5. A Pair of Camels in Edo Japan: Representation and Discourse

Hiroyuki Suzuki

Abstract: This chapter examines the striking reception of a pair of single-humped camels in Edo Japan. The Dutch East India Company brought the camels to Nagasaki in 1821 as diplomatic gifts to the Tokugawa shogun. Rejected by the shogun, the camels were displayed in public shows around the country for years, attracting enormous attention. The camel shows not only provided a wide audience with information, both genuine and fabricated, but also inspired scholars, intellectuals, writers, and painters to produce novels, verses, songs, essays, and paintings. The camels' reception in Edo society generated a wealth of connotations concerning camels, which also reflected people's general view of animals.

Keywords: camel, diplomatic gift, *misemono* show, Edo culture, Maruyama Ōshin (1790–1838)

Introduction[1]

Focusing on a pair of camels that a Dutch ship brought to Nagasaki in 1821, this chapter examines the remarkable ways in which the animals were received by the urban dwellers of Edo Japan. In the sixth month of that year, a pair of dromedaries or single-humped camels (*Camelus dromedarius*) arrived on Deshima Island. *A Study of Public Shows* (Misemono kenkyū, 1928) by Asakura Musei (1877–1927) suggests that the *opperhoofd* or chief merchant of the Dutch East India Company (hereafter VOC) at the trading post in Nagasaki, Jan Cock Blomhoff (1779–1853), sold

1 This essay was based on a paper presented at the international symposium "Shifting Perspectives on Media and Materials in Early Modern Japan" at Djam Lecture Theatre on 4–5 July 2015, at SOAS, University of London. For this paper, the author revised his article "Rakuda o egaku: Maruyama Ōshin hitsu rakuda-zu o megutte" (To Depict the Camel: Problems Involved in "Camels" by Maruyama Ōshin), *Bijutsu kenkyū* 338 (1987), pp. 16–34.

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the camels to an impresario[2] who orchestrated a series of shows exhibiting these strange animals in major cities such as Osaka, Kyoto, Edo, and Nagoya. Everywhere, a great number of local citizens came to enjoy the show. At the same time, the sight of the camels confused intellectuals because the appearance of the animals was inconsistent with their existing knowledge.

By delving into the various phenomena brought about by the pair of camels, we will obtain a glimpse of the cultural dynamics surrounding exotic animals in the Edo period. Particularly notable is the fact that a wealth of connotations generated and propagated by the camels found their way into novels, essays, comic verses, popular songs, woodblock prints, and hanging scroll paintings. People's general view of animals is reflected in the image of the camel.

On Exotic Animals

Early documents such as *Chronicles of Japan* (Nihon shoki) and *Continuation of Chronicles of Japan* (Shoku nihongi) state that exotic animals were imported in the late sixth century. In 598, an envoy of the empress Suiko (r. 592–628) brought a pair of magpies from the Silla kingdom back to Japan; moreover, the king of Silla presented the empress with a pair of peacocks as diplomatic gifts. In the following year, the king of Baekje presented the empress with other exotic animals, including a camel, a donkey, two sheep, and a white pheasant. From the seventh through the ninth centuries, rare animals were sporadically imported into Japan as diplomatic gifts from the Korean peninsula.[3]

During the Heian period, when Chinese maritime traders monopolised the export of rare animals to Japan, peacocks and parrots were especially popular. These exotic birds attracted the nobility, including emperors, retired emperors, members of the imperial family, and high-ranking aristocrats in Kyoto; they exchanged the birds among themselves to maintain their social networks. The imported birds in the palace garden and the gardens of noble residences were not just decorative, but also had significant religious meanings. The aristocracy saw peacocks as symbols of an esoteric Buddhist ritual conducted according to the *Mahamayuri Sutra*, or peacock sutra, to avert natural disasters and disease, and to bring happiness. They

2 Asakura Musei, *Misemono kenkyū* (Kyoto: Shibunkaku shuppan, 1977 [1928]), pp. 191–192.

3 Kawazoe Yū, "Hakurai dōbutsu to misemono" (Imported Animals and Shows), in Nakazawa Katsuaki, ed., *Rekishi no naka no dōbutsu tachi* (Animals in History), Hito to dōbutsu no Nihon shi, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2009), pp. 129–130. For the relation between exotic animals and Japanese culture, see Federico Marcon, "All Creatures Great and Small: Tokugawa Japan and Its Animals," in Robert T. Singer and Kawai Masatomo, eds., *The Life of Animals in Japanese Art*, exhibition catalogue (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), pp. 30–32.

also associated parrots with the preaching of Buddhist teachings because of the birds' ability to echo human speech.[4]

The Sino-Japanese trade reached its climax in the fifteenth century, during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), but there is little information about the import of exotic animals at that time, apart from a type of hawk native to the Korean peninsula. The Japanese warlords believed that Korean hawks were the best for hunting. In 1613, the first Tokugawa shogun, Ieyasu (1542–1616), ordered the Sō family, whose domain was Tsushima Island, located halfway between the Japanese archipelago and the Korean peninsula, to import hawks from Korea.[5]

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, the scope of the trade expanded to Southeast Asian countries. This meant that more exotic animals native to Southeast Asia reached Japan. In 1594, for example, a merchant in the port city of Sakai presented the hegemon Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598) with a civet cat he had obtained in the Philippines. Moreover, a series of genre paintings on folding screens from the early seventeenth century, called *Scenes along the Shijō Riverbed*, depict audiences enjoying animal shows of exotic species, such as peacocks, tigers, hedgehogs, and water buffalos, along with kabuki and puppet theatre and acrobat shows, all of which were performed on the dry riverbed of the Kamo River across Shijō avenue in southeast Kyoto.[6]

Issuing the edicts of national seclusion in the 1630s, the Tokugawa shogunate made it impossible for the Japanese to travel abroad or return to their native country in 1635 and barred Portuguese carracks from entering any Japanese port in 1639. After relocating the trading station of the Dutch VOC from Hirado to Nagasaki in 1641, the shogunate restricted their foreign trade partners to three designated countries, the Netherlands, Joseon Korea, and Ming (later Qing) China. As a result, the import of exotic animals was predominated by these countries. A large portion of animal imports were rare birds such as parakeets, parrots, hill myna birds, and pheasants. While some of them were displayed in public shows, others were sold at a high price to domain lords (*daimyō*) and wealthy townsmen.[7]

Among the *daimyō* of the Edo period, there were a few who took a fancy to collecting rare living animals. Typical is Tokugawa Mitsukuni (1628–1700), lord of Mito domain, who was said to keep imported peacocks, parrots, and parakeets, as

4 Kawazoe Yū, "Hakurai dōbutsu to misemono," pp. 131–132.

5 Kawazoe Yū, "Hakurai dōbutsu to misemono," pp. 133–135.

6 Kawazoe Yū, "Hakurai dōbutsu to misemono," pp. 136, 143–144.

7 Kawazoe Yū, "Hakurai dōbutsu to misemono," pp. 136–139. For the reception of exotic birds in the Edo period, see Martha Chaiklin, "Exotic-Bird Collecting in Early-Modern Japan," in Gregory M. Pflugfelder and Brett L. Walker, eds., *JAPANimals: History and Culture in Japan's Animal Life* (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2005), pp. 125–160, especially "The Exotic-Bird Trade" and "Avian Acculturation," pp. 139–147.

well as exotic hedgehogs, apes, and civet cats in his residence. The eighth shogun, Tokugawa Yoshimune (1684–1751), enthusiastically imported horses and dogs for official use. Records also show that he ordered elephants from Southeast Asia, and, in 1728, a Chinese ship brought a pair of Indian elephants from Vietnam to Nagasaki. Although the female elephant soon died, the male was kept for over ten years at the shogun's coastal retirement villa called Hama-goten and was sometimes shown to the public.[8]

During this period, the Dutch VOC also presented exotic animals as diplomatic gifts. They brought camels into Nagasaki in 1646 and transported them to Edo for an audience with the shogun in the courtyard of Edo castle in 1647. In 1675, they brought a pair of donkeys from Africa, which were presented at the shogun's court in 1676. In the context of the official audiences with the shogun in Edo, the VOC frequently imported large animals such as elephants, oxen, and horses, as well as exotic birds. They also presented various artworks, wine, food, and other products novel to the shogunal court. These gifts played an important part in maintaining cordial relations with the shogun and his officials, and they were intended to ensure the commercial success of the company in Japan.[9]

This brief history of the import of rare animals into Japan foreshadows the rejection of our pair of camels by the shogun and their subsequent exhibition to the public. In 1821, the VOC presented them to the governor of the city of Nagasaki for the usual inspection. However, the governor refused to accept the camels due to the shogun's disinterest. In his diary, Blomhoff claimed that he offered the camels to a Dutch interpreter, and another document tells us that they were finally obtained by an impresario with the Nagasaki merchant Toyamaya Bunzaemon acting as go-between.[10]

Depicting Camels Before the Edo Period

Visual images of camels appearing in artworks and book illustrations clarify what people knew about these animals. Moreover, these images sometimes suggest the context in which people received the depicted animals.

The earliest examples of camel imagery depict double-humped camels. They appear on two eighth-century objects in the Shōsōin treasury in the precincts of Tōdai-ji temple in Nara: a five-string sandalwood lute inlaid with mother-of-pearl

8 Kawazoe Yū, "Hakurai dōbutsu to misemono," pp. 140–141.

9 Michael Laver, *The Dutch East India Company in Early Modern Japan: Gift Giving and Diplomacy* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), pp. 37–38, 46.

10 Sugita Hideaki, "Rakuda to Nihonjin: Dōbutsu hyōshō o tōshite mita ikoku shumi" (The Camel in Japanese Literature and Art), *Hikaku bungaku kenkyū* 86 (2009), p. 51.

and a sandalwood chessboard inlaid with wood. One of the earliest paintings with camel imagery is a fourteenth-century hanging scroll titled *Illustrated Biography of the Prince Shōtoku* (Shōtoku taishi eden) in the collection of Shōmankō-ji temple in Aichi prefecture, which features a donkey-like animal with two humps on its back. This strange animal can be safely identified as a Bactrian camel presented by a Korean king to Prince Shōtoku, because the animal is described in *Biography of Prince Shōtoku* (Shōtoku taishi denryaku) attributed to Fujiwara Kanesuke (877–933), the text on which the painting was based. Although no camel appears in the oldest extant work on the same subject from the eleventh century in the collection of Tokyo National Museum, the camel may have been depicted in lost works that faithfully visualised the biography of Prince Shōtoku. Images of double-humped camels may also be found in works depicting the nirvana of the Historical Buddha (*parinirvana*), the earliest examples of which appear in the thirteenth century. Buddhist paintings of this period were generally inspired by the style of imported Song-dynasty paintings.[11] Japanese painters copied the original iconography of double-humped camels, along with many other animals gathering around the Buddha on the bier, without identifying the animal. An example from the fifteenth century is a double-humped camel appearing in the handscroll painting *Figures from Various Countries* (*Kuniguni jinbutsu zukan*), attributed to Sesshū (1420–1506), in the collection of Kyoto National Museum. In the late sixteenth century, more realistic depictions of double-humped camels appear in some *Nanban byōbu*, a pair of folding screens with scenes of trading with the Portuguese, showing the Portuguese, their carracks, and other curios. A sheet of drawings from the late seventeenth century found in the *Sketches of Birds and Animals* by Ogata Kōrin (1658–1716) contains an image of a single-humped camel.[12] The image is presumed to be based on a picture depicting one of the camels, which, as mentioned above, the VOC in Nagasaki imported in 1646 to present to the shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu (1604–1651). For reasons yet unclear, subsequent generations did not make use of the camel imagery that had taken shape by the end of the seventeenth century.

In the eighteenth century, the economic development and the growth of cities created new dynamics in various fields of cultural production including the study of materia medica (*honzōgaku*), originating in Chinese learning, and *Dutch learning*

11 See Nakano Genzō, *Nihonjin no dōbutsu ga: Kodai kara kindai made no ayumi* (Japanese Animal Paintings: From Ancient to Modern Times, Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 1986), pp. 179–180.

12 Belonging to the Ogata Kōrin archives of the Konishi family in the collection of Kyoto National Museum, the sheets of drawings of various birds and animals are mounted into two handscrolls. See Kano Hiroyuki, *Kōrin geijutsu no kisō* (Basic Elements of Kōrin's Art), Nihon no bijutsu 462 (Tokyo: Shibundō, 2004), pl. 2; and Yamane Yūzō, *Konishi-ke kyūzō Kōrin kankei shiryō to sono kenkyū: Shiryō* (The Former Konishi Family's Collection of Kōrin Archives and Its Study, Tokyo: Chūōkōron bijutsu shuppan, 1962), frontispiece 8.

Figure 5.1: *Camel* in Terajima Ryōan, *Illustrations of Three Powers in Japan and China* (*Wakan sansai zue*), vol. 37, 1712. Source: *Wakan sansai zue*, part II (Tokyo: Tokyo bijutsu, 1970, p. 435).

(*rangaku*) imported from the West through the port of Nagasaki. This scientific interest brought camel imagery to a new phase. In general, illustrations in imported Western books broadened the themes and techniques of woodblock prints. For example, the Dutch translation of *Historiae naturalis* by the Polish scholar John Jonston (1603–1675), published in Amsterdam in 1657, contains fine copperplate illustrations depicting various forms of life on earth, including camels. An image of a single-humped camel which is based on a *Historiae naturalis* illustration appears in *Manual of Painting of the Past and Present in Eight Subsequent Varieties* (Kokon gasū kō hasshu), published in 1771 by the Chinese-style painter Sō Shiseki (1715–1786).[13] However, the rarity of imported books from the West may be the reason that scholars did not mention the camels illustrated in *Historiae naturalis* when they discussed the animal after the arrival of our one-humped camels in 1821,

13 For Sō Shiseki's camel illustration, see Marcon, "All Creatures Great and Small," p. 36.

whereas images from popular illustrated books of Chinese learning were used in the discussion. One example is a small illustration of a double-humped camel appearing in the illustrated Sino-Japanese encyclopaedia *Illustrations of Three Powers in Japan and China* (Wakan sansai zue), compiled by Terajima Ryōan (dates unknown) and published in 1712 (Figure 5.1). The Ming-dynasty compendium of medical materials *Compendium of Materia Medica* (Chin. *Bencao gangmu*, Jap. *Honzō kōmoku,* 1596) by Li Shizhen (1518–1593) was frequently referred to as an authentic source of knowledge about camels, even though it does not contain any illustrations of the animal in question. Another source was provided by a double-humped camel that an American ship had carried to Nagasaki in 1803. Although the camel was not allowed to disembark, information about the camel found its way into the country because of the publication of woodblock prints depicting the animal.

The Popular Reception and Critical Eyes on Camels

Woodblock prints published in Nagasaki, commonly known as 'Nagasaki prints,' contributed to popularising the pair of camels, as was the case for other exotic animals and birds imported to the port city, and, as a result, contributed to the success of the camel show. Combining camels, Dutchmen and their enslaved attendants in a single image, Nagasaki prints not only visualised the dimensions of the camels, but also highlighted the exotic atmosphere of the strange animals imported into Nagasaki from a remote corner of the world. Some prints bear captions describing the animal in minute detail, for example with the title, "The Dutch imports early in the seventh month of the fourth year of the Bunsei Era [1821]" (Figure 5.2), continuing:

> A pair of camels, the male being four years old, the female five. Their approximate length is one *jō* and five *shaku* [fifteen feet], and their height nine *shaku* [nine feet]. Camels of this kind are reared by farming families in that country [Persia] and serve in farming. When used as a draught animal, it covers one hundred *ri* [about 250 miles] in a day without getting tired. When they are loaded, they fold their legs in three. First, they fold their front legs so that it is easy to put the load on their backs. They can stand up with a load as heavy as one hundred *kin* [about 130 pounds]. The male and the female are very affectionate towards each other. They are gentle animals.[14]

These captions on the prints provided people with general information about the animal, however, it was often incorrect. Moreover, those who made a living from

14 *Camels*, Nagasaki print, 1821. Higuchi Hiroshi, *Nagasaki ukiyo-e* (Nagasaki prints, Tokyo: Mitō sho'oku, 1871), pl. 8.

Figure 5.2: *Camels*, Nagasaki print, 1821. Source: Higuchi Hiroshi, *Nagasaki ukiyo-e* (Tokyo: Mitō sho'oku, 1871, pl. 8).

the camel shows appropriated the captions for their business, and the animals' character tended to be exaggerated as the shows became popular.

Our pair of single-humped camels were exhibited in Osaka and Kyoto in 1823, in Edo in the following year, and in Nagoya in 1826. In *A Study of Public Shows*, Asakura Musei summarises the programme of the shows as follows:

> When the spectators have all gathered in the barn where the show is held, a presenter [*kōjō*] in Chinese costume comes out, leading the camels around a circular space while a band plays the *shamisen*, bell, drum, and flute. He finally leads them to the centre of the circle and starts to speak about the strange animals. Following the presenter, a servant feeds the camels some vegetables, such as *daikon* radishes and sweet potatoes, while a vendor with vegetables in a basket walks around the circle to sell them to the spectators. Spectators who buy some [vegetables] enjoy feeding them to the animals. At the end of the programme, the camels slowly walk around the circle twice, led by three men in Chinese costume, to the music of the band. When a man beats a drum to announce the end of the show, the spectators leave through the gate.[15]

15 Asakura Musei, *Misemono kenkyū*, pp. 196–197.

Figure 5.3: Kōriki Enkōan, *An Illustrated and Detailed Record of Camels* (*Ehon rakuda gushi*), manuscript, 1827, Nagoya City Museum. Source: *An Illustrated and Detailed Record of Camels* (*Ehon rakuda gushi*). *Nagoya-shi hakubutsukan shiryō sōsho* 3 (Nagoya: Nagoya-shi hakubutsukan, 2007, pp. 18-19).

While Asakura does not mention the 'stage setting' of the show, the manuscript *An Illustrated and Detailed Record of Camels* (Ehon rakuda gushi, 1827) by the Nagoya essayist Kōriki Enkōan (1756–1831) visualises the spectacle with a few illustrations by his own hand (Figure 5.3). Describing the camel show in his home city, Enkōan's work testifies to the popularity of the camels. The manuscript, for example, visually illustrates camel-show-related merchandise such as clay figures, a *sugoroku* game, dolls, kites, a fan, and a tobacco pouch.[16]

The camel shows generated various connotations, such as the idea of 'a harmonious couple.' A caption of a handbill (*hikifuda*) for one of the camel shows (Figure 5.4) reads:

> The female and the male are both gentle-tempered. Nothing is more harmonious than this pair of camels, so that a human couple who see the pair will acquire the animals' capacity and become harmonious as well.[17]

16 See *Ehon rakuda gushi*, ed. Nagoya-shi hakubutsukan, in *Nagoya-shi hakubutsukan shiryō sōsho* (Series of Materials in the Collection of Nagoya City Museum), vol. 3 (Nagoya: Nagoya-shi hakubutsukan, 2007), pp. 37–38, 42, 44, 54–56.

17 *Camels*, flier (Kyoto: Yoshinoya Kanbei; and Osaka: Jun'idō; Tamaya Ichibei, ca. 1823), in the collection of the National Museum of Japanese History.

Figure 5.4: *Camels*, Handbill, woodblock print on paper, 34.5 x 48.0 cm, Kyoto: Yoshinoya Kanbei; Osaka: Jun'idō; Osaka: Tamaya Ichibei, ca. 1823, National Museum of Japanese History.

The flier also mentions more practical benefits, for instance, that camel hair can be used as an amulet against smallpox and to ward off evil in general. These magical functions had no basis in any knowledge of natural history but were fabricated by the presenters of the camel shows. The fliers were widely circulated and attracted people's attention.

The Japanese word for camel, *rakuda*, originally a Chinese term, now came to entail the idea of 'a harmonious couple' in everyday life. The Osaka novelist and *ukiyo-e* painter, Akatsuki Kanenari (1793–1861), commented on the popularity of the term:

> Nothing is more laughable than the recent use of a trendy word. Since the abovementioned pair of camels were imported, the word *rakuda* has become the fashionable term for a married couple who go walking together.[18]

18 Akatsuki Kanenari, *Unkin zuihitsu* (Essay on Beautiful Morning Mist), vol. 4 (1862), in *Nihon zuihitsu taisei* (Compendia of Essays in Japan), ed. Nihon zuihitsu taisei henshūbu, series 1, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1975), p. 113.

At the same time, *rakuda* connoted a quality of uselessness due to the camels' sluggish movement in the shows. According to Shihekian Shigetsuta's (dates unknown, active in the nineteenth century) observation,

> At that time a pair of large animals were imported from Persia, and they were called *rakuda* [...]. It is said that in that country camels are made useful by carrying heavy loads on their backs and travelling great distances. In this country, however, people do not know how to use them. Because of this, people call what is large and useless *rakuda*.[19]

In addition to conjugal harmony and uselessness, urban dwellers discovered another characteristic of the camel: it was supposed to be 'easy-going.' No doubt, it was the term *rakuda* that suggested this quality: r*aku* evokes a sense of leisurely existence or the state of being carefree, while the suffix *da* is a verb signifying 'being.' Therefore, camels came to be associated with such a carefree state of existence. In *Annals of Edo* (Bukō nenpyō, 1850), the eminent writer Saitō Gesshin (1804–1878) recorded a comic verse (*kyōka*) punning on *rakuda* composed by the Kyoto poet Kamo Suetaka (1752–1841):

Kubi wa tsuru	With a neck resembling a crane's
senaka wa kame no	and a back the shell of a tortoise
kō ni nite	easy-going are camels
senshū rakuda	for a thousand years
banzei rakuda	for ten thousand years[20]

In a collection of bits of hearsay from Edo, *Trivial Talks of the Town* (Kōgai zeisetsu, 1829), the author Jinsaiō (dates unknown) recorded a popular song making fun of the pair of camels:

Anoya, Harusha-koku de wa	Ah, in Persia
ichi-nichi ni sen-ri mo	they used to walk as far as
aruite mita ga eh	one thousand *ri* a day
Edo ja kuccha necha	in Edo they only eat and sleep
kuccha necha shicha	and only do eat and sleep

19 Shihekian Shigetsuta, *Wasure nokori* (Remains Left Behind), vol. 2 (1824), in *Zoku enseki jisshu* (Ten Kinds of Stones Looking Like Jade, second series), vol. 2 (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1980), pp. 148–149.

20 Entry for the sixth month of Bunsei 4 (1821), Saitō Gesshin, *Bukō nenpyō* (1850). See *Zōho bukō nenpyō* (Annals of Edo, enlarged edition), ed. Kaneko Mitsuharu, vol. 2, Tōyō bunko 118 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1968), p. 68.

koitsu wa mata	this seems to be
rakuda rō	only easy-going[21]

Whereas in the caption to the Nagasaki print the camel walks a hundred *ri* a day in their native country, this song speaks of a thousand *ri*. By sharpening the contrast, the song underlines the animals' easy-going existence in Edo.

Multiple meanings of *rakuda* coexisted in the popular imagination. One notable example is *The Harmonious World of Camels* (Wagō rakuda no sekai, 1825), an illustrated popular novel (*gōkan*), in which the author Kōnantei Karatachi (dates unknown) tells the story of a married couple who learn from the animal how to lead a happy life. The author appropriated the currently popular symbol of the 'harmonious couple' to advocate the feudal morality of conjugal harmony. The husband and wife live in a tenement house and, in one scene (Figure 5.5), their landlord, Santarō, settles a quarrel between them by giving them a lecture on camels:

> The pair of camels [...] they're such a harmonious couple. Even creatures of this kind act like this. The female cares for the male, and the male cares for the female [...]. Anyway, as a human couple, try to be harmonious and work hard day and night. Then your business will flourish, and naturally your descendants will be happier. Don't quarrel with each other anymore [...]. Work together to make money with unflagging zeal. Then you'll be easy-going [*rakuda*] in your future life.[22]

The appearance and popularity of the pair of camels in the show likely inspired the author of a popular novel to present the camels as an ideal couple exemplifying conjugal unity, happiness, and prosperity.

The camel show also attracted the attention of the intelligentsia. Having observed the camels with their own eyes, learned people of the time began to revisit long-accepted views of the animal. In the field of natural history, Dutch-learning scholars fiercely attacked the views of their Chinese-learning competitors. In 1824, Ōtsuki Gentaku (1757–1827), an eminent scholar of Dutch learning, challenged the conventional understanding of camels voiced two decades earlier by Ono Ranzan (1729–1810), a scholar of Chinese learning:

> In *Notes on What I Have Heard* (Kibun), Ono Ranzan says that the body [of a camel] is large and its shape mostly resembles a sheep [...]. He just had this from

21 Jinsaiō, *Kōgai zeisetsu*, vol. 2 (1829), in *Zoku Nihon zuihitsu taisei* (Compendia of Essays in Japan, second series), eds. Mori Senzō and Kitagawa Hirokuni, supplement 9 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1983), p. 131. One *ri* is 2.44 miles.

22 Kōnantei Karatachi, *Wagō rakuda no sekai*, illustrated by Utagawa Kuniyasu (Edo: Moriya Jihei, 1825), 8 verso–9 recto.

Figure 5.5: Kōnantei Karatachi, *The Harmonious World of Camels* (*Wagō rakuda no sekai*), illustrated novel. Edo: Moriya Jihei, 1825, 8 verso and 9 recto, National Diet Library, Tokyo.

> hearsay from the time [when a double-humped camel was imported in 1803]. Probably all the past and present views [on camels] in books of Chinese learning were just based on hearsay. If so, it is only natural that they cannot clarify the original habitat of camels.[23]

Ōtsuki's criticism of Ono Ranzan highlighted the lack of empiricism in the approaches of Chinese-learning scholars. This gave the impression that the knowledge of Chinese-learning scholars was unreliable and, in this way, elevated the status of scholars of Dutch learning.

Many intellectuals of the time tended to favour the conclusions of Dutch learning because of the empirical attitude of the discipline. They were particularly concerned about the disparity between the idea that was presented in existing literature regarding camels and the actual appearance of the animals they observed in the show. The bone of contention was the number of humps. The camels they saw were single-humped, while those in the literature were often double-humped. In *Annals*

23 Ōtsuki Gentaku, "Rakuda mondō" (Dialogue on camels, 1824), in *Ran'en tekihō* (Gathering flowers in an orchid field, 1831), manuscript in the collection of Tokyo National Museum.

of Edo, apparently recognising the point, Saitō Gesshin criticised the Sino-Japanese encyclopaedia *Illustrations of Three Powers in Japan and China*:

> Seeing the genuine things [camels] this time, I realised that the illustration Tachibana Morikuni drew in *Illustrations of Three Powers in Japan and China* is false. He drew two humps on the back [of the animal] based on the view that the humps on its back look like a saddle. In reality, it has only one hump. Moreover, the hump is very high.[24]

In his *Trivial Talks of the Town*, the abovementioned Jinsaiō echoes Saitō Gesshin's criticism:

> The statement that the humps are one behind the other and have a saddle-like shape is false. [And in reality] the hair resembles that of bovines and the colour is like that of "red cattle" (*aka ushi*). And it smells like cattle and is a sluggish animal. The male has thick front legs and lots of black hair covering its eyes. One cannot tell whether these are eyebrows or eyelashes. It moves back and forth in a curious rhythm to the tune of a flute and a drum.[25]

The discrepancy between the image based on the observation of the camels and the knowledge provided by the encyclopaedia clearly caused confusion among the intellectuals. However, the empiricism of the time soon led them to the recognition of another kind of camel with a single hump.[26] The journal of the retired lord of Hirado Domain in Kyūshū, Matsura Seizan (1760–1841), *Evening Tales of Months and Years Past* (Kasshi yawa), shows the process by which he came to know the animal, correcting his knowledge step by step. The process started when he encountered two images, one showing a double-humped camel and the other a single-humped one. In an entry for 1822, Seizan writes:

> A Dutch ship came to Nagasaki last year with camels on board. People said that they would later come to Edo, but in the end they did not. A certain painter gave me a picture of a camel some years ago when I attended a gathering at the residence of a lord. I found the picture among many old papers, and I have put it on the following page.[27]

24 Kaneko Mitsuharu, *Zōho bukō nenpyō*, vol. 2, p. 68.

25 Jinsaiō, *Kōgai zeisetsu*, vol. 1 (1829), in *Zoku Nihon zuihitsu taisei*, supplement 9, p. 130.

26 In *Bencao gangmu*, Li Shizhen refers to single-humped camels inhabiting Turfan (present-day eastern part of Xinjiang Uygur, China), but scholars seem to have forgotten about it until they recognised single-humped camels.

27 Matsura Seizan, "Entry for Bunsei 5 (1822)," in *Kasshi yawa*, vol. 8, reprinted in Nakamura Yukihiko and Nakano Mitsutoshi eds., *Kasshi yawa*, vol. 1, Tōyō bunko 306 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1977), p. 136.

Figure 5.6: *Camel* in Matsura Seizan, *Evening Tales of Months and Years Past (Kasshi yawa),* vol. 8, 1822. Source: *Kasshi yawa* 1, Tōyō bunko 306 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1977, p. 136).

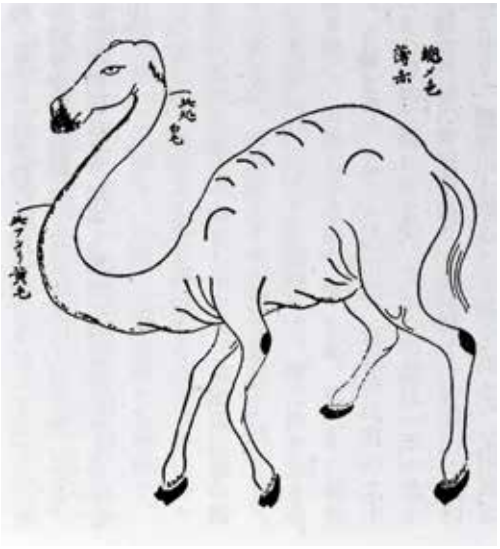

Figure 5.7: *Camel* in Matsura Seizan, *Evening Tales of Months and Years Past (Kasshi yawa),* vol. 9, 1822. Source: *Kasshi yawa* 1, Tōyō bunko 306 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1977, p. 163).

The image this entry refers to depicts a camel with two humps, also called saddle-humped (Figure 5.6). Another picture that Seizan saw in 1822, after having written this entry, depicts a single-humped camel that was said to come to Edo soon. This picture (Figure 5.7) considerably confused him:

> I happened to see a signboard of a show when passing by Ryōgoku bridge in the third month. It illustrated camels, and they sold woodblock prints depicting the animal [...]. I sent a man to ask what the picture was about, and they answered that it was an image of the camels brought to Nagasaki last year, and that the genuine thing would soon come to this city. The following day, I sent a man to see [what] the show [would be about]. They displayed a *tsukuri-mono* [a stage prop emulating the original figure] for the show, and he took a picture of the prop and came back with it. Judging from the picture, the figure must be a fake, and not modelled after the real animal [...]. This prop, however, does not have the saddle-like humps, which contradicts the caption of the woodblock prints [depicting camels]. The caption corresponds to what I have mentioned about the camel in the previous [eighth] volume of my journal.[28]

28 Matsura Seizan, "Entry for Bunsei 5 (1822)," in *Kasshi yawa*, vol. 8, reprinted in Nakamura Yukihiko and Nakano Mitsutoshi eds., *Kasshi yawa*, vol. 1, Tōyō bunko 306 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1977), pp. 163-164.

It all became clear when the real camels came to Edo two years later, in 1824 (Bunsei 7), and Seizan finally became aware of the existence of another kind of camel with a single hump:

> This year the camels came from Nagasaki to this capital [Edo] [...]. There are different kinds of camels. This time it is a kind that is called single-humped camel. The prop I mentioned earlier [in volume nine] was indeed of this kind. The camel recorded in volume eight was of a kind that had arrived in the seventh month of the third year of the Kyōwa era [1803] [...]. This is definitely a different kind of camel because the so-called saddle-like humps are depicted in the picture.[29]

Matsura Seizan's experience is representative of the way in which knowledge about camels spread to various social groups who were, each in their own way, curious about unknown creatures. It shows that the educated public, people like Gesshin and Seizan, also used *misemono* spectacles as a source of knowledge. Seizan's progress seems to be part of a general interest in natural objects shared by people of the time.

Commissioned Camel Paintings

Two extant works by the eminent painters Tani Bunchō (1763–1840) in Edo and Maruyama Ōshin (1790-1838) in Kyoto suggest that they were commissioned to paint the pair of camels imported in 1821; nothing, however, is known about the clients.[30] The demand for camel paintings was so large that the minor painter Kubota Setsuyō (dates unknown), who was based in Kyoto, repeatedly used the same composition to paint the animals. Three extant paintings of camels by Setsuyō are commonly dated to the tenth month of 1823,[31] the one by Ōshin to the ninth

29 Matsura Seizan, "Entry for Bunsei 7 (1824)," in *Kasshi yawa*, vol. 53, reprinted in Nakamura Yukihiko and Nakano Mitsutoshi eds., *Kasshi yawa*, vol. 4, Tōyō bunko 333 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1978), p. 73.

30 The most recent work mentioning Maruyma Ōshin's *Camels* (Figure 5.8), as well as other camel images from the eighth century to Hokusai's works, is Ayelet Zohar, *The Curious Case of the Camel in Modern Japan: (De)colonialism, Orientalism, and Imagining Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), in which she analyses Ōshin's work from a viewpoint of the realistic style characterising paintings by the Maruyama school. See "*Shashin*, Realism, and Live Drawings of Camels" in Chapter 2, pp. 73-79.

31 See *Misemono: Spectacles, Shows, and Circuses in the Edo-Meiji Period*, exhibition catalogue (Tokyo: Tobacco and Salt Museum, 2003), p. 58; *Cute Edo Paintings*, exhibition catalogue (Fuchu: Fuchu Art Museum, 2013), p. 44; and Fuchu Art Museum ed., *Dōbutsu no e: Nihon to Yōroppa, fushigi kawaii heso magari* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2021), p. 141. This catalogue contains another painting of *Camels* (1823) by Ueda Kōchō (1788-1850) in a private collection.

Figure 5.8: Maruyama Ōshin, *Camels*, hanging scroll, colour on silk, 125.5 x 54.6 cm, 1824, the Etsuko and Joe Price Collection.

month of 1824 (Figure 5.8), and the one by Bunchō to the twelfth month of 1825.[32] Setsuyō's inscription indicates that he painted the camel from life. It is possible that he made some drawings at a camel show in Kyoto, which he later used to supply paintings for commissions. The paintings by Ōshin and Bunchō were likewise made when the show was taking place in the painters' home cities, Kyoto and Edo. Their production dates suggest that Ōshin and Bunchō painted the strange animals after observing the animals at the show. Although we cannot tell whether they saw the

32 For Bunchō's *Camels* (hanging scroll, colour on silk, 98.0 x 42.0 cm., in the collection of Tekisuiken Cultural Foundation), see *Tani Bunchō: Commemorating the 250th Anniversary of His Birth*, exhibition catalogue (Tokyo: Suntory Museum of Art, 2013), p. 26.

camels before receiving the commissions or after, their naturalistic painting skills would have enabled them to meet the expectations of the clients.

Realistic depictions of this kind suggest a genuine interest in the actual animal rather than in its symbolic or talismanic connotations as highlighted by other media such as handbills distributed in connection with the camel shows. Their styles reveal subtle differences in the various painting techniques applied in these works, such as the use of ink wash and shading, but the painters shared a common attitude towards their subject: they aimed at a life-like representation of the animal. It should be noted that the three painters consciously chose to leave the background of their composition blank, in strong contrast to the Nagasaki prints which depict the camels within an elaborate setting. The absence of environment results in a portrait-like impression, focusing the viewer's attention on the individual shape and appearance of the animal. All three painters probably judged that this compositional style most suited the requirements of their clients.

In early modern East Asia, an empty background put the focus on the individuality of the subject, particularly in ancestral portraits. For this reason, a portrait usually included attributes that indicated the social status of the sitter, such as a gold-brocade garment for a high-ranking Buddhist monk, to identify the sitter and to highlight their distinguished personality. Similarly, East Asian painters traditionally chose this portrait-like compositional style, leaving the background blank, when depicting individual animals. In reference to extant works, this tradition traces back to the Northern Song dynasty in eleventh-century China, and to the Kamakura period in thirteenth-century Japan.[33] Artists who depicted camels must have been aware of this tradition. Therefore, it is significant that these camel portraits do not include any references to specific social contexts. This suggests that both the clients and the painters were primarily interested in capturing the spirit of the animal, not in its role within a specific context.

Although these painters adopted the traditional background-less style to highlight the individuality of their subject, in a way resembling works of portraiture, it should be noted that the composition and the realistic depiction were not adopted to merely represent a specimen of a particular species of camel. In other words, these painted camels were regarded as specific individuals imported into Nagasaki to 1821, and as such different from other camels belonging to the same species.

The three painters adopted the traditional blank-background style of composition to meet their clients' requirements. Moreover, the painters regarded the composition

33 This painting tradition can be traced back to a handscroll of eleventh-century Northern Song China, *Five Horses* by Li Gonglin in the collection of Tokyo National Museum, and a handscroll of thirteenth-century Japan, *Shungyū-zu* (*Ten Fast Bulls*), eight fragments of which are respectively housed in Tokyo National Museum, Cleveland Museum of Art, Seattle Art Museum and other collections. For the Li Gonglin work, see Itakura Masaaki, *Ri Kōrin* Goba zu (Li Gonglin *Five horses*, Tokyo: Hatori shoten, 2019).

as a kind of framework to depict their subjects as individuals, but not in the same way as one would depict a person in a portrait or flora and fauna as part of a picture. From an art historical point of view, their camels stood midway between a sitter and an illustrated object in a picture book for the study of natural history.

A careful reading of Ōshin's *Camels* and its social context can provide a better understanding of how realistic paintings such as these were appreciated in the late Edo period based on the skill in the painter. In the signature, the painter stresses his skills of realistic depiction: "Drawn from life [*shinsha*] by Ōshin in the ninth month of the seventh year of the Bunsei era."[34] Ōshin was a grandson of Maruyama Ōkyo (1733–1795), the founder of the Maruyama school in Kyoto. Ōkyo was known as the pioneer of naturalistic painting and, accordingly, Ōshin was regarded as a master painter and successor to his grandfather's painting style.

Compared with other surviving camel paintings, Ōshin's stands out for its use of a wide range of painting techniques, such as the delicate use of gradation to depict the round belly of the animals, and the skilful use of ink wash to represent soft fur. Another difference is in how the camels are arranged: Ōshin depicts one camel standing and the other crouching, while both are depicted standing in other works. Probably, the one standing is the male and the recumbent one the female. Ōshin must have adopted contrasting postures to show the curious way in which camels fold their legs when lowering themselves. This was frequently described in the captions that were added to the imagery in handbills and Nagasaki prints.

Close observation of Ōshin's work points to another striking feature. It gives viewers a lively impression of the animals, very different from that given, for example, by a stuffed specimen. This seems to be the result of the painter's intention of giving exotic animals a personality, which is particularly evident in the facial expression of the standing camel with its long black eyebrows or eyelashes. The camel's face must have reminded most viewers of the facial expression of an old man. Of course, the blank background, mentioned above, highlights this personifying effect.

This attempt at humanisation was linked to the notion of "living things" (*shōrui*). *Shōrui* does not distinguish between human beings and animals because it is tied to the Buddhist concept "transmigration to the Six Realms" (*rikudō-rin'ne*).[35] According to this concept, a human being or animal may become any other creature

34 The original signature reads "Bunsei shichi nen kōshin boshū Ōshin shinsha" with two of the painter's seals. For a discussion of the concept *shashin* ("representing the real") in *materia medica* or *honzōgaku* during the late Edo period, see Maki Fukuoka, *The Premise of Fidelity: Science, Visuality, and Representing the Real in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), pp. 105-153.

35 For the notion of *shōrui*, see Tsukamoto Manabu, "Mushi o miru me no rekishi: Edo jidai jin o chūshin ni" (A History of the View to Insects: Focusing on People in the Edo Period), *Shakaishi kenkyū* 6 (1985), pp. 71-77.

after death. Some of those who saw the show would have thought that a married couple had become this pair of camels. It also seems natural that people of the time credited the animals with human qualities and feelings. Consequently, this shared notion of *shōrui* may have provided the painter with an incentive to personify the animals in this way. The portrait-like composition apparently fitted this purpose. Surviving works by the two other painters, Bunchō and Setsuyō, may also reflect the same notion of *shōrui*, judging from their realistic painting styles, although they did not have Ōshin's skill in personifying living animals.

Despite Ōshin's statement that he "drew from life", the painter did not try to achieve what we would identify as a realistic or photographic style. He tried to capture the living spirit of the animal following the notion of *shōrui*. In addition, even though contemporary viewers were probably unaware of this, their appreciation of the images of the camels was impacted by the same sense of being alive. When interpreting the painter's signature in this way, one gets a sense of how people at that time may have understood a true-to-life painting of animals.

Comparison with the Case of Elephants

Comparing camels and elephants, two of the largest animals imported into Japan, makes us aware of different routes of reception and representation. Already in the sixteenth century, Portuguese carracks carried elephants along with double-humped camels and other curios to Japan, as can be seen in littoral scenes of the abovementioned screen paintings called *Nanban byōbu*. During the Edo period, elephants were brought to Japan at least three times. The first recorded import concerned a pair of elephants brought by a Chinese ship to Nagasaki in 1728 on the order of Shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune, as mentioned above. The second case was a female elephant from Ceylon brought by the English East India Company to Nagasaki in 1813. Wishing to safeguard Dutch trade interests, the *opperhoofd* of the Dutch factory at Deshima prevented the English from presenting the animal to the shogun. As a result, the elephant was sent back three months later. The third and last case was an Indian elephant taken to Yokohama by an American ship in 1862, eight years after the Tokugawa shogunate and the United States had concluded a treaty of peace and amity, which was followed by treaties with other Western countries. In 1863, the elephant was exhibited in a public show in the amusement district at the west end of Ryōgoku bridge in Edo and subsequently travelled around the country for more than ten years. The camels of 1821 remained the top attraction while the elephant show is said to have attracted the second largest audience.[36]

36 Tobacco and Salt Museum, *Misemono*, pp. 60-61.

Because the show was so popular, a much larger number of *ukiyo-e* prints were produced depicting the elephant of 1862 than those imported earlier. One of the works, a pair of *ōban* size colour prints by Utagawa Yoshitoyo (dates unknown), has a caption with an interesting phrase, which reads, "those who behold it [the elephant] once, will avoid seven kinds of calamity and enjoy seven kinds of happiness."[37] Clearly, as in the case of the camels of 1821, the elephant show propagated the belief that the animal possessed miraculous powers to grant divine favours to the audience. However, there is no evidence that portrait-like paintings of the elephant were commissioned. The most probable reason for this was the dominance of the Buddhist iconography of the elephant. A white elephant was widely recognised as the vehicle of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra. More commonly, on the day of the Buddha's annual memorial service, elephants were seen in paintings of the *parinirvana* along with many other creatures gathering around the Buddha on the bier. Elephants had inherent religious meanings; camels did not. A double-humped camel occasionally appeared in *parinirvana* scenes, as mentioned above, but most people would have been unable to identify it as a camel. The lack of religious connotations allowed people to furnish camels with arbitrary character traits. When commissioned to depict a camel, painters could only draw from life as there was no existing iconography, apart from inaccurate illustrations in encyclopaedias. This situation was favourable to painters skilled in drawing from life, such as Maruyama Ōshin in Kyoto and Tani Bunchō in Edo.

Conclusion

Examining the remarkable ways in which the pair of camels of 1821 were received and represented shines a light onto a broad range of cultural phenomena which would otherwise remain hidden. It gives an insight into the interplay of people's spiritual life, current feudal morality, Buddhist ideas, superstitious beliefs, and popular culture. It demonstrates a shared enthusiasm for curious things that engaged people of every class: scholars, novelists, essayists, and artists. This enthusiasm was also propelled by visual media and public *misemono* shows. Media such as *ukiyo-e* colour prints, monochrome broadsheets, and handbills were instrumental in circulating knowledge, both visually and textually, about these animals. At the same time, the camel shows gratified people's desire to see the living animals by creating a space for encounter. While media provided accurate as well as fabricated information, the spectacle of viewing the animals also engendered emotions, impressions, and connotations. These intersecting processes allow us to observe

37 Tobacco and Salt Museum, *Misemono*, p. 61.

how the cultural dynamics of that time stimulated imagery, essays, novels, songs, verses, and critical engagement.

Glossary

Akatsuki Kanenari	暁鐘成
Aka ushi	赤牛
Asakura Musei	朝倉無聲
Bencao gangmu	本草綱目
Bukō nenpyō	武江年表
Bunsei	文政
Bunsei shichi nen kōshin boshū Ōshin shinsha	文政七年甲申暮秋應震真寫
Ehon rakuda gushi	絵本駱駝具誌
Fujiwara Kanesuke	藤原兼輔
Gōkan	合巻
Hama-goten	濱御殿
Hiki-fuda	引札
Honzōgaku	本草学
Jinsaiō	塵哉翁
Jō	丈
Kamo Suetaka	賀茂季鷹
Kasshi yawa	甲子夜話
Kibun	紀聞
Kin	斤
Kōgai zeisetsu	巷街贅説
Kōjō	口上
Kokon gasū kō hasshu	古今畫藪後八種
Kōnantei Karatachi	江南亭唐立
Kōriki Enkōan	高力猿猴庵
Kubota Setsuyō	窪田雪鷹
Kuniguni jinbutsu zukan	国々人物図巻
Kyōka	狂歌
Kyōwa	享和
Li Gonglin	李公麟
Li Shizhen	李時珍
Maruyama Ōkyo	圓山應擧
Maruyama Ōshin	圓山應震
Matsura Seizan	松浦靜山
Misemono kenkyū	見世物研究

Nagasaki ukiyo-e	長崎浮世絵
Nagoya-shi hakubutsukan shiryō sōsho	名古屋市博物館資料叢書
Nanban byōbu	南蠻屏風
Nihon shoki	日本書紀
Nihon zuihitsu taisei	日本隨筆大成
Ōban	大判
Ogata Kōrin	尾形光琳
Ono Ranzan	小野蘭山
Ōtsuki Gentaku	大槻玄澤
Rakuda	駱駝 /楽だ
Rakuda mondō	駱駝問答
Ran'en tekihō	蘭畹摘芳
Rangaku	蘭学
Ri	里
Rikudō-rin'ne	六道輪廻
Saitō Gesshin	齋藤月岑
Shaku	尺
Shashin	写真
Shihekian Shigetsuta	四壁庵茂蔦
Shinsha	真写
Shoku nihongi	續日本紀
Shōmankō-ji	勝鬘皇寺
Shōrui	生類
Shōsōin	正倉院
Shōtoku taishi denryaku	聖徳太子傳暦
Shōtoku taishi eden	聖徳太子繪傳
Shungyū-zu	駿牛図
Sō	宗
Sō Shiseki	宋紫石
Suiko	推古
Tachibana Morikuni	橘守国
Tani Bunchō	谷文晁
Terajima Ryōan	寺島良安
Tōdai-ji	東大寺
Tokugawa Iemitsu	徳川家光
Tokugawa Ieyasu	徳川家康
Tokugawa Mitsukuni	徳川光圀
Tokugawa Yoshimune	徳川吉宗
Toyamaya Bunzaemon	富山屋文左衛門
Toyotomi Hideyoshi	豊臣秀吉

Tsukuri-mono	作り物
Ueda Kōchō	上田公長
Unkin zuihitsu	雲錦隨筆
Utagawa Yoshitoyo	歌川芳豊
Wagō rakuda no sekai	和合駱駝之世界
Wakan sansai zue	和漢三才図会
Wasure nokori	わすれのこり
Zōho bukō nenpyō	増補武江年表
Zoku enseki jisshu	續燕石十種
Zoku Nihon zuihitsu taisei	續日本隨筆大成

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About the Author

Hiroyuki Suzuki is Professor Emeritus of Tokyo Gakugei University and Director of Tōyama Memorial Museum. He studies Japanese art history and is presently preparing a book on the history of the formation of "Japanese art history" in the Meiji period. His books include *Antiquarians of Nineteenth-Century Japan. The Archaeology of Things in the Late Tokugawa and Early Meiji Periods* (2022), *Meisho fūzoku-zu* (Genre paintings of famous places) (2007), *Kanō Hideyori hitsu Takao kanpū-zu byōbu. Kioku no katachi* (Maple viewing at Takao by Kanō Hideyori. A shape of memory) (1994), and *Eitoku Tōhaku* (Kanō Eitoku and Hasagawa Tōhaku) (Shinpen meihō Nihon no bijutsu 20, 1991).