

The K.P.S. era

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In the first half of late 20th century Japanese photography, Kansai's photographic world is considered to have pioneered the photographic expression of Japan together with and beyond groups centered around the capital of Tokyo. At that time, the art photography movement was established to advocate pictorialism and Shinkō Shashin (New Photography) emerged in swift opposition. From there, Zen'ei Shashin (avant-garde photography) was born in pursuit of New Photography and social realist photography, with a journalistic point of view. During the war, national policy meant that photojournalism was adopted as propaganda and avant-garde photography suppressed. After the war a variety of photographic expression all seeking modernity were revived. This is the 50-year history of the formation and development of modern photography in Japan, through that pre and post war period.

According to the aforementioned 50-year chronology, Nihon Kōga Geijutsu Kyōkai emerged from the Kansai photographic world, centered around Hakuyō Fuchikami of Kobe and Naniwa Photography Club led by Kōrō Kometani, Hakuyō Fukumori and others in Osaka, pioneering an era of Japanese art photography. Then Naniwa Photography Club emerged, transformed by the arrival of Kiyoshi Koishi and Gingo Hanawa, as well as Tampei Photography Club in Osaka, led by the likes of Nakaji Yasui, Terushichi Hirai, Tōru Kōno, and Osamu Shiihara, and Ashiya Camera Club in Hyogo, centered around Iwata Nakayama, pioneered an era of New Photography. While 'Kansai' up until this point has been used to describe the history of Japanese photography, it was actually the Hanshin area (Osaka-Kobe), and almost nothing is discussed of movements in Kyoto, another of Kansai's three major cities.

Yet, Suizan Kurokawa representing the early days of art photography, Saigorō Matsuo a member of Nihon Kōga Geijutsu Kyōkai and Makihiko Yamamoto also a central figure of Nihon Kōga Kyōkai can also be named when it comes to Kyoto photographers. Katsumasa Kimura and Seikō Wada who were members of the Kyoto branch of Tampei Photography Club could also be added to the list. These Kyoto-based photographers except for Kurokawa must have been more interested in exploring their activities nationwide rather than focusing on the local area.

K.P.S. (Kyoto Photography Society,) founded in 1925 by Motohiko Gotō¹, a

¹ "List of photographic groups in Japan" in *ARS Camera Annual* 1926, p.17

medical student at Kyoto Imperial University (renamed Kyoto University in 1947,) was an amateur group of photographers active in Kyoto that evolved with remarkable success during the period of postwar reconstruction. Principle members included Yūshi Kobayashi, Noboru Hiroi (later Noboru Ueki), and Shunkō Kōsaka all photographers by trade with their own photographic studio, Koson Hayashi well-known for his tourism photography, and Tōyō Okamoto famous for his photographic documentation for artists. While clearly professional photographers, K.P.S. should be referred to as a group of amateur photographers from the point of view of artistic activity. Unfortunately much of what they got up to as a group is unknown and what little that does exist is unclear. The only record before the war introducing members work is the October 1939 issue of *The Photo Times* presenting the work of 6 people including Kobayashi, Hiroi, Hayashi and Gotō. The work of Kobayashi and Hiroi truly reflects the period of 1939 when avant-garde photography was at its most powerful, but other members would never be described as avant-garde despite being modern in their expression.

And so K.P.S. must be noted in terms of the avant-garde photographic representation that happened right after the end of the Second World War.

In January 1948, a joint photo exhibition held by the amateur groups Naniwa Photography Club, Tampei Photography Club, Chisō-sha, Chikai-sha, and Osaka Photographic Research Society is considered as setting the photographic world of Kansai on a path to postwar reconstruction, although the exhibition was centered around amateur photography groups of Osaka. It seemed “to make no difference that (Kyoto) was the only city unaffected by the war. Photographers there were unremarkable.”² Nevertheless, postwar development of K.P.S. began from August 1948. The first exhibition was the *Jiyū Shashin Bijutsuten [Free Photographic Art Exhibition]* held at Daimaru department store in Kyoto. There are 18 members centered around prewar members Kobayashi, Ueki, Hayashi, Tochiji Sahara, Okamoto, and Kōsaka with some 80 works exhibited in total. Yoshio Shimozato, a wartime casualty who lived in Kyoto and member of Nagoya Photo Avant-Garde, also takes part this time. A second exhibition that year in December is held at the Maruzen Gallery, Kyoto following the *Jiyū Shashin Bijutsuten [Free Photographic Art Exhibition]*, with a third exhibition in May 1949 at Maruzen Gallery, Kyoto. A 4th exhibition in August at Mitsukoshi department store in Osaka and a 5th exhibition in September at Maruzen Gallery, Kyoto were held that year in quick

² Kametarō Kawasaki, “Kansai Shadan no Genkyō” (The current world of the Kansai photographic world) in *Camera*, January 1948, ARS

succession, having a massive impact on Kansai's photographic world.

In the first exhibition, “30 abstract colour photographs roused the photography world,” according to a report by Ueki.³ The newspaper review also refers to the Osaka exhibition. “Noboru Ueki and Shunkō Kōsaka approaches colour photography with the technique of Deformation with the extreme freshness of picturesque representation ignoring traditional photographic art,” describing works with vivid hand-painting applied to compositional still life images and photography with an abstract expression.

The new trend of postwar photography began with Bijutsu Bunka Kyōkai (Fine Art and Culture Association), established a photography section in January 1949 as one of the first art groups that restarted in Tokyo after the war. In addition to Ueki and Kobayashi, members who were part of the prewar avant-garde photography movement also participated in the group, such as Nagoya Photo Avant-Garde and Avant-Garde Zōei Shūdan (Avant-Garde Image Group) in Osaka.⁴ Furthermore, there were signs of a trend developing nationwide with aspiring avant-garde photographers from Naniwa Photography Club, Tampei Photography Club, Chisōsha and Hyogo Photographers Group, gathering to help establish M.P.S. (Modern Photography Society) through the management of Hirai and Kōrō Honjō in May 1949.

Meanwhile, the Kyoto Photography Society (K.P.S.) held an exhibition at the Matsuya Ginza department store in Tokyo in July 1950. In the days before the war, Nobuya Abe who with Shūzō Takiguchi, Isshū Nagata and others would present a great number of works as members of Zen'ei Shashin Kyōkai (Association of Avant-Garde Photography) and who was also a central figure of Bijutsu Bunka Kyōkai said, “things are only experiments and often fail but their passion makes them good enough.”⁵ Although Kobayashi's montaged expression and Ueki's hand-coloured photographs are favorably received the assessment is never over the top. Photo critic Masao Tanaka offered severe criticism, saying Ueki's colour photographs exhibited at Bijutsu Bunka Kyōkai exhibition in March 1950, “cannot be avant-garde or art just by picturing something deemed unnecessarily important. A good example are the sheer number of colored photographs lined-up at the exhibition this time. And

³ Noboru Ueki, “K.P.S. no Kinkyō” (K.P.S. in recent years) in *Camera*, December 1949, ARS

⁴ Names that have been mentioned as members are Kansuke Yamamoto, Keiichirō Gotō, Yoshifumi Hattori, and Minayoshi Takada of Nagoya, Kiyoji Ōtsuji, Yasushi Takabayashi, and Teruyoshi Tokuyama of Tokyo, and Ryūichi Amano, Terushichi Hirai, Kōrō Honjō, Seijirō Ikemiya, and Atsushi Nakafuji of Osaka, according to “Bijutsu Bunka Kyōkai, Shashin-bu” (Fine Art and Culture Association, Photography section) by Yasushi Takabayashi, in *Camera*, June 1950, ARS

⁵ Nobuya Abe, “Shashin Tenpyō Nihon Shashinkai-ten to K.P.S.-ten” (A review of photography exhibitions by Nihon Shashinkai and K.P.S.) in *Camera*, October 1950, ARS

what of the colour works by Teruyoshi Tokuyama and Noboru Ueki? The colour of paint is vulgar in the extreme and the real colour would be impossible to make out”⁶

Needless to say, Tanaka’s criticism stemmed from the side of photographic realism movement, which was developed even further by Ken Domon describing them at that time as “absolute snapshots absolutely undirected,” bearing “the direct connection of camera and motif”. You could say the movement has been centralized in a way, using the photography magazine print media as a ‘space’ launched nationwide by professional photo-journalists in Tokyo.

Postwar avant-garde photography spearheaded by amateur photographers unable to get their message across found it difficult to gain weight as a single nationwide movement under conditions such as these. This trend would resurface in the late 1950s with the subjective photography movement when photorealism seemed to reach a dead end. However, Ueki and Kobayashi at the time were not rooted in either the Kyoto region or K.P.S. but can be described as participating as merely revered photographers.

The K.P.S. era only lasted for a short period after the end of the war. However, looking back at Ueki’s colour photography and Kobayashi’s montages I wonder if another rich, photographic expression different from the day does not begin to emerge?

⁶ Masao Tanaka, “Shashin Tenpyō Bijutsu Bunka-ten” (A review of the Bijutsu Bunka Kyōkai exhibition) in *Camera*, June 1950, ARS