

## SELLING SHISEIDO

COSMETICS ADVERTISING & DESIGN IN EARLY 20TH-CENTURY JAPAN

BY GENNIFER WEISENFELD

Introduction

Cosmopolitan  
Glamour

Marketing Beauty

Luxury & Thrift  
in Wartime

Sources  
Resources

### INTRODUCTION



An elegantly dressed European woman delicately holding a single camellia blossom lies luxuriously on a chaise longue. Her lissome figure showcases a gorgeous sleeveless blue-patterned dress cascading luxuriantly off the chair onto the floor. This could describe a French image of a stylish Parisienne in her boudoir, but it is, in fact, a late 1920s Japanese advertisement for the whitening peroxide toothpaste sold by the cosmetics company Shiseido. There is no Japanese company whose advertising design better represents the aesthetic of cosmopolitan chic seen throughout the visual sphere in early 20th-century Japan than Shiseido. The Shiseido cosmetics company opened its Western-style pharmaceutical business in Tokyo in 1872 and a few decades later, under the banner of its stylish camellia logo and signature arabesque designs, emerged as one of the leading cosmetics manufacturers in Japan, a position it still holds over a century later. <sup>1</sup>



Shiseido's camellia logo (left) was originally designed by Fukuhara Shinzo and revised to its current form by Yabe Sue in 1924.

Detail of logo (left) taken from wrapping paper designed by Yabe Sue, 1924 (below)

[sh01\_1925\_e015\_AdDesign]

Shiseido's signature arabesque designs appeared in various media such as posters, magazines, and wrapping paper.

Poster for Shiseido perfume, 1926 (below left)

[sh01\_1926\_e024\_PosterPerf]

Magazine ad, white powder cream, 1929 (below right)

[sh01\_1929\_e033\_MagazineAd]





*The arabesque style is woven into the cover image (left) and masthead (right) of Shiseido Geppō, Shiseido's customer magazine.*

Shiseido Geppō 40  
 magazine cover, January 1928

[sh02\_GP\_1928\_01\_4001]

Shiseido Geppō 44  
 magazine cover, May 1928

[sh02\_GP\_1928\_05\_4401]

While cosmetics may not have garnered the level of scholarly attention paid to other economic sectors, it was without question a critical part of Japan's burgeoning consumer market. It provides an unparalleled window into the changing contemporary ideals of beauty and taste, not to mention being a valuable indicator of cultural trends in health and hygiene.

Shiseido's innovative product and promotional production tells a distinctive story about Japan's experience of modernity, including the impact on national culture of mass market consumerism, urbanization, and changing gender roles. As Kathy Peiss has convincingly argued, "beauty culture" should not only be understood as a type of commerce, but also "as a system of meaning that helped women navigate the changing conditions of modern social experience" as they increasingly entered public life. <sup>2</sup>

It is not an overstatement to say that Shiseido and other consumer product manufacturers had a large hand in shaping the cultural landscape of modern Japan. They were not only innovative in terms of their product development and manufacturing, but also in their pioneering work in advertising design and marketing, which shaped the visuality of the public sphere. This period saw the dawn of modern commercial design around the world and Japanese corporate sponsors were in an international and inter-cultural dialogue with their colleagues around the world, particularly those in Europe and the United States.

### **Fukuhara Shinzo: Art, Photography & Design**

Shiseido was originally founded by Fukuhara Arinobu, but it was Arinobu's son and the company's second president Fukuhara Shinzo (1883–1948) who was the primary initiator of Shiseido's pronounced aestheticization of its commercial activity after he returned from study abroad in 1913.



*Shiseido's second president  
Fukuhara Shinzo (1883–1948)*

Having spent several years in the United States and Europe (1909 to 1913), Shinzo was intimately familiar with the vibrant advertising and design culture abroad, particularly the decorative, lyrical aesthetic movement of art nouveau that later developed into the more geometric, exuberant design styles of the art deco or style moderne movement inspired by the machine age. Fukuhara Shinzo brought this international sensibility to his work at Shiseido, dedicating extraordinary human and financial resources to the company's design. He was one of a number of Japanese company presidents during this generation of corporate entrepreneurs who had daily, hands-on involvement in the construction of his firm's corporate identity and marketing strategies, but he stands out among them for his pronounced dedication to art and aesthetics. It is no coincidence that he is also recognized for his pioneering work in Japanese pictorialist photography as well as for his important sponsorship of modernist Western-style painters working in Japan.

Shinzo was devoted to the arts throughout his life, beginning with studies in neo-traditional style Japanese painting (*nihonga*) under the well-known painter Ishii Teiko and expanding to watercolor and oil painting studies under Hakubakai (White Horse Society) painter Kobayashi Mango. Through his artistic connections, he soon became friends with prominent Western-style painters such as Ishii Hakutei as well. It was through this circle of acquaintances in Japan and later abroad that he developed his life-long passion for photography.

BEAUTIFUL WEST LAKE

BY  
SHINZO FUKUHARA



Photographs by Fukuhara Shinzo  
plates 1, 11, rotogravure edition  
from Beautiful West Lake:  
The Light with its Harmony, 1931

Shinzo is equally well-known in the history of Japanese photography for his pictorialist photography work and his role as founder of several highly influential photographic societies: *Shashin Geijutsusha* and the *Nihon Shashinkai*.<sup>3</sup> This photography work frequently graced the pages of the company's public relations publications like *Shiseido Monthly* (*Shiseido Geppō*).

*Shiseido* magazine with cover  
photograph by Fukuhara Shinzo

Shiseido Geppō 38, 11/1927

[sh02\_GP\_1927\_11\_3801]



But perhaps more importantly for the corporate history of Shiseido, several of Fukuhara's artist friends worked as consultants to the company's design division, most prominently Kawashima Riichirō, who was trained at the prestigious Corcoran School of Art and the National Academy School of Fine Arts in the United States and was later based in Paris.

While in the United States, Fukuhara worked with pharmaceutical industry market leader Burroughs and Wellcome in Yonkers, New York and at the time of his departure, he received from the company president William Gallagher and his mentor James Brien a parting gift of a sample of each of the company's products, which became a valuable reference resource for the Shiseido company upon his return to Japan.

### Bottles and Bodies

Over the years, the Shiseido Company has introduced a staggering array of products including most prominently: scented skin toners, hair styling balms, toothpaste, white and tinted face powders, perfumes, vanishing and cold creams, and soap. The earliest Japanese manufacturer of toothpaste (1888), the company touted the ostensibly higher quality of its merchandise in comparison to other generic goods that sold for just two to three *sen* a piece while Shiseido's new product (Fukuhara Sanitary Tooth Powder) was offered at a price point more than ten times higher at 25 *sen*.<sup>4</sup> One advertisement for the product buttressed this claim of higher quality by announcing that Shiseido's toothpaste had received honorable mention at one of Japan's Domestic Industrial Expositions (*Naikoku Kangyō Hakurankai*). The company's fashionable locale in the Ginza district and its stylish product packaging were thus also critical value-added elements of the brand identity that promoted Shiseido's Western-style products over cheaper generic competitors.



The packaging of these products was as distinctive as their print publicity, and it was often showcased in advertisements. The graceful curves of the glass bottles of toners and lotions, and their elegant labels, are both scopically and tangibly inviting.

*Euthrixine newspaper ad (left)*

*Hanakatsura (later Hanatsubaki), 1905*

[sh01\_1905\_a011\_MagazineAd]



Sometimes the bottles are presented alone and other times they are arranged in groups. The sensuality of the bottles is highlighted in aesthetic display compositions.

Magazine Ad, 1931 (right)

[sh01\_1931\_d002\_no8928\_MagAd]



## 資生堂銀座化粧品

銀座化粧水  
 銀座ホマード  
 銀座水白粉  
 銀座粉白粉  
 銀座固焼白粉  
 銀座クリーム

(定) 各 五 十 銭

資生堂化粧品株式会社

植物精液に酒精を加へた液から蒸して出た化粧水  
 植物油質で毛髪をよくと潤滑のホマード  
 自然の白くする特製のみろ水白粉とホマード  
 化粧にも化粧にも適するのまろくも白粉とホマード  
 湯洗後使用するのに適する固焼白粉とホマード  
 ペンシヤクリームに少量の酒精を加へた皮膚の保湿と潤滑のクリーム



Bottles arranged in groups (left)

Shiseido Geppō 35,  
back cover, 8/1927

[sh02\_GP\_1927\_08\_3502]

### Potions & Power The Jogakusei's Cosmetic Arsenal

*A new female type of the Meiji period, the jogakusei (female student) was recently empowered with state-mandated compulsory access to basic education, and her emerging public position and modern femininity clearly demanded a powerful new cosmetic arsenal.<sup>5</sup>*

*In one well-known early image a young female student with a fashionable coiffure dressed in the standard school uniform wields an oversized bottle of Eudermine cosmetic toner that is nearly as large as she is. The stylish bottle with crowning bow that matches the jogakusei is a metonym for the girl herself.*

*Eudermine newspaper ad, 1907*

[sh01\_1907\_a014\_MagazineAd]



*The jogakusei was just one new emerging Japanese female type of the modern period, which included “the new woman” (atarashii onna), the “working woman” (shokugyō fujin), the cafe waitress (jokyū), the housewife (shufu), and the “modern girl” (moga), all important consumer targets for Shiseido products.*



*Gibson Girl, ca. 1900  
by Charles Dana Gibson  
(near left)*

*Magazine ad, 1914  
Shiseido (far left)*

[sh01\_1914\_a018\_MagazineAd]

*Shiseido advertising images of women from around the 1910s show a clear stylistic reference to the widely popular American Gibson Girl who was known for her wit, charm, and beauty, as well as her spirited independence (an example above). The 1914 Shiseido ad at the left in particular evokes the Gibson Girl’s signature head tilt and upswept hairstyle (hisashigami).*

*From the 1920s, the Euro-American icon of the rebellious and sensual Flapper with her short sleek hairstyle, elegant shift dresses, visible makeup, and public cigarette smoking became a prominent stylistic inspiration for Shiseido imagery and modern girl fashion around the world.*





In other later images, hands literally reach into the containers in the picture to touch the products—an invitation to the consumer to do the same. Like their containers, cosmetic creams themselves were sensuous, and the tactile sensations they provided were part of the pleasurable embodied experiences linked to the desires and fantasies of cosmetic consumption. Cosmetics containers were also a beauty accessory that enhanced the visual appeal of a woman's dressing table or vanity and their display value (not to mention their symbolic value as indices of cultural capital) was an important marketing consideration for manufacturers.

*Shiseido Cold Cream  
magazine advertisement, Fujōkai, 1934*

[sh01\_1934\_d005\_11323\_MagAd]

Color was a central design element of Shiseido's product line. Although Shiseido's formal cosmetics division was not established until 1916, Shiseido launched its cosmetics line nearly twenty years earlier in 1897 with the scented skin toner Eudermine priced at 25 *sen* per bottle. Eudermine, meaning "good skin" in ancient Greek, was sold in an elegant corked glass bottle with a red ribbon and the liquid itself was a vibrant red, evoking the image of wine, and hence prosperity and vitality. A 1915 print ad for Eudermine even touted it as "Shiseido's red cosmetic water."

*Eudermine bottles*  
[Eudermine\_bottles]

*Eudermine magazine  
advertisement for  
"Shiseido's red cosmetic  
water," 1915*

[sh01\_1915\_e001\_poster]



The color of Eudermine was graphically accentuated in a striking 1925 poster designed by Yabe Sue that juxtaposes its tall slender red profile with the shorter, more curvaceous lily white container of peroxide vanishing cream (color poster below). From its inception, Eudermine was promoted as a product beneficial for the health and beauty of one's skin that could be applied under white powder (which would also help women avoid the poisonous effects of lead in powder) and would help prevent sweat in the summer, making one "smell like an angel (as one played outside in the gardens)." Eudermine has been one of the company's most enduring products and is still sold today, now known internationally as Shiseido Eudermine Revitalizing Essence.

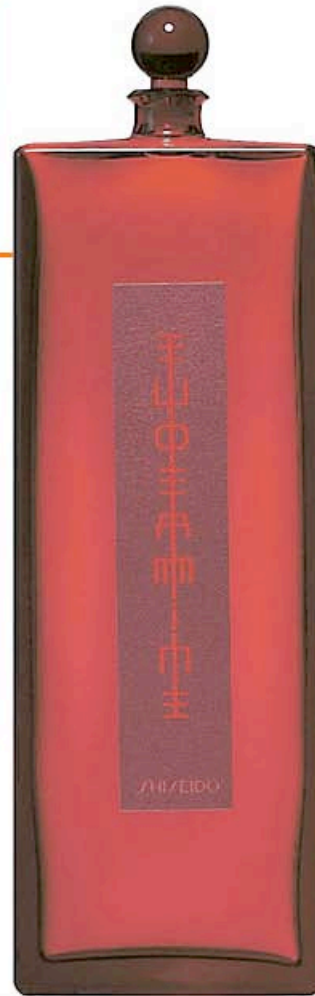


*Eudermine and Peroxide Cream poster, 1925, by Yabe Sue*

[sh01\_1925\_e005\_poster]

*Eudermine Revitalizing Essence, designed by Serge Lutens. The typography evokes archaic Chinese seal script, but is actually a mirror image of the word "EUDERMINE" in roman block type, written vertically.*

[EudermineRevitalizingEssence\_bottle]



Skin care would form the mainstay for many cosmetics manufacturers around the world and advertising promoted the notion that beauty began with the skin. In the 19th-century United States, there was already a fundamental distinction drawn between skin improvement (products that fostered a good complexion) and skin masking substances (makeup), with the former constituting part of a hygienic regimen critical to the morally invested notion of general bodily cleanliness.<sup>6</sup>

Scented hair tonics and oils for both men (*fuketori kōsui*) and women (*sukiabura*) were among Shiseido's most successful early cosmetic products. The company launched Hana Tachibana (Western brand name Laurine) for men and Ryūshikō (Western brand name Mellazerine) for women sold at 60 and 50 *sen* respectively and capitalized on the growing concern among Japanese that their hair oil was deemed malodorous by resident Westerners who complained of the smell.

Many of the products played on the imagery of the Ginza. Ryūshikō, for instance, evoked the image of the willow tree in the first character of its name to associate with the newly planted willow trees that lined the streets of the district. Hana Katsura (Western brand name Euthrixine), renamed in Japanese Hanatsubaki (Camellia) around 1909, was a scented hair oil for women that sold for a pricey 40 *sen* per bottle. Hanatsubaki was made of pure camellia oil and was advertised as not making hair sticky or dirty. One advertisement from 1911 touted that Hanatsubaki "vastly improves the nutrition and shine of your hair; does not cause cowlicks (*kami no kuse*), and helps keep hair's good color until old age." The product, it claimed, is "better than conventional/pre-existing products, does not cause dirty odors, keeps hair's beautiful shine, stops hair from falling, and does not harm skin."<sup>7</sup>

Most Shiseido products had two brand names; one Japanese and one Western rendered in romanized letters. These are among the earliest domestically produced Japanese cosmetic products that used romanized Western brand names; Shiseido did this to appeal to consumers who were looking for imported goods. Thus it is no surprise that Shiseido benefited enormously from the marked decrease in imported goods to Japan after the beginning of World War I in 1914, which caused Japan's economy, particularly the domestic production of consumer goods, to surge.

In 1906, Shiseido launched the first Japanese skin-colored powder called Hana Oshiroi (later renamed Yayoi Oshiroi). It was a non-lead based face powder which was considered healthier, as the poisonous effects of lead were already known in Japan, but lead-based cosmetics were not officially prohibited until 1931. Tinted face powders were exceedingly rare in prewar Japan and Shiseido pioneered them early on with a series of colors under the brand name Poudre de Riz.

The female entertainers (geisha) who worked in nearby Shinbashi and who were loyal Shiseido customers particularly liked the green and purple powder colors because they were thought to flatter the complexion under electric lighting. The powder packaging also diverged from the conventional round or cylindrical packages and used a tasteful octagonal container with the company trademark inlaid in gold that showed the nine leaves of the camellia blossom (see below). Gradually, as Japanese cosmetic practices changed over time and moved toward a greater naturalism, the traditional thick white cosmetic foundation (*o-shiroi*) ceased to be used for daily wear. 8



*Poudre de Riz, 1917*  
Maeda Mitsugu, designer

*Modern Colour Face Powder, 1932*  
Yamana Ayao, designer  
[sh05\_1932\_bk048\_powder]

Shiseido also produced five different varieties of cold creams for cleansing and softening the skin: vanishing cream (peroxide-based cream); smoothing cream; cold cream (rolling cream, which was considered the first real cold cream sold in Japan); Tsuya Bijin Cream; and Shinbashi Shiseido cream. An emulsion of water and fat that derives its name from the cool sensation it leaves on the skin, cold cream has been around for centuries, but it came to the fore in 20th-century cosmetics production as the single most fundamental and important facial care product for keeping skin sanitary and protected against both the elements and the harmful effects of makeup.



*De Luxe skincare brand, 1932  
Maeda Mitsugu, designer*

The foremost brand name in cold creams from the 1910s was Pond's Cold Cream, produced by the Pond's Company (which later merged with Chesebrough Manufacturing to become Chesebrough-Ponds and is now owned by Unilever).<sup>9</sup> Pond's Cold Cream was often marketed in tandem with the company's other best-selling product—Pond's Vanishing Cream—under the copy "Every normal skin needs these two creams."



*This poster advertising cold cream and vanishing cream (a dual system of cleaning and protection) shows links between Shiseido's marketing strategies and international practices.*

*Cold Cream and Vanishing Cream, 1927  
Maeda Mitsugu, designer*

[sh05\_1930\_c023\_poster]



*By the 1940s, the connection between cold cream use and marriage was unmistakable, as evidenced in a regular 1940s Pond's campaign under the caption "She's Engaged! She's Lovely! She uses Pond's," such as the 1945 advertisement featuring socialite Frances Hutchins. Other advertisements touted cold cream as the key to restoring a youthful complexion by returning a healthy glow and radiance. Cold cream could nourish a woman's "under skin," while vanishing cream protected and enhanced the look of her outer epidermis. A repeated claim was that two creams were needed for a woman's "two skins." Together with face powder and rouge, cold cream was part of "the trinity of beauty," according to Coty cosmetics.*

Perfumes enhanced Fukuhara's cultivation of a "rich" aesthetic for Shiseido's brand image. En route back to Japan from his time in the United States, he toured Europe, which included a stop in Paris, the world center of perfume production at this time. Here he viewed the annual Paris fashion parade and was able to make important site visits to the factories of three of the major French perfume makers: Houbigant, Roger & Gallet, and Coty.

Shiseido marketed over 50 varieties of floral perfume, so many that contemporary journalists referred to Shinzo as "*Hana no Fukuhara*" (Flower/Nose Fukuhara) referring playfully both to his largish nose but also to his role in developing floral perfumes. In 1919, Shiseido introduced two new perfumes with fashionable packages designed by in-house designer Yabe Sue: Ume no Hana (Plum Blossom; WOO-ME in English on the label); and Fuji no Hana (Wisteria). These were followed in quick succession by a series of different floral scents. <sup>10</sup>

*Shiseido perfumes, ca. 1918–21*  
*Ume no Hana (Plum Blossom,*  
*WOO-ME in English on the label) &*  
*Fuji no Hana (Wisteria)*  
*Yabe Sue, designer*  
[sh06\_perfume3\_WooMe]



[On viewing images of a potentially disturbing nature: click here.](#)

Massachusetts Institute of Technology © 2010 Visualizing Cultures

Creative Commons License 

MIT VISUALIZING CULTURES