

## The “Pictorial Visibility” of Writing: A Latent Connection between Ernest Fenollosa’s *Epochs* and *The Chinese Written Character*

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### Introduction

In the history of modern Japan, Ernest Francisco FENOLLOSA (1853-1908) is a rather well-known figure for his contributions to the revival of the Japanese traditional arts during the Meiji period. He lived in Japan for 12 years, working there first as a university professor and later as an arts policy advisor to the central government. Fenollosa returned to the United States in 1890 and became a curator at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. He resigned from that position in 1896 due to a divorce scandal and his subsequent confrontation with the Museum’s board of trustees. Fenollosa visited Japan three more times between 1896 and 1901. After his last brief visit there in 1901, he traveled around the United States and gave numerous public lectures which functioned as a major source of his earnings.

In addition to many translations of Chinese poetry and Japanese Nō dramas, Fenollosa wrote a considerable number of scripts for his public lectures during his later years. These scripts consisted mainly of two types. One was a set of scripts on the history of East Asian art. After his death they were edited by his wife Mary McNeil Fenollosa and published in 1912 as *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*. The other remaining scripts were heavily edited by Ezra Pound and published in 1919 as *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*.<sup>1</sup>

According to Mary Fenollosa, the draft of *Epochs* was framed in the summer of 1906.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the literary scholar Haun Saussy estimates that a prototype script of *The Chinese Written Character* (“The Chinese Written Language as a Medium for Poetry”) was also completed in 1906.<sup>3</sup> *Epochs* was a history; *The Chinese Written Character* a theory of new poetics. Interestingly, Fenollosa was almost simultaneously working on two separate writings whose arguments would be conceptually different (at least on the surface) from each other.

While *Epochs* and *The Chinese Written Character* are generally regarded as Fenollosa’s

major works, these two books do not receive much appreciation by historians or linguists. *Epochs* is certainly a pioneer work in the field of East Asian art history, but today most historians simply dismiss it as an outdated study.<sup>4</sup> In literary circles, *The Chinese Written Character* is perhaps a better known book than *Epochs*. In *The Chinese Written Character*, Fenollosa explores the full potential of the written Chinese as an appropriate ideographic medium for poetry. Fenollosa's unique interpretation in the book has significantly influenced not a few of literary scholars and poets of later generations. Seen from the viewpoint of professional linguists, however, *The Chinese Written Character* is nothing but a layperson's distorted conception. In fact, a famous Sinolinguist and Sinologist George A. Kennedy has once criticized the book harshly, calling it "a small mass of confusion."<sup>5</sup>

In *Epochs*, Fenollosa tried to write what he called "real history," whereby he meant his particular style of narration through which he could deliver to the reader the original vividness of historical facts and scenes. The language he used for his history writing was English. (He was actually not proficient enough to write in any other language than English as his native tongue.) Notably, English was one of what he regarded as western "phonetic" languages. In *The Chinese Written Character*, Fenollosa asserted that they were inferior to the written Chinese in terms of representing the "processes of nature"<sup>6</sup> – the primal unity of things and their movements in the actual world:

If we attempt to follow it in English, we must use words highly charged, words whose vital suggestion shall interplay as nature interplays. Sentences must be like the mingling of the fringes of feathered banners, or as the colors of many flowers blended into the single sheen of a meadow. (*CWC*, 59)

While he declared that English was an insufficient verbal medium for "variety and richness of expression,"<sup>7</sup> the fact still remained that he used English for his historical expression. My hypothesis is that Fenollosa was deeply conscious of this contradiction. In trying to alleviate (if not resolve) it, he presumably derived the most significant inspiration from his ideographic interpretation of the written Chinese: The "pictorial visibility" (*CWC*, 55) of writing should be achieved not only in poetry in general but also in his own history writing.

If this idea kept attracting Fenollosa, how did he try to act it out in *Epochs*? In the following part of this paper, I examine and verify my hypothesis with a focus on Fenollosa's efforts to explore the potential of his writing as well as the limitations that he acknowledged in such efforts.

## A History of Unique Individuals and a Universal History

Fenollosa wrote at the beginning of *Epochs*: “The purpose of this book is to contribute first-hand material toward a real history of East Asiatic Art.”<sup>8</sup> Despite the clear-cut tone of this statement, the meaning of what he called a real history was at least twofold.

On one hand, Fenollosa considered that the nucleus of his real history should lie in human creativity. He declared in *Epochs*: “This book conceives of the art of each epoch as a peculiar beauty of line, spacing, and color which could have been produced at no other time.” According to him, previous studies of Oriental art had usually focused on mere “technique of industries” such as “‘ceramics,’ ‘textiles,’ ‘metal work,’ ‘lacquer,’ ‘sword guards,’ etc., etc.,” thus incorrectly “producing a false classification by materials instead of by creative period.” Meanwhile, Fenollosa’s real art history was a record of unique artists whose works represented their power to “create the supreme types of imaginative beauty.” “How utterly then must Art History become a record of the causes,” he asserted, “that have produced unique individuals, rather than non-chronological and abstract essays upon industrial technique.” (*Epochs*, xxiii, 126, 72)

On the other hand, *Epochs* was also “a history of Oriental Art written from a universal point of view.” He designed *Epochs* to be “a study of relative importances” which dealt with “only imaginative or creative Art.” “Oriental Art,” he said, “has been excluded from most serious art history because of the supposition that its law and form were incommensurate with established European classes.” Westerners had usually considered that the main thrust of Eastern art lay in its superficially decorative (therefore, industrial) technical elements. “Most writers upon Oriental Art have...preferred to classify by the technique of industries,” consequently failing “to grasp the real and larger unity of effort that underlies the vast number of technical varieties.” Meanwhile, Fenollosa’s method in *Epochs* was “to treat the creative periods only”: “In this way, we see the separate shining places of movement of the human spirit.” Each of the “rare creative epochs” thus represented a common underlying cause of art that would enable them to emerge as truly unique. Although “the character, the individuality...of the different epochs may seem unlike,” he concluded, “the parts belong together, and will interlock.” (*Epochs*, xxiv-xxvi)

## History as a Personal Life Impression

Fenollosa thus considered that human creativity (which was embodied in the form of individual works of art) would provide him with a universal standpoint for his history writing. Notably, Fenollosa’s criteria for judging the creativity and uniqueness of artists and their works were quite arbitrary despite his claim for a universal history. While he asserted that “Art should

be judged by universal standards” (*Epochs*, xxvii), his own artistic sensibility still remained a primary element in determining which part of the human spirit and its potential was creative or imaginative.

Because of this arbitrary character of *Epochs*, Fenollosa fully recognized the possibility that the book might “be called, by others, a mere personal appreciation.” (*Epochs*, xxvii, xxvi) However, he never regarded his (perhaps, too) personal criteria of artistic uniqueness as a defective element which could undermine the objective credibility of *Epochs*. Rather, Fenollosa emphasized the merit of such criteria:

If this book is to have permanent value one phase, perhaps the most important, must lie in its unity and brevity. It is, indeed, a single personal life-impression, and I desire to have this thought of it, in the minds of readers, an ever-present one. Being such, it needs to aim at no encyclopedic completeness, and I shall at my own discretion subordinate small fact to large. Some readers will surely complain that too much is left out. To these I would suggest that the omissions are, themselves, of great significance. My constant effort must be to keep the parts in just proportion, and to do this nothing but my own sense of proportion can be consulted. (*Epochs*, xxvi)

Fenollosa’s arbitrary judgment and personal appreciation of art now stood as an integral part of *Epochs*. Even omissions of what other writers thought to be significant would accentuate his individuality and uniqueness as an author. The particular narrative of his own making would have been impossible if he had lacked a firm “sense of proportion” in selecting and coordinating the materials for his writing. In other words, what secured the integrity of his story was his own volition to discover (or even create) a grand narrative which he supposed to underlie a variety of past artists and their unique works of art. Defending the personal nature of his plot, Fenollosa even went on to say: “has there ever been, or can there be, a synthesis that is not personal?” (*Epochs*, xxvi)

### The History of His Own Creation

As Fenollosa’s “single personal life-impression” constituted the nucleus of *Epochs*, so his personal experiences ensured the reality of his narrative. In *Epochs*, he displayed considerable pride in the fact that the history he was writing about (or at least the crucial part of such history) was of his own creation. Discussing the Japanese painter Kanō Motonobu’s Bodhisattva painting (“Byaku-e Kannon”), he never forgot to mention that the painting was “now in the Fenollosa collection in Boston.”<sup>9</sup> (*Epochs*, 135) “I knew this copy...about 1882,” he continued:

It had been given away to a retainer by the Marquis [Hachisuka — its original owner], as so many daimyo treasures were given in the sad parting of ten years before, when families of faithful retainers...were absolved from their feudal vows and became citizens of a new democratic Japan. Treasures like this soon found their way into pawnshops, and so, at a day when the revived taste of a new aristocracy had not yet formed, into the general market. I thus bought for twenty-five yen what would be worth thousands were it sold in Japan to-day. (*Epochs*, 135)

The above description by Fenollosa included his presence as the essential constituent of the history that he was narrating here. He was the person who had saved many art treasures from “their way into pawnshops” and “the general market”; he was the person who had initiated “the revived taste of a new aristocracy” in Japanese native art; and he was the person who had successfully led Japan’s native art revival movement until the point where a formerly dirt-cheap painting was eventually transformed into a pricey masterpiece.

The gap Fenollosa pointed out in the above quotation certainly implied something more than the overturned market values of Japanese art treasures: It was the gap between the old world he had found himself in at the beginning of his art career in Japan, and the new world he had managed to create later. Fenollosa had taken charge of bringing about the transformation from the old world to the new. In *Epochs*, he often portrayed himself not only as an eyewitness to, but also the creator of, the history per se that he was actually narrating. *Epochs* thus exhibited his conviction that his presence in the book was the major source of the integrity and reality of his historical narrative.

### **Inserting His Presence and Emotions**

Based on this conviction, Fenollosa often inserted into *Epochs* his presence as an actual participant in, and firsthand witness to, notable historical scenes. “When the new government came in with 1868,” said Fenollosa of his research experience in Shōsōin (the imperial repository of ancient treasures) in Nara, “the exploration of this place became an unparalleled piece of romantic work.” According to him, Shōsōin was highly esoteric. Visitors were only allowed to enter it with “an imperial rescript.” No academic research had been performed on the treasures before he arrived there. “As imperial commissioner,” he said, “I had a chance to study these treasures on three separate occasions in the eighties.” He then presented to the reader his firsthand research experience in Shōsōin as the source of authenticity of the information that he provided: “And the little I can say here is taken from my note-books of those days.” (*Epochs*, 111)

In order to increase the reality of his narrative in *Epochs*, he not only inserted his presence in the historical scene but also his personal emotions. Describing the “most intense,” “physical and spiritual” effect of the Japanese painter Fujiwara Nobuzane’s scroll paintings (“Kitano Tenjin engi emaki”), he said: “I have sat before these stupendous rolls again and again, with the flesh of my back creeping as during a Wagner opera and tears standing in my eyes.” (*Epochs*, 111, 185) By combining his emotional and physical presence into the history of his own writing, Fenollosa projected *Epochs* as “a single life-impression” that was synthesized with his actual experiences in the past.

Fenollosa’s subjectivist approach to history writing led him to make an extremely anti-positivist argument. He went on to assert that his real history would attach almost no importance to documentary proofs: “Documents may sometimes be falsified; Art, in a certain sense, cannot.” (*Epochs*, xxvii) According to him, the truly original and excellent art would always “impress you as really present and permeated with a living aura or essence.” The real art would “seize upon the impressionable side of the soul, and thus become more real than could a world of photographs.”<sup>10</sup> To his eyes, most art historians ended up handling a mere “history of documents, or...a ‘history of a history’.” “Art is the power of the imagination to transform materials” or “to transfigure them,” said Fenollosa, “and the history of Art should be the history of this power rather than the history of the materials through which it works.” (*Epochs*, xxvii)

### **Beyond Objective History**

As a self-declared true art historian, Fenollosa now set the focus of his analyses on “the aesthetic motive in schools of design” that was materialized in “the ‘document’ of Art itself.” “Epigraphy records facts about Art, but only Art records Art,” he said: “a careful following of the movements of art forms, through even the most unpromising channels, often opens up paths about which history is silent.” (*Epochs*, xxiii, 1-2)

The documentary evidence thus assumed to Fenollosa’s narrative less importance than his intuitive reasoning from art per se. Furthermore, he boldly went on to maintain that it would hardly matter whether or not a hypothesis of art history was provable by written documents. “[J]ust because art work furnishes such a large amount of evidence, impressive even where it lacks explanatory record,” he said, “it is most important to weigh the unique testimony of these aesthetic documents.” In other words, genuine art historians must possess an acute sensitivity to the visual and imagination-provoking power of art, rather the ability to analyze documents for mere historical accuracy. “Indeed so entirely does the critic rely on his intuitive and, so to speak, creative faculties,” concluded Fenollosa, “that ‘scholarship’ in art seems almost a contradiction.” (*Epochs*, 52, xxvii)

Distancing himself from objectively-minded historical scholarship, Fenollosa often failed to provide the reader with substantial documentary evidence that could support his hypotheses in a positivistic manner.<sup>11</sup> However, *Epochs* was never a fiction in a fundamental sense. Whatever imaginative descriptions it included, *Epochs* still remained Fenollosa's "single personal life-impression." What provoked such an impression was his real experiences and interactions with past works of art. In fact, he made considerable efforts to translate his firsthand art experiences into an analytical and empirically recognizable form, whereby he apparently intended to increase the persuasiveness and the reality of his narrative. "I have prepared for use throughout this book," he said of *Epochs*, "a chart, graphic and chronological, of Chinese Art as a whole for five thousand years, showing its ups and downs, its periods of creative vitality, its central supreme culmination, and its slow final fall." (*Epochs*, 5)

Objectively-minded historians perhaps would not particularly oppose Fenollosa's method as outlined above, but the next step he took would definitely affect them adversely. Having dealt with numerous firsthand art materials and then digested them into various charts, Fenollosa tried to discover something beyond what the digested data could safely prove; he now went on to escalate his writing up to the point where he could reach highly imaginative interpretations. According to him, such interpretations would not even need any documentary proof because art per se would stand as real evidence. "I fully confess," said Fenollosa, "that my personal contribution to the evidence is a digest of art itself, the primary document." (*Epochs*, 5, xxix)

### **Art versus Verbal Expression: The Question of Reality**

If the visual impact of art, as Fenollosa claimed, should be accepted as the primary evidence to support his imaginative interpretations, his next task in *Epochs* was to communicate such visible power to the reader. While his "life-impression" about art was certainly real to himself because it was inseparably rooted into his intuition and personal experiences, the reader of *Epochs* could not necessarily share such an impression with the same level of intensity or sense of reality as Fenollosa had felt in his personal encounter with art.

Furthermore, what the reader would find in *Epochs* was Fenollosa's "digest" rather than "art itself." Even if Fenollosa was correct in that only art itself (not the documents concerning it) could testify to its significance, the fact still remained that any type of visual art would face the immediate risk of falling into a set of documentary data once it was processed into a verbally critiqued or interpreted form. If this was the problem that Fenollosa confronted in writing *Epochs*, would it be possible for him to transform the vividness of visual art into a verbal form in which such vividness could remain intact?

Fenollosa's answer to this question would be negative. While his conviction was that the

history of art should deal with works of art per se rather than their related documents, he simultaneously recognized that it would eventually be impossible to translate the vividness of visual art into a written form. After he explained in *Epochs* numerous details of the beauty of a Sung-dynasty Bodhisattva painting, he admitted that his description could never succeed in fully revealing the true beauty of the painting: “If we were to dilate upon all the intricate rhythms of the drapery lines, of the splendors of crown, jewelry, and lace mantles, we should have to expand this book to another volume.” (*Epochs*, 134)

However, Fenollosa probably knew that even another volume would not eliminate the problem that he faced here. To the end of the above-cited lines he added a brief, pessimistic statement: “Of course words quite fail.” (*Epochs*, 134) If the beauty of art could be explained thoroughly by words, such beauty would no longer need to be visual. The peculiarity of visual art lay in the very fact that certain kinds of beauty could not be expressed in any other form but visual. In this sense, the verbal critique of visual art would be a fundamentally impossible task. Once a piece of visual artwork was translated into a verbally communicable form, it would easily lose the particular vividness by which it had appealed to the eyes and mind of the beholder.

### Poetics, History Writing, and the Written Chinese as a Nexus

In attempting to write a real art history, Fenollosa could not avoid risking the nucleus of his narrative. While his abundant research experiences with innumerable visual artworks constituted the basis of *Epochs* as a real history, his firsthand contact with the artworks could easily degenerate into secondary, less intense explanations when they were presented in a verbal form to the reader. In *Epochs*, Fenollosa described various art pieces in an extremely detailed manner. His intention was clearly to present the alluring vision of those pieces to the reader as intact as possible. However, his detailed descriptions did not necessarily help recreate the original visual power of artworks, but rather transformed their initial vivid images into mere prolix (and often boring) explanations. The reader of *Epochs* could understand what Fenollosa was explaining but not necessarily submerge themselves into the narrative with the due emotional attachment that he intended to provoke through his writing.

With the above argument as a backdrop, we can reasonably assume that the problem which Fenollosa confronted in writing his real history overlapped considerably with the limits of linguistic expression in general. How, then, did he try to reconstruct in his writing the primal vividness of the moment when a specific event or phenomenon occurred in the past? Precisely because of his deep pessimism about the power of verbal expression, Fenollosa had to go ahead and embrace a radical, innovative vision of language — the vision which was embodied in his



interpretation of the written Chinese as an ideographic medium for communication.

In *The Chinese Written Character*, Fenollosa asserted that the written Chinese language would be a better medium for poetic expression than western phonetic languages because the Chinese ideogram powerfully exemplified the “verbal idea of action” with its pictorial vividness. “In the algebraic figure and in the spoken word there is no natural connection between thing and sign,” said Fenollosa: “all depend upon sheer convention.” European phonetic or “good Christian” languages (primarily English in his argument) thus could not fully “represent change...or any kind of growth.” (*CWC*, 45, 50, 57)

On the other hand, the Chinese ideogram originated from “shorthand pictures of actions or process,” hence symbolizing “the element of natural succession” of things on the move. “The earlier forms of these characters were pictorial,” continued Fenollosa, “and their hold upon imagination is little shaken, even in later conventional modifications.” Because of its power to provoke visually dynamic imagination, the Chinese ideogram would be “unforgettable once you have seen it.” “Like nature,” he concluded, “the Chinese words are alive and plastic, because thing and action are not formally separated.” (*CWC*, 46, 45, 50)

According to Fenollosa, natural phenomena could never be static but were “successive, even continuous; one causes or passes into another.” Based on this understanding, he even claimed that all modern grammatical divisions were merely artificial. “The eye,” he said, “sees noun and verb as one.” It was this primordial oneness that Fenollosa identified as the fundamental source of literary inspiration. “All nations,” he said, “have written their strongest and most vivid literature before they invented a grammar.” Because “its etymology is constantly visible,” the Chinese ideogram would best represent the inherent unity of “things in motion, motion in things.” (*CWC*, 47, 46, 50, 55)

Notably, Fenollosa discovered such unity as “the poetical raw material which the Chinese language affords.” “Poetry differs from prose in the concrete colors of its diction,” he continued:

It is not enough for it to furnish a meaning to philosophers. It must appeal to emotions with the charm of direct impression, flashing through regions where the intellect can only grope. Poetry must render what is said, not what is merely meant. Abstract meaning gives little vividness, and fullness of imagination gives all. (*CWC*, 53)

Here a certain parallel can be drawn between Fenollosa’s poetics and history writing. He identified the “pictorial visibility” of the Chinese ideogram with the essential element, through which “the Chinese written language [had] been able to retain its original creative poetry with far more vigor and vividness than any phonetic tongue.” If so, Fenollosa’s historical narration

also had to acquire visual qualities which would function as the very source of its reality. When he lamented, “Languages today are thin and cold because we think less and less into them,” the range of his criticism included not only poetic language but also document-filled, objectively-minded historical studies. In order to have the reader “think into” his narrative, Fenollosa naturally attempted to exhibit to them the “intensest power” of history by pointing back to the very beginning moment when a particular past had actually happened — the moment when “things in motion, motion in things” were still inseparably integrated with one another. (*CWC*, 55, 56)

### History in Motion: Fenollosa’s Pictorial Method

Fenollosa now tried to apply his poetic method to *Epochs* in order to restore the captivating power of history’s primal moments. His attempt to preserve the visual qualities of a particular past as intact as possible was most clearly exhibited in his description of the Bodhisattva statue (“Kuse Kannon”) which he encountered at the Yumedono pavilion of Hōryūji Temple, Nara, Japan. “This most beautiful statue, a little larger than life, was discovered by me and a Japanese colleague in the summer of 1884,” he continued:

I had credentials from the central government which enabled me to requisition the opening of godowns and shrines. The central space of the octagonal Yumedono was occupied by a great closed shrine, which ascended like a pillar towards the apex. The priests of Horiuji [i.e. Hōryūji] confessed that tradition ascribed the contents of the shrine to Corean work of the days of Suiko, but that it had not been opened for more than two hundred years. On fire with the prospect of such a unique treasure, we urged the priests to open it by every argument at our command. They resisted long, alleging that in punishment for the sacrilege an earthquake might well destroy the temple. Finally we prevailed, and I shall never forget our feelings as the long disused key rattled in the rusty lock. Within the shrine appeared a tall mass closely wrapped about in swathing bands of cotton cloth, upon which the dust of ages had gathered. It was no light task to unwrap the contents, some 500 yards of cloth having been used, and our eyes and nostrils were in danger of being choked with the pungent dust. But at last the final folds of the covering fell away, and this marvelous statue, unique in the world, came forth to human sight for the first time in centuries. (*Epochs*, 50)

Fenollosa tried to bring the reader’s attention as closely as possible to the very moment when the history he was writing had originally been created. All the details were closely linked to his presence in the narrative not only as a firsthand witness but also as the creator of the historical

scene. In order to “represent change...or...growth” actually happening in the moment, everything in the scenery was depicted “in motion” – the motion he initiated by almost forcibly entering the two-century-long untraversed pavilion, or the motion by which he started to create a particular historic moment. Carefully following his every move until he finally unwrapped the Bodhisattva statue, the reader was expected to share his excitement in engaging in the creation of real history.

Undeniably, verbal limitations still remained an inherent problem in his pursuit of writing real history. As Fenollosa claimed that “There is little or nothing in a phonetic word to exhibit the embryonic stages of its growth,” so written history would eventually fail to represent as intense visual vividness as the past per se had contained at its primal moment. However, Fenollosa had at least managed to exhibit history in this (quasi-)“pictorial method” and provoke the reader’s empathetic reading. (CWC, 55, 59) Through such reading, verbal limitations would hopefully be minimized; the reader would be able to enjoy a remarkable opportunity to transcend cold historical documents by approaching what he perceived as the reality of a particular past.

## Conclusion

Fenollosa’s description of the Yumedono Bodhisattva and its discovery thus typified his pictorial approach to history writing. Through such an approach he intended to ensure his narrative against reality-less abstraction. By trying to create the same effect in his historical narrative as the Chinese ideogram did through its pictorial visibility, Fenollosa aimed to turn his “single personal life-impression” into something whose reality would be sharable with the reader. In this sense, *Epochs* was never a mere self-centered monologue despite its “personal” nature. If the Chinese ideogram appeared as real to him as “blood-stained battles to an old campaigner,” then Fenollosa’s real history would also have to exhibit to the reader vivid images of past historical moments – vivid as to be “flashed at once on the mind as reinforcing values with accumulation of meaning.” (CWC, 56)

While Fenollosa designed *Epochs* to invite the reader’s empathy and arouse their imagination into his narrative, his misfortune was that he could not witness their response to the book during his lifetime. In fact, Fenollosa did not even manage to complete the final draft of *Epochs*. Its last part indicated that he was apparently planning further arguments by which to treat East Asian art in a broad perspective: “Moreover, Japanese art as a whole is only a sector of East Asian art.”<sup>12</sup> *Epochs* suddenly ended with this brief, insufficiently substantiated conclusion. According to Mary Fenollosa, the draft was “never touched” after October 1906. For the next two years until his death Fenollosa almost continuously traveled around the

United States, fulfilling his hectic lecture obligations. “At times, when I urged him to take up the work on the manuscript,” reminisced Mary,

he would say, “I cannot finish it until another visit to Japan. I must see Mr. Ariga and old Kano Tomonobu, and some of the others who have worked with me for Japanese art. There are corrections to be made, dates to be filled in, certain historical facts to be verified, and all these can be done in Japan only.”<sup>13</sup>

Mary’s above description may not be sufficiently imaginative to address the root issue of Fenollosa’s unfinished narrative. While he would surely have made factual corrections and revisions to the draft of *Epochs*, those elements did not really have any crucial relevance to his real history. After writing several hundred pages of script, Fenollosa presumably encountered the same dilemma as he had in his attempts to translate the visual vividness of the past into a verbally fixed form. No matter how detailed and elaborate, the written form would never transcend certain limitations that were inherent in the realm of words. The more he wrote, the more irreconcilable the gap he was inevitably to find between his narrative and what he had actually witnessed or experienced in his past life in Japan.

If so, was it not true that Fenollosa naturally yearned to offset such a gap by reactivating his past intense encounter with the primal moment of his real history? Just as he tried in *Epochs* to bring the reader back to a pre-written stage of the past in order to minimize verbal limitations, another visit to Japan (as well as further firsthand contact with art masterpieces there) would enable him to restore his initial experiences there with immediate vividness. If there was something he could do “in Japan only,” it must have been to revive the power of his first contact with the real past rather than mere factual corrections and verifications.

Fenollosa’s sudden death in 1908 deprived him of the chance not only for another visit to Japan but also for further revision of *Epochs*. While it was “in his appreciation and fine interpretation of the influence of art in the various epochs” that Fenollosa “surpass[ed] his predecessors,”<sup>14</sup> it was also true that his unfinished draft contained a considerable number of too bold (and even wrong) hypotheses which he dared to “assume...without waiting for proof.” “There is no doubt that future study, if seriously carried forward, will change many estimates, but if we waited for this nothing would ever be written,” said Fenollosa: “Later generations must build on the earlier, and I believe that my unified impressions, even if defective, must have a value.” (*Epochs*, xxix, xxviii)

My interpretation of *Epochs* and *The Chinese Written Character* is intended to fulfill (at least partially) what he expected from a later generation. Despite his pessimistic remarks about

verbal expression and its limitations, Fenollosa's writings succeeded in motivating me to "think into" his words and deeds.

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## Endnotes

1 *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* initially appeared not as a book but in serial form. It was first published in *The Little Review* literary magazine (September-December 1919).

2 Mary Fenollosa, "Preface," Ernest F. Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, vol. 1 (1912, reprint, New York: Dover, 1963): xxi-xxii.

3 Haun Saussy, "Fenollosa Compounded: A Discrimination," Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, eds. Haun Saussy, Jonathan Stalling, and Lucas Klein (New York: Fordham UP, 2008): 16-17.

4 For example, David Carrier observes that Fenollosa's *Epochs* "has many plates but no proper scholarly apparatus, with only a few notes and some references to other scholars.... Many details in his account have not withstood the test of time." (David Carrier, *Museum Skepticism: A History of the Display of Art in Public Galleries* [Durham: Duke UP, 2006]: 137, 138.)

5 George A. Kennedy, "Fenollosa, Pound, and the Chinese Character" (1958), *Selected Works of George A. Kennedy*, ed. Tien-yi Li (New Haven: Far Eastern, 1964): 444.

6 *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry: An Ars Poetica* (1918, 1936; Hereafter cited parenthetically as *CWC*), Saussy, Stalling, and Klein, eds., *The Chinese Written Character*, 59.

7 Ernest Fenollosa, "Synopsis of Lectures on Chinese and Japanese Poetry" (1903), Saussy, Stalling, and Klein, eds., *The Chinese Written Character*, 109.

8 Ernest Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, vol. 1 (hereafter cited parenthetically as *Epochs*), xxiii.

9 This collection, according to Ariga Nagao, did not nominally exist after his resignation from the MFA. In his explanatory notes on *Tōa bijutushi kō* (the first Japanese translation of *Epochs*), Ariga says that Fenollosa's name was removed from his former personal collection at the MFA because of an "unfortunate family imbroglio" — his extramarital affair and ensuing divorce. See *Tōa bijutushi kō*, vol.1 (1921, reprint, Tokyo: Sōgensha, 1933): 4.

10 Ernest Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, vol. 2 (1912, reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1963): 83.

11 As for this point, perhaps the harshest critic of Fenollosa's history writing is Allen Hockley.

An art historian himself, Hockley exemplifies Fenollosa's (sometimes too) strong inclination for constructing arbitrary stories. For Fenollosa's "completely unsubstantiated" or even "entirely false" arguments, see Hockley, *The Prints of Isoda Koryūsai: Floating World Culture and Its Consumers in Eighteenth-Century Japan* (U of Washington P, 2003), 38-39.

12 *Epochs*, vol. 2, 205.

13 Mary Fenollosa, "Preface," xxii.

14 Frederick Wells Williams' review of *Epochs*, *Yale Review*, vol. 3 (October 1913), 201.