Tenshin, Okakura ( 岡倉天心) (1863- 1913)

Eve Loh Kazuhara, Singapore National University

Okakura Tenshin, also known as Okakura Kakuzô, was a Japanese scholar and writer whose major works include *The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan* (1903), *The Awakening of Japan* (1904)*,* and *The Book of* Tea (1906). Tenshin studied at the Tokyo Imperial University (now known as the University of Tokyo) where he graduated and wrote his thesis titled *On Art* in 1880.

In his early career as a government official, Tenshin was instrumental to the re-organisation of art education policies. Together with Ernest Fenollosa (1853 – 1908) who taught Philosophy at the Imperial University, they championed a revivalist movement of traditional Japanese arts in the face of intense Westernisation. Their appointments as the leading founders of the Tokyo School of Fine Arts (1887), as well as Tenshin’s role as curator and director of the Tokyo Imperial Museum lent much support to their cause. Initially, the curriculum at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts was based exclusively on traditional Japanese arts but subsequently incorporated Western and Chinese painting divisions in 1896. When Fenollosa returned to the United States, Tenshin took over and continued directorship of the school until his resignation both from the school and the museum in 1898. When he left, he set up the Japan Art Institute (日本美術院Nihon Bijutsuin) and brought along notable artists like Hashimoto Gahô　（橋本雅邦）, Yokoyama Taikan　（横山大観）, Hishida Shunso　（菱田春草）, and Shimomura Kanzan　（下村観山）. At the Japan Art Institute, Tenshin encouraged Nihonga artists to experiment, synthesising Western aesthetics with traditional styles of Japanese art.

For some, Tenshin’s activities and philosophy were viewed as ultra-nationalistic, particularly with his idea of “Asia is One” (from *Ideals of the East*) and his rallying efforts to call for a Pan-Asian form of nationalism, after his time in India in 1902. Between 1904 and 1913, Tenshin took up post as advisor of the Oriental department at Boston Museum of Fine Arts and spent the remaining years of his life in Japan and the United States until his death in 1913.

Tenshin is known for many accomplishments– as a writer, as the founder of the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, as a curator and a historian who attempted to write the history of Japanese art. However, he is most widely regarded as the ‘the father of modern Japanese art’ for having saved Japanese art at a time when Western art influences were thought to be undermining its existence.

Tenshin left behind a legacy of a modern Japanese art movement (known as Nihonga) that would continue to evolve through the years. The Japan Art Institute, which Tenshin founded, is still active today and continues with its activities and annual exhibitions known as the *Inten*.

(452 words)

**References and Further Reading**

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**List of Works**

*The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan* (1903)

*The Awakening of Japan* (1904)

*The Book of* Tea (1906)