



Taisho Chic: Japanese Modernity, Nostalgia, and Deco

By Sharon A. Minichiello

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The Taisho period, loosely the first three decades of the twentieth century, was a dynamic era in Japan. On one hand, it spawned social liberalism and political radicalism; on the other, it generated the social conservatism and cultural nativism that grew into the ultra-nationalism of 1937-1945.

In art, it produced an infatuation with Western modernism as well as a new exploration of traditional aesthetics. Between these dramatic polarities was a rich middle ground of cultural synthesis and symbiosis in which Western concepts of modernity and nostalgia for Japanese tradition seamlessly merged or creatively contrasted. These values are witnessed in the Art Deco style, particularly as it infused Japanese art of Taisho.

Much of the debate over Japanese cultural identity centered on the appearance and social role of women. The primary focus in this volume is the nexus of tradition and modernity manifest in popular images of women, as well as in domestic furnishings and fashions made for women.

In an introductory essay, historian Sharon Minichiello provides a broad context for these issues by sketching major domestic and international events and themes of the period. In his essay and catalogue entries, art historian Kendall Brown first examines how women were at the center of the sociocultural debate on Japanese modernity, then details how artists helped fashion various female types, including the modern girl, the traditional beauty, and a new type of hybrid woman.

The nihonga paintings, woodblock prints, textiles, and domestic artifacts discussed and illustrated here are a broad range of objects representative of mainstream Taisho visual culture, and reconstruct the styles popular from 1915 to 1935 in a celebration of Taisho-Chic.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Taisho-, named for the reigning emperor of the time, was a short period from 1912 to 1926 that marked a modernizing tendency in Japanese society. The scope of this book expands to cover the first 30 years of the 20th century to dovetail with the Art Deco and Art Moderne eras in the West. Primarily a catalog of a print and painting exhibition at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, this book also covers some three-dimensional objects and shows 12 kimonos of strikingly modern design. The prints and drawings are mostly sentimental portraits of women and children that integrate Western perspective with traditional Japanese perspective. Strongly influenced by Western advertising art, the prints and drawings are a powerful graphic record of the changes that gave rise to the 20th-century "moga" (modern gal). Short historical and sociological essays by scholars of Japanese art and politics accompany high-quality illustrations, making this book valuable to readers interested in both Japanese art and history. For large public and academic libraries, especially those with a focus on Asian art.

David McClelland, Philadelphia

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Review

"This fine publication analyzes art of early-20th-century Japan, the Taisho (1912-26), a period of tremendous upheaval in Japanese society. Politics, economics, social structures, and military campaigns abroad all confronted a resurgent nationalism while 20th-century influences from the West were felt throughout Japan. This book examines artistic images of the period: paintings and prints, textiles and decorative art, and songbooks emphasizing women. . . . Strongly recommended." *Choice*

"Strongly influenced by Western advertising art, [these] prints and drawings are a powerful graphic record of the changes that gave rise to the 20th-century 'moga' (modern gal). Short historical and sociological essays by scholars of Japanese art and politics accompany high-quality illustrations, making this book valuable to readers interested in both Japanese art and history." *Library Journal*

About the Author

Kendall H. Brown teaches Asian art history at California State University, Long Beach. Sharon A. Minichiello is professor of Japanese history and director of the Center for Japanese Studies at the University of Hawai'i. The other contributors are Reiko M. Brandon, Patricia Salmon, Eriko Iijima, and Annie M. Van Assche.

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