

1.

Q: In discussing the incredibly high cost of paper (more than gold) for Japanese ink painters, you mentioned a friend who wrote about the economics of paper and the paper market during the Edo Period. Would it be possible to get from him/her a single line that we might use for docents to show visitors this idea?

A: In the major urban center of Osaka, for example, an extant trade report dated 1736 ranks paper as the commodity with the third highest value, right behind rice and lumber. It was such an expensive product that there were specialized used-paper collectors active throughout the cities. The used paper was collected and sold to specialized paper makers who produced new (expensive) paper from the recycled bits. This type of paper is seen quite frequently used for the covers of printed books and such.

Suggestions for Further Reading:

Kazuko Hioki. "Investigation of Historical Japanese Paper: An Experiment to Recreate Recycled Paper from 18th-19th Century Japan." *The Book and Paper Group Annual* 33 (2014): 44-53.

Timothy Barrett and Winifred Lutz. *Japanese Papermaking: Traditions, Tools and Techniques*. New York: Weatherhill, 1983.

2-3.

Q2: What is the name of the beautiful island where Kannon is said to have lived (on the east coast of China)? You mentioned it in connection with the White-robed Kannon, 15th century.

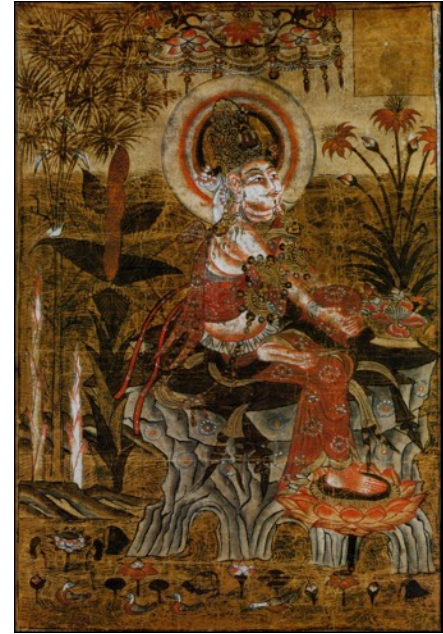
Q3: You also briefly mentioned, but I didn't catch, the iconographic feature in connection with this particular Kannon. Perhaps it was the little boy seeking wisdom that you said was typically pictured with him. By the way, what was the name of the boy? I loved your suggestion that we, as viewers, take the place of the absent boy. This reminds me of the space left in Baroque paintings for the viewer/devotee!

A: It is called Putuoshan (Mount Putuo), an island, and now a popular tourist destination, off the coast of China's Zhejiang province, not far from the important port city of Ningbo. By the 13th century, when Japanese Zen priests and painters were frequently traveling to China, it was already a popular pilgrimage site (with many temples, sacred sites, and such) for worship of Kannon (in Chinese, called "Guanyin"). It was well known in Japan more generally, since Ningbo was the major point of entry into China, so ships passed Putuoshan on their way to the Song Dynasty capital of Hangzhou, accessible from Ningbo by river. There are stories recorded in diaries of travelers to China that describe being rescued from rough seas by Kannon. Putuoshan is one of several this-world, sacred geographies (see also #3 below).

There are several important iconographic features of White-robed Kannon (one of many many manifestations of this bodhisattva), most obvious being the white robes themselves. Other less consistent elements of the iconography are the crown, long hair that falls over his shoulders in three or four tresses, his being seated on or near a mossy boulder beneath overhanging trees, and often a vase nearby containing a branch of willow. This is also the only version of Kannon that "lounges," as I am fond of saying. He does so because he is at home in his paradise. This paradise, known in Sanskrit as Potolaka (Fudaraku in Japanese) is first described in a Buddhist text known as the "Gandavyuha," a section of the longer Avatamsaka Sutra (the so-called "Flower Garland Sutra"). A story therein tells of a young, wealthy, wise-beyond-his-years boy named Sudhana (Zenzai Dōji in Japanese), that sets out on a journey in

pursuit of enlightenment after hearing a lecture by and taking the advice of the bodhisattva Manjusri (“Monju” in Japanese, the figure in the Kichizan Mincho painting in the Buddhist gallery and elsewhere). Sudhana visits and consults with fifty-three teachers on his journey. Sure enough, one of them is none other than Kannon, I believe the twenty-seventh or so of these teachers.

The sutra describes Sudhana's approach to Kannon, whom he finds seated on a diamond-like boulder in a watery grove. This is the very first description of Potolaka, Kannon's paradise, and the textual source for all subsequent pictorial depictions. The earliest pictures of Kannon "lounging" in paradise are from Central Asia/far western China (e.g., Dunhuang), heavily pigmented paintings that show Kannon seated on a rock in a lotus pond surrounded by many varieties of tropical plants--no doubt



Guanyin in Potolaka. China, Tang dynasty. Musée Guimet, Paris



White-robed Kannon.
Anonymous painter,
inscribed by Yakuō Tokken.
Japan, 14th c. Nara Nat'l
Museum

an early imagining of subtropical islands off India's coast where Kannon's paradise was believed to be in this world, one of the sacred geographies mentioned above (Figure). This iconography is transformed in 11th-13th century

China--Kannon becomes Sinicized, and his paradise is reimagined to be not in India, but in moist, misty coastal southeast China--Putuoshan. It is this kind of environment that is painted in the Burke example--mossy rocks, overhanging trees and vines, misty haze. Images of a white-robed Kannon lounging in this type of paradise, almost always in monochrome ink, were first painted by Chinese Zen priests, and these images were brought to Japan when an updated version of Zen was reintroduced to Japan in the 13th century. Japanese Zen painters began creating their own versions relatively early on, as evidenced by the Burke painting (Figure XX for an earlier Japanese example of Kannon in Potolaka with Zenzai Dōji at lower left). Many of these images of Kannon in paradise feature a small depiction of the boy Sudhana with his hands in worship, somewhere near the bottom of the composition. Although he is missing from this painting,

insofar as all of these paintings of Kannon allow us to "visit" the bodhisattva in paradise, to reenact this leg of Sudhana's journey. After all, that is the point of it all--Kannon is there, as he was for Sudhana, to help us all on our individual journeys toward enlightenment.

Fun side note #1: I once gave a talk about a triptych of Japanese ink paintings, a work with which I remain obsessed (Figure), that features a white-robed Kannon in the center, flanked by Chinese poets (Tao Yuanming and Li Bai), both of whom appear to have "caught sight" of Kannon, and who direct their lines of sight toward the central deity, in dialogue with Kannon. It is all much more complicated than this, as it involves several layers of poetic associations as well, but I described it then as being somewhat akin to the "sacra conversazione" of Renaissance Italy, a dialogue

in which we are invited to participate, to gain access to Kannon through historical or legendary figures, saints and sages like Chinese poets or Sudhana.



White-robed Kannon, Tao Yuanming, and Li Bai. Anonymous painter of the Kenchōji atelier. Mid-15th c. Kenchōji, Kamakura

Fun side note #2: Within Japanese Zen, it was Chinese and not Japanese geography that was held to be most sacred, so Kannon's worldly paradise remained China's Putuoshan. However, other sects of Buddhism, equally devoted to Kannon, imagined Kannon's paradise to be a site in Japan, specifically Nachi Waterfall in Wakayama Prefecture. The waterfall itself is imagined to be a manifestation of Kannon (actually each of three segments of the waterfall is a distinct manifestation). This is why there are, for example, "Mandalas of the Nachi Waterfall". Nachi became a wildly popular pilgrimage destination and remains so today.



Pilgrimage Mandala of Nachi Waterfall. 16th century. Kumano Nachi Shrine, Wakayama Japan.

Further Reading:

Chun-fang Yu. *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

D. Max Moerman. *Localizing Paradise: Kumano Pilgrimage and the Religious Landscape of Premodern Japan.*

Aaron Rio. "Ink Painting in Medieval Kamakura." Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2015. Especially Chapter 5, "Kannon and the Poets"

Jan Fontein. *The Pilgrimage of Sughana: A Study of Gandavyuha Illustrations in China, Japan, and Java*. The Hague: Mouton, 1967.

4.

Q: In discussing the lacquered *Accessories Box*, I thought I heard you say that a woman's garment might be pear skin ground. Is that correct?

A: No. "Pear skin ground" (*nashiji* or *e-nashiji*) refers only to the lacquer technique whereby dusts made of ground metallic foils are sprinkled on the surface of the object while the lacquer is still wet to create a speckled ground reminiscent of the skin of a pear.

5.

Q: What was/is it about the "Tale of Genji" that has appealed to people for a millennium?

A: I imagine that it appealed to readers for the same reason we are drawn to soap operas and tv dramas. It provides a close look, an insider's view, at the social drama of the inner court. Later, it must have been the Tale's ability to bring to life the classical Heian period--when people were more beautiful, poetry was better, culture was at its peak. Maybe the Heian Period was to Muromachi and Edo period Japan what classical Greece and Rome were to Renaissance Europe? In the end though, it is just a really, really compelling story, full of scandal and romance, sex, love, intrigue. I would encourage anyone to pick up one of the two more recent English translations--by Seidensticker or Tyler--and just begin reading. It takes some time to get your bearings (and will take forever to finish), but once you do, I promise you'll be completely sucked into the social drama that plays out (way better than *Downton Abbey*, which, incidentally, I happen to love...), and you'll understand precisely why it has been so beloved for a millennium. So beloved, in fact, that its author, the Lady Murasaki Shikibu, was believed to be a manifestation of Kannon! Just to bring this conversation full circle...

Suggestions for Further Reading:

Haruo Shirane. *Envisioning the Tale of Genji: Media, Gender, and Cultural Production*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

Haruo Shirane. *The Bridge of Dreams: A Poetics of the Tale of Genji*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987.

Murasaki Shikibu. *The Tale of Genji*. Translated and with an Introduction by Eward Seidensticker. New York: Knopf, 1976.

Murasaki Shikibu. *The Tale of Genji*. Translated by Royall Tyler. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.

6.

Q: You said it was a misnomer to call the family crest on the Samurai armor hollyhocks. What would be a better descriptor – maybe just the family crest? Or is it modeled on something else?

A: I believe this came up when we were in front of the Kenzan screens and someone asked if the hollyhock motif might have anything to do with the "hollyhock crest" on the samurai armor, and I was very adamant that this was wrong, then backed off a bit when I realized that it had been described as a "hollyhock" crest by others at Mia.

Let me reiterate, with certainty here, that the ubiquitous crest of the Tokugawa that appears on the suit of armor is not a "hollyhock," although it is often described as such. The problem is in translation. The specific crest in Japanese is called the



Alcea Rosea / Tachioi / Hollyhocks



Asarum caelestense / Aoi / Wild Ginger

"mitsuba aoi," literally "triple leaf aoi," the *aoi* being a plant that is commonly, but erroneously translated into English as "hollyhock." The correct English term for the *aoi* is "wild ginger," *asarum caelestense*. The "hollyhocks" (*tachioi*, literally "erect *aoi*" in Japanese) are related (in the same family of mallows) but are a distinct plant. Perhaps "Triple Aoi crest," as some scholars call it, or "Triple Wild Ginger crest" will do.

Although this all seems trivial, the fact that calling both plants simply "hollyhock" may lead someone to incorrectly assume a relationship between Kenzan's screens and the Tokugawa is precisely why a distinction should be drawn.



Mitsuba aoi (Triple Wild Ginger) Crest of the Tokugawa clan

7.

Q: We talked a good deal about whether Ogata Kenzan painted directly on gold foil in *Plum Trees and Hollyhock*. I think you had finally decided that his technique was mixed: That some of it was painted directly on gold, despite the apparent waste. But that other portions were painted and the gold was later applied around the painting. Is that correct?

A: This is correct. I've come back to this many times since. The right screen is mostly painted directly on the gold leaf. The left screen is painted on paper with gold leaf around the areas of pigment, but some of the darker hollyhock leaves seem to be painted with ink and malachite directly on the gold. I want to hold off saying much more on this--for example, is there any consistency as to when he does or does not paint directly on gold?--until I can examine this more closely, not behind plexi.

8.

Q: What is it about the *Oval plate with grapevines, trellis, and geometric design* that makes it great? I think you said that the Met really wanted this plate. How does it contribute to Mia's collection?

A: This plate is a fine early example of a style of ceramics known as "Nezumi Shino," ("nezumi" meaning "mouse" for the characteristic gray-colored glaze), a subset of so-called "Shino ware" ceramics.

Shino ware, more generally, is one of the four main types of pottery produced in the area of Mino (refer to my discussion/slides for Burke Docent lecture) during Japan's Momoyama period (1573-1615). Shino pottery features designs drawn in black iron pigment over which a feldspar glaze is applied (Figure for example). Shino wares were the first pottery in Japan to feature an underglaze design made with a brush.

Nezumi Shino is one of the five subsets of Shino ware pottery and is made by applying an iron-rich gray slip to the white body, then carving a design, revealing the white body underneath, and then covering the entire surface with a transparent glaze. Although the design is carved, it looks as if it to had been drawn by hand.

The painterly quality of the design of grapevines and a trellis on our plate, in particular, makes this an exceptional early example of this pottery type, which was highly prized among military elites at the turn of the 16th century. It has been called by Japanese connoisseurs, "one of the two finest examples of Nezumi Shino ware," the other being in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



Teabowl with Bridge and House.
Mino ware, Shino type. Late 16th c.
Mary Griggs Burke Collection. The
Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Suggestions for Further Reading:

Miyeko Murase. *Turning Point: Oribe and the Arts of Sixteenth-century Japan*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2003.

Louise Allison Cort. *Seto and Mino Ceramics*. Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art and University of Hawaii Press, 1992.

9.

Q: In the Nanga gallery, you spoke about a painter for whom there are only 10 known works in the world by him and that Mia has two. Who is the artist? And which are his painting in the Burke Collection?

A: I did happen to mention this in the Nanga gallery, but the painter I was discussing was not a Nanga painter, but rather a medieval painter called Geiai. Sorry for the confusion. One of the two paintings by Geiai that we own is his "Sparrows and Millet," which is up just across from the audience hall. The other is another bird-and-flower painting from the Clark Collection, though I don't believe it's been exhibited here yet (unless it was in Audacious Eye). The reason I mentioned this in the Nanga gallery is that the Geiai "Sparrows" is one of two paintings from the Burke gift of which there are "twins," nearly identical versions by the same artist, at the Met, the other "twin" being the Yosa Buson painting of birds in a peach tree in the Nanga gallery. It must have been in front of that painting that I mentioned Geiai and the Met twins. Both of the Met counterparts (which can be searched and viewed on their excellent Collection website), came from the collection of Harry Packard, an American collecting Japanese art primarily in the 50s and 60s, just as Mary Burke was getting her start. The Packard collection went to the Met in the 1975 (part gift, part purchase; all of the Packard paintings have accession numbers beginning 1975.268.***), and I have absolutely no doubt that Mary B., her curators, and consultants, knew very well that they were buying paintings of which the Met already owned suspiciously similar examples. Surely they believed the paintings she bought were "right" (not to say that means the Met's are "wrong" necessarily). It also is no coincidence that Mia received these two paintings. I'm preparing a blog post about this very topic for Mia's wonderful "Mia Stories" blog, so more on Geiai, Buson, and other Mia/Met "twins," in the near future.