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Merchants of Asianness: Japanese Art Dealers in the United States in the Early Twentieth Century

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This article explores the role of Japanese merchants within American art and collecting circles and analyzes the ways in which the construction of "Asianness" and, in particular, "Japaneseness" became intertwined with the classification of Asian art. In order to reconstitute the market for high art and to create their own positionalities as legitimate cultural intermediaries, Asian art dealers such as Bunkio Matsuki (1867–1940) and Sadajiro Yamanaka (1866–1936) used their connections to Japan as cultural capital. Ultimately, their experiences illuminate the complexities of the reconceptualization of ethnic–racial identities through the lens of aesthetic discourses.

An 1891 advertisement for the Almy, Bigelow, and Washburn Department Store in Salem, Massachusetts proudly announced the arrival of Asian goods and credited local denizen Bunkio Matsuki (1867–1940) with having procured the finest objects available from his homeland, "after a five-months [*sic*] purchasing trip through Japan." The collection was such that it was "a complete illustration of the art and ingenuity of the wonderful people of Japan that it is in itself education, and will be interesting to everybody, whether they desire to purchase or not."[1] The "unique trophies of that country" were trumpeted as being not only aesthetically pleasing but also imbued with the power to elucidate the arts and cultures of Japan for the

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[1] 1891 advertisement for the Almy, Bigelow, and Washburn Department Store, the Almy, Bigelow and Washburn Collection, James Duncan Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum (hereafter PL).

viewer (Figure 1). The advertisement, consequently, served to draw the unsuspecting individual into an interactive and didactic environment. The text was accompanied by eye-catching illustrations of tea sets, a Japanese woman and children in traditional kimonos, and other items that seemingly reinforced the authenticity of the merchandise. In the years to come, Matsuki would continue to use various advertising strategies in order to position himself as a renowned purveyor of high-quality Asian artworks, cementing his role as a trusted cultural mediator for clients like Boston elites Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840–1924) and William Sturgis Bigelow (1850–1926).[2]

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, socioeconomic and political transformations on both sides of the Pacific would galvanize the American fascination for Asian relics. Efforts to collect Asian materials for either personal edification or public display reached new heights with many admirers looking toward the East to satisfy different social and cultural needs: some, like the Gardners, simply wanted to purchase bric-a-bracs to enhance the beauty of their homes, while Bigelow and others hoped to surround themselves with the physical embodiments of the ancient ideals that they sought to understand. During this early era of connoisseurship, the paucity of knowledge about the Far East gave merchants of Japanese descent an opportunity to serve as influential figures in making artifacts available and in the classification of what was then known as "Oriental art." Their presence could be felt in multiple, interconnected geopolitical sites, including the art market and institutions of higher learning. In 1889, for instance, Matsuki was hired by Salem department store owner James Almy (1833–99) and famed marine zoologist Edward Sylvester Morse (1838–1925) to obtain and identify objects from Japan: Almy would sell the items in his store while Morse would augment his extensive collection of Japanese pottery for research purposes.

[2] William Sturgis Bigelow frequently served as an intermediary between Isabella Stewart Gardner and Bunkio Matsuki. Whenever he could not afford a certain item that the dealer sent his way, Bigelow would pass it on to her. In March of 1902, for instance, Bigelow wrote to Gardner, asking her if she would like to purchase nine pieces of bronze artifacts at a discounted price of $45,000. He informed her that famed European dealer Samuel Bing (1838–1905) charged $70,000 for a single bronze object from the same era. Letter of 22 March 1902, Isabella S. Gardner Museum Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (hereafter AAA). And again, in April 1902, he wrote to Gardner regarding a "pair of small red drape curtains embroidered with colored flowers the like of which I never saw. Price $450. They are too handsome for my humble home. Is there any chance of your wanting them or shall I send them back?" Letter of 9 April 1902, Isabella S. Gardner Museum Papers, AAA.

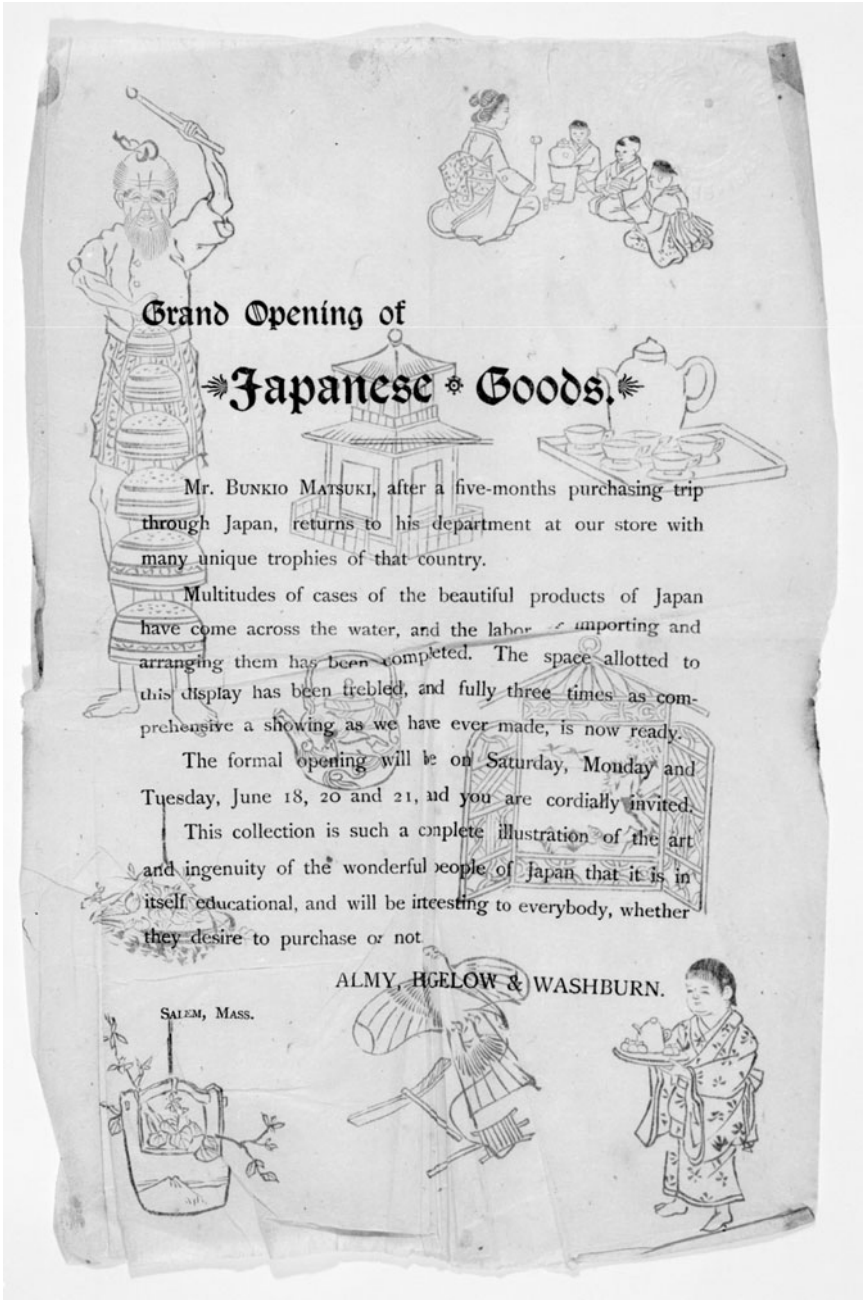


Figure 1. An 1891 advertisement for the Japanese Division of the Almy Department Store. (From the Almy, Bigelow & Washburn Collection, James Duncan Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.)

At the beginning of the 1900s, less than a handful of Japanese curio dealers had stores in the Northeast. This article focusses on two of the most influential and successful, the aforementioned Matsuki and Sadajiro Yamanaka (1866–1936). More specifically, it explores how both men used the auction catalogues that they distributed to potential buyers to define themselves as arbiters of taste and to dictate meanings for the Orient and its aesthetics.[3] These publications are invaluable and unique historical documents that scholars have not examined heretofore. While a number of monographs have been devoted to the role of European and white American art dealers in the creation of various individual and institutional collections specializing in Western art, the impact of Asians within American art circles has been neglected.[4] Matsuki and Yamanaka's stories, as told through their sales catalogues, illuminate the ways in which certain notions of Asianness and the reconceptualization of aesthetic categories were linked in complex ways. As such, these merchants fabricated and sold definitions of race and art to peddle Oriental goods; their Japaneseness became cultural capital and a marketing strategy. Ultimately, the Asian art dealers used their racial and social ties to Japan to establish Oriental art as a legitimate arena of connoisseurship for American collectors and to invent their own identities as unbiased cultural insiders.

INSTITUTING ASIAN ART

Both Matsuki and Yamanaka arrived in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century, Matsuki in 1888 and Yamanaka in 1894. Given that the Asian art circle was a small one, the two men undoubtedly were aware of

[3] For a discussion on the ways in which terminologies like "Orient" and "Oriental" have become problematized, see Edward Said's influential work, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978). See also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983). For specific discussions on how Orientalism has impacted American perceptions of Asians and Asian Americans see, for instance, Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and John K. W. Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776–1882* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

[4] See, for instance, Russell Lynes, *The Tastemakers* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954); Aline Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors: The Lives, Times and Tastes of Some Adventurous American Art Collectors* (New York: Random House, 1958); Gabriel Weisberg, *Art Nouveau Bing: Paris Style 1900* (Washington, DC and New York: Smithsonian Institution and Abrams, 1986); and John Rewald, *Cézanne and America: Dealers, Collectors, Artists, and Critics, 1891–1921* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). Even though the Salem, MA journal, *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, devoted a special issue to Bunkio Matsuki in April 1993, very little else has been written about him and other Asian and Asian American art dealers.

each other's activities, especially since they were potential competitors, who frequently worked with the same clients. A former Buddhist monk, Matsuki was hired by Almy, a Salem businessman, to acquire Oriental merchandise for the newly created Japanese Division of his department store (Figure 2). From 1889 on, Matsuki made numerous trips to Japan, importing a wide assortment of relics such as "porcelain and lacquer work, cups and saucers and tea pots of ware and metal, silver ware of curious workmanship and inlaying, tea trays and cabinets, chop sticks and rice bowls."[5] This eclectic and all-encompassing offering reflected his shrewd business instincts: he was attempting to appeal to a broad segment of customers from different walks of life. In 1893 Matsuki was able to open his own store in the bustling city of Boston, continuing to provide a variety of items, including paintings, artist's supplies, screens, and religious icons.[6] A few years later, in 1897, he established a Japanese Bazaar in his newly adopted hometown of Salem. Unfortunately, the Salem branch store would go bankrupt within the year and be shut down. In spite of this financial debacle, however, Matsuki remained a trusted adviser to interested collectors and continued to sell Japanese products through various auction houses in New York City and Philadelphia.

About the same time that Matsuki was setting up shop in the 1890s, Yamanaka also was launching his stores in the United States. Yamanaka and Company was headquartered in Japan but established branch offices in New York City and Boston in 1895 and 1899 respectively, in addition to having representatives and agents throughout East Asia (Figure 3). Besides Bostonians Gardner and Bigelow, its patrons included wealthy businessmen such as Charles Lang Freer (1853–1908) of Detroit and Henry O. Havemeyer (1847–1907) of New York City.[7] Like his countryman, Matsuki, Yamanaka aimed to satisfy the different needs of his clientele by making available an encyclopedic array of objects, including pewter bowls, bronze statues,

[5] From an 1891 advertisement that announced the "formal opening of our Japanese Bazaar" at the Almy Department Store, the Almy, Bigelow and Washburn Collection, PL.

[6] Examples of Bunkio Matsuki's catalogues include *Descriptive Catalogue of Important Japanese Fine Arts: Collection Including Japanese Pottery, Porcelain, Bronzes, Brocade, Ivory, Screens, etc. Selected by Bunkio Matsuki of Kobe, Japan and Boston* (1898); *Beautiful Silk Fabrics: Catalogue of an Extraordinary Collection of Antique and Modern Silks, Brocade and Other Fabrics* (1899); *An Exhibition and Sale by Auction of a Wonderful Collection of Silk Screens and Fabrics and Ancient Wood Carvings from Buddhist Temples* (1901); and *Catalogue of Ancient Chinese Tapestries, Porcelains and Pottery, Wood Carvings, Armor, Helmets, Blue and White Porcelains, Stone Garden Ornaments and Old Japanese Prints* (1907).

[7] Isabella Stewart Gardner was one of Yamanaka's most loyal patrons. See bills of sale from 7 May 1902, 2 Nov. 1903, 23 April 1904, and 14 May 1915. All of these documents are a part of the Isabella S. Gardner Museum Papers, AAA.

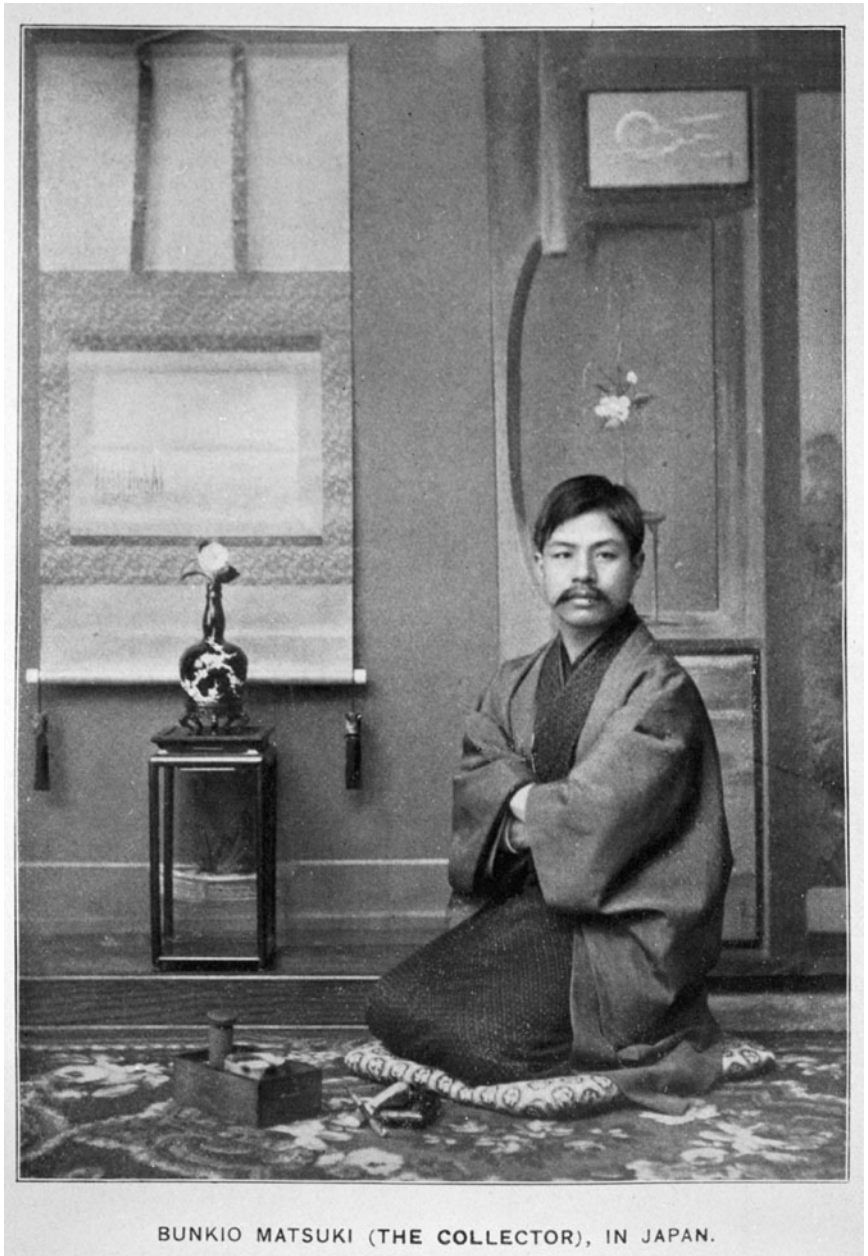


Figure 2. A famous and often-reproduced portrait of Bunkio Matsuki. (Photo: James Duncan Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.)

Figure 3. Yamanaka & Company staff in Beijing, China at the former palace of Prince Su in 1926. Sadajiro Yamanaka is seated second from left. (Yatsuhashi Harumichi Family Papers, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, Gift of James Arthur Marinaccio, 1994.)

ceramics, silk scrolls, embroideries, and religious paintings. In 1903 he even tried his hand at importing Pekingese dogs.[8] In the end, Yamanaka's international firm would endure beyond and reap greater financial success than Matsuki's Massachusetts-based galleries.

Matsuki and Yamanaka's arrival in the United States occurred at a time when Americans and Asians were being brought into closer contact by changing political and social milieus. Prior to the nineteenth century, Asia had not been an altogether unfamiliar place to Americans. Fueled by British importation of luxury items that catered to the wealthy colonists, interest in the region was palpable well before the establishment of direct trade relations with China. In the 1780s, the *Empress of China* began to shuttle back and forth between New York and Canton. Curiosity prompted many middle- and

[8] See Yamanaka and Company's *Catalogue of Antique and Modern Japanese and Chinese Paintings, Color Prints, and Screens* (1905); *Catalogue of Rare Japanese Prints: The Private Collections of Captain F. Brinkley, R.A. and Professor Josiah Conder* (1900); and *Illustrated Catalogue of the Chinese Art Treasures and Antiquities from the Private Collection of Mr. Edward R. Warren of Boston* (1918).

upper-middle-class white Americans to turn increasingly toward the seemingly wondrous and mysterious Orient in search of adventure and artifacts. They eagerly sought out and purchased porcelain tableware, tea, spices, and other merchandise which were embraced for everyday use. It was the fashion of the day for the affluent, especially those who were involved in the China trade, to display their connections with Asia prominently. Many of the well-to-do used silks, wallpapers, potteries, and other products imported from China to decorate their homes. Objects from exotic locales became status symbols, enabling the possessors to flaunt their prosperity, influence, and worldliness.[9]

The "opening" of Japan by Commodore Matthew C. Perry (1794–1858) in the mid-1850s would further help to stimulate the growing interchanges with East Asia and, in turn, complicate the processes of cultural articulation.[10] In 1860, less than a year after foreign embassies were set up in Edo, the capital of the Tokugawa regime, government officials would dispatch the first Japanese diplomatic mission to the United States.[11] On this "epic-making venture," the Japanese delegates met with President James Buchanan (1791–1868) and visited Congress.[12] From the West to the East Coast, they drew a great deal of interest wherever they went: after witnessing the Japanese emissaries march down Broadway in New York City, Walt Whitman would pen the poem "A Broadway Pageant" (1860) to commemorate their arrival. During this historical juncture, the Japanese and the Americans beheld each other with confusion, anxiety, and amusement. The visitors, for instance, were perplexed by the presence of women at official functions, something that would have been forbidden in Japan. And the Americans were equally mystified by the constant bowing of their kimono-wearing guests. Since "neither [could] speak nor understand a syllable of each other's language," both groups had to resort to often-incomprehensible

[9] See Hugh Honour, *Chinoiseries: The Vision of Cathay* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1961); Carl Crossman, *The China Trade: Export Paintings, Furniture, Silver & Other Objects* (Princeton: The Pyne Press, 1972); and Cynthia A. Brandimarte, "Japanese Novelty Stores," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 26, 1 (Spring 1991), 1–25.

[10] See, for instance, Peter Booth Wiley, *Yankees in the Land of the Gods: Commodore Perry and the Opening of Japan* (New York: Viking, 1990); and Rhoda Blumberg, *Commodore Perry in the Land of the Shogun* (New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, *c.*1985).

[11] See Masao Miyoshi, *As We Saw Them: The First Japanese Embassy to the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, *c.*1979); Taylor Parks, *The First Japanese Diplomatic Mission to the United States, 1860* (Washington, DC: Office of Public Services, Bureau of Public Affairs, 1960); and Alfred Tamarin, *Japan and the United States: Early Encounters, 1791–1860* (New York: Macmillan, 1970).

[12] Quoted from Fukuzawa Yukichi, *The Autobiography of Yukichi Fukuzawa*, revised translation by Eiichi Kiyooka (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 103.

"pantomim[ing]."[13] Regardless of the cultural disorientation, the 1860 Japanese mission would help to intensify the fascination for the "newly opened" nation and its neighbors.

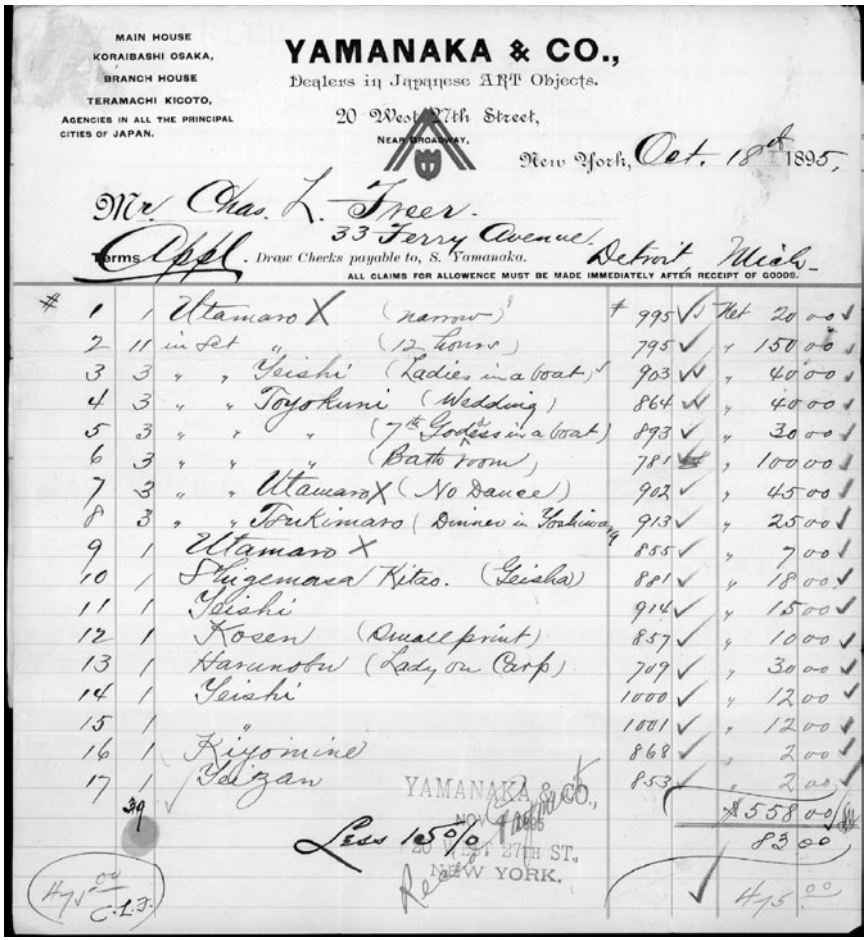
As the bourgeoisie collected more and more Asian pieces, debates concerning classification and definition arose. More specifically, scholars and connoisseurs wondered where these objects belonged within the Western cultural matrix. Nineteenth-century American museums frequently displayed the Asian relics in anthropological sections, using them to showcase foreign and outlandish ways of life. These discussions regarding the placement and meaning of artifacts took on political and ideological dimensions, shaping perceptions of progress and notions of racial enlightenment. When an Asian country's material culture was defined solely in ethnographic terms, the implication was that its creators lacked the comparable level of aesthetic imagination and ingenuity that their Western counterparts possessed, thereby reifying the chasm between the supposedly primitive East and the civilized West. Consequently, the evaluation of cultural productions went hand in hand with the assessment of peoples and societies.[14] Contemporary scholars and collectors tended to see the two categories, ethnographic and artistic, as being mutually exclusive. Asian art forms, which consisted of lacquerware, calligraphy, and ceramics, did not fit neatly into the existing rubrics of art as delineated by Westerners. Even Chinese and Japanese paintings and sculptures often were deemed to be too alien and disagreeable since "owing to the long-taught [Western] theory of art, there remain peculiarities in Japanese colour-prints not always acceptable to the occidental [*sic*], and not easily grasped."[15] For many, then, Oriental artistry was in complete dissonance with Western taste.

However, in the later decades of the nineteenth century, an intellectual shift would take place as Asian collectibles were reconstituted as "art" and were exhibited in some of the most prominent fine arts museums in the

[13] From the 30 June 1860 story on "Our Parting Guests" in the *New York Times*.

[14] See, for instance, James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988) on the ways in which aesthetic definitions can both shape and reflect racial discourses. See also Donald Preziosi, "The Question of Art History," *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (Winter 1992), 363–86; and Vernon Hyde Minor, *Art History's History* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1994). For discussions that delve specifically into the classification of Asian art, see Craig Clunas, *Art in China* (London: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Steven Conn, "Where is the East? Asian Objects in American Museums, from Nathan Dunn to Charles Freer," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 35, 2–3 (Summer–Autumn 2000), 157–73.

[15] Yamanaka and Company, *Exhibition of Japanese Prints: Illustrated Catalogue* (1926). This "exhibition" was in actuality the precursor to a sale that took place in London.


MAIN HOUSE
KORAIBASHI OSAKA,
BRANCH HOUSE
TERAMACHI KICOTO,
AGENCIES IN ALL THE PRINCIPAL
CITIES OF JAPAN.

YAMANAKA & CO.,
Dealers in Japanese ART Objects.
20 West 27th Street,
NEAR BROADWAY,
New York, Oct. 18th 1895.

Mr. Chas. L. Freer.
33 Ferry Avenue.
Detroit Mich.

Terms Cash. Draw Checks payable to, S. Yamanaka.
ALL CLAIMS FOR ALLOWENCE MUST BE MADE IMMEDIATELY AFTER RECEIPT OF GOODS.

#								
1	1	Utamaro X	(narrow)	995	✓	Net	20	00 ✓
2	11	in Set "	(12 Coins)	795	✓	"	150	00 ✓
3	3	" " Yeishi	(Ladies in a boat)	903	✓	"	40	00 ✓
4	3	" " Toyokuni	(Wedding)	864	✓	"	40	00 ✓
5	3	" " "	(7th Goddess in a boat)	893	✓	"	30	00 ✓
6	3	" " "	(Bath room)	781	✓	"	100	00 ✓
7	3	" " Utamaro X	(No Dance)	902	✓	"	45	00 ✓
8	3	" " Toukimaro	(Dinner in Yoshiwara)	913	✓	"	25	00 ✓
9	1	Utamaro X		855	✓	"	7	00 ✓
10	1	Shigemasa Kitao.	(Geisha)	881	✓	"	18	00 ✓
11	1	Yeishi		914	✓	"	15	00 ✓
12	1	Kosen	(Small print)	857	✓	"	10	00 ✓
13	1	Harunobu	(Lady on Carp)	709	✓	"	30	00 ✓
14	1	Yeishi		1000	✓	"	12	00 ✓
15	1	"		1001	✓	"	12	00 ✓
16	1	Kiyomine		868	✓	"	2	00 ✓
17	1	Hokuzan		853	✓	"	2	00 ✓
	39						$558	00 ✓
							83	00

Less 15%

YAMANAKA & CO.,
NO. 20 WEST 27TH ST.,
NEW YORK.

Rec'd Payment Nov 1st 1895

Figure 4. An 18 October 1895 receipt for Charles Lang Freer's purchase of Japanese prints from Yamanaka & Company. (Charles Lang Freer Papers, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.) This particular transaction would mark the beginning of Freer's long-standing relationship with the renowned firm

United States. In 1890, the venerable Boston Museum of Fine Arts established a Japanese Department of Art, the first of its kind in the nation. And by 1923, the Freer Gallery of Art, one of the earliest museums to be devoted to the collecting and displaying of Asian relics, would open its doors to the public in Washington, DC (Figure 4). At the same time, artists like John La Farge and James McNeill Whistler incorporated Asian styles and themes in their works, revitalizing the modern art scene within the United States and

redefining modernism by infusing it with elements of exoticism.[16] In the process, their fascination for the Orient validated the aesthetic contributions of the Chinese and the Japanese. Increasingly, Asian objects were perceived as having artistic merit even though they existed outside of accepted Western conventions of art; they were no longer of mere anthropological interest. In particular, the ennoblement of Japanese material culture occurred simultaneously with the elevation of Japan as an enlightened realm that was able to integrate ancient traditions in the course of modernization. To many collectors, therefore, the pieces they acquired were not only rare and beautiful but, moreover, were imbued with the mores of a romantic and idealized Golden Age without the rule of machines. Indeed, japonisme and chinoiserie became all the rage amongst many middle- and upper-middle-class white American connoisseurs, who were keen on using Oriental ideals and customs to make sense of their modern existence.

As the curiosity for the exotic continued to grow, Matsuki and his colleague, Yamanaka, would come to play a central role in helping to mediate the demand for Asian goods. Motivated by their desire for financial gain, these Japanese entrepreneurs endeavored to establish Oriental cultural creations as a bona fide branch of high art in the late nineteenth century since the prices of the artifacts that they proffered depended on the aesthetic and cultural meanings that they were able to assign to them. Although they sold a wide variety of items that included pots and lanterns, by the early twentieth century both Matsuki and Yamanaka portrayed themselves as purveyors of fine art. A survey of their catalogues shows that they focussed on marketing the merchandise that could be defined as having aesthetic importance. With the transition from affordable, everyday paraphernalia to works of art, they began to cater increasingly to the more affluent buyers. Because Asian art was a relatively new concept, Matsuki and Yamanaka knew that they had to convince potential connoisseurs of the value of such art forms. To generate a niche for Asian objects within the American market, one of the strategies Asian curio dealers utilized was to emphasize the cultural and spiritual significance of the goods they were promoting.

Seeking to conform to Western expectations of an Orient that never was, the Asian merchants used their catalogues to construct idealized Japanese and Chinese pasts filled with brave warriors and beautiful maidens. In so

[16] See, for instance, Henry Adams, "John La Farge's Discovery of Japanese Art: A New Perspective on the Origins of *Japonisme*," *Art Bulletin*, 67, 3 (Sept. 1985), 449–85; Laurance P. Roberts, "The Orient and Western Art," in Arthur E. Christy, ed., *The Asian Legacy and American Life* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1978), 70–83; and Linda Merrill, *The Peacock Room: A Cultural Biography* (Washington, DC: The Freer Gallery of Art, 1998).

doing, they labored to cement ideas of where Asian materials belonged within broader cultural frameworks in the United States. For instance, in his attempt to sell a "remarkable collection" of "magnificent Ming brocade temple hanging from the Jêho winter palace near Peking," Yamanaka highlighted "the romantic story of [the palace's] capture by Chang tso-lin, its loss and subsequent recovery."[17] Ancient artifacts associated with epic battles and the defeat of empires were especially tantalizing to potential buyers in Europe and the United States. For that very reason, Japanese swords became highly prized collectibles because they were the "privilege and distinctive mark" of the ousted Samurai caste.[18] In one catalogue, Matsuki explained the appeal of such items:

> Blades had been treasured for centuries, handed from father to son, looked upon as the soul of the owner for the sake of which he would refrain from any deed unbecoming a gentleman; some possessed histories going far back into the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when the country was at war within itself, around others were entwined romances, and above all, the sword was the faithful friend with which the Samurai might honourably end his life, either in the field or on the mats.[19]

The relics thus had importance that went beyond the aesthetic arena. They also were cherished for the historical allusions and purported legends attached to them, enabling collectors to romanticize the demise of an earlier era. Certain that middle-class consumers would find idyllic hinterlands appealing in the midst of rapid industrialization, the merchants likewise promulgated the idea that the enjoyment of Japanese landscapes could be used as a way to escape modern decadence.[20] Indeed, woodblock prints depicting the rural Asian countryside were some of the most sought-after items.[21] At a time when many Americans were growing increasingly disenchanted with modernization, Matsuki and Yamanaka seized the opportunity to build a market for goods from Old Japan, an era devoid of the modern contaminants that their customers detested. Recognizing their clients' disdain for the mechanized world enveloping them, these entrepreneurs promoted the accumulation of ancient artifacts as a way to find cultural and spiritual reprieve. For American connoisseurs, then, they were not simply buying artworks but,

[17] Yamanaka and Company, *Art of the Far East Catalogue* (1929).
[18] Bunkio Matsuki, *Arms and Armor of Old Japan* (1905).
[19] Ibid.
[20] For a discussion on how white Americans reacted to the encroachment of industrialization and urbanization, see T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
[21] See, for instance, Yamanaka and Company, *Catalogue of Japanese Prints* (1926). This catalogue was not only filled with prints that depicted rural landscapes but also included many images of Japanese women in various stages of repose.

more importantly, they were also imbibing the histories and cultures whence these collectibles came.

In order to explain a new aesthetic order to potential buyers in the United States, Matsuki and Yamanaka juxtaposed Asian art with European art, a tradition with which most Americans had at least some familiarity. Matsuki, therefore, equated the commodities he was promoting with well-known and established names in Western art, asking his patrons to consider "that these works of [Asian] art are as superb among productions of the Far East as so many Titians or Rembrandts" in the West.[22] According to the dealer, the merchandise he was peddling were not mere curios but preeminent pieces of art. Yamanaka followed suit, comparing the beauty of woodblock prints to the tour de force of modern European art.[23] In the *Japanese Swords* catalogue (1910), he went a step further and boldly claimed that Oriental cultural creations were superior to their European counterparts. When evaluated against European blades, Japanese ones had withstood much more rigorous tests, "sometimes officially by cutting up corpses … no sword in Europe ever came through such an ordeal … the Japanese blade has been pronounced perfect by all experts; that perfection is the result of thorough work."[24] This particular catalogue was significant not only because it heralded the supremacy of Asian materials over European ones. In marketing swords as objects of art, Yamanaka was reclassifying the aesthetic apparatus for Western connoisseurs.

The Japanese merchants similarly represented the relics for being unbelievably "rare" and exceptional, the hallmarks of fine art.[25] In the process, Matsuki and Yamanaka reappropriated the same rhetoric and strategies that their colleagues used to promote European art.[26] Not surprisingly, then, the pages of their catalogues were filled with adjectives such as "excellent,"

[22] Bunkio Matsuki, *Illustrated Catalogue of Ancient Chinese and Japanese Paintings, Screens, Prints, Chinese Porcelains, Wood Carvings and Gold Lacquers from the Collection of the Japanese Connoisseur Bunkio Matsuki of Boston, Mass. Collected in Japan during the Last Fifteen Years* (1910).

[23] Yamanaka and Company, *Exhibition of Japanese Prints: Illustrated Catalogue* (1926).

[24] Yamanaka and Company, *Japanese Swords* (1913).

[25] See Bunkio Matsuki, *Catalogue of Rare Objects in Wood, Pewter and Brass* (1903); and Yamanaka and Company, *Catalogue of Ukiyoye Paintings, Prints, Rare Screens, Illustrated Books, and Kakemonos Belonging to the Japanese Connoisseur Bunshichi Kobayashi* (1902). The desire to collect rare and unique objects has been discussed by Russell Belk, *Collecting in a Consumer Society* (London: Routledge, 1995); Susan Pearce, *Museums, Objects, and Collections* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992); and John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds., *The Cultures of Collecting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[26] See, for instance, Robert Jensen, *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

"exceedingly fine," "celebrated," "most beautiful," "extraordinary," "wonderful," and "unique."[27] According to the shrewd businessmen, certain objects were, in essence, so amazing that they were "important masterpieces" of museum quality that could illustrate the whole of Japanese and Chinese art histories.[28] Numerous artifacts had been described as national treasures that were supposedly being seen in the West for the very first time. Putting together a sale that included a wide variety of goods, Matsuki maintained that "many of them are of great value to me personally because of their merit from a purely Japanese standpoint of art, and have never before been shown to the public at large."[29] Echoing the same sentiment, at one of his auctions, Yamanaka highlighted the fact that it was not "without significance that such a treasure [of tapestries] was permitted to leave China, an event made possible by the fears entertained for its safety during the civil disturbances."[30] Political transformations in China and Japan worked to the dealers' advantage, enabling them to make available items that were previously protected either by powerful governments or by wealthy families.[31] However, in spite of their contention that they only sold merchandise of unparalleled quality, in reality, Matsuki and Yamanaka carried an extensive assortment of materials that included one-of-a kind antiquities as well as mass-produced knickknacks in their attempts to appeal to customers of different economic means and social standings.

[27] See Yamanaka and Company, *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Ancient Japanese Brocades, Embroideries, and Fabrics* (1936) and *idem*, *Catalogue of Ukiyoye Paintings* (1902). See also Bunkio Matsuki's publications: *Catalogue of Japanese Artist's Materials* (1899); *Catalogue of Japanese Color Prints* (1920); *Rare and Interesting Objects Illustrating the Arts and Crafts of Ancient China and Japan Collected by Bunkio Matsuki* (1910); *Remarkable Wood Carvings and Silk Embroidery at Copley Hall* (1902); and *Catalogue of Antique Chinese Porcelains and Pottery* (1908).

[28] Bunkio Matsuki, *Illustrated Catalogue of Ancient Chinese and Japanese Paintings, Screens, Prints, Chinese Porcelains, Wood Carvings and Gold Lacquers from the Collection of the Japanese Connoisseur Bunkio Matsuki of Boston, Mass. Collected in Japan during the Last Fifteen Years* (1910).

[29] Bunkio Matsuki, *Descriptive Catalogue of an Important Collection of Japanese and Chinese Pottery, Porcelain, Bronzes, Brocades, Prints, Embroideries, Kakemono, Screens, Ivories and Gold Lacquers Selected by Mr. Bunkio Matsuki of Kobe, Japan and Boston* (1898). Discussing some "ancient Chinese and Japanese Pewters" in one particular collection, Matsuki claimed that they were "probably the first examples of this interesting metal ever offered for sale in this country" – referring to the United States. From Bunkio Matsuki, *Catalogue of Rare Objects in Wood, Pewter and Brass Illustrating the Art of Old Japan* (1903).

[30] Yamanaka and Company, *Art of the Far East* (1929).

[31] As a result of the Meiji Restoration of 1868, high-quality Japanese objects like antique swords had become available. See, for instance, Bunkio Matsuki, *Arms and Armor of Old Japan* (1905).

MARKETING RACE AND CULTURE

As they strove to define the meaning and place of Asian objects within the United States, Matsuki and Yamanaka also tried to establish their own positionalities within American collecting circles. During this period, museum officials, art dealers, and university scholars collaborated in an interwoven system to create and disseminate knowledge about Asia, thereby helping to determine the importance and the market price of artifacts. Merchants often played the same pedagogical role as art historians: besides making sure that relics were available for purchase, they likewise educated neophyte connoisseurs who relied on them for guidance and tutelage. As Japanese-born dealers, both Matsuki and Yamanaka realized that commercial success would follow with the legitimization of their racial identity and social prominence – they would distinguish themselves from the European and white American merchants by building a cultural cachet around their birthright. Therefore, the sales catalogues they put together were not just advertisements for the materials they were selling but, more importantly, helped them to invent and propagate a certain mystique and persona that hinged on their connections to Japan, giving them the appearance of having insider status.

One of the first tasks that the Japanese dealers took on was to discredit their white American and European competitors' authority by suggesting that the unsuspecting and naive collector had been duped by disreputable businessmen and hence had been "imposed upon by manufacturers of spurious goods."[32] At a time when the popularity of Asian art was on the rise and the market was becoming increasingly lucrative, the number of valuable objects was diminishing.[33] As a result, Matsuki and Yamanaka warned that greedy and irresponsible charlatans were not above deceiving interested but

[32] From the story on "Real Japanese Goods," *Salem Evening News*, 10 July 1890. The newspaper was covering the opening of Matsuki's Japanese Division at the Almy Department Store.

[33] Yamanaka explained that the dearth of worthy *Ukiyo-e* paintings was the result of the fact that "the demand for immaculate prints has far outrun the possibilities of supply, for the resources of Japan have for long been almost exhausted to meet the demands of European and American collectors, and the disastrous Earthquake and subsequent fires at Tokyo in 1923, destroyed alike the small remaining stocks of the dealers, the few important collections which had been made in that country, and the last opportunity for any chance discovery of hidden treasures, while in Europe and America, the constant locking up of prints from important collections in National and other Museums, reduced the opportunities for securing copies which might be available in public sales, while making the prices almost prohibitive." From Yamanaka and Company, *Exhibition of Japanese Prints: Illustrated Catalogue* (1926).

uninformed aficionados. The implication was, of course, that only they could be reliable purveyors of such relics. Because high-quality Asian artifacts were in such demand, the Japanese merchants promulgated the notion that it was "almost impossible to bring back fine prints from the East, for the native collectors are too eager to secure them."[34] Despite purported difficulties, they assured their clients that the wares they procured were "widely admired, not only by the Japanese, but by European and American collectors."[35] This type of advertisement served two purposes: on the one hand, it indicated that Matsuki and Yamanaka were the ones to be trusted to locate superior collectibles; on the other, and more importantly, the art dealers were able to inflate the value of the artworks by advertising them as being desired by the most discriminating buyers throughout the world. In labeling the items as such, they had become even more appealing to American connoisseurs.

In a similar vein, the businessmen vowed that the artifacts they sold were by no means the substandard and hastily made export pieces that East Asians created expressly for the consumption of the unknowing and unsuspecting Westerner.[36] Such materials catered to Western taste, incorporating popular motifs and well-known themes – they were, consequently, believed to be inauthentic frauds that self-respecting Asian men and women would never deign to purchase or use.[37] To substantiate the superiority of its offerings, then, one particular advertisement for Matsuki's Japanese Division at the Almy Department Store promised that the products it peddled were "not at all like what are generally sold for Japanese goods – but the true work of the best artists in Japan – such articles as will be found in daily use in the Japanese homes themselves."[38] In reality, this was a difficult guarantee to make, especially since export art had flooded Asian and Western markets, exacerbating the challenge of differentiating it from the traditional craftwork produced specifically for the Japanese themselves.

[34] Bunkio Matsuki, *Catalogue of Japanese Color Prints* (1920).

[35] Yamanaka and Company, *Catalogue of Ukiyoye Paintings* (1902).

[36] In the *Collection of Chinese and Other Far Eastern Art* catalogue (1943), the purveyors of Yamanaka and Company derided the shoddy workmanship of "Chinese Export Ware": "English and American sea captains trading with Canton in the eighteenth century placed orders for Chinese wares, but they must be ready at a certain date, when the captain made a return voyage. This was contrary to Chinese instinct and habit and the ware so turned out was too inferior in quality for use in China. In fact, it was made and decorated on a mass production basis solely for foreign markets."

[37] In the article on "Real Japanese Goods," a reporter for the *Salem Evening News* wrote that "Mr. Matsuki … undertakes to show the true Japanese work" instead of substandard and undesirable export items. From the newspaper's 10 July 1890 edition.

[38] 1891 Almy Department Store advertisement, the Almy, Bigelow and Washburn Collection, PL.

Moreover, while Matsuki and Yamanaka had boasted that everything in their stores was so spectacular that its "equal … will not be found in all the country besides," the quality of their merchandise was actually very mixed, consisting of both high-end artifacts and inferior bric-a-brac.[39] Describing one of his buying trips to Japan to zoologist Morse, Matsuki touted the fact that he had found "a lot of Japanese looking goods … though there are lots of Yokohama muki."[40] "Yokohama muki" was precisely the sort of mediocre and shoddily made export ware that Matsuki had promised not to carry in his shops; it was unlikely that he publicized its existence or distinguished it from the objects of art he was selling. In the end, his desire for profit triumphed as he cultivated the idea that his entire inventory consisted of nothing but the finest from Asia. Matsuki and his colleague, Yamanaka, never failed to remind their customers that they rarely disappointed "lovers and admirers of Oriental art" as their collections were "never 'stock riddances' but invariably offerings which the purveyors are able to put forward with the assured belief that they will afford artistic pleasure to spectators, collectors, and thoughtful decorators and furnishers of the home alike."[41] Once again, they were appealing to a diverse clientele, both novices and experts, with a wide-ranging array of items in order to maximize their financial interests. However, by the 1920s, as Americans became more knowledgeable about Asian aesthetics, these Japanese curio dealers could no longer simply palm off any substandard knickknacks to their patrons. Matsuki, for instance, admitted publicly that he had a few "primitives" amongst "superior examples" when he was presenting some Japanese color prints to well-informed buyers.[42]

In addition, the art dealers gave personal assurances that the objects they put forth were not forgeries. This was no small feat since

> collectors and connoisseurs are well aware that it is becoming increasingly difficult to secure really fine examples of the arts of old Japan, and the task is further complicated from the fact that so much is copied by [counterfeiters] of the present

[39] From an 1891 advertisement for the Japanese Division of the Almy Department Store, the Almy, Bigelow and Washburn Collection, PL.

[40] From an undated Bunkio Matsuki letter to Edward Sylvester Morse, Edward S. Morse Papers, PL.

[41] Yamanaka and Company, *Art Treasures from the Imperial Palace in Pekin* [*sic*] (1917).

[42] Bunkio Matsuki, *Catalogue of Japanese Color Prints* (1920). The art dealer wrote that "knowledge of Japanese prints has enormously increased during the past five years; new facts have been brought to light, fallacies exposed and traditions interpreted. Accurate work has been accomplished in dating and classifying, both by native Japanese and western [*sic*] collectors."

day. It has ever been Mr. Matsuki's aim to aid the public in obtaining authentic and genuine articles.[43]

As the popularity of East Asian relics grew, unscrupulous dealers were not above selling fakes. Matsuki took authentication to another level. In his efforts to distinguish his goods from second-rate imports and counterfeits, Matsuki trademarked a rabbit symbol that was stamped on all of his products for easy identification. This was a common technique used by porcelain makers in China and Japan to designate the pottery's place of origin and, therefore, to determine its value. In following suit, Matsuki's rabbit marking not only connected him with a specific brand, but also served as a point of verification for his patrons, who were concerned about getting "real" Japanese articles. It furthermore demonstrated that his merchandise was so exceptional that he had to guard against "worthless imitations."[44] While this was an effective sales tactic, the quality and selection of Matsuki's collection was, in all likelihood, not all that different from those of his competitors. Using a similar approach, Yamanaka boasted that the furniture made by his Japanese factory had won the "Grand Prize and Gold Medal Award at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, 1904," and was of "unrivalled workmanship."[45] Even though the furnishings were everyday items produced for bourgeois consumption, this mark of distinction advanced them to a new aesthetic plateau – they were now works of art. More importantly, perhaps, Yamanaka's customers were assured that they were getting bona fide Japanese goods manufactured by the celebrated art dealer's very own workshop. As their fame grew, Matsuki and Yamanaka's mere names seemed to function as guarantors for "discriminating collectors" who relied on them to obtain the most superb finds.[46]

Matsuki and Yamanaka's self-branding, as it were, and the process of transforming themselves into reliable collectors-cum-dealers, who presented "the true Japanese work," rested upon their employment of certain marketing techniques and self-essentializing strategies.[47] More so than their museum and university counterparts, Asian merchants had to validate their

[43] Bunkio Matsuki, *Catalogue of Rare Objects in Wood, Pewter and Brass Illustrating the Art of Old Japan* (1903).

[44] Bunkio Matsuki, *Catalogue of Japanese Artist's Materials* (1899). Matsuki warned potential buyers that "the superiority of my goods calls forth many worthless imitations, but you are cautioned to accept none without the 'rabbit' trade mark."

[45] Yamanaka and Company, *Catalogue of Room Decorations and Artistic Furniture* (1905).

[46] Matsuki, ever dramatically, recounted how an "old Samurai family in Tokio [*sic*]" was willing to relinquish its collection of rare prints. From the *Catalogue of Japanese Color Prints* (1920).

[47] "Real Japanese Goods," *Salem Evening News*, 10 July 1890.

status as credible and trustworthy cultural insiders since they had no formal, academic qualifications. In this regard, their deep-seated racial and cultural ties to Japan served as a vital guarantee of their authenticity. Matsuki and Yamanaka arrived in the United States at a time when popular discourses about the Orient were in flux. In the late 1880s, Matsuki was surprised to find that Bostonians could not distinguish between different races of Asians. He was astonished and dismayed that the denizens of Boston, a city which he deemed to be the "cradle of American civilization," had such a meager understanding of Asia. For instance, he was frequently mistaken for a Chinese, in spite of the fact that he dressed in traditional Japanese kimonos.[48]

Before long, Matsuki discovered that it was disadvantageous to be identified with the Chinese since most Americans thought of China as being culturally stagnant and politically unstable. The nation that once had been considered the inspiration of other Asian cultures was perceived to be all but conquered by its inability to keep up with modernity. It was supposedly a "dead civilization" and "fallen country" inhabited by "savages."[49] In contrast, with the restoration of imperial rule in Japan in 1868, Meiji officials ended centuries of isolationist and xenophobic policies under the Tokugawa Shogunate. The new government sought to modernize and westernize Japan by hiring white American and European academics to teach science and English literature courses at Japanese colleges and universities. Official teams of delegates also were sent out to the West to help the country transition into the industrial age.[50] In the process, Japan was reenvisioned as a civilized place on a par with its Western counterparts.

In order to become successful curio dealers, then, Matsuki, Yamanaka, and their Japanese compatriots had to distance themselves from the Chinese and Chineseness and, instead, to publicize their Japanese heritage. They knew all too well that nineteenth- and twentieth-century Americans looked to certain signifiers in order to identify the exotic Other. One of the strategies

[48] Quoted from "The Bunkio Matsuki Memoir," translated by Hina Hirayama, *Essex Institute Historical Collection*, 129, 2 (April 1993), 182. The memoir was originally published in five installments in the Japanese journal *Konjaku*.

[49] The American media derided the so-called "downfall" of the Chinese. See, for instance, Mark B. Dunnell, "Our Rights in China," *Atlantic Monthly*, 86 (Oct, 1900), 271–77; and James B. Angell, "The Crisis in China," *Atlantic Monthly*, 86 (Oct. 1900), 433–37. See also Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

[50] See, for instance, Peter Duus, *The Japanese Discovery of America: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997); Robert Rosenstone, *Mirror in the Shrine: American Encounters with Meiji Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); and George Sansom, *The Western World and Japan: A Study in the Interaction of European and Asiatic Cultures* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951).

used by the two merchants to gain their clients' trust was to emphasize their incontrovertible ties to "delightful" and "enchanting" Japan.[51] Since the Japanese were viewed as the most advanced East Asian culture at that time, their legitimacy and authority as cultural experts depended upon their indisputable connections with their native country.

To reinforce his reputation as a so-called "real Japanese," Matsuki built a home that was reminiscent of the edifices found in his motherland. The local newspaper, the *Salem Evening News*, followed its construction with great enthusiasm and curiosity.[52] Fusing New England and Japanese architectural designs, the house had, among other things, a Western-style chimney stack and stained-glass windows. Matsuki also utilized the Western custom of using a cabinet to display chinaware in the dining room. Nonetheless, the paper and its readers proclaimed it to be an accurate replica of the dwellings found in the dealer's place of birth. In spite of the cultural inaccuracies, his domicile became a constant visual reminder of Matsuki's irrefutable bond with Japan. In 1917, Yamanaka likewise would use his newly built facility on Fifth Avenue in New York City to publicize his association with his homeland. Made with materials partly culled from Arizona and showcasing the latest lighting technologies, the building was lauded as a "modern business structure" that resembled a "Japanese temple."[53] Contemporary photographs of the gallery revealed that although it contained certain Asian elements, such as wood carvings in classic Japanese motifs, it was more of a hybrid construction that satisfied prevailing American ideals of an Oriental setting. Even the *New York Sun*, which reported on the grand opening with much interest, seemed to notice the ways in which "clever Japanese architects" had "harmonized" Western techniques and Eastern themes.[54]

While the architectural undertakings brought Matsuki and Yamanaka moments of attention in the public eye, their auction catalogues would continue to serve as a more effective and far-reaching tool for verifying their ethnic–racial identities and, in turn, for adding to the value of their goods.

[51] On the growing fascination with industrializing Japan, see Edward Sylvester Morse, *Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings* (New York: Dover Publications, 1866); and Percival Lowell, *The Soul of the Far East* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1888). In addition, Lafcadio Hearn wrote a series of articles for the *Atlantic Monthly* in the 1890s. See also Carl Dawson, *Lafcadio Hearn and the Vision of Japan* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); and David Strauss, "The 'Far East' in the American Mind, 1883–1894: Percival Lowell's Decisive Impact," *Journal of American–East Asian Relations*, 2, 3 (Fall 1993), 217–241.

[52] See the *Salem Evening News*, 6 Sept. 1893, 29 Sept. 1893, and 15 June 1894.

[53] From the *New York Sun*'s 11 Nov. 1917 story. The newspaper went on to describe the building's interior in great detail, congratulating Yamanaka on bringing Japan to New York.

[54] *New York Sun*, 11 Nov. 1917.

Matsuki was especially adroit at marketing himself as an authoritative Japanese insider. For one thing, he used his ostensibly impeccable genealogical credentials to legitimize his status as someone with innate and genuine insights into the arts and cultures of his native land. His catalogues frequently listed his residence as either Kobe or Tokyo, highlighting his ties to Japan.[55] Coming from a family where both of his parents had connections with the artisanal world, Matsuki generated certain myths about his patrimonial lineage. Indeed, his sales catalogues often drew attention to his family history:

> Mr. Matsuki, as a descendant of a famous architect and temple builder, has had an opportunity as a collector which could occur to no other man. His maternal grandfather, Bansia Tatekawa to whom was entrusted the restoration of several Shinto and Buddhist shrines, became in this way the owner of carved and painted decorations removed from the crumbling structures. These formed the basis of his collections, which is the result of the combined efforts of Mr. Matsuki, an able Japanese connoisseur, and other Japanese.[56]

Matsuki's allegedly incomparable ancestry seemed to function as further evidence for validating his claims of special insights. He represented himself as an authentic Japanese dealer from a prestigious household steeped in ancient traditions. While this story was fabricated to entice the buying public, in truth, he interlaced factual details with fictional ones. For example, his father was not a connoisseur of fine arts as he maintained, but rather a maker and a vendor of household items. Nevertheless, Matsuki continued to use his self-fashioned personal history to promote his merchandise.

The catalogues were likewise used to flaunt family and social contacts, yet another marketing strategy used to certify the Asianness and hence the superiority of the cultural productions the merchants were selling. On one particular occasion, Matsuki stated that he was able to acquire some rare examples of Japanese armor, which were "from famous *daimyo* families with whom [he] was fortunately brought into contact during his visit to Japan last year."[57] His many purchases from wealthy and patriotic Japanese families, who were relinquishing their heirlooms in order to support Japan's military efforts against Russia during the early days of the twentieth century, would lend the items even more importance because of the intriguing stories behind them, not to mention the fact that they appeared to have been ancient family

[55] Matsuki never tired of calling attention to the fact that Japan was his "native country." See, for instance, the introduction to the *Descriptive Catalogue of Important Japanese Fine Arts* (1898). His catalogues also often listed him as "Bunkio Matsuki of Kobe, Japan." Kobe was where the Matsuki Export Company was located.

[56] Bunkio Matsuki, *Catalogue of Rare Objects in Wood, Pewter and Brass Illustrating the Art of Old Japan* (1903).

[57] Bunkio Matsuki, *Arms and Armor of Old Japan* (1905).

treasures. Ever the cunning businessman, Matsuki added an aura of mystery and intrigue by refusing to divulge the origins of his merchandise, insisting that absolute secrecy was necessary because other dealers could "take advantage" of the networks that he had cultivated and steal valuables from him.[58] Once again, this pledge enabled Matsuki to confirm that the goods he proffered were unquestionably Japanese and not the export art shunned by experienced connoisseurs. In another 1901 publication, Matsuki boasted that much of the collection in his possession had come from the Lord of Riukiu.[59] In this instance, he was selling the nobleman's Satsuma ware. This was one of the most popular and recognizable Japanese ceramic styles for Western collectors – not surprisingly, then, they also were widely produced for sale overseas. This was precisely the type of object that Matsuki and Yamanaka vowed they would not carry in their shops. It would have been difficult to discern the domestic pieces from those manufactured specifically for the West. Furthermore, it was doubtful that art dealers of the era made any concerted attempts to point out such distinctions. Nonetheless, publicizing their relationships with renowned families in Asia worked to guarantee the authenticity of the relics (Figure 5).

In another advertising gimmick, Matsuki and Yamanaka repeatedly emphasized their direct access to Japan and China. They characterized themselves as well-connected collectors, who were able to locate some of the most prized relics through sheer determination on their many trips "back home."[60] The curio dealers routinely recorded detailed accounts of their buying expeditions in their sales catalogues as a tactic to substantiate their Asian ties. One particular advertisement, for example, announced that Matsuki "spent five months of last winter in Japan selecting these articles."[61] The merchants asserted that because of the amount of energy and effort expended traveling through Asia to scour for treasures, collections sometimes took years to amass.[62] This proclamation would make the objects seem

[58] Bunkio Matsuki, *Catalogue of Rare Objects in Wood, Pewter and Brass Illustrating the Art of Old Japan* (1903).

[59] Bunkio Matsuki, *Exhibition and Sale by Auction of a Wonderful Collection of Silk Screens and Fabrics and Ancient Wood Carvings from Buddhist Temples* (1901).

[60] See Bunkio Matsuki's *Catalogue of Rare Objects in Brass, Leather and Wood* (1903) and *Catalogue of Rare Objects in Wood, Pewter and Brass Illustrating the Art of Old Japan* (1903). The titles are telling in and of themselves.

[61] From an 1891 Almy Department Store advertisement, the Almy, Bigelow and Washburn Collection, PL. In the *Catalogue of Antique Chinese Porcelains and Pottery* (1908), the cover page proclaimed that the items at the auction were gathered by Matsuki on a "recent visit to his country." See also the dealer's *Catalogue of Arms and Armor of Old Japan* (1906).

[62] "The collection here exhibited has been made by me personally and by my special agents for the last ten years." From Bunkio Matsuki, *Descriptive Catalogue of an Important Collection of*

even more unique and remarkable. These collecting trips functioned as an advertising tool for the dealers – while visits to Asia served the practical purpose of acquiring merchandise, in some cases they could be deemed publicity stunts. Likewise, Yamanaka promised that he had a "corps of searchers at work in the Orient throughout the year, aside from the annual visits made to China by New York representatives and members of the home house in Japan" to make certain that he could always provide his clientele with the most spectacular relics.[63] As such, he claimed that he was able to gain control of the Manchu royal family's home furnishings, which included rugs, religious statuettes, gold ornaments, and other personal items. In the *Ancient Chinese Art* catalogue (1914), as a testament to his fame and renown, Yamanaka detailed how he and his staff had been invited by Prince Gong to purchase antiquities from the imperial palace in Beijing in 1912.[64] In actuality, this invitation did not necessarily mean that Yamanaka had special access to the rarified world of Chinese aristocrats. Amidst great political instabilities and economic downturns, many wealthy Americans, like millionaire J. P. Morgan (1837–1913), also were asked to view various imperial collections with the hope of enriching the royal coffers.[65] Nevertheless, as a way of legitimizing their credibility as cultural insiders, Matsuki and Yamanaka attempted to foster the notion that they occupied unique positions within the elite art and social circles in Japan and China.[66]

As a part of their efforts to characterize themselves as passionate patrons of art with pure intentions, Matsuki and Yamanaka sought to distance themselves from the commercial aspects of their vocation. In order to advance their business ventures, they had to convince suspicious collectors that they were not motivated by economic incentives. In the process, the catalogues became useful tools for depicting the art dealers as erudite and well-meaning educators; Matsuki and Yamanaka appeared to be selfless aficionados of art, who merely wanted to share high-quality artifacts with other

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Japanese and Chinese Pottery, Porcelain, Bronzes, Brocades, Prints, Embroideries, Kakemono, Screens, Ivories and Gold Lacquers Selected by Mr. Bunkio Matsuki of Kobe, Japan and Boston (1898).

[63] Yamanaka and Company, *Art Treasures from the Imperial Palace in Pekin* [*sic*] (1917).

[64] Yamanaka and Company, *Ancient Chinese Art: A Remarkable Collection* (1914).

[65] See, for instance, the article entitled "Embarrassment of Riches," from the 18 March 1996 issue of the *New Yorker*. In March of 1913 the imperial family approached J. P. Morgan's partners with the intention of selling "for own account and in entirety palace collection including pearls, bronzes, porcelains, etc."

[66] In the *Catalogue of Japanese Artist's Materials* (1899), Matsuki boasted that his "Japanese brushes for water color painting are the best made in Japan … Being the sole agent for this country, I handle exclusively the brushes, papers, silks, etc. made for the Fine Art Schools of Tokio [*sic*] and Kioto [*sic*]."

Figure 5. *Horokaku Mandara: The Buddha and Attendant Divinities*, Japanese, Heian period, twelfth century, hanging scroll, color and gold on silk panel. 101143 1/8a. (Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, Purchase, F1929.2.) Purchased in 1929 by Charles Lang Freer from Yamanaka & Company, the scroll was originally owned by Baron Kawasaki Yoshitaro (1869–1920)

like-minded individuals. At one particular auction in 1902, potential buyers were reminded that "Mr. Matsuki has also included in the sale all his personal collection of screens by famous masters."[67] In fact, Matsuki and Yamanaka were supposedly so dedicated to their clients that they were willing to give up their own family heirlooms and private possessions.[68] For all of their diligence and industriousness, they maintained that they felt the most satisfaction and contentment when they were recognized for amassing relics that even knowledgeable, university-trained Japanophiles believed "should be carefully studied" for their aesthetic and cultural significance.[69]

Matsuki and Yamanaka's catalogues, moreover, stressed that it was only through their tireless efforts that certain collections remained intact and were preserved for future generations to enjoy and study.[70] In one instance, Yamanaka claimed that in putting together "this exhibition of works by the masters of the schools of *Ukiyoye*, *Kano*, and *Shijo*, I have taken particular pains in choosing those having finer quality, beauty of colors, desirable subjects, and designs of greater rarity."[71] It was almost as though he was a museum curator, instead of a merchant intent on making money. Indeed, "to show them [the objects] in [the shops and at auction houses] is not altogether a commercial act; it may well … be regarded as a distinct benefit to the general public."[72] To avoid being portrayed as greedy opportunists, Matsuki and Yamanaka thus accentuated their status as selfless connoisseurs, who were not peddling art simply for monetary gain, but rather to help introduce an ancient cultural form to the rest of the world. In the end, though, they were more entrepreneurs than mere art enthusiasts; at best, they had coalesced their business acumen with their cultural convictions.

[67] Bunkio Matsuki, *Remarkable Wood Carvings and Silk Embroidery at Copley Hall* (1902).

[68] In the catalogue for *Remarkable Wood Carvings and Silk Embroidery at Copley Hall* (1902), the introduction promised that the "collection herein described was collected by Bunkio Matsuki, who has included the private collections made by his ancestors, known as the Tatekawa family." It went on to give an embellished history of Matsuki's family of artisans and architects.

[69] Bunkio Matsuki, *Catalogue of Antique Chinese Porcelains and Pottery* (1908).

[70] According to the *Catalogue of an Exhibition of Ancient Japanese Brocades, Embroideries, and Fabrics* (1936), "The present collection … was formed by Mr. Sadajiro Yamanaka … after many years's [*sic*] hard effort with his earnest desire to keep together all those interesting fabrics under one roof which otherwise would have been scattered about mercilessly unnoticed of its real artistic as well as historical value."

[71] Yamanaka and Company, *Catalogue of Ukiyoye Paintings, Prints, Rare Screens, Illustrated Books, and Kakemonos Belonging to the Japanese Connoisseur Bunshichi Kobayashi* (1902).

[72] Bunkio Matsuki, *Illustrated Catalogue of Ancient Chinese and Japanese Paintings, Screens, Prints, Chinese Porcelains, Wood Carvings and Gold Lacquers from the Collection of the Japanese Connoisseur Bunkio Matsuki of Boston, Mass. Collected in Japan during the Last Fifteen Years* (1910).

By the same token, curio dealers of Japanese descent took great care to cultivate their ties with prominent American intellectuals such as marine zoologist Morse as well as literary scholar and Asian art connoisseur Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908). Consequently, the forewords of the Matsuki and Yamanaka sales catalogues were frequently penned by well-known college professors, whose approval seemingly provided further legitimacy for the artifacts while separating the merchants from crass financial incentives. When Fenollosa wrote the Prefatory Note for one of Matsuki's 1906 catalogues, his involvement served to give validity to the value of the objects for sale. In the preface, he praised the dealer for offering up "examples that belong to the most interesting and most creative middle period of Japanese prints … This fact gives the collection unique interest, for so many prints of this culminating period have rarely been brought together."[73] In another catalogue, the renowned scholar described the goods as "quite extraordinary" and "uniquely rare."[74] More importantly, perhaps, Fenollosa often confirmed that the "dating of pieces and special appreciations of artistic qualities have been done" by him personally.[75] The items, therefore, could be deemed to be "of the greatest rarity and beauty" because they had been substantiated as such by an impartial and well-respected academic. The Japanophile's support of the art dealer's endeavors was especially important since he was recognized in Asian as well as American art and social circles for his knowledge of Oriental aesthetics and cultures.[76] In yet another catalogue, Matsuki credited "Professor B. Dean of Columbia University," a celebrated admirer of Japanese antiquities, for the inspiration to put together an auction focussing on Japanese military paraphernalia, suggesting that the scholar played a part in the sale.[77] For Matsuki and Yamanaka, there was no contradiction between their dual functions as educators and businessmen and they seemed to move seamlessly between the ostensibly divergent realms. Ultimately, though, the conscious division between the two worlds aided their economic interests since their self-professed status as unprejudiced and

[73] See Bunkio Matsuki, *Print Sale* (1906).

[74] From Bunkio Matsuki, *Catalogue of Antique Chinese Porcelains and Pottery* (1908). Ernest Fenollosa went on to write that "Mr. Bunkio Matsuki of Boston again distinguishes himself by bringing to us, at a time when they are becoming rare in his own country, a small, but choice and representative collection of old color prints."

[75] Bunkio Matsuki, *Print Sale* (1906).

[76] For additional discussions on Ernest Fenollosa and his role in the collecting and study of Asian art, see, for instance, Lawrence W. Chisolm, *Fenollosa: The Far East and American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963); and Van Wyck Brooks, *Fenollosa and His Circle* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1940).

[77] Bunkio Matsuki, *Arms and Armor of Old Japan* (1905).

neutral connoisseurs would enable them to assign monetary worth to the goods that they sold without the appearance of avarice.[78]

CONCLUSION

The notion of detached connoisseurship, along with other strategies, enabled Matsuki and his colleague, Yamanaka, to become trusted cultural mediators and guides, who helped to popularize the market for Asian artifacts in the United States. At the turn of the twentieth century, affiliation with East Asia frequently served as a more reliable touchstone for gauging the legitimacy of an art dealer than any academic training that he or she might have had. By the 1940s, however, it was no longer desirable to be so closely linked with Japan. Whereas the earlier decades saw the vilification of the seemingly backward and uncivilized Chinese, the course of international politics would redefine China's position within the American consciousness. The country was now perceived to be a "Flowery Kingdom" that brought to mind a sense of "mystery, romance, beauty and culture." Its peoples were reconstituted as "creative artisans" with a "native aesthetic sense" and "an instinct for the beautiful."[79] In contrast, Japan was reimagined as an evil military power. Anti-Japanese sentiments would lead to the closure of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts' Japanese galleries in 1941. The museum, in its place, opened a series of small exhibits on the Art of Our Allies, giving emphasis to Chinese relics.[80] Contrary to what Matsuki experienced in Boston in the 1890s, it was now beneficial to be aligned with the Chinese culture.

Neither Matsuki nor Yamanaka lived to see the commencement of hostilities between the United States and Japan. Yamanaka's stores, however, would suffer the consequences of wartime enmity. In May of 1944, the US

[78] See, for instance, Warren I. Cohen, *East Asian Art and American Culture: A Study in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). The symbiotic and yet tension-filled relationship between dealers, scholars, and museum curators was not confined to the Asian art field. For a monograph that discusses the European scene, see Robert Jensen's aforementioned work, *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*.

[79] Yamanaka and Company, *Collection of Chinese and Other Far Eastern Art* (1943). The publication's foreword went on to declare that "China is a country that has carried on its tradition for over five thousand years without any break in its culture, development of art, aesthetic enjoyment and religion. The Chinese possess an inherent artistic consciousness that explains the exquisiteness of their art. They take pride in every opportunity to express their love for aesthetic beauty and think nothing of the patience and toil required to accomplish that purpose. Their daily lives typify an existence lacking completely the turmoil and haste that is so much a part of the activities of the occidental [*sic*]."

[80] G. H. Edgell, "Exhibitions of the Art of Our Allies," *Boston Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin*, 41, 245 (Oct. 1943), 55–57.

government forced the venerable firm to liquidate all of the merchandise in its three American shops in Chicago, New York City, and Boston. Reporting on the news, art historian Alfred Salmony contended that "these brief days are bound to become landmarks in the history of collecting in America … The Yamanaka Sale will be followed by a new type of collector who has never received attention in this country – the man with small purse and ardent desire."[81] There was no mention of the political and social implications of the sale to be conducted by order of the Alien Property Custodian. Instead, Salmony preferred to celebrate the coming democratization of collecting in East Asian art circles. During the heat of the global conflict, Yamanaka and Company's most dependable credential and cultural commodity, its deep roots within Japan, had become associated with threats of imperialism and militarism.

[81] Alfred Salmony, "The Yamanaka Sale," *Art News*, 15 May 1944.