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TIGERS . . . AND THE
KISHI SCHOOL OF
JAPANESE PAINTING

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Hito tsuge ni
Tora no madara wa
Wakitsu to mo
Hito no kokoro o
Ikaga tanoman

A single tale
Might sufficiently describe
The stripes of the tiger;
But how difficult to divine
The real human heart.

This tenth-century Japanese poem, curiously similar to the western admonition about telling a tiger by its stripes, might be applied to the tradition of tiger painting in Japan--it is much more than a topography of dots and lines. Tigers were indigenous to China and Korea, but not to Japan. The absence of the real animal, coupled with the mythical associations that the tiger image possessed upon its introduction to Japan in the prehistoric period, posed special problems for the painter. A tiger by Kishi Renzan (1805-1859) in the collections of the Museum of Art and Archaeology of the University of Missouri-Columbia nevertheless succeeds in evoking both traditional attributes of the beast together with a naturalism new to Japanese painting (Fig.1).¹

The sources of tiger painting in Japan must be sought in Chinese cosmology. Together with the dragon, phoenix, and tortoise, the tiger was one of the four supernatural animals, and it variously represented autumn, wind, the west and sunset.² The pairing of the tiger with the even more



1. *Tiger*, hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, by Kishi Renzan, Museum of Art and Archaeology, S. Woodson Canada and Evelyn Kehr Canada Fund and gifts of Prof. and Mrs. Chester Starr, Josefa Carlebach, and Waldo E. Tyler (87.166).

mythical dragon is in evidence from the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.) in commentaries on the *Book of Changes*, where the dragon is said to have been followed by clouds and the tiger followed by the wind.³ Not surprisingly, the first manifestation of the tiger in Japanese painting is as a directional sign of the west in prehistoric tomb murals. Such paintings reflect the interests of Japanese chieftains in the sophisticated mortuary practices of their peers on the continent. Tigers soon appeared in the context of another importation, Buddhism. A panel of the seventh-century Tamamushi (Beetle-wing)



2. *Tiger*,
hanging scroll
by Mu Qi,
Daitokuji,
Kyoto.

shrine preserved in the Hôryûji temple, Nara, depicts the *Mahasattva Jataka*, a didactic tale wherein the Prince Mahasattva, an earlier incarnation of the Buddha, sacrifices himself so that a starving tigress and her cubs might live.⁴ Tigers continued to appear in the service of Buddhism in the centuries following. For example, in the so-called *nehan* (Sanskrit: *parinirvana*) paintings depicting the deceased Buddha amidst his followers, the tiger is among mourners from the animal kingdom.⁵

From the fourteenth century, tigers were favored subjects in the Chinese ink paintings imported by Japanese warriors and their emissaries in the Zen sect of Buddhism. While the tiger seems not to have had a formal iconographic significance in Zen, monk-painters drew freely from cosmological and popular imagery already established in China. The most heralded work from that milieu is a

pair of hanging scrolls depicting a dragon and tiger and bearing the signature of the thirteenth-century Chinese monk-painter Mu Qi (Fig. 2). The tiger bears the inscription, "When the tiger roars, wind blasts." The Mu Qi tiger, like the numerous derivative works that were to follow, is seated amidst summarily depicted rocks and bamboo; the atmosphere is mist-laden and ambiguous. This painting is referred to in a record of ca. 1500 as a "flanking picture," suggesting that it, together with an opposing dragon, formed a triptych with a Buddhist figure in the center. Such a juxtaposition

might have been intended to place Buddhism at the center of powerful and opposing cosmic forces.⁶ The reason for the omnipresence of bamboo in tiger paintings is not perfectly known, but it has been suggested that it evokes the yin/yang pairing of a "weak" tree to a "strong" animal.⁷

From the sixteenth century, Japanese tiger paintings based on the Mu Qi model appear in significant numbers on folding screens and murals; the earliest dragon-tiger screen extant is one from the hand of Tan'an Chiden (late fifteenth to early sixteenth c.) preserved in the Jihô-in, Kyoto.⁸ The continuing popularity of the subject with military patrons suggests that the tiger had become coded with more than simple ferociousness or religious symbolism. One explicitly political interpretation, derived from Confucian sources, maintains that the dragon coaxing rain from the clouds and the tiger calling for the wind symbolize an enlightened emperor selecting an enlightened minister.⁹ It is more likely, however, that tiger paintings, linked as they were with shogunal collections in centuries past, functioned as talismans of "legitimate" political power in this era of civil war. The connection between tigers and bald political authority emerges succinctly in the mid-late 1500s, in the heyday of upstart warriors like Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582) and Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598). Large-scale temple and castle murals featured the animal in stupendous isolation; one such composition, of tigers and leopards (the latter were believed to be female tigers) is noted as early as the mid-sixteenth century, at the Jukôin chapel of the Daitokuji temple complex in Kyoto.¹⁰

Meanwhile, Japanese generals were confronting Korean tigers during their invasions of the peninsula in the 1590s. Korea was the closest natural habitat of the beast; indeed the earliest Japanese mention of tigers—in the eighth-century *Nihon shoki*—takes place in the Korean kingdom of Paekche. The seventh volume of a book called *Ansai gunsaku* (Military plan for the pacified west) relates the capture of a Korean tiger and its subsequent shipment to Japan, where it was shown to Toyotomi Hideyoshi.¹¹ This may well have been the first display of a living tiger on Japanese soil. Warlord Katô Kiyomasa (1562-1611), renowned for his valor in the conflict, is cited for a stand against feline ferocity in *Shôzan kidan* (Shozan annals, vol. 10):

When Kiyomasa was in Korea, in the deep mountains, a tiger appeared. The tiger caused a stir among the horses, which angered the general. The beast tore into a small boy, and then turned toward



3. *Tigers*, detail of a sliding door panel by Kanô Sanraku and Kanô Sansetsu, Tenkyûin, Kyoto.

Kiyomasa. Kiyomasa then mounted a rock with a rifle in his hands. The tiger was within two hundred feet. The tiger stared at Kiyomasa and stopped. Others were afraid and made ready to shoot the tiger, but Kiyomasa ordered them to desist, saying that he would do the job himself. The tiger strode forward, mouth widening, and was about to make his leap when Kiyomasa shot it. The bullet struck the throat and the tiger perished.¹²

This story depicts more than a successful safari. Just as gorillas and other nonhuman primates served surrogate functions in racist and colonial narratives about Africa,¹³ here the tiger substitutes for the Korean population, foreign and ferocious perhaps, but no match for Japanese musket fire.

The pacification and seclusion of Japan in the early decades of the seventeenth century guaranteed both the proliferation and stagnation of tiger painting. Painters of the Kanô school, entrusted with the most prestigious and grandiose commissions, followed protocols established in the previous century by painters such as Sesson Shûkei (ca. 1504-1589), Hasegawa Tôhaku (1539-1610) and their own forbears. The subject was now frequently composed in color on a ground of gold leaf, but convention and not verisimilitude was the guiding principle (Fig. 3). The persistence of legend and absence of viewing opportunities is testified to in an entry in the 1713 Japanese encyclopedia *Wakan sansai zue*:

The tiger is the king of the beasts. The shape of its body is that of a cat. Its size is that of a cow. Its skin is a yellow color with black markings. It has fangs and claws. Its whiskers are like needles and its tongue, which is the size of a human hand, has a thorny texture. Its neck is short and its nose flat, and one of its eyes has the ability to glow at night. When it stalks at night, one eye glows and the other fixes on the game. When a hunter shot one, the glowing eye fell to the ground and turned to stone. This was amber. After killing the tiger, the head disappeared into the ground, and when the spot was excavated only ash remained. When the tiger roars, it sounds like thunder. The sound causes the wind to blow and other animals to tremble. The tiger makes such sounds in the autumn. It mates but once in the winter, on a veiled moonlit night. Seven months later, the female gives birth. When

hunting, the tiger waits for the proper phase of the moon. It attacks from the rear with up to three pounces. If the game is not vanquished after this, it will break off the attack. A tiger will become intoxicated if it eats a dog --they are like wine to to the tiger. It will run away if it smells the horn of the sheep--this is bad for it. If a tiger reaches the age of five hundred it will turn white. The tiger possesses a magical bone in its body. . . . It is shaped like a hook and it is about a foot long. It runs along both flanks. If this bone is extracted and carried around, the wearer will have good luck. If it is not carried, the person will incur the bad will of others. The tiger will eat people, but it hates porcupines.¹⁴

There is evidence from other sources, however, that tigers were to some extent accessible in the urban amusement centers that flourished in Japan from the early 1600s. Live tigers are reported at the riverbed entertainment district in Kyoto in 1648 and again in Kyoto and Osaka in the Empô era (1673-1681), although there is some question as to whether these were real tigers or not.¹⁵ Impresarios were apparently capable of painting up large cats or building models out of skins stuffed with salt and limestone. A record of the Genroku period (1688-1704) quotes the sideshow barkers announcing the tiger thusly: "Here, here! A tiger brought from Holland [meaning brought to Japan by Dutch traders] only yesterday! Money back if it's a fake! Hurry! Satisfaction guaranteed!"¹⁶ Authenticity notwithstanding, the passion for such amusements was temporarily curtailed by fifth-generation Tokugawa shogun Tsunayoshi (1646-1709). Told that his inability to produce a male heir stemmed from taking life in an earlier existence, Tsunayoshi in 1687 passed severe edicts protecting all forms of animal life, an act that earned him the sobriquet "Dog Shogun." The laws were finally repealed in 1717, and the passion for spectacles immediately resumed.

Three years later, the loosening of import restrictions by eighth-generation Tokugawa shogun Yoshimune (1684-1751) provided fresh inspiration for Japanese painters. European illustrations brought in by the Dutch revealed conventions of spatial perspective and solid form, and greater numbers of Chinese paintings (among them recent bird-and-flower paintings) displayed a heightened interest in natural observation and fine detail. There were also visits by Chinese painters to the entrepôt of Nagasaki, including I Fujiu (1698-after 1747) in 1720 and 1730 and Shen Nanpin (fl. 1725-1780) in 1731-1733. The latter transmitted his meticulous and colorful manner of bird-and-flower depiction to Japanese student Kumashiro Yûhi (1713-1772), whose students in turn spread this "Nagasaki style" to the cultural centers in Kyoto, Osaka, and

Edo. Yûhi's interest in sketching from nature is evidenced in a register of Japanese hermits and eccentrics called *Zoku kinsei kijinden* (vol. 5) :

At one time [Yûhi] was asked to make a painting of a tiger and it so happened that a foreigner had just imported one. With brush and paper in hand, [Yûhi] approached the cage. The tiger was motionless, with face lowered, but [Yûhi] wanted to see the tiger in movement. So he took it upon himself to fetch a bamboo pole and struck the tiger on the head. Then the tiger became angry and roared, causing all the bystanders to flee. Even though all had escaped, Yûhi refused to leave and kept on sketching. Witnesses recounted that even though the beast made a ferocious face with its eyes roundly glaring as if to pounce on someone, the painter boldly but calmly continued on with his work.¹⁷

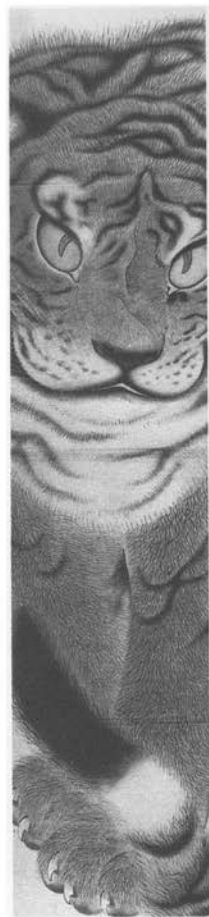
That caged tigers sometimes failed to evoke the true nature of the beast, however, is hinted in the inscription on a 1755 tiger executed by the individualistic Kyoto master Itô Jakuchû (1716-1800): "When I paint natural phenomena, depiction is impossible without a true model. As there are no ferocious tigers in this country, I could only indicate the appearance of one by copying [Chinese painter] Mao-I's painting."¹⁸

Was it that facsimile tigers failed to inspire the brush, or that the brush, worn by centuries of convention, failed to inspire the tiger? The triumph of Maruyama Ôkyo (1733-1795) in tiger painting suggests the latter. Ôkyo, like his colleagues in Nagasaki, benefited from the new influx of Western and Chinese materials. As a youth, Ôkyo trained under a Kanô painter, but employment as a maker of perspective prints to be used in an exotic toy viewing device called *nozoki karakuri* spurred an interest in empirically based depictions of space and volume. In his mature work, Ôkyo combined these new approaches with more traditional conventions (bold linear contours and areas of flat, ungraded color) to create his own brand of lyrical naturalism. Although he too seems not to have studied living tigers, Ôkyo made careful studies of tiger skins and animals of similar appearance. A longtime patron, the abbot Yûjô of the Enman-in monastery outside Kyoto, made notes about the painter's opinions about brushwork and color schemes appropriate to the subject: "Ôkyo said that in painting tigers, old tiger fur should be rendered by continuous flickering movements of the brush; the same is true for middle age tigers; young tiger fur is painted in thin brush strokes. Adding powdered shell to yellow ocher will whiten the color."¹⁹ Ôkyo's tigers (Fig. 4) accordingly display an unprecedented sensitivity for tex-

ture and coloration, avoiding the flat patterning of centuries past.

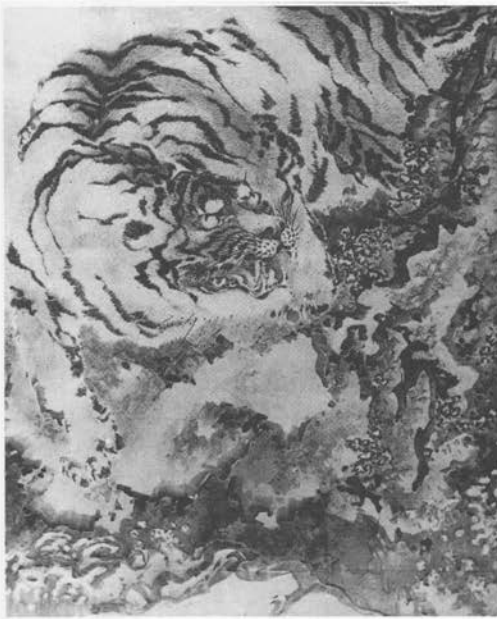
Ôkyo's greatest rival was Renzan's master Ganku (1749-1838), founder of the Kishi school. Son of a low-ranking samurai in Kanazawa (Ishikawa Prefecture), Ganku spent his youth working in a dyeing establishment; he learned to read by deciphering merchants' shop signs. He is said to have started in painting by sketching textile patterns, and there are legends that he worked under local masters Yada Shinyôken (dates unknown) or Mori Ransai (1740?-1801), but his writings fail to mention a teacher or school affiliation. In 1779, Ganku moved to Kyoto, where the naturalism of painters like Jakuchû and Ôkyo was revolutionizing Japanese painting. Ganku proceeded to digest the major currents, especially the color and detail of the Nagasaki school and the lyrical but rigorously structured naturalism of Ôkyo. To those precedents he added a nervous and exaggerated contour line that gave his work with a distinctive animation. In 1784, Ganku attracted the patronage of Prince Arisugawa, which in turn guaranteed numerous commissions from the merchant class (Kyoto artists had a long tradition of securing the nominal support of the Imperial family as a step toward attracting money-eyed buyers). By the time that Ganku was invited back to Kanazawa to decorate the local castle in 1809, he was quite wealthy; records show that his works sold at prices equal to those of Ôkyo.²⁰ Ganku's high commissions and his opportunism (he boasted of employment in the Imperial Palace, although his real duties consisted of nothing but lighting a ceremonial torch three days a year) were satirized by contemporaries; Miyajima Shinichi has suggested that such behavior militated against his gaining posthumous fame.²¹ Indeed, the influence of Ôkyo and his disciples, particularly Matsumura Goshun (1752-1811), continued into the twentieth century whereas Ganku slipped into obscurity.

Five prominent pupils nevertheless kept Ganku's style alive through the mid-nineteenth century. His son Gantai (1782-1865) and nephew and adopted son Kishi Ganryô (1798-1852) were conservative followers.²² Yokoyama Kazan (1784-1837) and Kawamura Bumpô (1779-1821) studied under Ganku but synthesized his manner with other currents. Widely regarded as the most versatile and talented heir was son-in-law and



4. *Tiger*, detail of a sketch by Maruyama Ôkyo, private collection, Japan.

adopted son Renzan, painter of the tiger under consideration here. Despite the considerable number of Renzan paintings extant, there is little information on his life. Early twentieth-century painting histories identify him as a Kyoto resident originally named Aoki Toku or Tokujirô. He also used the names Banshôrô, Shishin, and Bunshin, along with the studio names Shidô and Renzan. He is reported to have studied ten years with Ganku (some accounts say his mentor was Ganryô), whereupon he was adopted into the



5. *Tiger*, detail of a folding screen by Kishi Ganku, Tokyo National Museum.

Kishi family with the names Renzan and Gantoku.²³ A commission to decorate the Hall of the Wild Geese in the Imperial Palace²⁴ hints at a place of some esteem among early nineteenth century Kyoto masters. This work presumably occurred after master Ganku's withdrawal from active life in mid-1820s (his official retirement took place in 1824). Renzan's adopted son Chikudô (1826-1897), who came to Renzan after training with a Kanô school painter named Eigaku, continued in Kishi school subjects and displayed a large tiger painting at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Insofar as Chikudô served the Ii family, lords of the Hikone domain in western Japan, there may be some yet-undiscovered material on Renzan in the voluminous Ii

family archives.

As a tiger painter, Renzan was certainly well positioned. His master Ganku left numerous tiger studies (Fig. 5), and in 1799 he even assumed the name Kotôkan (Tiger-Head Hall) after receiving the head of a tiger from a Chinese resident of Nagasaki.²⁵ In the Museum of Art and Archaeology tiger, Renzan shows himself worthy of the Kishi mantle (Fig. 1). The salient features of the Mu Qi tradition are still in place: a few sketchy rocks, bamboo, wind-driven vapors, and the tiger itself. The space created by the bending and disappearing tree trunk and reappearing foliage is a Nagasaki school characteristic. The nervous, crumbly line defining the branches and the leaves is typical of the Kishi school. The tiger itself, depicted with the undulating physique characteristic of Kishi school tigers, is executed in three stages: an ocher wash for the body color, dark and diffuse ink blotches

for the stripes, and short, wiry, sparsely placed strokes for the fur. Renzan obviously studied tiger skins or good pictorial facsimiles, for the striations and the snarling mask successfully avoid the near-comic stylization of earlier modes. The convincing fur texture probably owes a debt to Ôkyo. The signature, located just below the tree trunk, reads "Renzan Gantoku," a combination of the painter's name and his school name. Immediately below the signature a square intaglio seal reads "Gantoku no in" (Seal of Gantoku) and a square relief seal underneath that reads "Azana Shidô" (alias Shidô).

As mentioned above, hanging scrolls depicting tigers originally formed part of a triptych, and that mode of display continued in samurai households as part of the system of official etiquette. On the other hand, urban merchants, the real supporters of Kishi school painters, had less concern for punctilio. Box inscriptions and ledgers demonstrate that Ganku was executing tiger scrolls as individual works. As for the associations that the tiger had for nineteenth-century merchant patrons, it must be remembered that the warrior class represented the apex of power and prestige. Aspirations to that status, however vicarious, frequently guided the merchants' cultural activities and guaranteed the popularity of traditional subjects like the tiger. But participation also engendered transformation. The merchants' frank enjoyment of reality through the prism of the senses and their interest in the world of colorful and exotic urban amusements also conditioned the production of Kishi tigers. Renzan's tiger thus represents not only a summation of the styles that had transformed eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Japanese painting but also a synthesis of the spiritual and secular urgencies that inform the entire tiger tradition.

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N O T E S

¹Kishi Renzan, *Tiger*, hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 109.0 x 41.0 cm. Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia (87.166), S. Woodson Canada and Evelyn Kehr Canada Fund and gifts of Prof. and Mrs. Chester Starr, Josefa Carlebach, and Waldo E. Tyler. The author wishes to acknowledge assistance received from Kuroda Taizō of the Idemitsu Museum and Ogasawara Saeko of Houston, Texas.

²Jan Fontein and Money L. Hickman, *Zen Painting and Calligraphy* (Boston, 1970), 29.

³Yoshiaki Shimizu and Carolyn Wheelright, *Japanese Ink Paintings* (Princeton, N.J., 1976), 206.

⁴See illustration, Kurata Bunsaku, *Hōryūji: Temple of the Exalted Law* (New York, 1981), 29.

⁵See, for example, the fourteenth-century *nehan* scroll in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Barbara Ford, "The Arts of Japan," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 45:1 (1987): 16.

⁶Suggested in Fontein and Hickman, *Zen Painting and Calligraphy*, 29.

⁷Henri L. Joly, *Legend in Japanese Art* (London, 1908, reprinted Rutland, Vt., 1967), 530.

⁸Illustrated in Yamane et al., eds., *Muromachi jidai no byōbu-e* (Screen paintings of the Muromachi era) (Tokyo National Museum, 1989), no. 59.

⁹Yoshiaki Shimizu, ed., *The Shaping of Daimyo Culture* (Washington, D.C., 1988), cat. no. 123.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 204.

¹¹See Shimodana Seiichi and Munemasa Itsuō, eds., *Nihon no monyō* (Japanese motifs) (Kyoto, 1976), 24: 14.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³See Donna J. Haraway, *Primate Visions: Science, Narrative and Politics in*

Twentieth-Century Studies of Monkeys and Apes (New York, 1989).

¹⁴Terashima Ryōan, ed., *Wakan sansai zue*, (pub. 1713, reprinted Tokyo, 1987), 38:48-49.

¹⁵Asakura Musei, *Misemono kenkyū* (Research on sideshows)(Tokyo, 1928), 195-96.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁷Quoted in Hosokawa Junjirō, ed., *Koji ruien* (Classified garden of ancient event)], vol. 7 *Dōbutsu-bu* (Animal section) (1896, reprinted Tokyo, 1981), 448-49.

¹⁸Quoted in Hickman and Satō, *The Paintings of Jakuchū* (New York, 1989), cat. no. 28.

¹⁹Sasaki Jōhei, "Ōkyō kankei shiryō *Banshi* bassui" (Selections from *Banshi*, a document related to Ōkyō), *Bijutsu shi* 111 (1981): 47.

²⁰See Miyajima Shinichi, "Ganku," *Ganku* (Toyama: Toyama Bijutsukan, 1987), 10.

²¹Already in the first half of the nineteenth century Kinoshita Itsuon (1799-1866) wrote that Ganku, along with Chikudō (Nakabayashi Chikutō, 1776-1853), Baiitsu (Yamamoto Baiitsu, 1783-1856), and Kaisenyakara (Oda Kaisen, 1785-1862), had flourished in his lifetime but was totally disregarded after his death. *Ibid.*

²²Two less important Ganku followers are Ganki and Ganjō. Gantai's three sons — Gankei (1811-1848), Ganrei (1816-1883), and Gansei (1827-1867) — and Ganryō's son Gankyō (1829-1874) also continued the school, although without special distinction.

²³See *Dainippon shoga meika taikan* (General survey of masters of Japanese painting and calligraphy)(Tokyo, 1934), part 1, 1162-63; part 2, 1923; *Rakkan-hen* (signature and seal appendix), 646.

²⁴Jack Hillier, *The Uninhibited Brush: Japanese Painting in the Shijō Style* (London, 1974), 228.

²⁵Miyajima, "Ganku," 13.