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Crossings and Dislocations: Toshio Aoki (1854–1912), A Japanese Artist in California

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Abstract:

In the mid-to late 1880s, a little-known Japanese painter named Aoki Toshio arrived in San Francisco, where he made a name for himself as T. Aoki, a painter, newspaper and magazine illustrator, and public storyteller. As a Japanese painter in California, Aoki was subject to prejudice from both Japanese and Americans, each of whom endeavored to situate him within a different set of social identities and artistic styles. This article assesses his positionality and works, asking what they reveal about the international circuits of *Japonisme* and Japanese art in the late nineteenth-century.

Crossings and Dislocations: Toshio Aoki (1854–1912), A Japanese Artist in California

by Chelsea Foxwell

In 1908, amid debates about the status of culture, internationalism, and modern art that continued to trail Japan's Russo-Japanese war victory, the prominent Tokyo art journal *Kaiga sōshi* (Painting digest) published the following report about the state of Japanese art's visibility in America and beyond. "As for *nihonga* [Japanese-style] painters," the author wrote,

Europeans and Americans know the late Kubota Beisen; for scholars they know Okakura Kakuzō, and among painters of great technical skill the late Hashimoto Gahō [has a reputation]. But each of these men is known only to the learned few and not at all among the population at large. The person who is known among the greatest number of Europeans and Americans, to the extent that it would be an embarrassment to fine ladies and gentleman had they *not* heard of him, is really Aoki Hyōsai.[1]

This name, as unfamiliar to us today as it was to the readers of *Kaiga sōshi* in 1908, refers to a Japanese painter and illustrator better known as Aoki Toshio or simply "T. Aoki." [2] Aoki was an immigrant artist who relocated from Yokohama to San Francisco in the 1880s and spent the rest of his life in California, dying in San Diego in 1912. [3] Virtually unknown before the past decade, his paintings—usually described as watercolor and gouache on paper—are now entering museum collections for the first time. In addition to representing the activities of one of the earliest known Japanese painters in California, they also offer a perspective on Japanese art's global positioning in the late nineteenth century: why and how did Aoki succeed in the States, and what was his relationship to the art world in turn-of-the century Japan?

During the 1880s and 1890s, artists first began to travel to Europe and America in small numbers, either as producers of Japanese-style export wares or as aspiring students of oil painting. [4] There they were obliged to confront racial prejudice as well as the broader cultural and economic forces of *Japonisme*, the passion for things Japanese that had begun in French artistic and literary circles but soon spread to communities on both sides of the Atlantic. [5] While Western *Japonistes* had indulged in creating a dreamt-of Japan in accordance with their own cultural and aesthetic agendas, Aoki was one of a small number of Japanese painters in the 1880s and 1890s who produced works in the course of sustained interaction with Western viewers outside of Japan. This, along with his involvement with California *Japonisme* and other local artistic trends, led his work in directions that differed both from European *Japonisme* and from art in Japan. [6] As we shall see, these developments were not met with favor by the Japanese reporter who covered Aoki's story in 1908. In fact, in a process that literally added insult to injury, the artist's failure to gain positive recognition in Japan was arguably tied to the racial obstacles he encountered in the American West.

Aoki likely never returned to his home country after his initial trip to the United States in the 1880s. Rather than focus on Japan, therefore, this article will consider the artist's relocation process as it was shaped by California *Japonisme*'s limits and potentials. In general, *Japonisme* was more ambivalent than Orientalism: while it almost always fell into primitivizing Japan at

some level, it also alluded to the dream of a truly alternative world where established Western prerogatives would be relativized or set aside.[7] Furthermore, the fin-de-siècle American myths of California and Japan were intertwined: both were romanticized as Edenic lands free from the ills of modern, industrialized society. [8] In this context, I suggest that Aoki’s mixing of medium and performance established a workable channel of interaction between the artist and his American patrons in the final years of the nineteenth century. Performance and iconographic experimentation expanded Aoki’s possibilities as an artist, but his solutions were not necessarily welcome or relevant in Japan. In the home country, rather, Aoki’s images and reputation—or at least accounts of them—surfaced briefly to challenge the versions of high art and international modernism that had become established in Tokyo and Kyoto.

Demon Painter

The earliest reliable source on Aoki is not a text but a painting. The undated *Shōki and Demons* helps tease out the fault lines of style, genre, and social class that came to be enmeshed within biographical interpretations of the artist on both sides of the Pacific. *Shōki* (Chinese: Zhongkui), the legendary demon queller, reclines in a palatial, vaguely Buddhist setting among a host of unruly demons: some arm-wrestle, play the shamisen, dance, cackle, fan themselves, and even read sutras (figs. 1, 2, 3). Signed “*Dai Nippon, Yokohama*” (Great Japan, Yokohama) in the manner of typical Meiji export art, the painting attests to his presence in Yokohama, the hub of international trade and the foreign settlement, although it is unclear whether Aoki produced it in Japan or America.[9] The work’s detailed, penumbrous style and Western illusionism exhibit affinities with late Edo and early Meiji monsters, ghosts, and pandemonium *hyakki yagyō* (night procession of one hundred demons) scenes that were popular at the time.[10] Its dark, crowded composition and emphasis on the foreign, unbeautiful bodies of the demon queller and his subjects evoke the works of Hokusai (1760–1849) and Kuniyoshi (1797–1862). As such, the painting is removed from nineteenth-century high art but is far from unusual: it represents an exuberant culture of the supernatural that underwent intense pictorialization in the late Edo and early Meiji periods.[11]



Fig. 1, Toshio Aoki, *Shōki and Demons*, late nineteenth century. Hanging scroll: ink, colors, and gold on silk. Clark Family Collection, on long-term loan to the Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture, Hanford, California. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 2, Detail of Toshio Aoki, *Shōki and Demons* (fig. 1). [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 3, Detail of Toshio Aoki, *Shōki and Demons* (fig. 1). [\[larger image\]](#)

While supernatural beings and their documentation have a rich legacy in all periods of Japanese history, in Aoki's time a new range of pictorial effects, especially Western illusionism and Qing Chinese metapictorial play, were marshaled to express the supernatural in new ways. [12] The appreciation of supernatural images, stories, and theater centered around the pleasurable sensation of playful, ironic viewing that made ghost images, kabuki, and ghost-themed street performances so popular as expressions of anxiety, criticism, humor, and ambivalence toward the unknown. [13] In the early Meiji period, demon images were associated with satire and urban popular entertainment, and early to mid-Meiji government officials repeatedly disparaged them. [14]

Aoki's *Shōki and Demons* reflects the extension of a grotesque, irreverent aesthetic into the Meiji period. At the same time, its use of what were perceived in Japan as Western artistic features of intricacy (*saiku imitsu*), shading, and spatial recession enacted a progressivism that likely struck many early Meiji viewers as timely and appealing. Intricate detail, drawn-back curtains evocative of those in nineteenth-century portrait photographs, and diligent concern with volumetric shading function as an expedient form of spatial illusionism. Two cave openings that appear behind the main action also experiment with depth by providing a view of a world beyond the space that Shōki inhabits (fig. 4). [15] The distant land visible through the cave opening resembles traditional Song- and Yuan-style ink painting, the bread and butter orthodoxy of elite Japanese painting, in contrast to the popular or vulgar style exemplified by the *Shōki* itself. This metapictorial awareness is underscored by the painting's prominent

inclusion of other art objects within itself: a Buddha statue is deliberately shown from the side as if to emphasize its status as a made object, and a painted screen bears Aoki's signature (fig. 5).



Fig. 4, Detail of Toshio Aoki, *Shōki and Demons* (fig. 1). [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 5, Detail of Toshio Aoki, *Shōki and Demons* (fig. 1). [\[larger image\]](#)

The image's status at the boundary of high and low class, of attraction and repulsion, illuminates key factors in the rhetorical positioning of Aoki's biography. When the author of the 1908 *Kaiga sōshi* article first encountered Aoki, the painter had already been living in California for twenty years. In the resort town of Pasadena, we are told, all the well-heeled vacationers know his studio, and "during the Season his place is constantly bustling."^[16] How was it that an unknown Japanese painter had attained such enviable status in America? "There are several reasons why he has provoked such renown," offers the reporter, "but . . . the story of the first half of his life is more extraordinary than a novel, so I shall record a little of it here." Aoki was allegedly a samurai from Aizu, one of the domains that had remained loyal to the shogunate and opposed the new government in the battles of the 1860s. By this account he was briefly jailed following the Restoration because of his political affiliations; once freed, he responded to the call of an American who was assembling Japanese artisans to form a show (*misemono*; the term connotes a popular sideshow or minor spectacle) in America.^[17] This last

note is more or less true: around 1885, Aoki was part of a group of artisans and performers that toured the United States under the auspices of the Deakin Brothers and Company, Yokohama-based exporters of Japanese goods.[18] After he finished touring, Aoki appears to have ended up in San Francisco; in 1888 he could be found there working for G. T. Marsh, importer of East Asian art and curios.[19]

While Americans viewed Aoki as an artist, the 1908 *Kaiga sōshi* article reports that he had been permitted to join the group as a *sunā-eshi*, or sand painter, a term that denoted a form of street performer rather than a true painter. In her memoirs written in the 1940s, the *nihonga* painter Uemura Shōen recalls that when she was a child in Kyoto during the 1870s and 1880s, there was a dirty, tattered sand-painter (*sunā-gaki*) of about fifty who would amuse the children by sprinkling handfuls of colored sand to make transient pictures.[20] If this is the meaning of *sunā-eshi* set down in the 1908 account of Aoki, then the term would have suggested an extremely lowly form of artist to readers in the early twentieth century.

The 1908 article proceeds in dramatic fashion to report that Aoki studied at an acting school in New York, married a French woman who later died, and ultimately settled in California. Here, it is noteworthy that Aoki's earlier status as a wandering street performer is followed up by the report that he joined an acting school in New York, a note that would have further convinced early twentieth-century Japanese readers of his marginal status. The article exposes such concerns with class and status when it later insists that Aoki "does not necessarily excel at the techniques of Japanese painting [*nihonga*]; instead, he enchants [literally: 'intoxicates'] the Americans with his strange talent [*kisai*] and distinctive social skills." [21] The journal article further claims that Aoki was modest: the émigré artist reputedly insisted that his paintings were worthless as *nihonga* and urged those who wanted to experience true Japanese painting to go to Japan and visit the painting studios there, where, he states, he "would be unfit to be so much as the doorman." [22]

Elaborate anecdotes are common to early twentieth-century Japanese artists' biographies, but it is notable that the Japanese text both elevates and disparages Aoki, averaging his identity between a former samurai and the lowest of street entertainers. At the hands of the Japanese reporter the painter denies that his works have any value, particularly with respect to the "real" Japanese painters in Japan.[23] This self-assessment does not comport with Aoki's masterful *Shōki and Demons*, which uses complex, relatively orthodox techniques of ink handling and color application that typically required years of professional training. What the painting lacks, rather, is the awareness of how such demon paintings might represent Japan as a nation in the eyes of the West, an issue that was of increasing concern to Japanese art administrators and commentators from the 1880s onward.[24] The 1908 Japanese article betrays anxieties about Aoki's social status and his fame among what it repeatedly describes as upper-class "gentlemen and ladies" in California.

Aoki on Foreign Ground

It should not be concluded that the *Kaiga sōshi* reporter wholly fabricated Aoki's story; rather, what we see here is a working through of the larger anxieties about the face of "authentic" Japanese art in the global age of *Japonisme*. These anxieties reached back to issues of social status that remained relevant for artists at this time. In other words, this was a metaphorical mapping of Aoki's career onto the larger social and political matrix that remained in the wake

of the Restoration. Aoki's "jailing" (real or metaphorical?), and the association of his vulgar—and by 1908, dated—style of demon painting with anti-Restoration themes constituted a metaphorical imposition of the painter's street-performance style back onto the turn-of-the-century Japanese map of "Japanese art." While Aoki may have been good at performing, he was likely neither from Aizu nor jailed in the immediate post-Restoration period. According to one account, he was born in Yokohama and studied with Kawada Suigai (1831–1900), a samurai bureaucrat in the service of the daimyo of Tottori domain and a disciple of Tottori's official painter Oki Ichiga (1796–1855).[25] Ichiga was noted for his tendency to negotiate between orthodox Kano ink painting and Qing- or Western-style illusionism, and between life as a painter in waiting to the daimyo and an artist at play in the urban environment.[26] Aoki, too, likely occupied the in-between status of a low-ranking samurai or highly educated artisan and may have crafted or embellished the stories about his background that were reported in *Kaiga sōshi* and also echoed in some American sources on his life. In reality, while he may have been born near Yokohama, it is equally possible that he went there to take up a job as a painter of export pottery; at the Second Domestic Industrial Exhibition of 1881 in Tokyo he was listed as the author of a hand-painted warrior image on a ceramic vase.[27] It is also possible that Aoki went to Yokohama to study the oil painting that he would continue to pursue in California.

In the American West, Aoki continued to work as a painter, performer, and illustrator. Toward the end of his life, he worked and lived at the Hotel Green in Pasadena.[28] As mentioned above, he also produced paintings for the wildly successful merchant and importer of Japanese goods G. T. Marsh.[29] Marsh had lived in Yokohama as a teenager in the 1870s and claims to have been the first department store proprietor in San Francisco to lay his wares out on tables instead of keeping them behind the counter: in his multi-room stores he separated objects by medium—porcelain, bronze, silk, and curios—engulfing customers in an exotic space that evoked an actual antique shop in Japan (fig. 6).[30] These display modes stimulated the sense of discovery that foreign visitors savored in Japan; like the pavilions at the world's fairs, they also offered visitors the free entertainment of being transported to a fictive, exotic space.



Fig. 6, *The Porcelain Room at G. T. Marsh's Japanese Art Repository, San Francisco, CA*, date unknown (after 1885).
Photograph. [\[larger image\]](#)

When Aoki came to America to work for the Deakin Brothers and for Marsh, he was inserted into the fictive environment of the curio shop and changed from a behind-the-scenes producer of objects to a performer who executed paintings before his potential clients' eyes. In

1908, the young Clarence Gamble (1894–1966), together with his father, visited Aoki at the Hotel Green and photographed him painting on a Western umbrella (fig. 7).^[31] In Japan, the established practice of painting or writing before the viewer's eyes (*sekiga* or *seki-e*) pervaded all levels of society, from street artists and *ukiyo-e* print designers to private literati practitioners and painters in the service of the daimyo or shogun. When Aoki engaged in *seki-e* in the United States, however, it was clearly within a broader context of popular performance. According to an article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, he performed as a storyteller for children and adults, simultaneously illustrating his stories with humorous or grotesque ink sketches. "While at work," noted a reporter, "the little artist keeps up a running comment in funny English about himself and his art" (fig. 8).^[32] Early American commentators often conflated Aoki and his paintings: he painted strange or comical figures, and he himself was described as droll or strange.^[33] He was admired for his skill, naturalism, and facility with the brush, but the humorous or strange nature of his works was often interpreted through the standard primitivist perception of Japan as a land that was strange or childlike.^[34] His 1893 illustrations in the *Californian* magazine were described as possessing "a queer oriental flavor" (fig. 9).^[35] On another occasion we are told that "Aoki . . . painted queer and laughable figures on lanterns of an odd sort."^[36]



Fig. 7, David Berry Gamble and Clarence James Gamble, *T. Aoki*, 1908, Photograph. Sarah Merry Bradley Gamble Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 8, Toshio Aoki, *The Three Buns*, 1895. Photomechanical reproduction of an ink drawing. *The San Francisco Call*, July 21, 1895, 14. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 9, Toshio Aoki, “Do You Tire of Pleasing the Stranger, Naka-san?,” from *The Romance of Yono-san*, 1893. Photomechanical reproduction of an ink drawing. *The Californian Illustrated Magazine*, IV, no. 3 (August 1893): 457. [\[larger image\]](#)

This bias limited the range of professional opportunities that Aoki was able to seize during the first several years of his stay in San Francisco. While local papers such as the *San Francisco Call* hired him as an illustrator, his signed illustrations appear to have been limited to the children’s page.^[37] By 1896, he was invited to charity fundraisers, speaking engagements at the Ladies’ Sketch Club, and other society events that were heavily marked as spaces for women and children.^[38] In 1896 he produced paintings at a kindergarten charity gathering, whose advertisement had been drawn by the young Helen Hyde (1868–1919). Hyde would later travel to Japan, becoming famous for her images of Japanese women and children.^[39]

Aoki strove to negotiate a workable identity even while caught within the economic and social limitations of the export market and of Asian exclusion. Moving away from San Francisco, the crucible of the immigration debates where Japanese residents and their businesses were repeatedly attacked, he found refuge among the idle, wealthy tourists of Santa Barbara and Pasadena. He playfully sketched Los Angeles notables in the guise of traditional Japanese men

and women, and painted images of young Japanese women, goddesses, and birds (fig. 10).[40] When he ultimately moved to Pasadena full time, he became known as a ladies' drawing instructor, theatrical set designer, painter of decorated rooms, and general part of the city's attractions.[41]



Fig. 10, Toshio Aoki, Title unknown (Japanese Woman with Parasol and Lanterns), detail, ca. 1890s. Ink and color on paper mounted on board. Collection of Michael D. Brown, www.asianamericanart.com.

[\[larger image\]](#)

In sum, Aoki's artistic identity was systematically compromised in California: he was a "character," master of the queer and the laughable, of the feminine sphere of storytelling, women's clubs, dinner parties, and Japanese rooms. His images could be found at kindergarten, on the children's page, and as illustrations of Japanese stories by Western writers or translators. In this sense it is significant that he was twice marginalized: once by the structures of Orientalism and anti-Japanese sentiment in California, and the other by Japanese journalism following the Russo-Japanese War, which refused to see him as a real painter. From the Japanese side, it could be said that the reporter and his readers would have been vaguely aware of—but in states of denial about—the relentless anti-Japanese discrimination that prevented Aoki from being either a serious American artist or an "authentic" Japanese one. The solution devised by the report was to insist on Aoki's lack of skill and on his inherent unworthiness as someone connected with the theater and with street performance. Japanese residents of Japan in the early twentieth century were essentially forced to reject Aoki, for only by rejecting him and his style could they also reject the structures of racism and preserve their own ideal of a world of a universal and even-handed artistic exchange. The 1908 *Kaiga sōshi* article had to doubly disown Aoki, first as a demon painter, and second as a lowly street performer: in other words, an actor.

Performance and Transformation

Against this backdrop, Aoki became known for another type of activity: the orchestration of "Oriental receptions," in which a wealthy patron would hire the Japanese artist to produce the decorations for a fanciful Japanese party. The *Los Angeles Times* of 1896 describes one such event, hosted at the Hotel Green:

A large room in the rear of the [hotel] had been converted into an oriental garden, . . . with bamboo, miniature pagodas, and tropical plants. The soft splash of a fountain falling from a rookery covered with ferns and aquatic plants added to the illusion. The side walls were covered with canvas painted with vines, lighted up with Japanese lanterns, the effect being wonderfully realistic. . . . Mr. Aoki in a dark blue Kunono and hakamar [sic], served tea to guests in Japanese style. An orchestra discoursed music, and the reception was most interesting and successful.[42]

Transforming himself into a set designer and host, Aoki curated lavish and costly parties involving notable guests from California and elsewhere, and he continued them when he began to reside part-time and ultimately full-time in Pasadena. While they overflowed with Orientalist stereotypes, the parties were also overtly fictional, creating an environment much like that of the masquerade ball, which encouraged dissemblance, play, and the abandonment of conventional barriers to social mixing. At a springtime party, for example, the menu included carp fish or koi—a homophone for the Japanese word for “love”—“lovers’ knot potpourri,” spring mushrooms, and vegetables carved to represent fleurs-de-lis and peonies. [43] While the parties encouraged guests to meet each other, they also had the effect of allowing members of the California artistic and social scene to know Aoki.

In 1906, a wealthy businessman named William Rouss hired the Japanese artist to paint and decorate the interior of Shannon Hill, his West Virginia retirement home.[44] By that time, Aoki had already painted several “Japanese rooms” in California, just at the time that Freer had purchased Whistler’s Peacock Gallery from the widow of a London industrialist for a legendary sum of money, making front-page news.[45] He also designed sets for local productions of plays such as *Madame Butterfly*. [46]

In thinking about the painter’s ability and willingness to construct such temporary theatrical spaces, it is compelling to note that Aoki may have had a relationship with Japanese theater to begin with. When the Japanese dancer Madame Sada Yacco (1871–1946) and her husband, the kabuki star Kawakami Otojirō (1864–1911), came to San Francisco on a mission to bring kabuki to American audiences, they brought along a young girl named Tsuru and left her in the hands of Aoki, who became her adoptive father and saw to her education, theatrical training, and eventually to her debut as a silent film star.[47] The fact that Aoki met with the Kawakamis and later designed sets and theatrical rooms suggests that he was no stranger to the theater.

The Oriental fetes demanded a peculiar sort of acting: even when they were sponsored by others, they cast Aoki in the role of the generous and well-heeled host. In 1903 he hosted a cherry blossom dinner in his Pasadena studio. The event was featured in the *Good Housekeeping Hostess* of the following year (fig. 11). “For weeks,” we are told,



Fig. 11, “The Host and His Helpers Preparing for the Cherry Blossom Dinner,” ca. 1903–04. Photographic reproduction. *The Good Housekeeping Hostess*, 1904, 87. [\[larger image\]](#)

Aoki and his students, some of them American girls who study with him, had been busy decorating the studio, painting the dinner cards and decorating and writing the cards of invitation, seventy-five of which were dispatched by special messenger three days before the affair. . . . Six thousand artificial cherry blossoms had been sent from Japan Dozens of wild goat skins, upon which were wrought most exquisite designs of peonies, iris, cherry blossoms, dragons, storks, demons, and gods, covered one wall, while above ran a double frieze of crimson and green matting made of the fiber of the famous Japanese dwarf pine. . . .

The windows had been painted to represent a garden of flowers, purple iris, rose-tinted cherry blossoms and graceful wistaria [*sic*] clusters rivaling one another in beauty. The only hint that one was not in a corner of the flowering kingdom was the large silken American flag, whose graceful folds were draped with the flag of Japan from the ceiling over the table.[\[48\]](#)

In an apt illustration of the double-sidedness of *Japonisme*, Aoki was celebrated as a host and master even as his mastery was confined to an overtly artificial, fantastic realm. It is difficult to say whether this was the most bitter of outcomes or in fact a form of release: in other words, in its fluidity, non-finality, and its open acknowledgment of the artificiality of social interactions, Aoki’s host performances may have become a means of salvation from the tyranny of racially determined identity in daily life. Here, following Judith Butler via Stuart Hall, the open-endedness of identity and of identification is empowering, for it presents the possibility to tinker with, to dignify, to complicate or to outsmart even the most pernicious of stereotypes. “Identifications,” says Butler,

belong to the imaginary; they are phantasmatic efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal cohabitations, they unsettle the I; they are . . . the structuring present of alterity in the very formulation of the I. Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted, and, as such, are subject to the volatile

logic of iterability. They are that which is constantly marshalled, consolidated, retrenched, contested and, on occasion, compelled to give way.[49]

The fluidity of identification, the possibility of casting off and contesting identities, was arguably a benefit for Aoki. Precisely for this reason, however, it was threatening to the nascent discourse of *nihonga*, or Japanese-style painting, in the artist's home country. Within Japan, *nihonga* was presented as high art that could equal the Western oil-painting tableaux; it was authentic Japanese painting that was meant to prove, once and for all, that authentic Japanese painting in Japan had not succumbed to Western corruption. Yet by the early twentieth century, *nihonga* had come to present certain widely sanctioned, non-threatening notions of class, gender, and subjecthood, while at the same time being well informed by recent artistic trends in the West. As a result, *nihonga* in Japan grew progressively distant from the demon paintings that Aoki had authored in the 1880s.[50] By 1908, the year of the Japanese article on Aoki, the brightly colored, dynamic, and intricate designs of woodblock prints and the kabuki theater that were prominent when Aoki left Japan in the 1880s had given way to a more subdued aesthetic that was in line with world trends of Art Nouveau and artistic modernism.

To the extent that Aoki and twentieth-century *nihonga* were at cross-purposes, Aoki was an unpleasant reminder of the constrained status of the Japanese in California. By the end of the Russo-Japanese war in 1905, nation and class were divisive issues among Japanese and Japanese Americans. According to Eiichiro Azuma, Japanese intellectuals in Japan and Issei Japanese community leaders in California were concerned that "Japan" in the United States was now represented by socially and economically disadvantaged residents of Japan's rural regions, who had little sense of belonging in the new Japanese state.[51] And at the same time that Japanese residents expressed concern over Japan's class identity in the United States, Caucasian residents of the American West were also unsettled in their own sense of identity when faced with the influx of Japanese immigrants who began to fill the labor shortages in San Francisco and other rapidly growing regions.[52] Given the tensions surrounding middle- and lower-class race and identity in California, it is significant that Aoki's images found their most receptive audience among society women and elite patrons who had taken up temporary residence in Pasadena from other parts of the country. In the theatrical space of Aoki's parties and decorated rooms, such visitors, too, must have felt like temporary sojourners who had crossed over and were consequently neither here nor there: not in the "West" (Western culture) as it was represented (albeit variously) by Paris, Chicago, or New York, but in an unfamiliar but pleasurable space of reprieve in the still sparsely settled Pacific region, on the other side of which lay Asia.

Channels of Communication

While Western prejudice against Japan continued to determine the nature of Aoki's commissions, the opportunity to interact directly with American patrons shaped his work in ways that differed from the forces shaping *nihonga*, which was increasingly directed inward, toward articulating visions of the ideal nation within Japan. By storytelling as he painted, or acting as the host of a temporary three-dimensional environment, Aoki could shape viewers' receptions of his work by supplying the key iconographic details that usually impeded Western appreciation of East Asian art in these years. This global version of the traditional Japanese practice of *etoki* (explaining pictures) made him more successful than the elite Tokyo- and Kyoto-based contemporary Japanese painters who had attempted to establish a Japanese Salon

in Paris in the mid-1880s, failing to sell even a single one of their paintings despite the general Parisian enthusiasm for Japanese art.[53]

Rather than remaining within closely defined Japanese iconography or obediently repeating Western stereotypes, Aoki's paintings show a degree of experimentation that represents the artist's thoughtful engagement with Japanese and Western trends. In America, the artist created watercolor images on paper showing a god or goddess in the sky. One of the works he produced in California shows a subject provisionally identified as the Chinese deity Chang E, who fled to the moon with the elixir of immortality. The female figure is shown floating in the sky with trailing scarves delineated in fine white lines. This unusual technique recurs in the several other images of goddesses signed "T. Aoki" now coming to light in mainly California collections (figs. 12, 13). The thin white lines suggesting diaphanous fabric resemble the lacy white scarves that Kano Hōgai added to the final version of his *Merciful Mother Kannon*, a painting that quickly became canonical in Japan as an example of Japanese painting's future potential. In *Merciful Mother Kannon*, Hōgai's diaphanous web of fine white lines has its roots in Goryeo Buddhist icons; in the nineteenth century, Hokusai and his school further popularized the use of white on white. [54] While taking a different route from the development of *nihonga* in the 1890s, Aoki's work nonetheless bore affinities to that produced in Japan.



Fig. 12, Toshio Aoki, Title unknown (Moon Goddess Chang E Fleeing to the Moon), ca. 1890s–1900. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. Collection of Michael D. Brown, www.asianamericanart.com. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 13, Toshio Aoki, Title unknown (Woman with Birds), ca. 1890s. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles. Purchased with funds provided by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas H. Crawford, Jr. Digital image ©2012 Museum Associates/LACMA. Licensed by Art Resource, NY. [\[larger image\]](#)

As seen in a painting of a torch-bearing goddess borne on the back of a demon, Aoki used the allegorical personification of abstract concepts—not a mode typical to Japanese painting prior to the 1890s- to increase the accessibility of his images. While the clothing of the goddess and the demon’s appearance are grounded in Japanese models, a note pasted to the painting’s verso bears the generalized title of *Hope* and adds that the work was exhibited as a watercolor at the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 (fig. 14).^[55] This rare indication of how Aoki titled his paintings shows how he rearranged and reinterpreted Japanese iconography for an international audience.^[56] Iconographical echoes of the Statue of Liberty—especially in the chiseled hemline of the blue robe—and possibly of Delacroix’s *Liberty Leading the People* indicate how East Asian images might be made to convey meaning internationally.



Fig. 14, Toshio Aoki, *Hope*, n.d. Ink and colors on paper. The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, Chicago. Photograph ©2012 courtesy of The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago. [\[larger image\]](#)

Aoki's attempt to paint East Asian themes with formal echoes of famous European and American compositions suggests another way in which he sought to increase his images' legibility. While *Shōki and Demons* is an East Asian theme, for example, Aoki's version evokes famous French paintings, including Ingres's *Odalisque with a Slave* of 1839–40 and *Turkish Bath* of 1862, both of which were then available in the form of reproductions (fig. 15). Reclining at right with the shamisen player toward the center of the composition to his left, Zhongkui becomes the master of a harem full of demons, a witty rewriting of the Orientalist trope of the bath or harem (see Figs. 1 and 2). Further, the demon queller's swarthy, brooding profile, dark hand supporting his head, and protruding lip echo those of the impassive Sardanapalus reclining on his bed in Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus* (fig. 16). The massing of bodies in the *Turkish Bath* or the crowding of figures in the *Sardanapalus* suggest a sort of sensory overload that is heightened by Aoki's transformation of the figures into Japanese demons.



Fig. 15, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Odalisque with a Slave*, 1839–40. Oil on canvas. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Cambridge, Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop. Photo: Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 16, Eugène Delacroix, *The Death of Sardanapalus*, Salon of 1827. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris. [\[larger image\]](#)

The strategy of co-opting an iconic Western composition for use in a new work is characteristic of other nineteenth-century Japanese painters like Kuniyoshi, who used the

Laocoön in his image of a Chinese hero from the *Water Margin*, and Kano Hōgai, who used an image of Michelangelo's *Moses* to serve as a model for his painting of Bodhidharma, the Buddhist patriarch (fig. 17).^[57] Overall, Western-style pictorial allegory was a central mode for Aoki's paintings, which ground meaning in visual form rather than relying solely on outside texts. *Chang E Fleeing to the Moon*, for example, exceeds the bounds of typical Edo-period iconography, which in any case would not have been understood by American audiences (see fig. 12). The moon goddess hovers in the sky with billowing clouds around her. Two child attendants with lanterns float below, creating a balance that is reinforced by the red, white, and gold trailing scarves that link the figures. A network of bluish-white patterned lines makes an ephemeral garland suggesting something like cosmic energy, and curving white lines radiate from her head and shoulders like a form of halo. The lines veining the infant's halo in Hōgai's *Kannon* are also similar to the fine gold veins lining the aureole around the moon goddess's staff.



Fig. 17, Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *White Streak in the Waves Zhang Shun (R?rihakuch? Ch?jun)*, from *One Hundred Eight Heroes of the Suikoden, One by One*, 1831. Color woodblock print. [\[larger image\]](#)

While it is possible that Aoki saw *Merciful Mother Kannon* or a reproduction of it, it is not necessary to suggest a direct relationship between these two paintings. Instead, these works together recall a moment when Japanese art first began to turn from a local context to a global one. With its fluttering garments, foreshortened celestial figures, and interlocking forms, Aoki's depiction of the moon goddess with child attendants evokes a European-style allegory in which foreshortened, interlocking human figures hover in the sky with cherubs.

Aoki's paintings thereby emerged within a universalist and anti-realist international context and drew on the universal penchant to read secondary or allegorical meanings into an image. Closer to home, we can compare Aoki's moon goddess to Andrew Lang's *Fairy Books* of 1889–1910 with illustrations by H. J. Ford. The widely available children's books included Japanese stories within their larger compendia of tales and may have served as a reference for Aoki, who had been briefly employed as both an illustrator and children's entertainer (fig. 18).



Fig. 18, H. J. Long, *Uraschimataro Met Princess Otohime*. Book illustration from Andrew Lang, *The Pink Fairy Book* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897). [\[larger image\]](#)

The American silent film *The Dragon Painter* (1919, Haworth Pictures Corporation, Los Angeles) similarly visualizes the ideal of fable-like legibility and of an equitable, universal, and mainstream audience for modern Japanese painting. Appearing seven years after Aoki's death, the film starred his adoptive daughter Tsuru and may include one of his own compositions. The screenplay is based on a 1906 book by Mary McNeill Fenollosa (1865–1954), the second wife of Kano Hōgai's patron Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908), and it is loosely based on Fenollosa's relationship with Hōgai.^[58] It is an allegory of the extinction of Japanese art: Kano Indara, a Japanese painter without an heir, offers his daughter Ume (Tsuru Aoki) to any painter worthy of continuing his lineage. The wild genius Tatsu (Sessue Hayakawa) appears, but as soon as he is happily married to Ume he loses the ability to make paintings. He is only able to resume painting when he thinks that she has died and is appearing to him as a ghost. At an exhibition he presents a large painting of a man and woman beside what appear to be two dragons and a pearl (fig. 19).^[59] This painting, close in style to Aoki's work, is successfully received by an international audience of well-dressed Japanese and Caucasians. Appearing at the film's conclusion, these viewers represent the ideal audience for modern Japanese painting and imply that the painter has succeeded in balancing wild genius and the taming, civilizing effects of family, society, and modern self-awareness.



Fig. 19, *The Dragon Painter*, 1919. Film still. Haworth Pictures, California. [\[larger image\]](#)

Angels and Demons: The Limits and Potentials of Fantasy

Aoki's association with fantasy should not be seen only within the confines of *Japonisme* but also as part of broader cultural trends in the West. In his style and subjects, Aoki embraced the anti-realist world of symbolism that was flourishing in fin-de-siècle Europe and America; or as Dario Gamboni has termed it, “between the brush and the pen,” in the worlds of literary illustration, lithography, engraving, and other “minor arts.”^[60] Gamboni proposed that by occupying the economically and artistically low-stakes fields of book illustration and works on paper, the literal margins of the field of artistic production, Symbolist or Aesthetic Movement illustrators and amateurs found a powerful world unto themselves. This world became a safe haven for those who rejected Realism and the French high-art establishment on the one hand and the bourgeois mainstream on the other.

In a similar way, the “Oriental,” broadly figured, disrupted the status quo and suggested alternative—or repressed—possibilities. The notion of the Orient as a fairy-land was an extension of a combined British and American Victorian and French or Belgian Symbolist world where, in the words of Brigid Peppin, fairy tales and folk tales “could be enjoyed unselfconsciously by a generation that had not yet been alerted to sexual symbolism by the discoveries of Sigmund Freud.”^[61] Lang's *Fairy Books* mirrored mercantile and colonial expansion by foregrounding folklore from outside the Western tradition, stories that could be enjoyed for their sexual metaphors and for the way in which they distilled and domesticated powerful stories from around the world by addressing them to young readers, who were to be sheltered from the rancor and power politics of actual colonial operations (see fig. 18).^[62] It is compelling to envision Aoki's work as a storyteller, entertainer, and illustrator within this context.

There is still much to be learned about Aoki. While I have called attention to the potentially empowering aspects of his status on the margins of artistic production in fin-de-siècle California, his only known oil painting tells a different story. The painter's great niece, who had never known her uncle nor seen his paintings, reported that according to her father Aoki had gone to America to study art, with the implication being that he would study oil painting and other aspects of Western art that could not easily be studied in Japan.^[63] Aoki's oil

painting in a private collection shows a Native American basket from which bruised and over-ripe persimmons have spilled (fig. 20). The work's potential symbolic dimension prompts thoughts of the Native Americans' persecution, which was ongoing during these years.^[64] It may also suggest other hardships: here are the necessary bruises, perhaps, of acculturation, of changing the cultural vessels that contain our lives. Aoki is utilizing the distinctly Western still life tops of the damaged or over-ripe fruit, but at the same time we can note that a persimmon's taste is optimal when it has visually passed its prime.



Fig. 20, Toshio Aoki, *Persimmons and an Indian Basket*, ca. 1890s. Oil on canvas. Collection of Michael D. Brown, www.asianamericanart.com. [\[larger image\]](#)

It is easy to see why Aoki's mode of grotesque or supernatural image-making, once prevalent in nineteenth-century Japan, was marginalized or rejected by a new generation of Japanese artists and viewers born after the Meiji Restoration of 1868. As the *Kaiga sōshi* article implied, it was precisely Aoki's proximity to theater and popular entertainment—and his willingness to perpetuate fantasy images of Japan—that made him both embarrassing to Japanese readers and successful among Anglo-Saxon tourists in Pasadena. Yet few Japanese readers were likely aware of or willing to recognize the systematic discrimination to which Aoki had been subject abroad, or the lengths to which he had gone in order to convert that sentiment into something productive.

Fantasy, like *Japonisme*, was ultimately a mode of rejecting present realities in order to imagine what might be. As such it was a form of suspension, where the hopeful and chimerical could turn toward affirming the fundamental similarity of human desires, as in Lang's children's stories or allegorical public statuary, or toward private, sexualized fantasies shaped by repressed desires or by racial and sexual anxieties, as in many Orientalist works. Through his broader engagement with fantasy's fluidity in theater, Western painting, and Western allegorical and symbolic representation, Aoki found a means of interacting with his American clients and audiences when other forms of communication seemed to fail.

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Notes

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All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.

[1] “Gaka Aoki Hyōsai no koto” [The painter Aoki Hyōsai], *Kaiga sōshi* [Painting digest], no. 254, June 15, 1908, 14–15.

[2] This article presents Japanese names with surnames first with the exception of Japanese who relocated to the West. When Aoki moved to the States he adopted the Western order, calling himself Toshio Aoki or simply “T. Aoki.” For unknown reasons, the *Kaiga sōshi* article calls Aoki by the style name *Hyōsai* instead of by his name *Toshio*; given the article’s high degree of correspondence with the details of Toshio Aoki’s life, however, it seems safe to assume that they are the same person.

[3] Aoki’s obituary from the *Pasadena Daily News* states that he was brought to California by the Deakin Brothers and Company, purveyors of Oriental goods in Yokohama and San Francisco. “Death Calls T. Aoki.” *Pasadena Daily News*, June 27, 1912, 1. *Langley’s San Francisco Directory for the Year Commencing May 1888* (San Francisco: Francis, Valentine & Co., 1888), 181, confirms that by this year he was residing in San Francisco and working as an artist for another oriental importer, G. T. Marsh. A brief biography of the artist is included in Mark Dean Johnson, “Uncovering Asian American Art in San Francisco, 1850–1940,” in *Asian American Art: A History*, ed. Gordan Chang, Mark Johnson, and Paul Karlstrom (Stanford: Stanford General Books, 2008), 6–7. Marian Yoshiki-Kovinick confirmed the artist’s birth year (1854 or possibly 1853) using data from the United States Census Bureau’s *1900 Census of Population and Housing* (personal communication via email, August 20, 2012).

[4] For the case of Yamamoto Hōsui, see Takashina Erika, “Pari jidai no Yamamoto Hōsui” [Yamamoto Hōsui in Paris] *Kindai gasettsu* [On modern painting], no. 6 (December 1997): 53–75; on Goseda Yoshimatsu, see Kanagawa Kenritsu Rekishi Hakubutsukan and Okayama Kenritsu Bijutsukan, eds., *Goseda no subete: Kindai kaiga e no kakehashi* [All about the Goseda studio: A bridge to modern paintings in Japan] (Kanagawa: Kanagawa Kenritsu Rekishi Hakubutsukan, 2008).

[5] Mabuchi Akiko, *Japonisumu: Gensō no Nihon, Japonisme: Représentations et Imaginaires des Européens* [Japonisme: The fantasy Japan] (Tokyo: Buryukke, 1997); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994); and Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978). For the effects of *Japonisme* in Japan, see, for example, Satō Dōshin, “Art and Economics: *Shokusan kōgyō* and *Japonisme*,” in *Modern Japanese Art and the Meiji State: The Politics of Beauty*, trans. Hiroshi Nara (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute Press, 2011), 96–136.

[6] On the notion of a dreamt-of Japan see Brigitte Koyama-Richard, *Japon Rêvé: Edmond de Goncourt et Hayashi Tadamasu* (Paris: Hermann, 2001). For a recent analysis of Japanese American artists, see Bert Winther-Tamaki, “Overtly, Covertly, or Not at All: Putting ‘Japan’ in Japanese American Art,” in *East-West Interchanges in American Art: A Long and Tumultuous Relationship*, ed. Cynthia Mills, Lee Glazer, and Amelia A. Goerlitz (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2012), 112–125.

[7] Elisa Evett, *The Critical Reception of Japanese Art in Late Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1982); and Phylis Floyd, *Japonisme in Context: Documentation, Criticism, Aesthetic Reactions*, 3 vols. (Ann Arbor: UMI Press, 1983).

[8] Sheri Bernstein, “Selling California, 1900–1920,” in *Made in California: Art, Image, Identity, 1900–2000*, ed. Stephanie Barron, Sheri Bernstein, and Ilene Susan Fort (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and University of California Press, 2000), 65–75.

[9] The place name in Aoki’s signature may indicate his place of origin or the location at which he produced the work.

[10] Michael Dylan Foster, *Pandemonium and Parade: Japanese Monsters and the Culture of Yōkai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); and Timothy Clark, *Demon of Painting: The Art of Kawanabe Kyōsai* (London: The British Museum, 1993). For a sampling of the literature on the *Hyakki yagyō*, see Tsuji Eriko, “Supensaa korekushon shozō *Hyakki yagyō zu emaki ni tsuite*,” *Nihon bungaku ronkyū*, no. 71 (March 2012): 22–31; Jeanne Cohen, Okuizumi Keiko, and Ōyanagi Hisaei, “Shinshutsu Kawanabe Kyōsai hitsu *Hyakki yagyō no zu emaki*,” *Kyōsai*, no. 96 (December 2007): 244–50.

[11] Tsuji Nobuo, ed., *Yūrei meigashū: Zenshōan zō San’yūtei Enchō korekushon* (Tokyo: Perikansha, 1995); and Melinda Takeuchi, “Kuniyoshi’s ‘Minamoto Raikō’ and the ‘Earth Spider’: Demons and Protest in Late Tokugawa Japan,” *Ars Orientalis* 17 (1987): 5–38.

[12] Kawai Masatomo, “Kano Kazunobu hitsu ‘Gohyaku rakan zu’ ni tsuite” [On the *Five Hundred Arhats* by Kano Kazunobu] in Minato-ku Kyōiku Iinkai, ed., *Minato-ku bunkazai hōkokusho Kano Kazunobu hitsu Gohyaku rakan zu* [Minato ward cultural preservation report: The *Five Hundred Arhats* by Kano Kazunobu] (Tokyo: Minato-ku Kyōiku Iinkai, 1983); and Matsushima Masato, “Kano Kazunobu,” *Nihon no bijutsu*, no. 534 (November 2010).

[13] See Foster, *Pandemonium*, 1–29.

[14] See, for example, Kuki Ryūichi, *Dai sankai naikoku kangyō hakurankai Inoue fuku sōsai narabi ni Kuki shinsa kanchō enjutsu* [Third domestic industrial exhibition: The lectures of vice-overseer Inoue and head juror Kuki] (Tokyo: Naikoku Kangyō Hakurankai Jimukyoku, 1889), 9–10; Brenda Jordan, “Potentially Disruptive: Censorship and the Painter Kawanabe Kyōsai,” in *Inexorable Modernity: Japan’s Grappling with Modernity in the Arts*, ed. Hiroshi Nara (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 27–48. Jordan shows how the government perceived Kyōsai’s *sekiga* as politically sensitive in addition to culturally circumspect.

[15] Aoki’s caves are strikingly similar to the caves in paintings by Kano Hōgai, which have been interpreted as symbolically freighted exercises in Western shading based on a fixed light source. Satō Dōshin, “Kano Hōgai hitsu *Gansekī zu*” [*Boulders* by Kano Hōgai], *Bijutsu Kenkyū*, no. 325 (September 1983): 111–14. On the broader implications of the cave for religious practice and worldview see Helen Hardacre, “The Cave and the Womb World,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 10, no. 2/3 (1983): 149–76.

[16] “Gaka Aoki Hyōsai no koto,” 14.

[17] *Ibid.*, 14–15.

[18] On the Deakins’ Japanese village, see the following sources; Mori Hitoshi, “Rukkuuddo no Shirayamadani Kitarō: tadoritsukenai jitsuzō” [Rookwood’s Shirayamadani Kitarō: In search of the true picture] *Issun*, no. 44 (November 2010), 32–3; Gomi Ryōko, “Rukkuuddo Potarii no Japonisumu,” *Tōyō tōji*, no. 41 (2012): 47–64; and Fred H. Deakin, *Explanation of the Japanese Village and its Inhabitants* (Pamphlet; publisher and date unknown; circa 1885). Source kindly provided by Gomi Ryōko.

[19] *Langley’s San Francisco Directory*, 181.

[20] The words *sunā-gaki* and *sunā-eshi* can both be translated as “sand painter.” Uemura Shōen, “Sunā-gaki no rōjin” [The old sand painter] in *Seibishō • Seibishō shūi* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1976), 144–46.

[21] “Gaka Aoki Hyōsai no koto,” 15.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] Chelsea Foxwell, “Japan as Museum? Encapsulating Change and Loss in Late-Nineteenth-Century Japan,” *Getty Research Journal*, no.1 (2009): 39–52.

[25] As indicated in note 2, there is little doubt that Aoki Toshio and the Aoki Hyōsai of the 1908 *Kaiga sōshi* article are the same person; furthermore, one Japanese document of Aoki’s passage to the United States as part of the Deakin brothers’ “Japanese village” identifies him as Aoki Hyōsai 青木瓢齋. Hitoshi, “Rukkuuddo no Shirayamadani Kitarō,” 33. Less secure is the identity of an individual from Yokohama named Aoki Tomisaburō (style name: Hyōsai 標齋) who studied with

Kawada Suigai and submitted paintings to the 1884 Domestic Competitive Painting Exhibition. The artists' biographies printed at the time of exhibition list Tomisaburō's birth year as Ka'ei 6 (1853), making it possible, though not definite, that he is the same Aoki who later traveled to America. "Dai nikai naikoku kaiga kyōshinkai shuppinjin ryakufu" [Brief biographies of the entrants to the Second Domestic Painting Exhibition], in *Kindai Nihon āto katarogu korekushon* [Modern Japan art catalogue collection] ed. Nōshōmushō Hakurankai Gakari (Tokyo: Yumani Shobō, 2001), 4:298. See Araki Tadashi, ed., *Dai Nihon shoga meika taikan* (Tokyo: Daiichi Shobō, 1975), 2:2467. This reference was kindly provided by Andreas Marks and Keiko Tanaka.

[26] On Oki Ichiga see Yamada Mayumi, "Oki Ichiga ni okeru gafū no tayōsei ni tsuite: Jinteki kōryū to no kanren kara" [On the stylistic diversity of Oki Ichiga: From the perspective of interpersonal networks], *Bijutsushi* [Art History], no. 164 (March 2008): 398–416; Tottori Kenritsu Hakubutsukan, ed., *Oki Ichiga: Tottori han goyō eshi* [Oki Ichiga: Official Painter of Tottori Domain] (Tottori: Tottori Kenritsu Hakubutsukan Shiryō Kankōkai, 2006). Kawada Suigai's brief biography appears in Nōshōmushō Hakurankai Gakari, *Kindai Nihon āto katarogu korekushon*, 4:234. Tottori domain's Restoration politics were complicated, as it had reasons to support both the pro- and anti-shogunal factions.

[27] Tokyo Kokuritsu Bunkazai Kenkyūjo Bijutsubu, ed, *Kangyō Hakurankai bijutsuhin shuppin mokuroku* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Bijutsu Shuppan, 1996), 141. "Aoki Toshio" is listed as producing a "Ceramic Vase with color painting of Tametomo subduing the West." Suigai also exhibited at this event.

[28] "Death Calls T. Aoki." *Pasadena Daily News*, June 27, 1912, 1.

[29] In 1888, T. Aoki was listed as an artist with George T. Marsh & Co. *Langley's San Francisco Directory for the Year Commencing May 1888*, W. H. L. Corran, compiler (San Francisco: Francis, Valentine & Co., 1888), 181. Source kindly provided by Michael D. Brown.

[30] Barry Wolf and Annabelle Piercy, "George Turner Marsh and Japanese Art in America," *Orientalism* 29, no. 4 (April 1998): 47–57.

[31] Clarence James Gamble diary, 1908, MC 368, item 341v, MS, Sarah Merry Bradley Gamble Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University.

[32] "This is Gala Week," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 26, 1894, 8.

[33] "To See Yourselves as Aoki Sees You." *Los Angeles Herald Tribune*, February 17, 1895.

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] "The 'Californian' for August," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 30, 1893, 7; and John W. Wood, "The Romance of Yono-san," *The Californian Illustrated Magazine*, August 1893, 455–64.

[36] "Japanese Are Happy. Joy Will Have Expression To-Day. Lantern Festival at the Fair," *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jun 9, 1894, 8.

[37] "In Childhood's Realm." Illustrated by T. Aoki. *San Francisco Call*, July 21, 1895, 14–16.

[38] "Japanese Fete By Fair Belles. Brilliant Entertainment for Charity on 'Nob Hill,'" *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 1, 1896.

[39] "Society's Helping Hand," *San Francisco Call*, October 25, 1896, 28.

[40] "To See Yourselves as Aoki Sees You."

[41] "Death Calls T. Aoki," 1; "Noted Japanese Artist Passes Away Suddenly," *San Diego Union*, June 27, 1912, 12. The latter was provided by Marian Yoshiki-Kovinnick.

[42] "Southern California News. Unique Entertainment," *Los Angeles Times*, December 28, 1896, 9.

[43] *The Good Housekeeping Hostess: Entertainments for All Seasons and Occasions . . .* (Springfield, Mass.: Phelps Publishing Company, 1904), 86–88.

[44] Thomas Condit Miller and Hugh Maxwell, *West Virginia and its People* (Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1913), 3:912–13. Rouss's gesture echoes or acknowledges Whistler's famous *Peacock Room*, which had been acquired by the Asian art collector Charles Lang Freer two years earlier, to great fanfare in newspapers such as the *Chicago Tribune*.

[45] "Whistler's Peacock Room/ World's/ Greatest/ Masterpiece/ of Decorative Art /Bought By an American," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, September 4, 1904, 1.

[46] "Death Calls T. Aoki," 1.

[47] Sara Ross, "The Americanization of Tsuru Aoki: Orientalism, Melodrama, Star Image, and the New Woman," *Camera Obscura* 20, no. 3 (2005): 129–57, [doi:10.1215/02705346-20-3_60-129](https://doi.org/10.1215/02705346-20-3_60-129); Ayako Kano, *Acting Like a Woman in Modern Japan: Theater, Gender, Nationalism* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); and Daisuke Miyao, *Sessue Hayakawa: Silent Cinema and Transnational Stardom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 24–25.

- [48] *The Good Housekeeping Hostess*, 86–88.
- [49] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (London: Routledge, 1993), 105, quoted in Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs Identity?” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: Sage, 1996), 16.
- [50] Aoki likely submitted a painting on this theme to the 1884 Domestic Competitive Painting Exhibition in Tokyo. See Tokyo Kokuritsu Bunkazai Kenkyūjo, ed., *Meiji bijutsu kiso shiryō shū: naikoku kangyō hakurankai, Naikoku kaiga kyōshin kai (dai ichi, nikai hen)* (Tokyo: Tokyo Kokuritsu Bunkazai Kenkyūjo, 1975), 298.
- [51] Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 17–60.
- [52] Colleen Lye, *America’s Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893–1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 1–95.
- [53] On the *etoki* tradition, see Ikumi Kaminishi, *Explaining Pictures: Buddhist Propaganda and Etoki Storytelling in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006). On the Japanese “Salon,” see Philippe Burty, “Le Salon japonais,” *République française*, June 25, 1883.
- [54] See, for example, the kimono detailing on Hokusai’s standing *Beauty* (ink and color on silk) in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, or the treatment of the white cloth in Hokusai’s famous *Watermelon* (signed Hokusai *manji*), private collection.
- [55] As a Japanese resident in America, Aoki was not included in the official exhibition of Japanese art that had been sent from Japan. If this painting appeared at the Chicago exposition, it possibly appeared as part of a commercial display, but further research is necessary.
- [56] A recent exhibition presented another example of how Aoki titled and interpreted his paintings. Marian Yoshiki-Kovinick, *Toshio Aoki (1854–1912)*, Pasadena Museum of History, April 12 to July 27, 2008. *The Goddess of Flowers* was published on the cover of the first issue of the *Pasadena Town Talk* (vol. 1, no. 1) along with Aoki’s own description. In the artist’s account, the painting showed a flower goddess that an artist named “Ho-sai, from Kyoto” once encountered in a dream. While Aoki grounds his story in a Japanese account, his flower goddess image does not correspond to any particular Japanese iconography.
- [57] See Chelsea Foxwell, “Merciful Mother Kannon and its Audiences,” *Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (December 2010): 326–47.
- [58] Mary McNeil Fenollosa, *The Dragon Painter* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1906).
- [59] This painting likely depicts Susanoo slaying the eight-headed snake Yamata no Orochi: the jugs in the lower portion of the painting would seem to represent the jugs of liquor laid out to intoxicate the beast. The young woman would represent Kushinada-hime, whom Susanoo saved from the snake.
- [60] Dario Gamboni, *The Brush and the Pen: Odilon Redon and Literature*, trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1–10.
- [61] Brigid Peppin, *Fantasy: The Golden Age of Fantastic Illustration* (London: Watson Guptill, 1976), 18–19.
- [62] Andrew Lang, *The Pink Fairy Book*, ill. H. J. Ford (New York: Longmans, Green, 1897).
- [63] Yoshiko Murai to Mark Johnson, April 8, 2004. SC0929, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 2, California Asian American Artists Biographical Survey Records, Stanford University Archives.
- [64] I thank Michael D. Brown for this suggestion.

Illustrations



Fig. 1, Toshio Aoki, *Shōki and Demons*, late nineteenth century. Hanging scroll: ink, colors, and gold on silk. Clark Family Collection, on long-term loan to the Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture, Hanford, California. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 2, Detail of Toshio Aoki, *Shōki and Demons* (fig. 1). [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 3, Detail of Toshio Aoki, *Shōki and Demons* (fig. 1). [[return to text](#)]



Fig. 4, Detail of Toshio Aoki, *Shōki and Demons* (fig. 1). [[return to text](#)]



Fig. 5, Detail of Toshio Aoki, *Shōki and Demons* (fig. 1). [\[return to text\]](#)

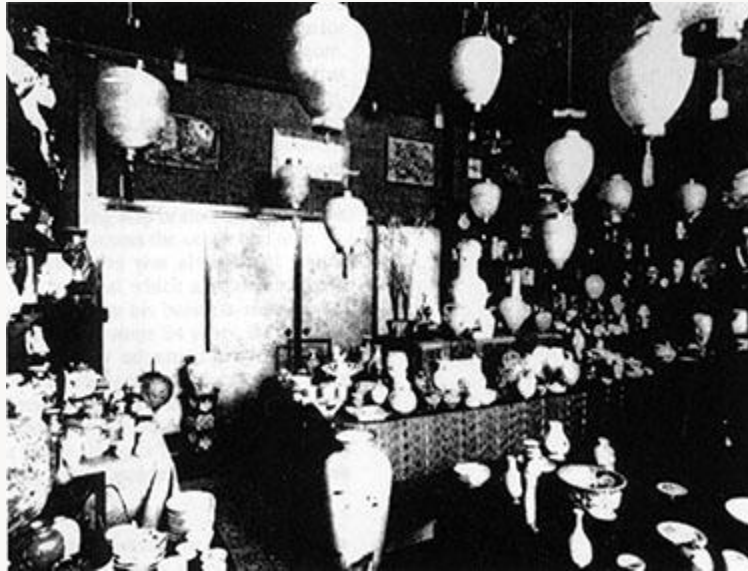


Fig. 6, *The Porcelain Room at G. T. Marsh's Japanese Art Repository, San Francisco, CA*, date unknown (after 1885). Photograph. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 7, David Berry Gamble and Clarence James Gamble, *T. Aoki*, 1908, Photograph. Sarah Merry Bradley Gamble Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 8, Toshio Aoki, *The Three Buns*, 1895. Photomechanical reproduction of an ink drawing. *The San Francisco Call*, July 21, 1895, 14. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 9, Toshio Aoki, “Do You Tire of Pleasing the Stranger, Naka-san?” from *The Romance of Yono-san*, 1893.
Photomechanical reproduction of an ink drawing. *The Californian Illustrated Magazine*, IV, no. 3 (August 1893): 457. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 10, Toshio Aoki, Title unknown (Japanese Woman with Parasol and Lanterns), detail, ca. 1890s. Ink and color on paper mounted on board. Collection of Michael D. Brown, www.asianamericanart.com.

[\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 11, “The Host and His Helpers Preparing for the Cherry Blossom Dinner,” ca. 1903–04. Photographic reproduction. *The Good Housekeeping Hostess*, 1904, 87. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 12, Toshio Aoki, Title unknown (Moon Goddess Chang E Fleeing to the Moon), ca. 1890s–1900. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. Collection of Michael D. Brown, www.asianamericanart.com. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 13, Toshio Aoki, Title unknown (Woman with Birds), ca. 1890s. Ink, colors, and gold on paper. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles. Purchased with funds provided by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas H. Crawford, Jr. Digital image ©2012 Museum Associates/LACMA. Licensed by Art Resource, NY.

[\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 14, Toshio Aoki, *Hope*, n.d. Ink and colors on paper. The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago, Chicago. Photograph ©2012 courtesy of The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 15, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Odalisque with a Slave*, 1839–40. Oil on canvas. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Cambridge, Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop. Photo: Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 16, Eugène Delacroix, *The Death of Sardanapalus*, Salon of 1827. Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris.
[\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 17, Utagawa Kuniyoshi, *White Streak in the Waves Zhang Shun (R?rihakuch? Ch?jun)*, from *One Hundred Eight Heroes of the Suikoden, One by One*, 1831. Color woodblock print. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 18, H. J. Long, *Uraschimataro Met Princess Otohime*. Book illustration from Andrew Lang, *The Pink Fairy Book* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897). [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 19, *The Dragon Painter*, 1919. Film still. Haworth Pictures, California. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 20, Toshio Aoki, *Persimmons and an Indian Basket*, ca. 1890s. Oil on canvas. Collection of Michael D. Brown, www.asianamericanart.com. [\[return to text\]](#)