

KYOTO

JOURNAL

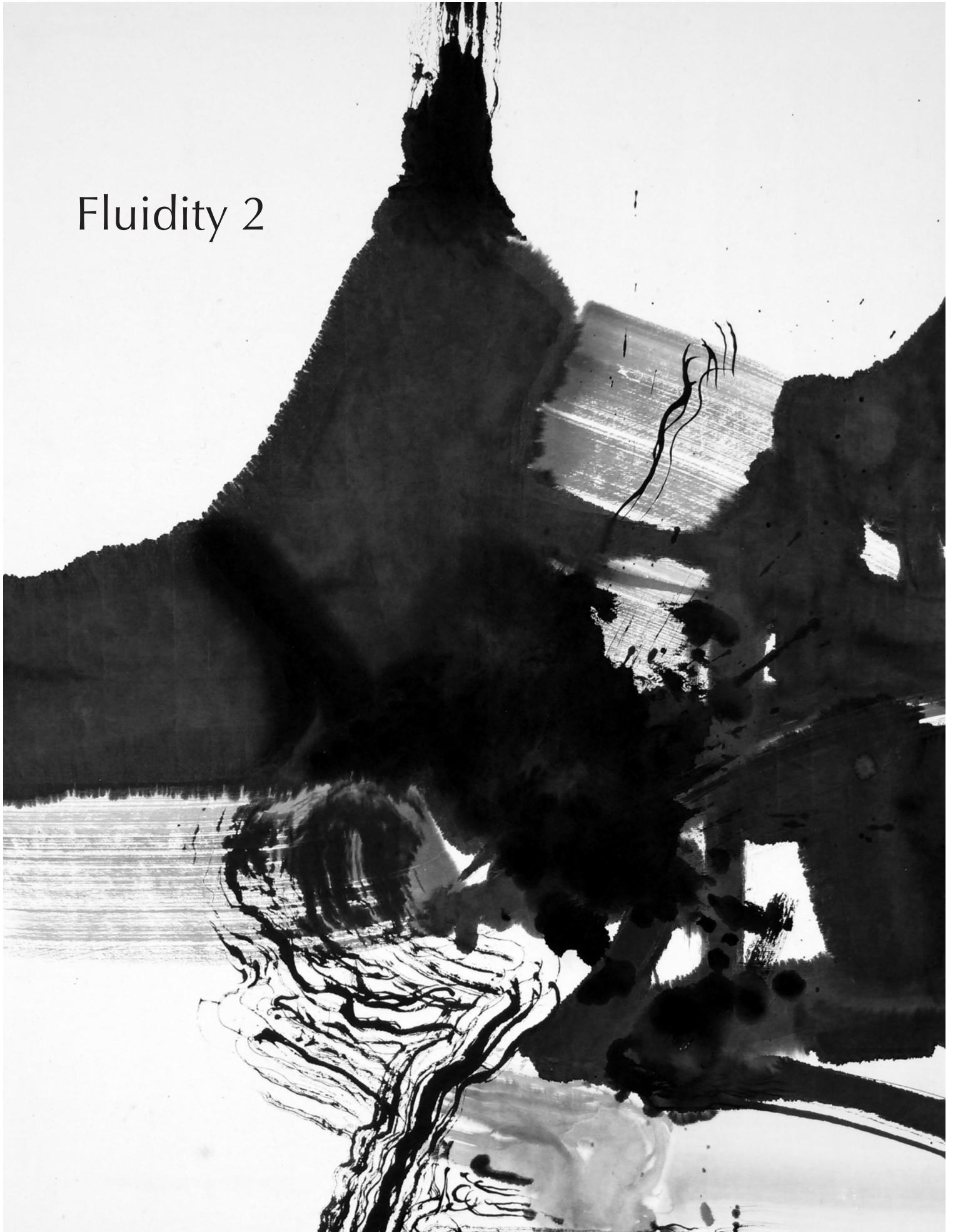
INSIGHTS
FROM
ASIA

108



fluidity 2

Fluidity 2



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'A Mountain in Escape,' painting by Hua Liu.

GUEST EDITOR
LANE DIKO

fluidity 2

Cultures are sometimes perceived as having clear edges and centers. Seen from a distance, foreign cultures can appear as distinctly-defined entities with singular personalities and characteristics. However, exploration into any particular cultural trope—whether 7th-century garden design, 1870s Impressionism, or 1970s glam rock—reveals the true nature of culture to be that of movement, change, and flow. On closer inspection, those seeming edges and centers that were seen from a distance cannot be found.

The tendency to personify and essentialize cultures is especially common when it comes to Japan, famous for its relative geographical and historical isolation. If, however, one island-hops along the Ryukyu Arc for example, from Kyushu to Taiwan, the cultures of each island can be seen to subtly but clearly differ from the next. At a certain point one needs to present a passport. This legal border, signifying the end of one space and the beginning of another, is no barrier in terms of cultural flows.

Cultures flow on a continuum in every direction and in time. Imagine a dynamic weather map, in constant motion, overlayed on a static map of political divisions. Like the weather, the dynamic trends and patterns of culture exist and move on a scale beyond human comprehension. Our language on this topic likewise cannot encompass its subtleties or scope. Out of necessity—in conversation and in this magazine—we use terms like “Kyoto” or “Japanese culture” as crude signifiers which may be intended to mean—and be interpreted as—countless things in interplay. Cultural flows can be chaotic and cacophonous, and at other times gradual and subtle. Geographic images come to mind: whirlpools, rivers, underwater currents, and tidal estuaries of culture. In the unprecedented maelstrom of our globally networked age, conventional boundaries—cultural, historical, geographic, and linguistic—seem to

be disintegrating. Simplistic concepts of imported and exported culture no longer apply. People are viewing themselves—their very identities—more and more as part of a spectrum: racially, nationally, sexually, and culturally.

In KJ 108, Fluidity 2, we explore the many ways culture has flowed in and out of Kyoto; how foreign cultures have manifested in new ways in Japan; how aspects of Japanese culture have been reimagined overseas, and further, how those manifestations of Japanese culture have returned to influence Japan. Fluidity can be observed in the complexity of diasporic and immigrant experiences around the world, from prehistory until today. It is inherent to the metamorphoses of ancient gods and goddesses as well as to modern, shapeshifting figures like David Bowie. Fluidity includes new, international versions of Noh theater, sumo competitions, and tea ceremony. We can find it in the interpretation and reinterpretation of music, from rock and roll to the avant-garde compositions of John Cage; in the work of visual artists like Kanemaki Yoshitoshi or Delphine Diallo, who blend traditional techniques with cutting edge technology; in Japanese whisky cocktails sipped in a Kyoto temple or a bowl of green tea served in Vancouver; and in the international influences of designers, architects, and writers. From Japonisme to Nintendo, AI to Hello Kitty—Fluidity is the nature of culture in the 21st century.



American photographer and artist **LANE DIKO** has been based in Kyoto for more than a decade and has been a regular contributor to KJ as a writer, photographer, and editor. He studied painting and photography at The Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York. His work has been featured by [VSCO](#), and he most recently exhibited at The Terminal KYOTO and EV Gallery in NYC. A solo exhibition of his work was held in 2024 at Ace Hotel Kyoto as part of Kyotographie/KG+.

See more of his work on his [Instagram](#).

‘Tribute to Huang Binhong,’ painting by Hua Liu.



lost dream in kyoto

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS
BY HUA LIU

TRANSLATION BY MAX CAO





萬壑松風圖 宋, 李唐 *Wind in Pines Among a Myriad Valleys*, Song Dynasty, Li Tang.

I

In the fall of 2015, due to a late flight, it was completely dark when I arrived in Kyoto. Few pedestrians could be seen on the streets of the silent city. Pulling my suitcase along, I walked and walked, as if in a trance. To me, the old city of Kyoto is like Rome, which has always been a distant dream. I thought that if I couldn't find a place to stay, I would roam slowly through the streets of Kyoto all night and enjoy the night color of the ancient city. I have always fantasized about time travel, which explains why I have been living in the historical city of Suzhou, China for more than 20 years, spending most of my time in the scenic classical gardens.

II

In Kyoto I stayed in the Kamigyo, Nakagyo, and Shimogyo wards, close to Kinkakuji Temple, Nijo Castle, and Toji Temple, respectively. The first place I visited was Toji. After a short walk, I found myself at the outer wall of the temple. The November sky was blue and clear. Warm sunlight dappled the pine trees along the temple's yellow clay walls, resembling an old ink painting spread out horizontally. The tall, gnarled branches of the pines were bent yet robust. I saw that one branch was actually pruned in the same way as a bonsai tree, which amazed me. I soon noticed, however, that almost all the pines in Japan are trimmed this way.

Pine trees always bring back memories of my youth, when I started learning to paint by rendering the famous Welcome Pine growing in China's Huangshan Mountains. During the Cultural Revolution, this pine gained an important historical and political significance. A large artistic depiction of the tree was displayed at the Anhui Hall in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing and group photos with foreign visitors would often be taken there. The Welcome Pine was the photographic backdrop for China's interactions with the rest of the world and was a household name at that time, not just a beautiful pine tree on Mount Huangshan. Even today its image is used for a variety of goods which have found their ways into many Chinese homes as a favorite interior decoration.

Among the subjects of traditional Chinese *literati* paintings—pine, bamboo, plum and orchid—the pine tops the list. The pine growing on a high cliff is particularly valued and praised as symbolic of the unyielding character of human beings. Books on painting techniques featured a variety of pine postures, some taken from nature, others from the works of famous artists, as the paradigm for beginners to draw and study. China's long-standing pine culture and aesthetics were introduced to Japan in ancient times. The Japanese, however, turned that pine tree on paper into a reality in life. Natural pines are pruned, modeled and managed in the exquisite bonsai style. Classical and graceful pine trees are planted in Japanese gardens, city parks, and large, landscaped areas. This requires unremitting efforts by generations of people. The spirit of the craftsmen in pursuit of perfection seems to bear the same tenacity as pine trees, which aroused my deep admiration.

As a painter of pine trees, I admire Li Xiongcai (黎雄才) most among modern Chinese artists. Mr. Li was a master of the Lingnan School of Painting and was formerly the vice-president of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts and the head of the Department of Chinese Painting. He studied in Japan in 1932 at the Tokyo Art Institute. When I was studying at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, I had the honor of watching Mr. Li painting pine trees.



阿閣圖宋, 趙伯駒 A Palace, Song Dynasty, Zhao Boju.



Center image: *Welcome Pine*, Huangshan Mountain, China. Photograph by Max Cao.

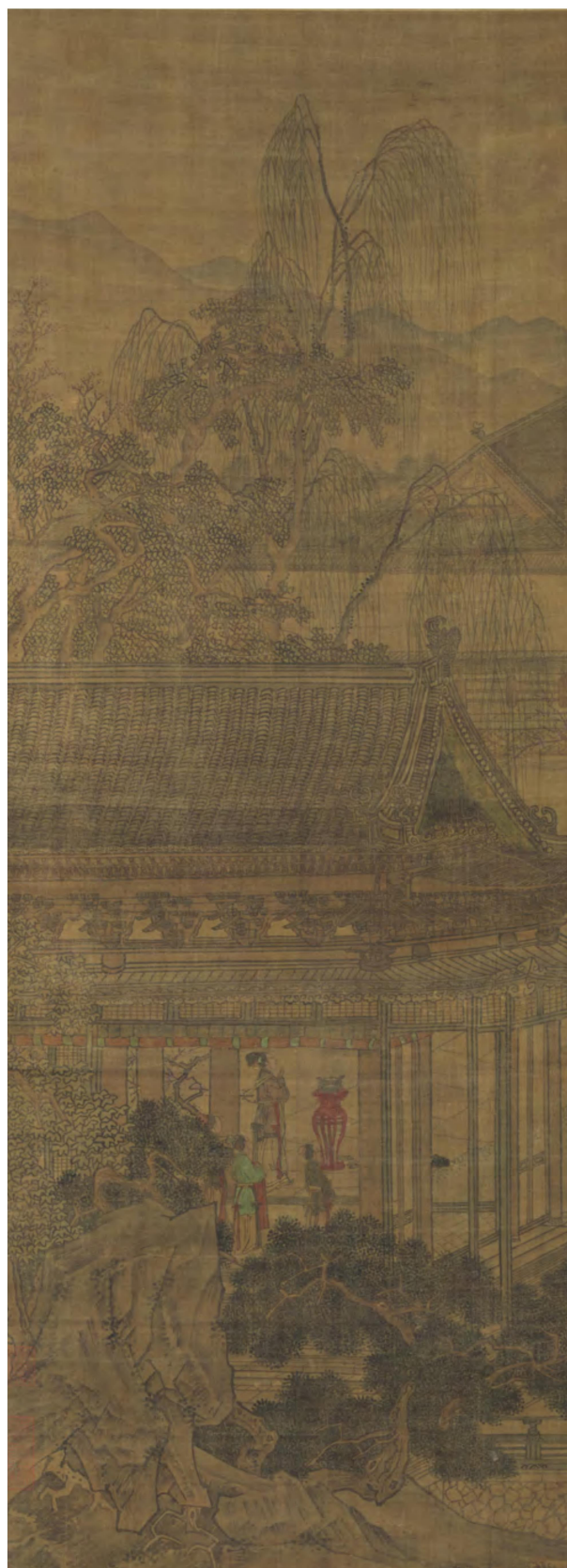
III

A few days after arriving in Kyoto, I went to Nijo Castle. The sky was gloomy and heavy with dark clouds. Raindrops fell from time to time. But when I entered the Honmaru Palace, I felt its overwhelming momentum. The tall, wide hall has colossal pillars and beams. It was a unique feeling to take off my shoes and walk on the wooden floor. Sometimes I would stand still for a short while, bending down to touch the history of the uneven wood grain with my hands.

What amazed me most were the magnificent screen paintings, also called barrier paintings, which were so huge that they covered every wall of the hall. Even in Japanese homes, paintings or *byōbu* screens have historically provided a professional market for Japanese artists. However, there are few interior wall paintings in ancient Chinese buildings, even in royal palaces. Only in some temple buildings can you see murals covering entire walls. The barrier murals in the main hall of the Nijo Castle were painted by masters of the Kano School. The paintings, whether of landscapes, flowers, birds and animals, all revealed the influence of the T'ang and Song Dynasties in terms of subject matter, technique, and composition. The difference is that the natural forms—mountains, rocks and trees—are relatively much larger and the Japanese colors are strong and gorgeous, with gold foil generously applied.

Traditional Chinese paintings had once featured strong colors too, especially the greens and blues of the landscape paintings of the T'ang and Song dynasties (7th-13th century). Outstanding artists of this era include Li Sixun (李思訓) of the Tang Dynasty, Wang Ximeng (王希孟) of the Northern Song Dynasty, Zhao Boju (趙伯駒) and Zhao Bosu (趙伯驩) of the Southern Song Dynasty, and Zhao Mengfu (趙孟頫) in the Yuan Dynasty. The color range in Chinese landscapes later became quite limited, however. Chinese painting was dominated by literati officials, who advocated an elegant and fresh style, and freehand ink painting became the mainstream in Ming and Qing Dynasties (14th-20th century). Their taste and influence undoubtedly hindered the development of color in Chinese painting.

Chinese painting styles dominated in Japan until the Ming Dynasty (14th-17th century), and the influence seemed to come to an abrupt end in the Qing Dynasty (17th-20th century). After that, Japanese culture has in turn influenced China to a great degree since the early 20th century.



拜月圖宋, 佚名
Worshipping the Moon God, Song Dynasty, Anonymous.



IV

In the Chinese province of Guangdong, Japanese *Nihonga* style had a major influence on the first generation of the Lingnan School of Painting, represented by Gao Jianfu (高劍父), Gao Qifeng (高奇峰) and Chen Shuren (陳樹人). The second generation was led by Li Xiongcai (黎雄才), in addition to Guan Zilan (關紫蘭), Chen Zhifo (陳之佛) and Li Shutong (李叔同) from other provinces. The famous Chinese master artist Fu Baoshi (傅抱石) also studied in Japan. They are all masters written into the annals of Chinese art history.

In 1980, an exhibition of Hirayama Ikuo's Silk Road paintings was staged in Guangzhou's Cultural Park. This was the first time I saw original Japanese paintings and in fact the first time I visited a foreign art exhibition. Hirayama's works focused on religious and cultural themes. In addition to China and Japan, the exhibition also included Persian customs. The works were mysterious, hazy, thick, pure in color, and visually penetrating, giving me a visual experience that I had never had before. I was curious about the techniques and production process of such works; teachers in our college were also discussing these issues.

I later learned that Hirayama used mineral pigments, such as azurite, lime green, pearl sand, etc. It is said that these painting pigments were first introduced to Japan from China, but after the Meiji Restoration Japanese artists

embraced the aesthetics of Western painting and elevated the color expression to a new level. This is especially evident in the works by three modern Japanese masters: Hirayama Ikuo (平山郁夫), Higashiyama Kaii (東山魁夷), and Kayama Matazo (加山又造). The colors of their works have a Japanese style, but each has its own personality.

In the last half century, a variety of developments have shaped Chinese figure painting, importantly the introduction of Japanese art after 1978. The Chinese painters who went to Japan to study mineral pigment painting include Ma Wenxi (馬文西), Wan Xiaoning (萬小寧), and Chen Wenguang (陳文光), who studied with Kayama Matazo (加山又造). They all went on to teach at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts and have nurtured a generation of artists.

As early as the 1990s, some Chinese painters began to imitate Japanese painters in their work. In fact, the teaching of traditional fine brushwork at art academies all around China was deeply influenced by modern Japanese painting. Jiang Caiping (蔣采萍) from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, He Jiaying (何家英) from the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts, and Gu Shengyue (顧生岳) from the China Academy of Fine Arts all bear obvious traces of Japanese Bijin-ga painting in their work.



養正圖宋, 劉松年 A Scroll of Yangzheng, Song Dynasty, Liu Songjian. (detail).



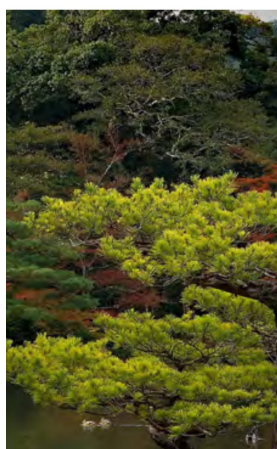
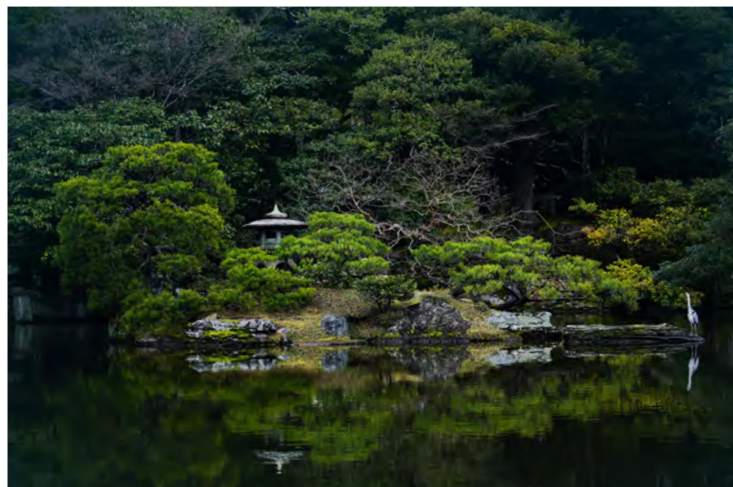
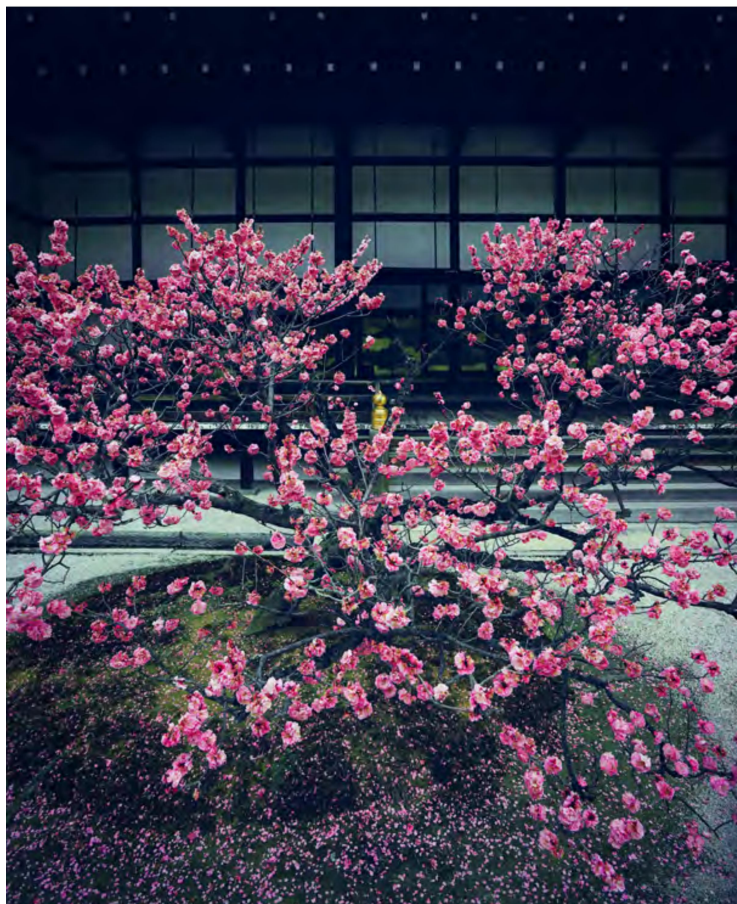
V

Tracing art back to ancient times has expanded my world. Wandering around the ancient temples and courtyards of Kyoto often made me daydream about the cities and pavilions of the Song Dynasty and imagine the life of its people. When I returned to China, I often looked at the art and architecture of the Song Dynasty, analyzing the shapes of ancient Chinese and Japanese architectural components and comparing their similarities. I have also spent a lot of time watching Japanese costume dramas and films such as *Genji Monogatari*, *Revolt*, *Lady Ogin*, and *O-oku—Shogun's Harem*. I've paid particular attention to stories about Kyoto, from architectural scenery and apparel to articles used in daily life. I realize that many things that were originally introduced to Japan from China have all but disappeared in the country of their origin.



華燈侍宴圖宋, 馬遠
Ma Yuan-Banquet by Lantern Light, Song Dynasty.





In 2019, I made the decision to switch from photographing Suzhou classical gardens to photographing Japanese classical gardens. I planned to set up my own studio in Japan. I wanted to create a new style of ink painting, hoping that my works would someday be displayed in Japanese-style rooms. I applied for a three-year visa and booked my flight and accommodation in Kyoto for March, 2020. The COVID-19 epidemic broke out in China and swept across the world. This unprecedented disaster put my long-awaited plans on hold. My dream was shattered. Hence, the title of this article ‘Lost Dream in Kyoto.’



HUA LIU graduated from the Department of Chinese Painting of Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts in 1982. He taught in the Art Department of Hengyang Normal College for ten years before moving to Guangzhou to become a freelance artist. He now lives in Suzhou where he is engaged in abstract ink painting, photography, garden and landscape design, art theory research, and writing.

See more of his work on [Instagram](#) and on Facebook [@Hua Liu \(Art of Garden\)](#).



Tofukuji, photograph by John Einarsen

About KJ

Based in one of the world's great cultural cities, *Kyoto Journal* strives to engage, celebrate, and showcase thinkers, artists, craftspeople, cultural masters and activists whose tradition-influenced practices reflect daily life locally, in Japan, Asia and world-wide today.

Founded in 1987, our all-volunteer publishing entity is now a Japanese nonprofit general incorporated association (*ippan shadan hōjin*). Our staff and international board are professionals, scholars, artists, designers, translators and authors who bring a deep appreciation for the unique cultural heritage accessible in this remarkable 21st-century city.

Our goal is to sustain a publishing frequency of one print and two digital issues of *Kyoto Journal* per year, and to continue to expand our online presence through our website and social media platforms. We reach our world-wide readership through on-line sale as well as regional distribution to retail outlets.

Our award-winning English-language journalism and vital graphic content engage with critical issues of today, including time-honored approaches to environmental and cultural sustainability. To this end, we welcome submissions of written word (including translations, fiction, poetry, interviews and essays) and visual arts (including photography) from both renowned and upcoming creators.

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Kyoto Journal's business model is simple, despite having to manage constantly changing distribution costs of shipping printed matter and seeking to maintain the highest production quality by working with SunM, Kyoto's most distinguished printer, our objective is to generate a diverse stream of funding, including donations and grants, limited advertising and sponsorships, to sustain our production costs at minimum, enabling production of additional issues and books, and the sponsorship of lectures and other cultural events.



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