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THE INFLUENCE OF JAPAN AND INDIA IN THE CIRCLE OF PATRICK GEDDES

Murdo Macdonald

The importance of Japanese art to European culture in the late nineteenth century is accepted as a commonplace but such influence has been less considered in the context of the Celtic revival in Scotland. *The Evergreen*, a broad ranging magazine published in four parts by Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) in 1895 and 1896, was one of the flagship publications of the Celtic revival. It contains several clear examples of Japanese influences. Most obvious is the figure of a Japanese woman, *Madame Chrysanthème* by E. A. Hornel (1864-1933), which appeared in *The Evergreen: Book of Autumn* in 1895. Hornel had just returned from a visit to Japan with his



fellow artist George Henry (1858-1943). The direct reference is to the French novel of the same title by Pierre Loti and, perhaps, to the opera by André Messager, which had first been performed in Paris in 1893. A decade later Loti's

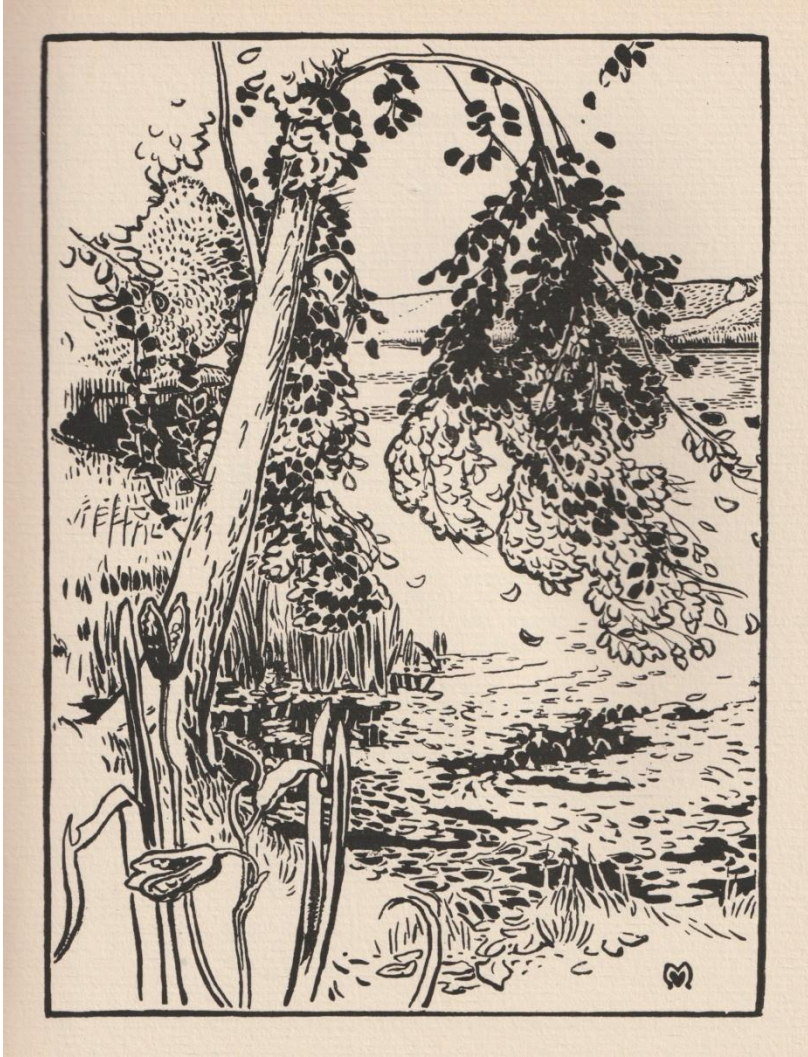
**E. A. Hornel,
"Madame
Chrysanthème,"
*The Evergreen:
Book of Autumn*
(1895), 101.**

story would become, at least in part, the basis of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. In this essay, I trace networks of direct and allusive interconnections to Japan and India such as this, within the works of Patrick Geddes and his circle, to illustrate the global nature of their cosmopolitan aesthetics.

It is likely that Hornel was invited to contribute to *The Evergreen* by his friend Charles Mackie (1862-1920), who had a significant role with respect to the visual side of the magazine. Mackie designed the covers for all four issues and contributed images. In the *Autumn* issue one finds Mackie's woodcut, *Lyart Leaves*. It is interesting in a number of ways, and, as we will see in due course, it relates to Japan. But an immediate focus is its use of Scots language, "lyart" referring to greying and streaked leaves of autumn. Linked to that, the title evokes the first line of *The Jolly Beggars* by Robert Burns (1759-1796) which runs: "When lyart leaves bestrew the yird," so there is a strong Scots-language poetical reference, very much in the spirit of Burns's literary predecessor, Allan Ramsay (1686-1758).¹ Ramsay is important also for it was Ramsay's collection, *The Ever Green: A Collection of Scots Poems* (1724), that gave Geddes's magazine its title and its cultural revivalist inspiration. Such local references were fundamental to Geddes's vision of culture, but the international dimension was equally important. Considered visually, and with respect to its medium of woodcut, Charles Mackie's *Lyart Leaves* makes an unmistakable international point, for, as with Hornel's work, it leads us to Japan. In the case of Mackie, it leads us to the work of Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858), specifically to his vertical format series *The Fifty-Three Stations on the Tokaido Road* published in 1855. Hiroshige's work was a key impulse to the development of modern art in Europe, not least for Vincent Van Gogh (1853-90), Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), and Gauguin's close ally Paul Sérusier (1864-1927). On visits to France from 1892 onwards Charles Mackie became a firm friend of Sérusier, and through him also visited Gauguin in Paris. In this way, the international connections in the work of Geddes's circle extend both to Europe and beyond.

Other *Evergreen* artists also absorbed such compositional lessons from Japan. I note in particular the work of Robert Burns (1869-1941). A case in point is his *Natura Naturans* (which one can translate as "nature naturing" or "nature doing its own thing") published in *The Evergreen: Book of Spring* in 1895. To the viewer of today the wave forms of *Natura Naturans*

¹ Robert Burns, "The Jolly Beggars: A Cantata," in Kirsteen McCue, ed., *Robert Burns's Songs for George Thomson* [Oxford Edition of Robert Burns, IV] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 68.



Charles Mackie, "Lyart Leaves," from *The Evergreen: Book of Autumn*, published by Patrick Geddes and Colleagues (1895), page 19.

recall the ubiquitous *Great Wave* by Hokusai (1760-1849), but it is even closer in reference to Hiroshige's *Rough Sea, Naruto*, made in the mid 1850s. It is, therefore, evident that the artists of Geddes's milieu were strongly influenced by Japan. Given the importance of the Japanese example to artists throughout Europe at the time, that is not surprising.

What is surprising (but perhaps it should not be) is to find Patrick Geddes's ideas influential in Japan just a few years later. In October 2004 a conference was held in Yamaguchi, Japan, in honour of the 150th anniversary of Geddes's birth.² At that conference Toshihiko Ando of Saitama University pointed out that in 1908 the young planner Nozumu Nakagawa (1875-1964) published a paper about Geddes's planning ideas.³ Geddes's ideas may well have been falling on fertile ground in Japan, for as Henry Smith has noted, one can draw analogy between Geddes's approach and that of his close contemporary, the influential Japanese politician, Shinpei Goto (1857-1929). "Reflecting his early medical training," Smith observes, Goto "insisted on a biological conception of the city, an important contrast with the mechanistic thinking of most other urban reformers and a fascinating parallel with his contemporary, the Scottish biologist Patrick Geddes."⁴ Both Geddes and Goto advocated the idea of the city as a growing organism. However, that is analogy, not influence. By contrast Ando was concerned with the clear influence of Geddes and he quotes in full a letter written by Nakagawa to Geddes in 1909.⁵ Ando's paper is invaluable in placing Geddes's ideas with respect to Japanese thought on urban planning and the environment, and he traces that trend in detail from Nakagawa's work in 1908, through numerous Japanese references to Geddes, to his own PhD research, submitted in 1998, and thence to 2004. In addition to being a key to understanding Geddes's role in Japanese planning and environmental thinking, Ando's paper points to the importance of a complementary cultural appreciation of Geddes, drawing on views put forward by myself and Duncan Macmillan at Yamaguchi in 1995.⁶ Ando also notes the cosmopolitan European view of Geddes put forward in the exhibition *Patrick Geddes: The French*

² The conference "Edinburgh–Yamaguchi, 2004" was held in Yamaguchi from 1 to 3 October 2004, neatly bracketing Geddes's birthday on 2 October. The proceedings were published in Kiyoshi Okutsu, Alan Johnston, Murdo Macdonald, Noboru Sadakata, eds, *Patrick Geddes: By leaves We Live. Edinburgh–Yamaguchi 2004* (Yamaguchi: Yamaguchi Institute of Contemporary Art, 2005).

³ Toshihiko Ando, "Quest for an Alternative Outlook: Geddes and Japan, 1900–2004," in *Geddes: By Leaves We Live*, 72–83.

⁴ Henry D. Smith, "Tokyo as an Idea: An Exploration of Japanese Urban Thought until 1945," *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 4.1 (1978): 64.

⁵ Ando, "Geddes and Japan," 74–75.

⁶ Murdo Macdonald, "Patrick Geddes: Visual Thinker," and Duncan Macmillan, "By leaves we live—an aphorism for all ecology," both in *Edinburgh-Yamaguchi '95* (Yamaguchi: Yamaguchi Institute of Contemporary Art, 1996), 50–60, 61–67.

Connection, held at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh in January 2004, and accompanied by a book of the same title.⁷

That cultural perspective is given further depth by Ando's intriguing observation that the first major Japanese figure to read Geddes in detail was not in fact the planner Nakagawa, but the pioneering modernist novelist Natsume Soseki (1867-1916). Soseki read Geddes's *The Evolution of Sex* (co-authored with J. Arthur Thomson) when he was based in London from 1900 to 1902, as part of his study for his wide-ranging *Theory of Literature*. Soseki had been sent by the Japanese Government, as one of a number of scholars, to learn more about the culture of the West, and to bring back that knowledge to make it available in Japan. Thus, and it is typical of his breadth of thought, we find Geddes to be influential both on planners and novelists. Geddes's link to Soseki was considered further at the 2004 conference by Kiyoshi Okutsu of Yamaguchi University, who proposed that Soseki was particularly interested in Geddes's diagram of "Ideal Unity," in which he expressed the evolving balances between the individual and society, egotism and altruism.⁸

Since then, insight into a specifically Scottish dimension to Soseki's thinking has come from the Soseki scholar and translator Damian Flanagan. In 2011, Flanagan made the convincing suggestion that Soseki's experience of the Scottish Highlands around Pitlochry in 1902, after a depressing period in London, was fundamental to the mindset of one of his most well-known works, *Three-Cornered World*, first published in 1906.⁹ Flanagan's translation, published in 2005, of Soseki's remarkable essay on the landscape around Pitlochry simply underlines that point.¹⁰

In a further report, published in 2018, Flanagan notes that, thanks to the discovery of a postcard of Robert Burns's Cottage signed by Soseki in 1901, it has become clear that Soseki spent much more time in Scotland, including in Edinburgh, than had been previously thought, and that new information transforms our understanding of Soseki's travels. Flanagan notes:

Why does any of that matter? It has always been thought that during the two years Soseki spent in the UK between October 1900 and December 1902, apart from a single night spent in Cambridge at the very beginning and a stay of a week or two in Pitlochry,

⁷ Belinda Thomson and Frances Fowle, eds, *Patrick Geddes: The French Connection* (Oxford: White Cockade, 2004).

⁸ Kiyoshi Okutsu, "Aesthetics of the Meiji Era and Geddesian Thought," in *Patrick Geddes: By Leaves We Live*, 11-28 (16-17).

⁹ Damian Flanagan, introduction to Natsume Soseki, *Three Cornered World*, translated by Alan Turney (London: Peter Owen, 2011), xx-xxi.

¹⁰ Natsume Soseki, "Long Ago," in *The Tower of London*, translated by Damian Flanagan (London: Peter Owen, 2005), 149-51.

Scotland, at the very end, Soseki never left London. But this postcard potentially explodes that idea.¹¹

More research is needed here, but one should not rule out the possibility that Soseki visited Patrick Geddes's Outlook Tower while he was in Edinburgh. Be that as it may, on his return to Japan Soseki transformed Japanese literature.

In his paper given in Yamaguchi, as well as exploring the link to Soseki, Kiyoshi Okutsu drew analogy between Patrick Geddes's thinking (in particular his ideas of sympathy, synthesis and synergy) and the aesthetic approach of another key Japanese writer and cultural activist, Kakuzo Okakura (1863-1913).¹² Okutsu's philosophical approach deepens awareness of the cognate attitudes to cultural revivalism of Okakura and Geddes. Okakura revitalised traditional approaches to painting in Japan, as a riposte to Western influence. But at the same time he was dedicated to the task of educating the West about Japan. To that end he wrote his most well-known work, *The Book of Tea*, in English. That pioneering introduction to Zen thinking is described by Okutsu as the most excellent book of aesthetics of the Meiji era.¹³ It was first published in New York in 1906, and it has rarely if ever been out of print since. An illustrated edition was published in Edinburgh in 1919 by T.N. Foulis, a publisher who also published Geddes and, indeed, Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1847), of whom more in due course.¹⁴

So far as I know Okakura and Geddes never met, but they had a mutual friend in the Irish-born cultural activist, Margaret Noble (1867-1911). She is a crucial link in the network of revivalists I consider here, and introduces us to Geddes and India. Under the name of Sister Nivedita, she became the lynchpin of the revival of Hinduism as a cultural force in India in the years before her untimely death in 1911. Geddes and Nivedita first met in America in early 1900 in the company of Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), whose disciple Nivedita had become, and later that year they all met again at the International Exhibition in Paris. In Paris Vivekananda lectured rejecting the Hellenistic influence on Indian art in favour of Hindu and Buddhist influences, a theme taken up by Nivedita and in due course by Ananda Coomaraswamy. Vivekananda's position was a riposte to the British imperial attempt to define Indian art as an insignificant outgrowth

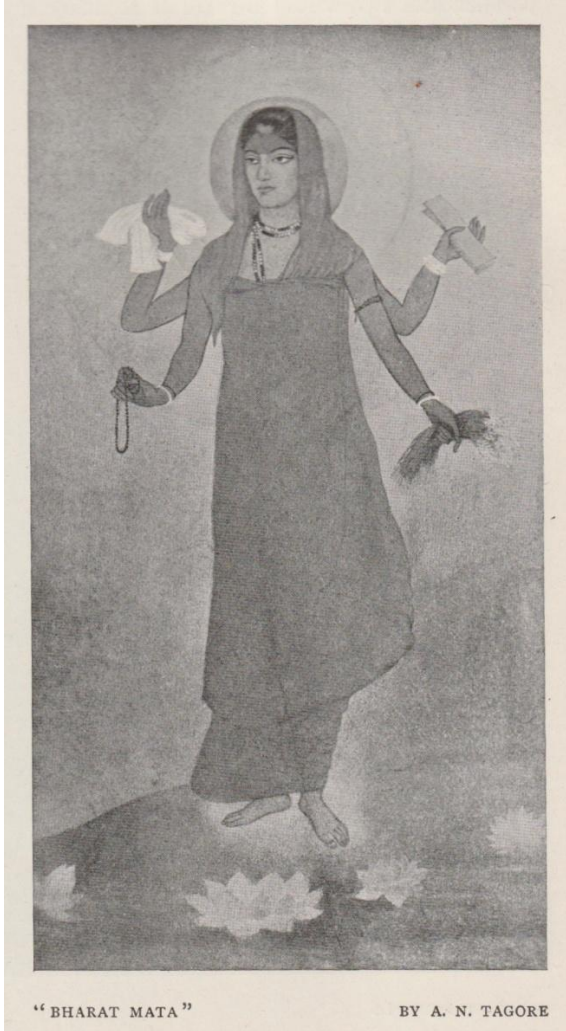
¹¹ Damian Flanagan, "Century-old postcard sheds light on dark days of author Soseki's life in UK," *The Mainichi* (15 June 2018):

<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20180615/p2a/00m/0na/009000c>.

¹² Okutsu, "Aesthetics," 18-21.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁴ For more on T. N. Foulis, see Murdo Macdonald, *Patrick Geddes's Intellectual Origins* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 138-41.



Abanindranath Tagore, “Bharat Mata,” from *The Studio* (July 1908), 108, illustrating E.B. Havell, “The New Indian School of Painting.”

of aesthetic developments driven by Europe, that is to say, a coded justification for imperial domination.

After Vivekananda’s death in 1902, Nivedita, and with her, Okakura, played a crucial role in supporting the revival of the visual arts in Bengal. A key early work of that Bengal school was *Bharat Mata* or *India the Mother* (1905) by Abanindranath Tagore, the nephew of the poet and

educator Rabindranath Tagore. (Geddes would begin to work with Rabindranath in the next decade). Stylistically *Bharat Mata* owes a debt not only to Indian tradition but to the revivalist art of Japan which was then developing under the influence of Okakura. Okakura had travelled to Calcutta in 1902 to meet Vivekananda, who was by that time in his final illness. After Vivekananda's death Nivedita made the links that Okakura needed, in particular with members of the Tagore family. In 1903 two Okakura's followers, the artists Yokoyama Taikan (1868-1958) and Hishida Shunso (1874-1911) travelled to Calcutta to work closely with Abanindranath Tagore.¹⁵ That same year Nivedita contributed a substantial introduction to Okakura's *Ideals of the East*, a book that is in essence a pan-Asian manifesto.

For Nivedita, Abanindranath Tagore's *Bharat Mata*, painted in 1905, was "a picture which bids fair to prove the beginning of a new age of Indian art."¹⁶ In political significance the image relates to the unrest that accompanied the partition of Bengal in 1905.¹⁷ The image rejected Western models and drew on traditional Hindu imagery, taking the form of a woman holding significant objects in the manner of a four-armed Hindu deity. At the same time it drew on the example of Taikan and Shunso both of whom, working towards Okakura's pan-Asian ideal, had by that time made images of Indian deities, for example Shunso's *Sarasvati* from 1903, and from the same year, Taikan's *Indo shugojin* (Indian guardian goddess).¹⁸

From 1905 onwards Coomaraswamy began to provide the art-historical scholarship needed to establish the psychological and aesthetic independence of early Indian sculpture from European models. 1908 saw the publication of his first major book *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*, which included as an appendix his essay, *The Influence of Greek Art on Indian Art*, in which he explored how that influence had been magnified out of all proportion by imperial apologists. Coomaraswamy held both Geddes and Nivedita in high regard. For example, writing of Ceylonese education in 1911 he writes:

¹⁵ For the links between Okakura's milieu and India, see Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New "Indian" Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 167-171; Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 262-266; Shigemi Inaga, "The Interaction of Bengali and Japanese Artistic Milieus in the First Half of the Twentieth Century (1901-1945)," *Japan Review*, 21 (2009): 149-181.

¹⁶ Nivedita, "Bharat-Mata" and "India the Mother" in *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, vol. 3 (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2014), 57-60.

¹⁷ Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 235.

¹⁸ Inaga, "The Interaction of Bengali and Japanese Milieus," 151.

Above all I should like [students] to come under the personal influence of men like Professor Geddes and women like Sister Nivedita. They would then be qualified by knowledge and responsibility, as they should be even now by inheritance, to shape and create.¹⁹

As with their connections to Japan, the lines of influence between Geddes's circle and India ran in both directions.

Coomaraswamy's paper was given in 1911 and collected in *Art and Swadeshi*, published in Madras in 1912. Those cultural-nationalist essays are more or less continuous with those found in Coomaraswamy's *Essays in National Idealism* of 1909, and it is interesting to find Geddes figuring in both collections, reinforcing the view that he was firmly part of an Indian intellectual milieu long before he set foot in India.

After Sister Nivedita's death in 1911, both Patrick Geddes and Rabindranath Tagore contributed to a volume in her honour.²⁰ While Coomaraswamy did not contribute, he performed a crucial role, stepping in to finish Nivedita's book *Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists*, published in 1913. That book made available to the West in highly readable prose key aspects of Indian thinking. At the same time, through its careful illustration under the direction of Abanindranath Tagore, it acted as a showcase for the Bengal school of painting, including work by Abanindranath himself, Nandalal Bose, K. Venkatappa, Kshitindranath Majumdar, Surendranath Kar, and Asit Halder.

In 1912 Coomaraswamy wrote to Geddes hoping that if he were visiting London, he would be able to attend lectures held by the India Society.²¹ That was a cultural-politically directed invitation, for the founding of the India Society in London two years earlier had been a defining moment of resistance to the British imperial perspective on Indian art. The issue was that Sir George Birdwood, a key India Office bureaucrat, along with the imperially minded historian of Indian art Vincent Smith, was intent on denying to India the status of a proper fine art tradition. The issue came to a head after a lecture by E. B. Havell at the Royal Society of Arts in London: the controversy generated led to the foundation of the India Society.²²

It should be emphasised that both Smith and Birdwood admired Indian art, but, as Partha Mitter notes, "what Birdwood failed to see was the

¹⁹ Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Art and Swadeshi* (Madras: Ganesh, 1912), 135.

²⁰ S.K. Radcliffe, ed., *Margaret Noble (Sister Nivedita)* (London: Sherratt and Hughes, 1913).

²¹ National Library of Scotland. MS 10543 f.10. Letter dated 15 January 1912.

²² Mitter, *Art and Nationalism*, 311-12.

patronising element in his admiration”.²³ That patronising admiration—genuine in so far as it went—was for what were regarded as the relatively minor aesthetic achievements of an irredeemably lesser culture. The Birdwood-Smith position was a way, no doubt unconscious and all the more pernicious for that, of justifying the imperial status quo by denying to Indian culture an identifying high-status feature of European culture, namely a firmly rooted tradition of fine art. In January 1910, Vincent Smith had lectured at the Royal Asiatic Society claiming that higher arts did not exist in India.²⁴ Two days later, Havell gave a scheduled lecture, asserting the opposite.²⁵ But in the chair was none other than Sir George Birdwood who, in a characteristic mixture of imperial entitlement and passive aggression, felt able to dismiss the notion of Indian fine art through analogy between a statue of the Buddha and a suet pudding.²⁶ It is interesting to note that Birdwood’s failure of perception with respect to support for Indian higher education ten years earlier had spurred Nivedita into action. It now did the same for Havell and Coomaraswamy, along with their supporter the English painter William Rothenstein, and thus the India Society came into being.

In March the same year Geddes sent Coomaraswamy a copy of his text for community drama, *The Masque of Learning*. Coomaraswamy replied enthusiastically, requesting extra copies of the book, and it is clear from this letter that Geddes’s adoption of the term “guru” in a more extensive text published later in 1912 was due to Coomaraswamy’s advice.

From that later version, it is also clear that Geddes has absorbed the arguments of Nivedita and Coomaraswamy into his own thought. He writes of Indian art as a subject “which we have long failed even to recognise, much less to penetrate or comprehend,” and he continues: “the artist with Abanindranath Tagore and Mrs. Herringham, the teacher with Mr. Havell, and the critic with Sister Nivedita and Dr Coomaraswamy, are at length revealing to us its beauty and its significance.”²⁷

In 1913, Coomaraswamy published his definitive statement on the independent validity of Indian art in *The Burlington Magazine*.²⁸ The following year Geddes travelled to India for the first time. In due course he

²³ *Ibid.*, 312.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 311.

²⁵ Announced in *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* (7 January 1910): 215.

²⁶ Mitter, *Art and Nationalism*, 311.

²⁷ Patrick Geddes, *The Masque of Ancient Learning* (Edinburgh: Patrick Geddes and Colleagues, 1912), 75.

²⁸ Ananda Coomaraswamy, “Indian Images with Many Arms,” *Burlington Magazine*, 22.118 (January 1913): 189-96.

began to share his thinking with Rabindranath Tagore.²⁹ In the years that followed there was a remarkable exchange of insight between the two thinkers.³⁰ Thanks to the work of Bashabi Fraser this can now be followed.³¹ A crucial figure facilitating the communication between Geddes and Tagore was Patrick Geddes's son Arthur who worked closely with both, in the years after 1917. Arthur Geddes deserves more attention than he has hitherto been given. As both Neil Fraser and Dikshit Sinha make clear, he made an active contribution to Tagore's projects in Bengal.³² Furthermore Tagore gave Arthur, who was a fluent Bengali speaker, his blessing to make English translations of his songs. Back in Scotland in the 1950s and 1960s, the period normally referred to as "the folk revival," Arthur's continuing commitment to song was to find further expression in *The Songs of Craig and Ben* (1951). Arthur thus becomes a direct link between the Celtic revival of his father in the 1890s and the folk revival after the second world war. At the same time he continued his advocacy of Tagore's songs, which resulted in performances in Edinburgh in 1961.³³

By the time Geddes was working with Tagore, both Okakura, and following him Coomarasamy, had found employment at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and it is important to remember the significance of American cities as generative locations for thinkers working on the cusp of revivalism and modernism. The significance for Boston was summed up as follows in 1932: "Posterity, indeed, is likely to remember that the golden age of New England literature was followed by an age of jade—one in which Okakura and Coomaraswamy were the principal Boston authors."³⁴

As these examples show, the cosmopolitan connections of Geddes and his circle were truly global. One final illustration confirms that the lines of influence traced here ran in both directions. Where Geddes's influence spread abroad, so his work and thought was strongly shaped by those international artistic and literary networks. One of the most intriguing

²⁹ Arthur Geddes, "Two Friends: Rabindranath Tagore and Patrick Geddes," *Annual of Architecture, Structure and Townplanning*, 2 (1961): 5-8.

³⁰ Macdonald, *Geddes's Intellectual Origins*, 149-50.

³¹ Bashabi Fraser, ed., *A Meeting of Two Minds: Geddes Tagore Letters* (Edinburgh: Word Power, 2005).

³² Neil Fraser, "A Scotsman in Sriniketan," in Bashabi Fraser, Tapaki Mukherjee, and Amrit Sen, eds, *Scottish Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2017), 134-44; Dikshit Sinha, "Arthur Geddes and Sriniketan," in *Scottish Orientalism*, 145-59.

³³ Arthur Geddes, *Presenting Tagore in Sound and Sight* (Edinburgh: Adam House, 1961).

³⁴ Frederick W. Coburn, "Boston Happenings," *The American Magazine of Art*, 24.2 (February 1932): 153-54.

American modernist-revivalist meeting places was a New York bookshop named after a Celtic ritual, *Sunwise Turn*. The story of the naming of that shop is an intriguing link to the Celtic revival in Scotland.³⁵ That bookshop was at the heart of the development of modernist thinking in America. In a memoir, the shop's founder, Madge Jennison, mentions books by Okakura and Tagore in passing.³⁶ The fact that they are only mentioned in passing is, of course, the interesting point, for the works of those two authors were clearly taken for granted as part of the bookshop's stock. The Tagore reference is with respect to wrapping up books for Christmas (itself a fascinating process at *Sunwise Turn* because the paper was artist designed), and the Okakura reference is about how preferable it is to read *The Book of Tea* rather than a business manual. But *Sunwise Turn* was more than a purveyor of interesting books, it was also a publisher, and in 1918 it published Coomaraswamy's seminal essay collection, *The Dance of Shiva*, a book still regarded as a definitive restatement of Indian culture, after its British imperial misrepresentation. Jenison notes a direct link between her remarkable bookshop and Patrick Geddes. When, in 1919, he left University College Dundee to take up his chair of sociology and civics at the University of Bombay, Geddes entrusted the provision of the American titles for his departmental library to *Sunwise Turn*.³⁷ Perhaps Okakura's *Book of Tea* was on Geddes's list.

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³⁵ Macdonald, *Geddes's Intellectual Origins*, 150-53.

³⁶ Madge Jenison, *Sunwise Turn—A Human Comedy of Bookselling* (New York: Dutton, 1923), 74, 85.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.