

# BIJUTSUSHI

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## **GOTO, Ryoko. A study of the art history by Omura Seigai and the change of his perception of Chinese painting .**

Art historian Omura Seigai (1868–1927) wrote two editions of *A History of Chinese Painting* in his lifetime, which reveal changes that occurred in the perception and recognition of Chinese painting in modern Japan. Chinese paintings arrived in Japan mainly in two great waves, the first occurring across hundreds of years prior to the mid-nineteenth century. Omura initially formed his ideas of Chinese painting history just as the second wave was beginning, at the turn of the twentieth century. His two histories of Chinese painting, written fifteen years apart, refer to different artworks, from the first and the second waves.

The first part of this paper outlines Omura's formation as an art historian. In the next section, we overview the diverse art history Omura constructed. In his early career, Omura published major series of art books from Shimbi-Shoin, such as *Toyo Bijutsu Taikan* (Masterpieces Selected from the Fine Arts of the Far East), which combines careful analysis and illustrations, to form a systematic image of Japanese and Chinese art as 'Asian art' (*toyo bijutsu*). Following the timeline of his publishing, we know that Omura's focus shifted from Japanese painting to Chinese art after 1909. After completing the first history of Chinese sculpture, he again turned to Chinese painting, which was to become a focus of his research.

In the second part, we examine the construction of Omura's history of Chinese painting. His early publication *Shina Kaiga Shoshi* (A Concise History of Chinese Painting, 1910), was the first systematic history of Chinese painting in the world, also published as the general history in the Chinese painting section of *Toyo Bijutsu Taikan* (vols 8-12, between 1910–1912). However, in this edition, the selection and attribution of Tang, Song, and Yuan era artworks suffered severe shortcomings, being based solely on the selection of inherited 'first wave' Chinese artworks in Japanese collections. Even in his time, contemporary critics pointed to such limitations in this 'history of Chinese painting', which Omura would try to overcome. At the end of 1921, Omura finally realised his first trip to China, spending three months there researching old masterpieces of Chinese painting. He undertook extensive research, visiting many leading collectors, including parts of the Qing imperial collection, and producing 750 photographic reproductions of "authentic" masterpieces, which he brought home. Some of those photographed artworks were later brought to Japan, becoming 'second wave' Chinese paintings. Based on his research in China, Omura dramatically changed his perception of Chinese painting, which led him to rewrite his history of Chinese painting, as *Toyo Bijutsushi* (History of Oriental Art, 1925), referencing a very different set of Chinese paintings. Such works can be observed by comparing the list of Tang, Song, and Yuan era artworks in *Chugoku Meigashu* (Masterpieces of Chinese paintings), published by Omura's son in 1945, which fortunately contains most of the photographs Omura had taken in China.

Today, in Chinese art history circles in Japan, Omura's art history is often regarded as merely the compilation of a wide variety of textual sources. However, Omura was also a scholar who pioneered the use of photographic reproductions of artworks as essential resources. While he indeed searched through all the previous art historical references and theories, he also checked these alongside visual illustrations of actual artworks, developing a new paradigm for Chinese painting history by connecting discourse and artworks. Moreover, his two editions of Chinese painting history reveal that Omura had overcome his earlier limitations and gained a new perspective. One reason scholars have neglected this may be because while Omura succeeded in publishing his texts, he passed away before he could publish an accompanying album of photographs produced in China. In any case, the role of Omura in the formation of Chinese painting history is worth reconsidering.

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