

Class of 2014-2015  
with  
Radu Leca

# Japanese Art



calligraphy

THE FIRST THING THAT POPS INTO  
MY MIND IS COLOUR...

mono-no-aware

the themes running  
through both visual and  
literary arts.

Buddhist themes...

## What is Japanese Art??

UKIYO-E

to me signifies an ebb and flow of ideas

TRADITION,  
ELEGANCE,  
PERFECTIONISM

Nature and refinement



Dear all,

This was my first year teaching this class, and you made it a very pleasurable experience. Throughout the year not only my beard has changed, but also my perspective on Japanese Art. I've come to appreciate more the diversity of artistic expression that can be subsumed under the label Japanese Art. Because most of what we learn are labels, and labels change. Ten years from now what you have just learned will be outdated, and it should be thus. Instead, I want you to take away a sense of wonder and curiosity towards yet unknown cultures, a sensibility towards objects (keep training your eye, even on your friend's mug) and an understanding of standards and conventions. The latter is something which I also need to work on. Though I tend to avoid convention, it is only by being precise about conventions that we can avoid them. A sharper sense of content and methodology is what I lacked sometimes, and it is this sharpness which you should strive for. Because, whether we like it or not, details matter.

And you have been very sharp in your comments on the seminar images, which are included in this coursezine. Your work is precious and I'm proud of you. There are moments of great originality and intuition. Trust that intuition – the best art historians are not those who know the most, but those who are honest about themselves and the objects they look at. And I hope I managed to make you see that there is not only one approach to art history. I thank Malcolm and Guillaume for coming in and showing you other views. And although I think art theory is fascinating, the way it is tailored and woven together should be determined by the characteristics of each individual object you discuss.

Thank you for a wonderful journey, and good luck on your future endeavours.

Keep looking!

With my warmest wishes,

Radu Leca

## Lecture Programme 2014-15

Term 1 – Monday 22 <sup>nd</sup> September 2014 (registration week) – Friday 12 <sup>th</sup> December 2014		
Week 1	30 <sup>th</sup> September	Introduction to the Religious Arts in Japan
Week 2	7 <sup>th</sup> October	Asuka period Buddhist Art: Transmission of Buddhism to Japan
Week 3	14 <sup>th</sup> October	Nara period Buddhist Art: The Great Buddha and Imperial Authority
Week 4	21 <sup>st</sup> October	Esoteric Buddhist Art: the Worlds of Mandala
Week 5	28 <sup>th</sup> October	The Lotus Sutra: Doctrine, Practice and Art
Reading Week 3 <sup>rd</sup> - 7 <sup>th</sup> November 2014		
Week 6	11 <sup>th</sup> November	Pure Land Buddhist Art: Images of Paradise and Hell
Week 7	18 <sup>th</sup> November	Kami and Buddha: Combinatory Religious Practices
Week 8	25 <sup>th</sup> November	Realism in Kamakura sculpture
Week 9	2 <sup>nd</sup> December	Art of Zen I: Ink Painting      Guest: Malcolm McNeill
Week 10	9 <sup>th</sup> December	Art of Zen II: Aesthetics of Tea

Term 2 – Monday 5 <sup>th</sup> January 2015 – Friday 20 <sup>th</sup> March 2015		
Week 11	6 <sup>th</sup> January	Introduction to Secular Arts in Japan
Week 12	13 <sup>th</sup> January	Emaki: The Art of Pictorial Storytelling
Week 13	20 <sup>th</sup> January	Tosa School: Transmitting the Themes of Court Painting
Week 14	27 <sup>th</sup> January	Kano School: Painting and Political Authority
Week 15	3 <sup>rd</sup> February	Rinpa Art: Aesthetics of Decorativeness
Reading Week 9 <sup>th</sup> -13 <sup>th</sup> February 2015		
Week 16	17 <sup>th</sup> February	Cross-Cultural Contacts I: Namban Art and the Dutch school
Week 17	24 <sup>th</sup> February	Cross-Cultural Contacts II: Literati Painting
Week 18	3 <sup>rd</sup> March	Ukiyo-e: Pictures of the Floating World
Week 19	10 <sup>th</sup> March	Modern Japanese Painting: Yoga and Nihonga
Week 20	17 <sup>th</sup> March	Postwar Japanese Art      Guest: Guillaume Vandame

**Class of 2014-15:**

Immelda Alty

Jenna Legear

Giulia Battaglia

Dinan Li

Catherine Beagent

Ziyu Lin

Eva Beck

Elisa Moioli

Daniel Benfield

Joe Nickols

Samuel Bingham

Milla Onass

Marie Blanck

Mariella Pacey

Thomas Brook

Lisa Petersohn

Carla Caria

Amy Raphael

Flora Cartwright

Georgina Richards

Min Choi

Elena Scali

Isabella Coimbra

Jennifer Stephens

Patrick Courtney

Marta Strzyga

Megan Dailey

Nina-Rae Village

Kieran Flynn

Akane Wang

Methika Gandhi

Samuel White

Calum Gordon

Hyejin Yoon

Rosamund Graham

Leonidas Zafiroopoulos

Jack Jewell

Shu Zhang

Yeunjeong Kim

Pu Nuo Zhu

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# Introduction to the Secular Arts

6th Jan. 2015

## EPAS - Edo Period Appreciation Society

This is our team's effort for compare and contrast question. We are EPAS and we just can't get enough.

If one compares the two images, we see in the images of the women that there are no divisions between the people, everyone is working together with one aim, the roles have been taken out of the boxes. Another huge difference is that all the figures are women compared to all men in their individual boxes.

This could be done to invert the whole picture.

Re: assigned role -

SAMURAI: top right, calligraphy, noble, elegant

FARMER: preparation of the paper as they create the base for the whole production

ARTISAN: the engraver, with the hammer (the symbol of an artisan)

MERCHANT: the tool sharpener, in the most individual outfit and only doing a job that anyone can do, also not engaged in active production.

The SAMURAI and MERCHANT have eye contact and are interacting together.

The top and bottom of the hierarchy have a relationship. The display of objects that is available for commercial purposes and all members of society are involved with the production of it.

There are figures depicted that are outside the social categories and yet they fit in with the rest of society and have roles that help production of society.







Commercialisation is more important than the roles that are predefined to them. All playing a part of the merchant role as they are engaging in commercialisation. Convergent of the social classes. Almost everyone is involved in making something and yet a merchant is not a producer so they still have the intrinsic values from the original image as originators of THINGS not middle men and still abiding by Confusian principles.

Merchants are about selling.

Why are they working at night?? Is it night??



## I'M SORRY I DIDN'T ASK YOUR NAMES YET

This is Rosamund writing for the i'msorryididn'taskyournamesyet group.

We mainly discussed the roles of the women and their relationship with their surroundings.

We felt there was a huge sense of community withing the image, something that cannot be found in the Confucianist one. The various workers, in this image displayed as women, have been removed from their boxes and form a soft circle around the room. There is a lot of movement and interaction between the women, perhaps portraying that the different social classes cannot create a functioning society if they do not work in cohesion.

Whilst the Confusianist image feels very static and false, when compared with the woodblock print it feels sarcastic.

In terms of the characters being portrayed we played them slightly differently to Joe's group. We based our judgement purely on the aesthetics of the women.

SAMURAI: Water painter - due to the size of her dress and central position.

ARTISAN: Carver, due to the hammer.

MERCHANTS: The two taking down the paper. The young girl is interacting with the woman taking the paper down and this seems to be the final stage of production.

FARMER: Perhaps the one sharpening the knife, as this is the only job that is quite manual labour.

## CHAOTIC PELLUCIDITY

We're the Chaotic Pellucidity, and here are our thoughts on the seminar.

The first work demonstrates communities within a society, and the second portrays a community within a production setting.

The samurai corresponds with the artist, a figure in the upper right, painting whilst leaning against the table. The artist who creates the drawing to be printed is highest in the printing process hierarchy, as it the samurai in Edo society. Both would also be most renowned and educated of the four clases.

The smoking woman in the lower left corner seems to be the merchant, as her lifted hand is parallel to the merchant, both are producing something for the samurai.

The artisan class is parallel to the chisler in the centre of the picture, as both perform manual labour and are lower in the hierarchy.

The female with the turban in the lower centre matches the farmer: the turban implies that out of all of the women present, she is probably undertaking the most challenging labour (i.e, work in which her hair could get in the way. etc.

and the position isn't identical but it is somewhat similar.

Elena and Marta preferred the second work, as it is lively and suggests a story - all of the actions can be linked to form a narrative. Immelda and Amy liked the first work, as the people portrayed have vivid expressions and are all shown to perform a specific action that highlights their status. Immelda argues that it also shows a narrative, if one is used to stories being told through drawings in boxes. (such as manga.)

Personally, I've done a little bit of reading last year into prints from this time, so the following observation is biased because of this, but I'd suggest that the print is a parody is a sign of the times: people wanted to be educated, and based on European encyclopedic tradition, prints were made to educate them about industries such as the production of ukiyo-e, or sericulture (silk production). By sacrificing some veracity and portraying all of the workers as women with elaborate clothing, the viewer is both intrigued, entertained (as was arguably the purpose of ukiyo-e) whilst also being educated. I thought that this may be interesting to some of you, but I might also be wrong since my reading applied to Utagawa Kitamaro.

# Art of Emaki

13th Jan. 2015



## CHAOTIC PELLUCIDITY

Hi everyone,

This is the Chaotic Pellucidity group and here is our understanding of the scroll we looked at yesterday. First of all, we looked at the pictures given to us, and tried to analyse their content separately. Then, we moved on to the whole long story and we examined the whole narrative.

PICTURE 1: The image focuses on a riverbank. From there a rabbit and a monkey are hiding. The image, however, is mainly landscape and from looking at it, we discerned it is a winter scene, perhaps even covered in snow.

PICTURE 10: A rabbit jumps really high holding a bow, it seems almost as if it is being carried by the wind. We talked about the possibility it may represent the moon. Together with the other compositional elements, we saw the artist create a sort of spherical movement.

PICTURE 21-22: These are the very end of the scroll. At the centre of the composition a Monk-Monkey sits holding a rosary. It is obviously an important figure, as others queue to bring him offerings of any sort (food, textiles, etc.) and is richly dressed. Flowers might be an indication of spring.

On the contrary, this picture seems very lively and more complex than the previous ones. Brush strokes forming the trees and mountains are continuous, parallel, re-produced. We felt the artist transmits a sense of ephemerality by using such techniques.

In general we understood the whole scroll being executed in Zen terms: it is simple, but complex in its execution. We also realised it represents a riddle, or rather it needs to be interpreted by the observer. Considering the presence of weapons, and the time the scroll was executed, we thought it might also contain political propaganda. It seemed to us that earlier in the narrative a fox introduces weapons to a harmonious context, therefore bringing the tensions. Towards the end of the story, we saw a powerful leader (could be the Ashikaga Shogun) being at the presence of Buddha and then the same being revered in the very last image., as if conveying the holy teachings. This might also represent the introduction and patronage of Zen Buddhism.

Analysing certain details of the whole picture, we also noticed there is a general progressing of the seasons. A deer and boar appear, in Japanese iconography the first representing longevity and the second reckless courage. There seem to be certainly circularity in the whole story: it begins in a peaceful setting, which is disrupted by the introduction of weapons and ends with peace being restored.





Our discussion focused on differing interpretations of the narrative and the ways in which the scroll would have been understood by its audience in the original 13th - 14th century context.



In the first instance it was agreed that the scroll fits the category of parody or caricature. The author had intended for the image to mock various contemporary establishment figures such as Buddhism monks and courtiers by rendering them as animals. However, some animals are engaged in everyday activities such as the selling of livestock and we came to conclude that the image works as a commentary on society as a whole. Only in some scenes can we observe courtly activities such as group readings of texts and archery competitions.

The types of animals included were noted as being specific to Japan such as the wild boar and the Sika deer., as opposed to conventionalised Chinese zodiac animals. Undoubtedly each animal would have had its own designated character traits and attributes in the Japanese context that we could not be completely aware of. . . Perhaps strangely, boar and deer that are tethered and look like they are being sold by the other animals in one scene are not transformed into humans.



One group member had followed the recurring appearance of the monkey figure and questioned whether this character could be seen as signifying the Buddha. As the case of the Buddha in early Japan, the monkey is at first opposed and mistrusted by people (chased with sticks by the rabbits and frogs) before in the final scene being venerated with offerings as one would a religious image. We recalled the Asuka period of clans who disagreed with the government's Buddhist policies and blamed a plague on the resulting anger of the kami. Certainly this is one interesting interpretation of the narrative.



## Nonamegroup

Our group was interested in the entirety of the scroll., and we attempted to decipher what the artist may have been articulating, or what viewers may have interpreted.

We agreed that the scroll seemed to be satirical, because even though it displayed certain violent elements, the fluidity and simple yet delicate nature of the brushstrokes gave the piece movement, liveliness, and some elements of humour. If the scroll was satirical, then we believed that it could have been articulating an aspect of Japanese society that took itself more seriously than was actually warranted.



Whether this was a specific element of society, like court life, or a more general commentary is unknown. When considering it to be a general commentary, we thought about how the scroll begins with harmony, has an interlude of violence, and then ends with the perceived harmony again. This tale could represent the manner in which history is articulated - often from the perspective of the victor. Thus, the importance of the frogs at the end is one that their victory has crafted; it is not necessarily representative of the frogs' true worth or right to honour. Therefore, the - although slightly dark - humour that comes with this interpretation seems to mock any form of self-proclaimed honour and seek a more tangible truth.



## Frolicking Rabbit

Hello, this is the Frolicking Rabbit's contribution.

As many other groups have already discussed we saw this scroll as a satirical representation of Japanese society. We thought the scroll was parodying the increasing trend for religious pilgrimage that began to popularise during the Heian period. Although the object of the pilgrimage is intended as sacred, the scroll substitutes a frog for the position of Buddha, and represents the monks who have sought him as a seemingly random assortment of animals.

The use of so many species of animals highlights the absurdity of the image, especially by their size distortion; monkeys, frogs and rabbits all appear to be of similar height. However, by depicting some animals in specific garments, and equipping them with different props (some appear soldier-like, with bows and arrows, others look more like performers, bearing drums and fans, and dancing) we thought that the artists were trying to express the variety of Japanese society.

Some animals even seem to be representing nobility, appearing better dressed, and accompanied by an entourage. This shows how all aspects of society, which was very segregated around the Heian period, could be united in the act of pilgrimage.

Some animals are clearly engaging in less than holy deeds, such as stealing and fighting, which, in addition to the satirical use of anthropomorphic animals, shows how the nature of pilgrimage was, for many, more an excuse to escape from the confines of their everyday lives and engage in debauchery on the way.

The animals are not headed in one uniform direction either, showing that the Buddha is not their sole motivation for travel. However, the general attitude of the picture is jovial, and even the characters that seem to be in trouble have smiling features, which suggests that the scroll is not critical of this irreligiousness.



# Tosa School Court Painting

20th Jan. 2015

## CHAOTIC PELLUCIDITY



A little reminder:

- Tosa Mitsunobu: ORIGINAL
- Isawa Katsumoto: SCREEN
- Isome Tsuna: BOOK ILLUSTRATION

Looking at the three together, their similarities are striking; the snow and the pine, the colour scheme, the boat shape, the red dress. These similarities could be a reflection of the detailed descriptions of the text, but could also be an imitation of the Tosa original.

The boat is of significant interest; it is shown in its entirety in the Isome illustration, yet half is shown in the Tosa and the Isawa paintings. Whereas the full boat, together with its central positioning in the Isome illustration draws the focus

to the boat and the journey to the island, the half boat draws focus to the island. This is especially true of the Isawa screen, where the shape of the twisting branches of the pine tree begins to merge with the island in the background.

This domineering pine tree demands your gaze. Observing the passengers of the boat, it may be that the half boat was a way of implying other passengers, while maintaining attention on the protagonists.



The clouds are also an interesting feature of the paintings, and serve to create different atmospheres. In the original Tosa painting, the clouds shroud the back and the front of the trees, giving a great sense of depth as well as giving an air of the heavenly and mystical (mist-ical!). The brilliant golden clouds of the Isawa screen are used more as a border and offer little to the image itself. The richness of the colour and the amount of gold used was clearly used as a sign of wealth, which is fitting with the nature of the screen paintings. On the contrary, the Isome illustration, a work with significantly less financial funding, is unable to create these iconic clouds. Instead, Isome used speckles of gold, and this together with the expanse of beige in the background appears like mist, creating a similar atmosphere to the original.

It is interesting to observe how different these pieces are, depending on the era they were painted in, the funding that they got and the purpose of the artwork. Whilst it is possible Isawa and Isome were inspired by Tosa's original, the artist's interpretations of the Genji text undoubtedly influenced their choices in painting these works.



# Team Anti-Oxidation

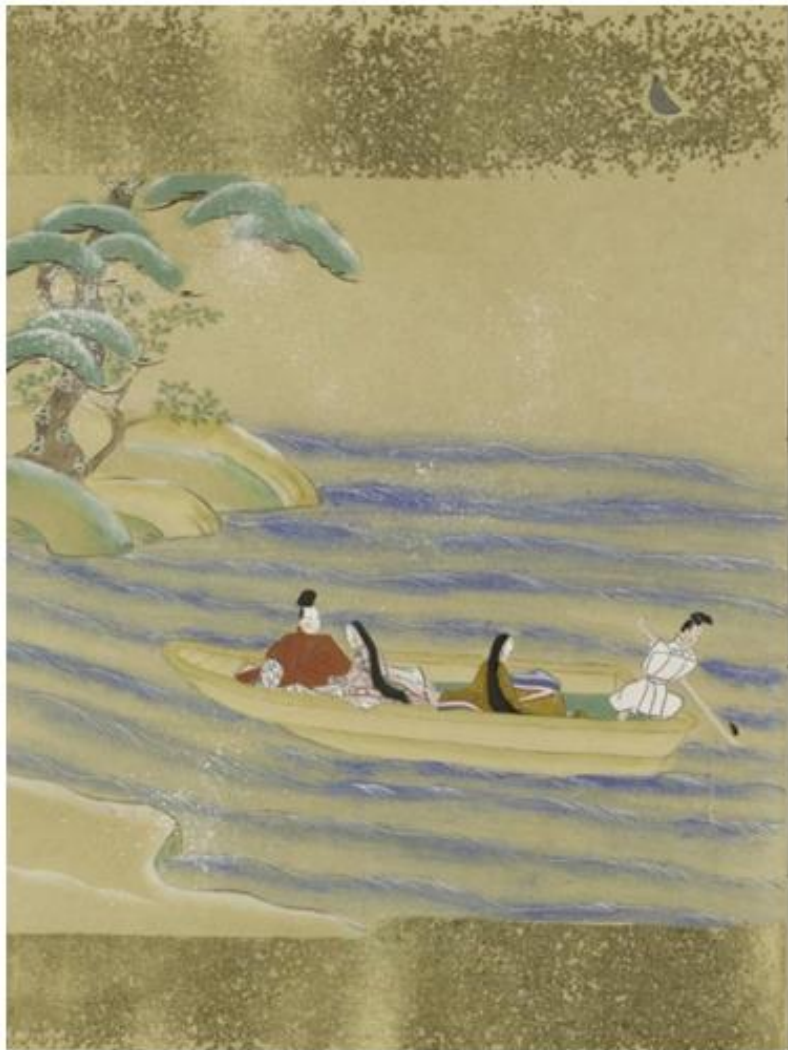
Our group focused our discussions on the difference in techniques and aspects of the three paintings drawn by Tosa, Isawa and Isome.

The Boat: a) the direction of the boat in both Mitsunobu and Isawa's paintings are drawn going from left to right, however Isome purposely drew the boat heading in the opposite direction. This may suggest that Isawa's painting is an imitation of the Tosa original whereas Isome got her inspiration directly from the Genji tale without imitating the Tosa original.

b) Isome is the only artist that illustrated the entire boat and the 4 people on board, possibly in hope to highlight the storyline of the Genji tale.

The other two paintings only included half the boat drawing our attention closer on the love aspect between the two characters rather than just a factual depiction of the situation. Artist's Perspective: Isome drew her piece as if she is looking down at the boat from a wide angle, whereas both Tosa and Isawa framed their characters with thick clouds that makes the audience feel as if looking through a window to the story. It gives visual depth, a sense of mystery as well as fantasy.

Even though the subject of these paintings are the same, each artist uses a unique technique: Isome draws the waves softly and with movement, in contrast to Isawa's piece that is rigid, very precise and looks like a still image.





# Kano School: Art and Political Authority

27th Jan. 2015



## CHAOTIC PELLUCIDITY

For the Kano School lecture screen comparisons we decided to actually see if we could directly identify hallmarks that would depict what made it Kano school and what didn't.

For the YES Camp (*It is Kano!*)

We observed how the featureless mountain in the background of the lower picture, created by iconography of absence was possibly linked to the Tosa tradition of painting Mt. Fuji in a very similar fashion. Tan'yu specifically is quite well known for his depictions of Fuji-sama by only suggestion of the outline of the mountain.

We noted how the characters were of classical Chinese origin, not just because of the Taoist nature of the spirits but also their clothing styles as well.

We noticed how the screens seemed to use both classical Chinese content and elements from the Tosa school, such as the use of colour as well as monochromatic schemes in the two screens.

We also discussed the dynamic nature of the images, which suggests Kano lineage.

In the NO Camp (*Down with the Kano!*)

The level of detail within the screens is obsessively depicted, giving a much stronger suggestion of the Tosa school of artistic observance, and less typical of the Kano school.

While there was gold within the screens, there was not an overabundance of it present in the image work, again suggesting that it diverges with the Kano traditions of large overt depictions of wealth and substance with the strong visual element of gold on its screens.

While this was later refuted, we did consider whether the number of people in the image could also suggest that it was not Kano school.

We were also struck with the strong use of the colour blue in some of the characters robes which is rather atypical of Kano artists who preferred to use green pigment over blue.





# Rinpa Art: Aesthetics of Decorativeness

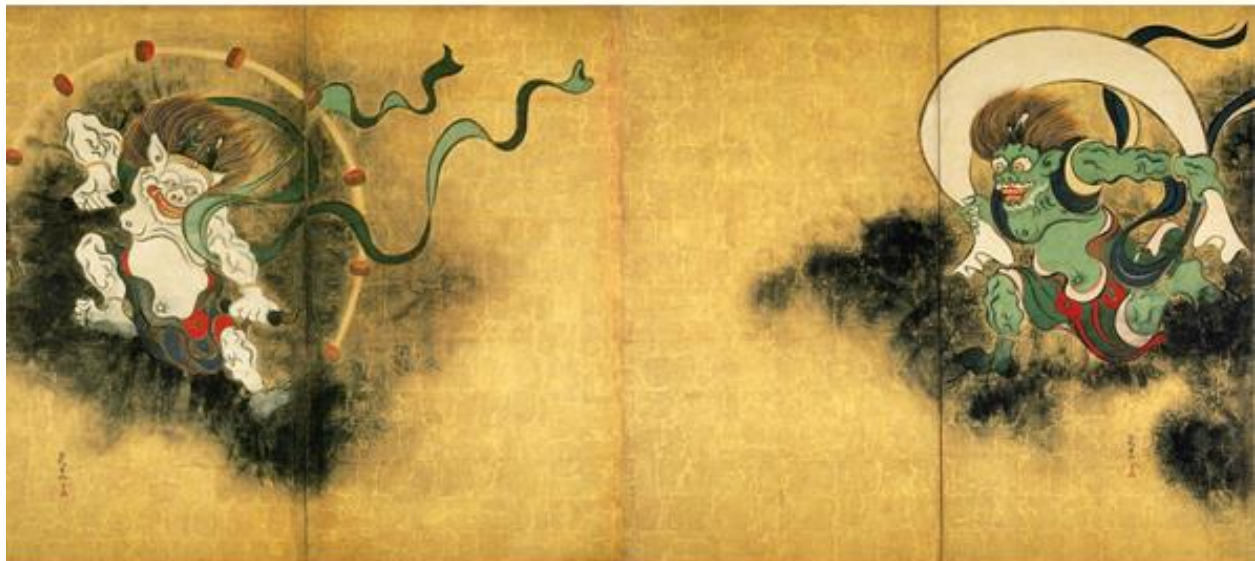
3rd Feb. 2015

## CHAOTIC PELLUCIDITY

Here is what Chaotic Pellucidity thought of the two Korin screens:

The two pieces of comparison are WIND GOD and THUNDER GOD, and RED AND WHITE PLUM BLOSSOM TREES, both screens by Ogata Korin. The Wind God and Thunder God are painted in detail, with black outlines and block colour which seems more in the style of earlier Buddhist paintings than in the nature of Rinpa School art. Furthermore, the black soot-like clouds, seem to have been applied by a dry brush, which again contrasts the trademark of the wet puddled-ink technique of the Rinpa School. This Buddhist theme could explain these diversions from traditional Rinpa School styles.

The Plum Blossom screen shows two trees with twisted branches and a river between them, in a bold, swirling design. However as the swirls of the two panels do not seem to align, it could suggest that the piece has been trimmed, that there is a panel missing between them, or that these pieces were not intended to be shown side by side. This screen shows traits of the Rinpa School, with bold, abstract patterns, 'boneless' flowers, and puddling employed on the trees.







Despite little in common in the subjects of the screens, a number of visual similarities can be drawn. The most striking similarity is the dynamism of the two pieces; the contorted, twisting movements of the tree and the animated movements of the thunder and wind gods are both as dynamic as each other.

Furthermore, when one considers that the river of the 'Red and White Plum Tree' screen could have been originally silver, this dynamism would have been further accentuated, especially in the candle light of the Edo period. The shimmering river, together with the gold sheen of the background would have brought more movement and depth to these screens. The silver river would have illuminated the room and the piece, and overpowered the trees, which is hard to imagine as the trees appear more dominant than the oxidised river we see today.

Similarities can also be drawn between the movements of the Gods and the trees. The left arm and the lower scarf of the Thunder God, together with the arching of the Wind God's bag seem to be reflected in the movements of the trunks and branches of the trees. Moreover, the golden void between the two Gods is in a similar shape to that of the river of the other screen.

Considering that Korin chose to copy this piece from Sotatsu, it is undeniable that he favoured and admired this design. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that he drew inspiration from this copy (dated to the 17th Century) to make the Red and White Plum tree piece which was painted later, in 1710.



# Ukiyo-E

3rd Mar. 2015

## CHAOTIC PELLUCIDITY

Chaotic Pellucidity on the Hiroshige and Yoshitoshi image comparison.

Hiroshige

The image has a more crowded composition, a barrier for the viewer - most

of the scene is obscured by leaves. Compares to the Yoshitoshi image, the colour is much more consistent and does not vary between faded and bright.

The bamboo cutter is characterised as remaining a humble man; he is shown to still be cutting bamboo, despite all the riches afforded to him by the Princess. His work clearly shapes his life, as the building, fence, and pole are all made of bamboo. The Princess can be seen on the right looking through a half-round window; we thought this is either to suggest the wealth (as round windows were seen as being Chinese and exotic) or that it may be like the moon, hinting at her origins.





### Yoshitoshi

This image is much more dream-like, as if in the clouds. The composition is more dramatic, with a simple white background. It brought to mind the dramatic Christian imagery used for depiction of saints: above the people, in the clouds, usually in the top-half of the image, with a source of light from behind or around them.

The Princess appears to be deified through these features. The blandness of reality - in comparison to the Princess in the heavens - is implied by the subdued, almost faded colours used to portray the bamboo cutter. The bamboo cutter himself once again looks humble, kneeling at the Princess's feet.

One person in our group suggested that the Princess' hairstyle, along with the intercrossing fans, suggests a Mt. Fuji peak. This is a viable suggestion in terms of comparison, as the Hiroshige image specifically portrays Mt. Fuji.

Editors:

Immelda Alty,  
Marta Strzyga,  
Meg Dailey.



