



East Asian History

NUMBER 39 · DECEMBER 2014

www.eastasianhistory.org

CONTENTS

- 1–4** Editors' Preface
Benjamin Penny & Remco Breuker
- 5–32** The Persian Language in Yuan-Dynasty China: A Reappraisal
Stephen G. Haw
- 33–52** The Telescope and the Tinderbox: Rediscovering La Pérouse in the North Pacific
Tessa Morris-Suzuki
- 53–74** Politicking Art: Ishikawa Kōmei and the Development of Meiji Sculpture
Martha Chaiklin
- 75–88** The Development of Mass Intellectuality: Reading Circles and Socialist Culture in 1920s Korea
Jung-Hwan Cheon, translated by Bora Chung and Sunyoung Park
- 89–102** Concepts and Institutions for a New Buddhist Education: Reforming the Saṃgha Between and Within State Agencies
Stefania Travagnin
- 103–16** To Regain Self-Affirmation: Qian Mu and His Exile
Gad C. Isay
- 117–30** Anti-Malaria Campaigns and the Socialist Reconstruction of China, 1950–80
Bu Liping
-
- 131–38** A Distance of Thirteen Thousand Miles: The Dutch Through Japanese Eyes
- 139–52** Forgotten Foibles: Love and the Dutch at Dejima (1641–1854)
- 153–80** Dutch Influences on the Japanese Language
(With an Appendix on Dutch Words in Korean)

- Editors Remco Breuker, Leiden University
Benjamin Penny, The Australian National University
- Editorial Assistant Lindy Allen
- Editorial Board Geremie R. Barmé (ANU)
Katarzyna Cwiertka (Leiden)
Roald Maliangkay (ANU)
Ivo Smits (Leiden)
Tessa Morris-Suzuki (ANU)
- Design and production Lindy Allen and Katie Hayne
Print PDFs based on an original design by Maureen MacKenzie-Taylor
- This is the thirty-ninth issue of *East Asian History*, the second published in electronic form, December 2014. It continues the series previously entitled *Papers on Far Eastern History*.
- Contributions to <http://www.eastasianhistory.org/contribute>
Back issues <http://www.eastasianhistory.org/archive>
- To cite this journal, use page numbers from PDF versions
- ISSN (electronic) 1839-9010
- Copyright notice Copyright for the intellectual content of each paper is retained by its author.
- Reasonable effort has been made to identify the rightful copyright owners of images and audiovisual elements appearing in this publication. The editors welcome correspondence seeking to correct the record.
- Contact eastasianhistory@anu.edu.au
- Banner calligraphy Huai Su 懷素 (737–799), Tang calligrapher and Buddhist monk

Published jointly by
The Australian National University and Leiden University



Australian
National
University



Universiteit Leiden

POLITICKING ART: ISHIKAWA KŌMEI AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEIJI SCULPTURE

 Martha Chaiklin

'Revere the emperor, expel the barbarian' was a slogan of revolution. In 1868, when the new Japanese government forsook the expulsion of Westerners, they embarked on a different form of revolution — a radical campaign of modernisation that affected everything from the structure of the state to the way the passage of time was measured. Art was an important part of this nationalistic discourse because it aided in the construction of both a modern present and a national identity tied to affixing value to the idealised past. Specifically, government leaders sought to shape art production for several overlapping purposes: economic prosperity, the creation of modern national identity, to gain the perception of parity with Western treaty powers, and to form a national polity from states that had been autonomous. These ambitious goals resulted in an often-contradictory attitude toward art. It was recognised as a source of lucre, but also as an expression of civilisation. Consequently, policy shifts emphasised, at different times: traditional methods and aesthetics, to preserve a sense of national identity; Western practices, in order to be viewed as a modern nation; or a hybrid form, for export to generate revenue. Tensions inherent in modern nationalism imposed from above were transferred to private discourse about art, as writer, scholar, and art curator Okakura Tenshin (Kakuzō) 岡倉天心(覺三) (1862–1913) summarised:

Now that people have finally started to pay attention to art, they have primarily deliberated over which to choose: the art of the East or the art of the West? This is actually exceedingly important in everyday life, in industry and in trade.¹

Aesthetics was, therefore, not an abstraction for a small intellectual elite, but part of state formation to an unprecedented degree — one that affected both policy and the individuals who produced art.

This article proposes a microhistory or marginal biography of sculptor Ishikawa Kōmei (Mitsuaki) 石川光明² (1852–1913) to provide a lens that will mag-

Research for this paper was generously funded by the Toshiba International Foundation and the Japan Foundation. The author would also like to sincerely thank Laura Mitchell for her ideas on microhistory as well as Harris Chaiklin, Mrinalini Rajagopalan, Karen Gerhart, Mario Pereria, Annemarie Sawkins, Richard Smethurst, and especially Kerry Ward for reading and commenting on earlier drafts.

¹ Okakura Kakuzo, 'A Lecture to the Painting Appreciation Society,' in Michel Marra, *Modern Japanese Aesthetics: A Reader* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), p.72. Originally published in *Dai Nihon bijutsu shinpo* 大日本美術新報, December 1887.

² 石川光明 Ishikawa was known by both readings — Kōmei and Mitsuaki — during his lifetime, but for the sake of clarity and because this is the name he is best known by in the West, Kōmei will be used here. Ishikawa also used the *gō* (号 art names) Juzan 壽山 and Hōyusai 豊勇齋.

- 3 Francesca Trivellato, 'Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?' *California Italian Studies Journal* 2.1 (2011): 1–24, at p.19. Online at: <<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/0z94n9hq>>, viewed 28/5/2014.
- 4 The classic example of social history is Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). For a discussion of marginal biography see Clare Anderson, 'Introduction to Marginal Centers: Writing Life Histories in the Indian Ocean World,' *Journal of Social History* 45.2 (Winter 2011): 335–44.
- 5 F. Brinkley, *Japan: Its History Arts and Literature* (London: Jack, 1904) 7:13. According to Brinkley, his father went by Toyomitsu and also trained with Masamitsu and his grandfather went by Katsuemon. His father Tōkichi 藤吉 died in 1854, and his grandfather in 1869, forcing the family to live with an uncle in Komagata. Takamura Kōun 高村光雲, 'Ishikawa Kōmei shi no isshogai' 石川光明氏の一生, in *Bijutsu no nihon* 美術の日本 5.9 (1913): 8–10, at p.8.
- 6 Sosen was the last of the painters under shogunal warrant (*goyō eshi* 御用絵師).
- 7 Takamura. 'Ishikawa Kōmei shi no isshogai,' p.8. Painter Hashimoto Gahō 橋本雅邦, for example, was apprenticed for thirteen years, from 1847 to 1860.
- 8 *The Japan Year Book* (Tokyo: The Japan Yearbook Office, 1906), p.406.
- 9 Suzuki Ryūsen 鈴木龍仙, 'Ishikawa Kōmei-ō,' in *Kenchiku kōgei sōshi* 嗚呼石川光明翁附翁の思ひ出 19 (August 1913): 37–39, at p.39.
- 10 There is a discrepancy between the *Tōkyō meikō kagami* 東京名工鑑 (Tokyo: Tokyo City Government, 1879), which states that he started at eleven and finished at 25, and the obituary written by friend Takamura Kōun, which states that he started at twelve and finished at 23. Interviews with modern carvers suggest that an apprenticeship of ten years was usually required. His inclusion as a 'Master Artisan of Tokyo' suggests that he already had an established reputation by 1879. This makes the earlier dates seem more likely. Moreover, the *Tōkyō meikō kagami* is incorrect as to Ishikawa's age at the time, listing it as 31 when he would only have been 26.

nify the details as to how 'cultural forms evolve in relation to political and economic structures'.³ He is worthy of this examination not because, like so many subjects of these methodologies, he was obscure or unable to vocalise his fate, but because he was one of the most powerful people in the Japanese art world of his day, yet he is but a footnote in contemporary historiography. As a methodology, microhistory has come to mean a window into a historical past through an ordinary life. Kōmei was an extraordinary man, in extraordinary times. His origins were, nevertheless, humble, and if his achievements are not assessed or valued, he has been as effectively silenced as if he were illiterate. Moreover, if we use Clare Anderson's definition of marginal biography as 'individuals ... who did not write their own autobiographies, but left traces of their lives in the archives', Kōmei was marginalised as part of a 'social and politically contingent process'.⁴ His liminality was not physical but intellectual, but he was marginalised nonetheless.

Kōmei embodied the tension in Meiji Japan between historical practice and modernity. Trained as a traditional craftsman who carved in wood and ivory, he actively shaped the development of sculpture as an art within Japan. This microhistory or marginal biography exposes the shortcomings of a methodology that elevates the present over historical context. Contemporary perspectives have diminished Kōmei's role in the formation of sculpture, and sculpture as a part of nationalist discourse. It shows the way a craftsman navigated the complexities of modernisation.

Early Life and Career

Ishikawa Kōmei was almost entirely a man of the Meiji period. He was born Ishikawa Katsutarō 石川勝太郎 in 1852, the same year as the Meiji emperor. This was the very cusp of change: the year before the American-led Perry expedition that 'opened' Japan arrived. Kōmei matured as the Meiji emperor Mutsuhito 睦仁 took the throne, and he died of stomach cancer on 30 July 1913 — exactly one year after the emperor's death. We know nothing of his own thoughts about the changes in his life. Tokyo was famous for fires, and Ishikawa's life became defined by them. Fire destroyed his place of employment in 1911 and Ishikawa's home in 1912, consuming his personal papers, official records, collections and works. Nor did he promote himself or publish, focusing on creating and teaching instead. What we know of him is almost entirely based on how others reported his actions.

His family resided in Kita Matsuyama 北松山 in the Asakusa craftsman district of Edo — the city that metamorphosed into Tokyo in 1868. This area is called *shitamachi* (下町 literally 'downtown'), in reference to its location in relation to the residences of the warrior class rather than a city centre. According to Francis [Frank] Brinkley (1841–1912) — a contemporary of Ishikawa's who resided in Japan and wrote extensively about art — Ishikawa's family members were shrine sculptors going back seven generations. His grandfather reputedly worked on the famed Tōshogu Shrine 東照宮 at Nikkō. Although shrines are from the Shinto tradition, the family also reputedly worked at Buddhist temples in Edo such as Higashi Honganji 東本願寺, an important Jōdo-Shinshū 浄土真宗 sect temple located in Tsukiji, Tokyo.⁵

In 1862, at the age of ten, Ishikawa began to study painting with Kano Sosen 狩野素仙 (1820–1900), a year after he had begun studying woodcarving with his uncle.⁶ An apprenticeship in the Kano School generally lasted over

a decade, but Ishikawa quit after only four years.⁷ He might have lacked inclination or been unable to pay. It might have merely been to expand his artistic range, never intending a full apprenticeship. He or his guardians might also have realised that traditional painters were unable to make a living in the societal flux of the day. It is unlikely, however, that his departure was prompted by a lack of talent. One source, at least, recognised Ishikawa as ‘a painter of no common merit’.⁸ Moreover, the masterful way in which he used space and texture in his relief carvings suggests he would have been equally able using a brush on a flat surface. He was reputed to have retained a fondness for Kano school paintings.⁹

After leaving Sosen, Ishikawa was apprenticed to *netsuke* carver Masamitsu 正光 (b. 1822) for ten years, about the average length of apprenticeship for an ivory carver.¹⁰ They were introduced through the vegetable seller who both families patronised.¹¹ Masamitsu, (given name Kikugawa Tazaemon 菊川太左衛門) began his career carving these toggles. After Japanese ports opened to foreign trade in 1859, he produced works for export, which he sold through Hachisukaya Yoshinosuke 蜂須賀屋芳之助 (dates unknown) and other merchants in Yokohama. Masamitsu was known for producing human figures, as was Ishikawa. In 1877, Katsutarō received the name Kōmei or Mitsuaki, taking ‘Mitsu’ 光 or light, from Masamitsu, using it for the rest of his life. Use of characters from the master’s name was a common traditional practice that denoted relationship, but one that Ishikawa could have easily abandoned had this relationship been insignificant to him. Early in his career, he sold through Etchū-ya 越中屋, a well-known ivory dealer in Nihonbashi, Tokyo.¹²

After treaty ports opened in 1859, the import of cheap, mass-produced goods initially devastated Japanese handicraft industries. However, rising interest in Japanese art after the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1867 created new markets. The Meiji government was quick to discover handicraft export was one way to offset the negative balance of trade, and put great efforts into exporting Japanese art and handicrafts under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce. For example, the value of ceramics exports, aided by government support, increased five hundred per cent from 1880 to 1900.¹³ Export art was generally hybridised of traditional and Western elements, but not only did it bring in desperately needed revenue, it suggested that a Japanese aesthetic was, if not superior, at least compatible, with a Western one. Ivory carving, which had spread during the Edo period, reached a peak in the Meiji producing for Western markets.

Ishikawa, the craftsman, began his professional life working for the Yokohama export market. According to the *Tōkyō meikō kagami* 東京名工鑑 — a compendium produced by the Tokyo city government in 1879 to aid the national government in promoting exports — early on, Ishikawa was doing fairly simple lathe work with etched designs. Initially, he produced the shafts for traditional Japanese pipes (*kiseru* 煙管), but as demand for them declined after the introduction of cigarettes, Kōmei then produced ivory vases and luxury pipe shafts of ivory. At the time the *Tōkyō meikō kagami* was published, Ishikawa already had at least three apprentices, and a growing family.¹⁴ Having to meet the financial responsibilities of a family and students might explain the commercial direction of this early work. As William Griffis wrote, ‘They [artisans] have to keep the rice-pot boiling, however, and they will make what will sell, and for which orders come’.¹⁵

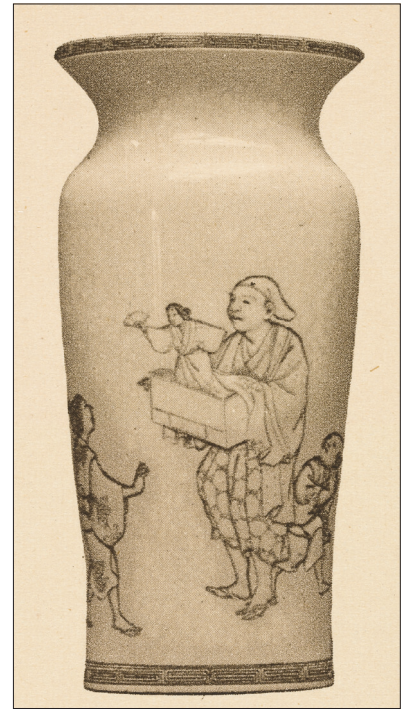


Figure 1

Lathe-turned vase ‘of dignified outline’ with relief carving. An export piece from roughly the time of Tokyo Meikō kagami, c.1880. A Selection of Oriental Works of Art, catalogue by British art dealers Spink & Son n.d.. From the collection of the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

11 Nohara Teimei 野原貞明, ‘Ishikawa-o tsumioku’ 石川翁追憶, *Bijutsu* 美術 1.7 (May 1917): 26–29, at p.28.

12 *Ibid.*

13 Yukimasa Hattori, *The Foreign Commerce of Japan Since the Restoration 1869–1900* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press 1904), p.52.

14 He married Suzuki Sada 鈴木さだ (in 1875) and fathered two daughters, Kōko こう子 in 1876 and Keiko けい子 in 1879. He later had another daughter, Teruko 照子, in 1882, and a son, Mitsuharu 光春, in 1884. Mitsuharu became a scientist. Teruko became a painter, studying under Kōmei’s colleague, Kawabata Gyokushō 川端玉章. ‘Meiji no reijo Ishikawa Teruko’ 明治の令女石川照子, *Yomiuri Shinbun* 読売新聞 (morning ed.) 7 April 1902, p.3. She married Western-style painter and sculptor Ishikawa Kakuji 石川確治 (1881–1956). Suzuki Ryūsen says he had seven or eight apprentices in this period. Suzuki Ryūsen, ‘Ishikawa Kōmei-ō,’ p.37.

15 William Griffis, ‘Japanese Ivory Carvings,’ *Harpers Weekly* 76.455 (1 April 1888): 709–14, at p.711.

Figure 2
 Kōmei netsuke. 'Monkey' Collection of
 the Los Angeles County Museum of Art,
 Raymond Bushell Collection.



The product mentioned last and given the least emphasis in the *Tōkyō meikō kagami* has been the most significant in preserving Ishikawa's name in the West: *netsuke*. These toggles appealed to foreigners because, as expressions of taste and personal identity, they were carved in minute detail. Old and new they were exported in large quantity and widely collected in the West. So many of them went abroad, in fact, that by the early twentieth century there were 'many genuine specimens to be picked up in London itself since most people who go to Japan bring some home and lose them'.¹⁶ Ishikawa's work was in great demand among export merchants, and from early in his career he had a reputation for making fine *netsuke*.¹⁷ The fact that Ishikawa left a total of eleven named apprentices in *netsuke* carving testifies to this reputation.¹⁸

A larger proportion, however, of Ishikawa Kōmei's output consisted of *okimono* (置物 literally 'placed objects'). Demand for *netsuke* was so intense that good prices were no longer paid for fine work, and the emphasis shifted to the quantity, not the quality of production. At the same time, domestic demand, which might have supported fine work, decreased as Japanese men converted from traditional to Western clothing. Moreover, fussy Victorian interiors called for more substantial bric-a-brac, and so *okimono* came into vogue. These primarily ivory statuettes were intended almost exclusively for the export market. For this reason, they are not seen as sculpture and even today collectors in the Anglophone world use the term *okimono* rather than statue, statuette, sculpture or even carving. For Japanese craftsmen such as Ishikawa, the transition to *okimono* and ivory vases was a departure from tradition. While Ishikawa's inclusion in the *Tōkyō meikō kagami* indicates he was already highly regarded as an ivory and wood carver, it defined him as a craftsman, not an artist.

New Definitions — Severing Craft from Art

The difference between Western art in the nineteenth century and art of the Edo period was not merely visual. According to Okada Yuzuru:

Western peoples regard the existence of pure art as separated from human living; that is, they are cognizant of the world of abstract beauty. Japan until about the middle of the nineteenth century was not aware of the possibility of making a distinct separation between life and art.¹⁹

16 Douglas Sladen, *Queer Things about Japan* (London: Anthony Treherne & Co., 1904), p.427.

17 Takamura, *Ishikawa Kōmei shi no isshogai*, p.9.

18 Morino Kōrin 森野光林, Satō Kōju 佐藤光寿, Matsumoto Kōtei 松本光貞, Miura Kōfū 三浦光風, Shiura Kōko 志浦光広, Kobori Kōho 小堀光甫, Hosaka Kōzan 保坂光山, Wada Kōseki 和田光石, Nijima Kōho 新島光保, Asahi Meidō 朝日明堂, and Satō Shinmei 佐藤新明. *Sunamoto Seiichirō 砂本清一郎, Kaitei shin-ban netsuke no miryoku 改訂新版根付の魅力* (Tokyo: Kogei shuppan, 1987), p.143.

19 Okada Yuzuru, *Japanese Handicrafts* (Tokyo: Japan Travel Bureau 1956), p.4.



Figure 3

Kōmei netsuke, 'Boy Behind Chinese Lion's Mask' Raymond Bushell Collection of the Los Angeles Museum of Art.

In other words, there was no separation between fine and decorative art because the objects created by Japanese artists were nearly all utilitarian and functional. Even painting was most widely used on screens and sliding doors. Many artists of painted screens or scrolls also worked in a variety of functional mediums. For example, Ogata Kōrin 尾形光琳 (1658–1716) — one of the most famous artists of the seventeenth century and who designed lacquer and painted designs on kimono — and the prolific artist Katsushika Hokusai 葛飾北斎 (1760–1849) designed prints for fans (*uchiwa* 団扇) and issued pattern books of designs for combs and pipes.

Ishikawa matured as a carver just as art production and education became an issue of modernisation among some members of the Meiji government. Export art provided valuable foreign currency but did not reach for abstract ideas of aesthetic beauty or present the image of a modern civilised nation. In addition to debates about East vs. West, or new vs. old, there was a debate as to what, specifically, was art. To some extent, this mirrored debates that were occurring in the West, exemplified by the Aesthetic movement, whose members were greatly influenced by Japanese aesthetics. Western ideas of art were based on a philosophical tradition that privileged painting and sculpture above all other arts. The Aesthetic movement challenged this barrier between art and craft by valuing hand production. This simplified classification has, on the one hand been periodically challenged, but, on the other, is still the one under which many museums and art historians operate.

Within Japan, a new vocabulary had to be developed just to have this dialogue. Aesthetics (*bigaku* 美学) was coined from the writings of Philippe Burty — French art critic and advocate of Impressionism — by statesman Nakae Chōmin 中江 兆民 (1847–1901).²⁰ Art (*bijutsu* 美術), painting (*kaiga* 絵画), sculpture (*chōkoku* 彫刻), and architecture (*kenchiku* 建築) — common words today — were all invented, redefined or repurposed at this time, also through translations of texts about Western art. Given that they were new words, the precise meanings were not necessarily clear to Japanese readers, educators, politicians or artists. By roughly the 1880s, traditional Japanese arts such as metalwork and lacquer were separated from fine art and grouped under the

²⁰ Burty is also credited with coining the word 'Japonisme'.

- 21 Satō Dōshin 佐藤道信, *Nihon bijutsu tanjō: kindai nihon no 'kotoba' to senryaku* 日本美術の誕生: 近代日本の「言葉」と戦略. (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1996), p.45.
- 22 *Ibid.*, pp.158–60. Some scholars consider theatrical masks, dolls, and carved interior elements such as transoms (*ranma*), part of a sculptural tradition.
- 23 Fenollosa originally came to Japan to teach philosophy at the Imperial University but became interested in Japanese art. He was a curator at the Japanese Imperial Museum and later the Boston Museum.
- 24 Ernest Fenollosa, 'Bijutsu shinsetsu' in ed. Yoshino Sakuzo, *Meiji bunka zenshu* 明治文化全集 (Tokyo: Nihon hyakuronsha, 1928) 12: 151–74.
- 25 *A Review of the Chapter on Painting in Gonse's 'L'Art Japonais'* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Sons, 1885), p.27.
- 26 Henry Adams, Letter to John Hay from Yokohama, 9 July 1886, in eds Donald Richie and Yoshimori Harashima, *Henry Adams Letters From Japan* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1960), p.10.
- 27 Other views, as represented by Edward S. Morse (1838–25), who collected ceramics, had little influence on art within Japan. Like Fenollosa, Morse taught at the Imperial University. He impacted art in Japan through the organisation of the Imperial Museum, but had more significance as a promoter of scientific method, proponent of Darwinism, and excavator of the Omori shell mound.

equally new term *kōgei* (工芸, literally 'manufactured arts') and were seen as less important than *bijutsu*, just as decorative arts are in the West.²¹ *Kōgei*, which uses the character for 'manufacture', had vaguely industrial overtones. Therefore, further distinction was made between the sometimes crudely, mass-produced handicrafts for export and high-quality studio pieces, by calling them *bijutsu kōgei* 美術工芸. Today, this phrase is usually translated as 'applied fine arts'. The morphology of this taxonomy points not just to an evolving consciousness about art that was influenced by Western ideas, but also to an evolving government policy that used these categorisations to support art in different ways.

For an artist such as Kōmei, working in the plastic arts, there was a further dilemma. Although graphic art had some history of connoisseurship before the Meiji period, there was no such tradition for sculpture. The very limited sculptural tradition in Japan as defined by Western standards comprised almost exclusively religious art. There was no convention of any other kind of public display or residential context, no figural exterior architectural elements or statues to grace interiors, with the exception of images contained in Buddhist or Shinto shrines in homes (*butsudan* 仏壇 or *kamidana* 神棚), or Girls' Day doll displays.

Some craftsmen of *netsuke* and the like received shogunal warrants (*goyō shokunin* 御用職人) that were similar to the patronage given to fine artists. Nevertheless, there was no tradition of gentleman carvers, like that of the literati tradition of painting. Sculptors were seen as craftsmen, and of different social status from painters.²² This was not, however, a rigid distinction, but a development of government art sponsorship that caused what had been a vague separation between classes in the Edo period to be transposed into a divide between art and handicraft. This division was reinforced through art education and government patronage. The purpose of such categorisation was to win Western approbation in the cultural realm, because political parity would not be achieved without acceptance on all fronts.

Okakura Tenshin and Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908) were significant actors in the formation of Meiji government policy on art, whether through their own actions or reactions of others to them.²³ They both promoted maintaining traditional cultural values over imitating Western ones, but they each had a limiting definition of what constituted traditional. Fenollosa thought that Japan should be an export country and that crafts should be exploited for this purpose, but that these objects were not to be confused with art.²⁴ Okakura and Fenollosa were antiquarians who believed the real Japanese tradition had declined and recent and contemporary production was of little value. For example, Fenollosa wrote, 'there is no culmination [of art] in the seventeenth century; rather there is a fearful decline'.²⁵ Writer Henry Adams (1838–1918) described Fenollosa as 'a tyrant who says we shall not like any work done under the Tokugawa Shoguns'.²⁶ In sum, these two men sought to maintain a national artistic identity through the application of imported definitions that separated fine art from other forms and constructed perceptions of value to create a standard that subsumed contemporary craftsman like Kōmei to a newly imposed definition of art.²⁷

Westerners who wished to be connoisseurs of then fashionable Japanese art also viewed antiquity as equal to quality. Even as early as 1867, before the rise of Japonisme in the West, a guidebook to the treaty ports complained:

Everything in the way of specimens of art has naturally increased in cost since the early days of the settlement, and at the same time owing to the greater demand for them they are not so good or so old as those formerly bought.²⁸

Okakura and Fenollosa were to provide a rationale for this taste for pre-Edo objects in their lectures and writing in and outside of Japan.

We do not know Ishikawa's views on these debates. His actions, however, indicate that he used them to his advantage. His earliest work showed modern elements of perspective. More importantly, by the 1880s he had traversed this new distinction between a craftsman who made *netsuke* and vases for export to become an artist in the modern sense. There were probably many factors that allowed him to make this transition, but a significant, new and traceable one was his participation in domestic expositions and world's fairs.

National and International Expositions

Commercial treaties that opened ports to trade, and the formation of a modernising oligarchic government occurred just as exhibitions became a prominent force in international politics. In a time when travel abroad was only for the wealthy, they simultaneously allowed the public to experience the wider world and revel in nationalistic pride. For participating governments, international expositions were a court of public relations. They remained a significant part of Japanese government policy well into the twentieth century. From the first major Japanese exhibit in 1867, even before the Meiji government was formed, Japanese woodblock prints had what was to be a lasting impact on Western art.

With a clear awareness of this new forum, the new Meiji government sent an exhibit to the 1873 Weltausstellung in Vienna despite pressing internal fiscal concerns. Initially unable to compete in technology, art comprised a significant component of Japanese participation in these international events, in part to increase exports, but more significantly to show Japanese artworks that promoted a sense of aesthetic equality, or even superiority, in relation to the West. Art was used as the envoy of cultural imperialism, so it was a matter of national pride that Japanese art be included in the fine arts pavilion.²⁹

All main exhibits were vetted by government representatives, so Ishikawa Kōmei's consistent participation at world's fairs indicates that he was perceived to represent the values the organisers of the Japanese exhibits wished to promote. From this position, he wielded considerable influence in developing and promoting the Japanese aesthetic that elevated Western perceptions of Japan as a civilised nation and contributed to a modern national identity. He was still an apprentice at the time of the Weltausstellung, but he contributed to almost all subsequent major exhibitions, international and domestic, always receiving some kind of recognition.³⁰ His work was even shown posthumously at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915 as a part of the Imperial Household exhibit.

Ishikawa's participation in expositions reflects both his personal transition from craftsman to artist and the development of sculpture as an artistic form in Meiji Japan. Ishikawa first exhibited at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876, the event that ignited Japonisme among the American public. He submitted a vase depicting a theatrical scene; a small chest portraying Tokiwa 常盤, the concubine of Minamoto no Yoshitomo 源義友

28 N.B. Dennys, ed. *The Treaty Ports of China and Japan* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1977), p.585.

29 Martha Chaiklin, 'The Fine Art of Imperialism: Japanese Participation in World's Fairs,' *Japan Studies Review* Spring 2008: 71–80.

30 The notable exception is the St Louis World's Fair in 1903, for which he did not submit an entry. He may have been ill with nephritis.



Figure 4

Ivory vase thought to have been acquired by William T. Walters from the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. The oldest datable Kōmei work. Note the use of perspective. Collection of The Walters Museum of Art.

(1123–60), probably in relief; along with ‘various ivory works’.³¹ One such Ishikawa ivory was acquired by William T. Walters and later bequeathed to the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore. The Walters piece is a 21 $\frac{1}{8}$ inch tusk carved in relief, lined in silver with a copper alloy base. The relief depicts a famous story in the life of warrior Minamoto no Yoshitsune 源義経 (1159–89). This piece is interesting because even though it is a very early work, it shows the use of a Western one-point perspective to heighten the perception of depth in the curved tusk. To be allowed to exhibit at the world’s fair shows in part the status of Ishikawa and government trust in him at a very early age. The list of exhibits and the Walters tusk also show that although Japanese exhibits were beautifully crafted, they were ‘export art’, not ‘fine art’.

The Meiji government also used exhibitions to stimulate and improve the art and crafts environment at home. To that end, the First Domestic Industrial Exhibition was held in Ueno Park in Tokyo in 1877 (a year after the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia).³² The government-sponsored Domestic Industrial Exhibitions were meant to elevate production quality, stimulate consumption of goods produced in Japan, and enhance national pride. Domestic expositions were also seen as practice events for the larger expositions abroad. At the 1877 Domestic International Exhibition, Ishikawa exhibited ivory *netsuke* under his childhood name Katsutarō, but more significant was his *Shibayama* 芝山象嵌 inlay.³³ It was illustrated in George Ashdown Audsely’s *The Ornamental Arts of Japan*, published in London from 1882–84.³⁴ Although Audsely does not give artist names, his detailed, realistically executed colour lithographs show a *Shibayama*-type wood panel of 29 inches by 19.5 inches clearly signed ‘Kōmei’. *Shibayama* — a dying art today — is an inlay method more commonly associated with export lacquer. Ivory or uncoloured wood, however, was sometimes used

instead of lacquer as a base to create inlaid designs in mother-of-pearl, bone, tortoiseshell, coral, semi-precious stone, amber, and other materials.³⁵ The panel depicts Benkei 弁慶 stealing the Miidera 三井寺 temple bell.³⁶ Benkei’s figure is ivory. The skin areas have been delicately coloured with flesh tones, and the details of Benkei’s clothing and armour have been shaded and emphasised with mother-of-pearl inlay. The bell is carved wood coloured to represent bronze. Kōmei used one-point perspective to depict the bell. Moreover, this plaque is very different from most *Shibayama*, which tended to the expensively gaudy. In other words, it was traditionally grounded, but modern by design. In this object, we can see the evolution of the artist.

However, by 1881, at the Second Domestic Industrial Exhibition, Ishikawa presented an entirely different sort of ivory carving. This event is sometimes viewed as the acme of Meiji ivory carving because sculptural ivory carvings played such a prominent part in the art exhibitions at the fair. Sculptor Takamura Kōun 高村光雲 (1852–1934) is famously quoted as saying, ‘If it wasn’t ivory it just wasn’t sculpture’.³⁷ Here we can see a significant evolution in art production. For this exhibition, sculptors attempted to create larger, more dramatic pieces of ivory in keeping with government initiatives to conceptualise and present ivory carving as sculpture. Ishikawa Kōmei submitted several works here, receiving two second-place awards in the Crafts Division. This incongruence of categorisation — sculptural ivory in a

31 Tokyo Kokuritsu bunkazaisho 東京国立文化財所 *Meiji jiki banko hakurankai bijutsuhin shuppin mokuroku* 明治期万国博覧会美術品出品目録 (Chuokoronsha, 1997), 227.

32 The Meiji government scheduled Domestic Industrial Exhibitions in the years when no significant international exhibition was taking place.

33 Suzuki Ryūsen, ‘Ishikawa Kōmei-ō,’ p.37.

34 The panel was collected by a M. Worch of Paris, but its current location is unknown (email communication from Mavis Pilbeam of the British Museum, 21 November 2005). Posthumous biographies of Kōmei, most likely based on Takamura Kōun’s account, claim that this inlay was shown at the First Domestic Industrial Exhibition in 1877 and



Figure 5

Shibayama inlay. Benkei stealing the Miidera Temple Bell. The sharply jutting shoulder and hip counterbalance the weight of the bell. George Ashdown Audesly, *The Ornamental Arts of Japan*. (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1882–84). Collection of the the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

crafts category — clearly reflects the lack of clarity in classification. Kōmei's submissions included an ivory carving of an old man, and several pieces of Shibayama inlay — a technique not commonly associated with him.

In 1889, Kōmei participated in the Paris Exposition Universelle. This exhibition was controversial because it commemorated the centennial of the French Revolution and a number of monarchies refused to participate.³⁸ Imperial Japan did not bypass this opportunity. With the exception of the unveiling of the Eiffel Tower and the foreign debut of the *jinrikisha* or rickshaw, this exhibition had little notable historical impact. By this time, overexposure and cheap imitations had lessened the French public's enthrallment with Japanese art.³⁹ Nevertheless, Ishikawa was honoured abroad for the first time in Paris in 1889, receiving a silver medal in the Manufactures division for a carved relief of Daruma (Bodhidharma). The following year, he received another second place at the Third Domestic Industrial Exposition for a wood relief of ducks, and an ivory carving of an old man. This was the last time in which he placed below first in any competition he entered.

The Chicago Colombian Exposition in 1893 signified growing Japanese international success. The fine arts exhibits were specifically selected by the Japanese exhibition committee to 'conform to the classification adopted in

that this work was responsible for making Kōmei famous in Japan. However, the timing appears to be a mistake because it is not in exhibit lists from this period.

35 Shibayama developed in the eighteenth century by the Shibayama family, but it was not exclusive to them. Little research has been done on it to date, the best being Koizumi Kazuko 小泉和子, 'Shibayama zōgan' 柴山象眼, p.204–209, on the history, and Miyazaki Teruo 宮崎照雄, 'Shibayama zōgan kōgei seisaku kōtei' 柴山象眼工芸政策工程, in *Nihon no zōgei bijutsu* 日本の象牙美術 Tokyo: Shoto Museum of Art, 1996), p.221, on technique.

36 There are a few versions of the story of Benkei and Miidera. Most agree that the bell was stolen out of caprice. In one version, the abbot tells Benkei to take it back, whereupon he kicked it, sending it bouncing back of its own accord. In another version, every time the bell is sounded it cried 'I want to go back', and finally, in frustration, Benkei returns it. Benkei is connected to Yoshitsune, depicted in the Walters tusk.

37 Takamura Kōun, *Bakumatsu ishin kaikodan* 幕末維新懷古談 (Tokyo: Iwanami bunko), p.181.

38 Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), p.147.

39 Richard Sims, *French Policy Towards the Bakufu and Meiji Japan, 1854–95* (Routledge: London, 1998), p.285.

40 Goto Tateno, 'Foreign Nations at the World's Fair,' *North American Review* CCC-CXXXIV (January 1893): 34–47.

41 This confusion is part due to the Aesthetic movement, which saw value in hand production, and their appreciation of Japanese art.

Figure 6

Wood Kannon relief. Received a gold medal in the Manufactures division at the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition. Collection of the Tokyo National Art Museum. Photo from: Uyeno Naoteru; Trans. Richard Lane. *Japanese Arts & Crafts in the Meiji Era*. (Tokyo: Pan-Pacific Press, 1958).



42 Uyeno Naoteru, *Japanese Arts & Crafts in the Meiji Era*, trans. Richard Lane (Tokyo: Pan-Pacific Press, 1958), p.95. In fact, most of the Western-style (*yōga* 洋画) painters withdrew in protest over the traditional bias of the Japanese selection committee. *Yōga* were exhibited in Paris in 1900. The contemporary accounts differ slightly as to what was actually exhibited in the Fine Arts building. According to the *Revised Catalog of the Department of Fine Arts* (Chicago: W.B. Conkey, 1893), it was the wood relief that was exhibited in this hall. Three oil paintings were exhibited, but not in the Fine Arts exhibition. See Ellen P. Conant, 'Japan Abroad at the Exhibition,' in ed. Ellen P. Conant, *Challenging Past and Present: The Metamorphosis of Nineteenth Century Japanese Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 2006), pp.266–69.

43 Charles M. Kurtz, *Official Illustrations From the Art Gallery of the World's Columbian Exposition* (Philadelphia: George Barrie, 1893).

44 Herbert Howe Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair* (Chicago and San Francisco: The Bancroft Co, 1893), pp.222–23.

45 *Report of the Committee on Awards of the World's Columbian Commission*, 57th Congress 1st Session Document 510, p.965.

46 In the collection of Tokyo University of Fine Arts Gallery.

47 William Walton, *Art and Architecture* (Philadelphia: G. Barrie, 1893), Vol.3, p.89.

48 *Ibid.*, p.90.

49 *Report of the Committee*, p.965.

50 Yokomizu Hiroko 横溝広子, *Takeuchi Kyūichi to Ishikawa Mitsuki* 竹内久一と石川光明 (Tokyo: Geijutsu Daiku Museum, 2002), 6 (unpaginated pamphlet); and Yokomizu Hiroko 横溝広子, 'Butsuzō de fain ato ni idonda chōkokoku' 仏像でフィン・アートに挑んだ彫刻家(2) *Art Library* 4 (2003): 1–7, at p.4.

51 Kaneko Keimyo 金子啓明, 'Nihon no zōgei chōkoku no genzai no mondai' 日本の象牙彫刻の現在の問題, in 27th *Nihon no zōgei chōkuten* 日本の象牙彫刻展, catalogue, 2004.

52 Yokomizo, 'Butsuzō,' p.4.

Japan', as 'only the best and most truly representative specimens of Japanese art'.⁴⁰ For the Japanese, Chicago was significant as this was the first time any Japanese art was displayed in the Fine Arts building rather than in Manufactures. The same debate that had occurred internally as to what comprised art in the Japanese context was transposed to the international stage and made a matter of national pride. While the Japanese had campaigned unsuccessfully to have handicrafts such as lacquer considered as fine art, the line between a craft 'manufacture' and fine art was by no means distinct in the West either, even for those visiting the fair.⁴¹ Wood and ivory carvings were exhibited in the Fine Arts building, but not a single Japanese oil painting was accepted for display.⁴² No Japanese pieces of any kind were included in the official catalogue of the Fine Arts building.⁴³ They were judged as Manufactures. That ivory and other art selections were positively received in this context is evident in the official handbook to the fair:

Most of the articles in wood and ivory carvings are of ingenious design, in striking contrast, as are the ceramic wares and mosaics, without the crudity of much of the workmanship now palmed upon the public as of Japanese production. An attempt to check this imposition has been made by the government art school in Tokyo, from which many delicate carvings have been sent to the Fair.⁴⁴

It was probably the peak for Japanese wood and especially ivory carving exhibits at world's fairs, where they 'exceed in number and general excellence' those held at previous expositions'.⁴⁵ Japanese artists submitted three significant sculptures done in wood. Ishikawa Kōmei entered a carved relief of the goddess of mercy, Kannon. Takeuchi Kyūichi 竹内久一 (1857–1916) sub-

mitted a large statue of a *Gigeiten* 技芸天 (a Buddhist goddess of good fortune and the arts),⁴⁶ and Takamura Kōun a four-foot statue known as ‘Old Monkey’, described in one guide as a ‘gorilla’. It was the only object listed as ‘Fine Art’ in the official catalogue, while the other two were placed under Manufactures. Art collector William Walton described Kōun’s work this way:

No. I is a wonderful carving in cherry wood, by Takamura [sic], of an old monkey, considerably larger than life, amusing himself with some eagle feathers which he has found. Fancy a European sculptor of repute staking his reputation and labor on such a theme!⁴⁷

Kyūichi’s work was also described by Walton: ‘Here the outlandish art still appeals to us, we see in addition to the extraordinary technical skill in rendering detail of the artist, a mysterious, uneasy life in his figure ...’.⁴⁸ Perhaps the very ‘outlandishness’ is what warranted an illustration in Walton’s book. It shows little of the appreciation that the Japanese government sought from these exhibits. Kōmei’s more subtle uncoloured wood relief was not mentioned. (His ivory was commended, however. Walton noted a ‘statue most exquisitely modeled and most delicately carved’).⁴⁹ Despite the apparent lack of attention to Ishikawa’s Kannon relief, it was the only one of the three wood sculptures awarded a medal, a gold one, in the ‘Wood Carving Section’ of the Manufactures division.

The significance of these works was greater in Japan, widely reported on in newspapers and magazines, especially Ishikawa’s Kannon relief. ‘Old Monkey’ and the Kannon relief were purchased at great expense for the Tokyo National Museum. Their exhibition in Tokyo rekindled domestic interest in wood carving as a sculpture technique.⁵⁰ Moreover, in the view of Japanese historians, Chicago is still seen as the turning point for Japanese sculpture, when, after a decade of experimentation, a distinction was clearly made between export *okimono* and sculpture as fine art within Japan.⁵¹ It was a rift between art and craft that occurred within a specifically Japanese context.

After Chicago, Ishikawa never again submitted Buddhist-themed work to an international exhibition. Yokomizo Hiroko has suggested that the lack of recognition there prompted him to reject Buddhist themes thereafter, but there may have been more complicated factors at work.⁵² From the little we know of his personality, Ishikawa appears to have been self-effacing rather than aggrandising, and, in general, seems not to have gone out of his way to promote himself.⁵³ A bruised ego would not for him seem a strong motivation. Moreover, Ishikawa, whose family worked mostly on Shinto shrines, appears not to have made many objects with Buddhist motifs at any time in his career.⁵⁴ (The lack of a real catalogue of his *oeuvre* prevents a definitive statement.) Rather, he seemed to favour naturalistic animal themes and figures from Japanese legend and history such as Yoshitsune. Kōmei may have only submitted Buddhist pieces to the Colombian Exposition at the behest of Okakura Tenshin, who, along with Ernest Fenollosa, felt that such works would help establish a national identity for Japan.⁵⁵ Both these men were heavily involved in formulating the presentations at the fair. Moreover, Okakura headed the government art school where Ishikawa taught. This may, nevertheless, have been miscalculation on Okakura’s part. While Japan was undergoing its own Buddhist revival in the 1890s, in the West there was a distinctively Orientalist view of Buddhism, focusing on India. Japanese Buddhism was not even seen as worthy of study.⁵⁶ Okakura would not publish his works introducing Westerners to Eastern aesthetics for another decade.

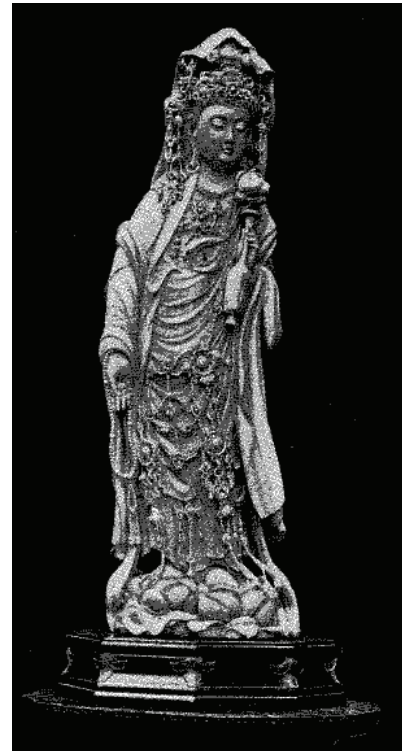


Figure 7

Ivory Kannon exhibited at the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition. The natural curve of the tusk gives shape to the figure. Misidentified as having been carved by ‘Ichikawa Komei’. *The Century* 46.4 (August 1893).

53 In a newspaper interview — the first in a series of conversations with famous craftsmen — Ishikawa talks only of the painter Buntei and Shibata Zeshin and not at all of himself. *Yomiuri Shinbun* (morning ed.) 27 July 1901 ‘Meikō itsuwa’, p.1.

54 The only other Buddhist image was the Daruma at Paris in 1889, but Daruma has many folk representations, and since the location of the object itself is unknown, it evades analysis.

55 Ellen Conant in collaboration with Steven D. Owyong and J. Thomas Rimer. *Nihonga: Transcending the Past* (St Louis: St Louis Art Museum, 1995), p.23; Martin Collcutt, ‘Kannon as Compassionate Mother in Meiji Art and Culture,’ in ed. Ellen Conant *Challenging Past and Present: The Meta morphosis of Nineteenth Century Japanese Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), pp. 197–224.

56 Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism and the Columbian Exposition* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp.4–10. Conversely, the interest in Buddhist images as fine art pre-dates Okakura’s influence.

57 *Yomiuri Shinbun* (special section) 20 February 1897, p.1.

58 Richard D. Mandell, *Paris 1900: The Great World's Fair* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p.121.

59 *Asahi Shinbun* (morning ed.) 20 July 1897.

60 Kris Schiermeir and Matthi Forrier, *Wonders of Imperial Japan-Meiji Art From the Khalili Collection* (Amsterdam: Waanders Press, 2006), *Falconer* currently in the Imperial household collection.

61 Panel recently identified as art decorating the underground floor of the Tokyo Kaikan, a meeting facility and executive club near the Imperial Palace. It was acquired in 1953 but how it got there is not known. Yokomizo 'Butsuzō,' 6–7.

62 *Zōge chōkoku bijutsu nenban* 象牙彫刻美術年鑑 (Tokyo: privately printed, 1975), pp.103–104.

Modern Buddhist-themed art did not, therefore, impress educated Westerners, who tended to favour antiquities.

After the Colombian exhibit, Ishikawa's work appears to have refocused on human portraits and animals. His submission to the Esposizione Generale Italiana held in Turin in 1898 was a statue of a pair of mountain goats.⁵⁷ At the Paris Fair of 1900, Japan exhibited with a new confidence. A victory in the Sino–Japanese War in 1895 and the renegotiation of the unfair treaty agreements of the 1850s engendered a sense of equality. Gone were the foreign advisers like Fenollosa. Japanese artists had become 'recognized winners ... in taste'.⁵⁸ In 1897, a full three years before the fair, the government appointed artists to create the exhibits for the 1900 Paris exposition. Ishikawa Kōmei was selected as one of those commissioned for the Fine Arts building, and exhibited an ivory carving of a falconer in ancient dress, a figure of Heian courtier Fujiwara Michinari 藤原通憲, a monkey, and an old man reading.⁵⁹ Unlike the porcelain exhibits, which received some criticism, the falconer won a gold medal.⁶⁰

By the Japan–British Exhibition in London in 1910, Japonisme had declined there. The exhibition catalogue shows that Ishikawa submitted the full range of his work: an ivory statue of a child crawling, a wooden panel carved in relief of goats,⁶¹ and a tray with *Shibayama*-type inlay of ducks. These last two also received prizes. Nevertheless, the British press paid scant attention to any modern Japanese arts or crafts, instead focusing on the antiques provided by the Imperial Household Museum.

Ishikawa's involvement in national and international expositions was far more than as an artist. He served as a jury member for the Third, Fourth and Fifth Domestic Industrial Exhibitions (1890, 1894 and 1905). He was also a selection committee member for the 1899 Exposition Universelle in Paris, for the 1907 Tokyo Industrial Exhibition, and for the Italian World's Fair in 1911. Collectors who could not travel to the Far East used these fairs to purchase quality pieces. Ishikawa was, therefore, influential in establishing nineteenth-century taste in Japanese sculpture both in and out of Japan, not only through the exhibition and sale of his own works, but also through his involvement in the selection of pieces to be sent abroad. These pieces set the standard for what constituted quality modern production. These actions moved him clearly out of the realm of traditional craftsmen.

The Intersection of Public and Private — Professional Organisations

International and domestic exhibitions were not the only stage on which Ishikawa Kōmei shaped Meiji sculpture. He was a leading craftsman and artist because he was a contributing member to all the professional associations of his time. In this capacity, he interacted with other artists and with members in the government responsible for policy about art. In 1878, he and some of the leading artists in the ivory business, including Asahi Gyokuszan 朝日玉山 (1843–1923) and Kaneda Kanejirō 金田兼次郎, founded a study group called the Industrial Promotion Association (*Kankōkai* 勸工会). The group was, as the name might suggest, formed to study foreign demand in order to formulate a response to lagging *netsuke* sales.⁶² By 1880, the group's activities came to include monthly peer evaluations to help improve production quality.

The following year, the newly expanded group changed its name to Sculpture Competition Society (*Chōkoku kyōgikai* 彫刻競技会) and the former secre-

tary of the Interior and head of the Board of Commerce, Kawase Hideharu 河瀬秀治 (1839–1928), joined. Kawase had been the commissioner general to the Philadelphia Exposition and continued to take an active role in developing art in Japan in co-operation with Fenollosa and others. It is in this same year that ivory carving played such an important role in the Domestic Industrial Exposition.

The group's name change signifies the shift from expanding business opportunities to raising aesthetic standards. Members clashed as tensions between art and commerce created friction. Some members felt that pursuing profit through export pieces conflicted with producing fine art. Ishikawa supported the idea that ivory carving was an art and not a craft. Despite internal squabbling, the society began sponsoring an annual sculpture competition in 1886. Ishikawa remained an important member of this society as an administrator, as judge, and as participant, entering works in 26 *Kyōgikai* shows and receiving frequent commendations. His stature in this organisation was reaffirmed in 1913, when two months after his death a special memorial exhibition of 'twenty or thirty of his masterworks was featured in the regular show'.⁶³ In 1890, the group changed their name to Tokyo Sculptor's Association (*Tokyo chōkokukai* 東京彫刻会). Kōmei served as vice-president at this juncture. Initially, this group was formed predominately of ivory carvers, but intentionally left the ivory reference out of their name so as to promote interaction with the art world at large. Over time, this group grew exponentially, so that by 1929 there were over 800 members. It was to have, by some assessments, almost as much impact as the Japan Art Association (*Nihon bijutsu kyōkai* 日本美術協会).⁶⁴

Ishikawa was also an influential member of the Dragon Pond Society (*Ryūchikai* 竜池会) and served as a judge at the first six juried exhibitions. Established in 1879 with 26 members, the society was the precursor of the Japan Art Association. It was, as Takamura Kōun called it, 'the mother of many things that happened thereafter in the art world. It planted good roots'.⁶⁵ The Dragon Pond Society was an organisation devoted to preserving traditional art, and, conversely, consciously interested in creating new art for export. It differed greatly from other art societies because, in addition to sculptors and painters, it included artisans of *maki-e* 蒔絵 lacquer, metalworking, and other 'crafts' in its membership, as well as collectors and government officials. Diet member Sano Tsunetami 佐野常民 (1822–1922)⁶⁶ was its first head. The society attracted the attention of the imperial family, especially Prince Arisugawa Taruhito 有栖川宮熾仁 (1835–95), who became its governor in 1883. In its early years, the society only held exhibitions of old art because the Domestic Industrial Expositions were seen as the proper venue for new work. The Dragon Pond Society, therefore, did not present contemporary works until 1885. The society was renamed the Japan Art Association in March 1890. Ishikawa exhibited and juried at all the competitions of this society during his lifetime. Ishikawa also served as secretary to the Flowers of the Nation Club (*Kokka kurabu* 國華俱樂部), founded by Okukura.⁶⁷ The journal this group published is still influential.

Bunten 文展 was an official, state-controlled, juried art exposition organised in 1906 directly under the auspices of the Meiji government's Ministry of Education. *Bunten* and its subsequent organisations became the largest venue for artists to display their work until 1945. Through its involvement, the Ministry of Education sorted out the creative chaos of the earlier years of

63 *Yomiuri Shinbun* (morning ed.) 4 September 1913, p.5.

64 Takamura Kōun, *Kibori shichijūnen* 木彫り七十年 (Tokyo: Nihon zusho senta, 2000), p.193–95.

65 *Ibid*, p.181.

66 At this time, Sano was a member of the senate (*genrōin* 元老院). He had a number of government posts but is perhaps best remembered for founding the Red Cross in Japan. He saw the 1873 Austrian Fair on his way to by a ship for the navy and thereafter was interested in art promotion.

67 Suzuki Ryūsen, 'Ishikawa,' p.37.

68 Tanaka Shūji 田中修二, *Kindai nihon saisho no chōkokuka* 近代日本最初の彫刻家 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kobunkan, 1994), p.263.

69 Ellen Conant, “‘Bunten’: A National Forum, 1907, 1918,” in *Nihonga*, pp.36–41.

70 Takamura, *Kaikōdan*, p.215.

71 ‘Hakubotan shusai no bijutsu kōgei ten’ 白牡丹主催の美術工芸展, *Yomiuri Shinbun* (morning ed.), 14 November 1908, p.3.

72 Yokomizu Hiroko, Kōgei – ‘Kōgei no Sekai no imi’ 工芸の世紀の意味, in *Kōgei no Seiki* (Tokyo geijutsu daigaku bijutsukan 2003), p.11.

73 Uyeno Naoteru, *Japanese Arts & Crafts*, p.118.

Meiji by creating an official exhibition doctrine.⁶⁸ Officially titled the Ministry of Education Art Exhibition (*Monbushō bijutsu tenrankai* 文部所美術展覧会), the name came from the first characters of the first and last words. *Bunten* comprised three divisions: one each for Eastern and Western painting, and one for sculpture. Jury members were nominated directly by the Ministry and Ishikawa was one of the eleven judges for sculpture. Although *Bunten*’s organisation and operation were politically influenced and rent by factional disputes, it was still influential in establishing recognition for artists.⁶⁹

Besides his influence through his association with formal organisations and events such as Dragon Pond Society and *Bunten*, Ishikawa also had many close associations with other influential artists. For example, he came to know sculptor Takamura Kōun about 1882. According to Kōun’s memoirs, by this time Ishikawa was probably well known as an ivory carver and an artist. Ishikawa would come periodically and peer into Kōun’s shop, sometimes for the whole day, but they never spoke until introduced by bronze caster Maki Mitsuhiro. Kōun described Ishikawa as a refined-looking gentleman who was ‘small with a bit of a beard, who might be a doctor or poet, or if not that a writer or a painter’. Kōun was amazed that such a major figure had even hesitated to enter his workshop.⁷⁰ Born in the same year to families that produced art for religious institutions, they even shared a character in their names (*hikari* 光). The two became close friends. Some people even thought they had apprenticed together. Although slightly younger, Ishikawa had, at this juncture, attained greater acclaim and he encouraged Kōun to enter the Dragon Pond Society competitions. Ishikawa went on to work collaboratively with Kōun on several commissioned objects and Kōun became his most significant biographer and eulogiser.

At the same time as Ishikawa was active in art circles as a sculptor, he also remained true to his identity as a craftsman, serving as a judge for the city of Tokyo in the Handicrafts Promotion Exhibition (*Tōkyōfu kōgei kyōshinkai* 東京府工芸共進会) in 1887. Kōmei participated in privately sponsored craft exhibitions too. For example, in 1908, he took a gold medal at national crafts exhibition sponsored by the Hakubotan Sake Company (*Hakubotan shuzō kabushiki gaisha*) 白牡丹酒造株式会社.⁷¹ Rather than participate in intellectual arguments of categorisation, Ishikawa sought to elevate the standard of production. Through his almost ubiquitous presence in such exhibits as an artist and a judge, Ishikawa had a substantial influence on the development and recognition of wood and ivory carving as well as all other aspects of art promotion, both domestically and abroad, in the Meiji period. His position as a leader in Meiji art was confirmed after being named an Imperial Artist.

Government Patronage

The Imperial household was a significant customer for traditional crafts, which were often selected from expositions. Kawase Hideharu (vice-president of the *Ryūchikai*) promoted this role while still a government official for the Imperial house because he believed imperial investment in the arts would contribute to national productivity and the happiness of the populace.⁷² The acquisition of works by the Imperial household could make the career of any artist.⁷³

Ishikawa received imperial patronage from fairly early in his career. In 1881, the emperor himself visited the *Ryūchikai*’s Second Exhibition of Old Art (*Kankokai* 観古会) and acquired an ivory brush stand and a sweetmeat dish

(*kashi bachi* 菓子鉢) carved with a chrysanthemum design.⁷⁴ At the following *Kankokai* in 1883, Kōmei presented three ivory bookmarks to the emperor himself. Ishikawa also worked for the Imperial house, carving large transoms (*ranma* 欄間) out of ginkgo wood for the study in the new palace in 1888.⁷⁵ A number of Ishikawa works were also purchased by the Imperial Household Agency, including his gold medal carving of a falconer from the Anglo-British exhibition of 1910.

In 1891, this kind of informal patronage was formalised in the creation of the Imperial Household Artist (*Teishitsu gigeiin* 帝室技芸員) system. Ishikawa Kōmei was one of the first group of artists to receive this designation. The system was established to maintain traditional art and encourage new art that would appeal to Western tastes. Sano Tsunetami suggested this system to Ōkuma Shigenobu 大隈重信 (1838–1922), then Minister of Finance and Industry, as early as 1880 as a way to find purpose for the Imperial house.⁷⁶ In addition to the prestige inherent in imperial patronage, the system allowed the artists so designated to spend the time necessary to produce fine objects by granting them a generous stipend of 100 yen per year. In return, appointment as an Imperial Household Artist required those chosen to present work, accept commissions from the Imperial house, and submit reports.

Ishikawa received his announcement of appointment by means of an official summons on 11 October 1891. The document merely stated that the Imperial Household Ministry (*Kunaisho* 宮内所) required his presence. Mystified, Ishikawa discussed it with others who had received the summons — Takamura Kōun and the painter Hashimoto Gahō 橋本雅邦 (1835–1908) and they concluded that the Imperial household was buying some paintings and sculptures and wanted them to appraise their purchases. They did not discover the meaning of the summons until they appeared at the ministry. Most of the other initiates were much older and well along in their careers. Only Ishikawa and Takamura Kōun were in their forties. At the Imperial Household Ministry, the men were called in one by one, where they each received a certificate for their annual stipend and notification that they were now Imperial Artists.⁷⁷ This did not really clarify the situation, however, and the appointees left as puzzled as they had arrived. It was not until later that the artists came to understand the purpose of the award through people connected to the *Kunaisho* — Okakura Tenshin, Sano Tsunetami, and the head of the Imperial Household Museum, Kuki Ryūichi 九鬼隆一. Feeling the pressure of being the only two young men to receive this appointment, Kōmei and his friend Kōun discussed how they would study harder to deserve the honour.⁷⁸ After his appointment, Ishikawa carved transoms and sliding doors (*shoji* 障子) in the Imperial Palace. He also carved a life-size pair of peacocks for the throne room. A composite work of wood and ivory, they took a year to complete, and were valued at the time of completion in 1890 at 20,000 yen.⁷⁹ In 1912, although already ill, he contributed some wood parts to a pair of cloisonné magpies that Namikawa Sōsuke 瀧川惣助 made for the new emperor.⁸⁰

On the one hand, the commissions of the Imperial house show an old-fashioned patronage in which designees were treated more like craftsman or artists in the pre-modern manner because they were put to work on utilitarian architectural objects or composite projects. On the other, they were elevated by proximity to the emperor. The system reflects the inherent contradictions of Westernising, modernising and creating a national identity. For Ishikawa, however, to be selected as an Imperial Artist, especially at such a young age,

74 Originally under the Museum Bureau of the Ministry of Home Affairs, it was transferred to the *Ryūchikai* in 1880, which held seven exhibitions between 1881 and 1886. Jintarō Fujii, *Outline of Japanese History in the Meiji Era* (Tokyo: Obunsha, 1968), p.181.

75 *Asahi shinbun* (Osaka morning ed.) 21 November 1883, p.1. *Yomiuri shinbun* (morning ed.) 3 March 1888, p.1. This *ranma* was quite large, about 6 feet by 3 feet, and carved from a single plank. The choice of ginkgo wood was probably because it is relatively light and does not easily warp, even in cycles of damp and dry.

76 Higuchi Hideo 樋口秀雄, 'Teishutsu gigein seido' 帝室芸員制度, *Museum* 202 (January 1968): 29.

77 In 1912, Ishikawa had his rank elevated and pension increased, in return for service and because he was ill.

78 Takamura, *Kaikodan*, pp.351–56.

79 *Yomiuri shinbun* (morning ed.) 26 July 1891, p.3. In 1891, the daily wage of a carpenter was only around 50 *sen*. See Shukan Asahi 週刊朝日, ed. *Nedanshi nenpyo* 値段史年表 (Tokyo: Asahi shinbun, 1988), p.118.

80 'Sentei to Bijutsu' 選定と美術, *Yomiuri shinbun* (morning ed.) 10 August 1912, p.5.

- 81 Sato, *Nihon Bijutsu*, p.5; Kumamoto Kenjiro 隈元謙次郎, 'Vincenzo Ragusa and His Work' ラグーザに就いて, in *Bijutsu Kenkyū* 美術研究 68 (August 1937), 6–8; also Ellen P. Conant, 'Principles and Pragmatism: The *Yatoi* in the Field of Art,' in eds Edward R. Beauchamp and Akira Iriye, *Foreign Employees in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), pp.137–70, at pp.146–51.
- 82 Letter from Fenollosa to Kaneko Kentaro, in Kanda and Gifford, eds 'The Kaneko Correspondence,' *Monumenta Nipponica* 37.1: 41–76, at pp.72–75 (letter # 15).
- 83 Ernest Fenollosa. 'Chinese and Japanese Traits,' *The Atlantic Monthly* 69.416 (1892): 769–75.
- 84 'Contemporary Japanese Art,' *The Century: A Popular Quarterly* 46.4: 577–82.
- 85 Okakura Kakuzo, *The Awakening of Japan* (New York: The Century Co., 1904), pp.197–98.

indicated his stature and accomplishment as an artist. Thereafter, he was always referred to in Japanese publications as an 'Imperial Artist'.

Shaping the Future: The Tokyo School of Fine Arts

For the Meiji government to promote nationalism through art, exhibitions, societies and patronage were not enough. Art education was also required. The first government-sponsored art school, the Technical Art School (*Kōbu bijutsu gakkō* 工部美術学校), opened in 1876 under the Department of Industry.⁸¹ Art education was initially a Western concept so it is no surprise that this school was run with hired foreign teachers. It closed in 1883, probably due to a lack of funding.

The Tokyo School of Fine Arts (*Tokyo bijutsu gakkō* 東京美術学校) opened in 1889 to train art teachers and professional craftsmen through the efforts of Okakura Tenshin and Ernest Fenollosa, who were both employed by the Ministry of Education at the time. It was a victory for their romanticised ideal of 'native style' and high art over Westernisation, represented by minister of education Mori Arinori 森有礼 (1847–89). Mori had held that government involvement in art should be for the purpose of educating art teachers and deliberately obstructed Okakura and Fenollosa until his assassination.⁸²

Ishikawa Kōmei was appointed to the Tokyo School of Fine Arts in 1890, a year after it opened. Fellow teachers included Takamura Kōun, who worked exclusively in wood, and Takeuchi Kyūichi. Takeuchi had also been trained as an ivory carver but, impressed by the sculpture in Kōfukuji Temple 興福寺 in Nara, switched entirely to wood carving of religious and historical figures. Ishikawa Kōmei and Takamura Kōun had both trained in carving religious figures, and all three were already well established in the field by this time.

Fenollosa's views on art are clearly expressed in an article he wrote for the *Atlantic Monthly*: 'Thus I believe, that theoretically and practically, it will be best for the Japanese to hold to her own ideas of Asiatic tradition. It is a solemn service she owes humanity.'⁸³ He had a low opinion of the developments in Europe, claiming the European salons produced 'travesties'.⁸⁴ The education, curriculum and staffing at the new art school reflected this romanticised, idealised version of what Japanese art should be. Okakura Tenshin, who headed the school, was invested in revitalising traditional art. Writing in 1904 he said 'our art is suffering not merely from the purely utilitarian trend of modern life, but also from an inroad of Western ideas'.⁸⁵ Neither he nor Fenollosa appear to have had much interest in sculpture or developing a national form for it and discuss it very little in their works beyond idealising ancient religious figures. Their emphasis was on painting and calligraphy. Yet to have left sculpture out of the school curriculum would have invited negative comparisons with Western traditions.

The dichotomy between art and craft adhered to by Western-influenced thinkers, and the neotraditional and the nationalistic concepts that characterised Okakura's thinking leaves a bit of a question as to why Ishikawa was hired to teach at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. Although widely recognised as a master, he was known for ivory carving, which would not have been represented in the ancient art that Okakura and Fenollosa so admired. Ivory carving existed in Japan since at least the Nara period, but usage did not extend beyond the uppermost elite until the Edo period. Wood carving, the material of religious figures, had 'not found a market in or out' of Japan, while Ishikawa was credited

**Figure 8**

Bronze statue of Kusunoki Masashige in front of the Imperial Palace. A group composition by faculty of the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. Author photo.

with creating ‘a wide market for works in ivory’.⁸⁶ It is possible that Ishikawa, who also carved in wood, was brought in to elevate woodcarving — a very traditional art — to the commercial success of ivory, a more recent tradition.⁸⁷

When he was hired, Ishikawa was sent to study ancient wooden works in Nara, just as Okakura, Fenollosa and Takeuchi had. Sculpture was a four-year course, and given the mission of the school and the training and preferences of the professors, the emphasis was heavily on wood. Still, as the only practicing ivory carver, there is little doubt that Ishikawa Kōmei was the instructor for ivory carving. This role may partially account for the diversity of his work. Frank Brinkley specifically credits this course for taking ivory above the so-called ‘Yokohama style’ of export bric-a-brac and creating the ‘Sensei (先生 Professor) School’ of high-quality work.⁸⁸

In addition to teaching, sculpture professors were expected to assist in commemorative statues and other government projects. Little is known as to what these commissions were, but Ishikawa did participate in the group effort that created the best known of them, a bronze statue of Kusunoki Masashige 楠木正成 (1294–1336) — a *samurai* renowned for his loyalty to the Imperial house — that stands in front of the Imperial Palace.⁸⁹ This work commenced production in the fall of 1891. In 1895, the entire fine arts school was commissioned by a wealthy American to produce a house interior along the lines of the shrine at Nikkō.⁹⁰ Another such commission was the decoration for the Nihonbashi Bridge in 1911, where Ishikawa designed the lampposts.⁹¹ This sort of co-operative production was a modern urban patronage system that resembled the Imperial Artist system.

Ishikawa also took personal commissions. In 1898, for example, Yasuda Zenjirō 安田善次郎 (1838–1921) founder of the Yasuda Zaibatsu, commissioned Ishikawa to design a statue of the Shinto deity Sumiyoshi 住吉, patron saint of fisherman and ocean travellers, which was cast in silver by Okazaki Sessei 岡崎雪聲. He even once carved a statue of painter Shibata Zeshin 柴田是真 in one night, having discovered there was no image for the Buddhist rites commemorating the seventh anniversary of Shibata’s death.⁹²

86 Jiro Harada, ‘Japanese Art and Artists of Today IV. Wood and Ivory,’ *The International Studio* 42.168 (February 1911): 110.

87 Fukui Yasutami 福井泰民, ‘Meiji no gechō okimono no shinsuisshi’ 明治牙調置物盛衰史, in *Nihon no zōgei bijutsu* 日本の象牙美術 (Tokyo: Shoto Museum of Art, 1996). Ivory carving existed in Japan from ancient times but was not common until the second half of the seventeenth century.

88 Brinkley, *Artistic Japan*, p.6.

89 Takamura Kōtarō 高村光太郎, *Takamura Kōtarō* 高村光太郎, Kitagawa Tarōichi, ed. (Tokyo: Nihon tosho senta, 1994), pp.49, 81, 84; and Christine Guth, *Katamura Kōtarō: On Being a Sculptor*, pp.152–79, in ed. Melinda Takeuchi, *The Artist as Professional in Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp.163–66 (Guth fails to mention Ishikawa’s contribution).

90 *Asahi Shinbun* (morning ed.), 7 April 1895. The name of the American was not printed.

91 Dallas Finn, *Meiji Revisited, The Sites of Victorian Japan* (New York, Weatherhill, 1995). 148–51.

92 *Asahi Shinbun* (Tokyo), 9 January 1897, p.3; *Yomiuri shinbun*, (morning ed.) 9 January 1897, p.4; *Asahi Shinbun*, 6 July 1897, p.2; *Yomiuri shinbun* (morning ed.), 6 July 1897, p.4.



Figure 9

Bronze Lanterns on Nihonbashi Bridge in Tokyo designed by Ishikawa Kōmei. Photo: Aimaiymi. Creative commons license.

93 Nohara Teimei, 'Ishikawa-o,' p.26.

94 *Asahi shinbun* (Tokyo) (morning ed.), 25 March 1903, p.8. The name of the school was *Joshi koto bijitsu gakko*.

95 Plans had already begun even before his death. Asakura, 'Ishikawa-o,' p.27.

96 Similarly, *cloisonné*, which Japanese artists had excelled at, dwindled at this time. Today, woodworking is part of both the Sculpture Department and the Crafts Department. The former emphasises modern sculptural techniques while the latter emphasises traditional hand-powered tools.

97 *Asahi shinbun* (Tokyo), 30 July 1913, p.5.

98 The tray set is held at the Tokyo University of Fine Art.

99 This cabinet was exhibited at the Third Industrial Exposition in 1890 and is most likely the one auctioned at Christie's in 2002.

100 Takamura Koun 高村光雲, 'Meikō no omokage' 名工の面影, *Asahi Shinbun* (Tokyo), 1 August 1913.

101 The Kamo festival is held to bring abundant harvests and is held on 15 May at

Throughout his tenure at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, Ishikawa is credited with training many students who went on to produce their own artwork. He was known for operating in the shadows to advance his students.⁹³ Two of his more famous pupils were Asakura Fumio 朝倉文夫 (1883–1964) and Nohara Teimei 野原貞明 (1858–1924). A newspaper advertisement from 1903 indicates that he also taught at a private art school for women.⁹⁴ The bronze bust of him erected on the Tokyo School of Fine Arts grounds in 1917, four years after his death, testifies to the positive impact he made.⁹⁵ Ishikawa's death in 1913 essentially brought about the end of the promotion of ivory carving in the university, but the ivory carving curriculum was not abolished until 1923. By this time, Japan was a major power in the Pacific, diminishing the need for export art as an extension of national identity.⁹⁶

Kōmei's Oeuvre

One Ishikawa obituary called him 'a man of many interests', and the variety of his output supports this.⁹⁷ No definitive catalogue of Ishikawa Kōmei's work exists. His best-known pieces reside in the Tokyo National Museum and at the Tokyo University of Fine Art and Music (the present name for the Tokyo School of Fine Art) but his work is held in collections abroad and by many private collectors. Even this limited survey shows a man of astounding diversity, who could handle the fine work of a *netsuke* or a large relief panel. This

is clearly a feat of technical virtuosity because many craftsmen were unable to take the leap from miniature *netsuke* to larger sculptures and went on to other pursuits. Ishikawa produced award-winning sculptures throughout his life. Yet at the time of his death he was working on a utilitarian tray with an incised lotus design and a matching set of five petal-shaped dishes.⁹⁸

In *Tōkyō meikō kagami*, he is listed as an ivory carver, although it also said he sometimes accepted commissions for wood pieces. In fact, Ishikawa worked in wood, ivory, deer horn, and boar tusk; created inlay; and had works cast in bronze and silver. He sometimes collaborated with other artisans on works such as an inlaid *shodana* (cabinet) created with lacquerer Yasui Hōchu 保井抱中 circa 1890.⁹⁹ Takamura Kōun claimed that later in his life Ishikawa no longer produced much ivory, having been forced into ivory carving by his parents.¹⁰⁰ This may reflect Takamura's own bias against ivory because another acquaintance described a Kamo Shrine 賀茂神社 Festival parade of some fifty ivory figures that Kōmei had spent several years producing in the last years of his life as a sort of *piece de resistance* of his ivory carving career. This work was lost to a fire at his home in 1912.¹⁰¹

The *Tōkyō meikō kagami* also notes that Ishikawa used the left knife (*hidariba* 左刃) technique. This carving method uses tools sharpened so the point goes from right to left. Developed at the end of the Edo period, the technique differed from the usual downward strokes used in woodcarving, requiring a more circular motion. The technique was used for ivory and harder woods. This difference is one reason for the limited crossover between artisans who worked in these materials.¹⁰²

Although Ishikawa worked in traditional media, a number of plaster statues in the collections of the Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music show

that, in addition to perspective, he adopted Western techniques to further his work. Using plaster in sculpture classes seems to have started at the Industrial Art School (*Kobu bijutsu gakkō*). The sculpture section was run by Vincenzo Ragusa (1841–1927) from the time the school opened until it closed.¹⁰³ Ironically perhaps, Ragusa had also studied ivory carving in Sicily. Not only did the students study from plaster casts, according to one account, they worked in clay and then covered the work with plaster.¹⁰⁴ Because plaster was inexpensive and easily carved, it was perfect for test compositions and study purposes, saving expensive ivory. It was probably through Ragusa and his school that plaster was introduced to Japanese artists and it is significant that Ishikawa adopted it even though he had no known direct connections to the Industrial Art School.

Despite having long established himself as an artist as well as adopting some new practices such as plaster and perspective in relief compositions, it appears that Ishikawa never abandoned his roots as a commercial craftsman. He continued to produce work for export throughout his career. Brinkley wrote that Ishikawa ‘has a large atelier of his own in Tokyo where many *netsuke* and ivory alcove ornaments are produced for the foreign market’.¹⁰⁵ According to photographer Herbert Ponting (1870–1935):

Kōmei Ishikawa, the most skillful ivory-worker in Japan, will take a three-foot tusk and carve it into a single file of elephants — so lifelike that they almost seem to move along the thin strip left as a base ...¹⁰⁶

This ‘elephant bridge’ was a popular tourist-art motif in many countries where elephant tusks were carved rather than fine art. Ponting, who visited Japan several times between 1902 and 1905, would have come across Ishikawa when he already was a professor at the university, highly renowned and winner of medals at numerous international expositions. According to Ponting, Ishikawa was ‘one of Kaneda’s artists’.¹⁰⁷ This was Kaneda Kanejiro, also known as Kinjirō, Kenjirō and Kingorō. He started out in metal casting, but appears to have diversified into ivory carving, producing mixed media pieces such as bronze figures with ivory faces and hands. He was known for large works, especially eagles that measured as much as five feet across the wings. One of these, entitled *Giant Eagle*, consisting of individual carved pieces on a wooden base, was shown at the Third Domestic Industrial Exhibition in 1890.¹⁰⁸ Brinkley claimed, ‘The heads of these birds were chiseled by Ishikawa Mitsuaki. Kaneda’s artisans have all been trained by Ishikawa or Shimamura’.¹⁰⁹ There is some evidence that Ishikawa produced a number of carved wooden bases for casting by others. For example, the large (almost four foot) silver crane Kurokawa Eishō 黒川英勝 (1854–1911) submitted to the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris was cast from a carving by Ishikawa.¹¹⁰ He does not ever seem to have avoided a commission because it was below his status. His former student, Asakura Fumio, noted that ‘he did not disdain ordinary production’ so that there were few who had produced as much as he had. He was also a hard worker, and another former student, Nohara Teimei 野原貞明 (1858–1924) wrote that, ‘no matter what time he went past his workshop, he saw the lamp lit and Kōmei at work’.¹¹¹

The export pieces produced by Ishikawa, Kaneda and their ilk were not the works that ‘presented no commendable features of any kind’ the ones Westerners bought only on condition that they ‘represent a great deal of labour, a certain amount of bizarre vigour, and a phase of Japanese fancy’.¹¹² Even though the export works were designed to please Western taste,



Figure 10

Bronze bust of Ishikawa Kōmei in the grounds of the Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music. Author photo.

Kamigamo and Shimogamo shrines in Kyoto. It is sometimes called the Aoi (あおい hollyhock) festival because ox-drawn carts decorated with hollyhock are featured in the procession. The event originated in the Heian period, so even today, participants dress in Heian court costume. *Asahi Shinbun*, ‘Kemuri to kieta ichidai no saku’ 煙と消えた一代の作 彫刻名人石川光明翁の災厄, 31 October 1930.

102 Nihon zōge chōkokukai 日本象牙彫刻会 ed., *17th Nihon no zōge chōkokuten* 日本の象牙彫刻展 (Tokyo: 1994), p.45.

103 Kumamoto Kenjiro Vincenzo Ragusa and His Work; also Ellen P. Conant, ‘Principles and Pragmatism: The Yatoi in the Field of Art,’ pp.137–70, in eds Edward R. Beauchamp and Akira Iriye, *Foreign Employees in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1990), pp.146–51.

104 Takamura, *Kaikodan*, p.173.

105 Brinkley, *Artistic Japan*, pp.13, 15.

Figure 11

Plaster carving of Toyotomi Hideyoshi by Ishikawa Kōmei. In the collection of the Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music.



106 Herbert Ponting, *In Lotus Land Japan* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1922), p.226.

107 *Ibid.*, p.46.

108 Uyeno, *Japanese Arts & Crafts*, p.88.

109 Brinkley lists two ivory carvers: Shimamura Ryomin (d.1896) or Homin.

110 *Yomiuri shinbun* (morning ed.) 11 March 1898, p.4. A government subsidy was provided to produce this work. Kurokawa Eishō 黒川英勝 (1854–1911), was regarded as one of the best metal artists of his day.

111 Asakura Fumio 朝倉文夫, 'Ishikawa Kōmei-o tsuikoku' 石川光明翁追憶, *Bijutsu* 1.7 (May 1917): 26.

112 Henry Norman, *The Real Japan* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), pp.172–73.

113 Tanaka Shūji classifies him as a realist (*shajitsuha* 写実派) along with Takamura Kōun. *Kindai nihon saisho no chōkokuka* 近代日本最初の彫刻家, (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 1994), p.54. Laurance P. Roberts characterises his work with these negative terms. *Dictionary of Japanese Artists* (New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1976), p.56.

114 Asakura, 'Ishikawa-o,' p. 27.

115 Harada, 'Japanese Art and Artists': p.110.

116 *The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Japanese Art, Volume 1: Selected Essays* (London: The Kibo Foundation, 1995), p.24.

Ishikawa's exports were, as the Walters piece shows, of very high quality. The difference in perception of these works and fine art seems to lie in the forms and materials rather than the quality of work.

While some modern critics have found Kōmei's work 'saccharine' and 'romantic', it is this light elegance that shows his genius. Ivory was often sold by weight, so sculptures were designed to take up as much surface space as possible.¹¹³ The results often seem to carry this weight visually and feel heavy. Ishikawa's works were not extravagant or wasteful but maintained a natural look that highlighted the material. His reputation is such that many forgeries still circulate on the art market.

The variety of his themes, materials, and forms suggests that Ishikawa frequently worked on commission. Left to his own devices, he favoured traditional and natural motifs and historical figures. Asakura Fumio attributes this interest in nature to have made him fearless about trying new things. Thus, Ishikawa had large numbers of pets, and built up an extensive personal collection of a wide variety of traditional Japanese and foreign (both Western and Chinese) objects to study as the basis for such work.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, the lifelike portraiture of the human figures was rarely found in traditional sculpture and this was in its own way revolutionary. He had many influences but imitated none. To summarise, as one contemporary critic wrote, Ishikawa had 'no special subject, being what one may term an all-round artist'.¹¹⁵ To be called a generalist may seem damning, but if we accept the idea that 'On the whole, the Japanese craftsman of the Edo period ... had nearly always preferred execution over innovation', then it is apparent that Ishikawa kept one foot in the traditional past in which he had been raised, but at the same time pushed his art to the limits of modernity.¹¹⁶ He survived a time of shifting aesthetic values by balancing on this tightrope.

Ishikawa's Legacy

Ishikawa was called a 'luminary', a 'great master' and a 'general' of sculpture in his obituaries.¹¹⁷ Regardless of how he saw himself, every Japanese newspaper account of the Meiji and Taisho periods, of which there were many, he was referred to as a sculptor, not a craftsman. Certainly he



Figure 12

Photograph of ivory workshop c.1905 showing elephant bridge. From Herbert Ponting, In Lotus Land Japan (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1922). Collection of the author.

maintained some characteristics of the artisan rather than the artist, but there was little clear definition between these categories for most of his lifetime. However one chooses to label him, he was a fine artist with more than sufficient talent and impact to warrant study. He has been overlooked in later scholarship for a number of reasons that reflect the biases of scholars and anachronistic definitions of art.

It is the nature of historians to work from the largest document caches, and the loss of Kōmei's personal and school papers due to fires late in life have left a paucity of documents and scattered collections. Moreover, Meiji art in its entirety has only recently received scholarly attention. As Ellen Conant phrased it,

The history of Meiji art is still too recent and shallow a terrain and has been too incompletely and inadequately surveyed to lend itself to most of the currently favored discursive strategies.¹¹⁸

Of this limited scholarship, the predominant historical and critical focus has been on painting, which, purposefully or not, reflected Westernised conceptions of Japanese painting and sculpture advanced by Okakura and Fenollosa. Frank Brinkley stated that as far as sculpture was concerned, 'the Japanese have never been great. Their ignorance of anatomy has proved a fatal obstacle'.¹¹⁹ This dismissive view of sculpture has been pernicious. A 1974 newspaper article on an upcoming retrospective exhibition on wood-carving from the Meiji period to the present begins, 'The current of the art world that took the longest to modernize was sculpture'.¹²⁰ In fact, sculpture in Japan is usually dated a full generation later than Kōmei. Rather, Asakura Fumio is seen as the pioneer of sculpture. This assessment devalues traditional forms and equates 'Western' with 'modern'. It denies us even a canon into which we can place Ishikawa's work.

Furthermore, the antiquarian, nationalist influence of Okakura Tenshin and Ernest Fenollosa left little room for an artist such as Ishikawa. After his

¹¹⁷ See, for example, *Yomiuri Shinbun* (morning ed.) 30 July 1913, and 3 August 1913, p.3 'Ko Ishikawa Komei ou sogi' and 'Kemuri de kieta,' *Asahi Shinbun*, 31 October 1930.

¹¹⁸ Conant, *Challenging Past and Present*, p.19.

¹¹⁹ Brinkley, *Artistic Japan*, p.2

¹²⁰ 'Mokkai no naka ni inochi o miru' 木界の中に命を見る, *Yomiuri shinbun* (evening ed.) 29 March 1974 p.7.

121 The curator, Andrew Keelan, associates four pieces in the collection with Ishikawa. Three are metal castings for which he was believed to have carved the base. The fourth is an ivory sculpture, one of very few in the collection, which was by Yoshida Homei but resembles one by Ishikawa. Email communication 27 October 2010.

dismissal from the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, Okakura's influence within Japan declined but increased in the United States because he went to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and began to publish in English. After Okakura's departure, interest and educational emphasis in Japan returned to Western techniques. As art education swung back to Western forms, ivory carving foundered because as a material is not especially suited to the large imposing compositions demanded by modern sculpture. Its virtue is that it allows very fine work. *Okimono*, which make the most of this property, were tainted by their very popularity as export products, so they have been seen as neither art nor craft but merely curios. Because *netsuke* are seen as an indigenous product, they have received more scholarly attention, but the analysis has been restricted to motif and little attempt has been made to locate them within any greater social or art historical tradition.

Even if we choose to look at Ishikawa as a craftsman, the Khalili Collection, which has spawned most of the academic books about Meiji handicraft, contains very little wood or ivory carving. The pieces that are in the collection have not received much scholarly attention because they are relatively few in number.¹²¹ For example, a wood and ivory carving of Kanyu (Ch. Guan Yu 關羽) is categorised as 'lacquer' for the surface decoration rather than carving. In addition, from the 1920s onward, Japanese perceptions of handicrafts have been coloured by the ideas of Yanagi Sōetsu 柳宗悦 (1889–1961). While a full discussion of folk art (*mingei* 民芸) theory is not possible here, Yanagi valued the beauty of simple utilitarian works made from inexpensive materials and produced by anonymous craftsmen for everyday use, a definition that excluded ivory or *okimono* of any sort. Taxonomies have excluded Ishikawa from academic study.

Although the Japanese art world moved toward a Western division of art and craft after his death, Ishikawa Kōmei was, nevertheless, a significant force in establishing sculpture as an art in Japan. He navigated the various currents of government policy and production as an active and very productive artist. He took his traditional training and forged new techniques and methods. He moulded the view of sculpture in Meiji Japan and abroad through his teaching in both traditional and Westernised venues, his participation in professional societies, his interaction with government policy-makers, and his role as a juror at major domestic art exhibitions. He did the same internationally by participating in world's fairs and by producing high-quality export art, some of which was commissioned and serving on their selection committees. His facility in the worlds of domestic and export art, sculpture and handicraft, and exhibition and education might make him difficult to classify but we should not avoid him for this reason. Rather, this incongruence is most revealing about the national and the individual struggle of modernisation in Meiji Japan.

Martha Chaiklin

Indian Ocean World Centre
McGill University
chaiklin@pitt.edu