Although this section is titled, “Japanese aesthetics in the world,” my survey of the field of Japanese aesthetics will be limited to the West, mainly the United States and Europe. In the West, the study of Japanese aesthetics was not initiated by departments of philosophy or art, as one might think should be the case, considering that, at least from Hegel’s time, aesthetics has come to be seen as a philosophical discipline studying the realm of the beautiful in art. Instead, it is scholars of Japanese literature who should be credited with the introduction of aesthetic terms and ideas with which they were confronted while translating into English and other European languages the “classics” of Japanese literature. A generation of gifted translators took upon itself the difficult task of introducing to Western readers texts which these readers were bound to perceive as unorthodox. The curiosity for the exotic that had fascinated European and American consumers of Japanese artifacts in the late nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth centuries was not strong enough to make them appreciate a literal translation of a “novel” which had no beginning nor ending, or of a “poem” that was as hazy as the mist described in it, or of a “tragedy” devoid of any movement or action. The translators felt a strong responsibility to make the original Japanese texts acceptable and pleasurable to Western readers. This was not an easy task considering the fact that mere content plays such an irrelevant role in literary texts. If a Westerner could easily appreciate the beauty of a Japanese screen with a beautiful landscape painted on it, surrounded by a poem in unintelligible Chinese characters, things were much more complicated once the poem was translated into English and sounded so little poetic and even more unintelligible. The first kind of unintelligibility

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1 This marketing strategy for appealing to a Western audience, paired with a passion on the part of a generation of Japan scholars who are genuinely in love with the field of their expertise, has continued until recent times. See, for example, Donald Keene, The Pleasures of Japanese Literature (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), the first chapter of which is titled “Japanese Aesthetics.”