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Introduction to the "Archive of 20" Project:
Visual and Textual Sources for Understanding Early Japanese History

By Marcia Yonemoto, Professor, Department of History

The student-authored articles collected here grew out of a final class project for History 4718, an upper-division lecture course on "The History of the Japanese Archipelago to 1600" that I taught in the fall of 2016. The course covers a wide swath of time, beginning roughly from the earliest human settlement of the archipelago around 20,000 years ago to the end of the sixteenth century. We began with the study of archeology and prehistory, focusing on early migration from the Asian continent, moved through the establishment of the early imperial state in the seventh and eighth centuries CE, and spent a fair bit of time on the classical period (c. 794-1185), which saw the flourishing of indigenous literary arts and culture. We then looked at the rise of the samurai and the development of warrior governments (shogunates) in the medieval era, the disintegration of that system into the chaos of "Warring States," and the emergence of a unified system of warrior governance once again by the turn of the seventeenth century. Throughout, we read both primary sources in translation, films and documentaries, and secondary scholarly works on aspects of Japan's political, social, cultural, and economic history.

As with any such class, as an instructor it is a challenge to design assignments that engage the range of material studied and require students to analyze and interpret it, but that also build on students' individual interests and aptitudes and offer them opportunities to creatively represent what they have learned. This challenge is perhaps more significant in the case of early Japanese history, where original sources are relatively few, and

accessible English-language translations of those sources even fewer. With these issues in mind, I came up with the idea to assign students to create, as a final term project, an "Archive of 25"—a curated and annotated archive of twenty-five texts, material objects, and/or visual sources that collectively illuminated a theme, idea, event, or process that was integral to Japan's premodern history. (Eventually, although "archive of 25" rhymed nicely, I decided twenty-five items was too many, and reduced the number to a sadly un-musical twenty.) By the end of the semester, after meeting with students and working with them to refine their projects, it was clear that many of the archives were shaping up to be extraordinarily creative and interesting, and I began to regret that I had not thought to include some way of exhibiting or circulating the projects to a wider audience. I therefore offered students the option to work on revising their archive projects in order to submit some of them in abbreviated form for publication in the History Department's undergraduate journal, and to simultaneously publish the full "archives of twenty" on a linked website. This publication effort was completely optional and voluntary. Six students—Ryan Curry, Patrick Dowdle, Colton Erickson, Davide Ippolito, John Murphy, and Amelia Spann—put in impressive efforts, on their own time, to revise their projects in the spring semester of 2017, and the result is presented here. Instead of twenty items, however, due to space limitations each article introduces and explains a selection of five archive entries. The topics, chosen by each author, range widely, from the environmental impacts of monumental construction efforts and violent coups among clans in the early imperial period, to the spread of Buddhism to the common people and the persistence of belief in monsters and the supernatural in the classical and early medieval periods, to the importance of Zen themes in religious art, and images of weaponry and warfare in the

later medieval period. Together, they do a remarkable job of addressing major issues in the early history of Japan: natural resources and environment, political violence and warfare, spirituality and religion, artistic and cultural expression. The articles are arranged here roughly in chronological order based on their subject matter. Many of the archives combine visual, textual, and material sources in revealing ways. Amelia Spann's and Colton Erickson's projects can be more fully appreciated by consulting the full-length archive projects at: https://archivesofclassicalandmedievaljapan.wordpress.com/

A note to readers: These articles were intended to be published in the spring of 2017, but production-related problems prevented them from appearing until the fall of 2018. In the interim, we experienced a tremendous loss: one of our contributors, Colton Erickson, lost his five-and-a-half year-long battle with brain cancer, and passed away in August of 2018 at the age of twenty-three. Like many of Colton's instructors, I was shocked and terribly saddened to learn of his passing, but also of his illness, because in spite of having taught him in two classes and worked closely with him on this archive project, neither I nor his classmates had any inkling that he had cancer. Indeed, I had always been struck not only by his excellent academic performance, but by his enthusiasm, his unfailingly positive attitude, and his generous contributions to the classroom community. I later learned that Colton had decided, soon after receiving his diagnosis during his senior year of high school, that he would not make his illness an issue. Despite having several recurrences and three major brain surgeries during his time at CU, and undergoing chemotherapy or radiation treatment for all but two months of his college career, Colton refused to seek any accommodations or special treatment, and did

not reveal his condition to any of his instructors. By all accounts, he never complained, and refused to feel sorry for himself. As his father later said, he wanted more than anything to have a "normal" college life lived on his own terms, not the terms of his illness. Despite his staggering health challenges, Colton graduated in May of 2017, on time (that is, in the usual four years), with a B.A. in History—a discipline he truly loved—and a near-perfect grade-point average. He was studying for the LSAT and preparing for law school when his illness recurred for the final time. Although the temptation is to mourn a death, especially of a person so young and full of promise, I feel we should take instruction from Colton and focus instead on how fully, gratefully, and joyfully he lived his life, and how he engaged every opportunity for learning that came his way. With respect and admiration, we dedicate this issue of the Department of History undergraduate journal to him.

Yōkai: Demons and Spirits in Pre-modern Japan

By Colton Erickson[1]

Introduction

The concept of *yōkai*, supernatural monsters, spirits or demons, is an extremely popular theme in Japanese popular culture today. Japanese horror movies like *Ju-on* (the inspiration for *The Grudge*), anime hits like Miyazaki Hayao's *Spirited Away,* and popular television shows like Pokémon and Yu-Gi-Oh are only a small testament to the Japanese fascination with *yōkai* folklore. That fascination has its roots, however, in pre-modern Japan, where a varied and innumerable host of spirits governed everything from weather and fortune to illness and conflict. Such spirits assumed roles as protectors, but also as harbingers of destruction. They had countless forms and varieties, from shape shifters and vengeful human spirits, to ghoulish creatures and neglected demons attached to old tools. The following archive contains a sampling of five illustrations, all taken from picture scrolls, dating from the Heian Period (794-1185 CE) through to the sixteenth century. These images both reflect and depict the prevalence of the belief in *yōkai* and some of the roles that they were thought to play in the classical and medieval Japanese world. This archive also sheds more light on the remarkably syncretic nature of Japanese religion during that time, where folkloric visions of ghosts and demons coexisted comfortably with Buddhist and Shinto beliefs and ideals. This meshing and amalgamation of customs and spiritual understanding created a way of looking at and understanding the world (and the events within it) that continues to have a marked impact on modern Japanese society and popular culture to this day.

[1] Colton Erickson (1994-2018) received his B.A. in History from CU in 2017.

Figure 1: ***Illustrated Legends of the Kitano Tenjin Shrine (Kitano Tenjin engi emaki)*****. Late 13th century. Metropolitan Museum of Art.**

This particular illustration comes from a series of scroll paintings depicting the origins of Kitano Tenjin Shrine in Kyoto. The scrolls, including the one pictured above, depict a series of extraordinary natural disasters and plagues that caused the deaths of poet and statesman Sugawara Michizane's (845-903 CE) enemies at court following his death in exile.[2] Michizane had been demoted and sent into exile following the abdication of Emperor Uda and the political maneuverings of his rival Fujiwara no Tokihira (871-909 CE).[3] The incidents following his death were attributed to his vengeful spirit, eventually leading to the dedication of a shrine in his honor, in hopes of stopping the disasters. In the painting, a multi-headed demon or *yōkai* is blowing fire onto a building, which is engulfed in flames. Michizane's tormented spirit or *onryō* sits to the right, watching and seemingly interacting with an onlooker. Of particular interest is how the

[2] Robert Borgen. *Sugawara no Michizane and the Early Heian court* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1986).
[3] Borgen, *Sugawara no Michizane,* 255-256.

painting depicts the absence of firm divisions between the natural and supernatural and between the living and the dead.

Figure 2: ***Tsukumogami (artifact spirits)*** **from the** ***Hyakki-yagyō emaki (The Picture Scroll of the Demon's Night Parade)***

This scroll painting titled *Tsukumogami (artifact spirits)* from the *Hyakki-yagyō emaki (The Picture Scroll of the Demon's Night Parade),* dated to the Muromachi Period (1336-1573 CE), depicts various tools which, after many years of use, have acquired a spirit living in them known as a *tsukumogami*.[4] Comprising a part of a larger series of paintings, it depicts a large and riotous parade of *yōkai* marching down the street at night, resentful and angry with their masters for abandoning them. It showcases the prevalent belief that demons could not only dwell within household objects, but also animate and control them. This idea of *yōkai* inhabiting everyday objects demonstrates how prevalent

[4] Michael Dylan Foster, *The Book of Yokai: Mysterious Creatures of Japanese Folklore* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 40.

and ever-present sprits and demons must have seemed to the people of medieval Japan. At the same time, it illustrates a theme very common in Japanese religious belief (owing much to both Buddhist and Shinto traditions) that all things, including objects, possessed a sort of spirituality or spiritual essence.

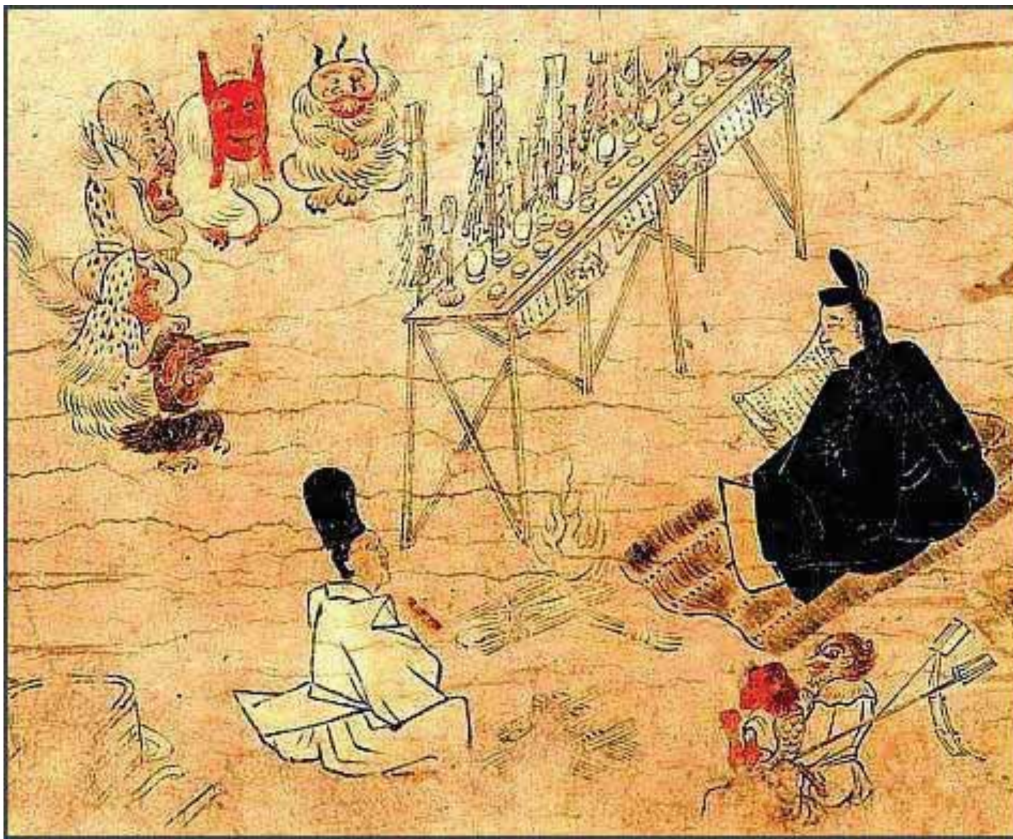
Figure 3: Anonymous Japanese Artist, "Hell of Shrieking Sounds" from the *Jigoku zōshi* (Tales of Hell), c. 1200. Ink and color on paper. Seattle Art Museum, Seattle.

This image, titled "Hell of Shrieking Sounds" from the *Jigoku zōshi* (c.1200) is one of seven fragments of a longer scroll depicting the Hell of Shrieking Sounds, the hell reserved for Buddhist monks who torture animals. The Hells (*Narakas*) of Buddhist tradition are, unlike the Christian version, places of finite (not infinite) torment, to which a person is subjected as the result of his or her accumulated actions or karma.[5] The eight major hells were subdivided into various sub-hells, and in this way Buddhists could point to a hell for almost every sin that existed. The horse-headed demons to the left, whose job

[5] Jens Braarvig, "The Buddhist Hell: An Early Instance of the Idea?" *Numen* 56, no. 2/3 (2009): 254-81.

was to continually beat the monks with iron rods, are a type of *yōka*i with a long history in Japanese culture, dating back to the Nara period, 710-794 CE. Demonic entities associated with or depicted as horses were thought to be the primary causes or transmitters of disease (*ekijin).* [6] This belief was so strong that one of the most important religious rites for the court became the "rite of roadside offerings," in which offerings were provided for the horse spirits at major intersections at roadways across Japan.

Figure 4: Detail from *Fudō riyaku engi* (Tale of the Efficacy of Fudō) Picture Scroll (14th century) Tokyo National Museum



[6] Michael Como, "Horses, Dragons, and Disease in Nara Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34, no. 2 (2007): 393-415.

Here, in this section from one of the most valuable scroll paintings in the history of Japanese art, *yōkai* are shown to have the ability to both cause and cure illness and disease. As the diviner (the man in black) prays, five illness deities (symbolic or representative of different illnesses) respond and appear (to the left). During this period in Japan, even illnesses like tuberculosis were believed to be caused by *oni* (demons), and the sickness was often treated by attempting to transfer the *oni* from the sick person onto or into something else, like a picture or object.[7] In this case, a deity known as Fudō Myōō, a protective deity especially revered in Japanese Shingon Buddhism, takes on an illness for a religious disciple named Shōkū (the man dressed in white).

Figure 5: The divine boys attacking the *tsukumogami,* From *Tsukumogami Picture Scroll,* Kyoto University Library.

This scroll painting depicting more *tsukumogami* (tool spirits) makes an especially interesting statement regarding the meshing of Folkloric and Buddhist religious beliefs and traditions. The remarks of divine boys (a religious archetype in

[7] Noriko T. Reider, *Seven Demon Stories from Medieval Japan* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2016)

Buddhism that is typically representative of a spiritually advanced person[8]) who are attacking the spirits, and the response of *tsukumogami* themselves, are written on the illustration. The boys are saying "All of you, we know what you've done. We've come to punish you. But if you stop killing people and decide to embrace Buddhism, we will spare your lives." The spirits' response reads "Thank you, thank you! From now on we will not have any evil thought and we will convert to Buddhism. Please spare us."[9] Not only are folk beliefs regarding *yōkai* seen to be interacting with and blending with Buddhist teachings, but the spirits themselves are susceptible to becoming converts!

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Anonymous Japanese Artist, *Hell of Shrieking Sounds from the Jigoku zoshi.* c. 1200. Seattle Art Museum. Ink and color on paper. *seattleartmuseum.org.*

Fudō riyaku engi picture scroll. 14th century. One scroll, color on paper. Collection of the Tokyo National Museum. *emuseum.jp.*

"Night Parade of One Hundred Demons." Edo Period (1615-1868). Hand scroll; ink, color, and gold on paper. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. *metmuseum.org.*

"The divine boys attacking the tsukumogami," from *Tsukumogami Picture Scroll*. Collection of Kyoto University Library. Reproduced in Noriko T. Reider, "Translation: *Tsukumogami-ki* (The Record of Tool Specters)," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* [Online only supplement: 1-19] (2009). https://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/nfile/2987.

[8] Christine M. E. Guth, "The Divine Boy in Japanese Art," *Monumenta Nipponica* 42, no. 1 (1987): 1-23.
[9] D.E. Mills, *A Collection of Tales from Uji: A study and Translation of Uji Shūi Monogatari* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970)

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Taming the Japanese Archipelago:

Examples of Humans Transforming Japan's Environment

By Davide Ippolito

Introduction:

Beginning with the Yayoi culture in the fourth century BCE, the Japanese archipelago has been subjected to immense physical changes caused by human development. The Kinai basin, which forms part of the larger Kansai region in central-western Japan, is the country's cultural and historical center. This central region was the first to adopt farming techniques and metal tools that came from the Asian continent. From there these technologies proliferated through the archipelago and were innovated upon by the Japanese to better suit their environment. Japan's difficult terrain and island status forced its inhabitants to develop unique methods for exploiting resources. As the environment was tamed, the population expanded. Terraces were built as a method for farming the mountainous terrain. Flood plains were irrigated to allow for agricultural and urban growth. However, the need for arable land, a scare resource in the archipelago, resulted in large-scale land modification as early as the Yayoi period (c. 200 BCE-250 CE), when wet rice agriculture was introduced.[1] The demand for more paddy land and resources only grew as time passed and the population increased. The introduction of metallurgy, the increased demand for kiln-fired ceramics, and the construction of larger and more complex cities caused an ever-increasing demand for timber in Japan.

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[1] Conrad Totman, *The Green Archipelago: Forestry in Preindustrial Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). Map 1 demonstrates the extent to which logging had occurred in the Kinai basin during the Yayoi period. Map 1 from Totman, p. xvi.

Beginning in the eighth century, monumental building projects undertaken by the new imperial government caused extreme pressure on the environment, especially on timber resources.[2] The imperial government and religious institutions constructed huge wooden palaces, estates, fortresses, temples, and shrines – some of which, such as the temple Kōfuku-ji, reached heights of fifty meters. At the local level the demand for resources ranged from tool-making to farming to fuel for cooking. Locals would venture into neighboring woodlands to collect timber for these endeavors, eventually leading to the depletion of forests surrounding communities.[3] Every level of society demanded lumber, which put stress on the natural resources of the archipelago.

By the eighth century CE, huge monuments requiring massive inputs of resources and labor had already been constructed in Japan. The Kofun period (c. 250-500 CE) saw the construction of massive burial mounds, while during the Nara and Heian periods (710-1185 CE) the imperial state built unprecedented and truly monumental temples, shrines, palaces, estates, and government buildings. A key factor in building these huge structures, whether burial mounds or actual buildings, was political organization. Without an organized way of coordinating labor consignment, resource extraction, and project execution, such building endeavors would have been impossible.[4] These building projects not only forced better organization of labor, but also enticed leaders to manage land in a more efficient way, helping lead to the *shōen* (private estate) land management system.

While land management techniques developed between the sixth and twelfth centuries helped increase agricultural production and facilitate urban growth, they also

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[2] *Ibid,* p. 18.

[3] Conrad Totman; *The Lumber Industry in Early Modern Japan* (Honolulu, HI.: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), pp. 95-102.

[4] Conrad Totman, *The Green Archipelago: Forestry in Preindustrial Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. xvi.

led to concerted construction efforts which would drain forests of their resources. Beginning in the thirteenth century, population growth kept the demand for resources growing.[5] Additionally, the growth of the military in the medieval period demanded huge amounts of fuel for smelting weapons and armor, as well as wood for constructing massive fortresses. The destruction of cities like Kyoto during the later Warring States period further increased this demand for wood, since the city was reconstructed multiple times.[6] As Japan emerged from the medieval era, a newly centralized state allowed for the further organized exploitation of timber. Although it depleted more resources than any regime in the archipelago before it, the Tokugawa government laid the foundation for reforms which would lead to reforestation and more efficient forest management.

The image below shows the amplification of logging that occurred between the Nara and early modern periods, extending throughout the Kinai basin and the peripheral regions.

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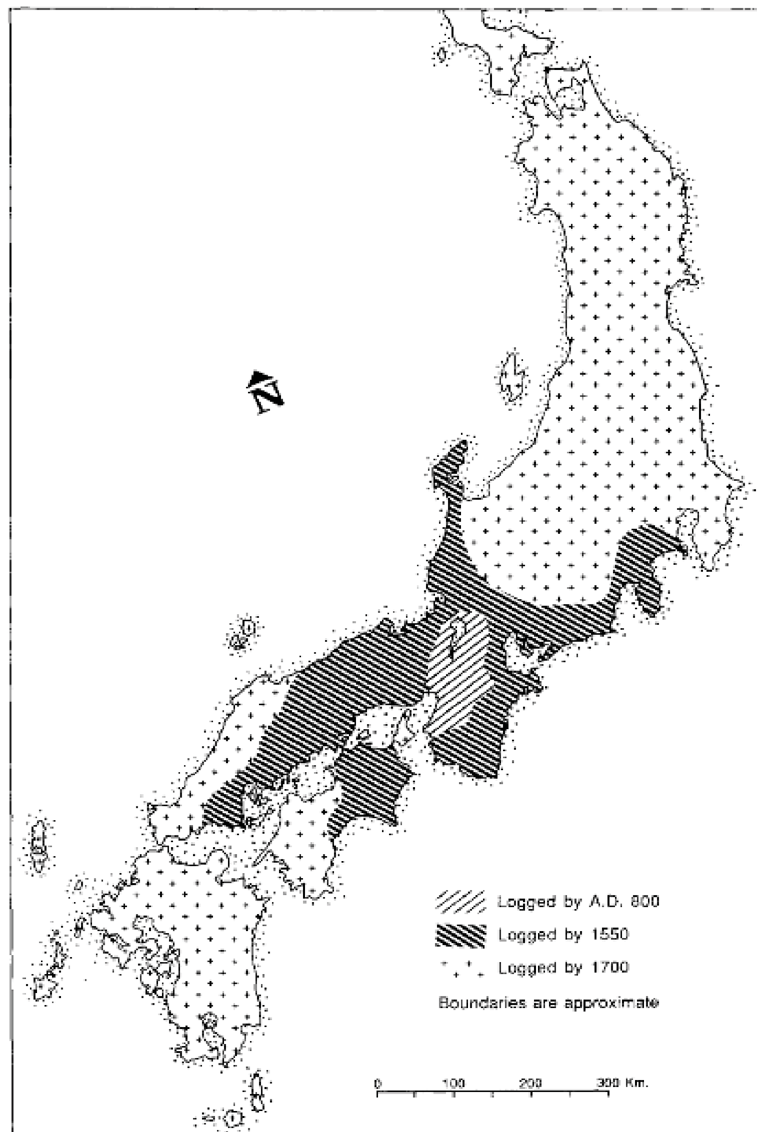
[5] Totman, *The Green Archipelago*, p. 36.
[6] *Ibid*, pp. 35-40.



Map 1: Areas Logged by Monumental Builders between C.E. 800 AND C.E. 1700

Map from: Conrad Totman, *The Green Archipelago: Forestry in Preindustrial Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. xvi.

This archive was created with the intention of telling the narrative of the origins of Japan's struggle to maintain equilibrium with its environment, specifically the challenges of maintaining a developing society without decimating available natural resources. Often, people will look at a forest as a "natural" feature and not realize that in reality it was planted by humans. Whole swaths of Japan were terraformed, deforested,

and reforested. This process is by no means a new one. This archive documents the struggle to achieve balance with the environment—a struggle that, in Japan, began long ago. Perhaps this story will resonate with many, especially due to the current questions human populations face with regard to our treatment of the environment.

Figure 1: Monumental Buildings: Tōdai-ji: Building large temples was one of the main uses of timber resources in Japan during the Nara period. In the eighth century, Emperor Shōmu, a devout Buddhist, began an enormous construction project to build enormous Buddhist temples around Japan. One of his most famous projects was the Tōdai-ji, or "Eastern Great Temple". The temple boasts a massive bronze statue of the Vairocana Buddha. The building alone required eighty-four major wooden structural pillars, each with a diameter of four feet and a length of about 100 feet.[7]

[7] William Coaldrake; *Architecture and Authority in Japan* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 70-72.

a.

b.

Figure 2: Monumental Buildings: The Kōfuku-ji Temple: Built by the famous Fujiwara clan, the Kōfuku-ji is one of Nara's most iconic constructions. Temples such as this one were of extreme importance to families like the Fujiwara, and the responsibility of maintaining them was one of the jobs of the clan leader. The colossal temple is about

150 feet high, and required an immense amount of old-growth lumber to complete. The temple was deconstructed and moved a number of times before being erected at its present location in Nara at the beginning of the eighth century. Buildings of this magnitude not only required huge amounts of lumber initially, but also needed to be maintained and repaired. This was especially true of roofs, which were also made of wood.[8]

Figure 3: The Jōmon Sugi: Though the Nara and Heian period monuments were beautiful as well as impressive in scale, there is a tragedy inherent in the construction of such architectural marvels. This image is of a famous *sugi* tree (Cryptomeria Japonica). The coniferous *sugi* tree happens to be Japan's national tree, and can grow to be 230 feet tall with a trunk of up to 13 feet in diameter. The "Jōmon Sugi" depicted here is said to be at least 3000 years old. Though this individual tree is not found in the Kinai basin, the

[8] Royall Tyler, "Kōfukuji and the Mountains of Yamato," Japan Review No.1 (1990): 158-163.

species was prevalent in the Yamaguni forest. This forest was located near Kyoto in the early centuries C.E. but from the eighth to the twelfth century, its lumber escalated into high demand. The demands of emperors and aristocrats for grand buildings, compounded by the slow growth of the species, led to the decimation of whole forests of *sugi*.[9]

a.

Figure 4: Resources Build Armies: With the establishment of the Kamakura and Muromachi shogunates in the twelfth and fourteenth century, respectively, much of Japan fell under military rule. The resources required to maintain the armies of the medieval

[9] Totman, *The Lumber Industry in Early Modern Japan*, p. 77. The *sugi* tree is described by Totman as being one of the major types of lumber used in Japan between the ninth and nineteenth centuries.

period exhausted already depleted forests. Unfortunately for the shogunates, the centralized system of controlling land developed in the Nara and early Heian periods had deteriorated, so the military governments did not have consistent control over timber and other resources. The woodblock print here, created between 1847 and 1850 by the artist Utagawa Kuniyoshi, depicts an idealized sixteenth-century warrior.[10] Though later than the medieval period, the print demonstrates the amount of resources needed to arm even one soldier. Each metal weapon or piece of armor required a significant amount of fuel to be smelted.[11]

[10] Utagawa Kuniyoshi's (1797-1861) woodblock print, *Endo Giemon Masatada (Endo Kiemon Natosugu)* from the*, Taiheiki eiyuden (Heroes of the Great Peace) Series,* can be found in the collection of The British Museum Online Collection. A brief description of the image was found at the online gallery of Fuji Arts, www.fujiarts.com. In the image, Endo Giemon Masatada is throwing a severed head.
[11] Posts from March 2013 on INFOS BUJINKAN. (n.d.). Retrieved February 24, 2017, from https://bujinkangard.wordpress.com/2013/03/

b.

Figure 5: Himeji Castle: Perhaps the best example of a late medieval Japanese fortress is Himeji Castle. Himeji is a *hirayamajiro* style castle, referring to its situation upon a hill in an open basin, which is located in the present-day Okayama prefecture. This location is of prime importance, as it lies only a few kilometers from an important access to the Inland Sea. While the castle was rebuilt in the seventeenth century, the original structure would have demanded an impressive amount of natural resources for completion and maintenance. The outer perimeter was originally 3.73 miles. It is the largest surviving

medieval castle in Japan. The *honmaru*, which was essentially an inner citadel, was an impressive size as well. Each of the *honmaru* walls were originally about 91 feet long. The outer walls were built of mainly moved earth. The mounds of earth were surrounded in stone and wood, as can be seen in the image. While the Himeji castle is the largest surviving castle, it was dwarfed by the sizes of the castles in the principle cities, which have since been destroyed. These types of castles were often demolished and rebuilt within short periods of time.[12]

c.

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Image 1, Area Logged by Monumental Builders C.E. 800 – 1700. From Conrad Totman, *The Green Archipelago: Forestry in Preindustrial Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). p. xvi.

[12] William Coaldrake; *Architecture and Authority in Japan*, pp. 120-123. Coaldrake reviews the Himeji Castle's original dimensions and the *hirayamajiro* castle style in general.

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Causes of the Taika Reforms (645 CE) and Why They Matter in Japanese History

By John Murphy

Introduction

Released in 645 CE, the Taika Reforms were a series of edicts overhauling the Japanese state. It is hard to overstate the effect the Taika Reforms had on the premodern Japanese government. The Taika Reforms transformed the Japanese archipelago from a scattered collection of clans into a centralized state with government land ownership, a landed bureaucracy, and a tax system. Prior to the reforms Japan was what historian Joan R. Piggott defined as an "inchoate early state."[1] After the Taika reforms had been implemented Japan had become a premodern state with a government apparatus capable of rivaling China's.

Taika means "Great Change" and this era illustrates that word. The labor tax was replaced with a rice and cloth tax on all land. This rice was paid out as a salary to magistrates, who gave up their land rights to the imperial government in exchange for stability and a place in the court nobility. The imperial court was fully reorganized and expanded with new hierarchical ranks to incorporate more local chieftains-turned-magistrates. Provincial boundaries were clearly defined to settle disputes and bring effective governance to distant regions. Remarkably, this huge overhauling of the Japanese state occurred in only two decades but left a mark that lasted many times longer.

The Taika Reforms are important and relevant because of their breadth and their longevity. While the imperial state created by the Taika Reforms would change greatly

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[1] Joan R. Piggott, *The Emergence of Japanese Kingship* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 100.

over the next thousand years, it would never stray far from the structure established by the reforms. For most of the next centuries the major governing paradigm—that of a centralized imperial state—remained the same, even though its context changed significantly. For example, when the *shōen* (private estate) system developed, depriving the imperial government of much of the economic and political power it had previously wielded, the same structure of government remained in place, even though its institutions were greatly weakened. The structure established by the Taika Reforms even co-existed with later shogunates (military governments), although the reforms were designed precisely to keep usurpers like shoguns from gaining power over the emperor.

The Taika Reforms would not have occurred without the right combination of internal and external factors that pushed the reform-minded Prince Naka into power and incentivized the momentous changes implemented. This archive will examine the causes and effects of the Taika Reforms. It is divided into four parts: the first part examines the state of affairs and system of governance in the half-century before the Taika Reforms. The second part focuses on the internal factors pressing for change, primarily the violent factionalization of the *uji* clans and the tension between the Buddhist Soga clan and anti-Soga traditionalist factions within the court. The third section looks at the external factors motivating centralization of government and the consolidation of the monarch's power. This is primarily due to the threat posed by the Chinese Tang Dynasty, which can be seen through the proxy war between the Korean kingdoms of Silla and Paekche. The fourth section will focus on the reforms themselves and their effects.

There are very few primary sources from this period of Japanese history, partly due to the fragility of the wooden tablets upon which early documents were written, and

partly due to Japan's relatively late adoption of a written language. Because of this historians are forced to draw heavily from the *Nihon shoki* (Chronicles of Japan) a historical text compiled in 720 AD that describes Japanese history from its creation myth through the most recent emperor. This is not a perfect history by any means—it is a dynastic history meant to support the ruling regime's claim to power, and is therefore prone to human errors and biases that must be understood in their context.

Section 1: Before Taika

To show the transformation of the Japanese state engendered by the Taika Reforms this archive will first examine the pre-existing modes of government in Japan. The clearest example of this is in the "Seventeen-Article Constitution" that was written by Prince Shōtoku and adopted by Empress Suiko in 604. Empress Suiko was from the Soga clan, as was her nephew Prince Shōtoku, and that clan's dedication to Buddhism can be seen in the constitution.

Passage 1: Excerpt from the *Nihon shoki*, Scroll 22, Prince Shōtoku's Seventeen-Article Constitution (604 CE):

> Summer, 4th month, 3rd day. The Prince Imperial in person prepared for the first time laws. There were seventeen clauses as follows:
> **...**
> II. Sincerely reverence the three treasures. The three treasures, viz. Budha, the Law and the Priesthood, are the final refuge of the four generated beings, and are the supreme object of faith in all countries **...**
> III. When you receive the imperial commands, fail not scrupulously to obey them. The lord is Heaven, the vassal is Earth. Heaven overspreads, and Earth upbears. When this is so, the four seasons follow their due course, and the powers of Nature obtain their efficacy. If the Earth attempted to overspread, Heaven would simply fall in ruin. Therefore is it that when the lord speaks, the vassal listens ; when the superior acts, the inferior yields compliance **...**
> IV. The Ministers and functionaries should make decorous behaviour their leading principle, for the leading principle the government of the people consists

> in decorous behaviour. If the superiors do not behave with decorum, the inferiors are disorderly : if inferiors are wanting in proper behaviour, there must necessarily be offences. Therefore it is that when lord and vassal behave with propriety, the distinctions of rank are not confused : when the people behave with propriety, the Government of the Commonwealth proceeds of itself.
> **...**
> XII. Let not the provincial authorities or the Kuni no Miyakko levy exactions on the people. In a country there are not two lords ; the people have not two masters. The sovereign is the master of the people of the whole country. The officials to whom he gives charge are all his vassals. How can they, as well as the Government, presume to levy taxes on the people?[2]

This Constitution marks the beginning of a movement to unify the state in Japan. It indicates that while the state was still very decentralized it was adopting aspects of a court society based on the Chinese imperial bureaucratic model. Article IV and its focus on rites and rituals is quite illuminating as to the structure of this early state and its dependence on ceremony. This shows that the government derived its power in part from a centralized bureaucracy, but also from court rituals that confirmed the legitimacy of the sovereign (the emperor or empress). Empress Suiko had a large palace at Oharida built as a ceremonial center mimicking the Chinese court, as China was the undisputed cultural capital of East Asia. But despite this large step forward the empress was still "more prestigious than she was powerful" and relied on her court for influence.[3]

Section 2: *Uji* clans and Religion

Passage 2: Excerpt from the Nihon Shoki, Scroll 21, Adoption of Buddhism, 587 CE

> 2nd year, Spring 4th month, and 2nd day. The Emperor performed the ceremony of tasting the new rice on the river bank of Ihare. On this day the Emperor took ill and returned the Palace. All the Ministers were in attendance. Emperor addressed them saying: "It is Our desire to our adherence to the three precious things. Do ye Ministers advise upon this." All the Ministers entered the Court and consulted

[2] W. G. Aston, *Nihongi, Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest times to A.D. 697* (London: Kegan Paul, 1896), p. 129.
[3] Piggott, *Japanese Kingship*, p. 101.

> together. Mononobe no Moriya no Ohomuraji and Nakatomi no Katsumi no Muraji opposed the Imperial proposal, and advised, saying: "Why should we reverence strange deities, and turn our backs upon the gods of our country? Of course we know naught of any such thing." The Oho omi Soga no Mumako no Sukune said: "Let us render assistance in compliance with the Imperial command. Who shall offer advice to the contrary?" Hereupon the Imperial Prince the Emperor's younger brother introduced into the interior of the Palace a priest of the Land of Toyo. Mononobe no Moriya no Ohomuraji glared at them in great wrath. Then Kekuso, Oshi sakabe no Fubito, came hastily and spoke secretly to the Ohomuraji saying: "All the Ministers are now plotting against thee, and moreover are about to waylay thee." When the Ohomuraji heard this he retired to Ato and assembled a body of men. Nakatomi no Katsumi no Muraji assembled troops at his house and went with them to the assistance of the Ohomuraji. At length he prepared figures of the Imperial Prince Hikobito, the Heir Apparent, and of the Imperial Prince Takeda, and loathed them. But presently finding that success was impossible he repaired to the Palace of the Imperial Prince Hikobito at Mimata. One of the attendants named Ichihi Tomi no Obito, watched till Katsumi no Muraji was withdrawing from the place where the Imperial Prince Hikobito was and drawing his sword slew him.[4]

This account describes in detail the emperor's conversion to Buddhism and the violence accompanying it. This affair can be viewed as the precursor to the Isshi Incident, a similar coup motivated by divisive clan politics and religious tensions. These tensions set the stage for the Taika Reforms. When the emperor wanted to convert to Buddhism he was backed by the Buddhist Soga clan but opposed by the Shinto traditionalists, led by the Mononobe clan. The Soga won, eradicating the Mononobe and gaining more power than any other clan. Buddhism's prevalence can be seen in the Seventeen-Article Constitution, quoted in Passage 1. The ease with which the clans turn to political violence to further their familial and religious agenda is a major aspect of the political history of the Asuka period (592-645 CE).

Section 3: China and Paekche

Passge 3: Excerpt from the Nihon Shoki, Scroll 26, Fall of Pekche, 660 CE

[4] Aston, *Nihongi*, p. 109.

> In the seventh month of the sixth year, Pekche sent Envoys with the following message to the Empress: "Great Tang and Silla have joined their powers for an attack upon us. They have taken away as prisoners King Wicha, his Queen, and the Heir to the Throne.
> **...**
> In one book it is said: "On the 10th day of the 7th month of the present year, Su Ting-fang of Great Tang drew up the fleet under his command in the harbour Micha, while Chhyun-chhyu-chi, King of Silla, with his horse and foot occupied Mount No-syu-ri and so they attacked Pekche from both sides. The fighting went on for three days. Our Royal city was taken. On the 13th day of the same month, they began to demolish the Royal city."[5]

This excerpt describes the fall of Japan's Korean ally, Paekche (rendered as "Pekche" in the quote), to Tang Dynasty China's Korean ally, Silla. The *Nihon shoki* describes the close relationship between Japan and Paekche, their close ally across the narrow Korean strait, and how the loss to Silla was seen as an existential threat to the Japanese state. According to the *Nihon shoki* Japan responded by sending troops to Korea to try and restore its influence in Paekche, but the Japanese were met with a humiliating defeat at the Battle of Baekjang. Although the Chinese never invaded Japan, the fear of a Chinese invasion led the Japanese state to construct a series of military fortifications, move their capital inland, and encouraged further centralization under Emperor Tenji (626-672) in a second series of reforms, which became known as the Taika Reforms.

Section 4: Taika (Great Change)

Passage 4: Excerpt from the Nihon Shoki, Scroll 26, The Isshi Incident, 645 CE

> Kuratsukuri no Omi wondered at this, and inquired of him, saying: "Why dost thou tremble?" Yamada Maro answered and said: "It is being near the Empress that makes me afraid so that unconsciously the perspiration pours from me." Naka no Ohoye, seeing that Komaro and his companion, intimidated by Iruka's prestige, were trying to shirk and did not come forward, cried out: "Ya!" and forthwith coming out with Komaro and his companion, fell upon Iruka without warning and with a sword cut open his head and shoulder. Iruka started up in

[5] Aston, *Nihongi*, pp. 258, 267.

> alarm when Komaro with a turn of his hand flourished his sword and wounded him on the leg. Iruka rolled over to where the Empress sat, and bowing his head to the ground, said: "She who occupies the hereditary Dignity is the Child of Heaven. I, Her servant, am conscious of no crime, and I beseech Her to deign to make examination into this."
> The Empress was greatly shocked and addressed Naka no Ohoye, saying: "I know not what has been done. What is the meaning of this?" Naka no Ohoye prostrated himself on the earth, and made representation to Her Majesty, saying: "Kuratsukuri wished to destroy utterly the Celestial House, and to subvert the Solar Dignity. Is Kuratsukuri to be substituted for the Celestial descendants?" The Empress at once got up, and went into the interior of the Palace. Komaro, Saheki no Muraji, and Amida, Waka-inu-kahi no Muraji slew Iruka no Omi.
> **...**
> 13th day. Yemishi, Soga no Omi, and his people when about to be executed, burnt the History of the Emperors, the History of the Country, and the objects of value Yesaka Funa no Fubito straightway hastened to seize the burning History of the Country, and delivered it up to Naka no Ohoye. On this day permission was given for the interment of the bodies of Yemishi, Soga no Omi, and Kuratsukuri in tombs. Lament for them was also allowed.[6]

This excerpt describes the Isshi Incident of 645, which precipitated the Taika Reforms. Prince Naka and his allies, including Nakatomi no Kamatari, took their revenge on Iruka (previously depicted in the *Nihon shoki* as hunting and murdering down a close ally of Naka) and killed him in front of the emperor. Iruka's father committed suicide later that week, effectively ending the Soga line. Empress Kōgyoku resigned in favor of her son, Prince Naka, but he declined the throne in favor of his uncle, who became Emperor Kōtoku. Despite this, Prince Naka was de facto ruler of Japan. Prince Naka, who would later become Emperor Tenji, resented the power one clan was able to hold over the emperor and was the driving force behind governmental reforms that gave the emperor singular powers.

Passage 5: Excerpt from the Nihon Shoki, Scroll 25, The Taika Reforms, 645 CE

> "I. Let the people established by the ancient Emperors, etc., as representatives of children be abolished, also the Miyake various places and the people owned as serfs by the Wake, the Omi, the Muraji, the Tomo no Miyakko, the Kuni no

[6] Aston, *Nihongi*, pp. 191, 193.

> Miyakko, and the Mura no Obito. Let the farmsteads in various places be abolished." Consequently fiefs were granted for their sustenance to those of the rank of Daibu and upwards on a descending scale.
> ...
> Further We say: It is the business of the Daibu to govern the people. If they discharge this duty thoroughly, the people have trust in them, and an increase of their revenue is therefore for the good of the people.
> II. The capital is for the first time to be regulated, and Governors appointed for the Home provinces and districts. Let barriers, outposts, guards, and post horses, both special and ordinary be provided, bell tokens made, and mountains and rivers regulated.
> ...
> III. Let there now be provided for the first time registers of population, books of account, and a system of the receipt and re-granting of distribution land.
> Let every fifty houses be reckoned a township, and in every township let there be one alderman who shall be charged with the superintendence of the population, the direction of the sowing of crops and the cultivation of mulberry trees, the prevention and examination of offences, and the enforcement of the payment of taxes and of forced labour
> ...
> IV. The old taxes and forced labour are abolished, and a system of commuted taxes instituted. These shall consist of fine silks, coarse silks, raw silk, and floss silk, all in accordance with what is produced in the locality.[7]

In this passage, the historians who wrote the *Nihon shoki* summarize the Taika Reforms. It is not, however, the actual text of the decrees. Nevertheless, one can easily tell that the Reforms consisted of a massive overhaul of the government that significantly broadened the state's range and function of power. The first article of the reforms abolished the semi-autonomous estates and replaced them with new elites who had to pay taxes to the government. The second article divided lands into the palace vicinity, the central district, and the regional provinces. It also provided for regional magistrates and clerks. The fourth article provided the state with a steady stream of rice and cloth with which to pay their newly created magistrates.[8] Together these reforms forged an administrative state with a streamlined taxation system and magistrates in the employ of

[7] Aston, *Nihongi*, p. 206.
[8] Piggott, *Japanese Kingship*, p.106.

the government rather than themselves.

The Taika Reforms were an extended process, not a singular event, and Prince Naka would implement additional reforms as Emperor Tenji, further consolidating state power and expanding the military. By the time of his death, in 672, Emperor Tenji had accomplished what he set out to do nearly three decades earlier. The royal court was now run by the emperor, not any meddling *uji*, and the centralized state he created was far better prepared to respond to external threats. Japan had finished its transformation into a fully fledged state.

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The Popularization of Buddhism in Medieval Japan:

Selections from Literature and Picture Scrolls

By Amelia Spann

Introduction

What follows is a selection of quotations from Buddhist-influenced tales (*setsuwa, otogizōshi, sekkyō)* and picture scrolls (*emakimono*) created in Japan during the Medieval Period (twelfth century- sixteenth century). Individually and collectively these selections demonstrate the popular spread of Buddhist teachings amongst commoners. They describe in detail the beliefs of their times, reflect the fears and hopes of the people, and present incentives and arguments for why a person should follow Buddhist teachings. The authors of many of the selections are unknown, and the selections have been organized by the themes they portray.

The first category of tale, *setsuwa*, or "spoken story," is a vast genre. The selections cover gathered here date from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries, many from the Kamakura Period (1185-1333 C.E.). These were commonly oral tales written down and put into collections by Buddhist monks. These stories use simple language and plots, and they consist primarily of descriptions of events and dialogue. The second category, *otogizōshi,* or short fiction, first appeared in the Muromachi Period (1336-1573 C.E.) as a successor to *setsuwa*. These fantastical tales describe encounters with *oni* (demons) and bodhisattvas (enlightened beings who have chosen to remain in this world to help the unenlightened) while also relaying moralistic Buddhist teachings. The *otogizōshi* highlight the increased popularity of the Lotus Sutra (the last sermon given by the historical Buddha before he died), and an increased focus on Amida Buddha,

the Buddha of salvation. *Sekkyō,* or sermon-ballads, emerged after the end of the Medieval Period, in the seventeenth century. Some of these tales describe how individuals accrued merit and goodness and became deified, others show the simplification of Buddhist teachings of the time. *Sekkyō* also reveal the negative results of neglecting Buddhist teachings, as well as the various ways to attain enlightenment. Despite their fantastical nature, these tales were conveyed to readers as if they actually occurred, or were common knowledge, in order that the audience could learn from them. The commoner audience could relate to the characters and settings being portrayed, resulting in the very effective transmission of Buddhist teachings to the populace.

The last sources I will discuss are *emakimono* (picture scrolls) which date from the twelfth through sixteenth centuries. The selected *emaki* beautifully depict buddhas and bodhisattvas, the various levels of hell into which one can be reincarnated, as well as images illustrating specific Buddhist tales. *Emaki* serve to enhance the absorption of Buddhism by visually reinforcing teachings, making the tales more vivid and believable, and making them more accessible to the common audience.

Themes we will explore in the selections include: the power of the Lotus Sutra, the mercy of bodhisattva Kannon (the bodhisattva of mercy), immoral behaviors, punishments, righteous behaviors, women as evil, and paths to enlightenment. Most selections present multiple themes, and so I have loosely organized them per the most prominent of the themes. Viewed together, these selected articles and picture scrolls provide a broad look at the popular dispersion of Buddhist teachings in Medieval Japan, and they also reflect the fears, desires and beliefs of their audience

Passage 1: "How a monk of the Dōjōji in the province of Kii copied the Lotus Sutra and brought salvation to serpents" from *Tales of Times Now Past* (*Konjaku monogatari shū*)

This passage is from the *Konjaku monogatari shū* (Tales of Times Now Past), compiled around 1120. The Buddhist theme of women as evil is very prominent in this *setsuwa* as is the punishment of being transformed into a serpent. The punished are only saved through a senior monk's dedication of merit, religious rights, services, and readings of the Lotus Sutra. The tale closes with a clear warning to avoid women.

> [T]he two monks thought, "Undoubtedly, because the promise to her was broken, the mistress of that house let evil passions arise within her heart and became a poisonous snake and pursues us." Taking to their heels, they ran as fast as they could to a temple called Dōjōji and went in through the gate.
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> Tears of blood flowed from her eyes; raising her head, she licked her lips and slithered rapidly away whence she had come. Before the eyes of the monks, the great bell of the temple blazed and was burned in the poisonous hot breath of the serpent. It was too hot to come near. But they threw water on it to cool it, and when they lifted it away to look at the monk, they saw that fire had consumed him utterly. Not even his skeleton remained. All that there was, was a little ash.
>
> ***
>
> Later, an aged monk, who was a senior monk of the temple, had a dream in which a serpent even larger than the one before came straight to him and addressed him face to face: "Do you know who I am? I am the monk who was hidden inside the bell. The evil woman became a poisonous snake; in the end, I was made her captive and became her husband. I have been reborn in this vile, filthy body and suffer measureless torment. […] I beseech you, on our account let limitless compassion arise within your heart; in purity copy the chapter of the Lotus Sutra called 'The Limitless Life of the Tathāgata.' Dedicate its merit to us two serpents and free us thereby from our torments. […] When the monk pondered this afterwards, his piety was at once aroused. He himself copied out the chapter; and discarding his robe and bowl, he invited a great many monks to celebrate a full day's Dharma assembly and dedicated its merit that the two serpents might be freed of their torments. Later, he dreamed that a monk and a woman, their happy faces wreathed in smiles, came to the Dōjōji and saluted him reverently. "Because you have cultivated the roots of enlightenment, we two were instantly rid of our snakes' bodies and set on the path of felicitous rebirth.
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>
> Now think: that evil woman's passion for the young monk must also have come from a bond formed in a previous life.

> You see, therefore, the strength of the evil in the female heart. It is for this reason that the Buddha strictly forbids approaching women. Know this, and avoid them.[1]

Figure 1: *Picture-scroll of the Chronicles of Dōjōji (Dōjōji engi emaki), depicting* "How a Monk of the Dōjōji in the Province of Kii Copied the Lotus Sutra and Brought Salvation to Serpents"

Figure 1 has an unknown author, and is from the Late Muromachi Period (c. sixteenth century). This scroll is an illustration of the aforementioned *setsuwa* tale "How a Monk of the Dōjōji in the Province of Kii Copied the Lotus Sutra and Brought Salvation to Serpents," from the *Konjaku monogatari shū.* The tale, and scroll, illustrate the Buddhist depiction of women as evil and vindictive. The monk hides in a large bell at a temple, and she cooks him inside it with the fire of her breath. They are then both turned into snakes and appeal to the head monk to perform services for their salvation and release from that hell. Women are depicted as sinful, deceitful, and unable to control their desires and emotions. The woman is shown to be the cause of the monk's descent into hell, down one of the Three Evil Paths. They are saved by a senior monk's reading of the Lotus Sutra, and the dedication of rights.

Dojoji engi emaki, Muromachi Period (16th c.), color and ink on paper, artist unknown

[1] "How a monk of the Dōjōji in the province of Kii copied the Lotus Sutra and brought salvation to serpents," in Marian Ury, trans., *Tales of Times Now Past: Sixty-Two Stories from a Medieval Japanese Collection* (Berkeley: University of California, 1979), 94-96.

Passage 2: "How Kaya no Yoshifuji, of Bitchū Province, became the husband of a fox and was saved by Kannon" from *Tales of Times Now Past* (*Konjaku monogatari shū)*

Passage 2 features the mischievous magic of spirit-foxes who can appear as women and ensnare people in their illusions. This *setsuwa* warns of trusting unknown and beautiful women, especially at night. However, all is not lost should one become ensnared, because merciful Kannon can be relied upon for aid. The man is saved because his family read sutras for him, prayed to Kannon for his welfare, and carved a Kannon statue, which takes on human form and saves him.

> Now, in autumn of the eighth year of Kanpei, while his wife was away in the capital and he, left by himself in his household, was a temporary widower, he went out for a stroll just at nightfall and suddenly caught sight of a beautiful young woman. She was someone he had never seen before. His lustful feelings were aroused, but the woman looked as though she would flee if he tried to touch her. […] Yoshifuji walked with her, holding her hand. […] Yoshifuji was treated very hospitably. He became utterly attached to the woman; they vowed eternal love, and waking and sleeping he spent all his time with her. He never wondered how his house and children might be faring.
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>
> In his own home, after he disappeared, he was sought for, but without success. […] Good resolves arose in them, and they felled a *kae* tree to make an image of the eleven-headed Kannon. The statue they made was the same height as Yoshifuji. They petitioned it: "At least let us see his corpse," they pleaded. Moreover, from the day on which he disappeared, they began invocations of the Buddha and sutra readings for the welfare of his soul in the next world.
>
> ***
>
> Yoshifuji had been tricked by a fox and had become her husband and was no longer in his right mind. They immediately summoned an eminent monk to pray for him and called in a yin-yang master to exorcise the evil influences; and they had Yoshifuji bathed repeatedly. But whatever they tried, he still bore no resemblance to his former self. Afterwards, little by little, he returned to his senses; how ashamed he must have been, and how queer he must have felt. Yoshifuji had been under the storehouse for thirteen days, but to him it had seemed thirteen years. Moreover, the beams under the storehouse were only four or five inches above the ground; to Yoshifuji they had seemed high and broad. He had thought himself in a great house that one went in and out of freely. It was all because of the magic power of the spirit-foxes. As for the layman who entered and struck about with his cane, he was a transformation of the Kannon that had been made and dedicated to Yoshifuji's welfare.

This shows why everyone should invoke and meditate on Kannon.[2]

Passage 3: *Sayohime*

Passage 3 was written in the seventeenth century. *Sayohime* gives us a brilliant example of filial piety. The daughter Sayohime is eager to sell herself to pay for Buddhist rites honoring her dead father, and this plan is encouraged by a holy man. She also recites from the Lotus Sutra, a very important Buddhist sutra of the time. She represents the ideal Buddhist woman, who goes so far as to dedicate a sutra reading to the snake about to eat her. Ultimately, she is rewarded for her piety, in this life and in the next.

> With no clear plan in mind, Sayohime left her mother and visited Kasuga Shrine. "I want to sell myself," she prayed with all her might, "so that I can sponsor a service for my father's enlightenment. If there's someone who would buy me, then please let us meet!" Now around that time there was a holy man from Kōfukuji Temple who had come to the shrine to preach. Learning of his presence there, Sayohime went to hear him speak. "We should all sponsor rights for our parents' enlightenment," the holy man instructed, "even if we have to sell ourselves to do so." Listening until the end, Sayohime became all the more resolved.
>
> ***
>
> Sayohime raised her voice again and recited from the fifth scroll of the Lotus sutra: "*Unga nyoshin, sokutoku jōbutsu.* As a woman how could you quickly become a buddha?" With all her heart, she dedicated the merit of the reading to the snake. "You too shall become a buddha," and she struck the giant snake on the head with the sutra scroll. Wondrously and miraculously, all its twelve horns fell free and shattered. Shouting, "Uphold the Buddhist law, uphold the Buddhist law!" Sayohima stroked the monster's body with the Lotus sutra from head to tail. Its 14,000 fins and 99,000 scales fluttered and fell away, scattering like blossoms in a gale.
>
> ***
>
> Later, she married the governor of Yamato Province and bore him many children. She possessed eternal youth and immortality, and exhibiting various wondrous signs, she manifested as the goddess Benzaiten of Chikubushima Shrine in Ōmi Province.[3]

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[2] "How Kaya no Yoshifuji, of Bitchū Province, became the husband of a fox and was saved by Kannon," in *Tales of Times Now Past*), 102-105.

[3] "Sayohime," in R. Keller Kimbrough, ed. and trans., *Wondrous Brutal Fictions: Eight Buddhist Tales from the Early Japanese Puppet Theater* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 161-190.

Passage 4: "How a sparrow repaid its debt of gratitude" from *A Collection of Tales from Uji (Uji shūi monogatari)*

Passage 4 was written in the early 13th century. This tale highlights the benefits of following Buddhist teachings such as being kind to living things. It also describes terrible punishments for the characters who do not follow this rule. Directly stating the moral at the end indicates what the reader should learn from the tale, and this reflects how, perhaps even more than its predecessors, the tale was aimed at a less-educated commoner audience. The characters and setting would have been familiar to average readers. The symbol of a sparrow indicates a rural representation of nature because it was distinct from the classical poetry of the capitol, which preferred the use of more migratory birds in describing nature. The sparrow is additionally important because birds were considered messengers that could pass between this world and the world of the deities (the sea and mountains).[4]

> Long ago, one fine day in spring, a woman of about sixty was sitting cleansing herself of lice when she saw a boy pick up a stone and throw it at one of the sparrows that were hopping around the garden. The stone broke the bird's leg [...] she revived it with her breath and gave it something to eat.[...] The sparrow took one look at the woman's face, then it seemed to drop some tiny object out of its mouth and flew away.[...] she found it was a single calabash-seed.[...] Whenever she took rice from the gourds, there was always far more than she could possibly use, so that she became extremely rich. The people in the neighboring villages were astonished to see how prosperous she had become, and were filled with envy at her incredible good fortune.
> [...] The neighbor now began to keep a sharp lookout in case she too might find a sparrow with a broken leg to tend. But there were no such sparrows to be found. Every morning as she looked out, there would be sparrows hopping around pecking at any grains of rice that happened to be lying about outside the back door - and one day she picked up some stones and threw them in the hope of hitting one. Since she had several throws and there was such a flock of birds, she naturally managed to hit one, and as it lay on the ground, unable to fly away, she

[4] Haruo Shirane, *Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 116-17.

went up to it in great excitement and hit it again, to make sure that its leg was broken. Then she picked it up and took it indoors, where she fed it and treated it with medicine.[...] Out of the seven or eight gourds came a vast horde of venomous creatures which stung the children and their mother - the latter so badly that she died. The sparrows had resented having their legs broken and had persuaded swarms of insects and reptiles to enter the gourds; whereas the sparrow next door had been grateful because when it had broken its leg it had been saved from a crow and nursed back to health.

So you see, you should never be jealous of other people.[5]

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The Rise of Zen Buddhist Art During the Muromachi Period:

The Fusion of Zen and the Warrior

By Patrick Dowdle

Introduction

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Japan, the Ashikaga shogunate (military government) underwent a tremendous amount of social and political upheaval, ultimately leading to the downfall of the shogunate in 1567 at the hands of the powerful warlord Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582). Political unrest was not the only thing that characterized Ashikaga rule though –religion and the visual arts also flourished. Art was itself a reaction to the unrest, as artists confronted the turmoil and uncertainty of the times. This archive focuses on religious paintings that emerged out of the atmosphere of religious reform and the influx of Chinese culture in the late medieval era. This continental influence is perhaps the most defining feature of the art of this period, because the Ashikaga shogunate re-established trade and diplomatic relations with China, which had the side effect of greatly increasing exposure to Chinese thought and art. Japanese artists began to adapt their styles, masterfully folding once-distinctively Chinese elements into new forms of artistic expression. This introduction of Chinese style also coincided with the rise of Zen Buddhism in Japan, which became enormously popular in tandem with the rise of warrior culture. Artists strove to embody Zen values even in their techniques, emphasizing that the act of painting itself should be a form of clear-minded meditation.

Religious art has always been a cornerstone of premodern cultural tradition, both in Japan and the rest of the world. In medieval Japan religious institutions often commissioned art works, supported education, and advocated contemplation, all of which created an environment for artistic sensibilities to flourish. Religious art flourished particularly under the popularization of Zen Buddhism, which transformed more esoteric forms of Buddhism into more exoteric forms more accessible to the average layperson. This was particularly true of the Zen focus on the act of meditation as a means to enlightenment. Art became a larger part of religious experience, both as embodiment of religious principles and practices, and as a visual aid to the meditative process. A prominent example of the former is Josetsu's "Catching a Catfish with a Gourd," a painting depicting the dilemma of how to get a catfish into a gourd (whose neck is obviously too small to permit the catfish entry). The painting is a visual rendering of a *kōan*, a paradox or riddle impervious to rational solution, which was meant to be meditated upon as a means of attaining enlightenment in the Rinzai Zen tradition. An example of the latter principle is iconography—the depiction of religious entities for the purpose of worship or mindfulness—which remained popular in Zen Buddhist art. Saints, or *rakans*, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas continued to be depicted in various artistic forms throughout the Muromachi period (1392-1573).

The paintings gathered in this archive are all embodiments of the values that Chinese-influenced Zen Buddhist art espoused – the monochrome works reflects a desire for simplicity and tranquility, and were meant to inspire thoughtfulness and meditation in their viewers. It can be argued that earlier Japanese artistic works were concerned with ephemerality, emphasizing the sweetness of the temporary and making the changing

seasons a favorite subject of art. But under the influence of Zen teachings, the ideals of self-control, asceticism, and discipline emphasized meditation, intuition, and simplicity, which is reflected in the monochrome ink paintings and landscapes shown below. Religious art not only tells us about the rise of Zen Buddhism but it also chronicles the growing preoccupation with religious ideas, as the Ashikaga shogunate and the samurai elite served as patrons, buying art and funding artists, and sometimes even becoming artists themselves. The admiration for these Zen works by the most politically powerful consequently made the Zen art itself fashionable, which created demand and appreciation for it in the non-elite class as well.

Figure 1: "White-Robed Kannon," by unknown artist, dated 1336-1392[1]

The bodhisattva Kannon was an immensely popular subject of study for religious art. As the bodhisattva of mercy, Kannon rivaled the Amida Buddha (the Buddha of salvation) as an object of popular admiration, while also becoming an object of meditation (her/his name has been translated to 'One Who Observes the Sounds of the World').[2] Here we see Kannon reclining, inactive and peaceful against a tranquil background. This painting dates from the early Muromachi period, and it displays the influence of Chinese painting techniques, particularly by its usage of heavy lines for the figure in a non-abstract style, with a washed-out background that draws the focus to the centerpiece of the painting.

[1] Unknown, "White-Robed Kannon," 14th Century. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York. Accessed December 12, 2016. http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/36143.

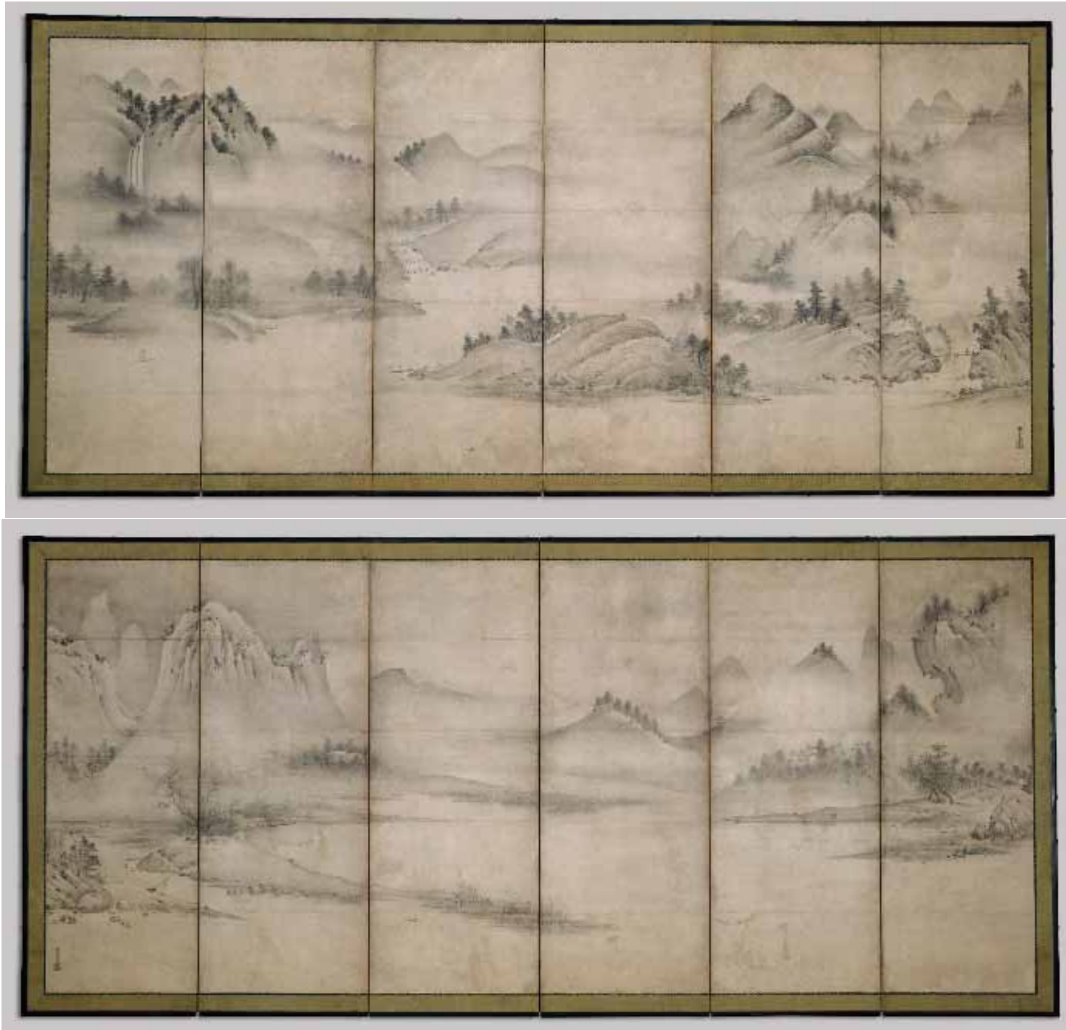
[2] Schumacher, Mark. *Kannon Notebook*. Onmarkproductions.com. Accessed March 8, 2017. www.onmarkproductions.com/html/kannon.shtml.

Unknown. “White-Robed Kannon.” 14th Century.
Collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Figure 2. "Landscapes of Four Seasons," by Sōami, Muromachi Period[3]

Screen paintings on six-panel folding screens made of wood, to serve as partitions, were popular among Japanese and Chinese artists. This mid- to late Muromachi painted screen set depicts eight views of the Xiao and Xiang rivers. These rivers in Xiaoxiang, China, were popular subjects of art thanks to their geographic significance and beauty, but this Japanese take on the rivers shows a much more abstract view. This reflects the Zen teaching that an abstraction of an object more closely captures its true essence, by way of allowing the viewer to interpret and meditate upon the themes and figures. Elements of the painting reflect Buddhist concerns with ephemerality, as the screen represents the passage of the seasons, as shown symbolically by waterfalls for spring in the first set of screens, and frozen mountains in winter with flora dotting the white snow-dusted peaks in the second set of screens. The decision to represent the screens by season as opposed to topographical appearance that would realistically mirror the view of Xiao and Xiang represents the importance of the passage of seasons as a symbol of temporality.

[3] Sōami, "Landscape of the Four Seasons (Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers)," Early 16th Century. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York. Accessed December 12,2016. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/41.59.1,2/.



Sōami, “Landscape of the Four Seasons (Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers),” Early 16th Century. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Figure 3. "View of Ama-no-hashidate" by Sesshū Tōyō, 1505[4]

Sesshū (1420-1506) was one of the fathers of Zen-style landscape art. This painting was done toward the end of his life, and is dated by the presence of buildings which only existed for a brief time between 1501 and 1507. Sesshū was famous for the unity of art and Zen, and this work strives to capture that with a calm and meditative contemplation of the mountains and the city below. The painting itself is a representation of unity with soft, cloudy mountains in the background with hard, defined hills in the foreground. The composition is meant to be in balance, and reflects discipline and expertise as Sesshū carefully blends abstraction with detail. Landscapes were seen to be meditative because their encompassing scope drew the viewer's attention to a multiple points of interest, while simultaneously diminishing those individual points in the larger context of the entire painting. This work had particular spiritual meanings because it features Ama-no-hashidate, the narrow peninsula in the foreground which is translated to the "Bridge of the High Plain of Heaven," and is seen as a resting place of Shinto deities. The fusion of Shinto and Buddhist religious themes is common in Japanese religious works, reflecting the unique coexistence of the two faiths in Japan. This seems in contrast with the urban development behind it but their proximity and uninterrupted flow into one another brings them some unity, and the heavy presence of clouds gives the painting an almost otherworldly sense, as if the bridge is inviting Sesshū across and into the heavenly mountains – which, given Sesshū's advanced age, may have been the spiritual focus of the piece.

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[4] Tōyō Sesshū, "View of Ama-no- hashidate," 1501-1506. National Treasure, collection of Kyoto National Museum. Accessed December 13, 2016. http://www.kyohaku.go.jp/eng/syuzou/meihin/suibokuga/item01.html.

Tōyō Sesshū, “View of Ama-no- hashidate,” 1501-1506.
National Treasure, collection of Kyoto National Museum.

Figure 4: "Su Shi in a Bamboo Hat and Clogs," inscribed by Zuigan Ryūsei and four others, Muromachi Period[5]

This painting reflects the simple *sumi-e* ink-painting style that had become popular with medieval Japanese artists, combined with poetic verse accompanying the painting, in a style referred to as *shigajiku* (poem-paintings in hanging-scroll format). This style has its roots in China, where, at that time, painting and poetry were seen as inextricably connected, like two sides of the same coin, and thus the calligraphy served not only to provide information about the graphic piece but was also considered artistic production in and of itself.[6] The picture is of the famous Chinese scholar Su Shi (1037-1101) who, caught in a rainstorm, borrowed a huge coat and hat to protect himself, which apparently made him look quite foolish. While the Chinese find the tale humorous, Japanese Zen artists took it as a representation of oneness: Su Shi is drawn in simple garb but he looks dignified and calm, representing a fusion of the refined with the unrefined. His humble garb does not tarnish is character and value as a philosopher and scholar.

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[5] Unknown, "Su Shi (Dongpo) in a Bamboo Hat and Clogs," 15th Century. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York. Accessed December 12, 2016. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1975.268.39/

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Unknown, "Su Shi (Dongpo) in a Bamboo Hat and Clogs," 15th Century. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York

Figure 5. "The Priest Hsien-tzu," by Kaō, Muromachi Period[7]

Zen priests were fond of painting notable monks and philosophers from their own religious tradition. The priest Hsien-tzu (Xian-zi), or Kensu as he was better known in Japan, is seen here laughing in the rain. The "happy monk" was a popular subject of rumination in Japan, as Japanese Buddhist practice had in some ways become relatively less strict in comparison to Chinese Buddhist practice which universally forbade certain merriments like drinking and sex.[8] Kaō was particularly fond of portraits, and used a washed out *sumi-e* style that used minimal brush strokes, with sharply defined features contrasting with blurry and abstract backgrounds. This innovation reflects on the nature of the painting as an expression of meditation, with Kaō using simple and few brush strokes as he meditated while producing the work. The idea was that the painter would enter a meditative trance, and in that serene state he would be able to paint without thinking, which was the essence of pursuing Zen enlightenment through artistic practice.

[7] Tanaka, Ichimatsu, *Japanese Ink Painting: Shubun to Sesshu*, translated by Bruce Darling (New York: Weatherhill, 1972), 45

[8] Only the Hokke, or Lotus Sect of Buddhism in medieval Japan specifically allowed clerical marriage.

"Priest Xian-zi Catching Shrimp," by Kao. Collection of the Tokyo National Museum

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Brandishing the Blade: The Place of the Sword in Medieval Japanese Culture

By Ryan Curry

Introduction

While the *katana*, or long sword, is often considered the iconic weapon of the samurai, its history has been heavily romanticized. This project asks: was the *katana* indeed the primary weapon of Japanese warriors? By assessing the representations of warfare in the visual medium of painting, it becomes clear that the *katana* was more of a sidearm than the primary implement of war, and that its importance developed not on the battlefield, but through the growing cultural symbolism of the warrior class.

During times of war, soldiers primarily relied on the bow (*yumi*) and halberd (*naginata*) rather than the *katana* or *tachi* (precursor of the *katana* long sword), with the bow being of greatest importance in actual combat.[1] As the ensuing depictions of battle demonstrate, soldiers in active combat situations in medieval Japan were required to make use of the weapons that conferred the greatest strategic advantage, typically in their range of utility. In this rubric, the long sword was but one part of a varied "system of weapons."[2] This is very much evident in the paintings presented below, which seldom contain scenes in which samurai actively make use of *katana*; the only paintings that readily emphasize swords being used in combat are the screen painting depicting the Battle of Sekigahara (1600) and the romanticized depiction of Miyamoto Musashi fighting off a pack of wolves. In both instances, the sword is presented as a tool for

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[1] The bow was dominant over swordsmanship throughout much of history until the Muromachi Period. See Cameron G. Hurst, *Armed Martial Arts of Japan: Swordsmanship and Archery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p.34.

[2] The "system of weapons," *sōgō bujutsu,* was characterized by a variety of weapons and tactics rather than a limited emphasis on swordsmanship; Hurst, *Armed Martial Arts*, p.31.

intimate, proximal conflict, and in the case of the latter, the sword was also heavily romanticized as part of the life story of Miyamoto, a legendary sword fighter.

It is evident then that the status of the sword changed dramatically over time, becoming prone to romanticization and acquiring a profound symbolism, especially during the early modern or Tokugawa period (1603-1868). This marked cultural shift is evident in the changing lifestyle of the samurai who, especially in times of peace like the Tokugawa era, sought a greater sense of purpose in a time free of widespread warfare and created a culture that reinforced the virtue of the warrior.[3] In peacetime, samurai attained government positions and were responsible for aspects of statesmanship, and many turned their attention toward intellectual pursuits and spiritual growth.[4] During these times, it is evident that the sword grew in symbolic importance much as the status of the samurai caste became increasingly symbolic and subsequently revered and romanticized. This shift in the status of the sword from an implement of war to an expression of identity was critically important, and marked a move from a combat orientation toward an artistic one, a shift that was criticized by eminent early Tokugawa-period warriors such as Miyamoto Musashi.[5] It is clear that the place of the sword had passed from the sphere of the 'martial' to that of the 'artist' in the Tokugawa Period and that its place as a prominent cultural symbol superseded its history as a secondary weapon. The purpose of

[3] Samurai had to "explain how it was that they performed no productive labor." Their response was to "concentrate on virtue and to embody it in society," upholding a "stern ethic" towards their path. Quotes from Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.103.

[4] It was during the Tokugawa period that *bushido*, or the way of the warrior, fully emerged as a moral code alongside the emergence of the "warrior-administrator" who utilized *bushidō* as a mechanism for preserving the culture of the honorable warrior in a pacified culture of statesmanship. See Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, p.103-110.

[5] In *The Book of Five Rings,* Musashi critiqued the emerging perspective on swordsmanship stating that "there are no warriors who clearly understand the Way of the Martial Arts in the world today." Miyamoto Musashi, *The Book of Five Rings*, trans. William Scott Wilson (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2002), p. 5.

this archive is to document this progressive romanticization of the sword in Japanese culture through its artistic depictions and to show that, while the sword has retained prominent symbolic importance throughout history, it was not until the Tokugawa Period that the sword emerged as the 'ultimate' weapon, the so-called 'Soul of the Samurai'.

Figure 1. Portrait of Minamoto no Yoritomo by Fujiwara no Takanobu (c. 1179)

This painting captures the essence of Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147-1199), Japan's first shogun: a stoic, subdued appearance, shrouded in darkness, with an unyielding and fixed gaze. With a *tachi* fastened to his side, Yoritomo gazes forward, anticipating his opponents' next move. The darkness of his robe veils his figure in much the same way his devious plots were concealed from his enemies; the darkness hides his

form entirely, and he appears as a great robe with a face. His body hidden, he epitomizes the competent warrior, unreadable and poised to strike out at any moment from his rest. While the sword rests at his side, it remains sheathed, a testament to the mind ready to strike. The sword here symbolizes the mentality of the warrior- hidden until it strikes out brilliantly and decisively. The place of the sword here is at the warrior's side, rather than in the warrior's hand, and symbolizes the power of the warrior that may be awakened when provoked.

Figure 2: Excerpt from *Heiji monogatari emaki* (Picture Scroll of the *Tale of Heiji*, c. 13th Century)

This excerpt from the *Heiji monogatari emaki* depicts a raid upon the Sanjō Palace in the imperial capital of Kyoto. Aside from the brilliant depiction of flame, it is worth considering how the *naginata*—not the sword—comes to dominate the depiction of battle. There is only one individual with a *tachi* raised, and he stands in close proximity to his attackers. Similarly, there is only one individual with a *wakizashi* (dagger) drawn as he severs the head of a fallen opponent. The use of swords appears reserved for cases where the bow and arrow and *naginata* are too slow in speed based on the opponent's distance from the wielder. It cannot necessarily be said that the sword was preferred in close quarters, as the impending murder in the lower right corner consists of one man preparing to run another through with a *naginata*: not using the sword for a final

encounter of this type refutes the notion that a “cult of the sword” was evident in battle at this time, suggesting that such a mentality may have arisen later.

Figure 3: Excerpt from *Obusuma Saburō ekotoba* (Illustrated words of Obusuma Saburō, c. 1295)

In this painting, it is readily apparent that the bow and arrow ruled the battlefield. While several warriors make use of the *naginata* as well as the *tachi*, the use of either of these weapons is dwarfed by the numerous depictions of use of the bow. It is interesting to note the crazed appearance of the individual in the top right corner as he charges forward, sword raised, racing with abandon. Surely such an individual has mustered the courage required to succeed in this extreme maneuver. The same frenzied expression is not repeated in the case of the two samurai dueling in the lower left corner: their faces possess the stern resolve of the romanticized samurai. It seems that in this painting, the sword is the more personal, intimately fatal, weapon of the combatants displayed here. It is used is in the context of a clash of wills between two warriors brandishing their blades in a personal duel. In this instance—just one battle among many conducted with weapons

other than swords—that the spirit of the warrior later emphasized in the Tokugawa period may be glimpsed.

Figure 4: Excerpt from the "Hikone-jō bon Sekigahara kassen byōbu" (Screen Painting of the Battle of Sekigahara, Hikone Castle version, c. 1620)

In this detail from a painting of the Battle of Sekigahara by renowned artist Kanō Sadanobu, the sword is finally presented in such a way that implies significant battlefield application. In contrast to the previous paintings, this depiction of Sekigahara includes numerous individuals with drawn blades, bracing themselves for combat. However, many of the swords visible belong to the deceased. This indicates that the sword, while immortalized in subsequent generations, at the time of this painting in the early seventeenth century, was not yet as legendary a weapon as many later assumed. Those who wielded swords seem to have fallen victim to the superior range of the *yari* (spear) or *naginata*, as well as the bow and arrow. Although the presence of the sword is more

notable here than in previous paintings, the sword is still relegated to the role of an accessory to the warrior rather than the warrior's most critical weapon.

Figure 5: *Miyamoto Musashi Sōshū Hakone no sanchū ni ōkami o ooku taiji shite shinmen no kijutsu arawashi hajimete Sekiguchi ni mamiyu* (Miyamoto Musashi Subdues a Pack of Wolves in the Mountains of Hakone in Sagami Province, Displaying His Marvelous God-given Ability, and Meets Sekiguchi for the First Time, c. 1861)

This nineteenth-century woodblock print by Utagawa Kuniyoshi captures just how romanticized the sword wielding samurai had become by the end of the Edo Period. Here, the legendary warrior Miyamoto Musashi fights off a pack of wolves with his twin swords, displaying his "godly" talent. While Musashi is certainly a notable historical figure for a multitude of reasons, this depiction of him exhibits the essence of the "cult of the sword" which developed in the Edo Period as samurai turned to a sort of philosophical inquiry about to their place in life during peaceful times. Here, the question

is answered in romanticized form, in Musashi’s unparalleled capacity to defend himself and strike down the beasts that surround him on all sides. Surely the scene is a euphemism for the threat of violence by “wolves” lurking under the cover of peace in Edo Japan. Musashi’s swords appear as if illuminated by a divine force, standing out in stark contrast to the background, accentuating the extent to which they embody his steely resolve. Indeed, this print is such a significant deviation from all prior depictions of the sword discussed thus far that it becomes at once apparent just how heavily romanticized the utility of the sword became in later years. Before, the sword was simply a sidearm to be used when other weapons failed, but here it is the vehicle by which the soul may find deliverance. It is a remarkable perceptual shift indeed.

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