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Okakura, "Modern Problems in Painting," in *Okakura Collected English Writings*, 2:77.

⁷⁸ Okakura, "Nature in East Asiatic Painting," in *Okakura Collected English Writings*, 2:153-54.

proposed by Darwin and Spencer. Indeed, his vision for the future of Japanese art was not purely the preservation of ancient heritage, but instead the *evolution* of Japanese art to a higher level. Okakura identified himself as a “conservative” who found it “deplorable that traditions of Chinese and Japanese painting should be entirely lost,”⁷⁹ but he also identified himself as a *shizen hattatsu ron sha*, 自然発達論者, or “natural development theorist.” He explained this concept to Japanese artists in 1887:

Natural development does not distinguish between the East and West, but bases itself on the basic principle of art, it would take in what is rational and master what is beautiful. Art should be based on the arts of the past, but it needs to evolve to accommodate the modern experience. If it is appropriate, study the works of Italian masters, or use oil paintings techniques. Furthermore, one should spend time on research and testing and seek the best way for future generations . . . Artists of Japan, art is in co-possession of heaven and earth. Let us not have a distinction between East and West.”⁸⁰

For a Western audience, he stated in 1904:

I do not mean to say that we should not study the Western methods, for thereby we may add to our own method of expression. Nor do I desire that we should not assimilate the wealth of ideas which your civilization has amassed. On the contrary, the mental equipment of Japanese painting needs strengthening though the accretion of the world’s ideals. We can only become more human by becoming more universal.⁸¹

One can ascertain from these two statements that Okakura emphasized the selective adoption of art practices from the West. The

⁷⁹ Okakura, “Modern Problems in Painting,” in *Collected English Writings*, 2:79.

⁸⁰ Okakura Kakuzō, “Kanga kai ni oite 鑑画会に於て (Speech Given to Kangakai (1887)),” in *Okakura Tenshin zenshū*, 3:173-78. Translated from 自然発達とは東西の区別を論ぜず美術の大道に基き、理のある所は之を取り美のある所は之を究め、過去の沿革に抛り現在の情勢に伴ふて開達するものなり。伊太利の大家中に在て参考すべきものは之を参考し、画油の手法も之を利用すべき場合に於ては之を利用し、猶更に試験發明して将来の人生に的切なる方法を探らんとす. . . 日本のお美術家諸君よ、美術は天地の共有なり、豈東西洋の区別あるべけんや。

⁸¹ Okakura, “Modern Problems in Painting,” in *Okakura Collected English Writings*, 2:79.

trace of evolutionary theory in Okakura's argument is apparent as he studied both Eastern and Western art histories, he saw the arts to be constantly evolving, and never static. He also found the cross-cultural interactions between different groups of people to be one of the greatest catalysts of change, whether it was the Japanese encounter with China or the European encounter with the Arabs. For Okakura, the era in which he lived represented an era of cross-cultural interaction and he found it completely natural for the arts to change and evolve within this new context. What he found unnatural was the abandonment of Eastern heritage in favor of its Western counterpart. Surrounded by Americans who appreciated Eastern art, Okakura was also well aware that some Western artists gained inspiration from Eastern art and began to incorporate these new Asian ideas and techniques into their art. As a student of Hegelian philosophy, Okakura saw the meeting of the East and West to be the meeting of thesis and antithesis, which led to the synthesis of the two, but not necessarily creating one new culture; instead, both artistic traditions are evolving into something new, based on their own respective traditions.

CONCLUSION

Okakura Kakuzō, remembered chiefly as a leading Pan-Asianist, was an art critic and art historian who fought to preserve the artistic heritage of the East in the face of rampant Westernization. His most famous quote, "Asia is One," was derived from his study of Japanese art history in which he saw a strong connection between India, China, and Japan through the thread of Buddhism. This meant that Okakura's conceptualization of "Asia" or "the East" was limited to the area east of the Indus River, with India and China serving as the two great centers of Eastern Civilization. Okakura's concept of the East, however, was ultimately East-Asia centered, with India included only because of its influence upon the arts of China and Japan through Buddhism.

Conceptually, he associated Eastern civilization and its art with individualism, freedom, and peace. As if to challenge the stereotypical view of Asia shared by many in the West, he repeatedly pointed out examples of individualism and freedom in the Eastern artistic traditions, including those grounded in both Buddhism and Daoism. He valued art based on spirit to be of a higher caliber than that which simply sought to depict realism. Artwork that drew in the viewers and allowed them to become a participant in the art was considered by Okakura to be the goal of a true artist. He believed that Eastern art tried to emphasize a concept of spirit, by having artists produce works from memory and imagination rather than from using models or copying landscapes. He also saw strong elements of individualism and freedom in the way that most Eastern art styles emphasized simplicity and restraint, often leaving much of the image blank to allow the viewer to complete the picture in their own mind rather than have the artist dictate exactly what the viewer should see and feel from the art. Ultimately, he saw the gentle art of the tea ceremony as the highest expression of the Eastern aestheticism and Eastern peace because of its simple elegance that could transcend social, economic, and spiritual boundaries.

On the other hand, Okakura saw much of Western art as nothing more than an attempt to copy and represent nature exactly as the artist saw it. The overemphasis on realism, whether the subject matter was the human body, a landscape, animals, or a still life, left the work devoid of the spirit and character which defined Eastern art. Okakura especially disdained much of the art produced during the industrial age since he felt the artistic community had become slaves of consumerism, creating mere decoration that served as a vulgar display of wealth, rather than real art. He identified the modern West with industrialization and the mass production of goods. Instead of creating hand crafted goods that carried the spirit and personality of the artisan who made them, the West had given itself over to a world where goods were created by the cold and unfeeling claws of machines, and therefore, lacked the originality, creativity, and individuality found in handmade items.

For Okakura, Western art and society had become a poor substitute for the spirit and individualism found in the East, having traded creativity and freedom for realism and sameness.

Okakura Kakuzō lived through a period when many Japanese were rejecting or abandoning their cultural traditions in favor of Western civilization. In such an environment, not only were many valuable cultural artifacts destroyed but the core spirit of the people and their culture appeared to be in danger of extinction. Okakura was one of the cultural conservatives who mourned the loss of Eastern heritage, but he was not an ultraconservative who sought to preserve traditions in their purest form. Indeed, he perceived the art histories of the East and West to be a history of evolution, where encounters between societies with different traditions were one of the most powerful agents of cultural change. For Okakura, the two halves of civilization developed separately in parallel and he believed that these two civilizations could each be elevated to an even higher level by incorporating good elements from each other while still maintaining their distinct identities. For him, Eastern and Western civilizations were thesis and antithesis, being equal in their stature and magnificence. In the area of aesthetics, Okakura perceived the East to possess higher quality than the West. What Okakura Kakuzō tried to accomplish was the elevation of Eastern civilization to the same level, if not higher than, Western civilization in the eyes of his fellow countrymen, his Asian friends, and Westerners.