



Revitalization and Innovation in the Light of History: Analyzing the Root Causes of the Japanese Nanga Crisis and Proposing Solutions

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Abstract. This study investigates the historical challenges and key transformations in Japanese Nanga, identifying critical factors behind its crises such as artistic identity ambiguity, diplomatic influences, and superficial trends in later works. Through an examination of historical episodes, it highlights innovative responses that emerged during these crises and proposes contemporary strategies to mitigate current challenges. These include enhancing artist collaboration, deepening artistic depth and spiritual focus, and promoting global cultural exchange. The research contributes new theoretical insights for the sustainable development of Japanese Nanga and offers applicable solutions for similar issues in the contemporary art scene.

Keywords: Japanese Nanga, Nanga, Nanga Crisis.

1 Introduction

Japanese Nanga, also known as Japanese literati painting, is deeply rooted in the traditions of Chinese literati painting and evolved significantly during Japan's Edo period (1603-1868). Various interpretations exist regarding the definition of Japanese Nanga; Xiao Qiongrui suggests it might be a misinterpretation of the Chinese Southern School painters and their styles, while Umezawa Seichi argues that Nanga actually stems from the artistic traditions of Tang dynasty's Wang Wei^[1]. Despite differing explanations, there is a consensus within the academic community that Chinese painting significantly influenced the formation and development of Japanese Nanga. Despite being a treasured artifact that showcases historical and cultural exchanges between China and Japan, Japanese Nanga faces unprecedented challenges today. This genre includes works by Chinese artists created in Japan and by Japanese native artists emulating the Chinese style, which should be highly valued and preserved by both nations. Unfortunately, the protection efforts for these cultural artifacts have been insufficient. The Japanese government's measures are inadequate, leading to widespread circulation in the market. Additionally, promotional efforts for Japanese Nanga in China are lacking, resulting in a cool reception in the Chinese market, depressing the prices of these works and sometimes leading to their remaining unsold at auctions. Whether viewed as commodities or

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historical artifacts, modern Japanese Nanga does not receive the attention and respect it deserves.

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in Japanese Nanga within the context of global art history. Alexandra Munroe's work, "The Art of Postwar Japan: Screaming Against the Sky," explores how traditional forms like Nanga influenced modern artistic practices in Japan (Munroe, 2011)^[3]. Additionally, several exhibitions and studies in Europe and America have further examined the significance of Japanese Nanga. Notable exhibitions such as "Nanga Painting from the Feinberg Collection" at Harvard University and "Hinges: Sakaki Hyakusen and the Birth of Nanga Painting" at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive emphasize the profound influence of Chinese literati traditions on Japanese Nanga (Harvard East Asian Art). These scholarly activities underscore the ongoing interest and recognition of Nanga's role in cross-cultural exchanges. These studies highlight the enduring significance of Nanga in both historical and modern contexts, emphasizing its role in fostering international cultural exchange and dialogue.

Furthermore, scholars from China and Japan have conducted in-depth research on Japanese Nanga. Sun Guoxi and Zhang Yaoqin, in their paper "The Evolution of Literati Painting in China and Japan," thoroughly discuss the historical transformations of Nanga in both countries (Sun & Zhang, 2019)^[4]. Du Yuxing, in her doctoral dissertation "The Influence of Ming and Qing Dynasty Flower and Bird Paintings on Edo Period Japanese Nanga," analyzes how the flower and bird paintings from China's Ming and Qing dynasties influenced the development of Japanese Nanga (Du, 2019)^[5]. Additional significant contributions include Yang Ruijie's study on the exotic appeal of Japan's Nampin school during the Edo period in "The Exotic Appeal of the Edo Period: A Study of Japan's Nampin School" (Yang, 2023)^[6], and Seiei Taki's comprehensive analysis in *An Overview of Literati Painting* (Taki, 2020)^[7], which is part of the translated series on Japanese-Chinese painting research published by the Shanghai Painting and Calligraphy Publishing House.

These studies and exhibitions not only enrich our understanding of Japanese Nanga but also provide new perspectives on its application in contemporary art practice. By synthesizing these research findings, we can better appreciate the significance of Nanga in both historical and modern contexts, as well as its unique role in promoting cultural exchange between China and Japan.

2 Historical Innovations and Turning Points in Japanese Nanga

This crisis in Japanese Nanga is not caused by a single factor but can be attributed to several deep-rooted causes. Firstly, the issue of belonging significantly highlights the complexity of its identity. As an art form heavily influenced by Chinese literati painting, Nanga initially demonstrated learning and imitation of Chinese literati artworks. However, through the innovations and developments by artists such as Yosa Buson and Ike no Taiga, Nanga gradually achieved localization, fulfilling the spiritual pursuits of 'wabi-sabi,' a traditional Japanese aesthetic^[2]. From a Chinese perspective, Nanga has become an integral part of Japanese culture, distinctly different from China's own

Southern School, reflecting China's recognition and respect. Yet, Japan's attitude towards Nanga shows complexity. Particularly in 1885, Yukichi Fukuzawa's "An Argument for Leaving Asia and Entering Europe" suggested that Japan needed to establish its own cultural subjectivity, advocating the creation of a native culture and art imbued with the "Japanese spirit^[2]." This led to vibrant discussions on the "Japanese spirit" and "national studies" within Japan, giving rise to a nativist ideology. Against this cultural backdrop, Nanga encountered unprecedented marginalization. Okakura Tenshin even considered Nanga as an "alien" presence in his "History of Japanese Art," proposing its ideological removal^[10]. These views were not uncommon in the Japanese academic community at the time, leading to significant neglect of Nanga in exhibitions and art education. The divergence in identity recognition of Nanga between China and Japan, along with the dispute over its value within Japan, jointly forged an awkward position for Nanga in the art world. The lingering impact of these ideologies has become one of the significant reasons for the decline of modern Nanga.

Additionally, one of the major crises facing modern Japanese Nanga stems from the ambiguity of its definition. Although the academic community has meticulously defined Japanese Nanga, substantial debate still exists regarding its precise definition. Diverse opinions on what constitutes Nanga persist: some scholars argue that only works by renowned Nanga artists documented in historical texts qualify as true Nanga; others believe that only works by artists affiliated with the Japanese Nanga school should be considered; some extend this to any Japanese painting with Chinese stylistic influences or works by Chinese artists created in Japan; and there are even views that any painting with Chinese elements since the Edo period should be categorized as Nanga. However, the art market generally treats Japanese Nanga as a generalized category, lacking efforts to precisely delineate and sub-categorize, which leads to an over-extension of its scope beyond academic definitions. This conceptual expansion inevitably results in a widespread undervaluation of the artworks. Furthermore, inconsistencies in definitions between the academic community and the art market, as well as within the art market itself, intensify the confused market image of Japanese Nanga. These factors collectively impact the recognition and valuation of Nanga as both a research subject and a cultural heritage, affecting the degree of attention and respect it receives.

Political factors also play a significant role in the crisis facing Japanese Nanga. Its development and evolution are deeply intertwined with the political and cultural interactions between China and Japan. Historical political tensions, especially during periods like the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War, have directly impacted the development and acceptance of Japanese Nanga. These periods witnessed significant anti-Chinese sentiment in Japan, affecting the public's perception and the valuation of Nanga as both an art form and a cultural heritage, leading to its marginalization.

Addressing the crisis facing Japanese Nanga requires a thorough review and study of its historical reforms and innovations. In the 1870s, Japanese Nanga (Japanese literati painting) faced a significant existential crisis. Following the arrival of Commodore Perry's "Black Ships" in 1854 and the signing of the Kanagawa Treaty, Western culture began to flow into Japan. Confronted with the powerful Western nations and the declining Qing dynasty, Japanese society absorbed Western culture extensively. This

period saw a stark contrast between Western civilization, which emphasized theoretical systems and military economy, and Eastern civilization, which valued natural spirit. After initially embracing wholesale Westernization, Japan began to revive its national essence. However, within the Japanese art revival movement, Nanga was excluded as it was seen as an alien element.

In 1883, the first Japanese art exhibition in Paris featured works from the mainstream Kano, Shijo, and Tosa schools, but Nanga was not included. By 1884, Nanga was also overlooked in the "Painting Appreciation Association Regulations" and the curriculum of the Tokyo School of Fine Arts in 1887. In response to this crisis, Nanga artists sought to rescue the art form by forming groups, expanding artistic activities, holding exhibitions, and leveraging the popularity of naturalism to elevate the value of Nanga. In 1897, artists such as Matsubayashi Keigetsu and Fuchigami Tetsuzai established the Nanga Painting Association and the Japanese Nanga Association, respectively. Iio Yukiko noted in "A Study of Modern Nanga" that the rise of naturalism provided an opportunity to reevaluate traditional Nanga^[9]. In 1917, Taguchi Kotei introduced the concept of "new Nanga" in "The Opportunity for New Nanga," emphasizing that true Nanga is created by young artists who have undergone proper Nanga education and awakened masters.

As time progressed, Japanese Nanga continued to develop under the influence of Western art. In 1912, Kinoshita's "Non-Naturalistic Trends in Western Painting" introduced various modern Western art styles, such as Expressionism, Cubism, and pure abstractionism. These styles brought new opportunities for Nanga. The non-representational nature of Nanga's creative characteristics aligned with the non-representational trends in modern Western art, promoting the revival of Nanga and the development of new Nanga^[8].

During this period, the roles of Nanga artists and theorists became more defined, leading to a more professional approach to the study and creation of Nanga. Critics like Sekisetsu Hashimoto significantly contributed to the understanding and appreciation of Nanga by analyzing its history, techniques, signatures, and subjects. His works, such as "The Path to Nanga," emphasized that Nanga is not realism or impressionism but expressionism, where individuals use objects to express their inner selves^[8]. His evaluations and reviews, including those in "Uragami Daid," helped reevaluate the value of Nanga masters like Taiga and Buson.

Through the concerted efforts of various Nanga associations and theorists, Japanese Nanga eventually overcame its endangered state. Fukuzawa, Yukichi's "History of Japanese Nanga" reflects these efforts, advocating for the abandonment of narrow nationalism, preserving, and expanding the value of Nanga. He asserted that "Nanga is a stronghold of art," reviving its vitality and vigor after nearly half a century of decline^[10].

The crisis of Japanese Nanga stemmed from multiple factors, and its revival required diverse efforts. The revitalization of Japanese Nanga necessitates both time and the dedicated efforts of professionals. Traditional culture must adapt to the times, ensuring its continued prosperity in the art world.

By analyzing and summarizing the historical crises and responses faced by Japanese Nanga, it becomes evident that maintaining and developing traditional culture requires

seizing contemporary opportunities, ensuring cultural heritage remains relevant and thriving in the modern artistic landscape.

3 Conclusion

In the context of accelerating globalization and the digital age, which fosters unprecedented cultural exchanges, Japanese Nanga, a shared cultural heritage of Japan and China, plays a crucial role in promoting intercultural dialogue and strengthening people-to-people connections between these nations. However, as extensively discussed in this paper, Japanese Nanga faces numerous challenges, including issues of cultural belonging, definitional ambiguities, and complex political influences. Addressing these challenges necessitates adopting strategic measures to rejuvenate and redefine Japanese Nanga in a contemporary context.

Firstly, leveraging current global trends to enhance cultural awareness and the inheritance of Nanga is essential. Modern media platforms have the potential to elevate public appreciation and understanding of Nanga. Just as Nanga was reinvigorated through movements like naturalism and expressionism, today's cross-cultural interests and modern media capabilities can be harnessed to raise awareness and appreciation of Nanga.

Secondly, collaboration between academics and artists is crucial. This collaboration should be supported by scholarly research to innovate traditional techniques and align them with contemporary aesthetics. Articulating the significant value and position of Japanese Nanga within the arts through academic research is necessary, while also encouraging artists to adopt and innovate traditional techniques to resonate with modern sensibilities.

Thirdly, policy support is vital for establishing a comprehensive system for the protection and development of Nanga. Both Japan and China should enhance their policies to safeguard these art forms, facilitating their preservation and appreciation both domestically and internationally. Adequate policy measures are essential to ensure that Nanga's artistic and cultural value is recognized and preserved.

Finally, integrating modern art elements and expanding Nanga's reach through international exchanges can propel it onto the global stage. By adapting Nanga with contemporary art elements and fostering international art collaborations, Japanese Nanga can serve as a cultural bridge connecting diverse cultures and audiences.

In summary, this paper outlines a series of actionable recommendations for revitalizing and developing Japanese Nanga by combining historical insights with strategies aligned with current global cultural trends. These recommendations emphasize a holistic approach that integrates cultural sensitivity with innovative practices, ensuring that Japanese Nanga remains a vibrant and respected facet of global cultural heritage. In an era marked by globalization and cultural diversity, the value of Japanese Nanga transcends its artistic merit, playing a crucial role in international cultural exchanges and mutual understanding. Thus, revitalizing Japanese Nanga is not only the responsibility of artists and cultural workers but also a collective mission for all who value cultural diversity and strive to foster international goodwill.

By analyzing and summarizing the historical crises and responses faced by Japanese Nanga, it becomes clear that maintaining and developing traditional culture requires seizing contemporary opportunities, ensuring that cultural heritage remains relevant and thriving in the modern artistic lands.

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