Oil Painting Techniques and Materials in Early Modern Japan

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The transition of the oil painting technique before modern times, which has rarely been discussed, was studied using bibliographical studies and related paintings. Oil paintings on the *Urushi* (Japanese lacquer) artifacts were made in the 7th and 8th centuries. However, this has not become an established practice in Japan.

Subsequently, when Westerners arrived in around 1600 AD, early Western paintings were executed as Christian paintings. An educational system in Seminario, a place where Italian instructors taught Japanese students, promoted the creation of early Western paintings using half-mixed (i.e., with egg) drying oils as a medium. The students' paintings, in turn, influenced Japanese craftwork and painting techniques.

The *Kano* school's seal and the Jesuit mark are observed in the portrait of St. Xavier, the first Jesuit to have set foot in Japan. It was also observed that it partially used mixed oil medium. Animal glue was the medium used in Early European screen paintings by Kano Naizen. In addition, modeling paint using shell lime (*Gofun*) and red underpaint beneath the gold leaves were newly introduced techniques. Unfortunately, such techniques did not spread wide enough due to the ban on Catholicism and restrictions on trade with foreign countries (*Sakoku*). The painting, which was recently found under a wooden panel of the Yomeimon gate in the Nikko-Toshogu shrine, had an *Urushi*-coated panel overcoated with a drying oil. Western painting techniques, between 1600 AD and the late 19th century, are presumed to be rare in Japan. However, these findings in the *Urushi* lacquerware and architectural paintings suggest an association between the *Urushi* lacquer technique and the oil painting technique. The Japanese painters in the late Edo period tried to reproduce the Western technique with the help of interpreters and scholars. The use of Prussian blue by Gennai Hiraga and the painters of the *Akita-ranga* school indicates a connection to the Western world. However, the recipes for oil media contained additives such as red pepper, camphor, and leaves of *Shikimi* (*Illicium anisatum*), that were unfamiliar with the Western techniques. It is also remarkable that the technique of coating oil or resin over glue paintings is common in *Urushi* lacquerware. This article outlines the possibility that the architectural *Urushi* technique might connect the oil painting technique from the early to the late Edo period.

Key words: Early Western-style paintings, Late Edo period Western-style paintings, painting materials, Namban art, oil paintings, tempera paintings