

Column Goshodoki Designs: Landscapes with Literary Imagery

Goshodoki designs refer to a type of pattern comprised of symbolic motifs that hint at works of classical literature or Noh plays through scenes of flowering plants of the four seasons that appeared on kosode robes worn specifically by samurai-class women in the late Edo period. These distinctive motifs appearing solely in kosode designs constituted a kind of riddle that challenged the viewer to identify the poem, tale, or Noh play being referenced in the design. In the absence of words to serve as clues, some designs were extremely difficult to decode.

The term goshodoki was coined only in the Meiji period and it has been suggested that the term referring to “courtly” or “aristocratic-style” designs was adopted due to the richly seasonal scenes that are suggestive of views of the imperial palace and pond gardens of the court nobility.

poetry, pictures and other puzzle-like techniques to easily identify and remember the order of the large, small, and intercalary months each year. These were known as daishō or daishō-goyomi (literally, “large and small” calendars). Of these, the calendars that included pictures were known as e-goyomi. In the New Year of 1765 (Meiwa 2), a group of kyōka comic poets held a gathering to exchange surimono prints of daishō e-goyomi, for which they produced woodblock printed e-goyomi calendars in full color for the first time, marking a major landmark in the birth of Nishiki-e multicolor prints in Japan. In addition to picture calendars that traced the outlines of human figures and objects with the numbers of the large or small months, there were also calendars that hid the numbers of the large and small months within the pictorial design, as well as calendars that indicated the order of the months by the arrangement of differing objects of large and small sizes.

Column Uke-e, Divination Pictures

In Onmyōdō Yin-Yang divination theory, fortunes were divided between good and bad luck depending on the relationship of one’s birth year to the Five Elements—wood, fire, earth, metal, and water—and the Twelve Meridians. Good luck was called uke and bad was called muke. When one was entering a period of uke, everything one did was pulled in a positive direction and it was a lucky year. It was believed that fortune came in a cycle of alternating periods of seven years of good luck and five years of bad luck. There was a custom of celebrating with seven things that started with the syllable fu for fuku (fortune) in the year one entered the period of uke. Therefore, uke-e or “fortune divination pictures” that incorporated images of seven fu items were popular from around the Bunka era (1804–1818) to the end of the Edo period, but they became obsolete around the middle of the Meiji period.

Column Hanji-e, Rebus Prints

Hanji means to deduce or to guess, and hanji-e were visual puzzles from which one was supposed to guess the textual meaning. These rebuses constituted a kind of word game in which the artist represented an idea obscurely through pictures with the intention that people would try to guess at the meaning. At the end of the Edo period, rebuses representing lists of like things, such as place names, insects, birds and flowers, or pictures of collections of other such related items appeared frequently in Ukiyo-e woodblock prints. These puzzles that required the viewer to guess the names of things from colorfully painted pictures were not simply amusements for children, but stimulated people’s intellectual curiosity and also were filled with various kinds of information, such as the names of things or categories of different kinds of things, that were also useful for cultivating knowledge.

5 WORD PLAY / PICTURE PLAY

In the Edo period, a wide variety of “word pictures” (moji-e) and “picture words” (e-moji) emerged that were rich in free-thinking ideas and humor that were released from the seriousness of auspicious and religious meanings or classical learning. In addition to “word pictures” that used written characters to form the outlines of images, there were also works that fused poetry and painting by replacing individual words in poems with pictures, as well as e-goyomi picture calendars that identified the order of the months in the old lunisolar calendar system through pictures and various other types of word and picture play. Furthermore, word puzzles drawing on the homophonous nature of language were popular, and the world of interwoven word and image created a harmonious diversity of both the classic and the colloquial with games including rhyming or punning word games or hanji-mono rebuses that presented pictures as phonetic symbols forming word riddles for the viewer to solve. More than a few famous painters tried their hand at such works, beginning with Maruyama Ōkyo (1733–1795), and including Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), Utagawa Hiroshige (1797–1858), Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798–1861), and others. Through their unique skills of observation and exceptional powers of composition, their masterful visual constructions tying together word and image are overflowing with humor that forces even the most serious among us to smile.

Column Egoyomi, Picture Calendars

According to the lunisolar calendar that was used in old Japan, the months of the year were divided between large months (of thirty days) and small months (of twenty-nine days), with the occasional addition of intercalary months, the number and order of which were not standardized from year to year. Accordingly, artists came up with clever ways of representing the abbreviated calendar using a wide variety of devices such as catch phrases, haiku and waka



In Japan, word and image are intimately intertwined and at times are so closely tied as to become inseparable. Moji-e, or “word pictures,” include styles such as ashide-moji or so-called “reed script,” which has strong pictorial elements, or Buddhist paintings and caricatures in which images are rendered with written characters. Conversely, e-moji are comprised of works in which pictures become words, as, for example, in hanji-e picture puzzles, where images serve as phonetic representations of words to form a kind of riddle. It is possible to find a variety of different happy unions of picture and text in Japanese calligraphy, paintings, and decorative art objects.

The world that is brought forth by word and image has not only a formalistic beauty; it has an element of intellectual stimulation as well. Here we present a world-class Japanese aesthetic world that is at once clever and entertaining.

* The following marks in this handout indicate:
● National Treasure
◎ Important Cultural Property as designated by The Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology
○ Important Art Object as approved by The Ministry of Education before 1949

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ONE HUNDRED TRANSFORMATIONS:
THE MANY FORMS OF THE WRITTEN WORD

Chinese *kanji* characters, which are the origin of Japanese writing, originated as pictographic characters that took the shape of the things they represented. In addition to the five commonly known styles of calligraphy—*tensho* (seal script), *reisho* (clerical script), *kaisho* (regular script), *gyōsho* (semi-cursive script), and *sōsho* (cursive script)—there is another ornamental style of script called *zattaisho* that forms characters from animal- and object-based forms, such as the shapes of birds and snakes. This *zattaisho* script was brought to Japan by the monk Kūkai (774-835), and examples of the script survive in the manuscript *Tenreibuntai* (Important Cultural Property, Bishamondō collection). *Zattaisho* script, which represented *kanji* characters in picture-like form, was believed to hold supernatural powers and can still be seen today in things like the Daishiryū school of calligraphy, which is based on the writing style of Kūkai.

Kanji characters are also ideographs that bear individual meaning, so it is not surprising that they have been ornamentalized and pictorialized since ancient times.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- ◎ No.1 *Tenrei Buntai*
Model Calligraphy in *Tensho* and *Reisho* Styles
Kamakura period, 13th century
Bishamondō Temple, Kyoto

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SACRED WRITINGS:
SANSKRIT CHARACTERS AND SUTRA TEXTS

The written character was not merely a symbol for communicating meaning, it also became an object of faith itself, embodying the sacred as it served as a lodging site for the divine spirits of the Shinto deities and Buddhist deities. Due to their esoteric nature, the Sanskrit writing symbols were believed to hold a spiritual power and were revered as holy words of the Buddhist Law. Each Sanskrit character (known as a “seed syllable”) was associated with a particular Buddhist deity, and was inscribed as a symbol of that divine figure.

Also in Buddhist tradition, copying sutra texts and building pagodas were considered virtuous acts of merit and the Heian period witnessed the emergence of paintings of pagodas formed from words of sutra texts. Gradually, this type of word picture expanded to include not only sacred pagodas but even the figures of bodhisattvas such as Monju and Fudō. This lineage of artwork was continued in the work of Katō Nobukiyo (1734–1810), who created Buddhist paintings formed from minute written characters in the Edo period. The great number of textual characters that would make up a Buddhist painting served as testament to the depth of the painter’s faith.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- ◎ No.13 *Hannya-rishukyō* Sutra by Fujiwara no Norinaga
Sanskrit letter by Prince Kakuho
Heian period, 1142
Daitōkyū Memorial Library, Tokyo

- ◎ No.14 Descent of Amida Nyorai, Kannon and Seishi Bosatsu
By Fujiwara no Norinaga
Kamakura period, 14th century
The Tokugawa Art Museum

- ◎ No.21 Three Thousand Names of the Buddha Forming the *Hōtō* Pagoda
By Priest Zhuxian Fanxian
Kamakura period, 14th century
Fukaji Temple, Aichi

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“REED PICTURES” AND “POEM PICTURES”

Influenced by Chinese *zattaisho* ornamental script, a type of word painting called *ashide-e* (reed-script pictures), which represented plants and birds and other pictorial forms with flowing written script, emerged in Heian-period Japan. Originally, *ashide* reed-script, like *mana* (*man’yōgana*), *katakana*, and *hiragana*, was considered a category of calligraphic style, and indeed was used as a model when writing celebratory poems on auspicious occasions, or for congratulatory events. However, due to its stylized nature, *ashide* script was easily integrated into paintings and soon the name *ashide-e* came to be used to refer to paintings that incorporated written characters hidden within their imagery as well as for pictures that presented homophonous characters in rebus-like puzzles.

Also in the Heian period, a type of painting called *uta-e*, which embedded the poetic spirit of *waka* poetry in pictorial form, was also produced in great numbers. If *ashide-e* were a type of “word picture,” then one could say that *uta-e* were a type of “picture word” that presented *waka* poems in pictorial form. It was not infrequent for *ashide* script to be included within *uta-e*, and the distinction between the two was truly ambiguous. As can be seen in the relationship between *ashide* and *uta-e*, in Japan, *moji-e* (word pictures) and *e-moji* (picture words) were created in kind of interdependence that was free and versatile.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- ◎ No.33 *Kanfugenkyō* Sutra
Heian period, 11th century
The Gotoh Museum, Tokyo
- No.34 *Zuiki-kudoku-hon* Chapter from the *Hokekyō* Sutra,
known as “Kunōji-kyō”
Heian period, 1141
Private collection
- No.35-1 and No.35-2
Johon Chapter and *Funbetsu-kudoku-hon* Chapter
from the *Hokekyō* Sutra, known as “Heike-nōkyō”
Heian period, 1164
Itsukushima Shrine, Hiroshima
- No.36 *Funbetsu-kudoku-hon* Chapter from the *Hokekyō* Sutra,
known as “Heike-nōkyō”
Heian period, 1164
Itsukushima Shrine, Hiroshima
- ◎ No.38 Illustrated Tale of Fujiwara no Takafusa and Lady Kogō
Kamakura period, 13th-14th centuries
National Museum of Japanese History, Chiba
- ◎ No.39 Illustrated Tale of Matsura-no-miya
Text traditionally attributed to Emperor Gokōgon
Kamakura period, 14th century
Tokyo National Museum

- No.43 Mirror
Cranes and chrysanthemums with scattered characters design
Kamakura period, 14th century
Tokyo National Museum
- ◎ No.45 Mounting for *Tachi* Long Sword
Heian to Kamakura period, 12th-13th centuries
Niutsumi Shrine, Wakayama
- No.47 Saddle
Kamakura period, 13th century
Eisei Bunko Museum, Tokyo
- ◎ No.48 Covered Box
Auspicious motifs from poem “Palace of Longevity”
Kamakura period, 13th-14th centuries
The Tokugawa Art Museum
- ◎ No.50 Inkstone Box
View of Shio-no-yama design
Muromachi period, 15th centuries
Kyoto National Museum
- ◎ No.51 Inkstone Box
Kinuta fulling block design design
Muromachi period, 15th centuries
Kyoto National Museum
- No.55 Writing Table and Inkstone Box
The Tale of Genji “Hatsune” motif design
Edo period, 1639
The Tokugawa Art Museum

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RIVALRIES OF WORD AND IMAGE

The written word, due to the high level of both its formal beauty and its power of communication, has also long been utilized in designs adorning craft objects as well. In women’s kimonos of the Edo period, designs incorporating scattered written characters inscribed amidst designs symbolizing poetic sentiment drawing on the tradition of *uta-e* were popular. There was no attempt at hiding the written characters; rather, the beauty of the script itself was highlighted and presented almost as if in competition with the pictorial motifs. This kind of beautiful rivalry between word and image was not limited just to kimono robes of the early modern period and later, but was a trend that can be seen not infrequently in painting, calligraphy, and lacquerware design as well.

In the late Edo period, *goshodoki* designs, which metaphorically referenced tales from legend and from Noh theater without words but through symbolic motifs alone, became a staple in *kosode* robe designs worn by women of the samurai class.

Although they were present in differing degrees, whether the primary focus was on the word or on the image, in every case the lyrical world of poetry and narrative represented a high level of literary cultivation and refinement that was played out when worn directly on the body.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- ◎ No.60-1, 60-2 and 60-3
Takefukusa Square Covering Cloth
Edo period, 18th century
Konbuin Temple, Nara