

The contrast in art and lives between kano eitoku



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Compare and contrast the life, work and social situation of Kano Eitoku and Hasegawa Tohaku. Kano Eitoku and Hasegawa Tohaku were two painters, who worked during the Azuchi-Momoyama period in Japan. Although Eitoku is far better known as an artist, due to not only his outstanding ability in painting but also because he was a leading figure from his familial Kano School, Tohaku is often considered a rival as his skill and talent was highly comparable to that of Eitoku.

Bearing in mind that Eitoku was more fortunate to have a historically famous name with the duty to uphold and grow in reputation, Tohaku began with absolutely nothing in terms of a reputation as an artist, therefore Tohaku's talent has often been overlooked in history, even though he was a master of his own kind. Thus, it is quite clear that fame does not translate to quality.

Although living in the same flamboyant age of extravagance, the Azuchi-Momoyama period, Eitoku and Tohaku lived in very different social situations, as they came from completely different backgrounds and lead separate lives. Taking this into account, it is not surprising that both artists eventually developed their own distinct styles, which are often compared but are vastly dissimilar. Although both artists produced works that were typically 'Momoyama' in style with the extensive use of vibrant colours and gold leaf background, their technique, composition and influences differ greatly.

Although the Azuchi-Momoyama Period was very brief, lasting for a mere 33 years, from approximately 1570 to 1603, it is one of the most internationally famous period of Japanese art history and is often referred to as the '

Japanese Renaissance', as it was notably more colourful, majestic and extravagant than any other. [i] An interval between the Muromachi and the Edo periods, the Azuchi-Momoyama period laid the foundations of modern Japan as it was during this period that the process of unification of the country began. ii] In 1582 Oda Nobunaga, one of Japan's most powerful samurai and daimyo, was assassinated by one of his own men, and consequently the fearless military dictator Toyotomi Hideyoshi took power and by 1590 he had control of one third of Japan. [iii] Hideyoshi was a strong, extravagant exhibitionist who enjoyed flaunting his power through building numerous castles and temples, decorated with dynamic, bold spirited artworks by his most favoured artist Eitoku.

Hideyoshi originally came from farmer descent, and served as a foot soldier of Nobunaga but rose by sheer cunning to become his top general. This could be a great underlying reason why he was so hungry for displaying his authority through impressive material possession, such as his expensive colossal castle collection. [iv] The spirit of Zen simplicity began to lose interest, vigour and attraction as it did not achieve reflecting the expressive needs in a period of continuous civil unrest and conquer, and therefore colour and animation began to replace monochrome stillness. v] Since the majority of the Azuchi-Momoyama period was reigned by Hideyoshi, buoyant, dazzling and rich paintings and Suibokuga monochrome ink paintings merged as it represented the energetic and intensely passionate spirit of the leader Hideyoshi, but also the birth of an utterly new age in Japan. [vi] During the Azuchi-Momoyama period, there were four major schools of art: The Kano School, which was the official ' Chinese style' school,

which served the military aristocracy. The Hasegawa School, founded by Hasegawa Tohaku who broke off as an independent artist from the Kano School, in an effort to express his own sensitive style.

Also there were two other major rival schools such as the Unkoku School and the Soga School. All of the schools were influenced by Sung and Yuan dynasties of Chinese art. Since, the Kano School, dominated decorative art since the late 15th century in terms of prosperity and ability,[vii] and were the official painters for the shogun court, to compete or make an independent effort to be noticed in the same field of study was painstakingly difficult, and almost impossible as the Kano Schools reputation overshadowed all others, including that of Hasegawa's. viii] Whilst Hasegawa delicately and abstractly composed his work, purposely utilising empty areas on the paper, to leave mental space for thought, logic, reflection and vision like Sesshu, the Kano School painted with a more matter-of-fact approach, connecting actual reality and beauty in a with a far more stronger and direct manner. [ix] Some of the enormous castle's that were built during the Azuchi-Momoyama period, included the Azuchi Castle for Nobunaga (1576-1579), for Hideyoshi the Osaka Castle in 1583, Jurakudai Castle in Osaka in 1586, and Momoyama Castle near Fushimi in 1594. x] These men of battle, especially Hideyoshi, who seized power through pure ambition, wanted a new kind of striking art style that portrayed their authority and might, art of grand scale, of masculine quality and elaborate showy technique to impress the pleb. And so walls of rooms and halls, sliding door screens, and folding screen panels were all decorated with paintings of curly maned lions, Zen

dragons and tigers, the four seasons, boats and curved bridges, beautiful gardens and peonies. [xi]

Kano Eitoku (1543-1590) was born in Kyoto, and was the son of Kano Shoei and grandson of the leader of the Kano School in first half of the 16th century, Kano Motonobu who was the official painter of the Ashikaga Shogunate. As Eitoku displayed great talent from a young age, his skill developed exponentially under the guidance of Shoei and especially Motonobu. Over the years, the conservative and strict Kano School educated him with their techniques and style of painting, which had primarily a lot of Chinese painting influence.

Exceeding his grandfather's skill and talent, Eitoku eventually developed his own bold and vigorous style that stemmed from his family tradition, with a dash of his own independent and strong character, which is why Hideyoshi was so fond of Eitoku and the art that he produced. Eitoku was considered to be a genius of his time, as he combined the Chinese based style of his family school, as well as the Yamato-e Japanese style of painting which was practiced by the Tosa school.