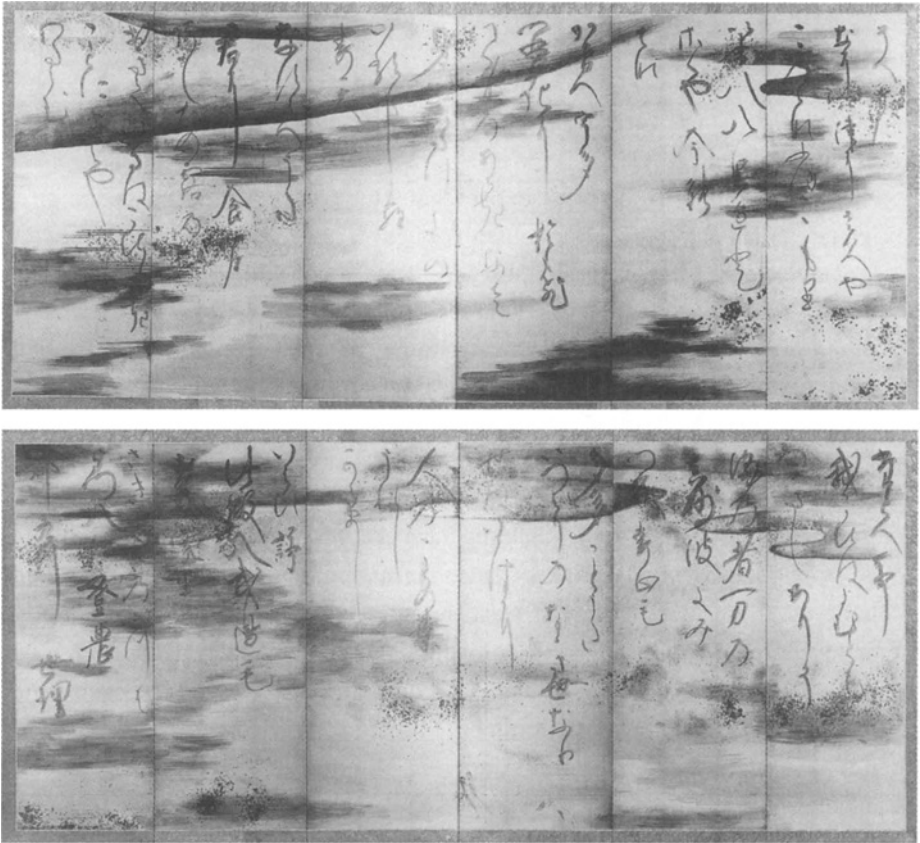


## Preface

This book is the result of a journey beyond my own expectations. When I began this study of Nobutada's works, I was first attracted to a pair of screens (ills. 1 a, b) in the collection of the Yōmei Bunko, the Konoe family archive. I was drawn to their beauty and the artist's use of this format, unusual for Japanese-style calligraphy. I began exploring the history of calligraphic writing on folding screens. For many years, I focused on similar works, while at the same time collecting as much information as I could find about Konoe Nobutada, the man whose name was connected to the Yōmei Bunko and a number of other stunning calligraphy screens.



1. Konoe Nobutada or follower, *Waka rikugi folding screens*, [5.5.5]  
ink and mineral pigments on paper; 164.5 x 363.5  
Yōmei Bunko Collection, Kyoto

Most of the literature on the art of the early seventeenth century led me to expect that Nobutada was ‘harking back’ to the art of the aristocracy during their ‘golden age,’ i.e., the eighth to the twelfth centuries. However, the further I delved into the background of Nobutada’s preferred subjects, the more I found that instead his works related more directly to those produced by painters and calligraphers of his father’s and grandfather’s generations, i.e., works created during the sixteenth century, many of which had roots in that golden age. This and other evidence pointed to an artistically active court that scholars mentioned only in passing, if at all, and to an uninterrupted history of courtly themes that apparently required no rediscovery.

As I gathered material on the Konoe family, I noted that the members of this and other aristocratic families were actively involved in cultural activities and even politics. This was also contrary to my expectations – as members of the defeated and powerless court, should they not have been mourning their lost glory days in impoverished yet distinguished resignation? If, as much of current literature would lead us to believe, they were simply crippled and helpless puppets of the shogunate, then what were these signs of vitality and involvement on both the artistic and political fronts?

Further, the literature led me to expect that after Tokugawa Ieyasu’s triumph at Sekigahara in 1600, everyone welcomed Tokugawa rule. My research contradicted this however, and I began to wonder why there was so little written about the politics of the early seventeenth century. Surely, Tokugawa Ieyasu’s clash with Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s son Hideyori rates more than just a few lines in passing? How is it that the happy Tokugawa myth was so widely accepted so long after the collapse of this military family?

I was thus forced to confront my own, at times naïve, prejudice in many areas. In writing this book, I occasionally present theories that seem logical given the data as I understand it, and at times I lack the hard proof to shore up the suppositions. ‘Pure’ scientists will likely criticise these lapses into empiricism. I invite others to challenge these theories, for at least the questions will be addressed and the themes explored. In addition, while conjecture has its own inherent dangers, if we base all our arguments on the dry facts available in carefully worded documents without supplementing these with imagination and knowledge of human nature, I believe that we run the risk of missing vital glimpses of the real people behind the official facade.

Finally, *Japonica Neerlandica* is a dissertation series. This book is written in as accessible manner as possible, yet some knowledge of Japanese history is assumed. This book is also not intended to give a general survey of the art of Nobutada’s period, as fascinating and useful as such a resource would be. Even when dealing

with Nobutada's own works, time limitations and the difficulties involved in ordering photographs and obtaining permission to use them have necessitated omissions. I apologise to the reader and sympathise with the frustration caused when works are mentioned in notes and appendices but are not illustrated in the book. Colour illustrations would also have been preferable but budgetary constraints have prevented us from using them, these are referenced in various publications, as noted Appendix 5. Unless otherwise stated, the poetry and other translations are my own.