

## **B.A. thesis supervisor's review**

### **Sara Adachi: *Assimilation and Transformation: Meiji Japan's Encounter with Western Art***

The proposed bachelor's thesis studies the phenomenon of the introduction of Western art and artistic conventions in Meiji era (1868-1912) Japan. It discusses the impact of lifting the isolationist policies and opening up to non-Asian influences in Japan, which had been previously closed from contacts with the Western world during the Tokugawa shogunate (1603-1868). The research question „how did Japanese artists and art institutions assimilate and adapt Western art movements during the Meiji Restoration, and what were the effects of this cultural exchange on the Japanese art scene“ is elaborated in order to gain „valuable insights into the broader cultural shifts taking place in Japan.“

The author describes art and artistic activities during the Meiji period in order to explore the dynamic relationship between the necessity to preserve vital traditional aspects of life in Japan, and the urgent need for modernization and reception of Western influences. To this end, the author first shortly summarizes the historical context, then elaborates on several popular artistic schools and their major representatives. This provides some insight into the situation as it was before the opening up and modernization took place.

The main chapters of the thesis (2-6) elaborate on the transformation of Japanese woodblock prints and paintings, showing some new topics and techniques that appeared under the influence of the West, the emergence of the art of photography, the production of sculptures, and briefly also organizations and institutions that were part of the quickly modernizing artistic life. On the whole, these sections are well written, based on an in-depth study of a range of relevant sources (a few important monographs, well chosen articles and information published by museums and collections that house artworks preserved from this period).

For more than a year, I have worked closely with the author from the conception of this thesis until its completion. I am therefore aware of the time and effort she has put into the study of the sources, consideration of the structure and contents, as well as refining the arguments and details of the individual chapters. I was witness to the fact that she has come a long way in putting together the informative chapters and making them a meaningful survey of her topic.

I was however a bit disappointed that although I have suggested so, she did not pay closer attention to Japanese works of art housed in Czech collections (mainly at the National Gallery and the Náprstek Museum of the National Museum), the description and consideration of which could have been truly beneficial for the local scholarly community.

I was also missing a more theoretical approach to the subjects in question (mainly in the final chapter, where introduction of Western system of artistic education and the formation of societies and institutions is discussed, as well as e.g. a discussion of the assimilation of the European habit of exhibiting art to general public and how it influenced the art scene in Japan etc.) I know that the author spent considerable time and efforts to describe the topics in the individual chapters. Unfortunately, sufficient space and time was not devoted to linking the details to wider art-historical or sociological concepts, which would make the results of the thesis a more relevant examination of the developments in Japanese society as a whole. The conclusion in Chapter 7 doesn't come up with more theoretical summing up of these issues, either.

The text is nevertheless written with care, well edited without significant typos or problems of style (which is by no means always the case in students' theses these days and therefore merits acclaim). The work also fulfills all requirements for a bachelors thesis regarding the quoting of relevant sources and neatly compiled list of references. Therefore, and in view of my above reservations, I recommend the thesis for defense and suggest the grade 2 (very good).

For the discussion, I suggest the question: Could you show us one or two Japanese works of art from this period and use them as examples to discuss the aspects of tradition and modernity that are elaborated upon in the submitted thesis?

In Prague, 16 September 2024

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