Thirteenth Presentation of the Charles Lang Freer Medal

April 12, 2012

Smithsonian

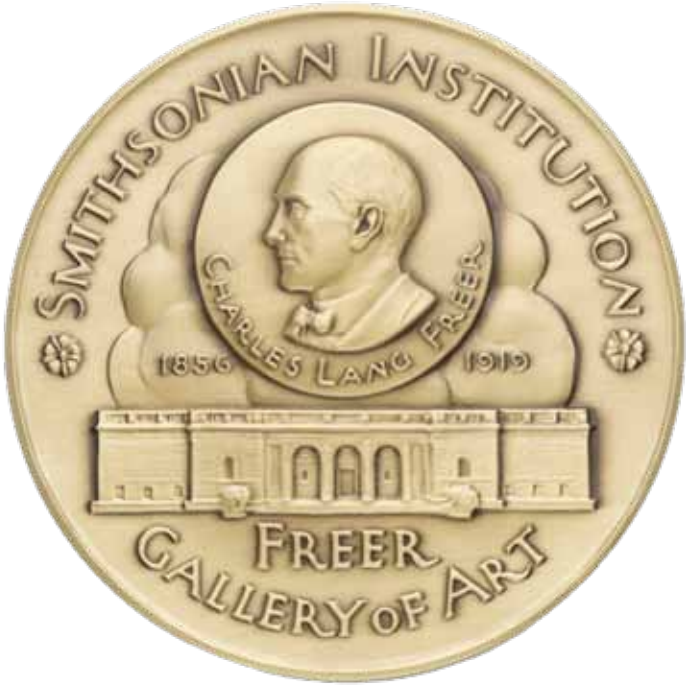
Contents

History of the Freer Medal

From the first presentation of the Freer Medal on February 25, 1956:

This medal is established in commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of the founder of the Freer Gallery of Art. The late Charles Lang Freer was born on February 25, 1856, at Kingston, New York. For many years he was a devoted and discerning collector and student of Oriental art. He believed that more is learned concerning a civilization or epoch from the art it has produced than from any other source. With this idea in mind, he presented his collection, a building to house them, and an endowment. The income was to be used "for the study of the civilization of the Far East," and "for the promotion of high ideals of beauty" by the occasional purchase of the finest examples of Oriental, Egyptian, and Near Eastern fine arts. This gift was offered to the Government during the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, to be given in trust to the Smithsonian Institution. The deed of gift was executed on May 5, 1906. Ground was broken on September 23, 1916, and the building was completed in the spring of 1921, about eighteen months after the death of the founder in New York City on September 25, 1919.

The medal, designed by one of our leading sculptors, Paul Manship, will be presented from time to time "For distinguished contribution to the knowledge and understanding of Oriental civilizations as reflected in their arts."



Previous Recipients

Osvald Sirén (1956)
Ernst Kühnel (1960)
Yashiro Yukio (1965)
Tanaka Ichimatsu (1973)
Laurence Sickman (1973)
Roman Ghirshman (1974)
Max Loehr (1983)
Stella Kramrisch (1985)
Alexander Soper (1990)
Sherman Lee (1998)
Oleg Grabar (2001)
James Cahill (2010)

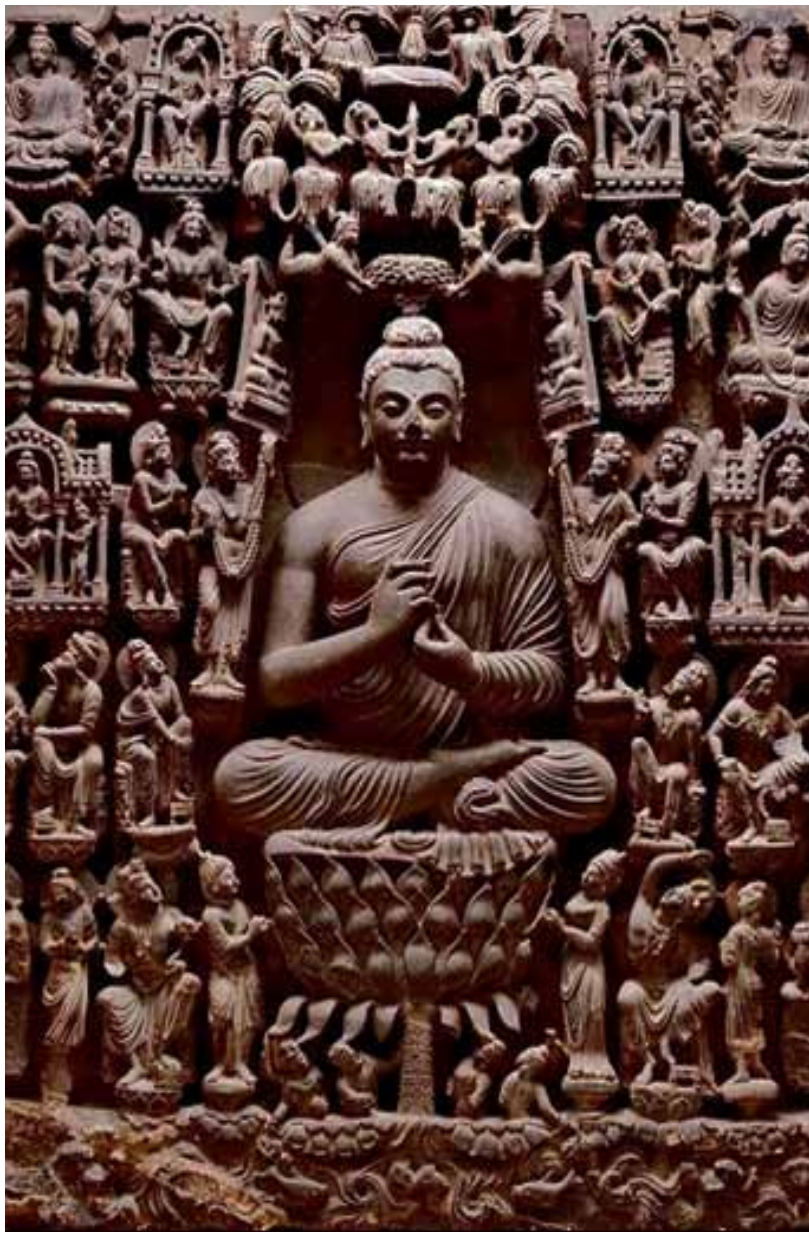


Fig. 1. Mahāyāna Buddhist Theophany. Ca. 3rd–4th century CE. Grey schist. 119 cm. Lahore Museum. Photo: *The Buddhist Heritage of Pakistan: Art of Gandhara* (New York: Asia Society Museum, 2011), p. 163. Note: Original photograph by Peter Oszvald and copyrighted by Kunst-und Austellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn.

Opening Remarks

Julian Raby, Dame Jillian Sackler Director of the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you this evening to the thirteenth presentation of the Freer Medal. This award, named for museum founder Charles Lang Freer, has been made on an ad hoc basis since its inauguration in 1956. The Freer Medal honors persons who, over the course of a career, have contributed in a substantial, even transcendent way to the understanding of the arts of Asia. The medal acknowledges those who share Mr. Freer's aspirations to create an environment conducive to the appreciation of Asian art, as well as his endorsement of rigorous scholarship as a key element in that appreciation.

We welcome you to Washington at its radiant, natural best. The ethereal canopy of cherry blossoms, a symbol of the important relationship between Japan and the United States, arrived early this year. But we are still in the midst of commemorating the centenary of the gift of cherry trees from Tokyo to Washington.

Together with other cultural institutions in the city, the Freer and Sackler Galleries have chosen to mark this moment with an array of important exhibitions of Japanese art. In their specificity and nuance, these exhibitions pay tribute to a very high level of audience discernment and sophistication.

Attendant to these diverse presentations of art, we are engaging in symposia and collegial conversations centered on the work of artists of Japan's Edo period. The participants in these scholarly events, including many of you present here this evening, possess a deep knowledge of Japan's visual culture and an impressive mastery of methodological and linguistic skills.

In a sense, presenting beautiful, challenging exhibitions that will be thoughtfully considered by the best minds in the field is a celebra-

tion of our honoree this evening, John Max Rosenfield, the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Professor of East Asian Art, Emeritus, at Harvard University.

This evening we honor Professor Rosenfield for a half-century of scholarship in the field of Japanese art history. We honor him as a mentor *par excellence*. Not only has he seeded the field with generations of gifted scholars and curators, he also has made certain that all who commit to this demanding path are welcomed and supported, regardless of institutional affiliation. And we honor Professor Rosenfield as a principal architect of post-World War II Western scholarship of Japanese art history. Through his intelligence and focused enthusiasm, Professor Rosenfield has leveraged his many positions of influence to advance the growth of the field.

John Rosenfield's path to Japan was hardly preordained. Born in 1924 in Dallas, Texas, his first foray into art involved—perhaps fortuitously—the sketchpad, pencil, and brush, tools he used in his pursuit of a BFA at the University of Texas, Austin. As with so many of his generation, World War II both interrupted and redirected him, not once but several times. Trained by the U.S. Army as a Thai language specialist, his first exposure was to the geography and cultures of India and Southeast Asia. Later, service in the Korean War took him to Korea and Japan.

Upon returning to the United States, Rosenfield studied at the University of California, Berkeley; Southern Methodist University; and the University of Iowa, earning a BLS, BFA, and MFA before receiving his PhD in art history from Harvard University in 1959. Notably, under the tutelage of the distinguished scholar Benjamin Rowland, Rosenfield specialized in the Buddhist art of central Asia and India, writing a dissertation on the art of the Kushans.

Following teaching positions at the University of Iowa and University of California, Los Angeles, a fellowship from Harvard took him to Japan to pursue the language essential to his Buddhist studies. While Rosenfield was abroad, Harvard decided to establish a specialized

program in Japanese art and invited him to compete for a position. He was successful and joined the Harvard faculty in 1965. During his decades at Harvard, Rosenfield held a variety of posts, including the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Professor of East Asian Art, chairman of the Department of Fine Arts, curator of Asian art at the Fogg Art Museum, and director of Harvard University Art Museums.

In such reflective and celebratory moments as these, one is cautious about sweeping statements, but I think that in close examination of Professor Rosenfield's career, several important features can be discerned.

His early instincts drew him to observation and rendering—to be an artist rather than to write about and study art—and these same instincts can be seen in his incisive texts, which invariably pivot on the point of close looking. In battles pitting theory and praxis, which were part and parcel of the academic environment of his time, Professor Rosenfield thoughtfully and fairly defended the put-upon notion of connoisseurship. He has always privileged the thing over ideas about the thing.

As a relative latecomer to the field that he would play a central role in shaping, Professor Rosenfield has sometimes referred to himself in a charmingly self-deprecating way as a "retread." Beginning Japanese language study at the age of thirty-six is no small undertaking. To give some perspective, in 1960 there were only three Americans in the field of Japanese art history who could handle written Japanese with any degree of fluency. Being invited to create a foundational program on Japanese art history at Harvard was nothing less than a pioneer venture.

In accepting the task, he was faced with a dual challenge: "training up" students to meet Japanese colleagues at the most sophisticated levels of exchange, while gently bringing Japanese colleagues into international scholarly collaborations as the world became increasingly interested in the art of Japan. Professor Rosenfield envisioned and played a major role in creating a field of study in which the entrée

to professional participation is merit rather than birthright.

He has always positioned himself as a learner, both a mentor to and companion of his students. The humbling lessons of being a "late bloomer" were not lost on Professor Rosenfield. Patience, humility, and persistence were as essential in his pattern of instruction as any content.

Professor Rosenfield's numerous publications deal with Indian and central Asian Buddhist arts of the Kushan period, Japanese Buddhist painting and sculpture, and early modern Japanese painting. His played a central role in the *Japan Arts Library* program, which brought a significant and varied body of Japanese scholarship to the English-speaking audience through skillfully selected and adapted translations.

As a guiding principal of the Kyoto-based Metropolitan Center for Far Eastern Art Studies, he been essential in directing the generosity of the late Harry Packard to many individuals and institutions engaged in the study of Japanese art. The center, in collaboration with the Freer and Sackler, sponsors the Shimada Prize, now in its twentieth year.

Rosenfield has lectured widely, organized several exhibitions of Japanese art, and served on various boards, including those of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Japan Society. He also was chair of the editorial board of the *Archives of Asian Art*. He is still a vigorous participant in many projects, large and small.

Indeed, the truth of his commitment can be seen in his retirement. The ambitiously encyclopedic *Extraordinary Persons: Eccentric, Non-conformist Japanese Artists in the Collection of Kimiko and John Powers* used works in the John and Kimiko Powers Collection as a launch pad to give the field an amazing universal resource (1999). His most recent book, the 2011 *Portraits of Chōgen: The Transformation of Buddhist Art in Early Medieval Japan*, represents the first significant study in English of the Japanese monk Shunjōbō Chōgen (1121–1206) and his efforts to restore major buildings and works of art lost in a brutal civil conflict of the late twelfth century.

Professor Rosenfield once described his fortuitous segue into Japanese art history as a "narrow escape" from a career trajectory of becoming a generalist, a "gentleman art scholar," a type familiar in an era before specialization. Somehow one doubts that would have happened in any case, but it is our great fortune that events transpired as they did.

Professor Rosenfield is that rare individual who can gracefully articulate his role and act in the continuum of a vast enterprise. His distinguished career provides us with a very important perspective. When he entered military service, Japan and the United States were locked in a horrendous conflict. The conflict and its consequences were not abstractions to the young soldier and soon-to-be-scholar. He surely does not take for granted the enormous distance traveled, the bridges built, and the commitments sustained during the more than sixty years that have passed since that dark time. He knows from whence we have come.

This evening we gather to thank John Rosenfield. We hope that in reflecting on the people and events that owe so much to him, he will feel that his unexpected journey has been the best of all possible endeavors.

Fig. 2. Portrait Statue of Tankai, detail. Ca. 1700. Attributed to Shimizu Ryūkei. Hollow woodblock construction, lacquer, inlaid crystal eyes. 75.2 cm. Hōzanji, Nara prefecture. From Aoki Shigeru, *Hōzanji*, pl. 29. Photo by Asukaen, Nara.

John Max Rosenfield

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Professor of East Asian Art, Emeritus,
at Harvard University

Dr. Raby and Colleagues:

I am amazed to find myself listed among the men and woman who laid the foundation for the history and criticism of Asian art, but of course I accept the award of the Freer Medal with utmost gratitude. At the previous award ceremonies, some medalists reviewed their careers, some described the state of their field of study, and some presented examples of their scholarship. Today I will briefly describe my own background and training and then discuss a current research topic that is somewhat controversial. I hope that members of the audience will give me their reactions and suggestions.

Apologia

Perhaps the only distinction that I bring to the list of Freer medalists is the fact that I am the only one born in Texas, which is not irrelevant to this occasion. I grew up in Middle America, but with the good fortune to have literate and active parents; my father was an accomplished amusements editor of the *Dallas Morning News*. In high school I learned to paint regionalist landscapes with cacti and an occasional jackrabbit. I was totally unaware of Asian art and had never encountered a person from Asia, but at age seventeen I read the picaresque novel *Kim* by Rudyard Kipling and was impressed by his vivid insights into the characters—the old Tibetan lama, the Anglo-Indian boy, the Punjabis, Sikhs, and Bengalis. Kipling's father was curator at the Punjab museum in Lahore, a great repository of Gandhāran sculpture and coins, and I now understand why Kipling, at the beginning of his novel, described in loving detail a relief carving that is one of the

prime landmarks in the history of Buddhist art (fig. 1). It was recently loaned by the Lahore Museum for display at the Asia Society Museum in New York. Kipling described the old lama seeing it in the museum and crying out, "The Lord! The Lord! It is Sakya Muni himself!"

I was eighteen years old when the United States entered World War II. Enlisting in the U.S. Army, I underwent infantry basic training, was sent to army language school to learn Thai, and then was shipped to India and Southeast Asia to serve in military intelligence. At age nineteen I found myself in Mumbai, marveling at the noise and exotic clutter of the bazaars. After three and a half years in the army I was discharged, returned to Texas, married sweet Ella Ruth Hopper, and went to art school at the University of Iowa. In 1950 I was recalled to service in the Korean War and was sent to Japan and Korea.

At the University of Iowa, realizing that I was not destined to become a professional painter, I came into the orbit of Professor William Heckscher, a gifted German-born member of the so-called Warburg School of art history and a specialist in Renaissance iconography. Heckscher trained us in basic methods of research and told me that if I wanted to do Asian studies, Iowa was not the right place. With the aid of the G.I. Bill of Rights I attended graduate school at Harvard for two years, with a third year for travel in India and Iran, and began the study of Indian Buddhist art.

The great French scholar Alfred Foucher once wrote that students of Asian art should be aware of what he called the *l'ambiance rizière* (the ambiance or atmosphere of rice paddy fields, which is to say, the underlying realities of life in preindustrial Asia). By this criterion I was well qualified. At a formative age I had served in Assam, north Burma, Sri Lanka, Thailand, north India, and then in Korea and Japan. Asia has always been a living reality for me, never a bookish abstraction.

My PhD dissertation focused on portrait statues of kings and grandees of the Kushan dynasty excavated near Mathurā, south of Delhi. Published by the University of California Press in 1964, that book is now badly out of date (I am amazed to say, however, that it

is still being pirated). It embodied the methodology I have come to use, whatever the subject. I like to make a detailed study of an eloquent work of art and then explore the circumstances of its creation—the artist, the material, the patron, the subject matter, and its place among other works. I prefer topics with abundant collateral evidence—inscriptions, coins, letters, diaries, and historical documents—that place the work of art into the larger social and cultural matrix, wherever the subject may lead.

Some scholars disapprove of my approach. Strict formalists say that I direct attention away from the object and weaken its aesthetic impact. Others claim that my forays into political or social history are amateurish. I acknowledge these liabilities. I am also keenly aware of debates about semiology (the various meanings of works of art), but I still strive to capture something of the intentions and realities of artists and patrons. I agree with Meyer Schapiro, who said in a talk to undergraduates at Harvard, "It is really very simple. We are art historians because we love art and we love history." To that I would add an appendix: "We study Asia because of the infinite richness of its arts and the profundity of its thoughts."

After World War II, the Fine Arts Department at Harvard—mindful of having trained Ernest Fenollosa and Langdon Warner, pioneers in the history and criticism of Asian art—sought to resume instruction in the Japanese field. The subject had fallen out of favor in American universities for a number of reasons, and there were few candidates. I lacked expertise in the field and had only a modest facility with Asian languages, but I was offered a chance to develop a Japanese program. With a soldier's knowledge of Asia and a respectable background in art history, I accepted the challenge.

Subsequently, as teacher and curator I had the privilege of serving for more than a half-century at Harvard—with its extraordinary students, faculties, libraries, and art collections, and with such richly endowed neighbors as the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Peabody Museum in Salem, and local collectors who are well informed

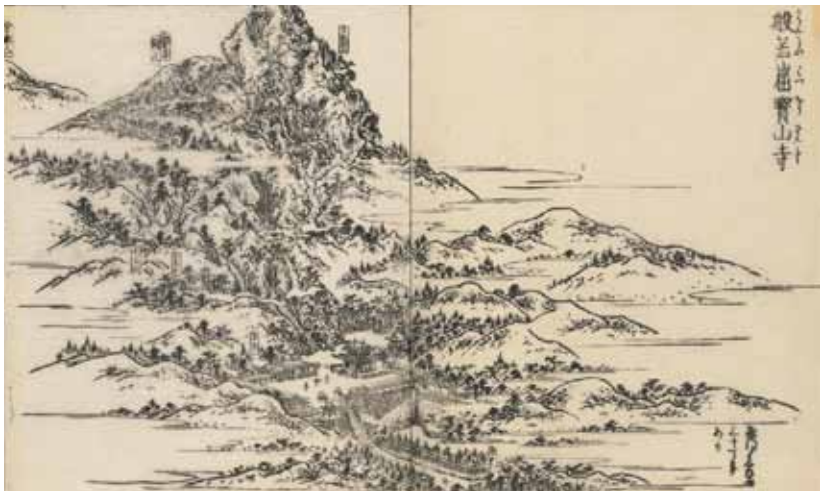
and articulate. With access to such resources I have explored many facets of Japanese art and, at the end of a career, have gained the level of language and research skills that I should have had at the beginning. I am much heartened by the fact that training in Japanese art history at Harvard is now in the hands of two outstanding scholars, Melissa McCormick and Yukio Lippit.

To conclude this embarrassing excursion into narcissism, I want to acknowledge the very generous help and forbearance offered by Japanese art historians, curators, collectors, and critics, and by many friends in Japan. Indeed, I can only hope that my scholarship repays their generosity, for otherwise I can never fully express my debt, respect, gratitude, and affection.

Current Project

Early this year the ancient house of E.J. Brill in Leiden published my most recent effort, a narrowly focused study of Japanese art in the early Kamakura period (around the year 1200). In it I explored portrait statues of a Japanese Buddhist monk, Shunjōbō Chōgen, famous for overseeing, after a brutal civil war, the restoration of Tōdaiji in Nara and of its great bronze statue of Vairocana. A thoroughly trained Shingon monk, Chōgen became a fervent devotee of Amitābha and salvation in the Pure Land of the West. He and his followers commissioned buildings and artworks of high aesthetic quality and historical importance. With great help from the publications of the admirable Japanese scholar Kobayashi Takeshi (1903–1969), longtime member of the Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute, I translated and annotated Chōgen's memoir, which took me some two years.

My current project is similar in concept: I am studying a coherent body of Buddhist arts associated with a Shingon monk, the well-known Hōzanji Tankai, who died in 1716 (fig. 2). At the age of fifty, Tankai came to live on Mount Ikoma, which is only six hundred meters high but is steep and forested, with rocky outcroppings, waterfalls,



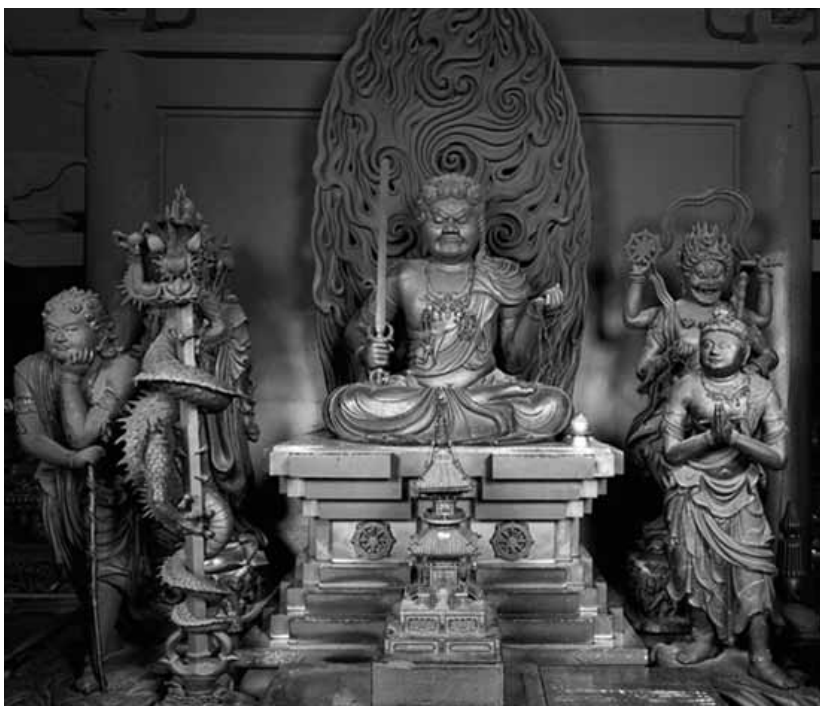


Fig. 3. Landscape view of Mount Ikoma and Hōzanji. 1791. From Akisato Ritō, *Yamato meisho zue*. Illustrations by Takehara Shunchōsai (signed "Nobushige"). 6 vols. in 7 boxes. Osaka: Takahashi Heisuke, 1791. Collection: Fine Arts Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Fig. 4. Seated Fudō and Four Attendants. Ca. 1690. Attributed to Tankai in engraved inscription. Hollow assembled woodblock construction, lacquered, inlaid crystal eyes, metal fittings. 75.7 cm (Fudō). Main Hall, Hōzanji. Photo: Hōzanji website.

and grottoes; on a clear day the cities of Osaka, Kyoto, and Nara can be seen in the distance (fig. 3). While there, he was appointed head priest of the temple that would become known as Hōzanji.

When, by happenstance, I visited the site in 1985, I was stirred by its natural beauty and impressed by the many works of art attributed to Tankai. He was, for example, credited with making the *honzon* (the primary object of devotion) at the temple: statues of Fudō (the Resolute King of Mystic Wisdom) and four attendants, blackened by years of smoke and soot from fire ceremony rituals (fig. 4).

Also at Hōzanji are hundreds of documents—sermons, doctrinal essays, lustration records, certificates of spiritual instruction, rules and regulations of Shingon rituals, and so on—a scholar's treasure trove. For convenience I refer to it as the Hōzanji archive. Kobayashi Takeshi heroically transcribed and published this material, but unfortunately he died before he could make an interpretative synthesis of the data. Not only does the archive make Tankai one of the best-recorded personalities in the entire history of Japanese art, it also provides a remarkable record of Shingon doctrine, ritual, art, and social dynamic.

Recently Patricia Graham of the University of Kansas published a thoughtful survey of Japanese Buddhist art since 1600, in which she asserted "the need to reassess the canon of Japanese art history to allow for the inclusion of ... later Japanese Buddhist materials." Graham deplored the fact that traditional Buddhist art of the Edo period and later has been judged by museum curators and art historians (in Japan and the West) to be low in quality and therefore unworthy of exhibition and of serious study. They have focused instead on exciting secular developments during the Edo period that heralded the advent of modernity: the incursion of empirical science and European illusionist imagery, the spread of the literati movement, the birth and flowering of so-called Floating World literature and imagery, the appearance in Kyoto of the brothers Ogata Kōrin and Kenzan, and so on. About the only religious art that has gained much attention is the

product of individualist Buddhist monk-artists such as Enku, Hakuin, and Sengai. By comparison, later Buddhist icons in a traditional style have seemed stereotyped and commonplace.

I propose now to show other works attributed to Tankai and ask members of the audience to judge this material on subjective, aesthetic grounds—recognizing that fuzzy PowerPoint slides are a poor basis on which to judge the originals. I will then share some of what I have learned about the objects and ask you if the collateral information affects your judgment. I join Patricia Graham in asking college professors to consider whether you would add such material to your survey courses, curators to consider whether you would exhibit such materials in your galleries, collectors if you would acquire such works, and art dealers (assuming no questions of export ethics) to think of market values.

The last point, market values, will be a red flag to colleagues who oppose the injection of money into discussions of art-historical value, but we must recognize that throughout history artworks have often been treated as commodities—their monetary values affected by such factors as rarity, attribution, provenance, condition, historic association, and, of course, visual appeal. All of these factors prevailed in 2008, for example, in the auction sale of a statue of Vairocana attributed to the thirteenth-century master Unkei for $12.8 million at Christie's in New York.

Statues Attributed to Tankai

Three Buddhist Deities. Let us now examine three statues attributed to Tankai that were made in 1709 (fig. 5). The group does not constitute a formal triad, which is a standard configuration in Buddhist imagery, but it contains the three deities most prominent in popular Buddhist devotions. Using the assembled hollow woodblock construction method (*yosegi tsukuri*), they were meticulously carved from thin pieces of cypress, their surfaces sanded smooth, then lacquered and

finally gilded. Tiny, elaborate copper necklaces with pendent strings of jewels were placed around the neck of each deity. Added to the garments were varied delicate patterns in cut gold leaf (*kirikane*), which can best be seen with a magnifying glass.

The largest depicts Kannon standing in a frontal pose inclined slightly forward as though responding to the devotee (fig. 5a). In its crown is a minuscule figure of Amida. Its right hand makes the "fear not" gesture; its left hand grasps the stem of a lotus bud. Carved into the mandorla are delicate filigree floral patterns covered with lacquer. The pedestal, ultimately derived from Tang period Chinese prototypes, is a lotus flower resting on a multilevel base, the whole intricately detailed.

The Jizō statue is more active (fig. 5b); the right foot steps forward slightly, the right hand holds a monk's staff and is extended as though in protective welcome, and the left hand proffers a wonder-working jewel. Beneath the feet are two lotus flowers that emerge from swirling cloud shapes.

Fudō stands with his weight on the right leg (fig. 5c); he holds a life-saving cord in his left hand and his mighty sword in his right. His head is oversized. He stands on a squared altar resting on rock forms; swirling tongues of flame form his halo.

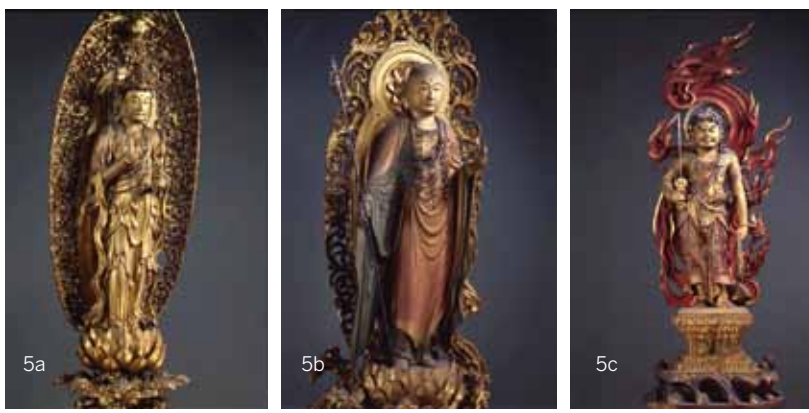


Fig. 5. Three Statues Commissioned by Higashiyama Tennō. Dedicated 1709.12.7. Reverse of each halo inscribed in gold paint *Hōzan Tankai jisaku*. Assembled woodblock construction, lacquered, attached copper fittings. From Aoki Shigeru, *Hōzanji*, pls. 43–45. Photos by Asukaen, Nara. 5a. *Kannon*. 59.42 cm. 5b. *Jizō*. 42.7 cm.5c. *Fudō*. 41.8 cm.

These statues were made to the order of Higashiyama Tennō (1675–1709), the 113th sovereign of Japan, who acceded to the throne at the tender age of twelve. Higashiyama was manipulated by both his father and the military regime in Edo, which sought to enhance the status of the shogun and increase its domination of the royal court. By 1709, still in his thirties but eager to abdicate, Higashiyama commissioned these statues to serve as the main objects of veneration in a private chapel that he was building in Kyoto.

This was not the first time Higashiyama had turned to Tankai for assistance. In 1699 he had already sired ten children by different women. The first four sons were obliged by custom to enter the Buddhist priesthood. The fifth son became Crown Prince and would be enthroned as Nakamikado Tennō in 1710. Hoping for a sixth son, Higashiyama asked Tankai to lead Shingon prayer rituals to insure conception, then safe childbirth, and finally a healthy childhood. The sixth son was born a great success in all respects—gynecologically, obstetrically, pediatrically, theologically, and liturgically—and the grateful royal regime donated a thousand rolls of silk cloth and quantities of gold to Hōzanji.

Inscriptions on the back of each of the three statues tell us that Tankai conducted eye-opening rituals (to bring the icons to life) on the seventh day of the twelfth month of 1709. They do not tell us that Higashiyama died only ten days later and the entire nation was plunged into a yearlong period of mourning. Delivery of the three statues was canceled, and they remained at Hōzanji in memory of the deceased sovereign. During the summer of 1712, however, Konoe Motohiro, the dominant official in the royal court, asked that the statues be sent to him. Tankai's response was exquisitely diplomatic. He noted that the three statues had been made at the order of Higashiyama Tennō, that full payment (including the pedestals and halo) had been received, and that he humbly hoped that the great minister would consent to receiving just one of the statues. What actually transpired next is not known, but the three statues have remained possessions of Hōzanji as memorials to the deceased sovereign.

If a great court minister in the early seventeenth century coveted these statues, a director of the Tokyo Imperial Museum in the late nineteenth century did not. In 1899 Kuki Ryūichi (1852–1931), a leading figure in formulating Japan's official cultural policies, wrote that Tankai was "... a noted wood carver who made several images of Buddha, which in artistic finish and touch, are quite above the ordinary, but when they are subjected to a critical investigation, there is in the appearance of the Buddha something vulgar, and sensual."

Elsewhere Baron Kuki stated that Buddhist statues and paintings represented the pinnacle of the nation's artistic achievements, but he asserted that not one sacred image worthy of veneration had been produced since the 1300s. Buddhist art had become completely spiritless. This, however, was not entirely the fault of the artists, he said, because the faith had spread from the higher classes to the lower, and no great men had appeared in religious circles in later times. "In short, modern works of art, though of elaborate and skillful workmanship, are spiritless, while ancient ones are meaningful and inspiring."

Why this baleful judgment developed in the Meiji period is a very big topic that will not concern us here, but it prevailed for decades among Japanese and foreign art historians and museum curators. As recently as the 1960s, for example, Robert Paine of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, writing for the canonical *Pelican History of Art* series, said that Japanese Buddhist sculpture and painting after the Kamakura period had suffered from the popularization of ancient cultural standards, and Alexander Soper claimed that Buddhist architecture after the Kamakura period had so declined that it demanded no prolonged critical attention.

Shrine of the Five Wisdom Kings. The only work bearing Tankai's name that has been registered by the Japanese government as an Important Cultural Property is a shrine about eighty centimeters (two and a half feet) tall (fig. 6). Made in the year 1700, it encloses a phantasmagoria engulfed in flames and commanded by Fudō, who

sits majestically atop a stepped pedestal holding a noose and sword. The haloes, swirling tongues of flame lacquered in red and tipped with gold, exude a sense of explosive energy that is compressed and contained within the box.

The five figures were carved of *aka sendan* (Red Chinaberry), a local substitute for fragrant sandalwood from India that was favored for making miniature icons. Inscriptions claim that Tankai, devout and revered at the age of seventy-three, made this shrine and conducted the requisite Goma (Fire Ceremony) rituals addressed to Fudō—more than twelve million wooden plaques burned in fires and a certain incantation recited five and a half million times.

Each of the freestanding kings, only fifteen centimeters (about six inches) tall, has multiple arms and a fearsomely scowling face. Each is thought to conquer spiritual obstacles. Trailokyavijaya, for example, subdues desire, resentment, and stupidity. In his eight arms he brandishes a vajra, dharma wheel, spear, and axe; his apron is a tiger pelt, serpents wrap around his ankles—all carved from wood in meticulous, minuscule detail.

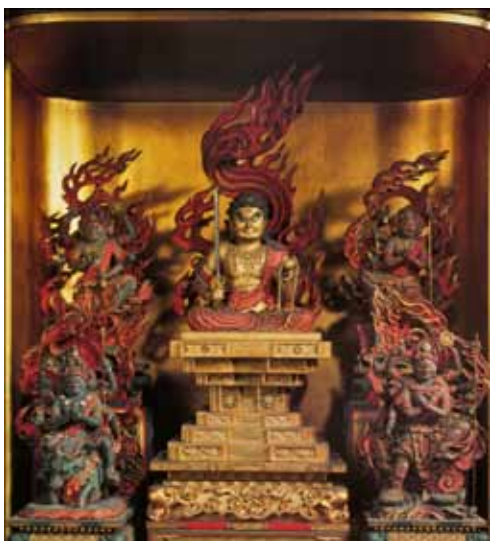


Fig. 6. Miniature Shrine of Fudō and Four Wisdom Kings. Dated to 1700. Attributed to Tankai. Important Cultural Property. Red Chinaberry wood, lacquered, with metal fittings. 80.7 cm (box). From temple brochure. Photo by Asukaen, Nara.

Shrine of the Seated Fudō. A highly sophisticated shrine dated to 1701 depicts Fudō seated on a rock, accompanied by the two youths (fig. 7). A short inscription in gold paint on the back of the box gives Tankai's name and his age as seventy-three, but does not explicitly credit him as the maker nor does it name a patron. However, so excellent an artifact must have been intended for someone of high rank. A geometric pattern of cut gold flowers and straight lines covers the inside of the shrine doors and back wall, contrasting contrapuntally with the high relief and dynamism of the main icon. Fudō is only five and a half centimeters tall (about two inches). The tongues of flame that swirl behind him frame his oversized head and scowling face. Water roils against the craggy rock that supports him.

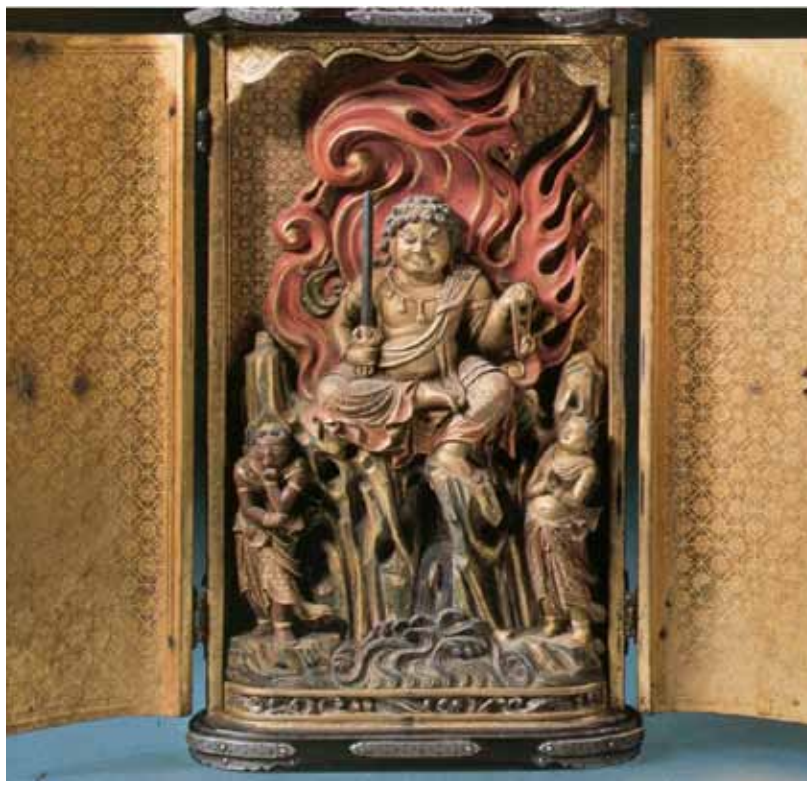


Fig. 7. Portable shrine of Fudō seated on a rock. Dated to 1701. Signed "Tankai." Carved cypress wood, lacquered, cut gold leaf. 5.5 cm (Fudō). From Aoki Shigeru, *Hōzanji*, pl. 46. Photo by Asukaen, Nara.

Elephant-headed God. Dateable to 1686 and bearing Tankai's name is a tiny bronze icon of Kankiten (Deva of Virtue and Joy) that represents male and female deities in sexual intercourse (fig. 8). The image is static and restrained, as befits a culture that esteemed decorum in public; only the jeweled band on the head identifies the female partner.

Fig. 8. Paired Statues of Kankiten. Dateable to 1686. Signed "Tankai." Bronze. 46.0 cm. Jōkōji, Nara prefecture. Photo from *Mikkyō bijutsu taikan* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1984), vol. 4.

In Tibet, where such images are more common, the sexual union of gods, called *Yab Yum* (father-mother), is explicitly shown. This, however, is a Japanese interpretation of the Hindu deity Ganeśa, who is considered a son of the all-powerful lord Śiva (Maheśvara). With the head of an elephant and the body of a man, this deity is thought capable of removing obstacles, promoting commerce, and rewarding his votaries with the fulfillment of their desires. Indeed, he is one of the most popular folk gods in Hindu India. Most Indian Buddhists thought Ganeśa an evil force, but Tantric Buddhist priests performed rituals that directed his mighty powers to benign ends. In the seventh and eighth centuries the worship of Ganeśa, along with that of many other Indian deities, was introduced to China and soon brought to Japan.

The iconographic significance of this deity was made clear in the following Japanese account (translation adapted from James Sanford):

> [In the dual form] the male *deva* is the transformation body of Maheśvara. He drives off both celestial and earthly demons and distributes profit in this world and the next. The female figure is a transformation of the eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara, the most potent of its thirty-three forms. The two standing in conjugal embrace represent the union of *yin* and *yang*....

A text attributed to Amoghavajra describes in great detail the cult of Kankiten, featuring a long ablution ritual that begins with a priest pouring a large amount of sesame oil into a brass bowl, reciting a mantra 108 times, and placing the statue in the oil. The many details spelled out in Amoghavajra's text do not concern us here, except for the final stipulation: that the rituals must be kept secret. Tankai himself wrote that those who reveal the details of the oil ablution ritual to outsiders will suffer punishment in hell. A few scattered medieval icons have been photographed, and nearly thirty drawings of the god appear in Japanese iconographic manuals, but Tankai's is the only Kankiten of recent vintage to be photographed. It was made for Jōkōji in Nara city, a tiny branch of Hōzanji. Jōkōji was shut down in 1896 and thus, in a sense, desacralized, which allowed the photograph to be made. Ironically, the fact that Kankiten images have been treated as holy secrets has greatly enhanced their mystic appeal to the public, but elephant-headed icons have played little role in the nation's artistic consciousness.

Both Fudō and Kankiten are still worshipped at Hōzanji, but when Tankai became chief priest in 1680, he declared that Fudō was higher in spiritual power. He made Fudō the *honzon* of the sanctuary and built for him a much larger hall than for Kankiten. The elephant-headed god continued to haunt Tankai's dreams, however, complaining loudly of second-class status and demanding more attention.

Without digressing into Freudian dream analysis, we should note that Kankiten became the object of great appeal for the public at large. The sesame seed oil merchants of Osaka, for example,

gave generously to Hōzanji because they credited their prosperity to Kankiten. Long after Tankai's death a hall dedicated to Kankiten was placed alongside the main hall at the heart of the temple. Covered with cypress-bark shingles, the eight large gables protruding from the roof impart a fanciful, exotic appearance unique in Japanese Buddhist architecture. At present, even in this highly industrialized nation, an estimated three million people still come each year for mystic rituals thought to provide worldly benefits—prosperity, safety, long life, love, children, good health, solace, or revenge.

Brief Account of Tankai's Life

Because I intend to publish a detailed biography of Tankai, I will offer here only a very brief outline of his rise from humble circumstances to great celebrity—he was a paragon of social mobility. He was born in 1629 in a tiny coastal village (population less than 100) near the Ise Grand Shrine. At age eleven he entered the Shingon priesthood in a local temple and revealed a propensity for stringent asceticism, fasting for weeks at a time. At age eighteen he began training at the Shingon temple of Eidaiji in Edo, where he was based for more than thirty years. He was able, however, to travel throughout western Japan seeking the teachers and environment best suited to his character—studying, for example, on Mount Kōya or at Tōji in Kyoto. In his forties he began to read Ritsu (or Vinaya) texts, the rules and regulations of monks and nuns for whom seclusion and celibacy, the total renunciation of worldly life, were the paths to salvation.

At age fifty Tankai finally settled on Mount Ikoma. Appointed head priest of what became Hōzanji, he began a whirlwind campaign of construction, image-making, and expansion. Gaining fame as a ritualist, he offered prayers and ceremonies to end droughts or prevent floods. He conducted baptismal ceremonies (Skt: *abhiṣeka*; J: *kanjo*) for student monks (as many as fifty-seven at a time), made amulets intended to dispel smallpox and other diseases, and at age seventy

began to minister to members of the royal courts in Kyoto and the shogun's court in Edo. At age eighty-six he died, and eulogists wrote that he was reborn in the paradise of Maitreya. Under his direction, Hōzanji had become one of the richest and most active sanctuaries in western Japan—and remains so to the present day.

Attributions

Even as a child, Tankai was said to be talented in drawing and modeling, but scholars have questioned how a busy prelate—fasting for weeks on end, conducting marathon fire rituals, lecturing to student monks—had the time or facilities to produce highly complicated works of art. The degree of Tankai's participation in any specific work is frequently a matter of conjecture, and there is evidence that professional artists and craftsmen made major (if usually unacknowledged) contributions to the images. At the very least Tankai may have enlisted craftsmen, secured financing, made preliminary drawings, supervised the making, and conducted rituals that "enlivened" the object. His name was a guarantee of an icon's mystical potency because he was reputed to be a wonderworker. His signature on an object was akin to a trademark, an indication that it had emerged from his spiritual ambience, and his exalted status overshadowed the contributions of others.

In Tankai's day there were twenty-six Buddhist sculpture workshops in Kyoto alone. His first known collaborator was an aged sculptor named Intatsu, head of the Ōmiya Buddhist atelier in Kyoto. When Tankai was named head priest at Hōzanji, he commissioned Intatsu to design statues that celebrated the sacred history of the site. Temple records clearly state that Intatsu made the model for the bronze statue of Maitreya installed at the mouth of a grotto high up the mountain; and in all likelihood he made the model for the similar statue of En no Gyōja, the semi-mythical mountain ascetic and wonderworker of the eighth century. Tankai himself wrote an inscription on a seated statue of Fudō stating that Intatsu, at age sixty-four, came to Hōzanji

in the summer of 1685, received instruction on Buddhist doctrine, and collaborated with Tankai.

Another of Tankai's collaborators was the well-known Kyoto sculptor Shimizu Ryūkei (1659–1732), thirty years his junior and apparently a devoted disciple. Inscriptions state that Tankai and Shimizu collaborated in 1696 on a seated Fudō statue for Gyokusenji, a small temple in Osaka. Though there is no verification, Ryūkei is credited with carving the life-size portrait of Tankai that we have already seen. After Tankai died, Ryūkei made statuettes of everyday people, and it is possible that it was he who made the statues in the miniature shrines.

Conclusions

Patricia Graham's survey has shown that the overwhelming quantity of traditional Buddhist art produced in Japan in the past four centuries has not been thoroughly sorted out, studied, and evaluated. The process, however, has begun.

The national museums of Nara and Kyoto have recently organized serious exhibitions of latter-day Buddhist sculpture. In 1994 the British Museum acquired two bodhisattva statues that once flanked an image of Śākyamuni (now lost). According to inscriptions, the statues were carved in the 1680s by a contemporary of Tankai, a lay-monk named Koyu, head of the Seventh Avenue Atelier (Shichijō Bussho) in Kyoto. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, is exhibiting on loan an Amida triad datable to the 1730s. We should note the efforts of Marsha Haufler, also of the University of Kansas, to explore Buddhist painting in China in the Ming and Qing periods.

For the past year I have been showing pictures of the Tankai material to knowledgeable friends and asking, "Is the aesthetic quality of this material worthy of full-scale art historical research?" One learned respondent said, "No. It is kitsch, high-quality kitsch, but uninspired, derivative, and overly elaborate. It is no more worthy of historical or critical study than the poems of Edgar Guest or the music of Rodgers and Hammerstein." Another person observed, "These are moribund

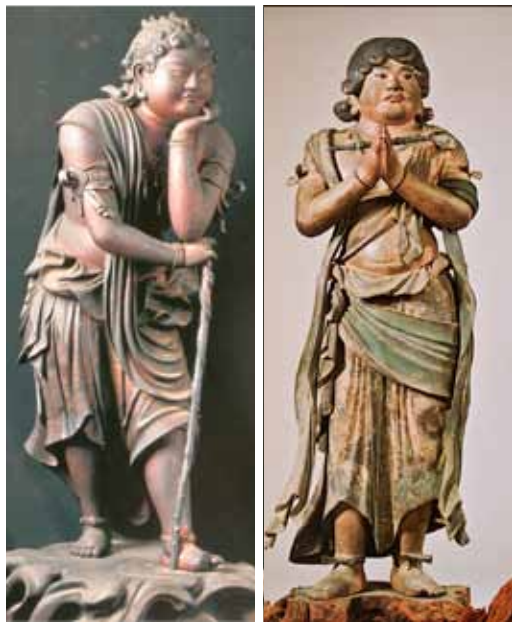


Fig. 9. Comparison: Statues of Dōji (youthful attendants of Fudō). Left: Signed "by Tankai." 1680. 97.9 cm. Hōzanji, Hondō. Photo from *Fudō Myōō Sōran*. Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1984. Right: By Unkei or a member of the Kei school of sculptors. 1199. 95.6 cm. Kongōbuji, Mount Kōya.

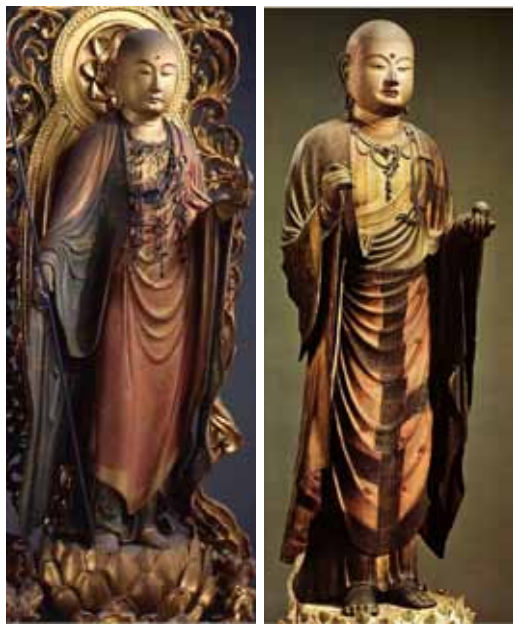


Fig. 10. Comparison: Statues of Jizō. Left: By Tankai. 1709. 41.8 cm. Commissioned by Higashiyama Tennō. Hōzanji. From Aoki Shigeru, *Hōzanji*, pl. 43. Photos by Asukaen, Nara. Right: By Kaikei. 1203. 89.8 cm. Tōdaiji. Photo: Asukaen, Nara.

vestiges of premodern culture, low in aesthetic quality. They remind me of the Easter egg baubles made by Fabergé for Czar Alexander." Such opinions reflect those of Kuki Ryūichi cited above, that the Tankai material is spiritless, vulgar, and sensual, with the corollary that ancient works of Buddhist art are meaningful and inspiring.

As a conclusion to these remarks, we might test this issue by comparing examples selected from the Tankai oeuvre with historical prototypes. A standing image of one of the youthful attendants of Fudō, done probably by Intatsu in collaboration with Tankai, may be compared with a similar statue on Mount Kōya attributed to Unkei or members of the so-called Kei group of sculptors in the thirteenth century (fig. 9). The two statues are almost five hundred years apart in date, and there is no question that the later work was derived from an earlier one, attested by the use of the scarf over the thighs— a unifying design feature—and the expressive realism in the face and eyes. The earlier work is perhaps more lively, for it was inventive and innovative at a time when a distinct new sculptural idiom was being formed. The later work is derivative, but is it worthless?

Another pair juxtaposes the Jizō made for Higashiyama Tennō with one three times its size at Tōdaiji, carved by Kaikei, circa 1203 (fig. 10). The latter figure is more realistic, farther removed from the exalted realm of Buddhist idealism, but can we think of it in the same way that we think of a present-day performance of a Beethoven piano sonata? A pianist, who is not Beethoven, adheres to (and interprets) an inspiring composition made centuries earlier, and we can judge the pianist's intelligence, clarity of execution, and emotional power. Tankai was not as great a theologian as Kōbō Daishi, and Shimizu Ryūkei was not as innovative as Unkei or Kaikei, but the ancient doctrines and forms of Esoteric Buddhism retained their deep meanings even as Japan itself was beginning to move inexorably into the modern age, the age of science and individualism.

I plan to keep working on this, and await your reactions, thoughts, and suggestions.

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