Displaying Japan

The Establishment of Museums in support of the Process of Japanese Nation-building in the Meiji Period (1868 - 1912)

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Picture on the cover:

Hashimoto Chikanobu (1838-1912), signed “Yoshu Hondo”, *Imperial family, ambassadors, and foreign dignitaries at the opening of the Ueno Art Gallery*, Woodblock Print, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Canada

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Introduction

Between 1868 and 1912 Japan went through a pivotal time of its modern history, known as the Meiji Period. The Meiji Period saw the transformation of the country from a feudal to a modern state, and was marked both by the introduction of innumerable elements and institutions from the West, and by a strong focus on domestic culture, traditions, and artistic productions.

The duality of this period, in which modernization and cultural and historical restoration complemented each other in the process of nation-building, makes it an exciting and compelling subject to research. This thesis will research the introduction to Meiji Japan, of an institution which enshrines in its nature both a Western inspiration and a desire to collect and display the national heritage: that of the museum. In fact, although Japan had developed its own conservational and exhibiting methods for objects of artistic, religious or scientific importance, until the Meiji Period it had not developed the institution of the "museum" as perceived by Europeans and North Americans. The first museum in Japan was established in Tōkyō in 1872, and had been inspired by the travels of Meiji governmental officials to the West.

The Meiji period has been deeply studied by various types of scholars, including historians and art historians. Most history publications focus on the introduction of economic, political and national institutions in Japan, while most art historical publications are concerned with the artistic developments of Japan, such as the creation of a national school of art. However, Meiji museums seem to fall *between* the two categories: the one of national institutions, and the one of belonging to the field of arts and culture, and therefore have been explored by only a few authors, at least in English. A few English language publications are available regarding Meiji museums. Wan-Chen Chang, in "A Cross-cultural Perspective on Musealization: the Museum's Reception by China and Japan in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century" (2012) analyses the ways in which Japan and China adopted the institution of the museum in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Chang relates that the two countries understood museums as "symbols of the advanced civilization of the West", and concentrated on the utilitarian nature of museums: she states that museums were perceived both in Japan and China as alternative tools to educate the population, at a time when formal schooling for the majority of the population still needed to be developed.

Chang concludes that, however strongly inspired by the Western models, both Chinese and Japanese museums were strongly influenced by domestic conservational and displaying methods.

Noriko Aso in *Public Properties: Museums in Imperial Japan* (2013), analyses the role played by Japanese museums from the end of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century, including colonial and privately established museums. Aso focuses on the museums' nature as public institutions, and on their role as part of a network of institutions which shaped the perception of the Japanese nation and created different “imperial publics", depending on the location of the museum.

In *The Imperial Museums of Meiji Japan: Architecture and the Art of the Nation* (2008) Alice Tseng explores the Imperial museums of Japan as "sites of constructed and idealized national self-images", focusing her arguments on an analysis of the museums' architecture. Through her research Tseng concludes that the establishing of Japanese museums' radically changed the way in which art objects were to be experienced in Japan. According to Tseng, one of the primary elements of the museums opened in the Meiji Period, which affected the visitors' engagements with artworks, was the Western style of architecture in which the buildings were constructed. However, Tseng also notices the lack of a general “master plan” that was followed in the establishing of Meiji museums, and brings attention to what she defines a “microcosm of the larger nexus of relationships and ideas regarding the public display of a nation and its identity in the modern era”. Indeed, Tseng is concerned with the relationship between the nation and the museum in Meiji Japan, and states that in the late 1880s Japanese art (and therefore, the institutions that displayed it) became *a tool for nation-building*. In fact, most publications regarding Meiji museums acknowledge in one way or another the relation between the museums and the nation. However, a systematic study of the historical context in which the building of museums took place, connected to theories of nationalism and theories of museum studies regarding the same subject, is lacking.

Such research will be carried out in this thesis, which aims at examining the first museums of Japan in relation to the historical and political context in which they were built, as well as the governmental goals and national narratives of Meiji Japan. Specifically this thesis will focus on the Tōkyō, Nara and Kyōto Museums: these three museums were chosen since the Tōkyō museum was the first museum to be established in Japan in 1872, while the Nara and Kyōto museums were established in 1889 as its satellite institutions.

This thesis will investigate the following research question: “What role did the three Imperial museums, established in Japan in the Meiji Period, play in the context of nation-building, and how is this related to the decision to specifically display artistic objects?” In order to answer this question, the first chapter will focus on the Japanese historical context, clarifying the main events which characterized the late Tokugawa Period and the Meiji Period. The second chapter will focus on the establishing of museums in Japan in the Meiji Period. This will not only include a consideration of how the institution of the museum was perceived by Japanese government officials travelling to the West and how it was introduced in Japan, but will also take into consideration how Japanese artistic productions were re-thought and introduced in the museum environment. Lastly, the third chapter will explore the concepts of nation and national identity, based on the theories of scholars of nationalism such as Andrew Smith, Eric Hobsbawm and Steven Grosby. Moreover it will include paying attention to theories of museum studies which focus on national museums, such as those formulated by Peter Aronsson, Stefan Belger and Gabriella Elgenius in the work *National Museums and Nation Building in Europe, 1750 – 2010: Mobilization and Legitimacy, Continuity and Change.* Lastly, it will focus on the meanings of objects and the meanings they can acquire when they are intellectually placed in a canonical history of art and physically placed in the museum environment. These theories and concepts will be explored in order to establish a possible relation between Japanese museums and Japanese national narratives and national goals.

Through its research, this thesis aims at highlighting the fundamental importance of cultural institutions, especially museums, in the construction of the power of nations. More specifically, it aims at clarifying the role played by museums in relation to the case of Japan's modernization and nation-building. Moreover, it strives to deepen our understanding of the role that displays of art played in such institutions.

Chapter 1. *Japan in the Meiji Period*

The founding of the first Japanese museums is placed within a turbulent time period of the history of Japan. In fact, the first National Museum was opened in 1872, only four years after a great political turnabout event: the Meiji Restoration. For this reason, it is necessary to dedicate the first chapter of this thesis to the complex historical and political context in which the building of the first museums of Japan took place.

1.1 *Japan at the end of the Tokugawa Period (1603 - 1868)*

The starting point for the exploration of the historical context will be Japan in the first half of the 19th century. It is important to notice how the state of Japan at this time was very similar to how it had been since the early 17th century. During this period Japan was what is defined as a feudal state, guided by a military leader, called *shōgun* (a rank often compared to the Western rank of Generalissimo), who was at the head of feudal lords, called *daimyō*, who each ruled a portion of the Japanese territory, which had been unified by the shōgun Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543 – 1616) by the year 1600. While the Shogunate (*bakufu*) ruled from Edo (today known as Tōkyō), the Japanese Emperor, whose role had become merely ceremonial, resided in Kyōto.[1] One of the most important elements of Tokugawa period Japan (1603 - 1868), was its insularity: not only in a simple geographical meaning of the word, but also in a metaphorical sense. In fact, since 1633 maritime restrictions (*kaikin*) were put into place, which minimized contact and trade with other nations.[2] According to these restrictions, Japanese people could not leave Japan, and foreigners could not access Japanese territory, with a few exceptions, such as the Dutch presence on the island of Deshima. The decision to create such restrictions had been taken in order to avoid the spread of new religions on the Japanese territory, in particular Christianity, which threatened to destabilize the power structure created by the Tokugawa rulers.[3] This situation is often indicated with the Japanese term *sakoku*, closed country, and often accompanied by the English term "isolation". This terminology has been challenged by some historians, as Japan was not completely isolated,

1 For more on Japan during the Tokugawa Period, see: McClain, James L., "Early Modern Japan, Volume 4.", in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, edited by John Whitney Hall. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991
2 Mark J., Ravina, *Understanding Japan, A Cultural History, Course Guidebook* (Chantilly: The Great Courses, 2015), 74
3 Ibid.

and maintained contacts and trade relations with some countries, not only the Netherlands, but also China and Korea, throughout the Tokugawa Period.[4] However, for the aims of this research it is enough to know that contacts with foreign countries other than those mentioned were rare. The international relations of Japan, and the internal politics described above, which had been in place since circa 1603, were to change drastically in the second half of the 19th century. As it will be shown below, it was the contact with the Western powers that would act as a catalyst for these changes.

The Japanese concern with the rest of the world intensified at the beginning of the 19th century. Marius Jansen indicates two main incidents in this time frame that are relevant in this context: the arrival in Japanese harbours of the the British ship *Phaeton* in 1808 and the American ship *Morrison* in 1838, which entered Japanese waters asking for supplies and trade agreements. The shogunate's response to both of the ships' requests was negative.[5] Furthermore, as reaction to these events, the Shogunate stressed the necessity to continue the policies of expulsion of any foreigners arriving on the Japanese territory, and underlined that violence was to be used to achieve such goal, if necessary.[6] At this point, Japan perceived Western powers as a threat: not only as the possible cause of the spreading of Christianity on the Japanese territory but, as Mark Ravina underlines, also because the Japanese perceived the rest of the world as divided between colonizers and colonized, especially with many Asian countries being colonized by the West, such as India, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Indonesia.[7] More specifically, Jansen indicates the information coming into Japan about the Chinese situation as the main source of this perception.[8] China had gone to war with Britain in 1838, and in 1842 was forced to sign the Treaty of Nanking, which will later become known as the first of a series of "unequal treaties" signed between Western and Eastern powers. The Nanking Treaty not only included the opening of five Chinese harbours to Western trade, with the application of a low fixed tariff on goods entering and leaving the ports, but also granted the right of extraterritoriality to foreigners on Chinese land. According to this right, Westerners who committed a crime would be judged not by Chinese law, but by Western law.[9]

4 Toby P., Ronald, Reopening the Question of Sakoku: Diplomacy in the Legitimation of the Tokugawa Bakufu, *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 323-325. For more on the issue of the *sakoku* see also: Kazui Tashiro and Susan Downing Videen, "Foreign Relations during the Edo Period: Sakoku Reexamined, *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 8, n. 2, (Summer 1982): 283-306

5 Jansen, Marius, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002), 265-267

6 Ibid.

7 Ravina, *Understanding Japan,* 115

8 Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan,* 270

9 John K., Fairbank and Merle,Goldman, *China, A New History* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard

These events came as a warning to Japan, which decided to diminish the policies of expulsion of foreigners through force, which included shooting on approaching boats, to avoid starting a war that probably could not be won.[10] However, when in 1844 the Japanese officials received a letter from the King of the Netherlands, in which he stressed the importance for the country to open to trade with other Western powers in order to avoid being forced to do so through war, the Japanese response was, once again, negative.[11]

This constant negative response was to change with the coming of requests of contact and trade on the part of the United States of America. America had two reasons to insist on an opening of diplomatic relations with Japan. Firstly, as it had started trading with China, America needed a station on the way there to and from the USA to restock and refuel their steam boats, and secondly, it wanted to change the Japanese practice of refusing help to American shipwrecked sailors.[12] After a failed first attempt in 1846 by Captain James Biddle (1783 - 1848), a new expedition was organized, lead by Commodore Matthew Perry (1794 - 1858), who was put in charge of the negotiations. Perry arrived at the Bay of Edo in 1853, leading four armed ships which became known as “the black ships” (*kurofune*) because of the colour of their hulls.[13] From the start of the negotiations Perry used strong tones, and threatened Japan with war, would it not accept the American requests. After much insisting on Perry's part, a ceremony was organized, for him to deliver a letter from the President of the United States of America to the Emperor of Japan, which took place in a formal and tense environment. After the ceremony Perry left, promising to come back for an answer. He came back eight months later, when new negotiations took place. The Japanese saw no possibility to refuse his requests, given the threats of war, and agreed to opening the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate to American boats, where American sailors would be able to restock on coal and acquire supplies, and deal with shipwrecked US sailors.[14] However irrefutable Perry's proposal seemed to be, both the request itself and its acceptance created a turbulent political climate within Japan. Perry's negotiations were followed by the arrival of another American representative, Townsend Harris (1804 - 1878), whose goal was to continue Perry's achievements by gaining the establishment of the right for American representatives to reside

University Press, 2006), 200
10 Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 273
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., 275
13 Ibid., 277
14 Ibid., 278

in Japan, and to formally establish a trading agreement, with the opening of four ports.[15] As with Perry, the answer to Harris' requests could not be negative either, but the shogunate's officials, who had already been criticized by their Japanese opponents for their dealing with Perry, tried to proceed with Harris' requests as slowly as possible.[16] An agreement was made by 1858 between Harris and the Shōgun, however to be signed it still needed approval by the Emperor. Political negotiations went on without coming to a conclusion. The agreement was only finalized when Ii Naosuke (1815 - 1860), a daimyō who had acquired a major leadership role in the shogunate, decided to conclude the agreement himself, without regard to the anger of the Emperor.[17]

Japan had now been officially "opened", and with the presence of foreign representatives in Japan the political climate grew more tense. To exemplify the climate at the time, it is enough to know that after the signing of the deal with Harris, Ii Naosuke took a hard line in leading the shogunate actions, with the sentencing of disloyal or dissenting daimyō to capital punishment in what is known as the Ansei Purge.[18] As a consequence of his actions, in 1860 he was assassinated by a group of daimyō, who took official responsibility for their actions and explained their act as "necessary", as Ii Naosuke had granted too many privileges to foreign representatives, while dishonouring and putting aside the traditions and values of the military class who guided the country.[19] Following this event, decisions were taken within the shogunate to loosen the controls over the daimyō, which led to an increase in their ability to build up their military forces and, at the same time, more attention began being paid to the figure of the Emperor, both at court and in daimyō domains, as his political and strategic importance in the near future was being acknowledged more and more.[20] Consequently, political uproar manifested itself in three geographic domains: the ones of Chōshū, Tosa and Satsuma. The relationship between the domain of Chōshū, the Imperial Court, and the Shogunate became especially tense as the domain's political leadership started taking actions towards what Jansen defines as "quixotic attempts to raise the Imperial flag", including a (failed) military attempt at taking the Imperial Palace. In the following months, Chōshū ignored the Shogunate's attempt to restore the policy of *sankin kōtai* (according to which each

15 Ibid., 283
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 285
18 Rosa, Caroli and Francesco, Gatti, *Storia del Giappone* (Roma: Laterza, 2004), 133
19 Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 296
20 Ibid., 297-300

daimyō's wife and heir had to permanently reside in Edo as hostages, while the daimyō themselves were required to reside there in alternate years), and was discovered to have been strengthening its military forces by recruiting irregular units.[21] The Shogunate felt it was necessary to militarily threaten Chōshū. However, when it came to battle, Chōshū's men were strongly motivated, and made invading the territory impossible.[22] The domain of Satsuma decided to collaborate with Chōshū, and also signed an alliance with the Tosa domain. The alliance was sealed with a text, in which it was expressed that the coexistence of the powers of the Imperial Court and of the Shogunate was to be ended and that the political power must be returned to the Imperial Court. Amongst the written arguments supporting this necessity, it was stated that a unified power was necessary in order to be respected as equal when dealing with foreign powers.[23] The next step was taken by Tosa leaders, who presented the Shōgun with a petition in 1867, asking him to resign from his position. The Shōgun accepted the demands, returning its powers to the Emperor.[24] This event was soon followed by an even more definitive event: the Imperial Court declared the Restoration of Imperial Rule of Old. With the restoration of imperial power, the Shogunate was abolished and the Tokugawa lord was requested to surrender his lands.[25] The refusal to do so on the part of the Tokugawa was followed by the Restoration War, in which the Court utilized armed forces to destroy the Shogunate resistance.[26] The authority over Japanese territory had returned to Imperial hands, and the military rule of the country under the Shōgun and the feudal lords had been demolished, after almost 300 years.

1.2 *Meiji Japan (1868 – 1912)*

This was the start of a new era for Japan, known as the Meiji Period, after the new name given to the Emperor. If before the restoration the foreign presence in Japan had been a triggering element for the power shift, in a similar way the “Western world” would become a source for major political and economic developments in Japan from that point onward. In fact, in post-Restoration Japan, Japanese scholars, government officials, young samurai and, in general,

21 Ibid., 306
22 Ibid., 307
23 Ibid., 309
24 Caroli, Gatti, *Storia del Giappone,* 137
25 Ibid.
26 Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 312

future members of the governmental elite were sent to Western countries to observe and study their culture, production methods, and administrative, legal and economic systems.[27] Japan started a process of "Western style" modernization on all fronts. A few examples include the creation of a new national currency, of a postal system, extensive railways, and modern industries.[28] For the aim of this research it will not be necessary to describe each and every new element adopted by the Meiji State. However, as the building of National Museums is situated in this context, a few examples will be analyzed to show how this process occurred.

The interest in Western knowledge and consequently its introduction in Japan may seem out of place in the context of a country in which the dealings with foreign representatives had caused such a political upheaval. Indeed, after the Restoration, sections of the supporters of the Imperial Court expected it to eliminate the trade deals that had been agreed upon, and nullify the changes towards a "Westernization" that had been implemented by the Shogunate, such as in the military field.[29] However, this was not to happen. The first trip to America by Japanese officials had actually taken place as early as 1860, when 70 men took part in the trip to America to ratify the agreement made with Townsend Harris.[30] In the following years, more missions took place, including in their itineraries European countries, such as England and France.[31] Since the first trips in the 1860s, the Japanese officials who came back from Western countries saw the importance of emulating Western practices to achieve similar levels of success and wealth, basic conditions Japan needed to meet in order to not be considered a "second class" state on an international level, and therefore to be able in the future to renegotiate the treaties made with the West.[32] On this basis, the trips to foreign countries took on a new level of importance when around fifty high officials of the Meiji State (the basis of the Japanese government at the time) were sent on a long trip to the "Western world" which lasted from 1871 to 1873. As Jansen notes, the travelling Japanese officials were not only absorbing knowledge and ideas from the West for the purpose of the Japanese modernization process: at the same time, they were a human representation and proof of the Japanese will to modernize and be perceived as equal by the Western powers.[33]

The building of a new Meiji Japan, was not only based on this process of

27 Ibid., 355
28 Ravina, *Understanding Japan,* 114
29 Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 333
30 Ibid., 318
31 Ibid., 319
32 Ibid., 360
33 Ibid., 356

modernization, which saw the introduction of knowledge and technologies from the West, but was also accompanied by a search for, and constant reference to, its continuity with pre-Tokugawa Japan, at times as early as the 7th century CE. The way in which the new Meiji state built itself as an amalgamation of both modern and ancient is identifiable in a variety of examples. With the proclamation of the restoration, the Tokugawa structure of power was abolished. The new need for political and structural unity contrasted with the former organization of Japanese territory in the Tokugawa period, which was characterized not only by a duality of the leading figures (the Shōgun and the Emperor) but also by the division of the territories into several domains, each lead by a daimyō. However, the idea of a unified territory with a central leader was not alien to the Japanese: in fact, the past presented examples of a Japan united under the leadership of the Emperor as early as he late 7th century CE.[34] Therefore, putting the power back into the hands of the Emperor, and unifying the territory under his sole power was a way to "restore the antiquity". In 1870, the territorial domains were abolished, to be turned into prefectures and diminished in number (from roughly 300 domains to 50 prefectures), which were to be administrated by samurai, although without any form of hereditary right or familial heritage to the territory they would rule.[35] Jansen reports a quote by William Elliot Griffis (1843 - 1928), an American teacher residing in Japan at the time, which is enlightening in expressing the transformation which happened not only on an administrative level, but also on a conceptual level through these reforms: at the dawn of the dissolution of the domains, he writes that (in Japan) "the time for loyalty has passed, the time for patriotism has come".[36] This statement also pictures the end of the samurai class as the warrior elite of Japan, and the creation of an army of conscripts. A new modern, Western style army was seen as more apt at defending the new Japanese state, and the government declared it was a step towards the equality of the citizens, through equality of their duties and rights. This undoubtedly modern claim was supported once again by the Japanese past: a conscripted army led by the Emperor had already existed in the 700s, and therefore having a new conscripted army was a way to continue an ancient tradition, which had been broken by the samurai.[37] However, with the new Imperial Army made up of conscripted soldiers and the abolition of the domains, many daimyō and samurai were left

34 Steven, Grosby, *Nationalism, A Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 67
35 Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 348-349
36 Ibid.
37 Ravina, *Understanding Japan,* 118

without responsibilities, dependent on the stipends that the Meiji government had taken the responsibility to pay to them. Many ex-warriors hoped to return to an active role in an early Meiji attempt at invading Korea, which had been taken into consideration by the government, but ultimately rejected. This decision worsened an already tense climate, and brought the warriors to manifest their dissatisfaction, often with violent acts. The climax of the protests was reached in the fighting between the Imperial Forces and the highly militarized Satsuma domain, lead by Saigō Takamori (1828 - 1877), whose forces were crushed in 1877, putting an end to all samurai revolts.[38]

The warrior class was not the only one to have seen changes to their role in society. In fact reforms aimed at changing the structure of society were put into place as early as 1871. The class system was simplified into two final classes: aristocracy (*kazoku*) and the general population (*heimin*), which included the previously divided classes of the peasants, artisans, merchants, and outcasts. Furthermore, each member of the population was left free to choose their own occupation, marry with persons of a different social status, adopt a surname, purchase land and travel.[39] These reforms resulted in the creation of a situation of equality in Japanese society, at least in the terms of legal rights and duties among the population.

All agreed that a necessary step to take in the development of the Japanese state was the writing of a Constitution, which been announced since 1868. After much discussion, the Constitution was to be written by Itō Hirobumi (1841 - 1909), who had travelled to the West and had studied the Western governmental structures. Itō's studies had taken place mostly in Germany and Austria, and it is interesting how Jansen notes that it was at the same time in which Otto von Bismarck (1815 – 1898) was directing the shaping of the newly unified German State.[40] According to the Constitution, promulgated on 1889, a new cabinet system was put in place, which showed the Japanese affinity with the Western governments.[41] At the same time this system made sure that it would be the duty of the figure of the Prime Minister to take up political duties, instead of the Emperor. The figure of the Emperor was to be used as an "axis for the State". Itō believed that Western states had as their axis a conservative religious belief, which Japan lacked. For this reason it was the figure of the Emperor itself that

38 Caroli, Gatti, *Storia del Giappone,* 151
39 Ibid., 142
40 Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 390
41 Ibid., 392

needed to take up this role.[42] This is evident in the opening of the text of the Constitution itself, where the figure of the Emperor, the one who gifted the Constitution to his subjects, is described as a having ascended to the Throne from an eternal, lineal succession, by virtue of the glories of the ancestors.[43] The day chosen for the promulgation of the Constitution was the 11 February 1889, declared National Foundation Day. This date coincided with the mythical date of the foundation of the Empire.[44] Once again, the mix of Western-style modernization and tradition is visible. The great political innovation in writing and promulgating the Constitution, is introduced (and we could argue, legitimized) by an ancient past, embodied in the figure of the Emperor and linked in space and time to the foundation of the Japanese Empire itself.

The plans for centralization and unification under the government's power did not only invest themselves in the administrative structure of the territory, but in the administration of religious matters as well. In Japan, two religions were present among the population: Shintō, the cult of the gods of Japan, and Buddhism, which had been introduced from abroad centuries before. During those centuries, the two religions had mixed in symbologies, and co-existed in a state of religious syncretism. Buddhism not only was not a religion born in Japan, but had also been favoured by the Tokugawa officials and the warrior classes, and for this reason, the early Meiji State favoured Shintō, which was raised as the native religion of Japan.[45] The government proceeded to separate the two belief systems, by dividing symbols and deities which had been exchanged and adopted by both, and persecuted the Buddhist faith by closing temples and destroying religious artifacts.[46] In this instance, we see how the ancient "native" religion is preferred, as it is tied to the figure of the Emperor itself, and therefore to the ruling power.

It can be concluded that the changes which occurred in Meiji Japan followed two trends: on one hand that of modernization of the country, and on the other hand that of research for a connection to the Japanese past. This duality was supported by the Meiji government, and is pictured in two governmental slogans which were omnipresent in Meiji society: the one of *Fukko,* translatable as *Restore the Antiquity* and that of *Bunmei Kaika*,

42 Ibid., 393
43 Ibid., 393-395
44 Caroli, Gatti, *Storia del Giappone,* 155
45 Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 350-353
46 Ibid.

translatable as *Civilization and Enlightenment*.[47] *Fukko* aimed at restoring Japanese cultural traditions, implying a research for what was to be considered "truly, intrinsically" Japanese, a research which was condensed in the subject of "Nation Studies" (*kokugaku*).[48] Interestingly, Jansen notes that the Japanese past itself was utilized as a source of legitimization of the Meiji practice of borrowing Western knowledge in order to further the process of modernization: in fact, as the Japanese ancestors had borrowed from the continent (China and Korea) what they thought was useful and practical (such as the Chinese writing system), therefore the Japanese of the Meiji Period should not refrain from borrowing what necessary for improvement.[49] Western borrowings were the tool to reach the ideals of *Civilization and Enlightenment*.[50] By becoming civilized, in a "Western" understanding of the word, Japan would be able to be perceived as equal by the nations of Europe and North America. A synthesis of the Meiji Period and its reforms can be pictured in a quote by Ravina. Highlighting how the Meiji Restoration went through to a process of the intersecting of the old and new, along with a complementarity of Japanese and Western elements, he states that "Japan reformed so as to look powerful and legitimate in a modern Western world […] Meiji reforms weren't about making Japan more Western, but about developing a Western oriented way of being Japanese".[51] How these changes manifested themselves in the field of art, and how the opening of museums took place in this historical moment, will be the topic of the next chapter of this thesis.

47 Ibid., 457
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 458
50 Ibid., 460
51 Mark J., Ravina,*Understanding Japan, A Cultural History,* (Chantilly: The Great Courses, 2015), Audio Lesson N. 17

Chapter 2. Meiji Museums and the Re-thinking of Japanese Cultural Heritage

As explored above, Meiji Japan went through changes which affected almost every aspect of the State. Numerous institutions inspired from Western models were introduced: amongst them, that of the museum. The decision to open museums in Japan and to display art objects in them will be analyzed, as well as the radical changes that manifested themselves in the field of culture, with the reshaping of the perception of Japanese artistic productions and the development of artistic categories.

2.1 *Meiji government officials and the changes in Meiji culture*

Many of the innovations regarding the arts and culture field during the Meiji period were due both to the influence of Western experts residing in Japan (known as *oyatoi gaikokujin*, or "borrowed foreigners") and to the work and efforts of Meiji bureaucrats and academics. It is interesting to note how these two types of figures tend to be embodied in the two persons of Ernest Fenollosa and Okakura Kazuko. Ernest Fenollosa (1853 – 1908) was a Professor of Philosophy and Political Economy at the Tōkyō Imperial University, which had been newly established in 1877. Residing in Japan he not only had grown interested in Japanese traditional artistic practices, but also worked as consultant for the Ministry of Education in regards to policy making in the field of art.[52] Okakura Kazuko (1862 – 1913), also known as Okakura Tenshin, was one of Fenollosa's students and worked as his assistant, and was to work for the Tōkyō Imperial Museum throughout his life.[53] These two characters worked in different ways to promote the role of art in Japan. Fenollosa, as a foreign "expert" resident in Japan, highlighted to the Japanese government the importance of art for nation-building, and as early as 1880 encouraged the implementation of a national art education, the organization of juried exhibition and nonetheless, the opening of national museums.[54] Okakura Kazuko stressed the importance of opening a national school of art, the necessity to support the development of a new, modern yet distinctively Japanese painting style.[55] Together the two founded the Art Appreciation Society (*Kangakai*) in 1884 and the Tōkyō Fine Arts School (*Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō*) in 1887, and conducted surveys to record Japanese objects of historical and artistic interest

52 Victoria, Weston, *Japanese Painting and National Identity: Okakura Tenshin and his Circle* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2004), 5-6
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., 6, 7
55 Ibid., 1

present in the territory.[56] Recent scholarship has challenged the centrality of the figures of Fenollosa and Okakura. Specifically, Victoria Weston argues that the situation of art in Meiji Japan was changing independently from these two figures, while Alice Tseng underlines the important roles played by other Japanese bureaucrats and Western experts, such as Machida Hisanari (1838 - 1897), Sano Tsunetami (1822 - 1902) and Gottfried Wagener (1831 - 1892).[57] It is important to note, as stated by Tseng, that many of the changes were pushed forward by Japanese bureaucrats and Meiji government officials, many of whom presented shared characteristics: for example many of them had travelled abroad, had been involved in international exhibitions and worked or had worked for the central government of Japan. These personages were the responsible figures for the building of museums in Japan as well.[58]

2.2 *Encountering Western forms of display: museums and world fairs*

The first Japanese encounters with Western museums are dated to the 1860s: as it was seen above, it was at this time that the Shogunate started sending Japanese representatives to North America and Europe, and this practice continued under the Meiji Government.[59] A major factor in spreading knowledge about the idea of the "museum" (and the term *hakubutsukan* as its Japanese translation) was the text by the author Fuzukawa Yukichi (1835 – 1901) *Conditions in the West*, which he wrote after travelling to North America and Europe in the early 1860s.[60] The text aimed at depicting the state of things in "the West" for Japanese readers, exploring a variety of topics and Western institutions. One of these was the museum, which he described as "a place where material goods, ancient artifacts, and rare objects are gathered and exhibited for the sake of propagating knowledge".[61] Tseng notes how in Fukuzawa's descriptions of the museum, he focused on scientific exhibits, overlooking the display of art. This favouring of scientific knowledge mirrored Japanese officials' general focus in the early Meiji period on the West's practical knowledge, seen as the

56 Victoria Weston, in *Japanese Painting and National Identity*, analyses in depth the work of Okakura and Fenollosa at the two institutions, while the role played by Fenollosa and Okakura in the surveying of temple storages is analyzed by Alice Tseng in *Meiji Museums: Architecture and the Art of the Nation* and by Noriko Aso in *Public Properties: Museums in Imperial Japan*.
57 Weston, *Japanese Painting and National Identity*, 7; Alice, Tseng, *Meiji Museums: Architecture and the Art of the Nation* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 85
58 Ibid., 86
59 Ibid., 20
60 The Japanese term *Hakubutsukan* (博物館) conveyed in its Japanese translation a sense of a building which housed items of diverse nature. For alternative translations of the word museum, and more details on the term "hakubutsukan", see Tseng, *Meiji Museums*, 20-21
61 Ibid., 21-22

source of its success. Through this lens, the museum was seen as a tool to reach that success.[62] However the Japanese perception of Western museums differed amongst the travellers to the West. In fact, Tseng reports two other records on Western museums by Japanese officials: namely *A True Account of the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Journey of Observation through the United States and Europe* written by Kume Kunitake (1839 - 1931) and the *Report on the Austrian Exposition* written by Sano Tsunetami. In the first one, Kume Kunitake collected the observations made by the high ranking Meiji officials who took part in the 1873 expedition throughout Europe and North America, in which they had the opportunity to visit several museums.[63] In this text Kume described Western museums as "housed collections of comprehensive diversity in type, genre and place of origin".[64] Regarding the uses and possibilities of the institution of the museum, Kume recorded the possibility to show the development of a nation's progress through the objects displayed.[65] *The Report on the Austrian Exhibition* contained the impressions of the members of the 1873 Japanese delegation sent to participate in the Austrian Weltausstellung in Vienna. Among others, one of the aims of the delegation was in particular to gather information useful for the building of a museum in Japan.[66] The section of the report which focused on museums presented combined advice by the above mentioned bureaucrat Sano Tsunetami and the foreign advisor Gottfried Wagener, who visualized a possible museum in Japan. Located in Tōkyō, it would have collaborated with national exhibitions and promoted the nation's art and industry, being heavily inspired by the institution now known as the Victoria and Albert Museum, at the time called the "South Kensington Museum".[67] These three reports provide useful insight into the first Japanese explorations of the idea of the “museum”, and what this research can gain from them is picturing how, starting from these first encounters, the museum was seen as an institution where a nation's progress, industrial developments and cultural achievements were to be displayed, for the viewers to learn about them and be inspired by them.

As noted above, at the same time that Japanese officials were encountering the Western institution of the museum, they were encountering another type of object display: that of the world fairs. World fairs were a phenomenon from the latter half of the 19th century, which started with the 1851 *Great Exhibition of the Works of the Industry of All Nations* which took place in London.[68]

62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 24
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 26
66 Ibid., 27
67 Ibid.
68 Robert W., Rydell, "World Fairs and Museums" in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald

Following this exhibition, world fairs were organized in the following decades all around the world, including both the capital cities of Western nations as well as colonized cities belonging to Western empires, located in Asia, Australia and Northern Africa.[69] Noriko Aso examines the Japanese attendance in world fairs at the end of the 19th century, at the apex of what she defines the "golden age of world fairs", which she identifies to be between the second half of the nineteenth century to the early decades of the 20th century.[70] The first world fairs in which objects from Japan were exhibited were the 1853 fair held in Dublin and the 1862 London fair. However, no Japanese representative had worked on these displays of Japanese objects, which, in fact, had been organized by Western collectors.[71] On the other hand, Japanese visitors were already present at the London exhibition, such as the members of the 1862 overseas mission, including the above mentioned Fukuzawa Yukichi, who in his writings manifests disappointment with the "antique store" style of the display.[72] The first Japanese presence as active exhibitors was at the fair held in Paris in 1867. At this date, which predates the Meiji restoration, the Japanese presence was not that of a unified country represented under a unified government, but was instead represented in different exhibits, one organized by the Tokugawa Shogunate in the role of "national government", and additional exhibits organized by the Satsuma domain and Hizen domain as "domainal administrators".[73] It is important to note, that many of the Japanese officials present at this fair were to take up fundamental positions in the future Meiji period government, and this fair provided them with impressions and experience on how to display a nation.[74]

Acknowledging the contact between the Japanese State and the world fairs is a fundamental step of this chapter. Firstly because Japan did not only continue to take part in world fairs, but also started organizing domestic exhibitions (the first one being in 1872), which served as preparations for the international events or following up after them.[75] These events were called *hakurankai,* a word translatable as "exhibition" (which was another newly created word made popular by Fukuzawa by its use in *Conditions in the West*) and were either organized by the Meiji State or by

(Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 135
69 Ibid.
70 Noriko, Aso, *Public Properties: Museums in Imperial Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 23
71 Ibid., 25
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., 26
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., 34. For more on Japanese domestic exhibitions, and how they started the emergence of a "mass audience", see also: Omuka, Toshiharu, "The Emergence of a Mass Audience for Modern Art in Japan." in *The Eye of the Beholder: Reception, Audience and Practice of Modern Asian Art*, edited by John Clark, Maurizio Pelleggi and T.K. Sabapathy. 94-110. Sydney: Wild Peony, 2006

local governments and private individuals.[76] While many of them did not differ much from Tokugawa period exhibitions (which will be covered later in this chapter), the State-sponsored events did recreate the atmosphere of the world fairs, especially in their being rather spectacular in nature.[77] Moreover, world fairs present a connection to museums: Robert Rydell highlights how world fairs "drew upon and contributed to" the development of museums, as many objects first collected to be exhibited at world fairs would then become part of the developing collections of museums, such as in the case of the Smithsonian Institution.[78] In fact, today's Tōkyō National Museum (the founding of which will be soon taken into examination) mentions on the "History" section of its website the importance of the 1873 Vienna World Fair as a fundamental stepping stone in its birth: as Japan had been invited to attend in 1871, the exhibits had been prepared over two years. In this process two exemplars of each object were collected: one to be destined for the world fair, and the other to become part of a domestic collection of the new museum to be opened in Tōkyō.[79] Furthermore, scholars of Museum Studies have noted how world fairs summarized political messages in their displays of material culture. Aso notes how world fairs functioned with the "nation" as their basic concept, and created a hierarchy of nations based on their placement in the fair ground and on their grouping.[80] In the *Austrian Report* seen above, the "ideal" Japanese museum was to collaborate with national industrial exhibitions: Tseng states that in Meiji Japan both museums and exhibitions were seen as two different tools necessary to reach the same aim, that of "being a source to the nation's enrichment and the people's enlightenment".[81]

2.3 *Japanese forms of display*

While the fixed institution of the museum and the international great exhibitions were new discoveries of the late Tokugawa/early Meiji period Japan, the same cannot be said for the broader idea of "exhibition". In fact, Japan had a native development of the idea of displaying objects for public viewing, or actually, several developments, which had been taking place since the mid 18th

76 P. F., Kornicki, "Public Display and Changing Values. Early Meiji Exhibitions and Their Precursors", *Monumenta Nipponica* 49, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 169.
77 Aso, *Public Properties*, 35-36
78 Rydell, *World Fairs and Museums*, 136
79 The Tōkyō National Museum presents on its website a reconstruction of its history in twelve steps, ranging from the first domestic exhibititions to the post war era. http://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_free_page/index.php?id=145 (Accessed 2 May 2018)
80 Aso, *Public Properties*, 27
81 Tseng, *Meiji Museums,* 28

century.[82] Peter Kornicki places the origin of Japanese exhibitions in four different types of display activities which had blossomed in the decades preceding the fall of the Shogunate, and were organized with commercial aims.[83] The first of these events is that of the *shoga tengakai*, shortened as *shogakai*, exhibitions of works of pictorial art and calligraphic art. These had begun in the end of the 18th century in the area of Kyōto, but had spread to Tōkyō (at the time called Edo) and other towns.[84] These exhibitions were at first organized for a limited public, such as connoisseurs, and took place in private spaces, such as homes and restaurants.[85] This had changed by the middle of the 19th century, when the *shogakai* became bigger in size, and were targeted at larger audiences (which paid for an entrance ticket) and provided catalogues of the works exhibited.[86] Secondly Kornicki identifies the *bussankai*, the exhibition of natural produce. The first of these *bussankai* took place in Edo in 1757, and by the 19th century they were regularly organized throughout the country.[87] Thirdly, another type of temporary display is identified, that of the *misemono*, displays of freak shows and street entertainments in urban centers, which Kornicki places between the idea of display and of performance.[88] Fourthly, the temporary display of objects did also manifest itself in the religious field under the form of *kaichō*, the temporary unveiling of usually concealed religious objects. The *kaichō* could take two forms: that of *igaichō*, where the religious artifact would be shown in the same temple where it belonged, and that of *degaichō*, where the religious objects would be transported to be displayed somewhere else (at times in multiple consecutive locations).[89] Notably, *kaichō* were organized by temples to boost their income through attendees' donations.[90] The *kaichō* were popular events, as they provided the viewers not only with a space for worship, but also with the possibility to see rare objects, stimulating the sense of curiosity. This sense of uniqueness of the event may have contributed to the transformation of the *kaichō* into bigger, often secular, events.[91] In fact, *kaichō* had been taking place since the Heian period (794 – 1185 CE), and their popularity had increased to become part of urban life of the Tokugawa period.[92] These four types of displays each presented different elements, but had in common the fact that they were organized with commercial ends, as, to quote Kornicki, they "made commodities out of works of art,

82 Kornicki, "Public Display and Changing Values", 171
83 Ibid., 172
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., 174
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 178
89 Ibid., 175
90 Ibid., 178
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid., 179

out of what had been religious icons, or even out of people".[93] These types of exhibiting events were transformed in the Meiji period into new catch-all term *hakurankai* mentioned above. However, even if they maintained many of their characteristics, they unavoidably shifted in meaning as their organization was taken over by the local and State government, and they were invested with the aims of education, international propaganda and meaning-making.[94] There is one last pre-modern mode of display that it is necessary to briefly investigate. Given its non-commercial nature it was not explored by Kornicki, but Tseng dedicates some attention to it: that of the *mushiboshi*, which consisted in the airing of religious objects such as books, paintings, utensils and relics. These objects were usually stored in a temple's storage rooms and would be aired every late summer to prevent them from developing damage from moisture and insects. The public would be able to attend these airings, and view the objects on show on the temple grounds.[95] All these different modes of displaying objects need to be taken into account when exploring the place of the museum in Meiji society, especially as they presented certain characteristics shared with the Western institution, such as the displaying of objects, public audiences, entrance tickets and printed catalogues.

2.4 *The founding of Japanese museums*

As seen above, the Meiji government was interested in opening of a museum in Japan, and had sent a Japanese mission to the the Vienna Exhibition in order to gather useful information for this aim. The first State-built museums was established in 1872 in Tōkyō, and was administered by the Museum Department of the Ministry of Education. In the following years the museum underwent diverse changes not only in its location, but also in its administration and name. In fact from the year 1872 to the year 1900 the Museum's administration switched from the Museum Department of the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1875, subsequently to the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce in 1881, to be finally placed under the authority of the Ministry of the Imperial Household in 1886.[96] The museum's location changed multiple times, and was finally placed in its definitive location in the Ueno park in Tōkyō in 1877, in a building designed for the

93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 195
95 Tseng, *Meiji Museums,* 142
96 Tōkyō National Museum Website – History Section http://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_free_page/index.php?id=155 Accessed 3 May 2018

occasion by the English architect Josiah Conder (1852 - 1920).[97] The museum's name changed as well: notably, when it was placed under the administration of the Home Ministry it was temporary named simply “Museum” (Hakubutsukan).[98] Tseng analyses this choice, and notes that while the Museum in Tōkyō was simply called “Hakubutsukan”, other eventual museums would need to add a local name in front of the word "museum". Tseng states that in choosing this name, the museum was made into the standard against which all other museums would need to compare themselves.[99] In its placement in Ueno Park (and consequently in the reorganization of the collection) the museum was organized matching the advice given by Tsunetami in the *Austrian Report,* and drew a rather strong inspiration from the Victoria and Albert Museum, especially in its collaboration with domestic exhibitions..[100] In fact, in its first years the Museum collaborated with the National Industrial Exhibitions which were taking place in Japan, and the first three fairs (in 1877, 1881 and 1890) took place in Ueno Park. From the fourth fair onward the location changed to other cities, and the collaboration with the Museum diminished.[101] The museum was to exhibit the nation's art and crafts, with the aim to educate and inspire the viewers through the objects collected.[102] Much of the attention of the first Japanese experiences of Western museums was focused on the display of industrial techniques and goods, and this was mirrored in this first museum once it was established in its definitive location in Ueno Park: the objects collected and displayed in the museum belonged to six categories, those of natural products, agriculture, horticulture, industry, arts and history.[103] The artworks present in the museum were displayed in glass cases: Tseng notes the difference of this display compared to exhibitions which had previously taken place: a new display style was implemented, which presented less objects, in a more orderly manner and leaving more space between them.[104] As mentioned above the museum's administration was moved to the Imperial Household Ministry in 1886, and in 1889 its name was changed to the "Imperial Museum", and changed once again to “Imperial Household Museum” in the year 1900.[105] The 1889 change in name and administration was accompanied by a reorganization of the collections, which lessened the

97 Tōkyō National Museum Website – History Section http://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_free_page/index.php?id=150 Accessed 2 May 2018
98 Tōkyō National Museum Website – History Section http://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_free_page/index.php?id=148 Accessed 2 May 2018
99 Tseng, *Meiji Museums,* 43
100 Ibid., 40
101 Tōkyō National Museum Website – History Section http://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_free_page/index.php?id=149 Accessed 2 May 2018
102 Tseng, *Meiji Museums,* 43
103 Ibid., 67
104 Ibid., 68
105 Tōkyō National Museum Website – History Section http://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_free_page/index.php?id=155 Accessed 2 May 2018

previous emphasis on science and industry in the new displays.[106]

In the same year it was decided to build two other Imperial Museums placed in Kyōto and Nara. The displays of the Nara and Kyōto museums were to be dedicated to objects of artistic and historical importance.[107] The decision to build two additional museums was taken after an almost ten year examination of temples and storage locations in the areas of the two cities, which had started in 1888 and lasted until 1897, and was supported and encouraged by Fenollosa, who advised that the treasures kept in temples would be instead better placed in national museums.[108] According to Fenollosa, this option was to be preferred, as the storing of artworks in temples and temple storage rooms presented several problems, such as lack of systematic records of objects and ambiguous ownership status.[109] The reasons to have such objects exhibited in local museums rather than in the museum in Tōkyō were both practical and theoretical: on one side it was better to avoid transporting ancient and delicate objects, and on the other hand a kind of national cultural balance was going to be maintained.[110] The Nara Imperial Museum was completed by 1894 and was designed by the Japanese architect Tōkuma Katayama (1854 - 1917), as a one story building divided in thirteen exhibition rooms, which were destined to exhibit ancient bronze and ceramic vessels, paintings and sculptures.[111] Many of the objects exhibited were Buddhist religious objects: this can be explained by Nara having been the capital of Japan in the Nara period (710 – 794 C.E.), in which Buddhism was the predominant religion and many Buddhist works of art had been made, especially in the capital.[112] Objects of religious nature were acquired by the museum from temples, which received compensations for entrusting the objects to the institution.[113] The museum collection was divided into departments: in this case the three departments of history, fine art and art industry.[114] The objects displayed in the rooms were either grouped by time period or by medium.[115] The Kyōto Imperial Museum was completed in 1895[116], in the city which was to become "the repository of the nation's cultural heritage"[117]. The Kyōto Imperial Museum was also a one story building designed by Katayama. The museum's exhibition was divided into several departments, which occupied different

106 Tseng, *Meiji Museums* , 82
107 Ibid., 79
108 Ibid., 90
109 Ibid., 148
110 Ibid., 150
111 Ibid., 156
112 Ibid., 140
113 Ibid., 165
114 Ibid., 163
115 Ibid., 156
116 Ibid., 93
117 Ibid., 96

numbers of conjoining rooms. According to the Museum plans, the departments were those of "Fine Arts", "Industry", "History" and "Art History". Some smaller departments were added exhibiting books, clothing, musical instruments.[118] The objects were organized in different rooms by type, function and medium.[119] Tseng notes that this choice, rather than the possible alternative of a display organized following a chronological progression, emphasized each piece in its aesthetic individuality.[120] It is interesting to note that the Museum had the Emperor as patron of the institution (although he never actually visited the museum) and a room had been designed specifically to be the throne room. Tseng states that in this choice the museum had been inspired by the European museums which had developed from monarchic collections being opened to the public.[121]

2.5 *The making of "Japanese art"*

As seen above, the Tōkyō, Kyōto and Nara Museums displays comprised of objects that fit the categories of art and history. Tseng characterizes 1889 as a fundamental moment for Japanese Museums, not only for the administration shift under the Imperial Household Ministry, but also for a shift in interest and focus from the fields of science and industry to the fields of arts and culture.[122] However, the construction of the concept of art had been continuing since the early Meiji years. As it is noted by many scholars, such as Alice Tseng and Michael Marra, Meiji Japan saw the introduction of a number of new concepts related to culture and the arts, and the introduction of these concepts was accompanied by the necessity to create new words to reference them. Therefore, following the creation of such terms as "art history", "fine arts" and "museums" it is possible to define and date the import of these ideas. Marra notes that in Japanese tradition the word "art" did not exist, and that what we would consider artistic actions such as painting were indicated with the terms of "path" or "practice".[123] On the other hand, a word for "craft" existed in the compound word *geijutsu* (芸術), where *gei* meant " craft, performance, act" and *jutsu* stood for "knowledge, skill and method".[124] Marra states that the introduction of the concept of art in the

118 Ibid., 119
119 Ibid., 128
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid., 122
122 Ibid., 84
123 Michael F., Marra, The Creation of the Vocabulary of Aesthetics in Meiji Japan, in *Since Meiji: Perspectives on the Japanese Visual Arts 1868–2000*, ed. J. Thomas Rimer (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 204
124 Ibid., 205

Meiji Period was accompanied by a redefinition of the ideal of beauty, and research in to the Western concept of aesthetics.[125] It was in the Meiji Period that the concept of beauty became canonically identified with the character *bi* (美). The use of this word, and therefore the application of this concept, implied a re-thinking of Japanese cultural heritage in "Western terms": Marra states that the Japanese intellectuals sought to establish if and what "beauty" existed in Japanese culture, finding the answer in the classical Japanese works of literature, religion, and history. Moreover, he explores how diverse elements of Japanese culture and aesthetics were made to match with the Western idea of beauty, for example the ideals of *wabi* (simplicity), *sabi* (of having the aspects of being old and faded), *mono no aware* (the impermanence of things).[126] In the 1870s the word for art had not been yet coined, and different words were being used to indicate this concept.[127] However, as the character *bi* had been defined to indicate beauty, it was combined with the character *justsu*, seen above, to create the word *bijutsu* (美術) to indicate the fine arts, literally translated as "the discipline of beauty". This word was used for the first time in 1872, in the Japanese translation of the German catalogue of the Vienna exhibition.[128] Tseng as well explores the genesis of the idea of fine arts in Japan, as she indicates the term *bijutsu* for fine arts was coined by the Meiji officials "in an effort to graft existing European terminology and classifications onto Japanese works for their entry into the international market".[129]

If before the Meiji Period the category of "art" did not exist, it was then necessary to not only create a word for it as seen above, but also define what objects would fit in this category, and therefore could be exhibited in the museums under this label. Aso dates the interest in protecting and storing objects of historical importance as early as 1871, when a document addressed to the early Meiji government encouraged it to take action towards the protection of Japanese ancient artifacts, in opposition to what was considered a frantic search for the new, with a consequential abandonment of the old.[130] Indeed, in the same year the government did issue a "Notice on the Preservation of Antiquities", in which it established the need to catalogue the antiquities present in the storehouses of the different regions.[131] The notice presented an attachment which defined which "antiquities" were to be catalogued and considered important. The list included objects from the ancient past, including both fossils and artifacts, such as *magatama* stone beads, flint knives,

125 Ibid., 193
126 Ibid., 195
127 Ibid., 205
128 Ibid., 205-206
129 Tseng, *Meiji Museums,* 32
130 Aso, *Public Properties*, 64
131 Ibid., 64-65

axes, bronze mirrors, bells and vessels. Furthermore, the list included ancient documents, Buddhist sutras, and works of calligraphy and paintings.[132] Regarding religious objects, both Shintō and Buddhist objects were included in the list, but Aso notes how Shintō artifacts and shrine implements were placed at the top of the list, while Buddhist images and temple implements were positioned almost at the very end of the list.[133] The list might not portray a hierarchical order of the objects, but pictures the Meiji practices of creating a clear division between the two religious belief systems. Many different types of implements were included in the list, not only related to religious practices or performance of traditional ceremonies and arts (such as theatre or the tea ceremony or writing), but also from the fields of agriculture, households and crafts. Products of traditional crafts were also included such as ceramics, laquerware and samurai weapons and armours.[134] In the following years the government implemented several laws to try and develop control over these objects, in fact creating a "national heritage" and declaring upon certain objects the status of national treasure (*kokuhō*).[135] Surveys would continue to be used to discover and register what objects of historical and artistic importance were present within Japan, and the Bureau for the National Survey of Treasures was established in 1889, and, as mentioned above, the decision to open the Nara and Kyōto Imperial Museums had been taken after the survey that was conducted between 1888 and 1897.[136] Needless to say, the surveys did not only play a fundamental role in the opening of museums, but also deeply influenced the perception of art history in Japan. This can be seen in the fact that the Bureau for the National Survey of Treasures issued several reports in the following years regarding the evaluation of national artifacts,[137] and these survey reports were to become the data basis which was to be used in the writing of an official Japanese art history, as planned by the Imperial Household Ministry itself. The first to appear was in the Paris world fair in 1900, under the title *Histoire de l'Art du Japon*, and was followed by the *Manuscript Summary of Japanese Imperial Art History* in several editions.[138] The extensive surveys and the writing of Japanese art histories worked in combination to create a canon of Japanese art. The role of a national artistic canon and the consequences of its exhibition in the museum environment will be explored in the following chapter.

132 Ibid., 66-67
133 Ibid., 65
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid., 68
136 Ibid., 88
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.

Chapter 3. Meiji Imperial Museums and the Nation

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the focus of the displays in the Tōkyō Museum underwent a shift in 1886, when its administration was taken up by the Imperial Household Ministry. At this time, the museum's displays were reorganized, with a reduction of the exhibits dedicated to industrial objects, and an increase in the spaces dedicated to objects of artistic and historical importance.[139] Tseng has linked this shift in the museum's focus to a broader shift in Meiji culture. She states that while the Meiji government officials were at first focused on the introduction of knowledge from the West, in the second half of the Meiji period the need to study and exalt "Japanese" culture was stressed, and more attention started to be paid to Japanese art.[140] When describing the shift of the museum's focus from science to art, Tseng states that art became a *primary tool for nation-building*. This chapter will investigate this idea, by focusing on the legitimization of national power in the context of the Meiji Imperial Museums, and dedicating special attention to the use of art in the support of national narratives. In order to do so, this chapter will first introduce and define the concepts of *nation* and *national identity*, contextualizing them in Meiji Japan. Following this, theories of museum studies will be explored, in order to clarify the relation between 19th century museums and the nation. Lastly, the interaction between Japanese art objects, Meiji museum displays and national identity will be explored.

3.1 *Defining the ideas of "Nation" and "National Identity"*

As seen in the previous chapters, during the Meiji period, Japan went through a series of changes which not only modernized the country, but, as it is often said, transformed it from a feudal land to a modern nation, with the emphasis on the two new-found aspects of unity and centrality. It is therefore necessary to first explore the meaning of the words *nation* and *national identity*, in order to understand the role of museums in the Japanese nation-building context. Defining the concept of nation is not an easy task: in fact, an international scholarly consensus on what nations are, as well as how they came into being, and why, is lacking. Views on the birth of nations range from primordialistic views, which conceive nationalism as being a biological characteristic of human beings, to perennialist views, which assert that nations have existed for many centuries, to

139 Tseng, *Meiji Museums*, 83
140 Ibid., 84

modernists views, where nationalism is conceived as a modern phenomenon.[141]

Steven Grosby, in his *Nationalism, a Short Introduction,* interestingly chooses Japan as an example to express the possibility of the existence of "nations" in pre-modern times.[142] According to Grosby, Japan in the Nara Period (710 – 794 BCE) could be argued to be an example of a pre-modern nation, as it, at least apparently, presents the elements that are usually perceived as the fundamental parts of the nation, such as a self-given name, a written history, a shared religion, a defined territory with a central leadership, which enforces a set of laws.[143] Grosby notes that Japanese 8th century Chronicles (such as the Kojiki and the Nihon Shoki) claim that the Japanese archipelago was created by the gods Izanami and Izanagi, parents of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, from whom the Emperor himself descends. Grosby argues that the existence of a creation myth, such as the Japanese one, achieves several effects: firstly, it creates a temporal connection with the territory, placing the Japan's origins in the ancient past. The connection between the territory and the nation is made stronger by the fact that deities were the actors in its creation. Secondly, the creation of a territory by the gods implies a uniqueness of Japan, as it is differentiated from other nearby territories, which were not created by Izanami and Izanagi. Thirdly, having the Emperor descend from the Sun Goddess, legitimizes its role as central head of the territory.[144] Continuing with the analysis of Nara Japan, Grosby highlights that from the late 6th to 8th century, Japan presented a code of written laws, called *Ritsuryō*, that was applied throughout the country, which at the time was divided into provinces but saw as the central leader the Emperor himself. Moreover, he notes that not only administrative and production matters were organized by the central authority, but religious matters as well, as a specific council controlled the worship of Shintō deities and took responsibility for the building of shrines, and the building of Buddhist temples was also controlled by the central government.[145] These elements seem indeed to cover all the basis for what are usually perceived as the fundamental elements of a nation listed above. However, Grosby himself highlights certain elements that might defeat this view, such as what he defines as a blurring between what was considered native and what was considered foreign, and gives the example of Korean refugees arriving in Japan in the 7th century, who, although being Buddhist, had been included in the imperial registry of families, and therefore incorporated into the mythological

141 Liah, Greenfield and Jonathan, Eastwood, "National Identity", in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*, ed. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 262
142 Grosby, *Nationalism, A Short Introduction*, 58
143 Ibid., 71 - 72
144 Ibid., 59- 60
145 Ibid., 67

kinship of the Japanese.[146] In conclusion to Grosby's analysis of Nara Japan, even if it might not have been fully defined as a nation in the modern sense, it is enlightening in understanding why this time period was so often used in Meiji Japan in the legitimization of its practices, as it was seen in the first chapter of this thesis.

To continue the search for the building of the Japanese nation other theories can be taken into consideration.[147] Christopher Hill places the rise of nationalism in the modern period, asserting that it was in the 19th century that the political situation in Europe underwent the most changes, which he attributes to the new form of government of the sovereign state. The rise of this new political unit eliminated other forms of territoriality, and saw a significant reduction in the number of states present in the European territory: while in the year 1500 about five hundred political units could be found in Europe, by they year 1900 the number had been reduced to twenty five.[148] Anthony Smith supports the view of the nation as a the result of a modern movement and ideology, that of nationalism, the birth of which he places at the second half of the 18th century, in Europe and America. In his work *National Identity,* Smith defines the nation as "a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members".[149] The pivotal element of this definition lies in the "common legal rights and duties for all its members", which intrinsically stands for equality of the citizens in the eyes of the law. To better understand the need for equality of the people in the defining of the concept of nation it is beneficial to look at the theories offered by Liah Greenfield and Jonathan Eastwood in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. According to these authors, the main elements which transform a territory into a nation is an open social stratification, with a possibility for social mobility. It is the possibility for social mobility which implies an intrinsic equality of the citizens.[150] The reason why equality of the citizens is at the base of the idea of the nation, is that a nation's political authority lies in *popular sovereignty*, which means that the nation's actions represent the will of the people themselves.[151] If the nation's citizens are equal, with equal sets of rights and duties, it is then that the nation becomes an expression of the people's will. As seen just above, Japan had a named human

146 Ibid., 70-71
147 Anthony D., Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism, A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 1
148 Christopher L., Hill, *National History and the World of Nations, Capital, State and the Rethoric of History in Japan, France and the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press), 7
149 Anthony D., Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 14
150 Greenfield, Eastwood, "National Identity", 258-259
151 Ibid.

population, a historic territory, common myths and historical memories and a shared legal system since the 7th century. What it did not have, was a egalitarian set of rights and duties which could be applied to all its inhabitants. As it was shown in the first chapter of this thesis, equality in Japanese society was only implemented in the Meiji Period, when the caste system was abandoned for a division in two classes, and a Constitution was implemented. It was during the Meiji Period that the all people acquired rights (such as the right to travel, to choose their own occupation, to marry with citizens of a different status) and also the duties (such as that to be conscripted in the Imperial Army). Greenfield and Eastwood specify how, in many cases, this idea of social mobility and therefore equality, was often attained following a popular dissatisfaction of the people regarding an actual or perceived status inconsistency, and is attained as a reaction to a perceived injustice, aimed at overthrowing the established hierarchical positions.[152] In the case of the passage from Tokugawa Japan to Meiji Japan, the new societal order was not attained solely through the will of the "lower classes". However, it is arguable that the group that first pushed forward this societal change, the warrior class, was in fact unsatisfied with the state of things, and perceived as unjust the power of the Shōgun.

Following on Smith's theories, it is necessary to define another widely used term: that of national identity. Smith defines national identity as "the reproduction and continuous interpretation of the pattern of values, memories, myths and symbols, and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of the nation, and the identification by individual members with that pattern and heritage".[153] The members of the nation therefore play an active role in the creation of a national identity, as it is necessary that they perceive themselves as belonging to the nation and identify with it. This is achieved through their interpretation of the elements that are fundamental to national identity (which Smith identifies with values, memories, myths and symbols, and traditions) and constant reenactment of such elements on their part.

Lastly, it is necessary to explore one alternative view of the nation, elaborated by Eric Hobsbawm, in which the nation is viewed as a cultural construct supported by *invented traditions*. According to Hobsbawm, invented traditions are practices which comprise values and norms of behaviour, which get internalized through the repetition of the practice. These traditions are invented and spread in the modern times. While at times they are completely new, other times they are linked to older traditions present on the same territory. However, all invented traditions are

152 Ibid., 265
153 Anthony D., Smith, *The Nation Made Real, Art and National Identity in Western Europe, 1600 – 1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7

attributed new meanings in the national context. These traditions support the nation because they create a perceived continuity with the past.[154] The past, and national history, are a fundamental aspect of the nation: Hill states that national histories in the late 19th century assumed rhetorical forms, which not only clarified the placement on the nation on an international level, but also its relationship to the previous form of government previously present on the territory.[155] As seen in the first chapter of this thesis, the Meiji state divided its policies between those of modernization and those of research and revival of the Japanese past.

From this analysis of theories of nationalism, it can be stated that Japan became a nation, developing a precise national identity, in the Meiji Period, and at this time past traditions and past history were used to support the new form of the country. This finding might seem to have been attained through a "Western" approach, as it was attained through theories of national identity by Western scholars, and which often refer to Western countries. However, it is necessary to keep in mind how Japanese officials, first belonging to the Shogunate and then to the Meiji government, travelled to Europe and North America, and in those continents studied the different nation's histories, forms of government and codes of laws and brought back that knowledge to Japan. It is also beneficial to highlight how, amongst the reasons for Japan to develop as a modern nation, the most urgent was that of using modern politics to preserve the country's independence from Western colonialism, and showing a form of national government that would render Japan to be perceived as equal by Western powers.[156]

3.2 *The "Nations as symbolic regimes" approach*

In her research on European national museums Gabriella Elgenius explores an approach to nationalism in which nations are seen as *symbolic regimes.* In this approach nations are seen as layered with national symbols, which are understood as "markers of pivotal times of nation-building".[157] The *nations as symbolic regime*s approach is used in the comparative study of nations, where different nations are compared in order to identify the national symbols and national markers

154 Smith, *Nationalism amd Modernism*, 118-119
155 Hill, *National History and the World of Nations*, 3
156 Erica, Brenner, "Japanese national doctrines in international perspective" in *Nationalism in Japan*, ed. Naoko Shimazu, (Oxton, Routledge, 2006), 9
157 Gabriella, Elgenius, "National Museums as National Symbols, A Survey of Strategic Nation Building and Identity Politics; Nations as Symbolic Regimes" in *National Museums and Nation Building in Europe 1750 – 2010, Mobilization and Legitimacy, Continuity and Change,* ed. Peter Aronsson and Gabriella Elgenius (London: Routledge, 2015), 160

which determine the development of the nation-building process. These national symbols comprise national flags, national celebration days and national anthems and Elgenius stresses how while such symbols are often believed to be have simply "decorative" purposes, they represent the nation's origins, present and future, and how these temporal elements were imagined and invented in the process of nation-building.[158] Amongst those mentioned above, Elgenius also considers national museums as markers of nation-building. Therefore, taking into account the introduction of multiple national symbols (such as the national flag or the national anthem) does not only reveal the way in which symbols are utilized in the process of nation-building, but also, and more importantly for this research, contribute to contextualizing the founding of the national museums.[159] Before applying this method of research to the founding of Japanese museums in the Meiji period, it is necessary to further clarify the relation between national museums and Meiji museums. In fact, until now the adjective "national" has not been used in regards to the three Japanese Museums analyzed in the previous chapter, and while in the second chapter of this thesis the different name changes of the Tōkyō, Kyōto and Nara museums were described, the adjective "national" was never mentioned.[160] However, it would be incorrect to rely on this evidence alone to come to the conclusion that the Imperial Museums were not national museums, or that they did not share any characteristics with these institutions. In order to identify a possible correlation between national museums and the Meiji Imperial Museums it is beneficial to look at the definition of "national museum" given by Peter Aronsson, who describes national museums as "institutions, collections and displays claiming, articulating and representing dominant national values, myths and realities".[161] Aronsson states that this definition can apply to museums, and groups of more than one museum working together, which fulfill this role over time, independently from their official name, patronage or funding.[162] In the case of the Meiji Museums, they had been established and economically supported by the Meiji government, with several changes in the Ministry administering them, to finally settle after 1889 under the auspices of the Imperial Household Ministry. Whether these museums supported, represented and displayed national narratives, and if so, how, will be the subject of this chapter.

By applying the *nations as symbolic regime* approach, the founding of the Meiji Museums

158 Ibid., 145, 160
159 Ibid., 162-163
160 The adjective "national" was introduced in the three museums names only after World War II. The Tōkyō imperial household museum became the Tōkyō national museum in 1947. Notably post Second World War Japan underwent many changes, amongst which the forced redimensioning of the figure of the Emperor.
161 Peter, Aronsson, "National Museums as Cultural Constitutions" in *National Museums and Nation Building in Europe 1750 – 2010, Mobilization and Legitimacy, Continuity and Change,* ed. Peter Aronsson and Gabriella Elgenius (London: Routledge, 2015), 171
162 Ibid., 172

will be contextualized with other elements which Elgenius defines as pivotal in the process of nation-building. The first Japanese museum was founded in 1872, with the establishment of the Museum in Tōkyō. The Japanese flag known as *hinomaru* was officially adopted in 1854, and used at first to represent Japanese ships or during diplomatic mission abroad, and then slowly started being used on Japanese land. In 1870 the Meiji government announced the official specifications for the flag's appearance.[163] The Japanese national anthem, called *kimigayo,* was officially adopted in 1882[164], while the 11th of February was established as National Foundation Day in 1889.[165] The Japanese flag, the national anthem, and the National Foundation Day, which are still the same in use today, present a strong connection with the figure of the Emperor. The red circle on the flag symbolizes the sun, and is connected to the Japanese Emperor as he was traditionally believed to have descended from the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, while the national anthem describes in its lyrics the Japanese territory as being the land of the Emperor. The National Foundation Day coincided not only to the promulgation of the new Meiji Constitution, but also to the mythical foundation of the Empire on the part of the mythical first Emperor, Jimmu.[166] What can be derived from this brief analysis is that the founding of the Meiji Museums took place at a time when new national symbols were introduced, and many of these newly introduced symbols and institutions shared a connection to the figure of the Emperor and his divine lineage.

As stated above, the *nations as symbolic regime* approach is used as a comparative approach in determining the appearance of these national symbols in different countries. It can therefore be applied to the opening of national museums on a global scale in comparison to Japan. Elgenius has identified the peak of inaugurations of national museums in Europe between 1850 and 1899[167], and states that by the end of the 19th century the tradition of forming national museums had been established.[168] The first National Museum to be established in Europe was the British Museum, established in the Britain in 1759, while the Louvre Museum was established in France in 1793 and the Germanic National Museum in Germany in 1852.[169] The first National Museum in North America was the United States National Museum, established in 1881.[170] Therefore, the establishment in

163 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. Flag of Japan, https://www.britannica.com/topic/flag-of-Japan Accessed 20/05/2018
164 Tessa, Morris-Suzuki, "National Identities and Minorities", in *The Encyclopedia of Contemporary Japanese Culture*, ed. Sandra Buckley (London: Routledge, 2001), 345
165 Caroli, Gatti, *Storia del Giappone,* 155
166 Ibid.
167 Elgenius, "National Museums as National Symbols", 147
168 Ibid., 155
169 Ibid., 151-153
170 https://siarchives.si.edu/history/featured-topics/baird/united-states-national-museum-1881-1911 (Accessed 25/05/2018)

Japan of National Museums was not an isolated case, nor did it happen significantly later than in the West: the museum building process in Japan is contextualized in the national museum building in Europe and North America, which happened in the time in which Smith indicates the rise of nationalism and nation-building.

3.3 *National museums and modernist museums: theories by Berger, Elgenius and Hooper-Greenhill*

National museums and their role in the nation were studied in-depth in the book *National Museums and Nation-Building in Europe, 1750 - 2010*. The theories that Gabriella Elgenius and Stefan Berger put forward in this text will be explored as fundamental to understanding the role of Meiji Museums in a period of nation-building. Berger defines national museums as "institutions of modernity". Berger places their birth to the French Revolution at the end of the 18th century, during which private collections of royal, aristocratic and religious origins were opened to the public, and underlines how their establishment greatly expanded in the 19th century, when a new and modern kind of relationship was being established in Europe between territoriality and identity: that of the nation. In fact, he states that the new nations which were taking shape in the 19th century strongly used national museums in the affirmation of their existence.[171] Elgenius notices that national museums have been introduced in different countries during periods which presented strong elements of change, such as during the formation of new political entities, dissolution of empires, or the gaining of independence for the nation.[172] Both Berger and Elgenius highlight the political role of national museums, which is acted out through the display of national narratives. Berger explores how European national museums played a fundamental role in the field of national politics, where they acted as constructors and stabilizers of national master narratives. Elgenius highlights the role of national museums as tools for nation-building, as they "raise awareness of, claim and contribute to the construction of national identities".[173] Through the displaying of objects, national museums represent the nation, creating narratives in which they legitimize the nation's community and its boundaries, therefore justifying the state's sovereignty.[174] More specifically, both authors define

171 Stefan, Berger, "National Museums Inbetween Nationalism, Imperialism and Regionalism,1750 – 1914", in *National Museums and Nation Building in Europe 1750 – 2010, Mobilization and Legitimacy, Continuity and Change,* ed. Peter Aronsson and Gabriella Elgenius (London: Routledge, 2015), 18
172 Elgenius, "National Museums as National Symbols", 146
173 Elgenius, "National Museums as National Symbols", 145
174 Ibid., 148

what museographical elements are active in the support of national narratives. Berger identifies it in the element of continuity with ancient history: through displayed objects, the museum can establish early origins for the nation. Berger states that the earliest a nation can date its origin, the more it will be perceived as "distinguished".[175] Berger underlines how this was especially true in the case of archaeological museums, which would try to establish the existence of the nation as far back as possible, while history museums would bring the historical narration to a less distant past.[176] Elgenius defines this element as the museum's *temporal reach*, in the meaning of how far in the past the display extends. In many cases, national museums' displays reach back to pre-history. This can create the perception of an *immemorial nation,* where the nation's tie to the territory is perceived as ancient, and its claims to the territory are indirectly expressed.[177] Elgenius adds another element of support to national narratives: that of what she calls *sameness*, a perceived homogeneity of the members of the nation, a fundamental element for nation-building, which is achieved in museums with the displaying of narratives common to the majority of the population (such as shared religion or ethnicity).[178] Moreover, Elgenius states that it is through national museums that the pivotal role of art in nation-building is exalted.[179] Berger also focuses specifically on the role of the national art museum, stating that national art museums were "the most prominent and spectacular national museums in the 19th century", and he asserts that national art museums expressed in their displays the ideas of the "national genius" and of the "national character", through the nationalizing of artists and artworks. National art museums had a double function: on one hand, the aim of educating the citizens, on the other hand the display of the nation's greatness.[180] Lastly, Elgenius and Berger concentrate on the way in which knowledge created in national museums was perceived. Elgenius highlights how the validity of national museum's narratives was (and still is) legitimized by the role that had been attributed to the museums: that of "vehicles of citizen's education".[181] Furthermore, Berger highlights the attribute of "objectiveness" which was attributed to national museums. Since these institutions were thought to interpret objects in a scientific manner, they were thought to display objective narratives. This was not only thought in the field of science museums, but museums of any type. Hence, the national museum, its authority and the knowledge it spread were legitimized by the scientific method of

175 Berger, "National Museums Inbetween Nationalism, Imperialism and Regionalism", 13
176 Ibid., 14-15
177 Elgenius, "National Museums as National Symbols", 159
178 Ibid., 146
179 Ibid., 145
180 Berger, "National Museums Inbetween Nationalism, Imperialism and Regionalism", 16
181 Elgenius, "National Museums as National Symbols", 148

research and categorizing .[182]

Following the theories on national museums by Berger and Elgenius, it is necessary to delve into the arguments made by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill in *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture,* in which she describes 19th century museums, focusing on their relationship with visitors and their aims. Hooper-Greenhill calls 19th century museums "modernist museums" and defines them as "one of the emblematic institutions of the modern period". She states that the museums of this age were educational in their aims. According to Hooper-Greenhill, the birth of the "educational" goal for museums first appeared in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which was founded in 1852 as the South Kensington Museum, and was the first English national collection to officially declare its educational aims.[183] Moreover, the modernist museum was intended as "encyclopedic" in nature, and the collection acted as an archive of knowledge.[184] In the modernist museum knowledge was based on scientific methods, and classification played a primary role. Objects acted as the base on which knowledge would be constructed, and it was believed that visitors would become educated by looking at them.[185]

3.4 *Art and national identity*

Until now, the role played by national museums, and 19th century museums, has been taken into account, with a small focus on national art museums. Now, the role of art objects in support of national narratives will be considered. When defining the concepts of nation and national identity, Smith underlines how these ideas are extremely abstract in nature. Smith asserts that it is necessary to make the nation "feel real", in order for the people who live in a specific territory to understand and support the nation. It is especially necessary to make the nation be perceived as "natural and continuous, enveloping its members and carrying them along on a foreordained trajectory".[186] It is at this point that art comes into play: visual arts can materialize a nation's past, history and future trajectories, making it tangible and easy to understand and identify with.[187] Stefan Tanaka describes how the past, often expressed in the form of art, can be used for nation-building. Tanaka defines a nation-state as a politico-cultural unit, in which culture works in combination with spacial and

182 Berger, "National Museums Inbetween Nationalism, Imperialism and Regionalism", 18
183 Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), 126
184 Ibid.
185 Ibid., 127
186 Smith, *The Nation Made Real, Art and National Identity in Western Europe*, 8
187 Ibid., 9

temporal constructions. He states that art should not be regarded as belonging to a "cultural" field, and thus be detached from the politics of a nation.[188] Furthermore, Tanaka underlines the important role played by the perception of the national past, underlying its special importance in non-Western societies: in fact, in some cases, modernizing non-Western societies eliminate domestic institutions in exchange for modern institutions and ideas. However, in this situation, as local institutions and ideas have been replaced for foreign ones, the centralized authority needs to focus on the nation's past in order to establish shared features and common goals for the nation, and creating a sense of uniqueness and distinction from the "other".[189] Tanaka contextualizes the use of the art of the past in the Meiji Japanese context, using as a source the texts written by Okakura Kazuko. Tanaka focuses on how art was first understood in Meiji Japan in an "utilitarian" manner, in the meaning that it was utilized both to create revenue (for example by selling Japanese art to Western collectors) and to depict institutional changes (for example, it was used on the newly introduced postal stamps, bills and paper valuables). The perception of art by government officials shifted at the end of the 1880s, when art started to be understood as an "expression of cultural heritage".[190] It was noted above how Fenollosa and Okakura played a substantial role in the shaping of the Meiji perception of art. Specifically, Tanaka notes a distinction between the two's understanding and portrayal of Japanese art: while Fenollosa inserts the past art of Japan into a narrative of worldwide art history, Okakura creates a narrative of an art history which is purely Japanese, which presented through objects "key moments of Japan's cultural development".[191] Okakura, who had studied Western philosophy, follows an Hegelian-style of development of Japanese history of art, dividing it in Symbolic, Classical and Romantic stages.[192] The origin of Japanese art is placed by Okakura in the pre-history, in a mystical blending of the origins of "Japan" and those of art. The height of Japanese classical art is placed by Okakura in the 8th century C.E.[193] Based on each of these stages of development, Okakura attributed certain characteristics to the art objects belonging to different periods, however, he asserts that when encountered by a modern viewer, each object should encapsulate a Japanese "essence" which re-unites all the characteristics of all the stages of development. For this reason, Tanaka describes the display of Japanese art objects, as understood in the Meiji period, as emanating both a feeling of "timefullness", defined as the presence of different characteristics of

188 Stefan, Tanaka,"Imaging History, Inscribing Belief in the Nation", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 1, (February 1994): 25
189 Ibid.
190 Ibid., 27
191 Ibid., 28-29
192 Ibid., 31
193 Ibid., 32

the past, and at the same time a feeling of "timelessness" understood as "the essence embodied in all objects".[194] Aesthetics and art created, by means of images and objects, a linear narrative of a Japanese unified history and cultural development. Moreover, it was in the objects of Japanese art that the meaning of being "Japanese" was encapsulated. It is important to note that these theories were not only written and spread by Okakura, but also by other Meiji scholars.[195] From this perspective on art history and national identity, it is unavoidable to reflect on the role of the museum in Meiji society, especially in the post-1889 focus on the display of art.

3.5 *Meiji Museums in support of nation-building*

When exploring the Meiji Museums from the perspective of nation-building, it is important, first, to underline the fact that, even if the idea of exhibiting objects for public viewing was not "foreign" to Japan, Meiji museums were "Western" in nature: the institution of the "museum" was imported from Europe and North America, and and so were the display methods used in the museums themselves. The museums from which the Japanese government officials took inspiration when planning the opening of museums in Japan were those analysed by Hooper-Greenhill as "modernist museums". In fact, as seen in the second chapter of this thesis, Sano Tsunetami had stressed the need for the museum that was to be built in Tōkyō to take inspiration from the Victoria and Albert Museum, which was also taken into account by Hooper-Greenhill as the origin of the educational goals for museums. In this being "Western" in inspiration, and in their aim of spreading knowledge, they embodied the Meiji institutional goal of *Civilization and Enlightenment*. At the same time, in the displaying of industrial techniques and national progress, the museum implicitly aimed at inspiring visitors to strive for such progress: in this way the museum embodied the governmental goal of developing a richer and more successful country. As discussed above, the focus in the museum display changed with time, and a new focus was put on objects of artistic and historical importance at the end of the 1880s. This shift in the museum's policies was the direct cause of the formation of, and the caring for, the cultural heritage of the nation. This pursuit for the nation's past and its art history fit another governmental aim, that of *fukko*, the restoration of antiquities.

In order to continue this analysis, a theory by Hooper-Greenhill needs to be introduced, that of the polysemic nature of objects. Hooper-Greenhill attributes to objects the characteristic of

194 Ibid., 36
195 Ibid., 41

polysemy, signifying that one object can carry multiple meanings, challenging the idea of an object being "objective", and therefore carrying only one, true meaning. According to Hooper-Greenhill, different meanings can be attributed to objects by the people who view them and use them, and the meanings attributed to them can be of different types: objects can carry cultural meanings, religious meanings, carry memories and feelings.[196] Importantly for this thesis, regarding objects, Hooper-Greehill notices that meanings can be "deliberately imposed upon them through the context in which they are placed, and through an anticipation of how they will be encountered."[197] At the time when Japanese Meiji museums were opened, objects were not interpreted as polysemic, as this is a rather recent development of Museum Studies. However, the action of displaying objects in the museum environment did nonetheless impose new meanings upon them.

The most mentioned case of attribution of new meanings is that of religious objects. Religious objects were also on the list of objects of artistic and historical interest. As we have seen in the first chapter, during the Meiji Period Japan was undergoing a religious reconfiguration, where the Shintō belief system was being favoured over the Buddhist religion. Not only were Buddhist temples being closed, but there had been acts of iconoclasm of Buddhist statues. However, such attitudes towards Buddhist objects (especially statuary) was about to change. Firstly, the religion of Shintō, based on the cult of gods of the natural world, did not have many objects which could be exhibited under an "artistic" perspective, unlike those of Buddhism. Secondly, the Japanese had encountered the necessity to present to the West, in the context of world fairs, objects which could enter Western categories of art, and at the same time show an independent artistic taste: the answer was found in Buddhist statuary, as it could easily fit into Western categories (specifically those of sculpture and of religious art) but would not be considered a "copy" from Western models.[198] Consequentially, Buddhist religious art was to be given great space in Japanese Meiji Museums, especially in Nara and Kyōto. It is notable that once physically removed from temples, and inserted into the new environment of the museum, the religious nature of the objects was replaced by the new meanings attributed to them, that of belonging to the cultural heritage of the nation.

Based on the idea expressed by Hooper-Greenhill that meanings can be deliberately imposed upon objects depending on the context in which they are placed, this paragraph will aim to reveal how the Meiji Museums' displays of artistic and historical objects supported national

196 Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, 108-111
197 Ibid.,110
198 Aso, *Public Properties*, 31

narratives. The nation was defined, using Smith's words, as a named human population sharing "an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members". Firstly, Meiji Imperial Museums materialized through their displays, the perception of a *unified territory*. In fact, as it was illustrated above, the objects exhibited in the museums were selected from storage and temple surveys throughout the Japanese territory. When transferred into the museum environment, the objects lost the characteristic of belonging to a region (or a temple), to become examples of the art of the whole nation. Objects of Japanese art were perceived as an embodiment of "being Japanese", representing the essence of the nation, shared by the the people who lived in it. Objects in the museum display could create a feeling of unity amongst people, of "sameness" as described by Elgenius. Secondly, c*ommon myths* were also on display, in the sense that many Japanese art objects were decorated with imagery of a mythical and religious nature, for example paintings, woodblock prints, and lacquerware. Moreover, the figure of the Emperor was a constant presence in the museum environment. This figure was mythical in the sense that it was believed to have directly descended not only from the first mythical Emperor Jimmu, founder of the Empire, but from the Sun Goddess Amaterasu herself. The way in which the museums presented the figure of the Emperor was firstly in their name, as the museums were named "Imperial Museums" after 1889 and "Imperial Household Museums" after 1900. Secondly, in her examination of the Meiji museums' architecture, Tseng notices a constant reference to the Imperial Household in the building's decorations.[199] Moreover, she notes that the Emperor was designated the patron of the Imperial Museum in Kyōto, which featured a dedicated throne room.[200] Finally, the Emperor had appeared at the inauguration of the museum in Tōkyō.[201] While the Emperor's symbolic presence, as well as the Emperor's attendance at inaugurations, was not combined with any significant courtly participation in the collating of the museums' collections or the founding of the museums, it was an element shared with other institutions founded at the same time.[202] In fact, Ravina underlines how between 1868 and the 1880s the Emperor visited different kinds of institutions and attended the opening of many others: the aim was to have people see the Emperor in order to use him as a symbol of national unity.[203] Thirdly, on the basis of Tanaka's theories about the relation between art history, history and the nation explored above, it is possible to state that objects in the museum

199 Tseng, *Meiji Museums*, 212
200 Ibid., 122
201 Ibid., 60
202 Ibid., 83
203 Ravina, *Understanding Japan*, 119

environment were a materialization of the Japanese people's *shared history*. It is important to note that even though not all museums displayed art objects in a chronological, linear projection, they were still organized in rooms by temporal origin. Moreover, amongst the objects which were collected, we can find artifacts belonging to the ancient past, such as stone beads and ancient pottery and stone vessels. Exhibiting these objects in the same environment as objects of Japanese art belonging to a later period would act in the creation of a perception of continuity between the nation and the ancient past, linking the Japanese people of the Meiji Period to the first inhabitants of the archipelago. This acted towards creating the perception of an immemorial nation, as described by Elgenius, legitimizing the nation's existence and its territorial claims in the Meiji period. The museums did also play a role in the creation of a *public culture*, not only by sustaining the creation of a shared cultural heritage and displaying it, but also in having such shared culture easily available to the public. Finally, the museums being open to the public implied a *right* for the citizens to view the museum displays and learn about Japanese art, which went hand-in-hand with the governmental goal of “civilization and enlightenment”, which implied a *duty* for Japanese citizens to acquire knowledge, which they could fulfill by visiting the new museums.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed at shedding light on the role that the three museums of Tōkyō, Kyōto and Nara, which were established in Japan in the Meiji Period, played in the context of nation-building, and how this was related to the decision to display art objects specifically. The way in which this thesis answered this question, and therefore the way in which it contributed to the discourse on the relation between the institution of the museum and that of Japanese nation-building in the Meiji period, was through a thorough historical contextualization of the phenomenon of the opening of Meiji museums, as well as in its use of theories of nationalism and museum studies. In fact, this thesis started with an historical overview of the end of the Tokugawa period, and the ensuing Meiji period, followed by an historical research of the founding of the museums, which acted as a basis for the exploration of the idea of the nation, and how nations are tied to the institution of the museum. This theoretical and historical framework was fundamental in picturing the role that Meiji museums played in Japanese nation-building, as well as showing the changing perception of Japanese art objects and the new meanings they acquired by being displayed the Meiji museums.

It was found that Japan at the end of the Tokugawa and throughout the Meiji period strongly felt the necessity to transform itself into a modern nation. This was due to the changes in international relations that Japan faced at the end of the Tokugawa Period, which saw the country opening up to extensive diplomatic and trade relations with foreign powers for the first time after more than two centuries. When opening diplomatic relations with international powers, Japan saw the world as divided between colonizers and colonized. In order to be treated as equal by Western powers, Japan needed to be perceived as a strong, modern nation. The process of nation-building started at the end of the Tokugawa period, with the strive to unify the political power in a unified centre: this meant putting the power back in the hands of the Emperor, and dismantling the Shogunal system. After the restoration of the Emperor's power, with the Meiji Restoration, the new Japanese Meiji government continued the process of transformation into a modern nation, which implied the import of Western knowledge and institutions, while at the same time creating a strong Japanese national identity. In this thesis it was highlighted that museums were one of such institutions modelled on a Western style, and were built following the advice of Japanese government officials who had travelled to Europe and North America. During the Meiji period, three museums were established by the government: those of Tōkyō, Kyōto and Nara. The opening of museums was supported by governmental officials, who had travelled to Europe and North

America, and had experienced Western museums and world fairs. Since the first Japanese encounters with these modes of display, the focus had been on how they could act as showcases for a nation's progress and development. In this thesis, it was found that the museums established in the Meiji Period in Tōkyō, Kyōto and Nara supported national narratives, and therefore operated in the process of nation-building. At first the Tōkyō museum's display focus was on industrial and technological elements, therefore exhibiting the nation's progress and scientific achievements. This display focus, however, changed in the late 1880s, when the two museums of Kyōto and Nara were established, and a new emphasis was put on the display of artistic objects. Concurrent to this new interest in displaying Japanese art objects, was the necessity to create a canon of Japanese art, which comprised the surveying, collection, and categorizing of Japanese artistic productions. By the late 1880s, the way in which the museums supported the nation was by materializing, through art objects, the main elements which scholars of nationalism point out as fundamental for the existence of the nation: in fact, it was discovered that the artistic and historical objects displayed in the museum materialized the perception of Japan's unified territory, its ancient history, its continuity with the past, and its shared culture.

Furthermore, it was shown that Meiji museums were active in supporting the attainment of goals set by the Meiji government. The governmental goal of *Civilization and Enlightenment* was supported by the museums in their being a Western-style institution aiming at educating citizens, while the goal of *Restoration of the Antiquity* was supported by the museums' actions towards the collection and conservation of objects of historical and artistic importance, which resulted in the creation of a national cultural heritage.

The Meiji Museums, even if they were established and administered by government officials, created through their names (*Imperial Museums*, *Imperial Household Museums*), idealized patronage and, even in their architecture, a link to the Imperial Household. It was noted how the figure of the Emperor was being used in other aspects of the Meiji nation: the Emperor's figure itself symbolized the country's uniqueness and ancient and divine origins, and was present in Japan's new national flag, in the new national anthem, in the Japanese constitution and in the national foundation day.

However, it was highlighted that, if the first Japanese museums opened in the Meiji period were to be analyzed in a global context, they were not the only museums around the world active in the support of national narratives: in fact, contemporary to the nation-building processes of Japan and the establishing of the Meiji museums, were the Western nation-building processes and the

establishment of national museums in Europe and North America.

Finally, it is necessary to note that, unavoidably, the research for this thesis had some limitations: namely the use of mostly secondary sources, and a limited use of sources by Japanese academics in the Japanese language. These limitations were mostly due to the difficulty of accessing Japanese academic material and historical documents outside of Japan, given the limited amount of texts and documents which have been digitized. These limitations can become the catalyst for future research, which could comprise of an in-depth analysis of the displays of the three museums based on historical documents and photos, and of the research of Japanese-language secondary sources.

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