

**Katsuta Shōkin:**  
**A Japanese Painter at the Government School of Art, Calcutta,**  
**1905–1907**

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**Introduction**

Communication between Japan and India through artistic activities in the modern period began with the Japanese art thinker Okakura Kakuzo's (1863-1913) visit to India from 1901 to 1902. With the renowned Tagores as his hosts, he had many opportunities to interact with Indian artists and visit historical sites in the country. He also cultivated friendships with Bengali artists and intellectuals, such as Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902). Then in 1903, Okakura's two protégés, Japanese painters, Yokoyama Taikan and Hishida Shunsō, visited India, and they furthered the artistic exchange between the two countries. The Indian experiences of these three Japanese figures have been the subject of much research, and they have been key aspects of the development of early modern art in both countries. However, the cultural communication that endured after these visits has received less scholarly attention, although such exchanges continue to this day. Indeed, India has been a source of inspiration for many Japanese artists.

After Taikan and Shunsō left India, Rabindranath Tagore asked Okakura to send another Japanese painter to serve as an art teacher for the Tagore family. Okakura chose Katsuta Shōkin (Katsuta Yoshio 1879–1963), who was then 26 years old and had just graduated from the Tokyo Art School. He left for India in 1905 and returned to Japan in 1907. During his stay, which was mainly in Calcutta, he taught Japanese painting techniques to members of the Tagore family in Jorasanko. In 1906, he also taught at the Government School of Art, Calcutta. Such experiences are surely

significant to the history of the cultural exchange between India and Japan, and they deserve more attention in the field of art history.

One reason for the scarce research on Katsuta Shōkin is that most of the works that he produced during the visit to India have been lost. Other than a major piece, *The Great Departure*, now in the collection of the Fukushima Prefectural Museum of Art, we know of his works only from old black and white reproductions. In addition, information on his activities in India is very limited. This situation has made it difficult for art historians researching Japanese modern art to investigate the significance of Shōkin's visit to India.

However, his important role in linking early renowned Japanese visitors to India to ongoing Indo-Japanese cultural relationships today should not be underestimated. In contrast with his three predecessors, Shōkin taught at the Government School of Art as its first Japanese teacher. Since the school and its Vice Principal, Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951), were at the center of the new Bengali art movement in the early twentieth century, Shōkin's work in India was indispensable to the movement in terms of its relationship to Japanese modern art.

In this paper, I trace Shōkin's life and the works that he produced during his stay in India as much as possible by examining the remaining works, photographs, and documents, including his diaries.<sup>1</sup> I also discuss information found in other related materials, such as articles by Indian and Japanese scholars. Through this examination, I will present Shōkin's struggles, as a foreigner, to learn from Indian art as much as to teach Japanese art, and then discuss the importance of the cultural relationship between India and Japan at the beginning of the twentieth century.

### **Research on Shōkin**

Although Shōkin was a well-known *nihonga* (Japanese modern style painting) artist, who contributed to the development of Japanese art, few comprehensive art historical studies on him exist. The major scholarly works on Shōkin, especially those focused on his engagement with India, area retrospective exhibition in 1988 with an

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Mr. Horii Yoshio, curator at the Fukushima Museum of Arts, and the family of the artist for letting me use personal documents for this paper.

accompanying catalogue and a paper on his Buddhist painting, *Shutsujo Shaka*, published in 2005.

#### Exhibition

In 1998, the Fukushima Museum of Modern Art held a comprehensive exhibition of Shōkin's works. His best-known painting on the subject of India, *Shutsujo Shaka*, was exhibited among his other works. This enabled a comparison with his works before and after the trip to India, and this work appeared quite unique in its subject and style. This is the major merit of the retrospective exhibition.

Another contribution of the exhibition to the research on Shōkin's experiences in India is that it introduced important sources, including his unpublished diaries, sketchbooks, drawings, and related photographs. Since *Shutsujo Shaka* is the only remaining painting on an Indian subject in Japan, the existence of drawings of his other Indian paintings suggested what he achieved in India. Images of several sites in India, the Tagore mansion, and members of the Tagore family also revealed fragments of his life there. Among them, the most important material that the exhibition introduced is undoubtedly his diaries. Information from these diaries and other documents enabled the curators to compile a chronological record of the artist. In addition, the first attempt to explore Shōkin's works from an art history perspective can be traced to a paper in the exhibition catalogue, "Katsuta Shōkin: His life and works," by the exhibition curator, Hori Yoshio. It traces Shōkin's life comprehensively and is full of fundamental information. The catalogue, edited by Hori and Masubuchi Kyoko, also contains a full bibliography. Hence, this catalogue is an important source that all students of the artistic exchange between India and Japan should consult.

#### Narihara paper

The exhibition made important historical materials of the artist available to scholarly communities for further study. Seven years later, a scholar of Buddhist art, Narihara Yuki, responded to the call. She relied primarily on materials from the exhibition to explore one of Shōkin's paintings. Her 2005 paper, "Katsuta Shōkin *Shutsujo Shaka* no tokushitsu to imi ni kansuru kosatsu," is a monographic study on

*Shutsujo Shaka*. It focuses on *The Great Departure*, taken from the life of the Buddha. Narihara Yuki claims that the subject was rare in Japanese Buddhist painting at the time. She analyzes Shōkin's depiction of the Buddha and finds that the work was based on his sketches of a living Indian person, which was also a rare practice for *nihonga* artists. According to her, these were a result of a new direction in Buddhist studies in modern Japan: an attempt to grow out of Buddhism through Chinese and Korean interpretations and to approach the original Buddhism in its birthplace, as European Buddhist scholars were doing then. With this new perspective, her paper sheds new light on the meaning of this painting not only from an art historical point of view but also from a Buddhist point of view.

#### Others

In addition to the Fukushima exhibition and the Narihara's paper, several papers exploring the artistic exchange between India and Japan in the early twentieth century have mentioned Katsuta Shōkin as a key player. Given the limited research on Shōkin, it was necessary to collect information, however small, from works on other subjects. One early example is an anonymous article titled "Indo-Japanese Painting," which was published in April 1922 in *Rupam, Quarterly Journal of Oriental Art*, edited by Ordhendra C. Gangoly. After summarizing the history of the Indo-Japanese cultural exchange since ancient times, the author mentions Shōkin, along with Taikan and Shunsō, as an example of contemporary exchanges. Further, the article describes two of Shōkin's paintings that are now lost. It is useful for us to know about Shōkin's lost paintings, or at least their subjects. The first painting is titled *Buddha and Sujata*, which we know of only in a design format and an old reproduction. The second one is *Temptation of the Buddha*, which the author informs us was tragically destroyed. We have only several rough sketches of the second one. The author points out that Shōkin, after his visit to Ajanta, painted those subjects from the life of the Buddha from his memories of this visit. He interprets these paintings as a Japanese artist's attempt to present Buddha in a realistic manner. He also finds a kind of synthesis of Indian and Japanese traditions in this painting, especially in the female figures.

Satō Shino’s paper on Shunsō also mentions Shōkin briefly and quotes the article in *Rupam*. She analyzes the subject and style of Shunsō’s *Buddha and Sujata* and compares the work with the paintings by Abanindranath Tagore and Shōkin on the same subject. The compositions of the three paintings are strikingly similar. Satō concludes that Shunsō and Shōkin based their works on the one by Abanindranath Tagore, who was a leading Bengali artist of the time. From this article, we gleaned that Shokin was working closely with Indian artists.

Tapati Guha-Thakurta also mentions Shōkin in a chapter on Abanindranath Tagore in her 1992 book, *The Making of a New “Indian” Art*. Introducing Shōkin’s scroll painting titled *Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana in the Forest*, she refers to his style as “the new Oriental style,”—a synthesis of the traditions of India and Japan. She points out that this style was also seen in works by Abanindranath Tagore, Yokoyama Taikan, and Hishida Shunsō.

Some scholars of other subjects have mentioned Shōkin on occasion. One is Azuma Kazuo, a scholar of Rabindranath Tagore. His major work on Tagore, *Jinrui no chiteki isan 61: Tagōru* (1981), details the cultural exchange between Japan and the Tagore household and Rabindranath’s school in Santiniketan. In this work, he describes Shōkin as the first Japanese painter to teach Japanese art technique in Santiniketan (pp.28–29). In addition, a scholar of Sano Jin’nosuke, the first Japanese language teacher in Santiniketan, mentions Shōkin since Sano and Shōkin were close during their stay in India (Panda, 2017, p.225).

As shown above, although academic interest in Shōkin’s works has grown over the past two decades, he has been mentioned only briefly in the context of modern cultural exchanges between India and Japan. Therefore, as the first step to study the artist, we needed to collect and integrate information from those sources.

### **Known Materials and Lost Materials**

Today, unfortunately, we know of only some of Shōkin’s paintings on Indian subjects—namely, (1) *Kumo no Tsukai (Could Messenger/ Meghaduta)*, (2) *Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana in the Forest*, (3) *Rama’s Parting*, (4) *Sita Surviving Fire*, (5) *Budda to Sujata (The Buddha and Sujata)*, (6) *Shutsujo Shaka (The Great Departure)*, (7) *Gouma*

(*The Temptation of the Buddha*), (8) *Seichi no Konjaku (The Past and the Present in the Holy Land)*, (9) *Enbujuka no Shidda Taishi (Prince Siddhartha under a Jambu-dvīpa tree)*, (10) *Himaraya no Shokou (The Dawn of The Himalayas)*, and (11) *Akuzo no Kibutsu (Savage Elephant Embracing the Buddha)*. Among these 11 paintings, the number (6) *Shutsujo Shaka* is housed in the Fukushima Prefectural Museum of Arts and (2) *Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana in the Forest* is reported to be in India (Guha-Thakurta, 1992, pp.xv–xvi). However, the whereabouts of all others, except for related sketches and drawings, are unknown. For some, we have only black and white illustration and pictures taken before they were lost.

Besides paintings, we have a few original materials to explore Shōkin's experiences in India: his diaries, sketchbooks, and articles published in art journals and newspapers. First, Shōkin wrote diaries even when he stayed in India. His family retained the originals, while the copies are stored in the Fukushima Prefectural Museum of Art. Although some parts of these hand-written diaries are difficult to decipher, they still allow for reconstructing his life in India to some extent. Second, his sketches and drawings are housed in the Fukushima Prefectural Museum of Art and Tokyo University of Arts. Some sketches show the place and date in his handwriting. Third, while Shōkin was in India in 1906, he contributed five short articles on India and its art to *Bijutsu Shinpo*. He also sent notes and illustrations to *Miyako Shimbun*, a newspaper in March to April, titled “Indo gaho” (Picture letters from India), nos. 1 to 7. These articles contain important information on the contemporary art, artists, and the state of the art world in India through his eyes. Since most of his paintings are lost, the above materials are important sources for studies on Shōkin's time in India. In the next section, I will explore his works and activities based on these materials.

## **His Life in India**

Before the departure, 1905

After Okakura's first Indian trip in 1901–02 and Taikan and Shunsō's trip in 1903, Rabindranath Tagore, wishing for a continuous exchange between the two countries, asked Okakura to send an artist and a Judo instructor to him. In response, Okakura and others sought candidates to fill these positions. Katsuta Shōkin was

selected as the artist to send to Calcutta. The records show that Shōkin was sent to India as an intern to study art and design by Japan's Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce (Hori, 1998, p.83). Although the details of this deal are unknown, Okakura seems to have managed to obtain the title and funds from the government for Shōkin.

When Okakura made this decision, Shōkin was a new graduate of the Tokyo Art School, where Okakura had once been the chancellor. However, different from Taikan and Shunsō, Shōkin was not a disciple of Okakura. Shōkin's teacher was Hashimoto Gaho (1835–1908), a major painter of the time, who contributed to the modernization of Japanese paintings with Okakura. After studying painting at Gaho's private school, Shōkin went on to the Tokyo Art School, where Gaho was a professor, along with Okakura, Taikan, and Shunsō. Gaho's close relationship with Okakura and the Art School helped Shōkin to be a candidate.

Another reason for the selection must be that Shōkin was a very promising student. He had already presented many works at exhibitions and had received several awards while he was a student (Hori, 1998, p.83). Then he graduated from school with an excellent record in July 1905. Two months later, he married at the age of 25, and 10 days after the marriage, Shōkin left for India (Hori, 1998, p.83). Given the short period between his graduation and departure, we can assume that his selection as an intern in India must have been determined before his graduation, and the marriage was arranged to occur before the departure. To send the best student to the Tagores, Okakura sought a candidate not only from the pool of his own disciples, but also among his colleagues' students. Shōkin was the best choice to respond to Rabindranath Tagore's request.

#### Arrival in October 1905

Shōkin was fortunate to know other Japanese people living in Calcutta. Sano Jin'nosuke, also invited by Tagore as a Judo instructor, accompanied him to India on the same ship (Hori, 1998, p.83; Panda, 2017, p.225). The two seemed to develop a close friendship throughout their time in the foreign land, frequently visiting each other (Katsuta Diary). On arriving in Calcutta in October 1905, the two visited a Japanese man named Mr. Nishide, who was living in Calcutta, and they stayed at his residence for several days until they moved to the residence of Gaganendranath Tagore, the son of

the poet's cousin (Diary, Oct. 26-30, 1905). In November, Sano left for Bolpur to teach Judo at the school in Santiniketan (Diary, Nov. 6, 1905), and Shōkin soon visited him there. Throughout his stay, Shōkin also maintained a close relationship with Kawaguchi Ekai, a Buddhist priest from Japan, who was studying Buddhism in India and living in Calcutta. Shōkin accompanied Kawaguchi along with Surendranath Tagore to Santiniketan on December 1 (Diary). There, Shōkin met Rabindranath Tagore and his children. Sano, Nishide, and Kawaguchi are mentioned many times in Shōkin's diaries. As I examine later in this paper, already in 1905, there was a small Japanese community in Calcutta, and Shōkin quickly became part of it.

#### At the Tagores

In addition to members of the Japanese community in Calcutta, Shōkin began to build relationships with members of the Tagore family soon after his arrival. First was Gaganendranath, who was Shōkin's host in Calcutta. Shōkin also received his monthly salary from Gaganendranath. Next, Abanindranath, a brother of Gaganendranath, often visited Shōkin. Once, the brothers took Shōkin to a hotel for dinner (Diary, Apr. 15, 1906). In April, as the weather was becoming hot, Gaganendranath let Shōkin sleep in a room in his main house, where it was probably cooler (Diary, Apr. 11, 1906). Shōkin (1906a) wrote in a letter to a Japanese newspaper that the Tagores had hosted Japanese visitors, Taikan and Shunso, before, so they were used to some Japanese customs. They seem to have been kind and sincere hosts to this foreign artist, and Shōkin (1906a) appreciated this, saying that the place was very comfortable. Then Shōkin taught Surendranath, the poet's nephew. Surendranath would often visit Shōkin and accompany him on short trips to the suburbs and on visits to museums (Diary, 1905–1907). A few years earlier, when Okakura had stayed at the Tagores', Surendranath had also accompanied Okakura to places, and Okakura seems to have liked him very much, calling him "Prince Suren." Thus, Surendranath may have been known to Japanese visitors as a kind host.

#### The Government School of Art, Calcutta



Shōkin's relationships with members of the Tagore family brought another opportunity for him. On January 10, 1906, Abanindranath, on behalf of Earnest B. Havell (1861–1934), the principal of the Government School of Art, Calcutta, asked Shōkin to teach Japanese painting skills at school (Diary). Early in February, Abanindranath visited Shōkin to observe his lesson (Diary, Feb. 2, 1906). Mrs. Havell invited Shōkin to dinner. After these meetings, Shōkin's appointment was decided. On February 23, Shōkin and Abanindranath discussed the conditions of the appointment, and it was decided that Shōkin would teach twice a week (Diary). After received an official announcement of appointment on February 27, Shōkin started his lessons at the school on March 7 (Diary). Except for a two-month vacation in May and June, he continued to teach at the school twice a week until the end of August 1906.

Shōkin's appointment was part of an innovative program at the art school. When Shōkin arrived in India, Principal Havell and Vice Principal Abanindranath were in the process of carrying out a bold reform of art education in India. The original purpose of the school had been to teach European-style painting. However, when Havell became the principal in 1896, he saw the value of traditional Indian art and reformed the art education to base it on Indian traditions. Abanindranath worked closely with him. This new style of art education promoted the new Bengal School of Art. The Government School of Art, Calcutta, became the center of the revival of traditional Indian painting. The addition of Shōkin, a Japanese painter, to the school faculty is a clear move toward new art education for India.

Shōkin shared Havell's and Abanindranath's view on the problems of Indian art education and the need for the reform of the school. In a report on Indian art, Shōkin deplored the dominance of Western-style painting and British art education in India (Katsuta, 1906a, 1906b). As Okakura had done a few years earlier, Shōkin found common beauty in Asian art, especially in its elegant lines and sheer coloring. Then he accused British art education of destroying this beauty. For example, he criticized portraits done in oil painting as showing bad taste (Katsuta, 1906a, 1906b). In such states, Havell and Abanindranath seemed, to Shōkin's eye, to be the only hope for the future of Indian art.

The reform that Havell and Abanindranath were undertaking can be seen as a parallel to what had happened in art education in Japan some decades earlier, in 1876, when the government established a design school for Western art. During this period, when few people valued traditional art, Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908), a young American invited to teach philosophy, “discovered” the value of traditional Japanese art and promoted it. He and Okakura, his former student and an art administrator, worked to establish the Tokyo Art School. They succeeded in opening a school mainly for Japanese-style art in 1889. Later, Okakura became the principal and made the school a center for the modernization of Japanese art. Okakura and Abanindranath, therefore, occupied similar positions in modern art education in their respective countries.

Both played important roles in artistic exchanges between Japan and India. Abanindranath hosted Yokoyama Taikan and Hishida Shunsō when Okakura sent them to Calcutta in 1903. He observed the painting skills of the two Japanese artists. The “wash technique” was a particular symbol of the interaction between the artists. Abanindranath developed Taikan’s technique of washing paint with a water brush and put his own style to it. The combination of Mughal miniature painting and the Japanese “wash” was a signature of Abanindranath Tagore and new Bengali art, which can be seen in his major works, such as *Bharat Mata*.

In light of the background of art education, Shōkin’s appointment at the school marks an important moment in the history of the artistic exchange between India and Japan. Abanindranath must have expected Shōkin to inspire his young students, as Taikan had inspired Abanindranath. At the time of Shōkin’s appointment, Principal Havell fell ill (Diary, Feb. 12, 1906); therefore, it must be Abanindranath who made the final decision as acting principal. Although it is unclear what Shōkin’s lessons were like from the diaries, this marks a significant turn in the cultural interaction between the two countries, from a private connection between Okakura and the Tagores to an official connection involving the Government School. Shōkin became part of Havell’s and Abanindranath’s reform programs of new Indian art education.

Although we do not have detailed records of his lessons, we can find Shōkin’s positive views on changing the art world in India, including the Government School of Art, from an article that he wrote for an art journal in Japan (1906a, 1906b). In this

article, Shōkin introduces Havell as a rare European who could appreciate Asian art. Then he shows admiration for the Mughal miniature paintings that Havell collected for the School. Shōkin was even aware of the controversial event of Havell having put the Art School's collection of Western art on sale during the previous year, and replacing the pieces with indigenous art. Shōkin visited Havell several times and asked some questions about the Mughal paintings. He also explained how Havell and Abanindranath had resisted the prevalence of Western painting and had struggled to revive Indian traditions. Shōkin introduced Abanindranath to Japanese readers as an exemplary Indian artist (1906a). Shōkin encountered the major players of the reform of art education of the time and unhesitatingly joined them.

To Shōkin, Mughal painting and art education based on that tradition were inspirational. When he saw the collection of Mughal paintings at the school, he first noted their surprising smallness (Katsuta, 1906a). Then he admired that human figures, architecture, plants, and animals could be expressed with clear and elegant lines in such small spaces. In particular, extremely detailed depictions of things surprised him. He even needed a magnifying glass to see microscopic brush strokes. He observed that the paintings were mostly based on imagination rather than on sketches from nature. He assumed that paintings of this style would be appreciated with poetic imagination. As an appreciator of traditional Indian art, he was a keen learner. The teaching position at the school was a learning opportunity for him as much as a teaching opportunity.

### Shōkin's works in India

Shōkin's (1906a) artistic interests in India were mainly in Buddhist art, and early on during his stay, he expressed regret that most Buddhist paintings from ancient India, especially from the time of the Buddha, had been lost. He then determined that ancient architecture could be an excellent source for his studies. To learn from such architectural remains, he visited the Ajanta and Ellora Caves, Bodhgaya, and Sarnath. On these trips, he sketched the remains of ancient Buddhism there. Later, these sketches helped him create a new style of Buddhist painting based on Indian culture, not on Chinese and Korean interpretations of Buddhism (Narihara, 2005).

However, it was not only Buddhism but also Hinduism and Indian literature that inspired his creativity. Soon after his arrival, he created a series of paintings on Hindu subjects and Indian literature. Within a month of his arrival, he designed *Sita, Lakshmana, and Rama* (a slightly different title from the one in today's record, *Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana*, Diary, Nov. 24, 1905), and then four days later, *Rama's Parting* (Diary, Nov. 28, 1905). A month later, he wrote in his diary, "Today *Sita Surviving Fire* is completed" (Diary, Dec. 24, 1905). Unfortunately, we do not know the whereabouts of two of these three works or even their designs. We know *Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana in the Forest* only from a black and white photograph (Guha-Thakurta, 1992, p.252, Fig.61). According to Guha-Thakurta, this painting is in the possession of a member of the Tagore family. It is likely that this series of Ramayana subjects were painted on commission by the Tagores and left in India, as some of Taikan's paintings had been a few years earlier (Guha-Thakurta, 1992, p.251). We should hope that other pieces have survived and will surface one day.

It is possible for us to speculate that Shōkin's sources for these Ramayana paintings were Abanindranath himself or his paintings. Looking at Shōkin's *Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana in the Forest* (Fig.1), we can observe some similarity to Abanindranath's works from this time. Moreover, compared to the work that Shōkin did before his departure for India (Fig.2), we can discern new elements emerging in his work, such as the haze between Rama and Lakshmana. This element can be seen in Abanindranath's works after his encounter with Taikan and in his wash technique. Since the subject of Rama and the story in the Ramayana must have been unfamiliar to Shōkin, it seems likely that Abanindranath would have shown him some of his paintings. In fact, an entry in Shōkin's diary, dated July 3, 1906, reads, "Abanindra babu gave me his picture of Rama. It is a well-done painting." Although this date is much later than that of the production of Shōkin's Rama piece, it is possible that such exchanges of works occurred several times. The similarity in their styles indicates that Shōkin worked closely with his host.

Another example of their interaction can be seen in their works on the same subject, *Cloud Messenger*, taken from a great Sanskrit poem, "Meghaduta" by Kalidasa. Although the original of Shōkin's *Cloud Messenger* (1906) was lost, we can see the

work in a black and white photograph (Fig.3). Its design sketch and composition are clearly influenced by Abanindranath's *Cloud Messenger* (1904, Fig.4). In both works, a *yaksa* is situated on the left, sitting in front of trees and rocks. The theme was clearly taken from the same scene of the story. There are some differences in the details, such as the man's posture and the leaves of the tree. However, we still see the connection between the two works in the man showing his profile, the style of his headdress, and the hazy atmosphere. When the foreign artist was asked to paint an unfamiliar subject, it is likely that someone explained the story and showed him another painting of the same subject as a reference. Shōkin's diary proudly states, "*Cloud Messenger* was completed. I think it is excellently done" (Diary, Jan. 10, 1906). These works show us that Shōkin was eager to learn the culture and tradition of his host country, and Abanindranath was the perfect teacher to help him.

Even in depicting a Buddhist subject, there is evidence that Shōkin learned from Abanindranath's works. Comparing Shōkin's *Buddha and Sujata* (Fig. 5) to Abanindranath's painting of the same theme (Fig. 6), Shōkin's work appears to be based on Abanindranath's work. Sujata is a woman who offered Gautama, the future Buddha, a dish of rice cooked with milk after his long ascetic practices. In Abanindranath's work, Gautama is sitting on the left holding a dish on his right hand and raising his left hand toward Sujata. She, on the right, is kneeling and praying before him with a jar to her side. On the other hand, in Shōkin's work, the positions of the two are reversed. Gautama is sitting on the right with his right hand raised. Different from Abanindranath's rendering, the dish of rice and milk is still in Sujata's hand. While Gautama has received the dish in Abanindranath's depiction, he is about to receive it in Shōkin's. The strikingly dominant banyan tree in Abanindranath's work is difficult to decipher in the reproduction of Shōkin's painting. Despite these differences, the two paintings suggest that there was a connection between their creators.

Between Abanindranath's and Shōkin's works, there is another work of the same subject by Hishida Shunsō in 1903 (Fig.7). Shino Satō, in her study on Shunsō, points out that before Shunsō's work, Sujata was a rare subject in Japanese Buddhist painting, and Shunsō must have been inspired by Abanindranath's *Sujata* (Satō, 1999, p.44). Abanindranath painted *Sujata* around 1901, and he had not acquired "wash

technique” yet. It is in 1903 Shunsō and Taikan visited India and had artistic exchanges with Abanindranath. Since Shunsō’s *Sujata* is dated 1903, it can be seen as his reinterpretation of the story based on Abanindranath’s work as a reference during his stay in Calcutta. Shunsō added a Japanese style to the trunk of the banyan tree in the background by moving it farther back and placing spreading branches in the foreground. Although *Sujata*’s jar is on her right-hand side, neither she nor Gautama is holding the dish. Shunsō must have arranged some details in his own way. Now, going back to Shōkin’s *Sujata* from 1906, we find the positioning of the two figures to be strikingly similar to one in Shunsō’s work; they are closer than in Abanindranath’s painting. Therefore, Shōkin inherited the connection between Abanindranath and Shunsō, and executed the same subject in his newly learned Indian style.

Shōkin’s other paintings of Buddhist subjects reflect what he learned in India. *The Great Departure* (Fig. 8), as Narihara (2005) points out, shows Shōkin’s study of ancient Buddhist sites. She compares the pillar behind the Prince to the pillar in Ajanta Cave 2. Although they are not identical, the similarity can be recognized in their detailed decorations (p.556). She also highlights a slight similarity between the face of the Prince and that of a bodhisattva in a painting in Cave 1. As Yokoyama Taikan also applied his studies of Ajanta Caves to his paintings of Indian subjects, the ancient Buddhist remains were significant sources for Japanese painters who visited India. In particular, the Ajanta Cave paintings are admired because of their similarity to the wall painting at the *Hōryū-ji* temple. As I mentioned before, Shōkin expressed regret that most of ancient Indian paintings had been lost. There were only partial remains of them in ancient Buddhist temples and caves. However, he found sculpture as interesting as those remains of paintings. He stated that he should study these and use them as materials for his works (Katsuta, 1096a). As Narihara points out, it is likely that he used his study at the ancient Buddhist site as a model for the elements in his Buddhist painting.

The figure of the Prince indicates Shōkin’s departure from traditional Japanese Buddhist painting. Narihara (2005) examines a new trend in Buddhist painting in Japan at the turn of the century (p.562). By seeing India as the true origin of Buddhism, Japanese painters found a way to demote China to a cultural source, instead of the only

source. The traditional styles of depicting Buddhist figures, which were based on Chinese models, disappeared here from Shōkin's work. Instead, he based the Prince on Indian sources. Scholars have pointed to sketches of an Indian figure that seem to have been the model for the Prince figure (Hori, 1998; Narihara, 2005). Owing to its realistic style, the painting became a history painting rather than a religious one. The same style can be seen in his other painting of the Prince, *Prince Siddhartha under a Jambu-dvīpa tree* (Fig.9). In this work, the young Prince is standing, lost in contemplation. Behind him are trees and an architectural element. Different from the idealized space in religious paintings, it is as if the Prince existed in a real space, which makes the style appear more realistic. The figure itself is that of a meditating young nobleman rather than a sublime religious icon. The Buddha is certainly recognized as a real person who existed in history here. The historicizing of religious painting is one of the most significant results of the artist's stay in India.

Shōkin also showed an interest in the landscape of this foreign country. In his report to *Bijutsu Shinpo*, he expressed admiration for the grandeur and beauty of the mountain landscape of the Himalayas (Katsuta, 1906d, 1906e). In May and June of 1906, Shōkin stayed in Darjeeling to avoid the heat of Calcutta. The magnificent view there, with snow and clouds, moved him. He wrote, "The vast Ganges, the grand Himalayas. Indian artists truly hold the treasure of the earth. It is not in vain because they have created great works like *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*" (1906e). In addition to picture postcards, he sent his own sketches along with his report to the publisher (Figs. 10 and 11). Unfortunately, the painting that he probably developed from these sketches has been lost.

He also painted landscapes of everyday life that he observed in India. Among the Indian subjects painted by Japanese artists, Shōkin's *The Past and the Present in the Holy Land* (Fig.12) is especially peculiar. Most Indian subjects were developed as history or religious paintings, but this work shows a combination of genre painting and landscape. In this painting, two women with food baskets on their heads are about to pass a ruin. They are accompanied by a herd of goats. The stone fragments with elaborate carving laid on the ground suggest that this place was once a holy site. The holy temple of the past and everyday life in the present coexist in this work. Moreover,

the women and the goats suggest slow but continuous movement in one direction, as if it is a metaphor for the passage of time. By contrast, the ruin is immobile. It has been there and will be there throughout a long history. In his sketchbooks, there are many scenes of everyday life as well as historical sites. This painting evinces Shōkin's praise not only of a great history but also of the people living with that history.

The Tagores planned to hold an exhibition of Shōkin's works at the end of 1906. It seemed that the Tagores started planning it in August, and especially Surendranath helped the plan (Diary, Aug. 21, 1906). In Shōkin's diary, many entries from December 1906 and January 1907 mention preparations for the exhibition. We can see how hard he worked to prepare for the exhibition. However, he also mentions some problems and a delay. The diary expresses his anxiety about the slow progress (Diary, January 5, 1907). Due to the lack of documents, we cannot confirm whether the exhibition was actually held or not. Therefore, we also do not know what happened to the paintings that Shōkin produced for the exhibition. When Yokoyama visited Calcutta and faced financial difficulty, the Tagores also held an exhibition of his works to help him. It is possible that Shōkin had financial difficulties, and the exhibition was planned by his hosts to help him. However, without further materials, we can only speculate. A study suggests that after Shōkin left India, one of his works was exhibited at the third exhibition of the Indian Society of Oriental Art in 1910 (Mitter, 1992, p.319). Some of his works must have remained somewhere in India.

#### Shōkin and the Japanese community in Calcutta

Besides the artistic circles mainly focused around the Tagores, Shōkin built close relationships with Japanese living in Calcutta at the time. It is surprising to know many Japanese were living there at the beginning of the twentieth century. Even though the cultural exchange between the two countries had just started, a small Japanese community had already formed. They held many gatherings, such as a New Year party (Diary, Jan. 1, 1906). Furthermore, Shōkin once visited "the Japan town" and ate *udon* noodles (Diary, Feb. 28, 1906). In addition to such occasions, members of the Japanese communities visited each other's residences almost everyday and would often spend



evenings together (Diary). These activities supported Shōkin and eased his loneliness and the difficulty of living in the foreign country.

His diaries mention several groups of Japanese whom he met regularly. One group was in Santiniketan. Sano Jin'noske and Kawaguchi Ekai most frequently communicated with Shōkin. Sano came to India with Shōkin, both at the invitation of Rabindranath Tagore. While Shōkin was hired to teach art in the Tagore household first, Sano was invited to teach Japanese language and Judo at Rabindranath's school in Santiniketan (Azuma, 1981; Panda, 2017). Sano and Shōkin visited each other frequently. Kawaguchi Ekai (1866–1945) was a Buddhist priest/scholar, visiting Tibet to study Buddhist scripture. After experiencing extraordinary difficulty, he succeeded in visiting Tibet in 1900. Two years later, he left Tibet and stayed in India for a while. Although he left for Japan in January of 1903, he revisited India in October of the same year. When Shōkin arrived in Calcutta in 1905, Kawaguchi had been in India and had studied Sanskrit. In 1906, he stayed in Santiniketan and continued his Sanskrit studies (Azuma, 1981). As an experienced traveler and a Buddhist priest, Kawaguchi supported Shōkin throughout his stay. It was Kawaguchi who invited Shōkin on the two-month vacation in Darjeeling. A carpenter in Santiniketan, named Kusumoto, also maintained relations with Shōkin. Next, Japanese businessmen, the second group, were present in India, too. The name Mitsui Bussan appears often in Shōkin's diaries. A branch of Mitsui Bussan was established in Bombay in 1892 to import cotton from India. Several Mitsui businessmen with whom Shōkin communicated may also have been there to work in the cotton business. Another group is more obscure. Shōkin referred to these people as colonel or major. Military records show that several Japanese military attachés were sent to British India in the same period; therefore, Shōkin had opportunities to meet these army officers (Rikugunsho, May 16, 1906).

#### Departure from India, 1907

Unfortunately, Shōkin's study and teaching in India were discontinued in 1907. He began to complain of ill health in the summer of 1906 (Diary). He had severe headache and fever on July 16. The next day, he felt pains in his limbs and lower back. Moreover, he constantly complained about the summer heat in Calcutta. He finally

decided to return to Japan in the summer of 1907, two years ahead of schedule. In addition to health problems, the exhibition and financial difficulty might have compelled him to make this decision. However, even during this shortened stay, he learned much about Indian culture and art, and after returning to Japan, he presented several paintings of Indian subjects at competitions and exhibitions in Japan. The two-year stay in Calcutta gave him extraordinary opportunities to participate in this crucial period of change in Indian art.

### **Conclusion**

In the shadow of Okakura, Taikan, and Shunsō, the life of Katsuta Shōkin in India has remained obscure. Although the information available to us is very limited, this attempt to present his experiences in India shows the role that he played in the history of the modernization of art both in Japan and in India. In his diaries, we see the excitement, suffering, and pleasure of learning and teaching. He witnessed a historical moment of change in the Indian art world and the early stage of the new Bengali art movement. Members of the Tagore family, such as Rabindranath, Abanindranath, Gaganendranath, and Surendranath, were major figures in his life there (Fig.13). Furthermore, the presence of the Japanese community signifies communication between India and Japan spanning various fields of culture and society. Thus, we must explore wider areas to examine the history of Indo-Japanese relations. Hopefully, this research will inspire further digging into Shōkin's paintings and documents, which are probably somewhere in India waiting to be uncovered.

## Figures

Fig. 1 Katsuta Shōkin, *Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana in the Forest*

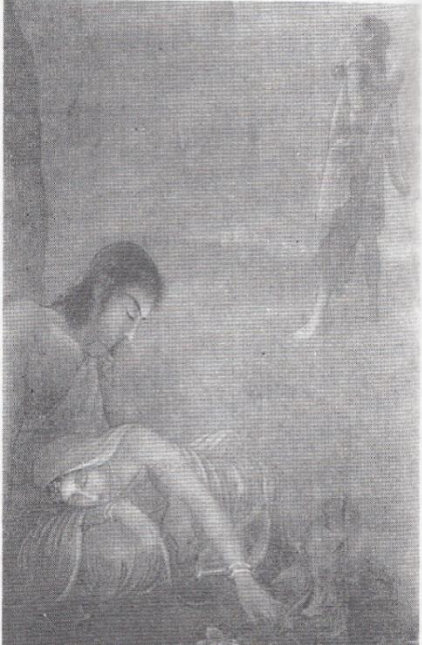


Fig. 2 Katsuta Shōkin, *Myoraku*, 1905, Tokyo University of Arts.

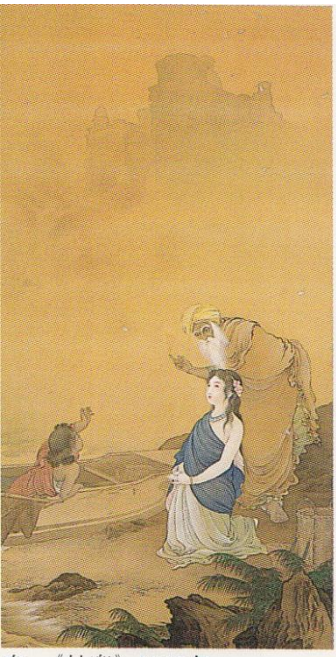


Fig. 3 Katsuta Shōkin, *Kumo no Tsukai* (*Cloud Messenger*)



Fig. 4 Abanindranath Tagore, *Cloud Messenger*, c. 1904, Watercolor, Rabindra Bharati Society.

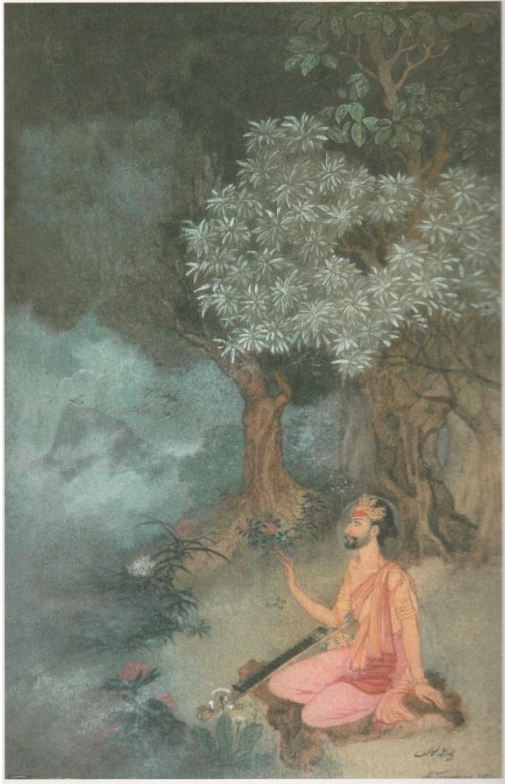


Fig. 5 Katsuta Shōkin, *Budda to Sujata* (*Buddha and Sujata*), design.

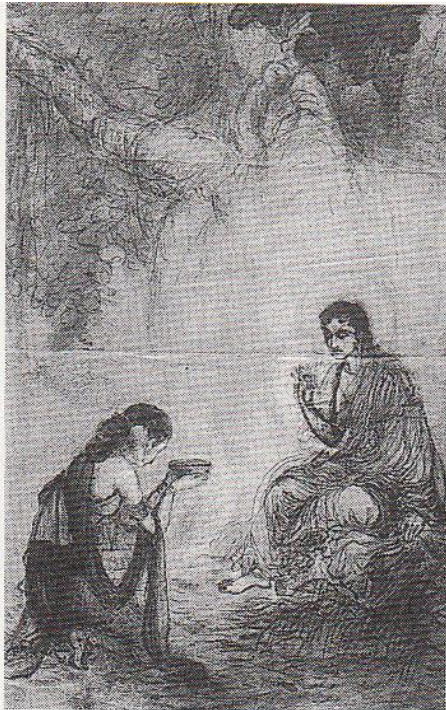




Fig. 6 Abanindranath Tagore, *Buddha and Sujata*, c. 1901, Watercolor, Indian Museum.

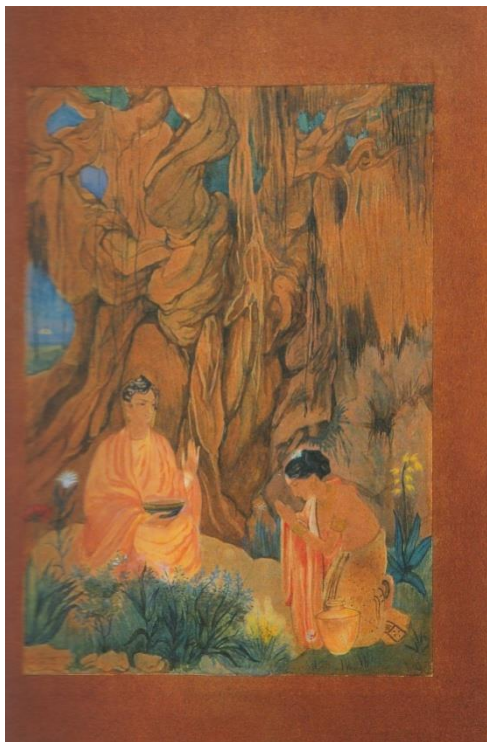


Fig. 7 Hishida Shunsō, *Nyubi Kuyo* (Serving a Bowl of Gruel, or *Buddha and Sujata*), 1903, Nagano Prefectural Shinano Art Museum.

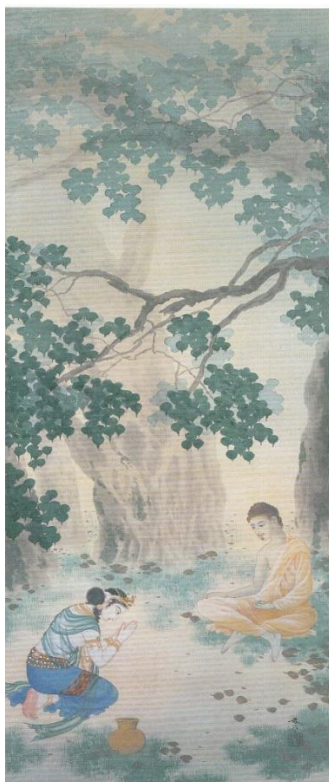


Fig. 8 Katsuta Shōkin, *Shutsujo Shaka (The Great Departure)*, 1907, Fukushima Prefectural Museum of Art.



Fig. 9 Katsuta Shōkin, *Enbujuka no Shidda Taishi (Prince Shiddhartha under a Jambu-dvīpa Tree)*, 1908 (?).

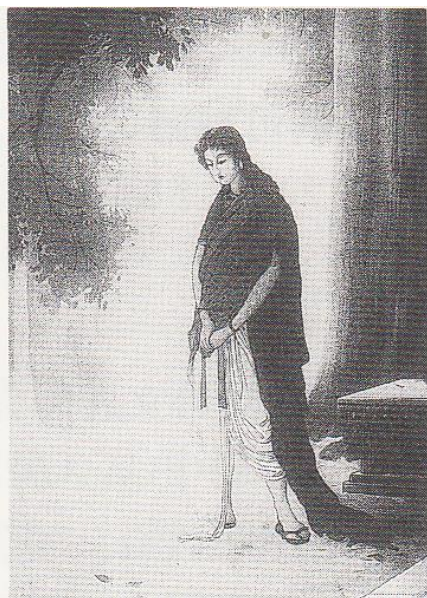


Fig. 10 Katsuta Shōkin, *Himaraya no Ichibu (In the Himalayas)*, 1906, Sketch.





Fig. 11 Katsuta Shōkin, *Himaraya no Ichibu* (In the Himalayas), 1906, Sketch.





Fig. 12 Katsuta Shōkin, *Seichi no Konjaku* (*The Past and the Present in the Holy Land*), 1908 (?).

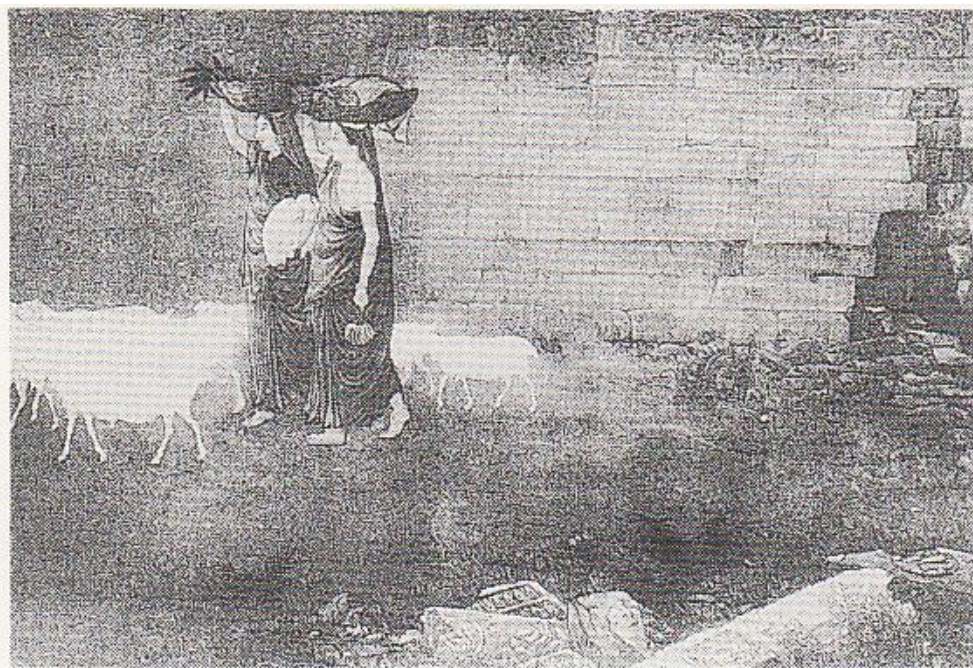


Fig. 13 Picture taken at the Tagore house. From left, Gaganendranath, Shōkin, Rabindranath, Kawaguchi Ekai, Abanindranath, Sano Jin'nosuke, Shomorendranath (?), c. 1905.



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