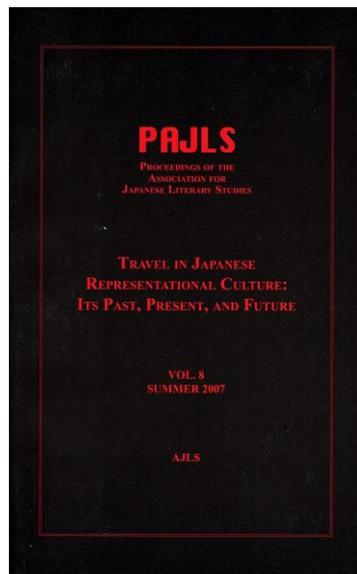


“A Journey’s Tale and a Tale’s Journey”

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*Proceedings of the Association for Japanese
Literary Studies* 8 (2007): 2–24.



PAJLS 8:
*Travel in Japanese Representational Culture: Its Past,
Present, and Future.*
Ed. Eiji Sekine.

**A JOURNEY'S TALE
AND
A TALE'S JOURNEY**

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I would like to thank Professors Miki and Mizuta of Josai International University for inviting me to speak at this annual meeting of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies this afternoon. When I accepted the invitation a few months ago I was told that the symposium's theme has something to do with "travel" in literature. After trying to come up with an appropriate subject or a set of subjects I might address, I was struck by how rich the fields of literature, as well as art, are with works that deal with travel. In art, as in literature, travel is at once a subject (allegorical or symbolic) *and* a rhetorical device, for example, *Pilgrimage of Sudhana* is both the story of the pilgrimage of a boy Sudhana (Zenzai Doji), who in earnest sets out on a southward journey in search of "good teachers" and enlightenment, eventually attaining them as he has an audience with Bodhisattva Samantabhadra (Fugen Bosatsu) and Buddha Vairocana. From the moment he starts his long pilgrimage until he meets his ultimate destination in Buddha Vairocana, what makes his journey fascinating is not a straightforward and steady march in search of the true teacher, but a series of digressions—fifty-three in all, not unlike the stops along the Tokaido highway. And at each stop he finds different kinds of teachers. The pictorial counterparts, known in the Song and late Heian periods in East Asia, fully explore the narrative scenes of fifty-three (actually a total of fifty-five) encounters with "Good Knowledge" or with masters, fully cultivating the mysteries of the boy pilgrim's spiritual quest through the visible, and often magical, manifestations of the super-mundane expressed through figurative forms.

In literature, as in art, journeys may take the form of a life-long narrative as told in the biography of an eminent itinerant priest such as Ippen Chishin (1229–1289). His life story of wandering all over Japan is pictured in the *Ippen shonin eden*, best known in the Kankikoji version in twelve scrolls, painted by a certain artist En'i, ten years after the priest's death. An impressive hagiography in *emakimono* form, the *eden* is a representation, both in text and image, of the life of the founder of one of the most significant schools of Buddhism of the Kamakura period.



Section depicting Kumano Shrine and Nachi Waterfall, Scroll 3 of Ippen Shonin Eden, by En'i, dated 1299; color on silk; Kankikoji collection, Kyoto.

It is also an allegory about salvation through retrieving the image of an earlier holy man Kuya shonin (10th century) on the one hand, and ultimately the earth-shaking event of the death of Buddha on the other as seen in the concluding scroll where Ippen's death is mourned by scores of his followers. Like Sudhana's journey, Ippen's journey consists of episodes he experienced moving from place to place as he gained his followers, like the Buddha Shakamuni on his travel acquiring hundreds of followers. But Ippen's journey throughout the archipelago is without careful plans: towns and villages he stops by are digressions, and it is what happens as digressions that constitute the interesting narrative episodes in the scrolls. The text chronicles Ippen's party as they hurry from place to place. The painting makes certain that the sense of reality is captured in the choice of images, most impressive of which are those of real landscapes that help enormously to imbue the scenes with credibility and enhance verisimilitude. The text, by designating hours, days, and months, provides the viewing experience with the sense of temporal reality of the narrative; the images of sites, by identifying the actual sites, offer specific places like Shitenwoji or Itsukushima jinja as referents. Temporal progression and spatial movement, both in images and text, lay down narrative coordinates, establishing a format for a tale to be told.



Detail of the above
depicting Nachi Waterfall



Photograph of Nachi Waterfall

Like the narratives of Sudhana's pilgrimage and Ippen's itinerant life, "journey" is a frequently used metaphor for describing one's own life. One's autobiography may be written following the kind of narrative structure a travelogue might offer, for one's life story has a beginning and an end, and whatever comes in-between consists of the continuous relocation of self (including unplanned digressions) in spatial and temporal terms. This afternoon I would like, with your permission, to talk about my journey to America fifty-three years ago as a tale that involves both my personal life in the new country and some significant events that connect me to Japanese art and how that ultimately drove me to art and the study of art. The first half of the title, "A Journey's Tale," is, therefore, how art history, especially of Japanese art, has become the subject of my personal and academic interest. The second part, "A Tale's Journey," is concerned with how, in my teaching experience, a specific genre of art, in this case the study of Japanese narrative hand scrolls of the Heian and Kamakura periods, are conducted in the classroom and, to offer you concrete examples of how American students studying *emakimono* at Princeton are understanding it through their analytical and

interpretive exercises. The main topic in that part of my talk will focus on the study of *The Shigisan engi* scrolls, a three-scroll set of the fabulous tales of the miraculous origins of the founding of the temple Chogosonshiji in Nara. With this lengthy preamble, let me now begin the first part of my talk, “A Journey’s Tale.”

INITIAL JOURNEY

In 1953, not long after the Peace Treaty between the United States and Japan was signed in San Francisco, I went to the United States for the first time. I was then seventeen years old, interrupting my high school life in the suburbs of Tokyo, and went to a private, boys boarding school in Concord, New Hampshire. I was the third Japanese student from the Japanese high school to attend this boarding school on what then was still an informal program that had its beginnings in 1949. (Today the program, now institutionalized for sometime, is in its fifty-eighth year.) Trans-Pacific student travel in the early 1950s was, as a rule, by boat, which from pier to pier took thirteen to fourteen days (i.e. from Yokohama to San Francisco); from there another four to five days to the east coast by train. The image of America then loomed large: the first impression of the material wealth of America remains indelible in my mind.

Japan in the early ‘50s was still experiencing a slow recovery from the debacle of World War II and another war was going on in Korea. It was about this time that the first magnetic tape-recorders were made and marketed by a tiny telecommunications firm of Tokyo Tsushin Kogyo, which was started by two former naval engineers, Ibuka Masaru and his junior partner, Morita Akio, with scarcely more than \$500 in capital. Pachinko games and Hollywood movies were two of the most visible entertainments for the Japanese along with professional baseball games. The average monthly family income for a university professor then was \$30—the same amount that a Japanese traveling abroad was allowed to take out of the country (which then was a soft currency country).

Those of us in our late teens in Japan were at that time given a high school curriculum consisting of both the pre-war and post-war materials quite symptomatic of the time. The new social studies course was taught along with Japanese history from the revised textbook; first year calculus was introduced in our junior year; Lamb’s Shakespeare and excerpts from *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot were included in our English reading. The Japanese translation of Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* was assigned in our Japanese class (*kokugo*). Kanbun class was given at least once a week. We would be asked to read and translate passages from

Rongo, just as passages were handled in our English class: the teacher would say, "So-and-so, stand up. Read. Translate. Sit down!" An elective second foreign language could be chosen between German and French. I took German. Calligraphy (*shodo*) was, in my school, still required and so was Gardening class.

After school ended for the day, popular American songs reached us over the waves of the Armed Service Radio network. The weekly *Hit Parade* brought American popular songs to our household. Here are some that I still remember: "*Mocking Bird Hill*," "*Mr. and Mississippi*," "*Smoke Gets in Your Eyes*," "*Tennessee Waltz*," and "*How High the Moon*," are some that I still remember and listen to now on disc. I do not know today's popular singers, but I can tell you popular singers mean to me: Patty Page, Mary Ford and Doris Day. We whistled these tunes. We found their verses useful in increasing our English vocabulary. These songs, like the Hollywood movies, lured us into further fantasizing about America; that it was a far away continent lying on the other side of the great ocean, that it was a county populated by people of great optimism, moodiness, great energy, and generosity. These perceptions were enhanced by the evidence of the material affluence and by the self-assured presence of the U.S. armed forces personnel in Japan. The image of America then contrasted sharply with the grim picture of a Japan that was slowly coming out of the debris of defeat in the Pacific war. Whatever America presented to us became a symbol of the vast geographical chasm that separated the two cultures and their peoples.

The makers of the first Japanese tape-recorders and transistor radios soon renamed their firm "Sony." The "Sony" brand began to spread in the U.S. throughout the 50s and soon became as familiar to Americans as the word "sputnik," television's "Mr. Peeper," "Pogo," and "Zen." These were the years of the momentous beginnings of the meeting of these two cultures—Japan and America—in more ways than one. The traffic over the Pacific became frequent and fast: the jet age had arrived. Whatever forces were behind this phenomenon—political, economic or cultural—the mutual attraction drew the two cultures closer than ever before and the communications between them increased. Not only did the means of transportation quicken the flow of people, but the flow of information as well. But let us not forget that the communications so effectively established owe as much to science and technology as to the people's will to know and their desire to understand.

In America I discovered the cultural and intellectual climate to be far more complex than a seventeen-year-old youth from Japan could have ever imagined. The 50s secondary school and college curriculum in the

U.S. may be said to be the “melting pot” of traditional knowledge and values and their new alternatives. The mainstream values, hitherto taken for granted, were being tested by the increasingly complex reality of the world against which America had to define itself. By and large, however, we may say that the dominant ideas were of Anglo-American origin. The writings of both Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell were two that I still remember from my freshman year reading list. “*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*” and “*The Wasteland*” by T.S. Eliot, written long before the 50s as a prophetic voice of the pessimism of life, still haunt me. Toynbee’s ten-volume *A Study of History* was just published in 1954. The theologian Paul Tillich had just joined Harvard’s faculty in 1957. *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* by Tillich prompted lively discourse on the plight of religion in the dominantly secular world of the mid-twentieth century, and especially on the role of Christianity in contemporary society, where a religion, organized or not, was becoming increasingly ecumenical.

These randomly recalled thinkers and the modes of thinking I read in the books of the 50s were by no means a fixed canon for college students of that generation. There were other foods for thoughts: Camus, Sartre, Heidegger, and Kierkegaard, widely read in Japan among the university students, were also savored by the American counterparts. They were important intellectual nutrients for us in our formative years. If the alienation of an individual from society was a pervasive topic of discussion in our classrooms, there were other things to read: in social criticism and satirical literature, George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty Four* and *Animal Farm*; in the genre of modern fable there was Saint-Exupéry’s *The Little Prince*, which, by the 1960s had reportedly sold over one million copies in several languages and that Little Prince was said to have made more friends than had any other little book.

As a young student from Japan I took in and was absorbed into the basically Anglo-American (or Euro-American) culture embodied in the required secondary school and college curriculum. You can only imagine the degree to which my boarding school education was “classical” in its *waspishness*. Note the reading list in the English class at the boarding school (English translation of) *Antigone*, Melville’s *Moby Dick*; J.P. Marquand’s *The Late George Apley*; Henry James’ short stories. In American history class, the two volume set, thicker than the *Bible*, *The Growth of the American Republic*, by Morrison and Commager. Preparing for the American history class took me hours, having to read at least one-hundred pages a week of solid material from the lead-heavy textbooks. I went to class with fear and trembling; the class consisted of

only seven or eight students, the school having been bound to its tradition, since its founding, of round-table discussion. Whenever I was picked to answer dead silence would prevail; I was definitely the focus of class attention.

Before I go on any further with accounts of my early journey in the New World in the 1950s, let me say something about the school and my preparation to attend it. The school was an Anglican school, so morning attendance at the chapel was expected. Because my family was Protestant Christian and I was accustomed to attending church in Tokyo, I saw no basic conflict in seeing myself partake of the daily attendance at chapel, and twice on Sundays, including evensong, another required attendance, at 5 o'clock pm after you're finished having tea with the school masters. In the chapel, as in classrooms and dining hall, jacket and tie were required.

In another respect the school distinguished itself from other public and private schools. In every grade, church history was a required course, which was a straight history course on significant moments and personalities of Christendom, including the history of the Reformation, though without the invasive indoctrination of catechism. The school chapel, built in the 1880s in the English gothic style, was an awesome edifice, its authentic setting of the perpendicular ribs coursing the walls and ceiling; the polychrome translucency of the stained glass windows; the deep sounds of the organ music enveloping and vibrating throughout the interiors with the sounds that seemed to emanate from the very bowels of the building—these were something totally new and sublime to a teenager from Tokyo who had seen, in his own homeland, smaller and fragmented versions not entirely aged or weathered by time. Profoundly affected by the organ music in the chapel that began every morning, the ceremonial procession of the boys as they filed in along the nave, and the hymns sung by the entire school, these were an irreplaceable New World experience for me that I saw no parallel for in Japan—the country and a culture that I had just left behind. No bewilderment, haplessness or resentment on my part, just that I found everything to be authentic and profoundly agreeable. Thus I took in and was absorbed into the Euro-American culture maintained at a school in New England and embodied in the required secondary school, and later, college curriculum. So massive was the dosage of Euro-American coursework that there would come a time when some antidote would jolt me back to a more resilient state. But that would take at least three or four more years of journey in the New World.

My secondary school education and attendance at college that soon followed happened to be perhaps the most important period of my formative years between adolescence into early adulthood. There were two totally new and deeply absorbing experiences that came my way. One was that I began to spend a great deal of time painting, first as a recreational diversion from the monotony of school work, but which gradually became something of an addiction, as I began to make a great deal of time to be myself. In other circumstances and certainly other students may have found sustained reading for the same reason. And there was an art teacher who would encourage students to paint. On weekends, weather permitting, the art teacher would take two or three students to the rustic New Hampshire fields and hills, to spend a few hours doing “plain air” painting with water-color, capturing images, for example, of New Hampshire landscapes with abandoned barns. My penchant for painting such scenes was likely to have been the result of hearing a lecture by Frank Lloyd Wright in Boston. For he had expressed his total contempt and disdain for the ferroconcrete structures of urban Boston, and stated that the only architecture worthy of note in New England were the farmhouses and barns.

Watercolor, I was to discover later, was a more difficult medium than oil. But the art teacher, who was a well-known watercolorist and printmaker, continued to introduce me to works he thought were great. These included watercolors by Winslow Homer that I was taken to view at the Currier Gallery of Art in Manchester—one of the most beautiful museums I came to know in America—and the work of Dong Kingman, a Chinese American watercolorist who was making quite a splash in the American art scene in the 1950s, most notably in commercial art.

Art was not a part of the accredited curriculum for upperclassmen at my school then, so painting and drawing for me was entirely voluntary. I joined the school’s Art Association, whose members numbered fewer than ten, and became its president in the following year. It was certainly not because I was especially talented in painting, nor was it because my art teacher saw any promise in my watercolors, that I gradually became “artsy.” It was also because I did not have much else to do outside of academic and compulsory sports programs at the school—and also simply because I hung around the art teacher more often than with anyone else—that I soon began to assume the identity of an artist at the school. That I found myself alone most of the time also contributed to my picking up painting. At graduation, I won the only art prize, an oil painting kit, given to a graduating student. In a sense, my role as an artist

was due more to recognition by the school I was departing than through intense self-awareness.

The second significant event that occurred during my initial years in New Hampshire is the chance encounter while in Boston with a select group of Japanese paintings and sculptures (mostly designated by the Japanese government as either National Treasures or Important Cultural Properties). It was late in December of 1953 that that same art teacher took a group of us in the Art Association to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which was hosting a major exhibition of Japanese art, *Art Treasures from Japan*, ninety-plus paintings and sculptures, packed and sent by the Japanese government, to five major cities in America during the early part of 1953, (Washington, D.C., Boston, Chicago, Seattle, and San Francisco). The exhibition, which opened at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., came to Boston, the second city to host it, in the late fall of 1953. Seeing this exhibition was not completely fortuitous, as I look back over the event. Some of the paintings that were shown at this exhibition would be chosen again in 1987, to be the premium works among over 500-plus items sent by the Japanese government to the National Gallery of Art. This would be the largest Japanese art exhibition ever mounted outside Japan and I had the privilege of curating and producing the exhibition catalog for it.

I must get back to the main road of my initial years in America. I entered Harvard in 1955 with a thousand other men, a considerably larger cohort than the boarding school from which I had just graduated. If the boarding school I had happily attended was a comfortable oasis for boys of privileged means, Harvard was a merciless jungle of aggressive minds that demanded competitiveness, excellence, and originality of thought in scholarship. One had to be a high achiever, able to take the rigor and vigor of its academic standards. At age nineteen, starting a new life at Harvard made me acutely aware that I was not ready for a four-year undergraduate career, for I was meeting contemporaries who seemed much older (there were veterans returning to school on the G. I. Bill) and much more sure of themselves than I was; some clearly showed far superior academic preparation to mine. And artistically, Harvard in those days offered very little.

There were a couple of studio courses one could elect at the Fogg Museum, as a part of the Fine Arts (now Art History and Architecture) departmental offerings taught by T. Lux Feininger (son of Lyonel Feininger, the Bauhaus artist) which were designed to meet the needs of Fine Arts majors. Once a week for three hours, these courses followed the trends of much academic art instruction: bits of theory mixed with

demonstration. Beyond these intradepartmental offerings, there were no studio courses or space in which undergrads could paint. The absence of studio courses at Harvard, however, was less problematic than the academic requirements that I was expected to meet but was unable to fulfill.

In the summer of 1956, after my freshman year, I attended the summer session of the Art Students League in Woodstock, New York, where I enrolled in the oil painting class given by a realist teacher by the name of Reilly, whose illusionistic, if formulaic, oil technique met my initial need to learn how to handle oil. While I was not entirely persuaded to follow his method, the technical control I could exercise in using oil paint undoubtedly helped me understand better the European and American old masters I saw in the university art museums. When I returned to Harvard the following fall, I painted with concentration and enthusiasm portraits of my college friends and copies of works by Copley and John Vanderlyn at the Fogg Museum. Being able to control oil painting techniques gave me mental confidence.

In many respects, college life was neither conducive nor encouraging for someone who might want to paint with serious intention. To be sure, the university offered its superb collections of arts of the world in the Fogg Museum and the Busch Reisinger Museum in Cambridge; and Boston had its Museum of Fine Arts. There were more than ample opportunities to visit these collections, and many Fine Arts majors and art lovers did, but there was hardly any opportunity for creative artists to experience a community of art. A saving grace was the presence of the patriarchal painter Ben Shahn, a Charles Elliot Norton Lecturer at Harvard. He gave, in 1956, a series of lectures on the subject of artists in contemporary society in general, and in the academic environment in particular, which were eventually to become chapters of his important book, *The Shape of Content*. Shahn sympathetically answered issues facing young artists in contemporary society such as: How should one go about painting as a profession in the increasingly consumer oriented world? Ben Shahn's almost fatherly stature and presence gave me a sense of connectedness to the outside world; he was, to me, a mentor.

As my sophomore year progressed, my painting activities increased. I transferred to the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston the following fall. My enrollment at the art school, however, was short. The art school curriculum, I determined, was not challenging enough. I was back at Harvard in the spring of 1958, but my attendance this time was also short-lived. Academically hardly inspired, I spent a great deal of my time in my studio.

After some months, I had accumulated enough works to show to a gallery in Cambridge, which was on the upper floor of the then famous Poet's Theater. In early April 1958, the gallery arranged my first one-man show, which included oils, watercolors, and drawings. Quite unexpectedly, the exhibition was financially satisfactory. It was even reviewed by the *Christian Science Monitor*. The review was favorable, but it also said "the young artist had not yet found himself." The description, in retrospect, was quite accurate. Once again restless, fearless, and also ignorant, I asked the college to let me leave once again, this time to go to Europe "to find myself."

GREAT ESCAPE

In the spring of 1958, I was living in Hamburg, attending the city's Landeskunsthochschule as a "visiting student." I can think of two main reasons why my German trip was artistically important to me. First, I was interested in German expressionists, such as Nolde, whose works, including many unpublished ones, I saw at the Nolde Stiftung in Seebull. Second, I saw Jackson Pollock's impressive canvases first hand in Hamburg's Kunsthalle. This constituted my initiation to Abstract Expressionism, and it was an eye-opening experience. Viewing the oil-drip layered surfaces of Pollock's canvases—many of them so huge that they took up an entire wall of the gallery—was like seeing flickering and sparkling lights against dark spaces, a swirling map of constellations. I had seen the work by Pollock and other American painters after viewing, at the same museum, the hard-edged, geometric abstract paintings of the Paris-based Russian painter, Serge Poliakoff (which hardly excited me), and the museum's omnipresent figurative works by Kollwitz, Munch, Corinth, and other expressionists. The Pollock paintings strongly impressed me as something totally fresh and free, yet having a rigorously structured space defined by the tactility of paint. My reaction to Pollock could not have been more surprising, since I had known of him, and of his premature death in an accident, while I was attending the summer school of the Art Students League in Woodstock two years earlier. Jolted by Pollock's works, and realizing that I had just come from the country that produced Pollock, I cut short my German trip, returning to America via Paris, in September of that year. Up until this point, two significant events should be remembered: in 1953, the year that I arrived in America, I had my first encounter with traditional Japanese art; five years later, I was jolted by the then avant garde art of Abstract Expressionism. Oddly, both of these two culturally and geographically specific

expressions came to my attention outside of the countries of their origins. I tended to rediscover things only after I left them behind.

TO MANHATTAN

My next three years were spent in Manhattan, largely pursuing the life of a painter. Living and working in New York, within close proximity of the MOMA, the Whitney Museum and the MET, and not to mention many commercial art galleries along Madison Avenue and 57th Street, provided many opportunities, not only to see the most recent works of the contemporary artists, but also to meet them in person. I met Isamu Noguchi, who, along with his Japanese architect friend, took us to one of the very few Japanese restaurants that were open in Manhattan then for a big sushi dinner. (I must admit that the sushi dinner I had at this restaurant near Columbia University was my first tasting of sushi ever in my life.) I met Jack Tworokov, one of the most lyrical of the abstract expressionist painters, and another artist, short in height but the ultimate maestro of that artistic movement, next to my urine stall in the men's room of the Cedar Bar on the East 9th Street. Visibly tipsy, with a cigarette dangling from his lips, and turning his head towards me, said, "Hi, I am Bill de Kooning." For a tenderfoot painter like me that limited encounter with the artist was good enough to boost my ego.

That I was getting somewhere was the constant feeling that drove me forward, until 1960 when another significant event occurred which eventually changed the direction of my life once again. That event was a major exhibition of Chinese Art from the Palace Museum, Taiwan, that was touring America, which I saw at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It included some of the most impressive Chinese landscapes made on a monumental scale. I had seen nothing like them before. What these paintings told me was that, though I came from East Asia, I hardly knew about my own cultural resources—those of Japan or of its neighbor, China. So this time, I felt that my reentry to Harvard represented, as it were, a chance to catch the last bus. It had been then four years since my initial departure from the college, and in spite of many flights from, and willful escapades beyond, the halls of academia, Harvard reinstated my scholarship and provided me with a spacious and bright studio space in an old factory building, facing the Charles River, then used by the School of Design. There I was able to stretch large canvases and was free to paint whenever I wanted. My elective courses included the Chinese language, the history of Chinese painting, and as many other art history courses as I could take, including Aegean archaeology. The pursuit of serious creative art and the life of an artist—I had tasted a modicum of

each in New York, and I felt these were things that one did not need to parade in public—dwell within a person, or so I told myself then.

In the summer of 1963, I finally completed my bachelor's degree requirements and left America for Japan, the homeland from which I had been absent for exactly ten years. At just that time, the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, a ferroconcrete building designed by Le Corbusier to be used by students in creative art, including painting, went up next to the Fogg Museum of Art. Good timing has never been my life's forte.

FROM MATERIALITY OF ART TO CONCEPTUALIZING ART: ART HISTORY TRAINING

When I returned to Japan in 1963 after a decade of wayward journeying in America, I was back with my family in the suburbs of Tokyo for a brief period of time—two months. My next period of my journey is with art history, and perhaps it was not just through a whim that I wanted to live in Kyoto, rather than in Tokyo, and I did, for the next four and a half years. When I arrived in Kyoto, I was still painting, setting up a studio near the corner of Higashi Oji and Gojo, in a small factory compound owned by the Kyoto ceramicist, Kawai Kanjiro. The studio is in name only. It was more like a bicycle shed than a congenial building with natural north light. Still, that space was my “beach head” for my next five years of life in Kyoto, which I had never seen before then. I did not even go on *shugaku ryoko* as a high school student.

Slightly less than five years of life in Kyoto probably gave me sufficient grounding for me to understand its history, as well as the artistic traditions of this city, which I had studied seriously as an undergraduate during my last year of college life in the U.S. What little knowledge I had about the urban history of Kyoto; architecture and many art treasures to be seen in the temples and museums. I availed myself of them as systematically as possible, and when my *senpai* John Rosenfield, who was living in Kyoto then, went on research expeditions to Nara and Osaka, I would accompany him and his cohorts.

When I think today of what those several years of life in Kyoto meant to me, I can answer that by having lived and experienced, albeit as an outsider, that the knowledge and understanding I have of Japanese art were credibly better grounded than without having had that life. I also felt, mainly from my past experience as a painter who had to be in control of the materiality of art, that the Japanese works of art, whether they are painting or sculpture, textile or ceramics, could be approached with ease. Visiting, for example, a gold-leaf factory in Kanazawa and watching how the artists cut gold leaf, and how they made a booklet, I

felt a certain kinship and empathy with the studio operation and the authentic experience of the artist. I, too, during my earlier days of painting, learned how to cut thin gold leaf for gold lettering. (I demonstrate the same in my class at Princeton by having the art history students handle the extremely fragile sheets of gold). What was important to me, during these four-plus years in Kyoto, was that the art and culture of pre-modern Japan displayed in the vitrines and cases of art museums are not isolated entities but contiguous with the real world of crafts traditions that still survive in the city, and, unlike the slide images of National Treasures and Important Cultural Properties flashing on the screens of some art history classrooms in America, the art works I saw in Kyoto, whether in the museums or at art dealers, were all linked in their common materiality, and at the same time are individuated and particularized by different authorships and qualities. To conceptualize my thoughts and curiosity about the history of art would take another ten years, culminating in the submission of a doctoral thesis at Princeton University on the Japanese fourteenth century Zen pilgrim painter in China, Mokuan Reien.

After completing the doctorate, I spent four years at Berkeley, where I was tenured, and five years as curator of Japanese art at the Smithsonian's Freer Gallery of Art before I returned to Princeton in 1984. I teach both undergraduates and graduates, but one course I especially enjoy teaching is an undergraduate seminar to the advanced western art history majors, who have no background in Japanese art whatsoever—babes in the woods, one might say. I have taught three different seminars, alternating every three years or so, of which the most fruitful one is the seminar named “Ten Great Japanese Narrative Handscrolls,” which introduces some ten major *emakimono* from the Heian and early Kamakura periods. Basically, it is a course in which students are asked to think of the relationship between “the tales told and those pictured.” It is a one semester seminar, meeting once a week for three hours. There are normally about eleven to twelve meetings, each of which has to be prepared, in syllabus form, for students to have ample exposure.

Each week presents a different type of narrative: Buddhist narrative constitutes one—Illustrated *Ingakyo* (the Life of the Buddha/ Illustrated Scroll of the Cause and Effect) of the eighth century opens the seminar. Then follows the category of Hagiographical *emaki* and Tales of the Founding of Buddhist temples. Mythological narrative (*Hiko hoho demi no mikoto*, original 12th century, lost and known only in copies) about the imperial family; Tales based on historical incidents: *Ban Dainagon*

ekotoba and *Kibi Nitto Ekotoba* are two examples. Courtly romance is another: The Tale of Genji is picked up in this session. Finally, we have Battle pieces, or *Gunkimono*; *Hogen Heiji monogatari emaki*. These are available in books and facsimiles, the latter especially useful in showing how *emakimono*, an object for private viewing, can be unrolled and seen by no more than five people at once.

The narrative hand scroll from Japan as an object of advanced art historical study outside Japan has its own brief history. In the 1940s the late Alexander Soper, a distinguished Sinologist, and architectural historian, published some insightful articles on the *Tale of Genji*. A contrasting work, *Shigisan engi* in three scrolls, has also been studied and published in German, by Dr. Gisela Ambruster, her doctoral dissertation, *Das Shigisan engi*, submitted to the University of Hamburg. Dietrich Seckel's *Emakimono: the Art of the Japanese painted hand-scroll*, translated from the original German, was published in 1959, the same year that Seckel's student Gisela Ambruster published her thesis: *Das Shigisan Engi emaki: ein japanisches Rollbild aus dem 12 Jahrhundert*. The substantially critical articles and informative research on these two major scrolls of the twelfth century are 99% in Japanese and over 100 individual published articles on the *Shigisan engi*, are in accessible to my students without the language. How do I conduct the class?

Implicit in the task I set out for the seminar is one of the basic questions about the interface between the text and image that are the two essential ingredients of any narrative hand scroll. Although some have survived without a text or with incomplete text, to view *emakimono* is to experience how a core story becomes embellished both in the scroll text and pictures. So, in our first meeting I give the students an assignment, to come up with THEIR versions of *emakimono* based on a prepared narrative text, to wit: an old tragic love story of a maiden of the Ikuta River, which was well-known as an early *emakimono* whose text alone had survived into the Heian period. When I give the assignment, there is a NB: when designing a narrative painting, the composition does not require maintaining its artistic quality. The assignment is simply asking for a "picture board" type, an organizational guide, to show the narrative in its completeness. Here's the assignment's full text:

Maiden of Ikuta River, an old tale of frustrated love
(liberally paraphrased from the version in Yamato monogatari)

".... A beautiful maiden lived in a village in the land of Tsu
(between Kobe and Osaka). Many suitors came to adore her,

particularly two young men. One was from the same village and the other from a distant land. The young men were amazingly alike, both handsome and talented. Both were anxious to court the maiden and wanted to marry her. The maiden found it difficult to choose, both men being so much alike. The parents of the maiden hit on an idea to let these men compete over the shooting of a water-fowl in the river called Ikuta. On embankment they pitched a tent. There the parents told the young men to shoot the fowl with an arrow. Whoever shot it successfully shall have our daughter. Both men hit the bird; one at the head and the other at the tail.

The maiden was even more frustrated. “How can I decide on my future husband?!” So saying she jumped into the river. The torrential water swept her away from the shore. The two men jumped into the water at once, to save her. One grabbed the girl’s legs and the other her the hands. But alas, all three drowned.

At this site where this event took place is an earthen mound commemorating the incident....” (Translated and paraphrased from *Yamato monogatari*, an 11th century collection of tales)

Create a scroll (develop from right to left), narrating the above tale. Bring your scroll on Thursday, February 16th.

Of eight students, some demurred, protesting that they could not draw. I said artistic quality is not asked. When their finished homework returned to the next seminar, two students brought a role of blank paper towels. Figure representation varied from student to student; some drew costumed figures that are distinctly “Asian.” Others drew village houses that are clearly “exotic.” But the exercise helped them realize that from the simple core narrative story or story line, eight different images evolved. Eleven weeks and ten narrative scrolls later, I did ask them to bring back the homework, revise the images, and this time write out a narrative text from the revised pictures. This assignment, I regret to say, I was never able to see, for my last session with the students had to be cancelled because of the appendectomy that took me to the local hospital. Another side trip I had to take.

Shigisan engi and *Hiko hoho demi no mikoto* both deal with travel, the former in three separate scrolls. The first scroll, with the magic alms bowl's flight from near Kyoto to Shigisan in Yamato, and the travel of the village chief and his entourage to Shigisan. The second scroll is about the flight of a deity dispatched by the holy man Myoren of Shigisan to Seiryoden at the Imperial Palace, Kyoto, in order to cure the emperor. The third scroll is about the journey of a nun, the sister of Myoren, from Shinano to Nara. *Hiko hoho demi no mikoto*, which as I said previously, is known only by its eighteenth century copy, represents several seafaring passages between the Dragon King's Palace, at the bottom of the ocean, and Japan. The passages that are depicted several times in the scroll include the frantic scenes of a regatta. In any case, both of these scrolls require translation of the scroll's written texts. *Shigisan...* has its incomplete texts that can be retrieved by a couple of Heian/Kamakura collectanea of tales that are available in D.E. Mill's translation (*A Collection of Tales from Uji: A study and Translation of Uji Shui Monogatari*). *Hiko hoho demi...*, on the other hand, has no parallel tale told in colloquial style outside the *emaki*, except for a few passages found in *Kojiki* (Donald L. Philippi's translation), at least in three different versions. We relied on the eloquent translation provided by Reggie Jackson, a Fulbright fellow from Princeton, now teaching at Yale.

At the end of the semester the seminar I asked each student to submit two differently focused but complementary papers on a particular scene/episode from any *emaki* they had studied, one addressing discursive problems of what difference there are between the pictorial images and the narrative text "telling" the episode. What is the relationship between the pictures and text? In the second paper they were asked to describe as much as possible, the same scene but addressing stylistic and artistic features of HOW the scene is represented. Good papers leave indelible impressions for their perceptive observations and deft descriptions. What follows are a few samples of the students' responses to the key masterpieces of Japanese *emaki*:

This is the scene of *Hiko hoho demi no mikoto* traveling back to Yamato in a fine smooth wooden boat with what could be either a carved or dragon like head on the bow. The boats gunwales appear to be coated in a lacquer and our hero is attended to by a servant carrying a parasol. In the stern of the boat there is a figure that controls the rudder of the boat, as it is being pulled by two human figures and one figure who can only be interpreted as some sort of sea beast in human form. Behind the

boat lays a pack of soldiers and guards meant to protect *Hiko hoho demi no mikoto* from harm during his travels, they carry bows, staff, swords and spears. One central figure appears to be some sort of royal guard, wearing a dragon like helm and full regalia and robes. These figures ride mythical beasts that seem to be the composite of turtles, bulls, snakes, and crocodiles. Behind them follows a standard bearer and servants carrying baskets of what must be provisions for the royal procession and their trip into the realm of Yamato. All of these characters fall within a setting of swirling and flowing lines depicting the powerful sea that is being crossed from one realm to another. As one can see, the scroll text and the picture offer two very different representations of what transpires in scenes of traveling between realms. A very terse textual statement is elaborated by the artist in a fashion which greatly dramatizes the narrative and its potential characters....¹

The second student chose a scene from the second scroll, “Curing of the emperor’s illness” of the *Shigisan engi* scroll.² The scene, the most picturesque of the representation of a miracle: the flight of the Sword Deity.

...The episode of the sword god is described in the text quite briefly and without much detail:

About three days later around noon, the Mikado, close to dozing off, saw a figure who appeared dazzling before his eyes. He asked him, “what kind of person are you?” The person said, “I am the sword god the holy man spoke of.” Thereupon the Mikado’s spirit began to feel fresh and breezy, hardly suffering from pain and discomfort, and he regained his usual disposition.

In contrast to this short written description, the pictorial

¹ This one was presented by Scott Mardy, a junior who, throughout the spring semester, had to report to his daily workout as one of the Eight (of the Princeton Crew).

² Quoted here with permission from Katherine Homgren, member of the class of 2007.

representation of the episode is lengthy and dramatic. As we unroll the scroll from right to left (the direction in which a Japanese handscroll should be read), we first see the arrival of the sword god at the palace of the Emperor. The deity stands on the veranda with a sword stretched out in his hand and swords attached all over his body. Beneath him rests a wheel which is the symbol of the Buddha's law. Mist billows behind the deity and curls up around the house of the Emperor, thereby separating this scene from the rest of the scroll and indicating that it takes place within a dream. In addition, a minister sits in the house with his back turned to the sword god, which indicates that he cannot see the sword god because the deity exists only in the dream of the Emperor. The Emperor himself is not depicted because the explicit portrayal of such a personage is traditionally taboo in Japanese handscrolls.

The scene of the sword god's arrival is followed by a scene that depicts the deity's journey to the emperor's palace. Here, the artist has represented the sword god running from left to right through the sky. His tremendous speed is indicated by the air that streams behind him and the splayed swords on his costume. In front of the sword god is the wheel of the Buddha's law, which is swiftly rolling through the sky, and far behind him to the left is a distant mountain with sparse trees and several small people indicated on its slopes surrounding the sword god is a vast expanse of colorless mist and rolling clouds.

Together, these two scenes take up an expansive portion of the scroll. This sheer length draws attention to the importance of the sword god in a way that the four short sentences in the text do not. The viewer is forced to dwell upon the appearance and arrival of the sword god for a long period of time as he slowly unrolls the scroll. Hence the pictures play a significant role in making the viewer realize the miraculousness of the event...

(The student went on to analyze and interpret what the above order of representation might mean....)

....In addition, the painter of the *Shigisan engi* scrolls must have been given a lot of artistic freedom since the details and

structure of the pictorial sequences often depart from the text. To begin with, the second scene (i.e. the sword god running) is understood to be a flashback: it shows the process by which the deity arrived at the palace after the arrival itself has already been depicted. Time and actual order of events have been inverted, which consequently forces the viewer to roll back and reexamine the arrival of the sword god. This reexamination emphasizes even further the miraculous and singular nature of the event, and thus the inclusion of a flashback adds more drama to the storyline. Nowhere in the text is there any suggestion of including a flashback in the narration: this is purely a product of the artist's imagination and creativity. The pictorial representation, therefore, expands beyond the general outline that the text provides...

And finally the third student³ who wrote on the third scroll or "A Nun's Scroll":

"A Nun's Scroll" relates the nun's long pilgrimage, which is divided into two phases: from Shinano, her family's home province, to Todaiji; and from Todaiji to Mount Shigi. The artist is charged with representing significant passages of time. He begins by showing the nun on a mule, riding down a mountain path; to her right, the mountains meet the ocean, and to the left they are enveloped in mist. This dramatic landscape suggests the scope of the travels. (It has been observed that) the journey from Shinano to Todaiji is lengthy; accordingly, the artist devotes sixteen sheets, out of twenty-six, to this first portion of the trip. The artist depicts deer on the mountainside, a convention which indicates the nun's ascent to Nara, where Todaiji is located. The combination of mist and mountain suggest the great distances that the nun covers.

Interestingly, however, the artist also uses mountains to signify elapsed time without shifting the location of the characters. This technique is apparent on the twenty-third sheet of the scroll, after the nun approaches Myoren's house and before she enters it. The artist depicts the nun as arriving from the left; this

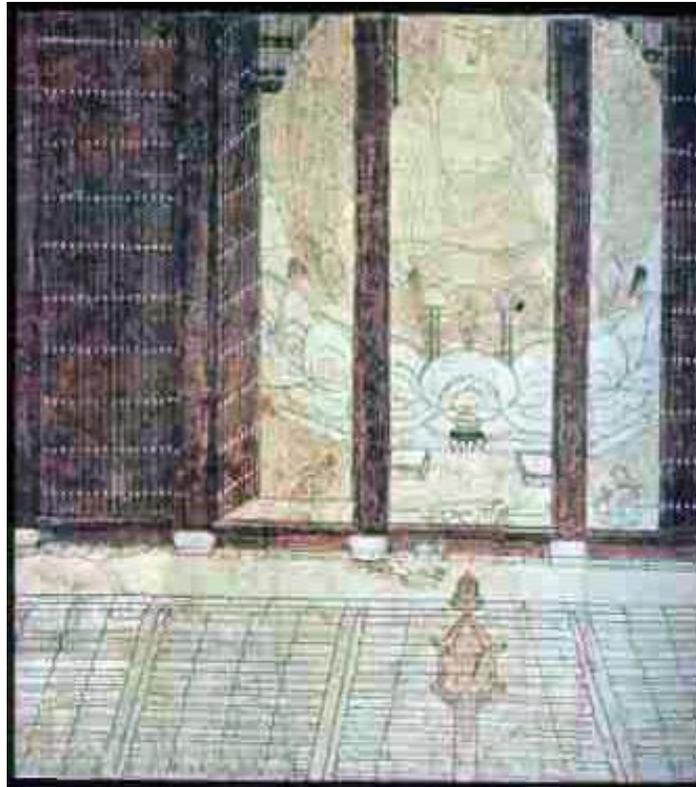
³ The student, Caitlin Horn, a member of the Princeton class of 2007, has given me permission to quote the pertinent passages from her paper.

reverses the natural right-to-left direction of her journey, but is consistent with the Japanese convention that denotes the intrusion of an element into the normal flow of action by left-to-right movement. Had the nun arrived from the right, the artist could have shown, via a right-to-left progression of figures, the nun's movement into the house and the subsequent order of interactions with her brother. Instead, the nun's appearance on the left side of Myoren's home precludes her from entering it in the same scene, because the direction of the narrative cannot reverse. The artist needs a way to interrupt the scene, so that when he return to it right-to-left motion can resume. The insertion of mountains allows a curtain to fall on the scene.

This strategy has the added benefit of isolating, and thus dramatizing, the instant of the reunion. The viewer has a chance to dwell on this climactic moment because the interlude is significantly shorter than the extensive stretches of mountains that appear earlier in the scroll. When the narrative picks up again, Myoren and his sister stand in the house, leaning toward each other with mouths open and arms outstretched. The fact that the figures continue to express surprise and joy is further indication that the temporal progression of the narrative has been minimal. The scenes in the home are separated spatially and temporally through architectural detail, that is, the walls that pace the pair's movement through the house....(what Kohara refers as "disparate moments in the same picture")....The figures repeat, performing different actions in a temporal sequence, while the scenery remains static.The nun first presents her brother with a special cloth to wear. The text describes this gift; the (picture) demonstrates Myoren's delighted reaction, reminding the viewer of the value of a warm robe to an ascetic monk. In the second vignette, the pair sit before a table with sutras; finally, Myoren reads a sutra, while his sister busies herself on the veranda. This sequence takes the viewer beyond the fact of their reunion, providing insight into their domestic life and their contentment in being together.

.... The artist uses the same technique of "disparate moments in the same picture" in the depiction of the nun before the Great Buddha. (Kohara) clarifies the stages of the nun's actions: She first kneels in prayer to ask for guidance; next she is shown

sleeping at the foot of the statue, then awakening from a dream and giving thanks to the Buddha. Finally, she appears departing from Todaiji. In most of the scroll the viewer may easily identify the nun by her stooped posture and wide-brimmed hat. Here the nun adopts a wide range of expressive poses which, shown in close sequence, have the effect of animating the nun's course of action from the evening that she arrives to the next morning when she leaves. The scene marks a dramatic shift in scale: The figure of the nun is only half as large as it appeared prior to this scene. The artist juxtaposes the smallness of the nun with the imposing figure of the Great Buddha, which spans half the height of the scroll.



Section depicting the nun spending the night before the Great Buddha of Todaiji; from Scroll 3, the Nun's Scroll, Shigisan Engi, early 12th century; Chogosonshiji, Nara.

Then this student had a clincher

The current condition of the scroll provides insight into the process by which the artist created this scene. Where the white pigment of the nun's robe has fallen away, one may see through the architecture of the temple. It appears that the artist drew only some of the figures before filling in the details of the temple. The lines denoting the ground, for example, break around the body of one of the figures that lies on the floor, but not the other; of the two figures walking away from the temple, only one figure's contours overlap with the edges of the building. It is possible, then, that the artist began with a sparser depiction of the night's events, and then filled in a few more figures to provide a more thorough account.

The foregoing lengthy quotations, for which I have asked my students permission to read aloud, are such a focused "looking" of the famous scenes of the widely known Japanese narrative scrolls representing significant travels. A quick glance at a work of art won't do to understand the depth of creativity of the artist, whose deft crafts and imagination allowed him to depict some of the most impressive pictorial images.

Many years ago, when I first began to pay attention to the masterpieces such as we have just seen, in the gallery of a national museum in Kyoto, I had never thought that one day, from studying them with the English speaking students abroad I would be taught how to creatively digress, to see more than I have seen before. Viewing a work of art, like journey one embarks on, benefits from lengthy digressions to see something unexpected, something that lies beyond what is expected.