

**BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSION AND COLLECTIVISM:
ONCHI KŌSHIRŌ'S WARTIME PRINTS**

by

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B.A., The Colorado College, 2013

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES
(Art History and Theory)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

August 2019

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Between Individual Expression and Collectivism: Onchi Kōshirō's Wartime Prints

submitted by Annika Davis in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for

the degree of Master of Arts

in The Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (Art History and Theory)

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ABSTRACT

Onchi Kōshirō (1891-1955) was one of the key figures associated with the creative print movement, *sōsaku hanga*. The movement developed in Japan in the early 20th century, one of many practices in the visual arts that heralded the rise of modernism in Japan. Creative prints differed both visually, and in their means of production, from the traditional *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints that had been so popular during the Edo period (1603-1868). Rather than being created on commission by a team of people, as *ukiyo-e* had been, *sōsaku hanga* artists took as their motto “self-drawn, self-carved, self-printed.” This change reflected their embrace of expressionist ideals, as they strove to dissolve the boundaries between art and life and sought to depict the everyday, including their own thoughts and feelings.

Most scholars break Onchi’s work into pre and post-World War II periods, paying little attention to his wartime activities. However, the war years represent an important time in his career, during which he was forced to negotiate his own artistic subjectivity within a nationalistic frame. In many ways, wartime nationalism helped woodblock print artists to justify their place within society, as the medium came to be seen as uniquely, divinely Japanese. Though it may seem at odds with the movement’s ideals, Onchi was very active during the war, traveling to Manchuria to document activities there, and selling works to help fund the war effort. Through a study of Onchi and other artists’ activities during the war, I explore this period of his life, so as to more critically consider the implications that it had on his existence as a modern Japanese artist, and leader of the *sōsaku hanga* movement.

LAY SUMMARY

Onchi Kōshirō (1891-1955) was one of the key figures associated with the creative print movement, *sōsaku hanga*. The movement developed in Japan in the early 20th century, one of many practices in visual arts that heralded the rise of modernism in Japan. Most scholars break Onchi's work into pre and post-World War II periods, paying little attention to his wartime activities. However, the war years represent an important time in his career, during which he was forced to negotiate his own artistic subjectivity within a nationalistic frame. In many ways, wartime nationalism helped woodblock print artists to justify their place within society, as the medium came to be seen as uniquely, divinely Japanese. Through a study of Onchi and other artists' activities during the war, I critically consider the implications that this period had on his existence as a modern Japanese artist, and leader of the *sōsaku hanga* movement.

PREFACE

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Annika Davis.

All text is written using standard romanization, and Japanese names are written following the East Asian convention: family name first.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I offer my enduring gratitude to the faculty, staff, and fellow students in the Art History, Visual Art and Theory Department at the University of British Columbia who have pushed me and inspired me to continue my work in this field. I owe particular thanks to my adviser, Dr. Ignacio Adriasola, who has opened my mind to new ways of thinking about modern Japanese art, guided my thesis research, and continually inspired me.

I thank Dr. Joseph Monteyne for acting as my second reader, asking helpful guiding questions, and always providing prompt and kind responses.

I would also like to thank my professors and colleagues outside of AHVA, particularly those in the Asian Studies Department.

To my undergraduate adviser Dr. Tamara Bentley, I owe special thanks for initially fostering my interest in Japanese art, for always writing my letters of recommendation, and for discussing my future over many cups of tea.

Finally, special thanks are owed to my parents, who have inspired me to pursue higher education, and whose unending emotional and financial support have made it possible

INTRODUCTION

Sōsaku hanga artist Onchi's Kōshirō's (1891-1955) 1917 woodblock print *Mother and Child* (fig. 1) depicts a mother embracing her child, done in bold black and white, expressionist style. The figure of the mother is curved around the child, whose small head is barely visible within the middle of the mother's circular form. The figures are surrounded by rings of wavy lines not unlike the growth rings in a tree stump, calling the print's medium to mind. The composition shows elements of abstraction, while still retaining figural elements. Though he showed a general trend toward abstraction during the course of his career, Onchi expertly explored both figurative and abstract compositions in his woodblock print art, blurring the lines between traditional and avant-garde, high and low art, exhibition and propaganda.

Most scholars break Onchi's work into pre and post-World War II periods, paying little attention to his wartime activities. However, his artistic production did not slow during the World War II, but instead seemed to flourish in many ways. The war years represent an important time in his career, during which he was forced to negotiate his own artistic subjectivity within a nationalistic frame. He also explored both figurative and abstract artistic techniques in his wartime work, as well as photography, its potential as an artistic and photojournalistic medium, and its similarities to woodblock prints. In many ways, wartime nationalism helped woodblock print artists to justify their place within society, as the medium came to be seen as uniquely, divinely Japanese.

The early 20th century saw the end of the Meiji Period (1868-1912), along with profound changes within Japan's art world. These changes were particularly

evident in the sphere of *yōga*, or Western-style painting. As Japanese artists were studying European oil painting techniques, they were also learning about European modernism, and its rejection of academic conventions in favor of individuality and expressivity. A new influx of European prints, magazines, books, and catalogs introduced these ideas to interested artists of *yōga*.

This period also saw many *yōga* artists begin to practice the medium of woodblock printing, which was deeply traditional to Japan. Through woodblock printing, they explored new modernist ideas, striving toward the goal of self-expression. This new movement in woodblock printing was called *sōsaku hanga*, meaning “creative prints.” Most accounts of *sōsaku hanga* artists break their activities into pre and post World War II periods, downplaying or outright ignoring their activities during the war. When the work is mentioned, it is brief, and devoid of an analysis of the works’ implications.

While many scholars have begun to study and write about Japanese war painting in the last decade, wartime woodblock prints have not received the same level of attention, and there remains a pervasive notion that print artists lacked materials and inspiration during these years. Though many scholars studied modern prints during the 20th century, they rarely mentioned wartime works. For example, important catalogs by Donald Jenkins and Lawrence Smith are both devoid of war-theme or nationalistic prints.¹ Jenkins’ catalog includes a chapter titled “The Dark

¹ See Donald Jenkins, *Images of a Changing World: Japanese Prints of the Twentieth Century* (Portland, Oregon: Portland Museum of Art, 1993), Lawrence Smith, *The Japanese Print since 1900: Old Dreams and New Visions* (London: British Museum, 1983), and Lawrence Smith, *Modern Japanese Prints, 1912-1989* (London: British Museum, 1994).

Valley, 1931-1940”, but it is directly followed by “The Postwar Years, 1945-1980”, completely bypassing the years 1941-1945. Watanabe Shōzaburō (1885-1962), a publisher of many modern artists including Kawase Hasui (1883-1957) and Itō Shinsui (1898-1972), wrote that print sales flourished until the start of the war, during which time a shortage of paper and pigments caused artists to stop most production and to disperse.²

There are many possible reasons for the dearth of information on wartime prints, beginning with the simple fact that discussion of 20th century Japan is almost always bifurcated into pre- and post-war periods. This periodization makes it difficult to discuss any work created during the war years. Additionally, as suggested by Kendall Brown, “Scholars are often partisan to their subjects and have had scant interest in war prints. They also have refrained from tainting the reputations of masters like Shinsui and Yoshida Hiroshi (1876-1950), who made beautiful prewar *shin hanga*...or the progressive postwar accomplishments of such *sōsaku hanga*...luminaries as Munakata Shikō (1903- 1975) and Sekino Junichirō (1914-1988).”³

The bias suggested by Kendall Brown may make it difficult for scholars of *sōsaku hanga* to write about the wartime work of such seemingly progressive artists, though the truth is that many of them were very active during the war. Onchi Kōshirō, one of the movement’s most well-known and prolific members, traveled to

² Watanabe Shōzaburō, *Catalogue of Woodcut Color Prints*. Tokyo: S. Watanabe Color Prints Co., 1952, rev. eds. 1954 and 1962.

³ Kendall H. Brown. "Out of the Dark Valley: Japanese Woodblock Prints and War, 1937-1945." *Impressions*, no. 23 (2001): 66.

Manchuria to document activities there, and sold works to help fund the war effort. Onchi continued to serve the government for the duration of the war, traveled to Taiwan, China, and Vietnam to show his works, and participated in many government-run exhibitions in Japan.

Though he continued to make art by his own hand throughout the war years, the fact that the works were created to support the war effort stands at odds with his and other Japanese modernists' regard for independence and individuality, and highlights a period in the development of Japanese art where modern individualism was eclipsed by wartime nationalism and collectivism. Furthermore, it was during the wartime period that Onchi and other artists kept the movement alive by continuing to create prints, setting themselves up for even greater commercial success post-war. This begs the important question: how could artists of *sōsaku hanga* and other modern Japanese art movements negotiate their own artistic subjectivity within such a nationalistic time? It is with this question in mind that I argue that Onchi's activities during the war should not be excluded or downplayed from the narrative of his development as an artist, and the development of the *sōsaku hanga* movement. I will demonstrate this through an exploration of this period of his life, so as to more critically consider the implications that it had on his existence as a modern Japanese artist, and leader of the *sōsaku hanga* movement.

Individualism, Expressivity, and the Formation of the Creative Prints Movement

Onchi's bold, expressionist print *Mother and Child* displays many of the new values associated with modernism that some Japanese artists were beginning to

explore, which differed from the traditional artistic aesthetics and values that others chose to retain.

As J. Thomas Rimer writes in his introduction to the book, *Since Meiji: Perspectives on the Japanese Visual Arts, 1868-2000*,

“After being cut off for virtually two centuries from significant artistic contact with the West, Japanese writers and artists now came to embrace new ideas from Europe that, had the country remained open to the currents of world culture...would have been introduced slowly and with a certain circumspection...But this new explosion seems to have quickly produced what seems in retrospect to have been a kind of schizophrenic division in the arts.”⁴

In other words, some artists were eager to adopt new artistic techniques from Europe, while others aimed to retain classical styles and techniques. In the genre of painting, this led to the development of the *yōga*, or Western-style art, and *nihonga*, or Japanese-style art movements.

Many artists of *yōga* studied under European teachers in Japan, and others traveled to Europe and America to study painting, bringing their new knowledge and influence back. One such artist was Kuroda Seiki (1866-1924), a *yōga* painter

⁴ J. Thomas Rimer, *Since Meiji: Perspectives on the Japanese Visual Arts, 1868-2000* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 5.

who helped popularize Western-style painting. He studied in Paris from 1886 to 1893, in the studio of Raphaël Collin. Once back in Japan, he began to utilize the skills in painting that he'd learned in Paris to depict Japanese scenes and themes *en-plein-air*, or painted outdoors. As Lawrence Smith writes in his chapter in *Since Meiji*, entitled “Japanese Prints 1868–2008”, Kuroda and other *yōga* painters were artists “who saw themselves as part of a much wider world and who went to Europe to study. From them and their pupils there arose a desire—often explicitly expressed, but always implied—for equality with the independence of Western artists.”⁵

As modern artists were beginning to consider their identities as artists within Japan and within an international context, many chose to reexamine the medium of woodblock printing. Woodblock printing, or *hanga*, had been an incredibly important medium in Japan, particularly *ukiyo-e*, which flourished during the Edo period (1603-1868). Traditionally, these prints were paid for and distributed by a publisher, and created by a team of people. The artist designed the print, and a separate carver cut the woodblocks, and a printer inked and pressed them. Though the term “artist” is used, designers of *ukiyo-e* were not considered to be artists in the modern definition of the term, but were more akin to craftsmen working with a team to produce a product.

Though some artists continued to create *hanga* after its heyday in the Edo period, in general it experienced a significant decline in popularity. Woodblock printing had allowed artists and publishers to produce mass media, but the influx of

⁵ Lawrence Smith in J. Thomas Rimer, *Since Meiji: Perspectives on the Japanese Visual Arts, 1868-2000* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 369.

cameras and new mechanical printing techniques in the late 19th and early 20th centuries rendered woodblock printing less useful in Japanese society. This created an opportunity to reexamine the medium of *hanga*, and its potential to be fine art. In the 20th century, renewed interest in the medium led to the formation of two different groups: *sōsaku hanga*, and *shin hanga*, meaning “new woodblock prints”. *Sōsaku hanga* artists were deeply invested in the ideas of individuality and self-expression that other modern artists were grappling with. Though they were working in the traditional medium of the woodblock print, *sōsaku hanga* artists did not work with a team as producers of *ukiyo-e* had, but created each print by hand, and usually limited their compositions to just a handful of printings. They took as their motto, “self-designed, self-carved, and self-printed” (*jiga, jikoku, jizuri*)."

Shin hanga artists, however, were a group wishing to continue making woodblock prints more traditionally, by working in a team of several people to depict classical Japanese themes. Although these prints did incorporate modern visual elements such as use of perspective and 3-dimensionality, they were much more similar to *ukiyo-e* visually and in their creation than the expressionist, often abstract works of the *sōsaku hanga* movement. *Zōjō-ji in Shiba* (fig. 2) is a 1925 print by Kawase Hasui, one of the most well-known artists of *shin hanga*. The subject matter of the Buddhist temple Zōjō-ji is an example of *meishō*, meaning famous places, a common theme amongst *ukiyo-e* artists. The person dressed in kimono, the snow-covered tree, and the bright red temple gate together create a traditional atmosphere. Though the print lacks the bold, black outlines that were typical of

ukiyo-e, the composition's different colors, created by many different woodblocks, are still clearly defined from one another, with crisp, clean edges.

As Hollis Goodall-Cristante writes in "Shin-Hanga: New Prints in Modern Japan," "The obscure parts of the country that Hasui visited were romanticized and abstracted by casting them in twilight or rain and by placing insignificant figures within monumental panoramas...The people in these prints are often shown in silhouette or from the rear as the romanticized version of the quiet village surroundings dominate the mood. The feeling of home is evoked by the nostalgic warmth of these scenes."⁶ *Zōjō-ji in Shiba* is a quintessential example of Kawase's depiction of a romanticized, traditional Japan.

Pre-WWII, *shin hanga* was quite commercially successful overseas, and many prints were made specifically for sale to European and American markets, where purchasers longed for images of an idealized, traditional Japan. During the war, artists continued to create *shin hanga*, including many nationalistic and patriotic images, as well as a few war scenes, which will be discussed more thoroughly later in this thesis.

In 1918, The Japan Creative Print Association (*Nippon Sōsaku Hanga Kyōkai*) was founded. One of the group's founding members, and frequently said to be the most influential *sōsaku hanga* artist was Onchi Kōshirō. Onchi's 1931 print *View from Surugadai* (fig. 3) is a landscape scene, but the differences between this *sōsaku hanga* composition and Kawase's *shin hanga* print are stark. The print comes from

⁶ Hollis Goodall-Christante. *Shin-hanga: New Prints in Modern Japan*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1996, 19.

Onchi's series *One-Hundred Views of New Tokyo*, which depicted scenes of a modernizing city very unlike the idyllic and traditional scene depicted by Kawase. The composition, done in muddled, muted colors, is a decidedly urban one, with tall, modern buildings, and cars on a road that travels toward a vanishing point in the background of the composition. The print shows a scene of everyday life, something that *sōsaku hanga* artists and other avant-garde artists were increasingly interested in depicting. They were also deeply invested in the ideas of individuality and self-expression that other modern artists were grappling with.

Onchi, like many other *sōsaku hanga* artists, was formally trained in oil painting. In his self-portrait of 1919, titled *Self-portrait (Blouse)* (fig. 4), Onchi displays his skill in the medium. He depicts himself in the middle of the close-cropped composition, wearing a western-style shirt. He draws further attention to his clothing by including it in the title, using the *Gairaigo*, or English loan word, *buruzu*, meaning blouse. The eyes beneath his furrowed brow do not meet the viewer's gaze, but instead focus on something outside of the composition. Behind his head is an abstract artwork, perhaps one of his own, and because of the composition's close crop, the only things depicted here are Onchi and this artwork. Through this, he makes it clear that art is deeply important to him. Through the use of oil paint, style, and clothing, Onchi is also showing the viewer that he is educated in western-style art and fashion. Through the practice of making a self-portrait, he demonstrates his position as a modern artist in Japan.

Following his training in oil painting, however, Onchi decided to devote himself to the medium of woodblock printing. For many *sōsaku hanga* artists,

focusing on the medium of the woodblock print may have been a way to connect with their artistic predecessors, while still creating uniquely modern works. Artist Kitaoka Fumio, who spent many years outside of Japan and trained in Paris at the École des Beaux Arts, said of woodblock printing, “when they are made the Japanese way, with *baren* and handmade paper, they are a very Japanese art, and it’s good to feel at home in one’s medium.”⁷ Hybridization, including the blending of European artistic techniques with traditionally Japanese materials and themes, became a common theme in Japanese modern art. As Midori Matsui writes in *Beyond Signs: Hybridity in Japanese Art*, “the hybridization engendered by the blending of techniques learned from contemporary European avant-garde paintings and uniquely Japanese themes, materials, and sensibility gave rise to individual achievements in both Western-style and Japanese-style paintings in the 1910s and 1920s.”⁸

Onchi came to see woodblock printing as a better medium than oil painting to explore expressionism. He thought and wrote about artistic self-expression throughout his life, and shared his ideas with other *sōsaku hanga* artists. He expressed his concept of abstract modernism through the term *jojō*, 抒情 (lyricism)⁹, which he first wrote about in a 1918 article, *Jojōga ni tsuite* (About Lyrical Art). He wrote,

⁷ Kitaoka in Lawrence Smith, “Modern Japanese Prints,” 10.

⁸ Midori Matsui, *Beyond Signs: Hybridity in Japanese Art in The Age of Anxiety* (Gallery at Harbourfront Centre, 1995), 65.

⁹ 抒情 (*jojō*) is often translated as “lyricism”, but literally means to tell one’s feelings or emotions.

Creation is the result of the desire to live for the love of other people and the hope to deepen their lives. My *jojōga* (lyrical art) came from this emotion. These drawings occur from purely inside. This is totally different from drawing complicated shapes on canvas or planning a drawing from objective phenomena on one flat surface, or drawing various phenomena.¹⁰

This idea that prints could be used to express one's inner thoughts and feelings became a fundamental belief of the *sōsaku hanga* movement. Onchi embraced these ideals, and translated them into his prints. *Human Body*, of 1924 (fig. 5), is completely devoid of figuration, instead composed of circles, semi-circles, and other abstract shapes filling the space of the print. While he would continue to make some figurative works, he favored this bold, abstract style. This composition of shapes arranged on a flat pictorial surface became a common practice for him, and can be seen in many of his prints, designs, and even in his later photographic works.

Japanese modernists, including those involved in the *sōsaku hanga* movement, had access to works by many modern European artists, authors, and philosophers. In her research on Hasegawa Kiyoshi, a print artist the same age as Onchi, Sawatari Kiyoko notes that many European avant-garde books and magazines were found in Hasegawa's collection. Among these were writings by Bergson, Tagore, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Verlaine, Baudelaire, Blake, Maeterlink,

¹⁰ Onchi Koshiro, "Jojōga Ni Tsuite", *Kanjō* 20, June 1918 (Tokyo: Kanjōsha), 2-3.

Schopenhauer, and others.¹¹ The ideas of Henri Bergson may have been of particular importance to Japanese modern artists, especially artists of abstract works like Onchi. In *Time and Free Will, Matter and Memory* and *Creative Evolution*, Bergson writes that creativity is the highest form of human activity, and calls for a rejection of visual representation of the physical world in favor of expressions of thoughts and feelings.

Onchi created several prints in 1915 for the magazine *Tsukuhae*, issues V-VII, with titles beginning with *jojō*, (抒情, lyric). *Lyric: Thankful Tear for Merciful Affection* (fig. 6) is devoid of figuration, with shapes printed in muted grey and red ink. A round shape in the upper middle of the composition is followed by a comet-like streak, generating a sense of motion toward the upper left corner. Examples of other prints from 1915 include *Lyric: Sunshine on My Forehead*, *Lyric: Life Is Sorrowful*, *At Midnight I Wake up in Tears*, *Lyric: While in Agony Something Creeps into My Breast*, and *Lyric: Hearts Believing Each Other*.¹² Each of these abstract prints is an expression of *jojō*, a visual representation of a thought or feeling devoid of figuration.

While it is not definitively known that Onchi read Bergson's writing, his 1915 series of *Jojō (Lyric)* prints make it clear that he was grappling with similar ideas about abstraction. We do know that Onchi read *Thought Forms*, written in 1902 by

¹¹ Sawatari, Kiyoko, *Hasegawa Kiyoshi no Sekai: Tofutsumae (Hasegawa Kiyoshi's World before France, part one). Volume 2*, Yokohama Bijutsukan Soshō Volume 2, edited by Yokohama Bijutsukan Gakugeibu, Yokohama: Yurindo, 1997, p 138-140.

¹² For a complete list, see the catalog for *Onchi Koshiro: January 13 - February 28, 2016, The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo: April 29 - June 12, 2016, The Museum of Modern Art, Wakayama*. Available online at http://www.momaw.jp/files/Onchi%20Koshiro_List%20of%20Works.pdf.

the English Theosophists Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater. It was translated into German in 1908, and was influential for the artist Wassily Kandinsky, and for other Post Impressionists. In his 1918 article in *Kanjō*, Onchi writes about *Thought Forms* as one of the basic theoretical texts of Theosophy, and about its discussion of using shapes and colors to visually represent human thought.¹³

In addition to his encounters with European writers and thinkers, Onchi was also exposed to modern European art, including Expressionist prints and paintings, early in his career. He would later write that one of the first things that drove him to printmaking was *Der Sturm Mokuhanga Tenrankai* (Der Sturm Woodblock Print Exhibition), held by the White Birch Society (*Shirakaba*) in Tokyo in 1914. The show included works by Franz Marc, Wilhelm Morgner, Heinrich Campendonk, Ludwig Kirchner, and Wassily Kandinsky.¹⁴

Onchi was interested in Kandinsky in particular, and once said that seeing Kandinsky's work at *Der Sturm Mokuhanga Tenrankai* was one of the first things that led him to focus on woodblock printing. In addition to seeing Kandinsky's work, it is highly likely that Onchi read his writings, as well. In 1912, several of Kandinsky's books were available in Japanese department stores, including *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (*Über das Geistige in der Kunst*), his poetry book,

¹³ Onchi Koshiro, "Oto to Ito to", *Kanjō* 20, June 1918 (Tokyo: Kanjōsha), 3.

¹⁴ Kuwahara Noriko 桑原規子, *Onchi Kōshirō kenkyū, hanga no modanizumu* 恩地孝四郎研究：版画のモダニズム (*A study of Onchi Kōshirō: Modernity in Japanese prints*) (Tokyo: Serika Shobō, 2012), 144–46.

Klange, and his autobiography, *Kandinsky 1901-1913*.¹⁵ In addition to the availability of Kandinsky's writing, between 1912 and 1915 several people were publishing articles about him and his theories.

In *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Kandinsky writes that, "The work of art is born of the artist in a mysterious and secret way. From him it gains life and being. Nor is its existence casual and inconsequent, but it has a definite and purposeful strength, alike in its material and spiritual life."¹⁶ For Onchi, who was proficient in German, Kandinsky's ideas about art and artists must have been exciting, and quite similar to his own thoughts. Onchi and other *sōsaku hanga* artists were particularly concerned with artistic subjectivity, and the idea, echoed by Kandinsky, that art should be the creation of the singular artist, a representation of their personal, unique inner self.

In a 1913 article titled "Kandinsky's Theory of the Principle of the Inner Requirement (Inevitability): Nonnaturalistic tendencies in Western Art", Kinoshita Mokutarō explained Kandinsky's theory of abstraction, saying that abstraction without inner life becomes merely design, and that inner life prevents the abstract

¹⁵ Kandinsky, Wassily, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 1912, the information about the stores in Nihonbashi is from Wada, Koichi, "1910 Nendai no Onchi Kōshirō no 'Chūshō' (The Abstraction of Onchi Kōshirō in the 1910's), Onchi Kōshirō. *Iro to Katachi no Shijin* (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shimbun and Japan Association of Art Museums, 1994), 78.

¹⁶ Kandinsky, Wassily, and M. T. H. Sadler. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. New York: Dover Publications, 1977.

from being decorative.¹⁷ In 1916, Onchi wrote some of his first theories about abstraction, saying,

In drawing starting from the desire to possess nature and reaching to make one's own truth vivid in art we need floating life beyond the shape we can recognize (symbol or metaphor). In order to substantiate self expression (emotion) only with a mix of color and line without natural shape, emotional *ritoumus* and *fritzhei* would be transferred to the canvas which is the purest element of art.

Leftovers, after you get rid of all the clothes (nonessentials) from art, have some common power among viewers. This is the power which all great arts have. If you do not have this, you cannot get through to people...The drawing with only line and color, lacking pure and true life, becomes pattern.¹⁸

Like Kandinsky, Onchi believed that abstraction can be a tool for self-expression in art, and that without a basis in emotion, or “pure and true life”, abstract works

¹⁷ *Bijutsu Shimpō* (Art News), Vol 12, #5, March 1913, 228. Kuwahara, “Yusai Gakka to shite no Onchi Kōshirō” (Onchi Kōshirō as Oil Painter), note 43, p. 125. In Susan Strong McDonald. *Onchi Kōshirō: Taishō Modernist*. PhD diss., The University of Minnesota, 2002, 51.

¹⁸ Onchi Kōshirō, “Shin keiko yōga ni tsuite” (New Tendencies in Western Art), *Kagaku to Bungei* (Chemistry and Art), November 1916, Vol. 2, no. 11, 27-28, from Kuwahara Noriko. “Yūsai gakka toshite no Onchi Kōshirō” (Onchi Kōshirō as Oil Painter), note 40, p. 125. In Susan Strong McDonald. *Onchi Kōshirō: Taishō Modernist*. PhD diss., The University of Minnesota, 2002, 51.

become merely pattern, and not fine art. Onchi demonstrates this belief in his work, particularly through his combinations of poetic titles and abstract compositions, as in his previously discussed *jojō* prints.

In Japan, many artists, poets, and writers began to form groups within which they could discuss ideas like artistic subjectivity, individuality, and expression. One such group was called the *Fusainkai* (Fusain Society), which disbanded in 1913 after only its second show, but which nevertheless facilitated the production of some important writing and artwork. The Society consisted of several artists who tended toward expressionism, including print artists Kobayashi Tokusaburō (1884–1949) and Kishida Ryūsei (1891–1929). Another member, artist-critic Takamura Kōtarō (1883-1956), affirmed the new subjective tendency in his 1910 essay, *Midori iro no taiyō* (“The Green Sun”):

If another man paints a picture of a green sun, I have no intention to say that I will deny him. For it may be that I will see it that way myself. Nor can I merely continue on, missing the value of the painting just because ‘the sun is green.’ For the quality of the work will not depend on whether the sun depicted is either green or red. What I wish to experience...is the flavor of the work in which the sun *is* green.¹⁹

¹⁹高村光太郎. (1910). 緑色の太陽 (Midori iro no taiyou). Retrieved June 30, 2019, from https://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/001168/files/46507_25640.html

Onchi was also very influenced by modern Japanese writers and poets, collaborated with them, and developed friendships with several, particularly the humanist writer Mushanokōji Saneatsu (1885-1976), of the *Shirakaba*. As Susan Strong McDonald writes in her dissertation on Onchi, “It was in the literary discussions, many of them in the pages of the *Shirakaba* magazine, that Japanese artists were liberated to find their own individual voices as painters, poets and printmakers.”²⁰

Magazines like *Shirakaba* became central to Onchi’s work, as he often designed covers for them, submitted prints and writing, and created many of his own publications. His first was *Tsukuhae*, or “Moonglow”, founded in 1913 while he was a student at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. Onchi’s cover for the 6th issue (fig. 7), released in 1915, shows a flat, abstract composition of circular and triangular shapes, perhaps reminiscent of the shape of a moon. The abstract composition, perhaps an expression of Onchi’s vision of the concept of “Moonglow”, references European avant-garde art, but it is printed on paper made from the mulberry tree, a traditional Japanese print medium, once again displaying a cultural hybridity. In the years leading up to WWII, Onchi contributed to and founded several journals. These journals promoted self-expression through prints and poetry, and Onchi contributed artwork and writing, and artwork inspired by others’ writing. During this time, he also made a living through book design, for which he was quite renowned for his abstract, avant-garde designs.

²⁰ Susan Strong McDonald. *Onchi Kōshirō: Taishō Modernist*. PhD diss., The University of Minnesota, 2002, 40.

The formation of the *sōsaku hanga* movement and the early years of Onchi's writing and woodblock printing occurred during the interwar period, which encompassed the Taishō period of 1912–1926, and the early part of the Shōwa period of 1926–1989. Having experienced victory in the Russo-Japanese war of 1905, Japan had begun to see the success of its government's modernization project, and promotion of *fukoku kyōhei*, or “rich country, strong army”. However, the country soon experienced a series of tragedies, including antigovernment riots like the Rice Riots of 1918, which highlighted class inequalities that persisted, despite the government's efforts to promote national solidarity.

To the north, Russia experienced the bloody revolution of 1917, which subsequently brought social rebellion, and socialist and communist ideals across the ocean and into Japan, prompting political activism amongst the working class, younger generations, and many artists, as well. Then, in 1923, the Great Kantō Earthquake devastated the metropolis of Tokyo and its surrounding areas, and was met with responses of sadness and anger from the artists who tried to come to terms with the tragedy. The turmoil of the interwar period prompted increased interest in politics, social justice, and rebellion amongst artists, as well as an increased interest in integrating art into everyday life and the commercial sphere.

WOODBLOCK PRINTS AND WARTIME COLLECTIVISM

Prior to World War II, modern Japanese artists were largely able to explore these themes relatively free from government coercion. However, in the late 1930s, and as Japan's protracted war with China drove a political change toward collectivism, the state began imposing limitations to artists' freedom of expression. By 1941, an article in the art magazine *Mizue* detailed the aesthetic goals and views of the Information Section of the Imperial Army, an organization that had not previously been engaged in artistic discourse. The article was a transcription of a roundtable discussion held in November 1940, between three staff officers from the Information Section and two civilians, none of whom were artists. The soldiers included Major Suzuki Kurazo, a graduate of the Imperial Military, Major Akiyama Kunio, and First Lieutenant Kuroda Senkichirō.

The main message of the 1941 *Mizue* article was that "Art would not be produced for its own sake, but in service to the Japanese race."²¹ It attacked art for art's sake, and "the idea that the determination of value and relevance rests with the artist,"²² beliefs that had been the foundation of the avant-garde, surrealist, and *sōsaku hanga* movements.

As Japan became embedded in war, the government began to sponsor artists' involvement, largely through the commission of war scene paintings. Many artists were urged or chose to work with and for the military, under the slogan "Serving the

²¹ Mark H. Sandler in *Art and War in Japan and Its Empire: 1931-1960*. Boston: Brill, 2013, 158.

²² Mark H. Sandler in *Art and War in Japan and Its Empire: 1931-1960*, 159.

Nation Through Art” (*saikan hōkoku*). Oil painters were enlisted to produce war record paintings, defined in this quote by Major Akiyama Kunio:

War record paintings are paintings that have the significant historical purpose of recording and preserving the military’s war campaign forever. They are the paintings that celebrate the Imperial army’s spirit to defend the nation, defeat the enemy, and fight for victory. They are paintings that preserve when, how, and why we fight for posterity a hundred, thousand years later.²³

While many of these war record paintings were produced, they are not necessarily readily available for contemporary study. As Asato Ikeda, Aya Louisa McDonald, and Ming Tiampo write in the introduction to the book, *Art and War in Japan and Its Empire: 1931-1960*, “Artists who produced war art have been dogged by issues of culpability...a practice that has denied them serious art-historical evaluation. As a result, Japanese artists who made war art...have tended to downplay or conceal their wartime activities and have prohibited the exhibition and reproduction of that work.”²⁴ Because of this, there has been limited study of wartime art, and of the activities of artists during the war years.

²³ Akiyama Kunio in Asato Ikeda, Aya Louisa McDonald, and Ming Tiampo, eds. *Art and War in Japan and Its Empire: 1931-1960*, 15.

²⁴ Asato Ikeda, Aya Louisa McDonald, and Ming Tiampo, eds. *Art and War in Japan and Its Empire: 1931-1960*, 15.

Though the 1941 Mizue article and the subsequent enlistment of artists into the war effort seemed to contradict the beliefs of many modern artists, particularly the avant-garde, the only printed response came from artist Matsumoto Shunsuke. He submitted his article, which was carefully scrutinized and edited by government censors, shortly after Surrealist painter Fukuzawa Ichirō and art critic Takiguchi Shūzō's politically motivated arrests. In his response, he scrutinized the Mizue article, saying, "I regret to say that in the symposium titled 'National Defense State and the Fine Arts,' I could find nothing of value. It is wise to keep silent, but I do not believe keeping silent today is necessarily the correct thing to do." He wrote in defense of artistic freedom and individualism, and of abstract art, though he himself made figurative works.

Matsumoto began by quoting Suzuki's accusation "that the circles and triangles of modern art were merely foolish play, like the drawings of lunatics."²⁵ He responds by saying,

I often have to defend the meaning of abstract works. When it happens, I have no way to explain them other than to use the example of music, even though I am not really qualified because I have lost my hearing. It is possible that the nuances of color, line, or shape describe the movement of human feelings, as melody can stimulate all kinds of emotions. Wishing to convey a discreet and individual spirit through

²⁵ Mark H. Sandler. "The Living Artist: Matsumoto Shunsuke's Reply to the State." *Art Journal* 55, no. 3 (1996): 80.

pure form, artists use abstract painting to avoid the myriad unintended associations that viewers inevitably bring to representations of concrete things.²⁶

He also references Freud's idea of the psychological subconscious, saying, "People have held that it undergirds the conscious mind, conjuring up new expressive modes, such as Surrealism. Unlike the images produced by the mentally ill, which were random and unconscious acts of creativity, abstract and Surrealist works were calculated escapes from 'subject painting,' giving to Japan new and different visual impressions and, hence, new universal meaning."²⁷ He argued that abstract and Surrealist art was key to modernism, and that Japan would never be able to succeed in the world of the future without embracing modern art and artists' freedom. He went on to continue to write in opposition to totalitarianism and authoritarianism, and used his painting to convey his opposition to the war. While Matsumoto's views foreground a fundamental conflict between modernist individualism and the newly ascendant collectivism, this was not necessarily perceived as a contradiction by the government.

The government supported the continued creation of woodblock prints, considering the medium an important example of traditional Japanese culture, and integral to their goal of promoting nationalism and creating a homogenous Japanese

²⁶ Matsumoto Shunsuke in Mark H. Sandler. "The Living Artist: Matsumoto Shunsuke's Reply to the State." *Art Journal* 55, no. 3 (1996): 80.

²⁷ Matsumoto Shunsuke in Mark H. Sandler. "The Living Artist: Matsumoto Shunsuke's Reply to the State." *Art Journal* 55, no. 3 (1996): 80.

racial and cultural identity. As Kendall H. Brown writes in his article "Out of the Dark Valley: Japanese Woodblock Prints and War, 1937-1945", "Print art was touted as evidence of Japanese cultural uniqueness and superiority."²⁸ For Onchi and other *sōsaku hanga* artists, the medium that they had chosen to explore their artistic subjectivity and to express their individual feelings and beliefs had become a symbol of Japanese nationalism, and cultural and racial homogeneity. Despite this, many *shin hanga* and *sōsaku hanga* artists, particularly Onchi, seemed to show support for the government and its war effort, either through the creation of overtly nationalistic works, or through the sale of their art as a means to raise funds for the war.

The war years were not a dark period for Onchi or the *sōsaku hanga* movement as many scholars, including Helen Merritt, have claimed. In her 1990 book *Modern Japanese Woodblock Prints*, Merritt writes that the main purpose of the Japan Print Service Society, which was organized by woodblock prints artists in 1943, was the acquisition of materials.²⁹ In truth, the society was formed with much more complex goals in mind, and with its primary purpose being support of the war effort. As Kendall Brown states, "The goal of the Japanese Print Service Society, as stated in the February 1943 issue of *Etchingu*, was to stress the value of the woodblock print as a type of famous Japanese art which, as a multiple original, could be purchased by the masses at reasonable prices. As such the print could boost

²⁸ Kendall H. Brown. "Out of the Dark Valley: Japanese Woodblock Prints and War, 1937-1945." *Impressions*, no. 23 (2001): 64-85.

²⁹ Helen Merritt. *Modern Japanese Woodblock Prints: The Early Years*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990.

morale domestically, comfort soldiers fighting overseas, and help the citizens of Co-Prosperity Sphere countries better understand Japan so that they might trust its leadership.”³⁰ *Etchingu*, the official magazine of the Japanese Print Service Society identified several goals for its members in the February 1943 issue:

(1) Hold exhibitions to raise money for battleships; (2) make prints of battlefields for the bereaved families of soldiers who had died there; (3) make and present to officers and soldiers images of homeland scenery to decorate their quarters; (4) set up a movement to contribute a cabin on merchant marine ships; (5) comfort farmers, industrial workers and conscripted soldiers by presenting prints to them, holding exhibitions, and teaching them to make prints; (6) comfort Japanese overseas by making prints of their hometown scenery in concert with local cultural groups; (7) cooperate with the policy in each area of the Co-Prosperity Sphere by making prints with didactic content; (8) cultivate the creativity of ‘young citizens’ (schoolchildren) by teaching their instructors how to make prints; (9) encourage woodblock printing for such educational items as picture cards used by storytellers (*kamishibai*) and posters; and (10) establish the Japanese Print Research Center (*Nippon Hanga*

³⁰ Kendall H. Brown. "Out of the Dark Valley: Japanese Woodblock Prints and War, 1937-1945." *Impressions*, no. 23 (2001): 79.

Kenkyūjo) to preserve traditional print techniques by setting standards and training artisans.³¹

Besides holding exhibitions to raise money for the war, it is unclear how many of these specific goals were met by the society, or if any of the exhibitions raised money specifically for the purchase of battleships, as stated in goal 1. What is clear, however, is that goals of the Japanese Print Service Society were based in support of the war effort, not the acquisition of artistic materials.

In addition to supporting the war by selling prints, print artists also showed support for the war in other ways, including artistic military service, and the creation of prints of patriotic places and people, battle scenes, and scenes of the occupied territories. Many of the landscape prints created between 1937 and 1945, though seemingly innocuous at first glance, were in fact prints of patriotic places, and can be considered soft propaganda given the patriotic ideology that consecrated Japan as a divine country. *Shin hanga* artists created most of these types of landscapes, a good example being Tokuriki Tomikichirō (1902-2000). His war-era fifty-print series *Collected Prints of Sacred, Historic and Scenic Places (Seichi shiseki meishō hangashū)* of 1937-1941 depicts places associated with Japan's founding, Meiji history, imperial rule, samurai culture, and shrines. Through the creation of war prints, *shin hanga* artists also established a connection to their *ukiyo-e*

³¹ *Etchingu* reprint (Kyoto: Shiokawa shoten, 1991), vol. 4, 1160-61. In Kendall H. Brown. "Out of the Dark Valley: Japanese Woodblock Prints and War, 1937-1945." *Impressions*, no. 23 (2001): 79.

predecessors who had created war prints during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–5 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905.

One of the most overtly nationalistic works from Tokuriki's series is *Foundation Pillar of the Entire World under One Roof* (Miyazaki hakkō ichiu motohashira) (fig 8.), which depicts the Hakkō Ichiu Tower in Miyazaki City. *Hakkō ichiu*, meaning “all the world under one roof,” a term which began to be widely used in 1940, when Prime Minister Konoe proclaimed that the basic aim of Japan's national policy was “the establishment of world peace in conformity with the very spirit in which our nation was founded.”³² The first step, according to Prime Minister Konoe, would be the proclamation of a “new order in East Asia” (*tōa shin chitsujo*), later known as the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.” *Hakkō ichiu* was invoked to claim that peace would follow once all East Asian nations were under the Emperor's rule, and therefore violent force was justified against those who resisted. The government also declared 1940 the 2600th anniversary of the ascension of Emperor Jinmu, and 2600th anniversary of the founding of Japan.

The print depicts the tower in the left-hand side of the frame, flanked by the silhouettes of several trees. Because of the horizontal orientation, the tower's base and top are cropped, accentuating its height and implying that it may continue forever. In the top of the composition, a few stars are visible against a blue sky that

³² Edwards, Walter. "Forging Tradition for a Holy War: The Hakkō Ichiu Tower in Miyazaki and Japanese Wartime Ideology." *Journal of Japanese Studies* 29:2 (2003).

fades to orange at the bottom, suggesting that the sun, a symbol of Japan, has just begun to rise.

Tokuriki included an essay with each work in the series, and in the postscript to the essay that accompanied *Foundation Pillar of the Entire World under One Roof*, he wrote about how the tower's ideology informed his own larger project. He was also inspired by the a calligraphic inscription written by the chief priest of Meiji Shrine for the bound set of the print collection, which included the phrase *hakkō ichiu*. Tokuriki states "that his own devotion to these sites is intended to demonstrate to the people the dignity of the national polity," and that "although woodblock printing originated in China centuries ago, prints have now been uniquely modified in Japan, bringing in valuable foreign currency through their sale to Japanese living abroad and spreading art on the home front thanks to the fact that they can be mass-produced."³³ He believes that prints may soothe the spirits of the nation's citizens, and concludes by saying, "In the end, this is why I advocate prints."³⁴

In contrast to the number of patriotic landscape scenes created during the war, not many prints of battle scenes were made. Of those that were, most were created by *shin hanga* artists. Two examples include Kawase Hasui's *Charge (Totsugeki)* of 1937 (fig. 9), and Igawa Sengai's (1876-1961) *Thirty-six Brave Soldiers under Commanding Officer Yanagizawa of the Combat Engineers Forming a*

³³ Kendall H. Brown. "Out of the Dark Valley: Japanese Woodblock Prints and War, 1937-1945." *Impressions*, no. 23 (2001): 71.

³⁴ Tokuriki Tomikichirō in Kendall H. Brown, 71.

Human Pillar in the Creek, of 1938 (fig. 10). There was, however, one battle scene created by a *sōsaku hanga* artist, Hashimoto Okiie's (1899-1993) *Bombardment at Dawn* (*Akatsuki no hōgeki*) of 1942 (fig. 11). The print was created for the Japan Print Society (*Nihon Hanga Kyōkai*), which sponsored exhibitions of *sōsaku hanga*, and produced a yearly calendar. Okiie's print served as the calendar image for November 1942. The print depicts soldiers firing artillery in front of a mountainous background, as two planes fly overhead. He said of the print, "A chisel is the best way to express the awesome scene in chaos. You can't express these things with a brush. Recently I've come to believe that the chisel is the best tool to express intensity, complexity and power. I'd love to make more work like this in the future."³⁵ Though most other *sōsaku hanga* artists did not create war scenes, it seems that for Okiie, the physical and even violent act of carving the woodblock was a way for him to express the power and intensity of warfare.

In general, *sōsaku hanga* artists mainly participated by collecting funds for the war effort, showing their work in state-sponsored exhibitions, and traveling to the occupied territories. Despite the government's statements against abstract art, and promotion of nationalism that stood at odds with their stated goal of individual self-expression, *sōsaku hanga* artists were deeply involved in wartime collectivism, which required every Japanese citizen to actively support the war in whatever way they could. Onchi and the Japan Creative Print Association, of which he was the leader, participated particularly extensively in the war effort.

³⁵ Hashimoto Okiie in Kendall H. Brown, 74-75.

In 1938, the Association began a series of prints of the new “expanded empire”, which included Onchi’s print *East Gate in Taipei* (*Taipei tōmon*, 台北東門) (fig. 12). The print depicts a gate in bold red, set against the contrasting blue and green sky and plants. It has little in common visually with the abstract compositions that he became known for, making it quite striking when viewed in the breadth of his body of work. The print shows similarities and differences when compared to Tokuriki’s visualization of the empire, *Foundation Pillar of the Entire World under One Roof* (*Miyazaki hakkō ichiu motohashira*). Where Tokuriki has chosen to depict the tower in a horizontal composition, accentuating the building’s height as it reaches past the edges of the frame, Onchi depicts the gate in the upper half of a vertical composition. This leaves room for a more detailed depiction of the plants surrounding the gate, one of which takes up a significant portion of the center of the frame. Perhaps the foreign plants are another indication to viewers that this scene is located outside of the mainland. The colors of Tokuriki’s print establish the scene as taking place during sunrise, while Onchi’s scene suggests little about time of day. Onchi’s bright red gate with a sharp, pointed roof is a stark contrast to Tokuriki’s tower, which seems to rise naturally from the earth high to meet the sun high in the sky.

Sale of the print series of the new “expanded empire” was intended to raise funds for the association, and also as a way to demonstrate their patriotism from the home front. In light of the government’s position on avant-gardism, perhaps Onchi felt it necessary to create a more figurative work for inclusion in this particular catalog. To further underscore the patriotic goals of the catalog, its cover read “It

does not make a difference in our patriotic spirit that we attempt to change culture without daring to hold guns." This seems to be a reaffirmation that artists had a duty to serve their country, even if it was not directly in the front lines of battle.

The grouping of artists as a way to contribute to the war effort involved the formation and cooperation of several governmental bodies and associations, including the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (IRAA), the Cabinet Information Bureau, and its subgroups the Regulatory Association of Japanese Arts and Crafts and the Patriotic Association of Japanese Arts. The latter two groups were in charge of regulating art materials, and bolstering support for the war. One of the departments within the association was the Japan Print Service Society, of which Onchi was elected chairman. During the war years, Onchi continued to serve as chairman of the Japan Print Service Society, and participated in many government-sponsored exhibitions.

The Japan Print Service Society's inaugural ceremony took place on May 11, 1943, in the headquarters of the IRAA. In attendance were many *shin hanga*, etching, and early *sōsaku hanga* artists, with the *sōsaku hanga* artists making up the largest group. Other guests included the president and vice president of the IRAA, representatives from newspapers and publishing agencies, and representatives from the Ministry of Education, Cabinet Information Board, War Ministry, Naval Department, Soldier's Association and Greater East Asia Ministry.³⁶ Tokyo University professor Fujikake Shizuya (1881-1958) gave the inaugural address, in

³⁶ Kendall H. Brown. "Out of the Dark Valley: Japanese Woodblock Prints and War, 1937-1945." *Impressions*, no. 23 (2001): 23.

which he summarized woodblock printing's history in Japan, ending with his opinion that it was entering a new golden era in which print media "coincided with Japan's new place as the leader of Asia."³⁷ These sentiments were shared in the oath sworn by members of the society, an oath written by a group of artists, and revised by Takamura Kōtarō author of *Midori iro no taiyō* ("The Green Sun"). The oath states that,

The print is uniquely Japanese and represents the spirit, beauty, and justice of Japan...Prints and their makers are invaluable tools – 'the advanced guard of art' - in battles that will decide the Greater East Asia War. Prints inspire workers, farmers and soldiers, filling ships, planes, submarines and soldiers' knapsacks. Wherever they are taken, 'prints reproduce the scenery, light and spirit of the homeland in the minds of our compatriots.'

The oath ends with the final line: "We swear that we will sway the hearts of our countrymen with the beauty and spirit of the print, we encourage them, and together with them we resolve to 'fight on' (*uchiteshi yamamu*)."³⁸ The oath makes clear the nationalism and support for the government and the war that was at the

³⁷ *Etchingu* reprint (Kyoto: Shiokawa shoten, 1991), vol. 4, 1907. In Kendall H. Brown. "Out of the Dark Valley: Japanese Woodblock Prints and War, 1937-1945." *Impressions*, no. 23 (2001): 80.

³⁸ *Etchingu* reprint (Kyoto: Shiokawa shoten, 1991), vol. 4, 1908-9. In Kendall H. Brown, 80.

heart of the creation of the Japan Print Service Society, of which Onchi served as Chairman.

In addition to participating in organizations that supported the war effort, artists could further aid the government by traveling to the occupied territories as military service artists. The program sought to “demonstrate support for the military by famous citizens, to convey the idea of war not as destruction but as a positive adjunct of Japanese culture, and to illustrate the Japanese occupation of China, and later the countries of Southeast Asia, as peaceful.”³⁹

In 1939 Onchi was nominated by the Japan Print Association to be part of an official war art campaign to China, where he was assigned to take photographs. He traveled through Nanjing, Hankou, Xingzi, Shanghai, Yangzhou, Suzhou and other cities, taking photographs of tranquil city and country life. The photos were shown in an exhibition at the Isetan Department Store in Tokyo upon his return. It is unclear why Onchi was asked to take photographs, though it may be possible that he himself suggested it, as he had been developing a keen interest in photography, mainly through the creation of photograms, which he made by placing random objects on a paper, or on negatives, and exposing it to light.

His photographs of China (figs. 13-20) show landscapes and scenes of everyday life, and as Kuraishi Shino, Assistant Curator at the Yokohama Museum of Art writes, show that “Onchi possessed an intuitive power to detect the major

³⁹ Kendall H. Brown, "Out of the Dark Valley: Japanese Woodblock Prints and War, 1937-1945." *Impressions*, no. 23 (2001): 67.

elements of the composite forms in a landscape.”⁴⁰ The photographs are engaging, and depict scenes that would have looked particularly provincial to the modern Tokyoites viewing them, referencing colonial tropes that attempted to show China as a picturesque rural space benefitting from Japan’s peaceful occupation. During the occupation, many Japanese citizens were sent to China to take photographs that would be shown to the public back at home. The government established a weekly magazine, *Shashin shūhō*, which printed photos and stories about the war intended to inspire those on the home front. Many of these photos depicted citizens in the occupied territories, emphasizing their peaceful but provincial life under Japanese rule, and excluding any depictions of hardship. Sometimes Chinese and Japanese citizens were shown happily interacting with one another, as in one 1939 photo (fig. 21) of a Japanese woman in a kimono smiling alongside a Chinese woman, or another 1939 photo from *Shashin shūhō* (fig. 22) that shows a Chinese woman selling goods to two Japanese women in kimono.

In addition to the government-sponsored *Shashin shūhō*, many companies sponsored photography in the colonies, such as the North China Railway, which produced a magazine for Japanese citizens to view scenes of the places this new railway would travel to. Many of these photos also depict seemingly ordinary life, including a photo of a bookstore in Beijing (fig. 23) and an outdoor barber in Henan Province (fig. 24), both of 1939.

⁴⁰ Kuraishi Shino in *Onchi Kōshirō: A Poet of Colors and Forms*. Tōkyō: Yomiuri Shinbun, 1994, 313.

Onchi's photographs are further examples of these peaceful provincial scenes, and similarly served to show a highly stylized and selective view of occupied China to Japanese citizens. An aesthetic difference between Onchi's photos and many other photographers' images of China becomes clear, however, when considering his status as a woodblock print artist, and his interest in abstract art. In particular, the high contrast in Onchi's photos obscures the subjects' faces from view, and creates a planarity not dissimilar to his abstract prints. He has chosen to depict not only figures, but has also paid attention to architecture, seemingly favoring the curved forms of bridges, and sharp, diagonal lines of wooden beams. This creates a contrast of black and white circular, semi-circular, and pointed shapes, compositions that are quite similar to his print *Human Body* of 1924, and other abstract works.

In the early 1930s, many practitioners of photography in Japan began to change how they perceived its role in society. Photographer and editor Natori Yōnosuke (1910–1962) was one of the first to advocate for the functional use of photography and the establishment of photojournalism in Japan, and established strong ties to propaganda production. Natori was the one who translated the term “photojournalism” to *hōdō shashin*, which “marked a distinction from the more generic category of press photography, as it implied a more active and journalistic role for the photographer, whose work was seen as paralleling written copy but with the narrative constructed of images—in essence a photoessay.

Photojournalism was, therefore, a construction of multiple photographs (*kumi*

shashin), either a series of related photographs, a photcollage, or a photomontage.”⁴¹

It was generally accepted by the Japanese public that *hōdō shashin* depicted reality, making photographs excellent tools for propaganda. In truth, they were much more complex, as photography critic Ina Nobuo (1898-1978) wrote in 1935, “It has generally become common perception that what is expressed through the eye of the camera actually exists. Due to this attitude, ‘hōdō shashin,’ which made possible mass communication by being printed, is the greatest weapon for ideology formation.”⁴² The reality was that many *hōdō shashin* photographers did extensive shooting in order to produce a sense of “unmediated reality.” Additionally, many of them were affiliated with modernist photography associations, and were interested in the aesthetic value of photography in addition to its photojournalistic possibilities. This fostered what photography historian John Roberts has called the “dialectical permeation” or the “shared cultural space of the photographic document and the avant-garde.”⁴³

In her article “Touring Japan-as-Museum: NIPPON and Other Japanese Imperialist Travelogues”, Gennifer Weisenfeld writes about the ways in which photographers “used a host of sophisticated modernist visual techniques, including

⁴¹ Gennifer Weisenfeld. “Touring Japan-as-Museum: NIPPON and Other Japanese Imperialist Travelogues.” *Positions* 8:3 (2000): 751-52.

⁴² Ina Nobuo in Gennifer Weisenfeld. “Touring Japan-as-Museum: NIPPON and Other Japanese Imperialist Travelogues.” *Positions* 8:3 (2000): 752.

⁴³ John Roberts. *The Art of Interruption: Realism, Photography and the Everyday*. Manchester: St. Martins Press, 1999. 3.

an array of stunning photomontages” to present highly curated scenes of both Japan and the colonies to European and American viewers, as well as viewers in Japan. She cites Timothy Mitchell’s idea of “world-as-exhibition,” which was “not an exhibition of the world but the world organized and grasped as though it were an exhibition.”⁴⁴ Not only were Onchi’s photographs of China literally presented as an exhibition in the Isetan Department Store, they also occupied the dual “cultural space of the photographic document and the avant-garde,” photojournalism and art exhibition.

Having photographers and artists document the occupied territories was also a way for the Japanese government to cultivate cultural capital, and to encourage Japanese citizens to visit the colonies, particularly Manchuria. In her essay, “Fuchikami Hakuyō’s *Evening Sun: Manchuria, Memory, and the Aesthetic Abstraction of War*”, Kari Shepherdson-Scott discusses the pictorial magazine *Manshū Graph* (Pictorial Manchuria), and the functions of Japanese art photographers’ depictions of Manchuria. She writes of a special art photography issue of *Manshū Graph*, “Despite the group’s focus on the continent where the Japanese empire was engaged in an ongoing conflict with China, nowhere in this issue does a direct reference to military operations appear...Instead, the art photography featured in the January 1939 issue focuses on a kind of romantic, formalist aestheticism.”⁴⁵ Much like Onchi’s photographs, also of 1939, these photos

⁴⁴ Timothy Mitchell in Gennifer Weisenfeld. “Touring Japan-as-Museum: NIPPON and Other Japanese Imperialist Travelogues.” *Positions* 8:3 (2000): 747-8.

⁴⁵ Kari Shepherdson-Scott, *Art and War in Japan and Its Empire: 1931-1960*. Leiden: Brill, 2013, 275.

prioritized shadows, light, and textures, and depicted scenes of landscape, architecture, and people, omitting any images of soldiers or war.

There were many reasons for promoting this kind of aesthetic photography of Manchuria, including the maintenance of the illusion of peace, as previously mentioned. Shepherdson-Scott writes that, “This trope was common not only in the pages of *Manshū Graph*, but also in other propaganda during the war as well.”⁴⁶ She also references scholars Kawata Akihisa and Tano Yasunori, who have written that “images of Chinese women, children, and the elderly were important for negotiating the balance between the war and representing occupied Chinese subjects who were supposedly benefitting from a strong, Japanese military/masculine presence.”⁴⁷ These same themes can be seen in Onchi’s colonial photographs. By having established artists and writers travel to create these images of peace, Imperial organizations could also promote Manchuria as a beautiful, inspiring frontier destination that would be a culturally legitimate destination for Japanese tourism, and a site for artistic expression.

Onchi was one such artist, and he used his time in occupied China to experiment with the similarities between photography and printmaking, and demonstrate how both could be useful during wartime. His photographs further enabled him to explore both abstract and figurative compositions, as in his print *Circular Ripples* (fig. 25), based on a photo of woman washing clothes in Jiujiang (fig.

⁴⁶ Kari Shepherdson-Scott, *Art and War in Japan and Its Empire: 1931-1960*. Leiden: Brill, 2013, 283.

⁴⁷ Kawata Akihisa and Tano Yasunori in Kari Shepherdson-Scott, *Art and War in Japan and Its Empire: 1931-1960*. Leiden: Brill, 2013, 283.

26). The image of the woman by a river was common in scenes of the colonies, and in Onchi's photo she is shown in the very center of the frame, kneeling at the end of a simple wooden dock that protrudes from the bottom of the composition. Ripples extend from where she has dipped the clothing into the water, her back is turned to the viewer and her face is obscured. In the print, he has kept the figure of the woman in the center of the composition, with ripples spreading out around her. The colors are muted, much like the black and white of the original photograph, but the woman is shown wearing blue.

He made a second print of his time in China, *White Walls (Scene from Suzhou)* (fig. 27), of 1940. The print, done in mainly shades of white and dark blue like *Circular Ripples*, shows the view down a hallway into a room where the right side of a woman's back is just barely visible as she looks at a pattern on the rear wall. She is shown in a Chinese-style dress, or *qipao*. In her article *Imperial Desire and Female Subjectivity: Umehara Ryūzaburō's Kunyan Series*, Ikeda Shinobu discusses Japanese artists', particularly the painter Umehara Ryūzaburō's (1888-1986), depictions of "Chinese girls" in ethnic dress in the late 1930s to mid 1940s. She argues that, "Umehara's series exemplifies fears of and desires toward China, as imagined by the male intellectuals at the center of Japanese modernism."⁴⁸ It is important to note that both prints based on Onchi's time in China are images of Chinese women, and as such exist within the canon of Japanese depictions of the women of occupied China that Ikeda discusses in her article.

⁴⁸ Ikeda, Shinobu. "Imperial Desire and Female Subjectivity: Umehara Ryūzaburō's Kunyan Series." *Ars Orientalis* 47, no. 20181025 (2017). 240.

By depicting the women of occupied China, particularly in ethnic dress, Japanese artists sought both to “separate ‘China’ from The West in order to pull it closer to Japan,”⁴⁹ and to set up a power differential between the subject of the gaze, the Chinese woman, and the active gazer, the Japanese artist and audience. For the Japanese male viewer, the women depicted must have appeared both foreign and arousing, eliciting a desire for ownership and control that mirrored the Japanese government’s desire to own and control China. In both Yasui Sōtarō’s (1888-1955) 1934 *Portrait of Chin-Jung* (fig. 28) and Umehara Ryūzaburō’s 1942 *Chinese Girl with Tulip* (fig. 29), the subjects are shown in *qipao*, dresses that were considered both foreign and quite fashionable and modern when compared to the simple uniforms that Japanese women on the home front were suggested to wear. By not looking at the viewer, they exude both desirability and unattainability. The woman in Onchi’s *White Walls (Scene from Suzhou)* is also depicted in *qipao*, though she is shown with her back to the viewer, half obscured by the sharp, white wall behind her. Unlike Yasui and Umehara’s women, Onchi’s may not even be aware that she is being watched. Nevertheless, the lines of the hallway all converge at her figure in the left center of the composition, and she is clad in navy blue, contrasting with the stark white walls. These elements prompt the view to look at her, perhaps even to travel down the hall to her. By depicting the women of occupied China, Onchi joined many other male modern artists and members of the intellectual elite who had painted

⁴⁹ Ikeda, Shinobu. "Imperial Desire and Female Subjectivity: Umehara Ryūzaburō’s Kunyan Series." *Ars Orientalis* 47, no. 20181025 (2017). 244.

and written about the same subjects, another way of depicting Japanese dominance over and longing for China without depicting actual scenes of war.

CONCLUSION: *SŌSAKU HANGA* AND ITS CONTRADICTIONS

It is tempting to dismiss the war years as a dark period for *sōsaku hanga*, as artists' extensive participation and support for the war, and ambivalence toward the rampant nationalism that accompanied it seem to stand at odds with their interest in individualism, expressionism, and for Onchi in particular, artistic abstraction. However, Onchi spent those years creating many works, both figurative and abstract, solidifying himself and his movement as important members of Japanese society. Following the end of the war, *sōsaku hanga* continued to flourish, even as *shin hanga* sales declined. In particular, occupying American forces became *sōsaku hanga* artists' biggest patrons, drawn to the prints' combination of modern aesthetics and traditional Japanese materials.

Onchi's work during the war had a direct impact on his postwar success. During those years, he was able to explore the similarities between photography and print, and the role that both could serve in modern Japan. He also continued to experiment with abstraction and figuration, and his photographs of China provided him with an opportunity to understand how both could operate in a single composition. Using his photo of woman washing clothes in Jiujiang, he drew inspiration for *Circular Ripples*, in which he depicts a human figure in a flat, abstract space. He would go on to use similar techniques for much of his most successful postwar work. For example, we can see the blending of figuration and abstraction in his 1947 print *Impression of a Violinist* (fig. 30), which depicts the head and shoulders of a violin player against an abstract background of black, white, and grey curved lines and shapes. *Image No.6 Motherhood* (fig. 31), of 1950, similarly shows

the figure of an infant, curled up in the center of the composition, surrounded by abstract shapes of yellow, blue, and brown, a color palette very similar to what he used for both *East Gate in Taipei* and *Circular Ripples*. Through these works, we can see several of the visual techniques that he began to experiment with during the war carrying over to his postwar work.

Onchi's support of the war could have been due to sincere patriotism, fear of punishment, conformism, or opportunism. His participation did afford him access to materials that were scarce during the war years, as well as opportunities to travel, and to show his work in many exhibitions. Despite the government's disapproval of abstract art during the war years, Onchi seemed to have been allowed to continue creating work freely during that time, and his production did not stop or even slow. In August of 1945, Onchi's second son, Masao was killed at war, aged 23. Though the war took the life of his son, and the government denounced many of the artistic ideals that drove him, through participation, he was able to continue creating prints at a time when many artists were struggling to obtain materials and to follow their own artistic visions. The war years were not a dark period during his career, but a time when he and other *sōsaku hanga* artists continued to explore their craft, and to negotiate their artistic subjectivity and position within Japanese society.



Figure 1. Onchi Kōshirō, *Mother and Child*, 1917, woodblock print.



Figure 2. Kawase Hasui, *Zōjō-ji in Shiba*, 1925, woodblock print.



Figure 3. Onchi Kōshirō, *View from Surugadai*, 1931, woodblock print.



Figure 4. Onchi Kōshirō, *Self-portrait (Blouse)*, 1919, oil painting.



Figure 5. Onchi Kōshirō, *Human Body*, 1924, woodblock print.



Figure 6. Onchi Kōshirō, *Lyric: Thankful Tear for Merciful Affection*, 1915, woodblock print.

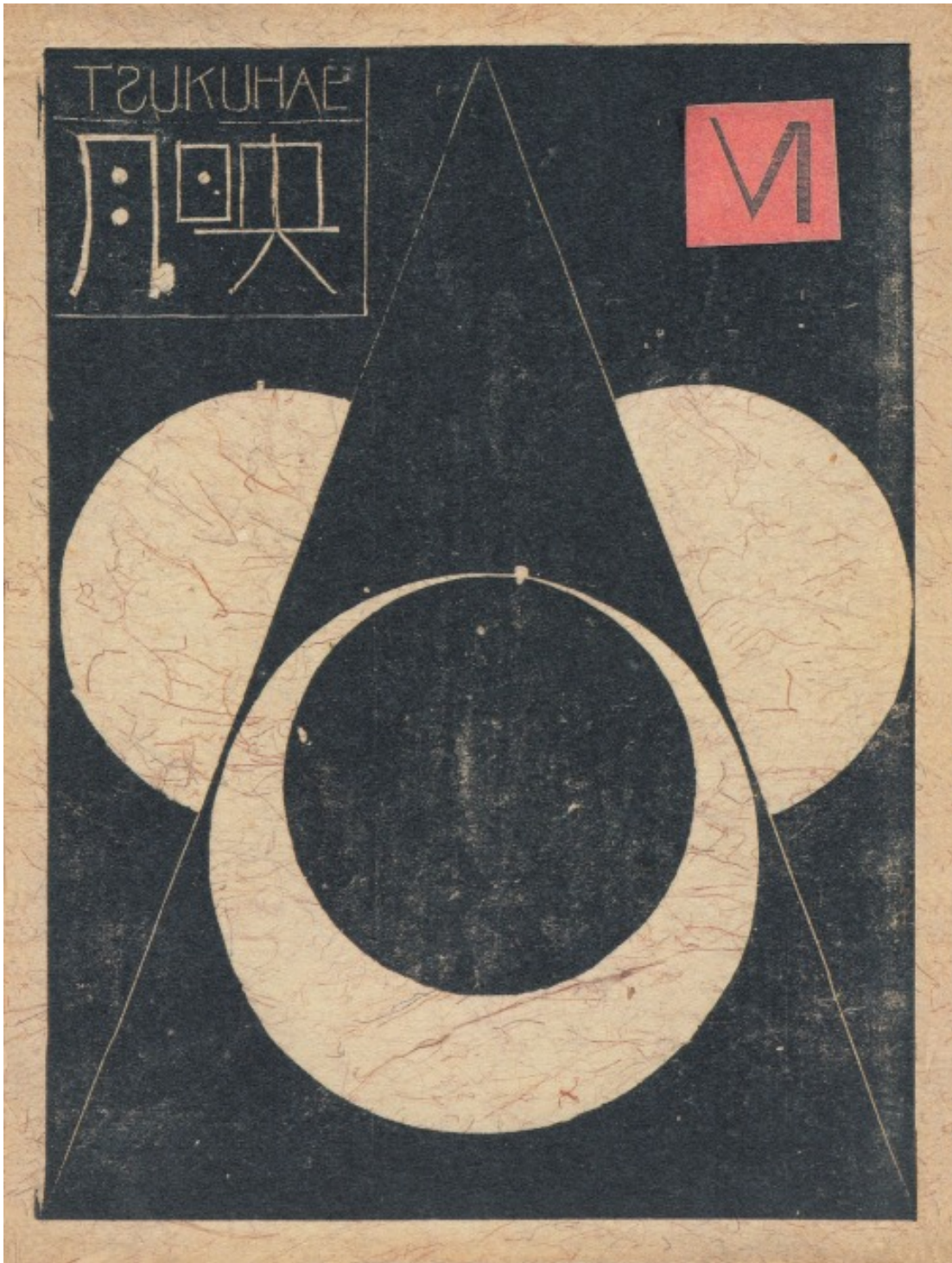


Figure 7. Onchi Kōshirō, cover for *Tsukuhae*, 1915, woodblock print.



Figure 8. Tokuriki Tomikichirō, *Foundation Pillar of the Entire World under One Roof*, 1937-1941, woodblock print.



Figure 9. Kawase Hasui, *Charge (Totsugeki)*, 1937, woodblock print.



Figure 10. Igawa Sengai, *Thirty-six Brave Soldiers under Commanding Officer Yanagizawa of the Combat Engineers Forming a Human Pillar in the Creek*, 1938, woodblock print.



Figure 11. Hashimoto Okiie, *Bombardment at Dawn* (*Akatsuki no hōgeki*), 1942, woodblock print.

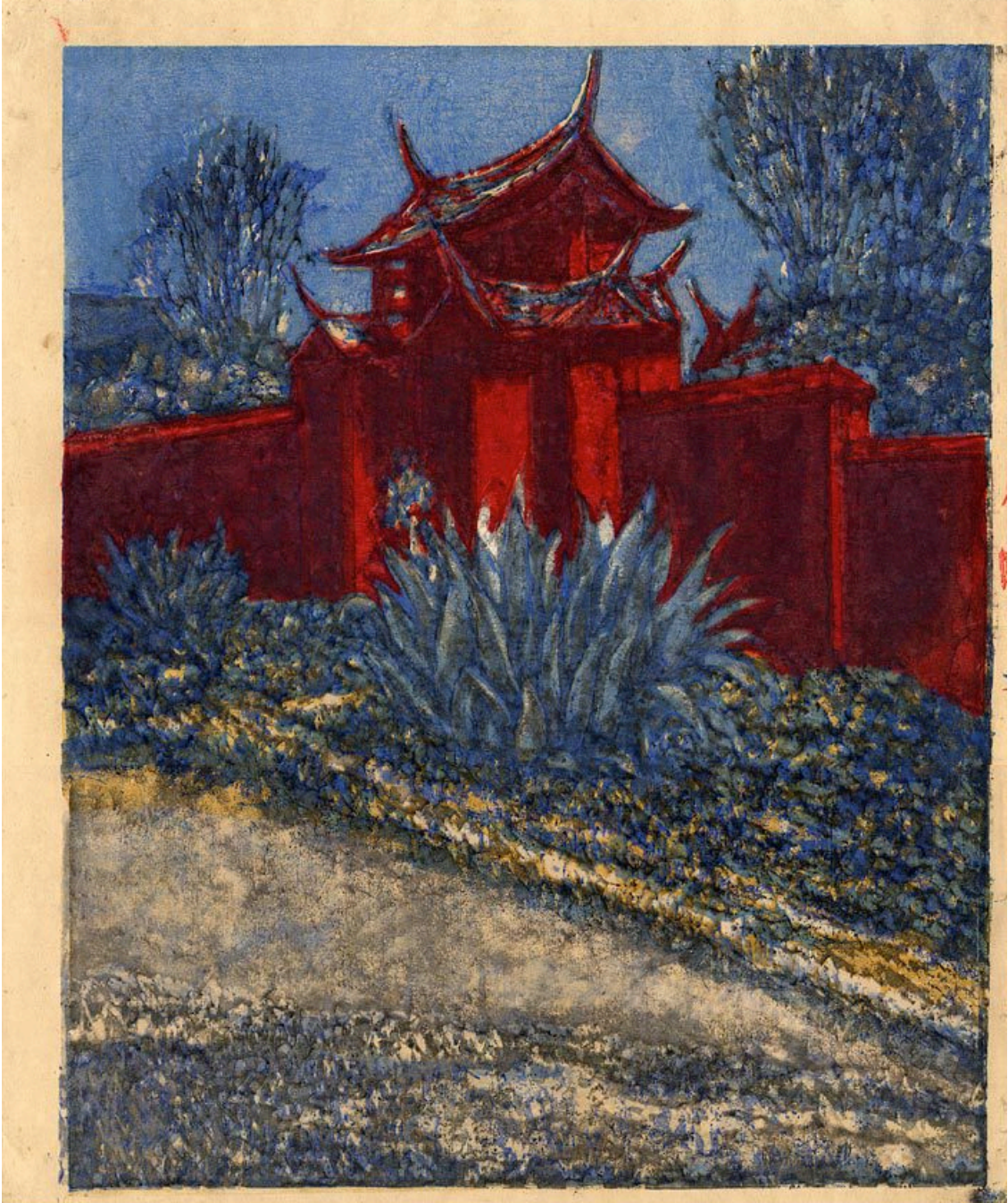
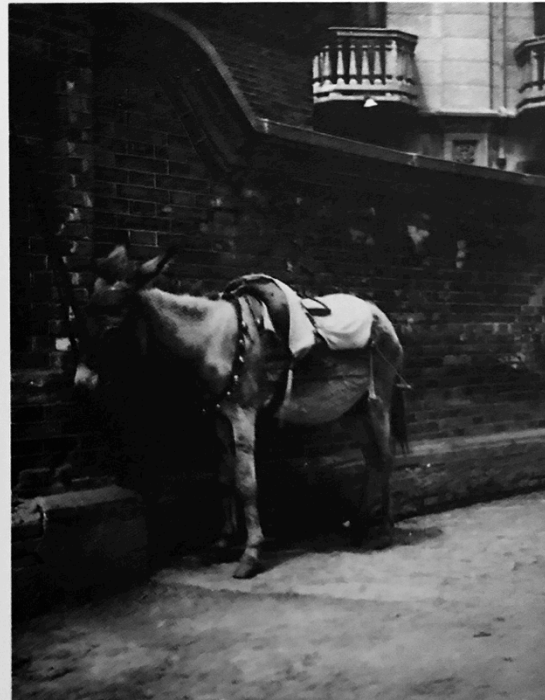


Figure 12. Onchi Kōshirō, *East Gate in Taipei*, 1939, woodblock print.



Figures 13-16. Onchi Kōshirō, *China*, 1939, photographs.



Figures 17-20. Onchi Kōshirō, *China*, 1939, photographs.



Figure 21. From the *North China Railway Archive*, 1939, photograph.



Figure 22. From *Shashin Shūhō* 82, September 30, 1939.



Figures 23-24. From the *North China Railway Archive*, 1939, photographs.



Figure 25. Onchi Kōshirō, *Circular Ripples (Empa)*, 1939, woodblock print.



Figure 26. Onchi Kōshirō, *Jiujiang, China*, 1939, photograph.

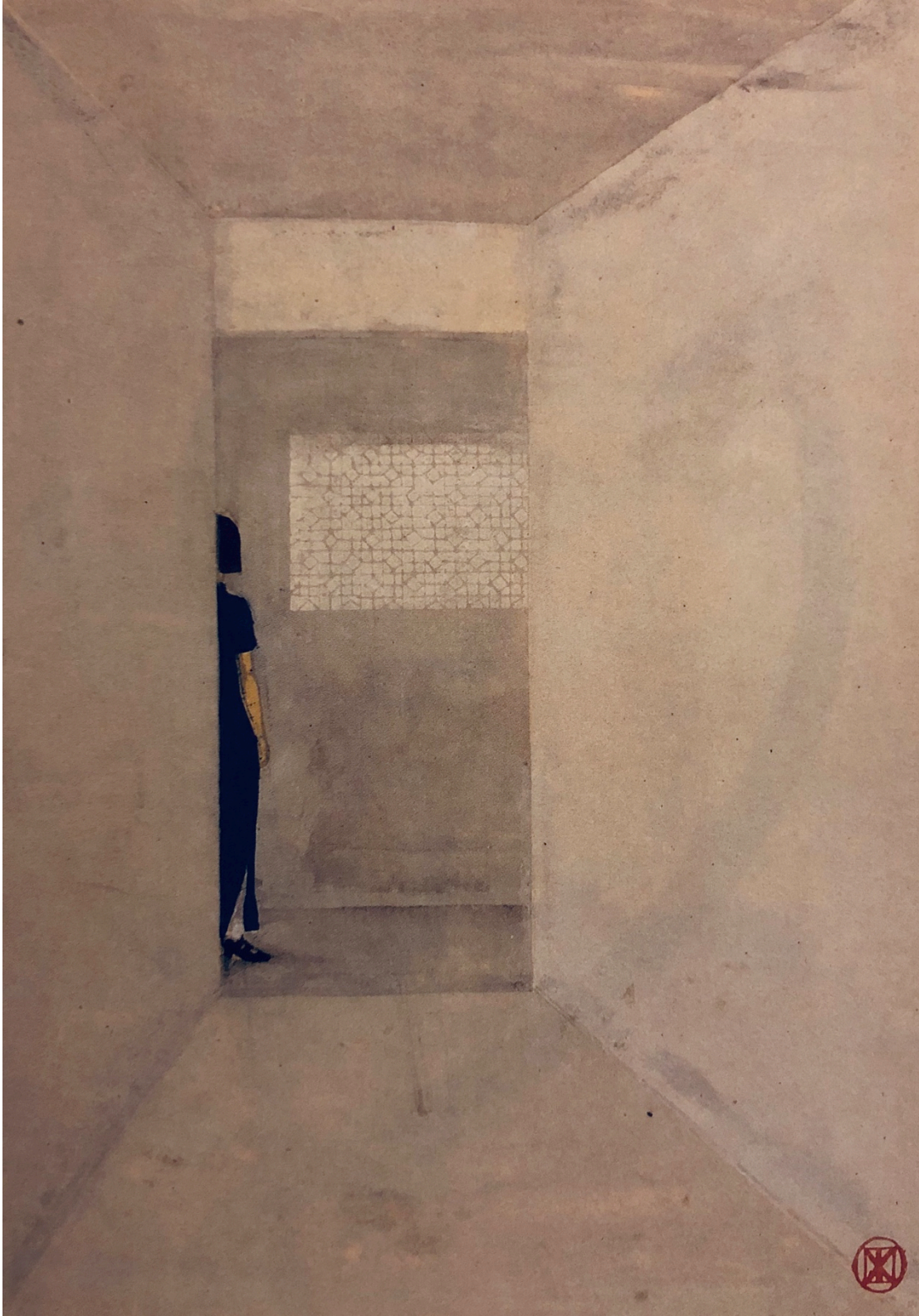


Figure 27. Onchi Kōshirō, *White Walls (Scene from Suzhou)*, 1940, woodblock print.



Figure 28. Yasui Sōtarō, *Portrait of Chin-Jung (Kin'yō)*, 1934, oil on canvas.



Figure 29. Umehara Ryūzaburō, *Chinese Girl with Tulip (Kunyan to chūrippu)*, 1942, oil and mineral pigment.



Figure 30. Ochi Kōshirō, *Impression of a Violinist*, 1947, woodblock print.



Figure 31. Ochi Kōshirō, *Image No.6 Motherhood*, 1950, woodblock print.

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