“Art and Power in Japan: The Creation of Japan’s National Treasure System”

2016 FACDIS International Studies Summer Institute

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Meiji Restoration "in a Nutshell"

Meiji Period: 1868-1912

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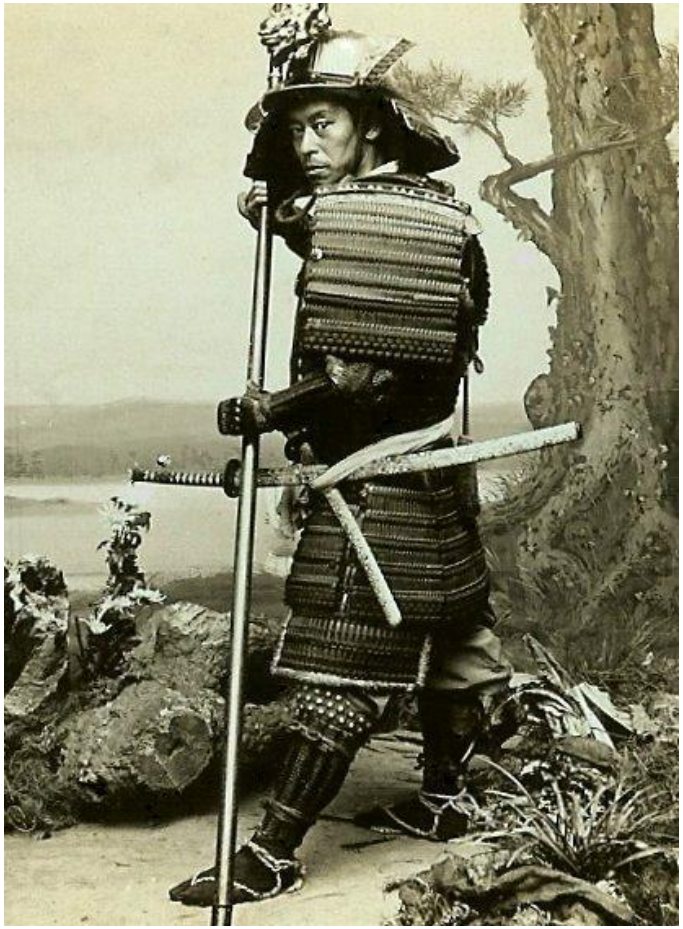
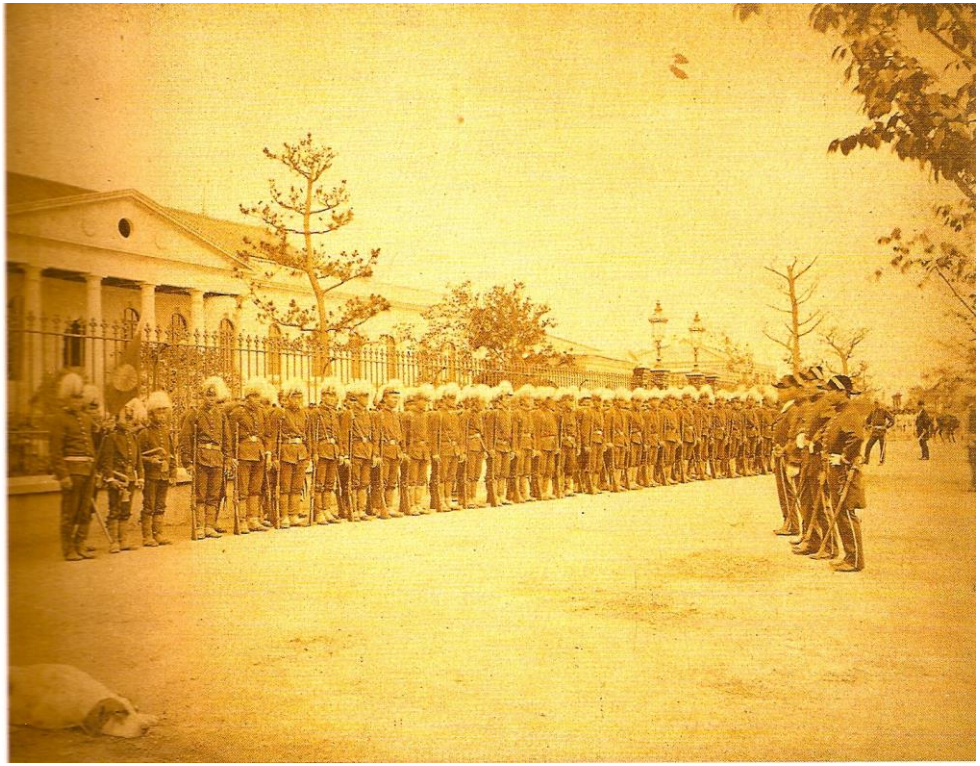
Infrastructural Changes: Trains and Architecture

Benkei Railroad, 1872

Rokumeikan, 1883

From Samurai to Modern Military





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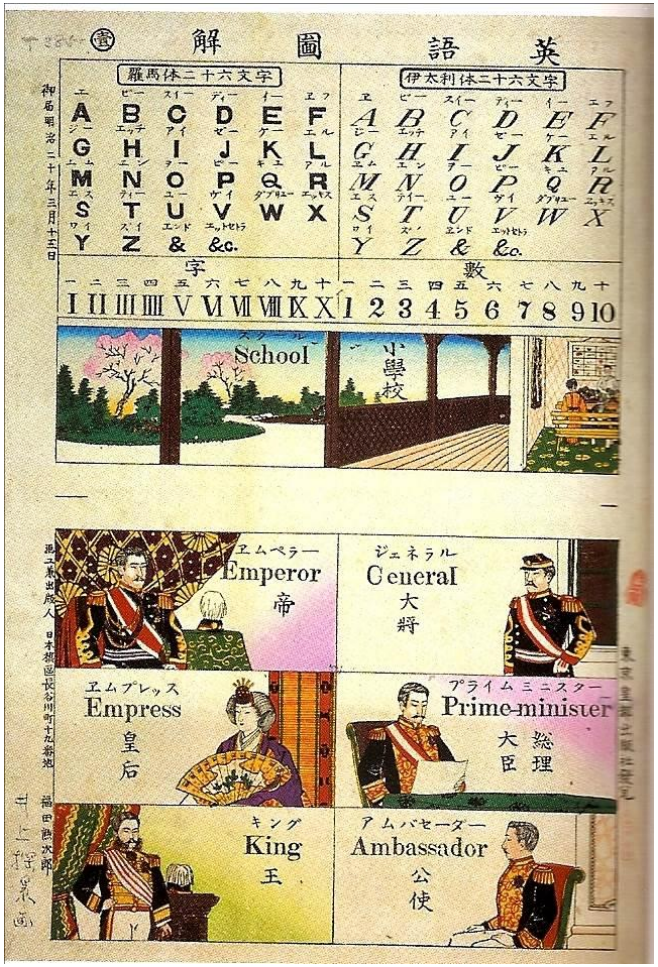

“Civilization and Enlightenment” Music at the Rokumeikan

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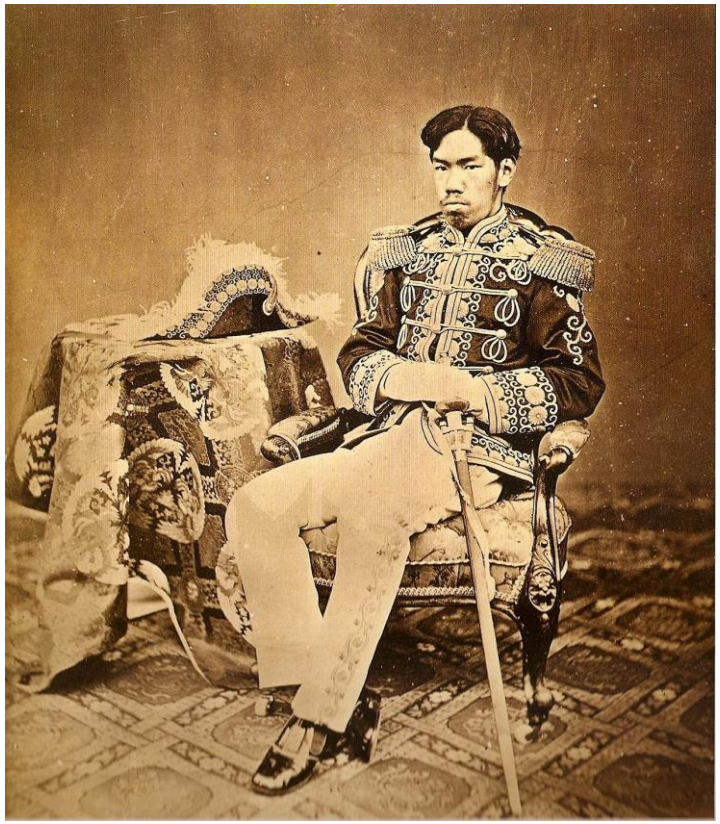

Meiji Dichotomy
Tak Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy*

- Kyoto
- tradition, past
- Emperor as god
- removed from politics
- invisible
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- Tokyo
- modernity, future
- Emperor as secular
- Emperor as head of State
- visible
- hair

What Do Woodblock Prints of the Emperor (*nishiki-e*) Contribute?

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- **Where does "art" fit in?**

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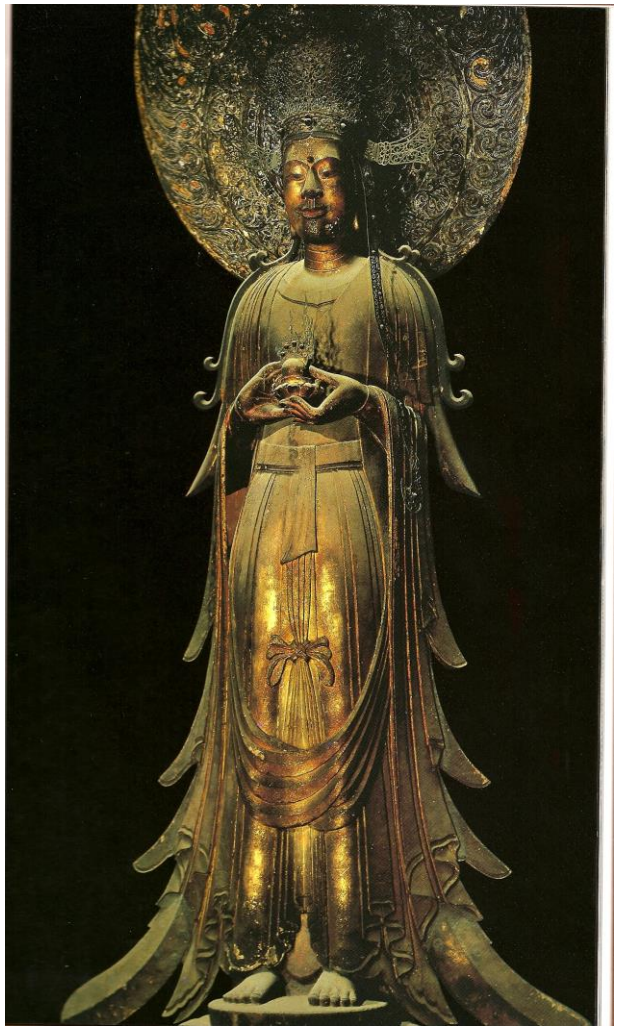
"Discovery" of Yumedono's Guze *kannon*, Hôryûji, 7th century (1884)



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- 1888: transition to the 10-year *national* survey, which ranked 215,091 objects; **advent of treasure photography**

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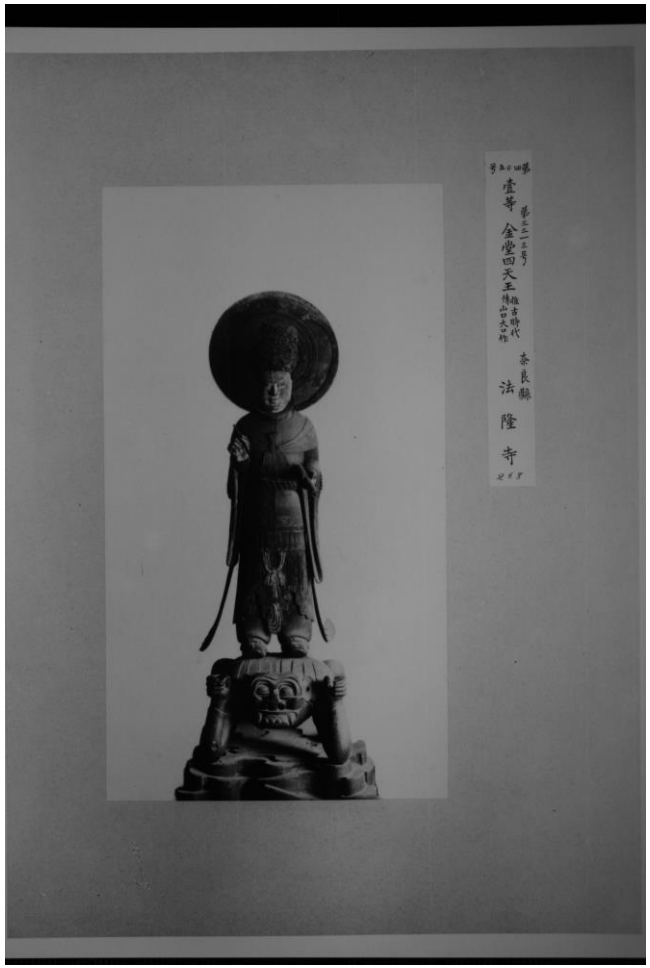
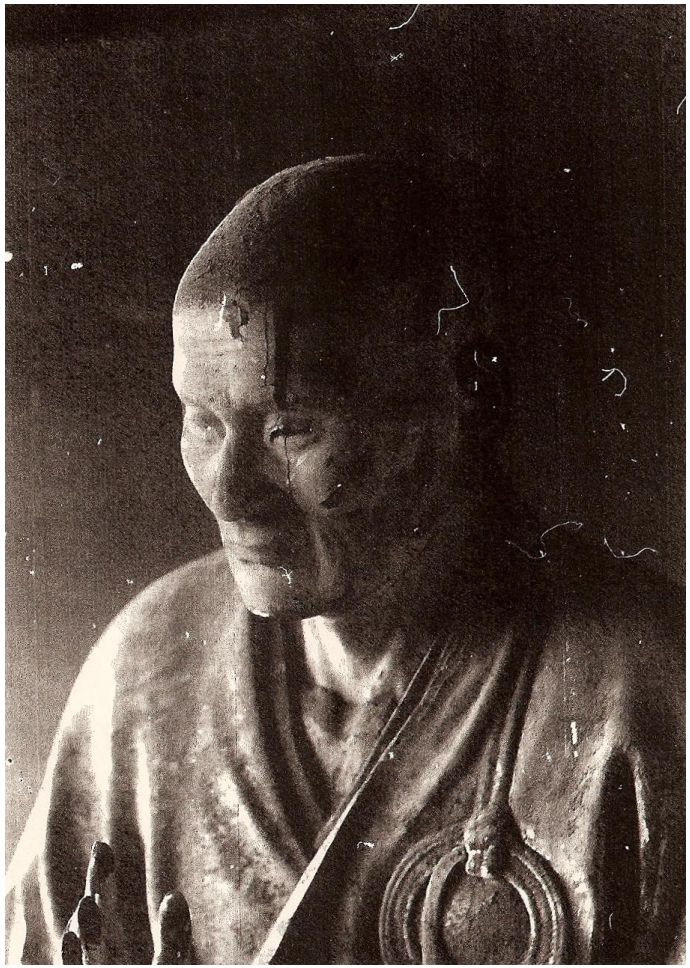
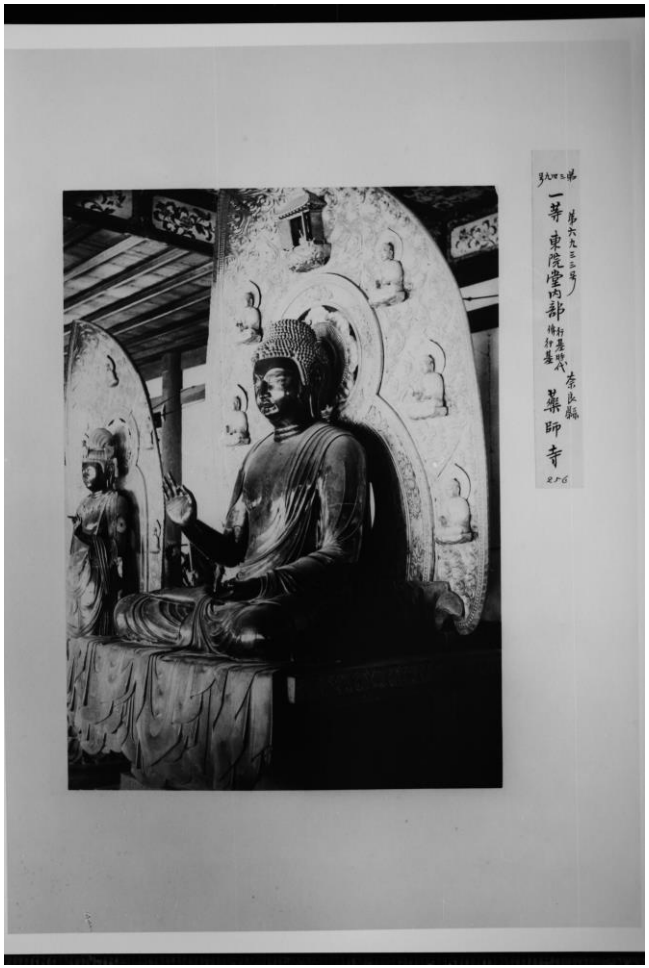
Ogawa Kazumasa, Photographer: (L) *Shitennô*, 7th c.; (R) *Muchaku bosatsu*, Unkei, 1208-1212 (photo 1888-1889)



Ogawa and Muchaku Close-ups: Record or Art?



Ogawa, photographer: Yakushi Triad, late 7th/early 8th (1888-1889)

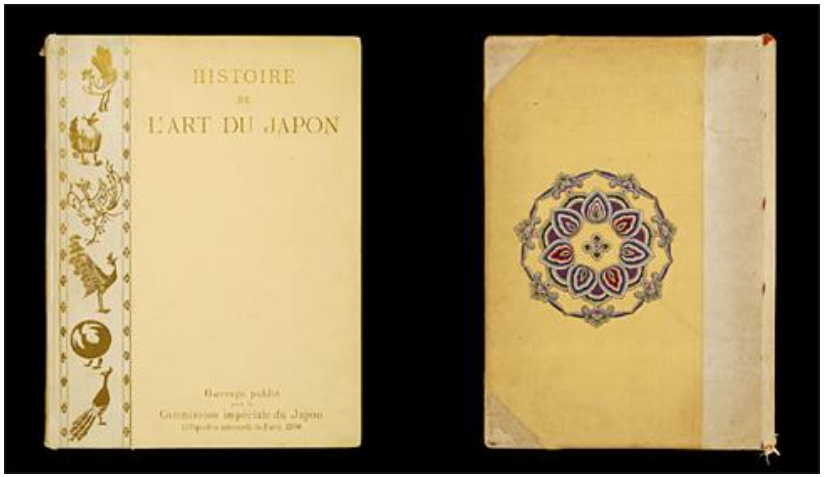


Ogawa and bijutsu kôgei 美術工芸: (L) kabuto (helmet), Kasuga and (R) Tamamushi shrine

Popularizing Japanese Art Around the World

Kokka

***Histoire de L'art du Japon*, 1900**



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Kyoto National Museum (1897)

Distinction Among the Three Imperial Museums

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- Kyoto (1897)
  - Display art between 8th and 18th centuries (Paris)

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- 1897: Ancient Shrines and Temples Protection Law

Main Themes of Ancient Shrines and Temples Protection Law, 1897 (*koshaji hozon hô* 古社寺保存法)

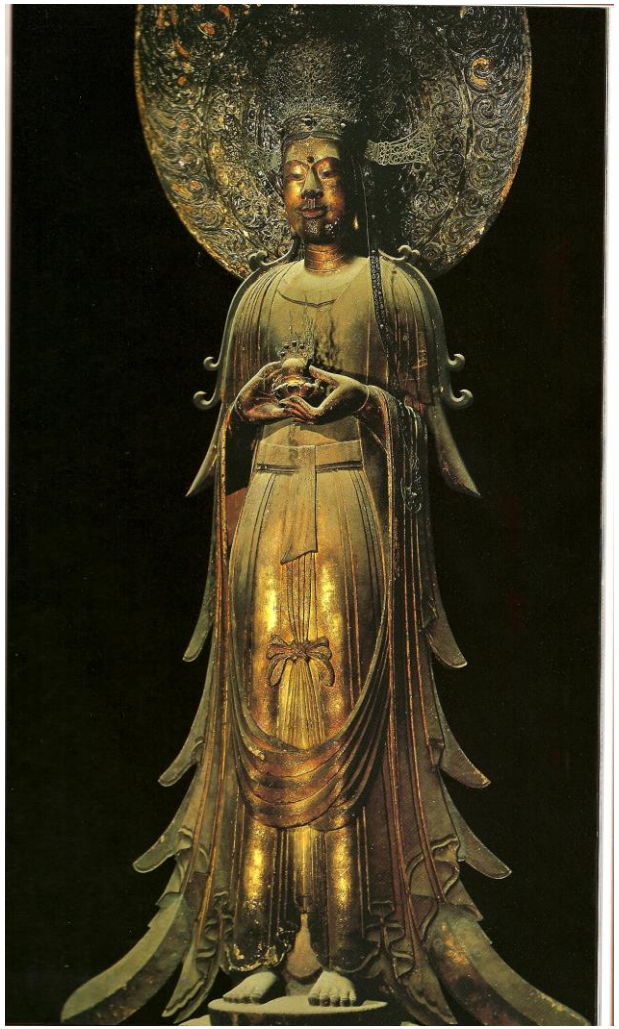
- First official use of the word *kokuhô* (国宝): **National Treasure**
- Included *structures* as worthy of protection
- (vs. 1871 "list") emphasizes qualities, not items
- Punitive emphasis

Cautions of "Capital H" **H**istory

"The past is not only transmitted forward in a *linear* fashion, its meaning are also *dispersed* in space and time. Bifurcation points to the process whereby , in transmitting the past, Historical narratives and language appropriate dispersed histories according to present needs, thus revealing how the present shapes the past."

Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*

"Discovery" of Yumedono's Guze *kannon*, Hôryûji, 7th century (1884)



What Do We Do With This?

"But it was the aesthetic wonders of this work that attracted us the most. From the front, the figure is not quite so noble, but seen in profile, it seemed to rise to the height of archaic Greek art. But the finest feature was the profile of the head…on which a quiet mysterious smile played, not unlike Da Vinci's Mona Lisa's. Recalling the archaic stiffness of Egyptian art at its finest, it appeared still finer in the sharpness and individuality of the cutting. In slimness it was like a Gothic statue from Amiens."

Ernest Fenollosa

"When we cleared away the spider webs, we saw a table which is said to be from the Higashiyama period…[The statue] was 7 or 8 feet tall and wrapped endlessly in pieces of cloth or sutra…Up to the middle of the Ashikaga period this statue was probably not a hidden idol…On the face the cheekbones were high and the lower cheeks drooped. This was a common form of Buddhist statues of the Suiko period."

Okakura Tenshin