



# From Fenollosa to *kokubungaku*: aesthetics and the birth of the *utsukushii Nihon* a virtual lecture by Arthur Mitteau

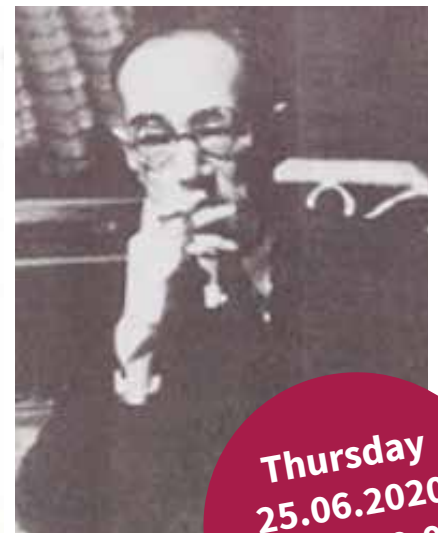
In this lecture, we will explore the shift from the generation building, in the 1880s and 1890s, the first iterations of modern aesthetical discourse, with writers such as Ernest Fenollosa, Tsubouchi Shōyō and Okakura Tenshin, to another group in the 1920s and the 1930s, men that first held the newly created chairs of aesthetics at Imperial Universities, such as Ôtsuka Yasuji or Ônishi Yoshinori. This shift has implications for contemporary Japan, down to politics of identity, since that second generation was responsible for the “re-invention” of aesthetical notions picked in Japan’s past, such as *wabi*, *yūgen* and *aware*. How did we come from a model that included, in the first half of Meiji era, almost nothing of what is considered today as hallmarks of Japanese aesthetical characteristics, such as minimalism, the sense of nature or sensibility projected within objects (*aware*), to our actual set of representations that build up, around such stereotypes, an image of Japan as the land of beauty, with the blessing of some of nowadays’ political speeches and cultural policy ?



Okakura Tenshin



lacquerware with plover motive (Gengensai)



Onishi Yoshinori

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online

<https://japanologie.univie.ac.at/onlinelectures/>



**Arthur Mitteau** is a junior research associate at Paris EHESS’s Centre for Studies on Korea, China and Japan (CCJ), and will be working as an associate professor at France Aix-Marseille University from next fall. He studies the history of aesthetics, defined as ideas and discourses on art, while also collaborating to researches on art history and cultural history, mainly around the worlds of painting and of tea gatherings in Meiji era Japan. Recent works include articles in French, and participation to CIHA (International Committee for Art History)’s 34th international symposium in Tokyo in 2019. He is currently working on a book, which projected content will be the topic of the lecture.