The Post-Cold War Era—Americanism, Globalization, and Nationalism

FURUYA, Jun

This paper seeks to understand the significance of the past decade in the history of American political ideology as well as of the American view of the world.

The end of the Cold War started hesitantly with Perestroika, continued with the dramatic fall of the Berlin Wall, and concluded irrevocably with the breakup of the Soviet Union. Because the Cold War thus ended without any direct “hot” war between the United States and the Soviet Union, it is not easy to determine when and how the post-Cold War era began. This in turn renders it difficult to characterize the era in a simple and compact manner.

The end of the Cold War in fact did little to alter the course of American politics, economy, and culture. Neither Presidents nor Congressional leaders provided the country with any clear-cut and positive leadership for diplomatic or domestic affairs. Nor did the American public provided a clear mandate to its leaders. Both leaders and the public were so content with a prosperous economy and an international hegemony that significant structural political reforms that might have been expected from the end of antagonism with the Soviet Union were seldom implemented. In short, during the past decade the United States drifted both domestically and internationally in the sea of Cold War victory. As in the case of the Second World War, the United States enjoyed the status of the sole super power in the world. But unlike the former case, the United States had won the war without having transformed itself.

In the United States, until the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the post-Cold War era had relied mainly on institutional and mental inertia. The terrorist attack not only galvanized the United States into a new war against terrorism but also furnished a vantage point for discussing continuity and change after the Cold War and for contextualizing the post-Cold War era in American intellectual history.

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This paper thus discusses the origins of Americanism and anti-Americanism in current world affairs. First it addresses the contradiction between the particularism and universalism that has been inherent in Americanism, or American nationalism, since its inception. Americanism has contained this contradiction because it provides Americans with a sense of pride both as a uniquely chosen nation and as a universally exemplary heir of western Enlightenment. This cognitive dissonance has made the American people assume a self-contradictory attitude toward the outer world. Sometimes Americans are boastful of their uniqueness; at other times they urge other peoples to copy the American way of life. Nowadays globalization led by American power forces other nations to emulate American business styles and cultural life, even if this destroys indigenous cultures and ways of life. This self-centered attitude of the Americans in turn greatly heightens anti-American sentiment in the world. This has probably cultivated potential terrorists.

Second, this paper deals with the tension between the two public philosophies in American society, multiculturalism and nationalism. With the end of bipolar ideological confrontation, multiculturalism in the United States has blossomed, while centripetal nationalist forces have receded. "Culture Wars" was a catch phrase during the 1990s for the age of multiculturalism and political correctness. The terrorist attack has suddenly checked this trend and has again given rise to nationalist and conformist sentiment.

The attack on September 11, 2001 thus punctuated the monotonous years after the Cold War. Now the United States is clearly confronted with a new age. This is the time to ask if Americanism can continue to be a tenet of democracy and liberalism.
U.S. Economic Performances During the 1990s

SHINOHARA, Soichi

It is alleged that the U.S. economic performance of the 1990s was exceptional.

On the contrary, this paper shows that the macro-economic data analysis does not support such a common view. We found the average levels of inflation, unemployment, real growth rate and the rate of increase in labor productivity were similar to what was expected in previous decades. However, the stability of these variables was drastically improved in the 1990s.

Although a large share of the impressive stability during the 1990s was due to good luck, as the U.S. economy was free from any unfavorable shocks like oil crises, it should be noted that only the U.S. economy kept the stability while other economies experienced excessive turmoil during the same period. This indicates that the U.S. economic structure is flexible and quick to adapt itself to recent developments of underlying economic conditions, including information technology and the overall globalization of economic activities.

Where Has the Vietnam Syndrome Gone?
America’s Memory of Defeat and Its Post-Cold War Military Interventions

MATSUOKA, Hiroshi

The American experience in Vietnam has substantially prohibited the United States from entering another protracted, large-scale, and expensive military intervention. American political and military leaders, however, have skillfully devised the means to bypass the public
plea for "no more Vietnams" in undertaking one military action after another since the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam in 1973.

Fighting almost exclusively in the air has been one of the most efficient tools to portray a war effort as less dangerous and less costly than it really is. The overwhelming victory in the Persian Gulf War and NATO's successful bombing operation against the Serbs in the ethnic conflict of the former Yugoslavia fortified the American belief in the value and effectiveness of air power in deterring and, if necessary, repelling any aggression.

The United States has also relied upon amazing accomplishments in military technology. Maximum use of "smart" weapons, the fruits of the so-called Military and Technological Revolution (MTR), as shown in the Gulf War, has allowed the American forces to inflict critical damages upon their enemy without risking detection. So-called Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) nowadays is expected to minimize American casualties in war.

Beginning in the Vietnam era, mass media, especially television, has increasingly brought war into the homes of citizens across the United States. As the American public has become more familiar with war due to the efforts of media, they have grown increasingly hostile to any human, material, or financial cost of war. This has necessitated more careful control of mass media by government officials. The Gulf War was a successful example of a controlled media, providing Americans with an image of apparently bloodless warfare.

While maintaining U.S. initiative and leadership, cooperative efforts by American allies also have been required in order to decrease the financial burden as well as the political and diplomatic risks of embarking war. Establishing United Nations-supported multi-national forces was an essential prelude to the Gulf War, since their creation demonstrated that the United States was not alone in attacking Iraq.

None of the above methods is entirely new to American diplomatic tradition. The United States questioned neither the supremacy of its air power nor the strength of its highly advanced technology in military operations in Vietnam. The Vietnam War also witnessed the control of domestic media by the political and military leaders, though consequentially ineffective, and the formation of the Free World Military Assistance Forces composed of seven anti-Communist nations.

It seems that the Vietnam syndrome has gone nowhere. Even after
the end of the Cold War, it still restricts the way the United States fight
wars. Quite ironically, however, American concern over “another
Vietnam” has required the United States to depend upon air attack,
hi-tech weapons, image control through mass media, and multilateral
approach, in more sophisticated forms than were actually utilized in the
jungles of Vietnam.

Memory, Narrative, and Identity after the Cold
War: The Representation of the Vietnamese
Refugees in Robert Olen Butler’s
A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain (1992)

SUZUKI, Toru

Written by a white, Vietnam-veteran writer and told in the first
person by fictional Vietnamese-American narrators, Robert Olen But-
ler’s short-story collection A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain once
received warm welcome to win him the Pulitzer Prize in 1993. Although it has attracted surprisingly little critical attention since then,
Butler’s attempt to represent the imagined voices of the Vietnamese
refugees fled from South Vietnam to Louisiana is a remarkable contribu-
tion to the reconstruction of collective memories in the post-Cold-War
era.

The Cold War marked a starting point for the reconsideration of
collective memories. The politically and culturally repressed minor-
ities challenged the official story of the time that America is a champion
of democracy, and tried to make their voices audible in the public arena.
The effort made by the minority writers to recover their repressed voices
was accompanied by such a historian like Ronald Takaki, and paved
the way to the influx of personal and private micro-narratives into public
spheres. This influenced the narrative forms of various cultural texts
including museum exhibits and history teaching, and the blending of
official history with oral history to create new collective memories has
become an important issue in contemporary America. Although
recovering the repressed story does not always generate a new sense of collective memory, the dialogue between official discourses and private narratives can promote inter-textual reconstruction of American past, offering people with opportunities to reconsider their identity and ties with other people.

Butler's stories, another example of exploring repressed narratives behind the official history, is unique in two points. First, he focused the most neglected of the Vietnam-related narratives created by American authors: the voices and memories of the Vietnam refugees. Second, in recovering their voices, Butler utilizes the legacy of American literature such as the tradition of the short-story cycle and Twain-like narrative technique. The result is a cross-cultural text mixing both Vietnamese and American past, which is his answer to integrating the repressed memory of the Cold War with American history.

Butler's success mainly derives from his effort to understand other people's past and to represent their personality rather than their common experience. The narrators, Butler's own creation, tell their stories to share their private memories with others, which echoes Butler's imagination searching for mutual understanding with the refugees. In addition, Butler escapes the stereotyping of the Vietnam refugees by creating various types of narrators who are not totally living in the past but are exposed to some extent to American popular culture. Thus the cross-cultural background of Louisiana functions as a setting for another inter-textual identity, and Butler's effective use of ghosts, the technique commonly used in the minority fiction, also indicates the intertextual structure of this short-story cycle written by a white author. Despite the danger of misrepresentation, Butler's stories are important achievements in representing memory, narrative, and identity in the reconstruction of collective memories.
"Transgender" is now used as an umbrella term for everyone, both gay and straight, who challenges the boundaries of sex and gender, including transsexuals, butches, drag queens, intersexes, transvestites and so forth. The sexologists who first recognized transgender or trans-genderism as not necessarily being related to homosexuality and then researched it were Magnus Hirschfeld and Havelock Ellis, though they did not call it transgender, because at that time gender and sex were not separate concepts. In 1955, John Money finally adopted the term gender, following which the concept was popularized by the second wave of feminists. However, transgendered people still tended to be misunderstood and marginalized even within gay communities, because they were quite often singled out as the most abject homosexual stereotypes. It was only after heteronormativity became recognizable in the late 1980s that both feminist and queer theorists began to look at transgenderism as that which puts in question the binary of gender versus sex, of heterosexuality versus homosexuality, in addition to those of man versus woman, masculine versus feminine, male versus female. There is still much to be explored about the potentiality of transgender as we need to understand how we can conceive of ourselves free from the binaries which have defined/confined us for so long.
The Sorrow of Roger Williams: Separationism as a Regulative Principle and Accommodationism as a Constitutive Principle

MORIMOTO, Anri

The First Amendment Religion Clauses have two mandates, disestablishment and free exercise, which are juxtaposed by a simple "or" with no definitions how to construe their relation. This ambiguity has caused the recent Supreme Court rulings to vacillate over the separation of Church and State cases. Those who emphasize the disestablishment clause uphold strict separationism, whereas those with emphasis on the free exercise encourage non-preferential accommodationism. These two positions can also be represented by two contemporary American philosophers, John Rawls and Michael Sandel, the former on the separationist side for his non-interference policy, and the latter on the accommodationist side for his commitment to the public good. While strict separationism is indispensable as a regulative principle to protect the rights of dissenting individuals in a liberal established society, it does not provide a constructive vision around which an emerging society can cohere. Non-preferential accommodationism, while carefully avoiding sectarianism, allows religiously and morally charged expressions in the public sphere as long as they contribute to the common good of the society.

Roger Williams, the historic progenitor and champion of the separation of Church and State, was deeply troubled in his later years by divisive forces within the colony he founded. This article examines the cause of his political impasse and finds it endemic to his strict separationist view. Williams was an outright separationist when he protested against the Massachusetts government interference in the matters of religion, yet when he started his own plantation, it was his turn to deal with dissenters who abused the democratic constitution of the colony to self-serving ends. At first, Williams envisioned a settlement no larger than a haven for people persecuted in other parts of New England. The colony continued to expand, however, precisely because of the complete freedom of religion it guaranteed. His principle that the civil authority
should be exercised "only in civil things" kept being renewed, yet since strict separationism by default cannot produce a vision of the communal goal, the budding community was mired and eroded to the verge of disintegration by rampant disputes over land ownership and political hegemony. After desperate efforts to keep the settlement together, Williams lost interest in politics and sank into long solitary retirement. In his Quaker controversy that accentuated his last years, Williams tartly disputed with Quakers, an action he had never undertaken against people of other convictions. This rather inconsistent action suggests his unfulfilled desire to redefine civil and religious order more in the manner of accommodationism than separatism, contrary to the conclusions of studies hitherto published.

Through these examinations, this article concludes that much of Williams' predicament was due to his strict separationist view that failed to provide a constitutive principle around which a society could be constructed. Happiness and liberty can be ultimately achieved, as Hannah Arendt once said, not by escaping from but by participating in the public life of the society.

Yasuo Kuniyoshi and the Cultural Cold War: The Politics of Postwar American Art

KOBUYASHI, Go

This paper examines the relationship between art and politics in postwar America by exposing the misrepresentation of Yasuo Kuniyoshi in the current canon of American art. Born in Okayama, Japan, the painter and instructor at the Arts Students League was one of the influential leaders in the American art scene of the period. The 1948 retrospective exhibition of Kuniyoshi was the first one-man show of a living American artist presented by the Whitney Museum of American Art. In the same year, he was chosen as one of the best ten living painters in America by the 1948 Look poll. Then why are some artists like Kuniyoshi so underestimated in the mainstream American art his-
tory? What happened in the American art scene during the Cold War? To answer these questions, I first examine a hypothesis concerning the sudden rise of Abstract Expressionism in the Cold War era and the controversy over an international circulating exhibition called “Advancing American Art” sponsored by the State Department.

Such “revisionist” art historians as Eva Cockcroft have considered Abstract Expressionism as an icon or a cultural “weapon” of the Cold War America and have argued that Abstract Expressionism was promoted by the CIA through various cultural projects such as the MoMA’s international programs and served as a symbol of the American ideals and values. As Jonathan Harris put it: “Abstract Expressionist paintings were portrayed as simultaneously ‘autonomous’ from the brute determinations of actual economic and political life in the Cold War, and yet also as symbolic of a kind of ‘free,’ ‘creative’ cultural practice, as characteristic of a ‘free America’ standing up against the threat of the Soviet Union to the western capitalist democracies.” This story of the CIA and Abstract Expressionism, however, conflicts with the fact that, in the same period, there were the public’s negative attitudes toward any types of modern art. An art exhibit called “Advancing American Art” organized by the State Department in 1946, attracted an extraordinary amount of national attention, as it temporarily became a center within the whirling vocabulary describing public attitudes toward modern art in the first postwar decade. In the controversy, the paintings of modern artists such as Kuniyoshi in the State Department’s collection were described as “communistic,” and the circulating show was eventually canceled.

Then is this the reason why Kuniyoshi is misrepresented in the current history of American art? This paper points out some flaws in these stories, proposes an alternative history that sees the postwar American art scene as the transition from a federal support system to a free-trade market, and concludes that, in such transition, the works of artists like Kuniyoshi, who was the first president of Artists Equity Association, an organization that was constantly asking the government to reactivate the federal patronage for artists such as the WPA/FAP (Works Progress Administration/Federal Art Project), were gradually deaccessioned from the major modern museums’ collections in order to be traded with the works of the canonical artists while Abstract Expressionists were greatly advertised by popular magazines such as Life.
because of the "apolitical" characteristics of their paintings in the political era.

A Transformation of Fundamentalist Views of Catholicism, 1878-1918

YAMAMOTO, Takahiro

There are two conflicting images of fundamentalists regarding their attitudes toward Catholics: one of the "anti-Catholic" fundamentalist and the other of the "pro-Catholic" fundamentalist. The former is largely a creation of the critics of fundamentalism who depicted it as the desperate attempt by rural Protestants in the 1920s who felt threatened by the rising of a new urban culture. In the rural/urban dichotomy, fundamentalists were given the image of being opposed to Catholicism, one of the symbols of urban America.

However, in recent years historians have begun to notice that fundamentalism has roots, both theological and organizational, which go back to the late nineteenth century, and that it cannot be reduced to the rural/urban conflict in the 1920s. Once the fundamentalist movement was separated from the social circumstances in America in the 1920s, the diversity of the movement began to be uncovered. Robert Wenger, in his analysis of the social thought of fundamentalists from 1918 to 1933, pointed out that the fundamentalists were politically opposed to Catholics only to the extent that other Protestants were, that their anti-Catholic statements were made with "restraint," and that they felt closer religiously to Catholics than to Protestant modernists. Furthermore, the "pro-Catholic" inclination of fundamentalism discovered by Wenger was brought to the attention of the general public by the emergence in the early 1980s of the Religious Right, which brought together conservative Protestants and Catholics in a "historically unnatural" alliance.

Despite the changes in the historiography and the general perception of fundamentalism vis-à-vis Catholicism, there has been a lack of studies attempting to explore the roots of the "pro-Catholic" fundamentalist and
the process by which pro-Catholicism was legitimatized among fundamentalists who had shared anti-Catholicism with other Protestants. This paper tries to shed light on a subtle transformation of fundamentalist views of Catholics that took place from 1878 to 1918, the period immediately preceding that covered by Wenger.

The catalyst that triggered this transformation was a form of "premillennialism," which was adopted by fundamentalists in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This premillennialism contributed to a "downgrading" of the historical Protestant fear of Catholics in a two-fold manner: by its inherent logic and by its plausible explanations of the religious and social conditions in America and the world. The type of premillennialism adopted by fundamentalists is called "futurist," for it teaches that all the biblical prophesies concerning the end times refer to future events. One of the implications of futurist premillennialism was to deny that the appearance of the Antichrist, one of the signs of the times, had been fulfilled in the rising of the Pope, as Protestants had traditionally believed. Moreover, this premillennialism contributed to the neutralization of the Protestant fear of Catholics by providing fundamentalists with plausible explanations about the state of Catholics and that of themselves in the religiously plural world.

This study will point to an important, though rather unexpected, way in which a dogmatic movement has played a role in the development of cultural pluralism in America.

Congressional Voting Decisions on the China Trade Bill

MAESHIMA, Kazuhiro

This study investigates congressional voting on the China Trade Bill (H.R. 106-4444) and examines how members of Congress represent interest groups and their constituents' economic and political interests. The bill grants permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) to China, ending the annual review of Sino-U.S. trade links and throws open the world's
largest market to American businesses in exchange for offering Beijing permanent low tariff access to U.S. markets. Both the House of Representatives and the Senate passed the bill in the year 2000.

One major significance regarding the China Trade Bill was that the legislation deeply divided members of Congress, especially House Democrats. Unions, environmental advocates and human rights groups waged an all-out drive to defeat the measure, arguing that China's poor record on labor and human rights should not be rewarded with U.S. trade concessions. Also, national security advocates raised security concerns. By contrast, business, and agricultural, and high tech lobbies flexed muscle in China debate to pass the bill. Further, the PNTR for China was a vital part of President Bill Clinton's program as he nurtured his political legacy in the remaining days of his administration. White House officials, such as Secretary of Commerce William Daley, had lobbied Congress that a failure to pass this bill would cost U.S. businesses billions of dollars in lost commerce.

This study specifically explores the China Trade Bill legislation by analyzing the congruence between members' roll-call voting and their (1) party; (2) presidential support scores analyzed by Congressional Quarterly; (3) business and labor PAC (political action committee) contribution; (4) high tech interest group's ratings; and (5) constituencies' interests (agricultural population, Asian-American population, union membership, and Clinton's percentage of votes in the 1996 presidential election). This paper hypothesize that while some variables (labor PAC contributions and union membership) will negatively influence the support of the China Trade Bill, other variables, such as business PAC contributions and Asian American population, will be positively congruent with his/her vote.

Although the Democratic Party appeared lacking in unity regarding the China Trade Bill legislation, the results demonstrate that a member's party showed a strongest influence on roll-call voting of the Bill. A Democratic member is more likely to support the Bill than a Republican member. Also, the results indicate that a member's presidential support score establishes a strong congruence with the vote.

Other results are consistent with most of the hypotheses. The higher the contributions a member receives from the business community and the less from the labor union, the more likely a member will cast a "yea" vote for the China Trade Bill. Also, a member's score from a high tech
The Sacred Self and the Miracle Controversies: 
On the Origin of Emersonian Individualism

NARITA, Masahiko

Though no one can dispute the special significance of Emerson's philosophy of self-reliance in the tradition of American individualism, it is not necessarily easy to truly grasp its nature, lasting impact and essential radicalism in the historical context. Emerson's philosophy has often been discussed in its close conjunction with such European sources as Kantian idealistic philosophy, Swedenborgian mysticism, or English romanticism, as if it were no more than a derivative of their thoughts; or his self-reliance has simply been regarded as another version of 19th-century bourgeois individualism. However, his concept of self is much more complicated, and deeply rooted in the American soil. Only when put squarely in the American religious background does it disclose its own radical meanings. In this essay, my aim is to elucidate what Emerson's sacred self actually means by discussing it in terms of the miracle controversies among the New England Unitarians between 1836 and 1841, and of the appearance of the individualistic ethos in the early 19th century.

For understanding the Emersonian self, we first need to reconsider his love-hate relationship with New England Unitarianism. Though he left the Boston Second Church due to his antagonism against its rituals in 1832, throughout his life he never left the denomination that spiritually nurtured him, strongly influencing the formation of his thought. The religion was significant to him mainly because, particularly through its emphasis on man's power of reason, it formed a historical impetus to transfer the religious authority from the outer religious authorities like the church and the Bible to man's inner soul. Emerson hated its "bare
reason, cold as cucumber” and the Unitarians themselves never ceased to hold on to the authority of the outer material “evidences,” but he owed his idea of the sacred self, we have to note, much to this Unitarian spiritual heritage. As to the individualistic ethos widely permeating the 19th-century capitalistic America, his individualism certainly had something in common with what he called “the age of the first person singular.” However, Emerson’s self cannot be fully explained within that context, for in spite of its shared ethos, his sacred self had distinct features opposing and going beyond that bourgeois individualism.

What Emerson’s sacred self actually means becomes clear when we look at it in the context of the miracle controversies among the Unitarians. Over the significance of the religious miracles, the liberal party of George Ripley contended with the conservatives like Andrew Norton. Emerson himself did not directly participate in it, but through their arguments it becomes apparent that Emerson actually tried to establish the only religious authority in man’s soul, the very matrix in which one mystically merged with God. Or seen from another perspective, Emerson almost attempted to “kill” the traditional God and any fatherly authority outside the soul. Thus, in Emerson’s sacred self, America had the individual as the absolute authority who negated any other power outside himself. It was originally meant as the ideal stage for transcending materialistic society and even egoism to attain the most genuine religious experience, yet it also had a dangerous trait, we have to note, of being degraded into ever-enlarging self-righteousness and the ego-centered world-view.

Terrorism, Cult and Literature: Representation of Others in Don DeLillo’s *Mao II*

TOKO, Koji

This article focuses on Don DeLillo’s novel, *Mao II* (1991). In this novel, DeLillo explores the problem of how to establish communication with people thought of as Others. Here “Others” refers to the unintelli-
gible and often uncontrollable: for example, the cult members and terrorists of *Mao II*. DeLillo’s analysis of the problem is that it is the process of considering “self” as monolithic and of constructing Others as outside self that prevents mutual understanding. DeLillo therefore uses the physicality of the self as an uncontrollable Other actually within the self to change the definition of selfhood from something monolithic to something which includes plural “selves.” In doing this, he opens up space inside the “selves” to accept Others.

In *Mao II*, DeLillo deals with terrorists, cults, and a famous US novelist, Bill Gray, pointing out the structural similarity among terrorism, cult and literature. He shows that all of the protagonists conceive of each other as Others; the novelist sees terrorists and cults as enemies of democratic society; the terrorists think of the novelist as a representative of the imperialistic West; and the cult members believe that everybody lives in the devil’s world except them. Nevertheless, terrorism, cultism and literature are strikingly similar; the right to speak and interpret the world is given to one person, typically male, while others have no choice but to accept his words. Moreover, in each case enemies outside define inside identity.

DeLillo depicts how each of these groups experience collapse from inside. Bill realizes that language itself is uncontrollable and not a mere carrier of his message. Moreover, after “the death of the author” he discovers that his self, which he had thought of as the basis of his expression, is not stable. DeLillo extends this point: he literally kills Bill Gray in the novel. Unlike other postmodernist novelists, such as J. G. Ballard in *Crash* (1973) and Steve Erickson in *Arc d’X* (1993), DeLillo invests meaning in the dead body, meaning which cannot be reduced to any narratives that Bill might carry with him. On the other hand, while both cults and terrorist groups teach their followers to efface their own selves and be copies of their leaders, this teaching is challenged by members who question its validity. This challenge is suppressed, of course, but never completely. It returns as an undeniable bodily pain.

DeLillo presents this physicality as the uncontrollable Other in self, and shows that the recognition of plural “selves” is a necessary step to the acceptance of Others because it changes the definition of self from a monolithic one with a clear borderline to an accumulation of “selves” with much space inside. The borderline of “selves” becomes blurred, and “selves” sometimes sympathize autonomously with what was previ-
ously supposed to be Other, as in DeLillo's *The Body Artist* (2001). Thus, *Mao II* is different from other postmodernist novels: to criticize the hyper-real modern world, *Mao II* not only parodies this hyperreality but also tries to open up fissures within it by showing how the paranoiac narratives that fill this world collapse from within.

Self-Portrait of Katherine Schmidt, Painter: Partnership with Yasuo Kuniyoshi

HOSHINO, Mutsuko

After her return from Europe in 1929, the Daniel Gallery held a one-person exhibition in which she demonstrated the fruits of her overseas experiences through new works. Her name was Katherine Schmidt (1898–1978). One painting, entitled “Self-Portrait at Easel” (c. 1928), became the focus of attention. Standing firmly with one hand on her waist and the other holding a brush, Schmidt confronts herself with the canvas, and her gaze toward us is confident. This painting struck the viewers as a sensation and the exhibition itself was so well received.

Despite such success, Schmidt is now virtually forgotten as a painter, and her works are far too underestimated. Since a retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1982, four years after her death, her paintings have been exhibited on very few occasions. Today, her name seems to appear only in the context of being the first wife of Japanese-American painter Yasuo Kuniyoshi (1889–1953).

This paper attempts to reevaluate Katherine Schmidt as an artist. It uncovers her career — buried behind Kuniyoshi’s—and reassesses the period of their marriage, mainly between 1919 and 1932, from the viewpoint of her partnership, as a painter, with Kuniyoshi. Among her works, this self-portrait claims a particularly important position. As mentioned above, it was painted when she made a fresh start as an artist and, at the same time, her first marriage was starting to collapse. Furthermore, it coincides in time with her husband’s pursuit of audacious sexual expression in female figures, which is what made him popular in
the 1930s. For this reason, this study also analyzes Schmidt’s self-portrait comparatively with a series of female nudes painted intensively by Kuniyoshi in 1929.

In the mid-1920s, Schmidt first secured her reputation as a “flower painter,” a role within “the field of feminine talent” defined by a then-dominant gender concept. To become a purer artist, however, Schmidt needed to break away from this reputation. Like others, her European experiences awakened in Schmidt a clearer view of herself as an “American painter.” The fruits of this new artistic self-esteem are exemplified by this self-portrait. At the same time, Kuniyoshi’s female nudes of 1929, which showed his affinity for Parisian Bohemians, are nothing more than sexual objects exposed to the gaze of a male artist/viewer. The comparison of both painters’ works reveals that her self-portrait attempts to rescue the female body often seen as a sexual object from this gaze, thereby recovering a female subject. The most noteworthy aspect is that, in the painting, she has her own gaze, and looks at us. This is the moment when the female body dramatically turns from an object to a subject.

“Self-Portrait at Easel” is not simply the personal manifesto of a female artist. This work provides us with an opportunity to question, from the standpoint of feminism, the issue neglected by male-dominant art history, which Schmidt tried to challenge.