

The Japanese Influence in Art Nouveau Decorative Arts

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*****Abstract*****

Although the foundation being so unlike each other, East and West have been influencing each other continuing to this day. Rather than dividing both cultures this paper will examine the part where they meet. Asia inspired western artists and designers to create their own fanciful vision of the east. Art nouveau was a style emerged from international communications, while concerned in mass and high art with industrial patronage's well as domestic interior set on urban district. Alongside with conventional past and contemporary European artistic tradition, oriental motif especially Japanese had a great impact on Art Nouveau style.

In this paper Japanese influence in Art Nouveau period mainly concentrating on subject matter in various medium including decorative arts as well as painting. It would be interesting to see how western world comprehend the works of Japanese and transform to their own.

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Aesthetics of Art Nouveau

Art Nouveau was a distinctive style which had a significant impact over all decorative arts and architecture and was a style which eventually spread all over Europe and America since its appearance in the early 1890's until the First World War. Despite the different aesthetic traditions and sensibilities and national cultures of the countries where it spread to, it was the first self-conscious, internationally based attempt to transform visual culture through a commitment to the idea of the modern.

It's difficult to pinpoint the exact initial object which can be identified as belonging to this movement. Since it was to take root in such a great variety of different countries, they all have their own starting moment. However, to engage in generalising, it can be said to have had conduct to have three phases. During the initial period (1893-1895) individual artists began to produce consistent artefacts while the underlying intellectual agenda was in the process of being thoroughly worked out. Three major incidents can define this phase. First, taking place at London, Aubrey Beardsley published illustration *Jai baise ta bouche Iokanan* for Oscar Wilde's play 'Salome' in the journal 'The Studio' in 1893. At the same time, Victor Horta at Brussels completed a bourgeois commission of terraced town house in the St. Gilles district, exhibiting a fully developed Art Nouveau style of architecture. Finally, in 1895 Paris, the German born French entrepreneur Siegfried Bing opened the new gallery, and shop on the rue the Provence in Paris. The gallery, subsequently expanded to include workshops and ateliers, was named 'L'Art Nouveau'. The style thus acquired one of its most active centres of distribution and its most enduring and widely used name. (Footnote V&A p.26) This initial period can be defined as the 'linear' phase derived from arabesque 'whiplash' and was characterised by the adoption of a more natural form.

The second phase (1895-1900) was the period when the style spread to many urban centres in Europe and North America. Historical sources were used or sometimes replaced in some cities instead of natural forms. As Symbolist ideas developed, the metaphysical aspects of the style became more important. Other cities such as Antwerp, Berlin, Brussels, Chicago, Milan, Nancy, Prague, Paris and Turin incorporated Symbolism with nature. Other cities like Glasgow, Vienna, and Munich produced geometric images by using straight lines and conventionalised nature. Amsterdam, Budapest, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Moscow and Oslo fused the style their own local character. During this period, Art Nouveau was promoted further on an entrepreneurial basis. Promotion at international exhibitions and by figures prominent in the established art-related press as well as open new galleries all aided the style to prosper. In case of international exhibitions, beginning at the Crystal palace, London, it became the most important event for advertising products for the industrialised imperial society. At 50 most prominent exhibitions held between 1873 and 1915, more than 170,000,000 people attended to the art Nouveau related exhibitions. Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900 showed the summit of the Art Nouveau spirit during this developing stage. Other figures helped spread the style; apart from the obvious names like Siegfried Bing and Aurthur Liberty, Belgian Octave Maus founded magazine called '*L'Art moderne*' (1881) and cosmopolitan exhibition groups '*Sociste des Vingt*' (1884) and '*La Librete estheitique*'(1894). Another Belgian Gutave Serrurier-Bovy had a shop in Liege that displayed one of the initial Art Nouveau style artefacts, at the same time linking the ideas of England, France, and Belgian. The German Julius Meier-Graefe opened a gallery called *LaMaison Moderne* in Paris in 1898.

The final phase is from 1900 to 1914. The style became much more common and began to decline. In 1902, the international exhibition held in Turin called *Prima Esposizione d'Arte Decorativa Moderna*, exhibited Art Nouveau objects extensively. Dozens of pavilions and thousands of objects celebrated the style as an international phenomenon. Although to millions of consumers it still represented the thrill of contemporary life, Art Nouveau turned out to be overtly distributed which lost the idealist socio-cultural transformation of modernity which it had first promised. The leading architects, artists, and designers began to move toward simplicity and precision and placed more emphasis on the possibilities of machine technology over hand-craftsmanship. The elaborate decoration of the 1890's made way for the geometric, ordered, and unembellished surface of the early 20th century.

Socially, imperialism was at its height. Europeans occupied and asset-stripped considerable parts of the globe. Countries compete with each other for factory and marketplace as well as territory. The process of economic, imperial and industrial modernisation occurred everywhere. With the purpose of developing the quality and status of commodities for economic purpose, states supported and built public museums, schools of art and design, held official exhibitions, and established ministries and government agencies. Visual culture was additionally used to promote national identity. Large nations used art and design to consolidate their image of themselves and to promote internal cohesion; small nations used it as a political weapon in the struggle to differentiate and separate themselves from rivals and overloads. Indeed, to the Finns, Norwegians, Hungarians, Irish and others, the achievement of a distant cultural identity was synonymous with the embracing of modernity. (Footnote V&A p.31)

The artists and designers of western industrialised centres felt the need to pursue cultural modernisation as well. By doing this they thought their creative spirit could improve the life of the community. To reach a wider audience, the concept of Gesamtkunstwerk (total works of art) was accepted. The term means demolition of hierarchy among fine arts and decorative arts. The artists thought harmonious ensemble of equal arts by designing various media would surround and transform the audience.

Three major characteristics of Art Nouveau are 'Nature' 'conventionalized symbolism' and 'history'. Most obvious and prominent was 'Nature' due to scientific advancement. The interaction between arts and science was a widespread practice in nineteenth century. Increase in the number of illustrated books of biological and botanical subject as well as sea-life from distant ocean also allowed many people to get acquainted with nature. These books were distributed widely to many schools of art and design. A large format coloured images of flora and fauna call 'Curtis Journal' was published in Paris by P.J. Redoute between 1785 and 1865. Additionally, conservatories and hot houses in the public parks of Brussels, London, Paris, Vienna and other cities was being built since 1850's onwards. Because of this greater accessibility, many decorative artists like Christopher Dresser, John Ruskin and Emile Galle studied botany. Nature was expressed in a 'symbolic conventionalization'. Nature was abstracted in a way, which to flat, formed regular patterns and contoured shape representing stable and reliable domestication of nature fulfilling the purpose of being beneficial. Attitude toward nature were in conflict; on one side it was a means for urban wealthy to show off their means, while on the other hand lay pantheism. Through the latter it revealed a revived interest in nature as a mysterious agent, carrying a sense of awe and fear. (Footnote V&A p.62) Animals, reptiles, and insect

were subjects of Art Nouveau style. Theory of evolution was important factor that influenced nature in this style. Charles Darwin published 'On the Origin of Species' in 1859. In response to this theory, people realised that human not above but part of nature. Metamorphic looks appeared. Human, animal and plant fused as part of decorative object. Furthermore, artists themselves psychologically made themselves at one with their total environment. For Art Nouveau designers, nature stands for modernity. In it's reinvented form, it pointed to the future outside the convention of the past styles.

'French Symbolism' had an important role in the Art Nouveau movement philosophy. The Symbolist's attitude of non-material, anti-rational ideals were derived in opposition to capital and collective machinery science. As a result, individualism and further developed anarchism evolved and appealed to many artists. The idea of spiritualism matured in Paris, promoted by magazines and newspaper columns such as *Le Revue independente* (1884), *La Vougue* (1886), *La Plume* (1888) and *La Revue blanche* (1889). Café culture and literary clubs like '*Les Hydropathes* (1878) and *Le Chat noir* (1881) sprang up. Out of this cultural background, the symbolist group Nabis was born. Founded by Paul Serusier and Maurice Denis, the member included prominent Paul Gaugain, Edouard Vuillard, Paul Ranson, and Pierre Bonnard. The work of the Nabis was premised on an intense formalism that aimed to the free imagination pursues spiritual perfection. The typical Nabis artist would recognise observed reality into flat, free form plans of strong colour, intended to convey a heightened, idealised impression of the world. (footnote V&A p.75)

Gaugain's use of various method to meet aesthetic purpose can be connected to Art Nouveau's idea of Gesamtkunstwerk (total works of art). Another cultivation of spiritualism was gallery *Salon de la Rose+Croix* mainly organised by writer and

mystic Josephin Peladan. The mystical aspect of Art Nouveau was part indebted to Pre-Raphaelites mysticism, the anti-materialist approach of Ruskin, mythologizing of Gustave Moreau, mysterious classicism of Puvis de Chavannes and illustrative symbolism of Odilin Redon. Other influences for Art Nouveau were Pointillism or neo-impressionism. Stylistically, it's stylization of nature expressed in geometry of dots, arabesque and planes- a deliberate creation of artifice from natural form while carefully preserving the evidence of nature, frozen and controlled- had a strong influence in Art Nouveau designers. Ideally, the concept of individual makes a contact with the outside world by means of scientific order can explain the impulse of Art Nouveau artists who wanted to improve the cultural improvement. As a powerful emotional determination at the heart of the psyche, sex was a key subject of psychological and spiritual investigation. Metamorphic depiction of woman of symbolist can be connected to dream maidens of Art Nouveau's decorative objects.

The last major characteristic term for Art nouveau is 'history'. In order to create something new, people studied past styles. This reaction was not to copy, but to recover, reorient and even invent histories that had been pushed to the periphery of established practices, that celebrated the unusual rather than normal, signified different forms of society, and that set precedents for a new European culture.(footnote p.37). Therefore, Art nouveau emerged from diverse roots. Artists aware of the past traditions intentionally alter them and recreate a new style. Familiar past European tradition of Classicism, Baroque, Rococo, folk art and non-European influences from Islamic, China, and Japan were adopted partially. Classicism's obscure side of mythology and proportions were restudied. Rococo's delicate curves, asymmetry and floral detailing, sometimes with Baroque Louis' style, were adopted by various designers. Folk arts, including the national local arts of Russia and Nordic

countries as well as Britain's Arts and Crafts movement appealed to Art Nouveau style with their simplified lines and bold patterns.(expand aesthetic, outside Europe)

Japanese influence in Art Nouveau

During the nineteenth century Japanese art played important role in occident. Asian artefacts have been introduced since the sixteenth century. From 1690's, Japan maintained itself as a 'close country' in order for the government to dominate the country more effectively. Japan signed a forced trade treaty with America in 1853 when Commander Perry fired the port of Japan.

A great deal of information and goods that reached Europe and the United States led to craze for all things Japanese, which developed into a major cultural phenomenon known as Japonism. Art Nouveau designers collected Japanese art extensively; Paul Gauguin, Gustave Klimt, James Abbot McNeil Whistler, Victor Horta, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, E.W. Godwin, and Christopher Dresser, as well as entrepreneurs like Athur Lasenby Liberty, and Louis Comfort Tiffany.

Japanese art arrived in various routes. Most important figure who promoted it was Samuel Bing. He opened 'Oriental Art Boutique' at Paris in 1875. In his '*Le Japon artistique*' journal he wrote,

'Especially to the numerous people who, for whatever reason, are interested in the future of the decorative arts. In the new formulas that come to us from the distant shores of the Extreme Orient... we shall find examples worthy in every respect of being followed.'

Published in French, German and English editions, it had a far-reaching influence in Europe and the United States that lasted long after the date of the final issue. Japanese prints of Katsushika Kokusai and Utagawa Hiroshige were displayed at exhibitions organised by Bing. Among numerous exhibitions he held at major cities of Europe,

the *'Maitres de l'estampe Japonais'* at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1890 was the most significant. In terms of quantity: 725 prints and 428 books were displayed while introducing late 18th century printmakers whom public were not familiar. During the Art Nouveau period, other numerous exhibitions of Japanese art were held all over Europe sometimes with International exhibition held in Chicago (1893), Paris (1900), Turin (1902) and St. Louis (1904) were such cases. The Japanese government's participation also provided more information to the west. At the beginning of the craze, Japanese high quality national treasures remained in Japan European had more contact with contemporary objects. However, people who visited Japan had better chance of acquiring high quality objects. One of them was Emile Guimet who opened the Musee Guimet. Others were diplomatic serviceman like American Edward Morse, Samuel Bigelow, Charles Freer and Ernest Fenollosa. The Japanese Import Company introduced their country's artefacts to the west. The *'Kiritsu Kosho Kaisha'* company was established in 1874. A Company interpreter Hayashi Tadamasa delivered objects from Japan as well as help Parisians to gain better understanding of the artefact. In America, Hiromachi Shugio, Director of the First Japan Trading and Manufacturing Company in New York, and Matsuki Bunkio provide people with things Japanese. In a more direct way, some Japanese worked at European firms. Shirayamadami Kataro worked for Rockwood Company.

At the height of 'craze for Japanese', it's art was viewed as a fresh possibility to set European art free and providing new direction. Hat it had no ties with traditional European style also appealed to the Art Nouveau artists who were intentionally seeking for something 'new'. Writing in 1910, Henry Van de Velde recalled 'it took the power of the Japanese line, the force of its rhythm and its accents, to arouse and influence us.'(footnote p.107) Many connections can be made between

Japanese and Art Nouveau scheme via Gauguin's symbolist movement. In terms of concept, as mentioned in chapter I, the idea of Gesamtkunstwerk-total works of art-can be found in Japanese society. With no distinction between art and craft, the craftsman of Japan participated in various mediums. For westerners, Japanese lived in a totally artistic environment, which each element of architectural structure and interior design harmonised to create the total work of art that was the goal of Art Nouveau. (footnote V&A p.111). (Japan index))

Stylistically, the asymmetric dynamic line derived from Japanese woodblock prints and illustrated books of Hiroshige and Hokusai closely related to this ideal.. Henry Van de Velde wrote that 'it took the power of the Japanese line, the force of it's rythem and it's accents, to arouse and influence us.'"(footnote V&A p.107).

Despite all the praises and positive reviews of Japanese art, it was looked upon as a part of colonial possessions. Another major oriental influence, that China had less impact in nineteenth century. Chinese art was considered as inferior according to their social and political inferiority. This idea was confirmed by the Opium war of 1840-42, which occurred as a result of resisting the trade with the west. In constrast, the Japanese received a more positive response from the public due to the trade with the west but could not escape the imperialistic view at that time. The nation was looked upon as an ideal, ancient and primitive society of a mythical Golden Age that could be viewed with an escapist longing by those doubtful about certain aspects of life in the industrial West. The unspoiled qualities of their art meant that it was something that had to be controlled by European art. The union of man and nature, the ties of social deference and the concern with craftsmanship that were commented on by writers on Japan seemed to highlight exactly what the west feared to lose. However, although aesthetic superiority could sometimes be acknowledged, it was not expressed without

an underlying conviction that the West was ultimately superior. (footnote V&A p.117) Therefore, despite Japan's later industrial development and victory over war with China(1894) and Russia(1905) Japan's past was more emphasized.

Contrary to Japan's great impact on Art Nouveau, Japan's adaptation of west is hard to dismiss. After the unequal treaty with the America the political atmosphere changed. In 1868 Tokugawa Shogun was overthrown and the emperor Meiji was restored. This Meiji period (1868-1912) was the time of enormous change for modernisation, politically, socially, and economically. Alongside with adaptation of other western culture, Japan was eager to incorporate western art into it's traditions as well. Many foreigners were invited. Ernest Fenollosa contributed to Japanese adoption of western art. With Okakura Tenshin, Fenollosa taught at Tokyo University where he insisted to preserve Japan's own style in the school disciplines of Japanese craft, sculpture and Japanese style painting. 1898 saw the addition of western-style painting by Hayashi. He believed in implying artist's own philosophy and creativity from the beginning to the finish. Approved by the government, he later organized the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900. As a surprise to the Japanese authorities, carefully selected Japanese objects from the Tokyo school were criticised by the viewers who ironically praised the latest Art Nouveau design that was very much influenced by the Japanese crafts. In order to learn this 'new trend', authorities developed The Great Japan association, which introduced Art Nouveau by publishing journals as well as Japan Design Group; later arranging Kyoto Art Nouveau exhibition in 1902.

The problem for Japanese adoption of the western art was that as a result, the transformation that occurred in Japanese art and art education eventually forever divided the distinction between art and craft in Japan.

A Discussion of the Plates and Figures Used

Oriental art seeks to understand and capture the spirit of the subject rather than trying to achieve photographic realism. The artists use an economy of means, stripping down to the main elements, to capture and express the pure essence of the object or moment. The art produced during 17th to 19th century Japan is called 'ukiyo-e'. Many influential woodblocks like Hokusai and Hiroshige prints were produced. It conjured up the life of the Yoshiwara (brothel quarter of Edo, now Tokyo). Geishas and Kabuki actors were favourite subjects, but Ukiyo-e artists also depicted landscapes and scenes from historical epics, legends and folk tales.

The exhibitions are divided to three categories: First, Japanese influence in principles of Art Nouveau. Secondly, Japanese influence in subject matter. Depictions of natural phenomenon like wave, bride, rocks in the sea, and rain are shown. In case of animals and plants, Butterfly and peony, tiger, cat, waterfowl, birds of pray cranes and herons, cock and hen, raven, wild carp, insects, Plant. Each principle will be discussed in detail comparing Asian artefacts with western object. The items may overlap in categories mentioned. There are no boundaries of medium since the impact of the Japanese artefact was widespread to all vehicles, from architecture, furniture, glass, poster etc.

Glossary

Gesamtkunstwerk-Synthesis of the arts. A term first used in the fin-de-siecle context in relation to music of Richard Wagner, it implied equality among the arts and their orchestration into unified ensembles.

Pantheism-1. a doctrine identifying the deity with the universe and its phenomenon
2. Belief in and worship of all gods

Fin-de-siecle-‘end of century’ The amalgam of artistic and literary tendencies typical of the 1890’s

Japonism or Japonaiserie-1. European imitations of native Japanese art and crafts
2. Japanese products which most appealed to Europeans at the height of the European enthusiasm for Japan during the second half of the 19 c.

Rimba Style-Recognised for bold covers of flat colour and stylised shapes.
Spare, bold ink paintings are also produced. Literary themes and nature are often used as subject matter

Wood-block print-a type of woodcut printed from separate woodenblocks, each carrying separate colour and fitted together to mark the complete design, with one colour sometimes overlapping another to give still greater variety of hue.

Pate-de-verre- glass paste. Powdered glass fired in a mould so that it fuses. The effect is like that of translucent semi-precious stones.

Meiji reformation-Overthrow of Japan’s Tokugawa shogunate and restoration to power of the Meiji emperor in 1868. The emperor promised a search for knowledge that could transform Japan into a ‘rich’ country with a strong military. The restoration ushered in the Meiji period, a time rapid modernisation and westernization.

Symbolism- A painting movement that flourished in France in the 1880’s and 1890’s in which subject matter was suggested rather than directly presented. It features decorative, stylised, and evocative images.

Folk art-Works of culturally homogeneous people without formal training, generally an according to regional traditions and involving crafts.

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The Exhibition

Group I

With it's divers climate, Japan consists numerous types of plant, some overlapping with the one's in Europe. Circulation of artists' manuals, enable Japanese graphic artists of the 19th century drew animals in immense detail. The representation of plants or displayed with animals, it implies a symbolic meaning. For example, eight emblems represent Buddhism. Foremost among them was the lotus, the symbol of summer, followed by peony. As the herald of spring, the chrysanthemum standing for autumn, and the plum standing for winter. The circulation of painters' manuals encouraged artists to comprehend their movements.

Subject

Tree

There is a connection between the Asian view of simplified depictions of trees and the stylised expression of Art nouveau. Compare to Hokusai's woodblock print. This shows an expression of tree branches, similar to those of Felix Vollaton. The tree branches cause a decorative line reminiscent of arabesque line that force the viewer to look around the ornamental plain.

Bamboo

Bamboo has a special meaning to Asian culture. It is used in everyday life as a building material, tool, weapons and ornaments. For Taoists, it represents the 'yang' principle due to its rapid growth. It belonged to the 'four noble plants'; plum blossom, iris or orchid, ahrysanthemum and bamboo. From the 18th century, Chinoiserie, furniture made from bamboo appeared. Since then Western culture adopted Bamboo as a subject matter in many decorative objects.

Iris

The iris, lily and orchid have a line that ideally fits into the Art nouveau's linear style. Japanese artists produced some great examples. Western artists combined elements of Japan with Christian associations with lily. Rather than describing realistic still life like flower from a traditional Renaissance idealism, flowers were produced in a selective way. Few parts of the petals and leaves were drawn. A close up view of a flower in vertical or asymmetrical composition was used.

Butterfly

The butterfly had a great appeal to the east. Sometimes placed with peony, it is looked upon as an embodiment of the soul of a dead person, and the presence of a soul in this form is believed to bring luck and protection. Two butterflies are regarded symbolically as the officiants at the wedding ceremony and as the companions of the

young couple setting out upon life's journey. It was one of the most representative subject matters for Art Nouveau artists.

Tiger

In East Asian culture, the tiger symbolises strength. In China and Korea, artists painted large hanging scrolls with profound admiration for the animal. The figure of the crouching tiger or leopard is a motif often found in Art Nouveau. The tension expressed in the pose, the feline suppleness, the decorative making of the coat, the eyes glittering in the wedge-shaped head were depicted again in the years around 1900.

Cat

For Japanese, cats were believed to be cunning dangerous demons. It was also a nickname given to talented female singers and musicians. In contrast, it was also shown as a devotional animal sacrificing itself for others. Cats were common subject matter for influential woodblock prints of Hokusai and Hiroshige