# Japanese Pigment Names "*Gunjo*" (blue) and "*Yoko*" (red) and their Compositions in the Edo and Meiji Periods

SHIMADZU Yoshiko

Some synthetic pigments have been imported from foreign countries since the late Edo period. The colors of certain pigments are similar to traditional pigments, such as those made from natural stones. "*Gunjo*" indicates two types of blue pigments, where one is used industrially (synthetic ultramarine blue), and the other is used in the field of Japanese paintings and polychrome historical objects (azurite). Ultramarine blue was patented in France in 1828 and was imported by Japan in the late 19th century. Until the middle of the Meiji period, imported ultramarine blue was called "*Hakurai-gunjo*" or "*Jinzo-gunjo*," literally meaning "from overseas" or "artificial," respectively. When it became widely used industrially, it came to be known only as "*Gunjo*," indicating a synthetic ultramarine blue pigment. However, before the Meiji period, the azurite pigment had been given two names according to their colors — "*Gunjo*" and "*Konjo*." Since "*Konjo*" indicated a darker blue pigment, the name *Konjo* also indicates another synthetic dark blue pigment, Prussian blue, industrially.

An imported red pigment "*Yoko*," meaning "western red," was assumed to be widely used in *Nishiki-e* prints in the Meiji period. It was originally a carmine lake made from cochineal insects in South America. After the discovery of different types of synthetic pigments and lakes, "*Yoko*" could have also been made from these newly synthesized pigments or dyes.

This study, through the investigation of references and objects, aims to organize and clarify what the pigment names "*Gunjo*," "*Konjo*," and "*Yoko*" meant when they were used in the aforementioned instances, and their possible origins. The timing of the name of the pigment indicates that more than two types of pigments, such as "*Gunjo*," are often assumed to occur when similar pigments were imported in the late Edo period. However, this seems to have occurred during the late Meiji period. When new types of pigments were imported from abroad, some were given Japanese names based on their similarity to the traditional pigments. In the field of Japanese painting, they continued to use traditional pigments and their names. As the composition of pigments that came into use during the late Edo and early Meiji periods may differ from the current composition, it would be better to understand the context in which the terms were used.

Keywords: Natural blue pigments, *Konjo*, Ultramarine blue, Cochineal, *Nishiki-e*