

COMPLETION REPORT

Designing Asia: An investigation into "Zokei" activities in interwar Japan and Colonial Taiwan

I-Fan Chen
Ph. D. Candidate
Department of Visual Arts
University of California, San Diego, USA

During the research period, I was affiliation with Waseda University and reading archival documents I needed from different institutions listed in below

*National Diet Library

*Archival library in National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Tokyo

*Art Library of Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo

*University Libraries at Waseda University, Tokyo University, Musashino Art University, Tokyo University of the Arts, and Tokyo Gakugei University (Special Collection of Nishimura Bunko)

The project investigates the historical contexts of a particular Japanese term “Zōkei” in visual arts during pre-WWII Shōwa period. Nowadays, “Zōkei” is primarily associated with design-related fields and is offered as basic design curriculum in major art and design colleges in Japan, such as Tokyo Zokei University, Musashino Art University, and Kyoto University of Art and Design. However, the versatile meaning of “Zōkei” during the interwar period as a complicated imperial discourse was left out and eschewed by another term Dezain (デザイン) that reflects the global booming of postwar industrial and product design under U. S. influence. Preliminary research have shown that Japanese Dezain was largely informed by a series of U. S. - Japan cooperated design exhibitions, including the 1957 exhibition “Exhibition of 20th century Design in Europe and America” in Tokyo and the newly founded “Good Design Award” in Japan of the same year. While Dezain has become the commonly accepted term equivalent to English Design in the postwar era, it veers away from some fundamental implications of Zōkei during interwar period.

This project targets a swift period in late 1930s when “Zōkei” was part of the cultural policy in the Shōwa Research Association and was carried out as the Association of Kōa (Greater Asia) Zōkei Culture in 1941. Between 1938 and 1942 Zōkei activities were seen in mainland Japan, colonial Taiwan and Japan-occupied Shanghai, which shows the imperialistic flavor of the term but also reveals the Japanese endeavor in curating a new term to validate different aesthetic traditions in Asian arts and craftworks. Activities of Zōkei Culture imparted concepts of Japanese Mingei and Sangyō Kōgei (Industrial Art) to its own practices that reflected upon a wider historical background of Japanese Asianism during the wartime. All these unique historical contexts of Zōkei make the term difficult to be translated into other languages, and it differs from the current understanding of Zōkei as modern design.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

Chen, Ifan. "Curating National Life in wartime Japan," oral presentation in the panel "Representing a New Life: Visual Images and Cultural Reform in East Asia" at 2020 annual conference AAS-in-Asia, Kobe, Japan. August 31- September 2, 2020.

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)