Traditional Japanese Arts in a Social and Political Context: Overview and Practical Application

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Abstract

Is traditional always a synonym for "conservative" or does it have the potential to challenge and react to social and political problems? This research explores how contemporality and social activism, particularly, have developed inside a group of traditional Japanese arts – woodblock prints *ukiyo-e*, calligraphy *shodo*, Japanese painting *nihonga*, and *ikebana*. For this purpose, I analyzed the contemporary art scene through publications in the media and exhibition catalogs both online and offline, from the period of the Japanese economic miracle till nowadays. By comparing the visual forms of traditional arts and problematics reflected in their topics then and now, I attempted to understand better traditional arts' role and power in participating in social, political, and environmental discourse. Besides traditionally socially oriented woodblock prints, that from their very beginning in the Edo period were critical and satirical – free-spirited depictions of social life with all its goods and flaws, this research unveiled an emerging movement of so-called neo-arts in *nihonga*, *shodo*, and *ikebana*, that raise questions about women's rights (Fuyuko Matsui), tragedies of war (Ilya Baibikov) and many others. At the same time, as an art practitioner, I created *Nihonga* artworks that carry a social message to support the ongoing change toward deeper social and political engagement. Doing so I am starting an important but still absent in a public field conversation on how traditional Japanese arts stop being a spectator and become an actor in the social and political life of the country.

Keywords: Japanese, *nihonga*, traditional, social

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Introduction

Born as a tool for depicting reality, recording daily life, and communicating, through the centuries and cultures art has changed its definition and reasons multiple times. It is like a big living organism that keeps transforming and evolving.

The etymology of the word “art” going back to the 10th century and has its roots in the Latin “ars” – “work of art; practical skill; a business, craft" (Art - etymology, origin & meaning, n.d.). The first usage of this term was found in 13th-century texts, but plausibly its variants have existed since ancient days. For example, already as early as in the 4th century BC Greek philosopher Plato determined art as a “mimesis” – a copy or an imitation of reality. Defining and describing art is an ongoing process, it always has and always will have a place in our life, as well as, quoting an author of “The History of Art” H.W. Janson, it can’t be isolated from “the context of time and circumstance, whether past or present. How could it be otherwise, so long as the art is still being created all around us, opening our eyes almost daily to new experiences and like that forcing us to readjust our understanding?” (Janson & Janson, 1977).

By being inseparable from “time and circumstance” art can’t avoid participating in political, social, and, not to mention, cultural discourse. Also being diversified and heterogeneous, it consists of numerous independent elements and exists in various shapes. Depending on those factors, art can be a passive or an active actor of social discourse, specifically serving a purpose of external power or, on the contrary, initiating changes driven by internal powers.

It is impossible to overestimate the role of art, whether active or passive, in confronting contemporary global issues, but it constantly needs to question the borders of acceptable and conventional. The bigger the contrast – the more powerful the message can be. From this perspective, the potential of traditional art to spread a message is enormous. And what if those arts are coming from a country that has always been considered very traditional, yet culturally rich, like Japan? What is the place of traditional arts in Japan nowadays and is it capable of changing and reacting to modern agenda? I’ve tried to explore these questions as a researcher diving into the history of selected Japanese traditional arts and as an art practitioner by creating artworks carrying a social message.

Japanese Traditional Arts and Crafts

Before talking about Japanese traditional arts, it is important to understand what we will understand under “traditional arts”. According to National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), “the folk and traditional arts are rooted in and reflective of the cultural life of a community” (FOLK & TRADITIONAL ARTS 2016). This means that the arts I’ll be covering today were established a long time ago enough to become an integral part and be shared by Japanese society. As a whole Japanese traditional culture is a complicated formation, the shaping of which was almost completed in the second half of the 19th century when the traditionalist movement mingei’s (folkcraft) effort helped to establish the system of Living National Treasures (Mason & Dinwiddie, 2005). It was then that traditional techniques and arts were redefined and gained its recognition. Among those arts were Japanese painting *nihonga*, woodblock prints *ukiyo-e*, calligraphy *shodo*, cultivation of small trees bonsai, the tea ceremony sado, flower arrangement *ikebana*, and many others. In addition to aesthetic qualities, they also had ethical ones. The formation of a single nationwide complex of traditional culture was carried out by the efforts of different social groups, and different

classes. Each of them made a personal contribution to its formation in accordance with ideas about the surrounding world and its place in it. Despite the difference in temporal and social characteristics of various types of Japanese traditional culture, all sectors of society participated in its creation in one way or another: some as customers and consumers, others as inspirers and scholars, and some as creators and performers. The complex of Japanese traditional culture is a treasury of the collective creative experience of the entire population, a kind of spiritual arsenal of the nation, which could be used for both - defense and advancement (Grisheleva, 1986).

Traditional culture throughout the history of Japan performed the most important function of consolidating the nation and distinguishing it from others, not only at the initial stage of the formation of the nation and its identity but also at critical moments for the nation's fate and its historical existence. Traditional culture can be a living source for creative activities. And traditional arts, as a part of it, can be a drive or a tool for social and political changes. At the same time, turning to traditional culture can also be counterproductive, because often "traditional" is taken as a synonym for "conservative", which excludes or slows down progress.

Woodblock Print – *Ukiyo-e*

Starting a conversation about Japanese traditional arts which actively and almost directly were and still engaged in social and political life, the most obvious one to mention is *ukiyo-e* or woodblock prints.

Ukiyo-e prints, "pictures of the changing world", became a very outstanding phenomenon of the urban culture of the 17th - 19th centuries. Thanks to their existence in this urban environment prints were diversified and unique in features of their artistic language.

The most famous genres of printed graphics in Japan are images of beauties bijin-ga, portraits of kabuki theater actors and images of scenes from *yakusha-e* performances, the heroic genre of *musya-e*, landscapes *fukei-ga*, greeting sheets *surimono* and erotic prints *shunga*. These prints served as advertisements, placards, and posters and were produced to entertain, and sometimes enlighten.

However, it has never been considered high art and, on the contrary, aroused the fears of the Japanese military government as a product that promotes moral decay and freethinking. In the early and middle decades of 18th century Japan, a socially and politically unsettled time, *ukiyo-e* prints were a way of provoking and challenging comfortable ideas and ways of thinking, which resulted in strengthening and consolidating opposition to the government. Political issues were subtly addressed through the use of remote warriors, scenes that portrayed popular satirical fiction, and the supernatural as a means of interpretation among the townspeople. Since the artists who expressed social and political concerns belonged to the same community that possessed such concerns, a new language of signs and symbols emerged, which was called a "public discourse" (Lillehoj, 2007). Like any printed matter, *ukiyo-e* was censored and many topics were banned.

Japanese graphics of the post-war period differ from those before. Whereas in those years there was an atmosphere of grief-stricken pessimism in painting, the *ukiyo-e* prints of the sixties show people coming forward, demanding and defending themselves. Ikeda Shuzo's woodblock print, Gathering (1966), shows demonstrators with simple and rough features,

who are dancing with colorful flags. Another example of social activism was artist Koguchi Ichiro, who made a series of prints highlighting the Ashio Copper Mine Pollution Incident. Kawamata Incident (part 2) by Koguchi Ichiro represents a wave of demonstrators fighting police. Tense in color, Koguchi Ichiro's dynamic print combines publicism with high symbolic generalization. And this quality has defined all Japanese progressive graphic art in those years.

Calligraphy – *Shodo*

The history of Japanese calligraphy is rich in masterpieces and can be traced back to around the 5th century. It was then when the first samples of writing from the continent, namely from China, started to appeared on the Japanese islands. This was due to the fact that in China by that time all the basic principles of calligraphy, the types of hieroglyphic inscriptions and their features, and most importantly, the traditions of use, had already developed.

A calligrapher creates a calligraphic work, not just to depict the meaning, but to express and embody the idea of a single word, as well as a whole poetic or prosaic piece. At the same time, as a rule, it is associated with established forms of written characters: the basis of calligraphy is a system of handwriting, each of which has semantic nuances and corresponds to the author's intention. So, although it might look like the art, which operates with artist's self-expression and dealing with hieroglyphs, which carrying multiply meaning should be a fat land for political and social statements, its tight connection with Zen Buddhism redirected the power of *shodo* from external development to development internal. It used to be widely practiced by Buddhist monks and can be compared to a meditation, where one's mind should be absolutely clear, as called by the Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitaro – *mushin* or "no mind state" (Kitaro, 1965).

Japanese Painting – *Nihonga*

Nihonga is a style of painting that utilizes traditional Japanese materials and techniques. It is characterized by the use of mineral and organic pigments bound with Japanese glue, as well as traditional Japanese painting techniques such as ink wash painting sumi-e, Japanese narrative painting yamato-e and gold leaf application. It was established in Japan as a separate class of painting apart from oil painting in the late Meiji era, around 1880s when the Japanese government began to support Japanese-style painting calling it like this. From its very beginning *Nihonga* was always tied to politics. It served the functions of visualizing the nation-state and guaranteed the stability of Japanese cultural identity and ethnic particularity.

There were several painting schools that in some way dealt with social issues in Japan. For instance, the "Mito School" of painting, which began to develop in the latter half of the 18th century and was closely linked to the Mito branch of the Tokugawa shogunate, aimed to advance neo-Confucian principles through its works of art. Or the "Shij School" of painting, which emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was influenced by Western realism and naturalism and frequently addressed social issues like urbanization and poverty.

Certain changes were taking place in painting in after war period. It should be noted that before the Second World War the traditional *nihonga* painting was the leading trend in Japan. The relevance and demand for this artistic movement in Japan after the Second World War was declining. *Nihonga* painting began to occupy a modest place in contemporary art, but it

was an important art for the training of craftsmen. *Nihonga* panels and screens were still mostly connected to medieval themes or were illustrations of classical Japanese literature. Consequently, there was not a complete break with traditional art culture in Japan after the war. In addition to adherence to tradition, a certain innovation in the painting also can be noted, which was manifested in the use of new materials - foil, ground stone and others. But the combination of traditional form and modern content, as in the series "Hiroshima" by Iri and Toshi Maruki, has so far been a rarity and an exception. In the post-war period, the theme of grief and national distress occupies a central place in the canvasses of artists. The Japanese were portrayed as lonely, destitute and passive. The canvases are imbued with a tragic despair. Pessimistic worldview is reflected in the landscape. The alarming voice of protest and warning against the scourge of the atomic bomb is raised most loudly in the works of artists. Maruka Iri and Maruka Toshiko depict the horror and sorrow of an atomic explosion. The artists were awarded the International Peace Prize for their work Hiroshima (1950–1955). This series is unique in the grandeur of its conception and solution. The viewers observing these works feel as if they are in the middle of a terrible event, surrounded by a mountain of disfigured corpses, mutilated people and wounded soldiers. Some fragments of the panels are rather hard to look at, so naturalistic that they cause shock and rejection rather than pity. Japanese artists often crossed the line into art when describing the subject of the atomic bombing. In this way they achieve their goal. Looking at the ugliness and horror of these paintings, viewers wish it had never happened again.

But in comparison with *ukiyo-e* prints, which very often were actively political, *Nihonga* painting was usually a tool in hands of the ruling regime. Unlike prints, creation and exhibiting of paintings required more resources and all major sponsors and customers were affiliated with the government. As a result, there are no many examples of internal influence of traditional, in particularly *nihonga*, artists on social or political discourse in the country. And in the times, when we hear about Japanese painting being used to criticize or comment on political topics, it is usually done by not *nihonga* artists, but others, who "appropriates" its style for arousing critical awareness of ideological workings.

Flower Arrangement – *Ikebana*

Ikebana is a traditional Japanese art form that involves the arrangement of flowers in vases or other containers. It is also known as *kado*, or "the way of flowers." The practice of *ikebana* dates back to the 7th century, and it has evolved over time to become a highly respected art form in Japan.

Ikebana is more than just the arrangement of flowers – in a certain way it is similar to calligraphy a mean of expressing one's feelings and emotions through the use of, originally, plant and other materials. It is a meditative and contemplative practice that requires skill, patience, and attention to detail. *Ikebana* arrangements often use a limited number of flowers, branches, and leaves, and they are carefully placed in a container to create a sense of balance and harmony.

Ikebana has played an important role in Japanese culture and society for centuries. It is often used in religious ceremonies and rituals, and it is also used to decorate homes and public spaces. In Japan, *ikebana* is often given as a gift to express gratitude or to celebrate special occasions such as weddings and birthdays.

Substantially *ikebana* has been serving decorative and ritual functions and there is no specific record of *ikebana* being used to address political or social issues in Japan. Although it is a highly expressive art form that can be used to communicate a wide range of emotions, so it is possible that it has been used to convey certain messages or ideas in the past.

Contemporality: Tradition-Based and Neo-Arts

Contemporality in traditional Japanese arts refers to the ways in which traditional Japanese art forms are being practiced and interpreted in the contemporary world. While many traditional Japanese arts, such as calligraphy, painting, flower arrangement, and *ukiyo-e*, have a long history and are deeply rooted in Japanese culture, they are also constantly evolving and being adapted to suit the needs and interests of contemporary practitioners. In every art field, there are many of those who are exploring new approaches to these traditional art forms, such as incorporating elements of other cultures or using modern materials. Although the degree and speed of evolving is varying depending on various social, historical, and cultural factors.

One of the problems which traditional arts faced since the end of 19th century is a rapid development of political, industrial and, alongside, artistic life. That put a lot of pressure on an urgent necessity to adopt to new circumstances, what wasn't received equally well by all participants. That's when new movements began to grow from old formations. Those new movement originated from traditional arts also often being called "tradition-based" or as I'd like to address it - "neo" arts. The term "neo-arts" does not have a widely recognized or standardized definition in art historical discourse. However, the prefix "neo-" (meaning "new") is commonly used to denote movements that revisit, reinterpret, or reactivate earlier artistic styles or philosophies. These "neo-" movements often emerge as responses to preceding art forms, aiming to adapt traditional aesthetics to contemporary contexts or to challenge established conventions. The usage of the term is varies between different genres, and if in some of them, like neo-*nihonga* – it has been defined and widely used, then in others it doesn't exist as an established term and is being suggested by me as a unifying definition, that reflects the differences between the traditional and contemporary forms of the arts.

Neo-*Ikebana*

Neo-*ikebana*, which more often being called the avant-garde *ikebana*, is a contemporary interpretation of the ancient Japanese art of *ikebana*, which entails arranging flowers in a visually appealing manner. Neo-*ikebana* is more open to individual expression and creativity than traditional ikebana, which follows strict guidelines and conventions. It deviates from the traditional triangular composition used in *ikebana* arrangements and frequently uses unconventional materials.

Neo-*ikebana*, which has grown in popularity in Japan and across the globe since Sogetsu school, aims to introduce a modern and contemporary perspective to the art of flower arrangement. It is frequently linked to the idea of *wabi-sabi*, which emphasizes the value of natural, organic forms and the beauty of imperfection.

One notable artist associated with the avant-garde *ikebana* movement is Tetsumi Kudō. Kudō's *ikebana* arrangements often incorporate industrial materials and everyday objects, and are known for his using his art to "communicate" about the issues of present – ecology and sexuality. Also as a leader of an Anti-Art movement, he corresponded to the need of the

youth and engaged in political and social life, what found it's reflection in is art. Another notable artist who focus his art around ecology is Tetsunori Kawana, who creates large-scale, sculptural *ikebana* arrangements that incorporate elements of abstract expressionism and minimalism.

A notable example of avant-garde *Ikebana* art is "Flower Sculpture" by Tetsunori Kawana, where the sculptor used a lot of technology and materials to create an interactive flower installation that responds to the viewer and the environment around it.

Another interesting example, is a Japanese artist Watanabe Yoshiko, who in her artworks often addresses ecological themes, just as in her work titled "141.3".

Being a traditional Japanese art, *ikebana* is not practiced exclusively by Japanese only, especially in a context of neo-formations. Ilya Baibikov, flower arrangement artist from Russia, who recently lives in Kobe, has been a Sogetsu *Ikebana* instructor for many years. In his artworks he uses unconventional materials and addressing non-typical for *ikebana* topics, dragging it from arts decorative into arts conceptual.

One of his recent works was introduced in an anti-war exhibition "Home. Smoke. Home," which took place in Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. The *ikebana* work on display included burnt bamboo and flowers in blue and yellow, the colors of the Ukrainian flag. As artist commented himself "it represents independence and unity with the Ukrainian people who are fighting for their survival" (Hasebe, 2022).

Neo-Calligraphy

Contemporary Japanese calligraphy began to form in the early 20th century. The term "neo-calligraphy" mostly has been used in the context of Islamic calligraphy. Applied to Japanese calligraphy, it is characterized by a looser, more informal writing style that combines elements of conventional Japanese calligraphy with a more contemporary, artistic approach.

One notable example of contemporary *shodo*'s practitioners is Japanese artist Rie Takeda, who describes her work as multi-layered, both literally and metaphorically. "A harmonious marriage of beautiful calligraphy and imagery with a Western contemporary flair" (Moor, 2019). Her most distinguishable works are prints and body art performances.

Another important name which should be mentioned is Shigeko Kubota, a Japanese video artist, who's most infamous work, nevertheless, was a performative calligraphy writing called "Vagina Painting" (1965). It was presented at Cinematheque in New York on July 4, 1965 (Hawley, n.d.). By tying a paintbrush to her underwear and dipping it in red, so that it appeared to come from inside her, she moved her hips to drag the brush across canvas that was lying on the ground, what created menstrual-like smears. Numerous feminist art historians have praised this work in the years since for fundamentally shifting traditional, patriarchal roles: man as artist, woman as nude muse. It could have also been a nod to the custom of lower-class geishas who occasionally entertained their clients by writing calligraphy with brushes inserted in their vaginas. The dichotomies of high and low art, masculine and feminine elements, and Eastern and Western cultures were combined in Kubota's performance.

Neo-*Nihonga*

As an alternative to contemporary Western-style painting, Tenmyouya Hisashi, a contemporary Japanese artist, developed the art concept of neo-*nihonga* in 2001. He thought that modern Japanese painting has lost its substance by sticking to traditional mediums like mineral pigments, glue, and ink. Neo *Nihonga* is a novel art form that incorporates contemporary mediums like acrylic paint while also making reference to traditional elements of Japanese art like traditional line drawings, decorative, playful and symbolic elements (Tenmyouya, n.d.).

Among other artists, who are challenging *nihonga* borders is, not a *nihonga* artist, but "appropriator" Aida Makoto and Mise Natsunosuke, who believes that *nihonga* will develop in the same way that languages do as society changes over time. As he says, *nihonga* can create "new traditions" because *nihonga* was created as a "new" tradition in the late nineteenth century through the blending of numerous different and frequently conflicting traditions, and has since been reformulated numerous times by painters up to the present.

Another notable figure is Fuyuko Matsui, the first woman to receive a PhD in Japanese painting from Tokyo University of the Arts. Deeply rooted in traditional Japanese techniques and themes, her works often confront issues of pain, madness, gender, and mortality. Drawing influence from classical Japanese painters as well as Renaissance masters, Matsui uses the *nihonga* format to explore contemporary anxieties, particularly through motifs like the "Nine Stages of Decay" (kusōzu), which she reinterprets with unsettling clarity.

Even with development of neo-*nihonga*, discourse on coverage of social, political and environmental topics in Japanese painting is almost missing, or just occasionally being mentioned as a part of bigger conversation about contemporary scene or socially engaged arts in Japan.

Personal Practice

My personal interest is laying in an area of socially engaged art in correlation to traditional, particularly Japanese, arts, where I like to explore the borders of acceptable in terms of shape, materials and topics, as well as bringing interdisciplinarity into the process and exhibiting - performance and installation. As a Japanese painting researcher, I tried to expand borders of my own art practice by covering social issues, such as agism, alcoholism, environmental pollution and human rights in my *nihonga* paintings and by bringing traditional Japanese culture to contemporary performative shape. And if to define main directions in which I am developing my own *nihonga* practice, those will be: directly addressing social and political issues by visual matters, following the traditional technical process and using traditional materials; indirect references hidden behind a traditional shape; fusion of contemporary conceptual and performative approach with traditional *Nihonga*, specifically transforming the process of making a painting into an art itself, where it became as important as the final product, if not more. And thus, I'd like to describe three works, each of which represents a certain approach of me redefining borders of the Japanese painting.

Crucifixion

The first artwork was created intentionally to spread a political message and as a reaction on a certain situation in Belarus, when in the year 2020, after falsified elections people went on

streets to speak out their disagreement. Those protests were brutally suppressed by riot police, participants alongside with random passersby were detained, what lead to numerous injuries and some deaths.

The work titled “Crucifixion” (2021) was created prior an exhibition dedicated to Belarusian protest art – “Expired. Belarus Art of Resistance” which took place in Tokyo in January 2021 and was organized and curated by me together with another Belarusian activist. This painting combines the aesthetics of European Christian icon with technical traditionalism of *Nihonga*. We can see a figure of a man who is being detained by police. Light captured by darkness. Metal leaf, a signature material for Japanese painting, represents a strong and clear spirit, the inner shining of a pure soul. At the same time a dark and coarse mineral pigment – a symbol of harshness, injustice and callous heart. This is a motif of ongoing confrontation of opposites - Chinese yin and yang, biblical good and evil. But same as Lucifer has a divine nature or yin has yang, In the painting there is also a hope that the darkness conceals light and a change is possible.

What make this work different from typical *nihonga* is the theme which addresses a political situation and speaking independently, not serving a purpose of political regime’s support.

Re-main

The next artwork, which is at the same time my Master degree’s final project, named “re-main” (2023) and at the first glance it is not raising any socially significant topics. Same as in previous example, this painting was created in traditional technique, with a usage of metal leaf and various types of mineral pigments. The most eye-catching element of this work is an irregular panel’s shape, what puts this artwork aside from the majority of other *Nihonga*. But this panel’s modification is not only a visual transformation, but a reference to another issue of contemporality.

This artwork is about time, memory and people in our life. For its creation I used garden soil. Soil is a source of life; in soil we turn after death and soil contains remains of our past. It quotes traditions of both Christian icon and Buddhist sculpture. Central figure is very contrast, covered by metal leaf and symbolizes spirit or memory of a person. We can recognize a shape of a man, even see contour lines, but it is mostly flat. Those lines are imprinted in the paper, because human's spirit is about deepness, not about tangible textures. Metal leaf, which is bright now, will darken and fade away, just like people's lives do. At the same time background is very rough and dark. We can see and touch much more here. But it is still dark and monochromatic, because the light is hidden in a person who looks or who is being looked at. In overall the panel with the person is slightly sticking out, showing triumph of spiritual over physical.

Another variation of this artwork is an artwork without central figure. When person is taken out, we can see the same textures and scenery as on the rest of the panel. Although we still can see and feel the missing part. Memories are deeply engraved in our life, and it will always remain imprints of people, even if they won't be there anymore. At the same time this version of the artwork is also referring to Buddhist sculpture. First of all, empty space in the artwork is just like an empty chair, which was a well-known representation of Buddha in the first century B.C. And for the second, it is a reference to Afghanistan's Bamiyan Buddhas, which were blasted by Taliban on March 2001.

In this case behind the traditional shape is hidden an indirect reference to problematic of neglecting or abusing humanistic and cultural values, whether it is a place of an individuum in the world or religious radicalism.

Under My Skin

And finally, the third work was created as a part of anti-war performance, which took a place this year as a reaction to Russian aggression in Ukraine. Titled "Under my skin" (2022) it combines contemporary performative approach, transforming the process of making a painting, with traditional *Nihonga* materials and a final product, which by itself can be classified as *Nihonga*.

> One death is a tragedy. Thousands are mathematics. It's easier to emphasize a single instance of grief, but when the numbers of grief are countless - it becomes a new normal. We will never be able to pass through ourselves all the pain war brings to people's lives. But it is important to remember what stands behind those numbers. Under my skin there are millions of nerve endings. If I can't imagine the pain of every single human in the war, I might feel how overwhelming it's number. Thousand of hairs, pulled in a silent prayer, as a symbol of thousands of war casualties. Lives, which were pulled off from the skin of the Earth. Rested in between blue silk and gold, heaven and wheat fields. Each is precious.

This performance, just like Shigeko Kubota's calligraphy or painting by Aida Makoto, making an artist a literal part of the artwork, not only the creator, but also a material. Demonstrating, that artistic world and culture are inseparable from us and capable of affecting not only our mental, but also physical shape.

Conclusion

The definition and purpose of art have evolved over time and cultures and continue to change and adapt to the context of time and circumstance. It is an inseparable part of our lives, and it is impossible to overestimate its role in social, political, and cultural discourse. Depending on the factors involved, art can be a passive or an active participant in this discourse, which we could see through the comparison of *ikebana* and *ukiyo-e*. Nevertheless, its potential to spread a message is significant.

Japanese traditional arts and crafts form a complex and rich cultural heritage that played an important role in the formation of the national identity and the spiritual arsenal of the nation. They were shaped by various social groups and classes and can be seen as a reflection of the collective creative experience of the entire population. Such traditional arts as calligraphy, painting, flower arrangement, and *ukiyo-e*, have a long history and are deeply rooted in Japanese culture. However, traditional art forms are also constantly evolving and adapting to the needs and interests of contemporary practitioners.

Tradition-based art or neo-art movements have emerged as a result of this evolution, and are characterized by incorporating elements of other cultures or using modern materials in traditional art forms. This shows that traditional art in Japan has the capability of changing and reacting to modern agendas, and the process is ongoing.

Additionally, traditional art can be a powerful tool for addressing contemporary global issues. It holds a powerful potential to address and react to modern global issues, as it can generate strong contrasts which in turn makes the message more powerful. The potential, that yet wasn't fully developed. Traditional art can be a drive or a tool for social and political changes, yet turning to traditional culture can also be counterproductive as it is often associated with conservatism. Hence, generating a positive impact requires to keep questioning and challenging the borders of what is considered conventional.

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