



Western Influence on Japanese Art: The Akita Ranga Art School and Foreign Books

Hiroko Johnson

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The Akita Ranga art school is a by-product of "rangaku," 'Dutch learning', an important intellectual movement in eighteenth-century Japan. Akita Ranga artists, highly influenced by illustrations in Western books, created a new direction in Japanese art by using Western techniques such as chiaroscuro (shading) and perspective. Odano Naotake (1750-80), a leading Akita Ranga artist, illustrated "Kaitai shinsho," Japan's first anatomy book. Dr. Johnson first analyses how Naotake applied new techniques to traditional Japanese art and created a quasi-Western style of painting. Secondly, she focuses on Lord Satake Shozan (1748-85), who wrote Japan's first art theory and criticism on Western art and whose complete text is translated and incorporated in this book. Shozan also based his three sketchbooks on foreign books, especially the "Schouwtoneel der Natuur" by Noel A. Pluche, and wrote an encyclopaedia of scientific lore. By focusing on the influence of illustrations in foreign books, Johnson brings a new perspective to Japanese art history.

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