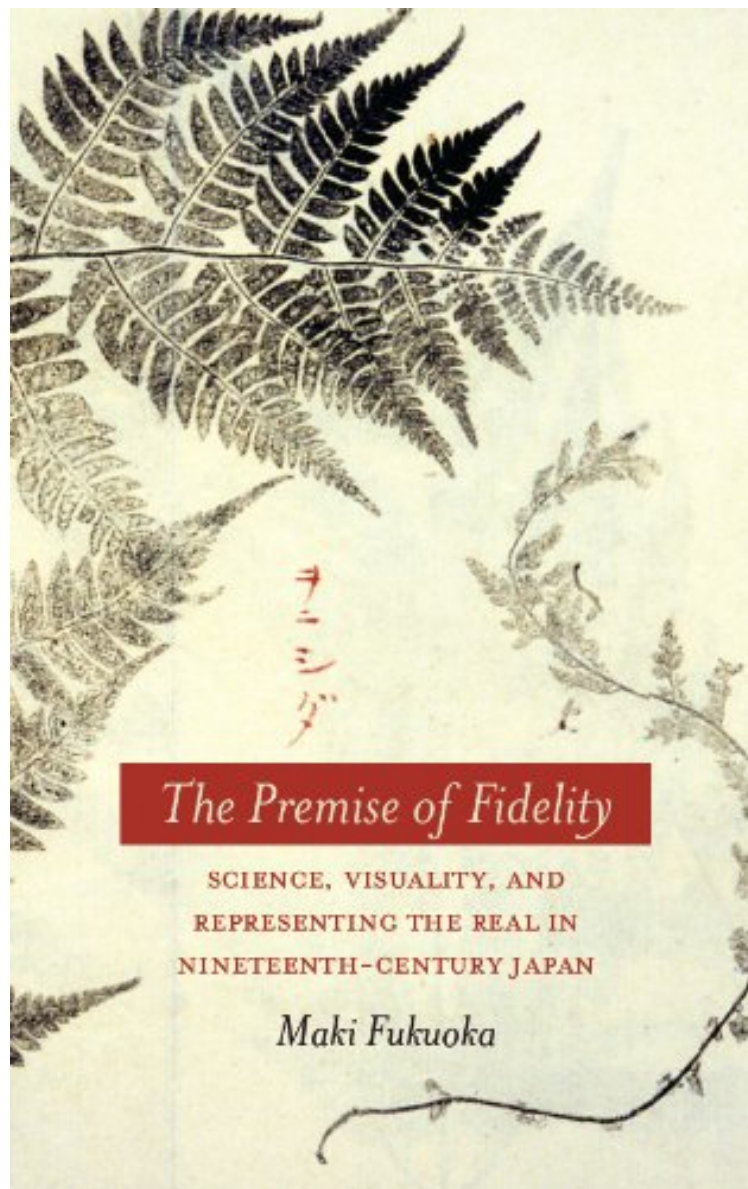


(Download) The Premise of Fidelity: Science, Visuality, and Representing the Real in Nineteenth-Century Japan

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Maki Fukuoka

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Maki Fukuoka : The Premise of Fidelity: Science, Visuality, and Representing the Real in Nineteenth-Century Japan before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Premise of Fidelity: Science, Visuality, and Representing the Real in Nineteenth-Century Japan:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Genealogy of shashin - first published on tapreview.org, Apr. 2013

By Ayelet Zohar Maki Fukuoka's new publication is a book that delves into the origins of photography in Japan before its actual presence. While most books considering the history of photography in Japan will start with the moment when the technology, with its unique devices and distinctive prints, was introduced to the land, Fukuoka's approach heads in a rather different direction: instead of tracing the technological and physical history of the medium, Fukuoka's endeavour is targeted at the theoretical value of photography as a medium and a concept in Japan. To be able to do so, Fukuoka starts with a genealogical scrutiny into the term *shashin* (シャシ印), the Japanese word for "photography," which can roughly be translated as "Reflecting/ Tracing/ Inscribing Truth." Fukuoka chooses to explore the genealogy of the term in a Foucauldian manner, walking into the history and archival material that stands behind this term, to be able to understand what were the particular reasons that led to its eventual selection as the translation of the term "photography." Therefore, Fukuoka's research concentrates on the moments before photography, on the time when the term *shashin* was used in the context of herbal research conducted by the *Shocirc;hyaku-sha*, a group of Japanese medical herbalists who were trying to identify all plants that existed in the Chinese and Dutch medical literature, and to confirm their presence in Japan. In order to be able to confirm the concrete presence of specific plants, the herbalists ink-rubbed the leaf (or other parts of the plant), and then used the plant as a stamp to imprint the leaf onto a sheet of paper, as an actual confirmation of the plant's existence in Japan. These ink imprints were called *shashin* (or sometimes *shin'ei* (沈印)), and were an important part of the *Shocirc;hyaku-sha* work on herbs in Japan. However, the actual record of identification of the plant consisted of three elements: the ink imprint; a descriptive, hand-painted (sometimes woodblock or copper plate) illustration; and a textual explanation of the plant recorded in the ink print, making the trio of concrete evidence, visual representation, and word-based description the full evidence of their research and the proof on the evidence of the plant in Japan. On the other hand, the term *shashin* was also used by the Japanese scholar and painter *Shiba Kocirc;kan* (芝居勘) (1747-1818) in his book on Western painting (*seiyo gadan* (西遊談)) as early as 1799. In contrast to the *Shocirc;hyaku-sha*'s application of the term in the context of concrete evidence of presence, *Kocirc;kan* applied the term to describe Western-style painting with its special attributes of linear perspective and shading, creating three dimensional objects placed on an illusionary plane of the painting surface. *Kocirc;kan* describes the Western-style method of painting and its means of representation as superior to the Chinese and Japanese methods of paintings, which he dismisses as "childish" (171-172). The final chapter of Fukuoka's book is a very fine textual embroidery, showing how the two concepts of *shashin* - that of Western painting as described by *Kocirc;kan*, and that of the "concrete evidence" *agrave; la Shocirc;hyaku-sha*, were combined together, under the governmental institutions at the capital that were seeking pictorial and visual methods to better "govern the people." This process, mainly conducted by *Keisuke*, successfully acquired Western technologies and knowledge, coalescing in photography as a central tool for description, representation, and concretely evidencing the presence of subjects and objects within bureaucratic procedures of registration and governance in Japan. Hence, Fukuoka's book ends with the moment of the birth of photography as a medium in Japan, bringing together the varying sources of the term and their presence in Japanese culture before the photographic moment. The *Premise of Fidelity* is therefore an invaluable text in understanding the modes and manners of how Western technology was assimilated into existing modes of visibility and conceptual methods of analysing and concretizing visual material, thereby creating a document of immense value to research on the history of photography in Japan in particular, and other non-Western cultural centres, in general. This book is a must for anyone interested in the intellectual and conceptual roots of the photographic practice in Japan. It is so well written that I read it like a thriller - the complex plot is revealed in every chapter as Fukuoka follows, step by step, the different characters and their deeds as their actions influenced the conceptual future of photography as a medium in Japan. The multifaceted narrative and the personalities of *Itocirc; Keisuke*, *Iinuma Yokusai*, and *Takahashi Yuichi*, and the complexities of the process of making the term *shashin* the prevalent term for "photography" in Japan, are revealed gradually, with important discussion and clarifications of every stage and their difference from earlier ones. The book marks the significance of conceptual inquiry, the understanding of the medium before it was even born, looking into its genealogy, and the "genes" carried from the past into its creation as a central medium for Japanese visual culture. Fukuoka's book's most important value comes from its successful indication of continuity, making the idea of "photography" coherent within the Japanese cultural sphere, crossing the common barriers that assume the medium to be an imported one. Her varying investigations into the history of the term, rather than the technology or the images, is a very fruitful method that enlightens those studying photography to adopt a new approach to the medium and its centrality within modern and contemporary Japanese culture. Fukuoka's research can be beautifully linked to a previous work by *Hirayama Mikiko*, who looked into the terms *shumi* (写眞の美) (elegance) and *shucirc;yocirc;* (写真の学) (discipline) and their importance within the pictorial photography tradition in early 20th century (1903-1920) Japan.[1] While *Hirayama*'s enlightening work places a special importance on the artistic practice of "pictorialism" in Japan, and the specificity of this trend to the Modern, late-Meiji/Taishocirc; eras, Fukuoka's research is an overall work that is really able to go beyond the specificity of a certain period and the association of photography with the influence of the West in Japan, to establish a local understanding of the medium that goes beyond the Western understanding of "light writing" to a system that recognizes the concreted evidence, or

the indexical value of photography as its main value. Hence, "tracing truth" became the dominant concept of photography as a concretization of presence (in the indexical sense of the word) over the idea of light mechanically creating pictorial presentation, as the term is commonly used in Western languages. I think that Fukuoka's research calls for another major scrutiny into the genealogy of the term *satsuei* ?? which at the present time is the preferred professional term for the act of photographing, and the one that has a strong link to modern Chinese applications of the term (*sheying* ??) as the preferred general term for "photography."

The Premise of Fidelity puts forward a new history of Japanese visuality through an examination of the discourses and practices surrounding the nineteenth century transposition of "the real" in the decades before photography was introduced. This intellectual history is informed by a careful examination of a network of local scholars; from physicians to farmers to bureaucrats; known as *Shōhyaku-sha*. In their archival materials, these scholars used the term *shashin* (which would, years later, come to signify "photography" in Japanese) in a wide variety of medical, botanical, and pictorial practices. These scholars pursued questions of the relationship between what they observed and what they believed they knew, in the process investigating scientific ideas and practices by obsessively naming and classifying, and then rendering through highly accurate illustration, the objects of their study. This book is an exploration of the process by which the *Shōhyaku-sha* shaped the concept of *shashin*. As such, it disrupts the dominant narratives of photography, art, and science in Japan, providing a prehistory of Japanese photography that requires the accepted history of the discipline to be rewritten.

"This book makes a major contribution to the history of art, science, and medicine in Japan by examining botanical illustration in the nineteenth century. It helps us understand how Japanese scholars at the time explored the relationship between seeing and knowing nature . . . This sophisticated study will be essential reading for historians who wish to go beyond simplistic narratives regarding the introduction of Western art, science, and medicine in Japan." (Morris Low American Historical) "The Premise of Fidelity analyzes a field that has barely been considered in Western-language materials before, but the text does not, on this account, restrict itself to an introductory treatment. Rather, it leads the reader at once into serious and important topics relating to truth and the ability of scholars to grasp, and then to represent, this. Its particularizing features lie in the author considering an area in which results are crucial, namely medicine, and a time when the stabilizing pillars of Japanese intellectual life were starting to shake, through contact with Europe." (Timon Screech, Professor of the History of Art, SOAS University of London) "A major contribution to visual and intellectual studies of nineteenth-century Japan." (Luke Gartlan, Lecturer in the History of Photography University of St. Andrews) "There are many optical wonders in Maki Fukuoka's new book . . . This fundamentally trans-disciplinary book offers much of interest to historians of East Asia, of science, and of art: histories of public exhibitions, of natural history, of photography, of anatomical dissection, of translation and typography, and much more can be found within the pages of *The Premise of Fidelity*." (Carla Nappi New Books in East Asian Studies) "[*The Premise of Fidelity*] contributes substantially to our understanding both why and how the Japanese adopted from Europeans several new approaches to perceiving and comprehending the natural world . . . [The book] deserves a careful read by anybody interested in the broad range of disciplines it traverses, and it provides a model for transdisciplinary studies to come. It is a book that promises a long-term impact based on its originality of vision, and thorough archival research [...]" (William Johnston Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies) "This well-researched book creatively weaves together material from a number of fields, including intellectual history, science (particularly medicine and botany), and visual studies. Fukuoka successfully situates this rich material within a broader social and cultural history while also engaging in a narrowly focused and detailed analysis of specific texts and visual objects. By untangling the complex nuances inherent in *shashin*, her study ultimately positions the early history of Japanese photography within its own sociocultural nexus as a development of specific local cultural practices pertaining to visual representation, rather than perpetuating the idea of photography as a form of visuality imposed on Japan by the West. This is a seminal work that will be of great interest to a wide range of scholars." (Karen M. Fraser Monumenta Nipponica) "Fukuoka has done a great work in synthesizing a variety of sources to convincingly argue for a more nuanced and multivalent understanding of 'shashin' among the late Edo intelligentsia. She has successfully put forward a case, especially in the last chapter, that rescues the term from being merely another cultural import within a unidirectional process of modernization and technological transfer. This piece of scholarship is according highly commended for developing a more sophisticated understanding of pre-Meiji intellectual culture." (Alistair Swale Journal of Japanese Studies) "This book is a must for anyone interested in the intellectual and conceptual roots of the photographic practice in Japan. It is so well written that I read it like a thriller?the complex plot is revealed in every chapter as Fukuoka follows, step by step, the different characters and their deeds as their actions influenced the conceptual future of photography as a medium in Japan." (Ayelet Zohar Trans Asia Photography) "This highly original work opens a window into the world of early Japanese botanical drawings, ink-rubbings, woodblock prints, and modern photography to show the dynamic connections between art, science, and medicine in nineteenth-century Japan." (Ann Jannetta, Professor Emerita of Japanese History University of Pittsburgh) "The Premise of

Fidelity is thoroughly researched and written clearly and eloquently. It will prove an invaluable resource for anyone interested in Japanese art history, Japanese intellectual history, medical history, and the visual culture of the Edo and Meiji periods, history of photography, and transnational studies. Given the recent growth in appreciation of interdisciplinary research and visual culture, Fukuoka has written a pioneering book." (Asato Ikeda CAA s)About the AuthorMaki Fukuoka is assistant professor of Japanese Humanities in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Michigan.