This lack of organization often arbitrarily limits what students are able to say on their own. For example, the word 高い 'expensive' is introduced in lesson 2 along with prices and a dialogue about a flea market, but the word 安い 'cheap' and negative forms of adjectives are not introduced until lesson 5. Of course, students can simply label every price they see as "expensive," or the teacher can intervene, but if *Genki* had been organized around the principle of enabling students to communicate their own original thoughts and ideas, it is unlikely that this problem would have occurred.

Overall, while *Genki*'s appearance has been modernized, its language teaching philosophy has, if anything, regressed. There is no mention of broader proficiency goals or standards. While each lesson begins with a statement of ostensible outcomes (e.g., two outcomes of lesson 9 (*kabuki*) are "Report someone's speech" and "Order food in a restaurant or shop"), the material presented is insufficient to support their achievement beyond the narrowest of contexts. While the field of second language acquisition has placed increasing focus on fostering the development of skills that language learners can apply in various contexts flexibly, *Genki* still promotes an idea of language acquisition as the piecemeal memorization and assemblage of discrete words and grammatical forms. To be sure, great teaching can be achieved using *Genki*—this author personally will continue to use it in the classroom—but with considerable regret for what could have been if the effort that went into improving on its already strong points had instead focused on what learners of Japanese will do outside the classroom.

New Essays in Japanese Aesthetics

By **A. Minh Nguyen, ed.** Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2018. lxxv, 449 pp. $49.99.

Reviewed by
Rea Amit

The discourse on "Japanese aesthetes" could probably be traced back to the middle of the nineteenth century and the European trend known as *Japonisme*. The French label marked a profound fascination for Japanese (mainly visual) culture that, while inspiring European and North

American artists, also spread misconceptions about the island nation. Outside of Japan, rigorous academic studies on what "Japanese aesthetics" might mean began only in the middle of the twentieth century. Despite the continuous interest in the subject or perhaps even nascent field of study, there were only a few attempts to fill this lacuna in English language scholarship that directly addressed what aesthetics could mean in a Japanese context. Notable in this regard are the pioneering works of literary scholar Donald Keene from the mid-1950s, Nancy G. Hume's edited volume *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture* (1995), several publications by Yuriko Saito, as well as, arguably most importantly, works by the late Michael F. Marra. *New Essays in Japanese Aesthetics* is therefore an invaluable addition to the specific topic at hand, and to the larger field of Japanese studies.

Editor Nguyen has gathered for the volume a formidable group of scholars from different disciplines including philosophy, Japanese literature, and history of art. These scholars harness their expertise to focus on myriad aspects of Japanese art and culture such as gardening, literature, film, calligraphy, painting, cuisine, poetry, theater, and even martial arts. Several of the chapters in the volume are more theoretical, exploring philosophical concepts or pondering different articulations of Japanese aesthetics in the writings of various thinkers. Other chapters are more practice-oriented, uncovering manifestations of such theories in actual art-making, in the broadest sense of the term. A few chapters even go so far to challenge the "Japanese" factor in the national sense of its purported aesthetics. For example, Koji Yamasaki and Mara Miller focus on Ainu aesthetics, and Hiroshi Nara's chapter looks at an imagined idea of Greece in modern Japanese culture.

The volume boasts twenty-seven chapters, a foreword by Stephen Addiss (who has also contributed the image that adorns the front cover), a preface, a general introduction to the subject, followed by the editor's book introduction. The chapters are divided into six parts: Japanese Aesthetics and Philosophy, Japanese Aesthetics and Culture, Japanese Aesthetics and Cultural Politics (the longest part, with six chapters), Japanese Aesthetics and Literature, Japanese Aesthetics and the Visual Arts, and the Legacy of Kuki Shūzō (the shortest part, with three chapters).

This division could be seen as somewhat arbitrary (for example, Timothy Unverzagt Goddard's chapter on novelist Nagai Kafū and the "Aesthetics of Urban Strolling" could have easily been included in the

"Literature" or the "Culture" parts instead of the "Politics" one). However, given the ambiguity surrounding the volume's main topic, and the vast array of subtopics attempting to exemplify its meaning, some overlap in chapters is unavoidable. Moreover, in his careful introduction, the editor provides an astute consideration of the volume's inner organization, along with a brief yet precise presentation of each chapter that explains their placement rationale.

Despite the volume's breadth, and its overwhelming diversity, an underlining tendency does tie the majority of the chapters together, namely: the emphasis on Japan's premodern past. This is not a surprising preference. In fact, since the early days of *Japonisme*, intellectuals saw in Japan prior to its opening to the West a uniquely distinct cultural "Other." Much of the enthusiasm for "everything Japanese" in the twentieth century stems from this premise, including the aggrandizement of Zen Buddhism's role in Japanese culture. This volume manages to maintain the original enthusiasm, while balancing it with a more sober academic tone. This is achieved, in the cases where Zen is concerned—a subject that many of the chapters touch on—by filtering the discussion through the theoretical perspective of the Kyoto school of philosophy, and especially (although not exclusively) through the school's founder, Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945).

While some uniformity is marked throughout the volume by the majority of the chapters' inclination to point at premodern Japan as the source of its aesthetics, it is the definition of this term that sets them apart from one another. As Yuriko Saito indicates in her chapter, the academic field was established by the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762), who coined the Greek term *aesthetica* to mean sensory perception (62). One might argue that given its European origins, it would be erroneous to even discuss the applicability of the term in the Far Eastern nation. However, it is important to acknowledge (although Saito does not do so) that while Baumgarten's pioneering book on aesthetics is to this day not available in English, it has been translated from the original Latin into Japanese (the translator, Matsuo Hiroshi, was the reviewer's master's thesis advisor at Tokyo University of the Arts). Thus, the absorption of the term might arguably be more extensive in Japan than in other countries. In fact, some of Japan's leading academic institutions host aesthetics departments that are led by professionals dedicated solely to this field of study.

Yet, the volume does not consider works by contemporary Japanese aestheticians. Rather, most of the chapters showcase a greater fascination for Japanese phenomena or objects. Aesthetics, in this context, is understood or applied mainly as a matter of style. For example, in his insightful chapter on Japanese food appreciation, Graham Parkes discusses the notion of "taste" and rightly singles out its importance in the philosophical literature on aesthetics (although he does not mention Hume's "Of the Standard of Taste"). At the same time, however, he also refers at one point to an "aesthetic appearance," thereby evoking the non-philosophical meaning of the term (110).

Similarly, John C. Maraldo acknowledges the original philosophical meaning of the term, but he moves on to advance an idea of "the aesthetics of emptiness" by postulating that the term also considers beauty (335). Matthew Larking also situates the term within the realm of beauty (indeed, the Japanese *bigaku* could be translated as "the study of beauty"), but he introduces a new sense of an "individualized aesthetics" (320). Alternatively, while considering certain features in recent poems that were distributed online in response to Fukushima's triple disaster, Roy Starrs proposes an "aesthetics of disaster." This, he convincingly demonstrates, is not a new phenomenon, but one that can be traced back to what he calls "court poetry aesthetics" (290).

Other chapters discuss aesthetics as a form of experience. Chiefly among them is the chapter by James McRae who refers to John Dewey's famous articulation of art as experience. It would have been a compelling position from which to explore a uniquely Japanese form of such experience. Unfortunately, however, the chapter ultimately argues for Japanese art as an object that can "promote aesthetics experience" (130), thereby, unlike Dewy, implying that artistic objects rather than their emotional or perceptual reception accommodate a *Japanese* "aesthetics."

In his preface, Nguyen acknowledges the lack of consistency among the chapters in terms of their contributors' "personal and professional preferences" (xxvi). It would be tedious to underline editorial errors in such a vast volume, especially given that several of the contributors may have had only limited access to sources written in Japanese. The editor himself at one instance swaps the writing order of Japanese names in his introduction (lxiv), despite vowing to follow the Japanese custom of placing last names before the given ones. Although it is only a minor inconsistency, it is arguably nonetheless indicative of the predicament in recognizing cultural and social customs, one that might be the volume's

central unsettling propensity. This is seen most clearly in the way contributors use another term "tradition."

Even in English, the idea of "tradition" stirs debates, and applying it to the Japanese context in the sense of premodern customs—as scholars such as Masao Miyoshi, Harry Harootunian, and Marilyn Ivy for instance have shown—can be problematic. Seemingly indifferent to Eric Hobsbawm's general critique of "invented tradition," or Stephen Vlastos' work that sheds light on specific cases of such "inventions" in Japan, several contributors are at ease discussing Japanese "traditional aesthetics" (269). One might wonder in this regard when and why Japanese tradition had ceased to exist. It is doubtful that any contributor or the editor intended to argue that tradition cannot coexist in contemporary Japan, but the overemphasis on Japan's past throughout the volume suggests a perpetual dichotomy.

In the same vein, Japanese aesthetics is contrasted with Western aesthetics or even, in at least one case, Japanese concepts are presented as opposing "traditional Western philosophical concepts" (385). Philosophy arrived in Japan at the same time as aesthetics during the Meiji era, when the country was going through an accelerated process of modernization. Japanese aesthetics is therefore rooted in the country's modern identity. Beyond the tensions between "tradition" and "modernity," many of the chapters in the volume overstress cultural divides between Japan and the West. While the origins of the philosophical "tradition" of aesthetics are European, and while it is possible to apply the term retroactively on areas where it has not been in use, it is still necessary to consider why Japan deserves its own aesthetic domain where other countries, including Russia, Spain, or Egypt, do not.

In addition to these large issues, and given the magnitude of the volume, minor errors in chapters are inevitable. For instance, Thorsten Botz-Bornstein mistakenly dates the animated work *Akira* to 1999, although it was actually released in 1988, and while *Ghost in the Shell* was indeed adapted into a Hollywood film, it was directed by Rupert Sanders not Steven Spielberg, in 2017, not 2008. More critical (at least in my area of expertise, Japanese film and media studies), Jason M. Wirth misleadingly refers to common camera placement or positioning in Ozu Yasujirō's films as "low angle," a phenomenon actually more common in Hollywood films, especially in the American genre of the western.

Still, other chapters can bolster interdisciplinary learning. For example, it is revealing to learn about art historian Yashiro Yukio's work

in J. Thomas Rimer's chapter, particularly about how he saw in *emakimono* picture scrolls "technique of the cinema" (172), a topic I have written about in the context of film theorist Imamura Taihei. The last chapter, by Peter Leech, too, is groundbreaking in its ability to think through philosopher Kuki Shūzō's work beyond time and place. I too have done so previously with, admittedly, less convincing power.

Leech also acknowledges (albeit only in an endnote) Michael F. Marra's contribution to the field (410). This is a significant reference because what the volume and the field most critically lack is more engagement with writing on aesthetics in Japanese beyond the University of Kyoto. The main obstacle many scholars face in this regard is the absence of enough translations into English. Marra has provided a few translations of works by key aestheticians including Tokyo University's Ōnishi Yoshinori, and Imamichi Tomonobu. Still, other aestheticians, for example, Nishimura Kiyokazu and Otabe Tanehisa, among many others who continue to advance disciplinary study of Japanese aesthetics in their writings, should also be included.

In sum, *New Essays in Japanese Aesthetics* is a major contribution to Japanese studies. It widens the opportunity for non-Japanese specialists to engage with the paradox that is aesthetics itself, and not Japan as a *topos*. Chapters in the volume will surely intrigue scholars in many disciplines, as well as students, graduate and undergraduate alike. Despite its magnitude it does not exhaust the topic. On the contrary, it leaves much more to be desired, and puts forth a demand for more vigorous studies, more collaborative academic work on non-Western aesthetics, and for a broader inclusion of aesthetics into the larger field of Japanese studies.

The Tale of Genji*: A Japanese Classic Illuminated*

Edited by **John T. Carpenter** and **Melissa McCormick**. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2019. 368pp.

Reviewed by
Marjorie Burge

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