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Elephants under the rising sun: pachyderms in premodern Japan

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In the last part of her life, Hanako was known as “the world’s loneliest elephant”. A gift to Japan from the Thai government at the end of World War Two as an expression of peace and friendship, she earned the sobriquet in her last years when a petition circulated to retire her from the concrete pen in the zoo to an elephant sanctuary in Thailand.

Figure 1: Hanako in 2006 at Inokashira Zoo.

Hanako, who died on 26 May 2016 at 69, was the longest-lived elephant in captivity, and spawned several books and a TV series in Japan.[1] Upon her death, hundreds of flowers were brought to her memorial. Her story is both illustrative of the history of live elephants in Japan, and representative of the view that elephants are an anomaly on the isolated archipelago. However, the mutual history between the Japanese people and elephants is long, deep and complex. Elephants represented both the exotic and the familiar. They speak to how globalised the world was even in pre-modern times and to the charisma of megafauna within the phrenic landscape.

The pachydermal past

It is not quite true that elephants are not indigenous to Japan. The ancestors of elephants once roamed most of the world – their fossils have been found on every continent except Antarctica and Australia. There was a startling range and diversity of species, the peak of which was reached during the Pleistocene epoch (roughly 2.6 million to 11,700 years ago).[2] Japan, although an archipelago, is believed to have been connected to the Asian mainland at various times in its prehistory, which allowed early proboscidea to migrate to areas that

now comprise the Japanese archipelago. The earliest of these was the *Gomphoterium annectens,* first identified in 1924 by Matsumoto Hikoshichirō in Gifu Prefecture. Dating from about 19 million years ago, these animals had four tusks, both upper and lower, and were characterised by a simple molar. About 15 million years ago, the four-tusked *Stegolophodon pseudolatidens* appeared in several subspecies, including a dwarf variety. This four-tusked variety is only found in Japan and Thailand. Scientists do not agree whether they came to Japan by crossing a land bridge, or by the so-called sweepstakes dispersal route in which a random event causes the dispersal of animal life. The smaller Japanese *stegolophodon* are the oldest known case of insular dwarfism in elephantoids.[3]

There is a gap in the fossil record of elephant presence in Japan after *stegolophodon*, until about five million years ago when *stegodons* appeared. In the Pliocene Epoch (ca. 5 million to 2.5 million years ago), probiscidea were generally quite widespread. *Stegodon* looked more like elephants but came from a different evolutionary branch. The exact number of Japanese species of *Stegodon* (meaning "roofed tooth" for its distinctive molars), seen as intermediate between elephants and mastodons, is disputed by scholars, ranging from as many as fourteen and as few as three.[4] In Hokkaido, the remains of the steppe mammoth (*E. trogontherii*), which inhabited much of northern Eurasia from 600,000 to 370,000 years and the woolly mammoth (*Mammuthus primigenius*) ranging from about 43,000 to 16,000 years ago, have been found.[5]

More notable in relation to human history was the Naumann elephant (*Palaeoloxodon naumanni*), named for German geologist Heinrich Edmund Naumann (1854-1927) who first identified fossils found in Yokosuka in an 1882 paper.[6] Fossils from these relatively small animals (2 to 3 metres high) are found extensively in China and Taiwan as well as across much of Japan, although those from Taiwan and China appear to be significantly different from the Japanese animal. It is believed that there were two separate migrations: 430,000 years ago, and 30,000 years ago.[7] Their presence is given as evidence of the land bridges that are believed to have once connected the archipelago to the Asian mainland.[8] Naumann elephants were covered in hair, had a bulge in the forehead, and a slightly twisted tusk.

Some 18,000 years ago, the earliest humans on the Japanese archipelago had contact with Naumann elephants. Excavated tools with elephant fat on them suggest that they were hunted.[9] Other evidence includes a bone scraper made from the tibia of a Naumann elephant and other elephant bone tools from an Upper Paleolithic period (40,000-10,000 BCE.) site in Tategahana near Lake Nojiri in central Japan.[10] The Naumann elephant was victim to the larger contraction of probiscidea species, going extinct about 15,000 years ago. Naumann elephant extinction did not necessarily end contact between human residents of the archipelago and elephants because elephants inhabited southern China into the Song dynasty and are still found in parts of Southeast Asia. Periodic contact with the Asian mainland reinforced a vestigial elephant memory.

Live elephants in Japan

Once the land bridges to the Asian continent disappeared it is not surprising that very few elephants migrated across the notoriously rough Sea of Japan. However, a few live elephants came to Japan before the advent of the steamship, even if the total can be counted on one's fingers. Like Hanako, these elephants were sent as affirmations of human alliances and aspirations. The elephants, given a choice, probably would have preferred not to make the difficult, and often fatal, journey.

The first record of an *Elephas maximus*, or Asian elephant, in Japan is thousands of years after the Naumann elephant roamed, from 1408. This creature was a passenger, along with some other animals like two pairs of peacocks and two pair of parrots on a Southeast Asian ship that had drifted to Wakasa (now Fukui Prefecture.)[11] There is no information as to why these creatures were on board but most likely they were intended as gifts for a ruler from that region that went instead to the fourth Ashikaga shogun, Yoshimochi (1386-1428, r. 1394-1422). Perhaps because the Japanese did not know how to properly care for it, the

elephant was perpetually bad-tempered and even trampled an official to death. After only three years, the elephant was regifted to the King of Korea, Taejong (1367-1422, r. 1400-1418) in thanks for receiving the requested copy of the Buddhist cannon *Daizōkyō* (considered the best version of the Tripitaka in Chinese), with which Yoshimochi had desired to conduct a funeral service for his father, Yoshimitsu (1358-1408, r. 1367-1394). [12] The elephant did not find a happier home in Korea. After several people were trampled by the elephant, and tired of the high cost of feeding it, the king exiled the elephant to an island, where it was later reported as alive, but emaciated. [13]

This elephant, and those that followed in the early modern period, were Asian elephants that served as diplomatic gifts that, even when initially welcomed, did not come to happy ends. Elephants have a very long history as facilitators of foreign relationships, especially in Southeast and South Asia. They are imposing emblems of strength and wealth with added symbolic capital through their importance in Hindu and Buddhist belief systems. As Japan increasingly became a participant in the power politics of the region, it is almost inevitable that elephants would come to serve this function, however limited, in Japan as well. It is also no coincidence that the largest number of elephants came when Japan was most active in regional politics – five in the quarter century coinciding with the rise of Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), who began the process of ending civil war and unifying Japan, and ending with the expulsion of the Spanish in 1624. As Japan withdrew from international relationships, gifts of elephants were sometimes rejected.

After the first castaway elephant, it was over a hundred years before another elephant came to Japan. Very little is known about the one that came on a Chinese ship in 1574, but that from the following year was a gift to the daimyo (warlord) Ōtomo Yoshishige (1530-1587). His good will was desirable because he governed the important port of Hakata and controlled important sulphur mines, but this elephant also soon died. More is known about Don Pedro, the elephant presented to Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598, r. 1582-1598) in 1597. [14] This bull first began his travels when he was sent from Siam to the Philippines as a gift to Spanish governor Luis Perez Dasmariñas (?-1603, gov. 1593-1596) because the Siamese king wanted a Castilian horse and other European curiosities. It was not an easy journey as a storm initially waylaid the travellers in Melaka. [15] The gift was meant to heal a rift in Spanish-Japanese relations caused by the so-called *San Felipe* affair. This was a Spanish galleon headed for Mexico, laden with the gold and silver it had obtained for its cargo of silk and other Chinese commodities. It foundered off the shore of Shikoku in 1596, whereupon Hideyoshi promptly confiscated the cargo. While Hideyoshi still contemplated its return, the Pilot-Major, Francisco de Landa, in an ill-judged attempt to impress upon him the power of Spain, intimated that as was previously the case in the Americas, the Franciscan missionaries in Japan were just a precursor for conquistadors. [16] Hideyoshi responded by crucifying twenty-six Christians: six Franciscan priests, seventeen converts, and three Jesuit priests. It was this dramatic and severe rift in relations that Don Pedro came to repair.

According to the Spanish governor of the Philippines, Francisco de Tello Guzmán (1532-1603, gov. 1596-1602):

> "The elephant was very well received, and they tell me that on the day when he entered Meaco (where the court of Japon resides) [Kyoto], the concourse of people in the plaza was so great—because they had never seen elephants before—that seven persons were suffocated". [17]

Hideyoshi was especially tickled because Don Pedro had been trained to kneel and trumpet in greeting. He fed the elephant pears, peaches and melons and delighted in watching the elephant raise the fruit to its forehead in thanks and spit out the pits and seeds. The Japanese ruler had specifically sought to acquire an elephant as a symbol of his power over regions outside of Japan, as was often the motivation. The elephant was the source of much excitement, and as a result he again trampled to death some of the crowd who pressed close to see him on the march to Osaka castle. Hideyoshi is not recorded as having any concern

for those trampled by his elephant. Don Pedro died by swallowing the sword he snatched from a bystander.

Another elephant was sent to Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616) in 1602, shortly after Ieyasu took power, from Cochin China (part of modern Vietnam) as an overture to extend official trading relations. [18] This elephant was then regifted to Toyotomi Hideyori, the son of Ieyasu's political rival Hideyoshi, who had played with Don Pedro as a child. [19] The last elephant of this cluster was one sent by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) as a gift in 1624. Originating from Siam, it must have been very young because it was described as "as big as a calf". When it arrived in Hirado in 1624, the site of the Dutch factory, the local daimyo, Matsura Takanobu (1592-1637, r. 1602-1637) was intrigued. He ordered the keeper, Daniel Hertsen Dortsman, to bring the elephant to his residence where he and other members of his entourage, including the women of the household, observed the elephant. The elephant was given saké, which it enthusiastically drank up. After a *rojū* also requested a viewing, this elephant was sent back to Batavia. [20] The motivation for this gift is not recorded, but it was perhaps intended to gain favour with the shogunate over the VOC's many rivals.

The elephants of isolation

This modest trickle of pachyderms was the peak of premodern elephant imports into Japan. After the Maritime Laws of 1630s that created the isolated conditions known as *sakoku* or *kaikin*, only three additional elephants arrived, of which one died almost immediately upon arrival. There was again a gap of just over a hundred years before any other elephants were brought. Detail is given for these two elephants because it is available while it is not for the others, and therefore can provide a better sense of elephant lives in Japan.

In 1728, a young pair of elephants was brought from Vietnam by Chinese traders. The five-year-old female died soon after arrival in Japan. The seven-year old male was hardier, and would have perhaps the greatest impact as weighed by the number of books, writings and artwork he inspired, including several recent books just about his journey across Japan. [21] These elephants were a specific request by Shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune (1684-1751, r. 1716-1745). This eighth shogun in the Tokugawa government is generally considered the last strong shogun. His power is evident in the wide variety of imported goods, animals and even humans such as an equestrian master that he demanded from Dutch and Chinese traders to satisfy his catholic curiosity. [22] Yoshimune was interested in elephants, and quizzed VOC representatives about their size as early as 1717. He questioned Chinese traders extensively as well – about what they ate, their size, how they were handled. In the more open interest in Western knowledge encouraged by Yoshimune's enthusiasm, the daimyo of Tosa, Fukao Toyonobu (1712-1768) asked about importing elephants and buffalos in 1726. [23]

Yoshimune made the request for an elephant, apparently a white one, from Chinese trader Wu Ziming in 1726. Wu negotiated trading licenses and monetary support for the venture. but it took more than one attempt to get the elephants to Japan. Yoshimune was not pleased – one junk was denied entry for failure to bring a promised elephant. Another junk from Cambodia was rumoured to have brought an elephant that year that had died on board before landing. [24] When the Chinese traders finally did succeed, they were richly rewarded with 1200 chests of copper although they had requested silver, which was in high demand in China. The mahouts received 50 chests of copper each. [25]

The elephants were housed in the Chinese compound while preparations were made for the journey, but the female elephant developed a boil on her tongue and died days after disembarking from the ship. The surviving elephant and their Vietnamese mahouts had to walk much of the way from Nagasaki to Edo (Tokyo) at a rate of about seven to 10 miles a day, taking 74 days. Villages along the way were advised to prepare grass for the elephant to eat and the roads were cleared. The slow pace and advance notice gave bystanders plenty of time to observe his progress. His trail was marked by more than scat. For example, the

mountain pass of Inasa was so narrow and steep, the elephant cried on the way up. Today this stretch of road is known as Zō-naki-zaka, or "Crying Elephant Hill". [26]

Upon arriving in Kyoto, the elephant stopped off for a visit at the request of Emperor Nakamikado (r. 1710-1735). One widely cited source claims the elephant needed a court rank to appear before the emperor and was given one with that was equivalent to what a daimyo might receive, but not all scholars agree that the elephant was so honoured. [27] He did however, receive an audience and was fed mandarin oranges and sweets while the aristocrats watched. He also visited Retired Emperor Reigen, grandfather of the reigning emperor. The elephant's visit inspired poems, including this one traditionally ascribed to the Emperor Nakamikado:

> To have this opportunity to be able to see this extraordinary beast from a foreign land at the imperial palace today makes me very happy.

Other poems by aristocrats who had witness the visit were compiled into a book, *Eizōshi* [Poems in Admiration of Elephants]. [28]

The elephant then proceeded to Edo where he was welcomed at the Hama Rikyū [Detached Palace]. There he was viewed by high officials and paraded so the women of the *Ooku* [29] could see him. After about a year, the shogun, tired of the elephant and the expense of feeding him, gave him away. According to one report, they had tried to economise on food, and the hungry elephant wrapped his trunk around the keeper and choked him to death. Gensuke, the recipient, charged admission for the privilege of seeing him for the next several years. When the elephant died in 1741, the hide was presented to the shogun, but Gensuke continued to profit for the next twenty-five years by showing the bones. These bones were then sent to a temple, Nakano Hosenji. [30]

The last elephant brought before the treaty ports were established, was brought as a gift in 1813. The Dutch East India Company collapsed at the end of the eighteenth century with the advance of Napoleon, but the Dutch retained a presence in Japan. For some seventeen

Figure 2: *Indian mahout astride the elephant*. Dated 1813.

years, they were cut off from Patria while the British East India Company took over Dutch possessions. At this time, Sir Stamford Raffles had an elephant sent from Batavia (but born in Ceylon or Bengal), [31] what is today called Jakarta. His purpose was two-fold. First, he needed to heal the friction created by the rash actions of Captain Edward Pellew, who in 1808 had blasted into Nagasaki harbour in the *Phaeton*, taken hostages and demanded supplies. Secondly, Raffles hoped to open up a direct trading relationship between the British East India Company and Japan. According to the Governor-General of the British East India Company, there were:

> "reasonable grounds for concluding that under a proper management, the trade with that country [Japan], if it can be established, will prove not only highly beneficial to the interest of the colonies …, but open the prospect of a mart for the profitable disposal of a considerable portion of the produce of British India. [32]

This extravagant gift was rejected by the Japanese government. There are a few reasons why this might have occurred. First, by this time, exotic animals were no longer seen as desirable diplomatic gifts, a shift that occurs after the decline of personal power in the office of the shogun. [33] Secondly, the Dutch factory head obstructed English attempts to move in on their territory. And finally, the shogunate was not interested in engaging in trading relations with the British. According to David Ainslie, the doctor accompanying the trading party, the elephant was seen as "a very flattering testimony of regard" but was rejected, "… entirely in consequence of some difficulties started to the conveying of the Animal to Jedo," which clearly had not affected his predecessor. [34] The poor elephant never left Nagasaki and had to get back on the boat. The shogun was not heartless, however, and sent 100 bales of wheat for the elephant to eat on its return journey. [35]

This elephant did not go unremarked by those not officially connected to the visit or of high rank. A number of prints were produced as souvenirs in Nagasaki. Ōta Nanpo (1749-1823), a low level shogunal official, poet and writer wrote:

> First visit in Ōei [36]
> By Kyōhō [37] we're on good terms
> But the third time they come, we have to send them back
> These newfangled elephants [38]

While Nanpo took artistic license in abbreviating the number of elephants, it is notable that the ones he did mention are historically accurate. The expense and difficulty of transport and the difficulties imposed by their care limited the number of live elephants in Japan before the opening of treaty ports in 1859 to these seven, widely spaced, elephants. Outside of the context of the political relationships that these elephants represented, what then, is the point of discussing them, or elephants in the context of Japan at all?

The Japanese world of elephants

Prehistoric predecessors aside, the idea of the elephant significantly preceded the advent of the first *Elephas maximus*. Ancient objects such as mirrors decorated with elephants exist from as far back as the fourth century. One particularly famous example is a saddle embossed with elephants found in the Fujinoki tomb from circa 593 CE. [39] Naumann elephants may well have continued in folklore, supplemented by sporadic contacts with the Asian mainland. However, the introduction of Buddhism, traditionally in 538 CE. through envoys from the Korean kingdom of Baekje, contained knowledge of elephants through doctrinal expressions such as that a dream of a white elephant preceded the Buddha's inception and many jataka tales about elephants. Initially Buddhism was a religion of educated elites, but the Hossō priest Gyōki (668-749) travelled widely to convert people from all levels of society, beginning the process of a wider diffusion. After the Christian-led Shimabara Rebellion of 1637-1638, it became common practice to require local abbots to verify non-Christianity, which was codified by 1660.[40] Thus, by the seventeenth century, Buddhist ideas were widespread in Japan among all social classes.

Because it was so widely practised, Buddhist-derived symbology of the elephant, such as a representation of wisdom, was widely known and deployed**.** Moreover, in Japan, Fugen (Samantabhadra), the Bodhisattva of Great Conduct, was an important deity. He is usually depicted on an elephant, the remover of obstacles. Because Fugen was the patron deity of the Lotus Sutra, a central text in Mahayana Buddhism in general, and in Japan in particular, the elephant became broadly familiar through Fugen iconography.

Figure 3: *Shaka triad with Fugen riding a white elephant*. Hanging scroll. Thirteenth century.

Fugen on his elephant appeared in many forms outside of temple images. For example, he appears in the *Hokke genki*, a collection of biographies of sages of the Lotus Sutra authored by Tendai priest Chingen ca. 1040. The section on the priest Shunchō recounts how he,

seeking to save convicts, stole from a nobleman to purposely have himself incarcerated. Once Shunchō was locked up, all the jailors dreamt the prison was full of elephants, while the warden dreamed of Fugen on his elephant. Ultimately, the entire prison, inmates and warders alike, obtained salvation through Fugen.[41]

Figure 4: *Eguchi no kimi*. Hanging Scroll. Katsukawa Shuntei. Late eighteenth-early nineteenth century.

The story of a harlot either possessed by, or as the transformed body of Fugen appeared in thirteenth century story collections such as the *Kojidan* and the *Senjūshō.* This tale was further popularised by the noh drama *Eguchi* by Zeami (1363-1443).[42] Noh is a dramatic form in which brilliantly costumed, masked actors chant and dance on a minimalist stage. It was patronised by the warrior aristocracy with Zeami credited as its founder. The play

is therefore an important part of the noh repertoire and the subject of many paintings and prints.

Eguchi is about a priest on pilgrimage who encounters the ghost of the prostitute of Eguchi. He is lectured to by her corporal form and when he asks her identity herself, the harlot of Eguchi boards a boat which is intended to represent an elephant as the chorus chants:

> I will leave you now, she cries,
> revealed as the bodhisattva
> Fugen, the All-Wise.
> Her boat is a white elephant:
> In glory she mounts dazzling clouds and sail off westward through the skies,
> Leaving behind gratitude and joy.[43]

Figure 5: *Eguchi from the Series of No Performances*. Tsukioka Kōgyo. 1898.

Fugen was by no means the only elephant transported to Japan through religious belief. For example, the Deva of Bliss known as Kangiten, Kankiten or Shōson was derived from Ganesha. Part of Tantric, Tendai and Shingon belief, this deity was not officially accepted in mainstream orthodoxy but was nonetheless influential in various presentations of the occult. It is most commonly found as a dual form of a male and female elephant-headed figures embracing, which represents the duality of opposites. But, by also coming together as one, the two elephants represent the unity of opposites. Not surprisingly, this dual form is also seen to represent conjugal bliss, or blissful sexual union. These images are rarely shown.[44] There are only about 250 temples with images of Kangiten.[45]

Figure 6: Image of Kangiten from *Besson zakki*, by Shingon Priest Shinkaku (1117-118?)

Nor was the elephant absent from folk belief. The *baku* is a mythological creature transmitted from China that is usually described as having the nose of an elephant, the eyes of a rhinoceros, the tail of a cow, the feet of a tiger and the body of a bear.

Figure 7: *Baku*. Ivory netsuke. Attributed to Gechū. Eighteenth century.

It was a benevolent monster that ate nightmares. Sleeping on the skin of one was thought to protect against communicable diseases, and drawing one would cure a cold. References in Japan go back at least to the late Heian period. While *baku* are not the same as elephants, their description as having elephant-like features, conversely, reinforced the idea of elephants.

Elephants were also depicted in kabuki, another, form of Japanese theatre in which actors use heavy make-up rather than masks. It was primarily attended by commoners and therefore the presence of elephants is an indicator of knowledge outside the educated elite. Representations of elephants in kabuki are not generally religiously inspired. Perhaps the most famous elephant kabuki play is *Zōhiki* (1701). This *aragoto* (rough style) play is one of the *Kabuki Juhachiban*, or the Eighteen Great Kabuki Plays performed by actor Ichikawa Danjurō. The one act play portrays a conflict between Imperial Councillor Soga no Iruka (d. 645) and Yamanoue Gennaizaemon, vassal of Iruka's political opponent Fujiwara no Kamatari (614-669.) The Soga family were advisors to the imperial throne but gradually usurped power to the point where it appeared that Iruka would found a new imperial dynasty, before he was assassinated in 645. In the play, Soga arrives to view cherry blossoms on a white elephant. He attempts to trample his enemy, Gennaizemon, but is prevented by a hair rope barrier erected by Gennaizaemon's wife. The two men wrestle over the elephant until Gennaizaemon is victorious. Although the plot is simple, the dramatic nature of the play made it a popular subject of ukiyo-e prints.

Figure 8: *Pulling the Elephant (Zôhiki): Actors Ichikawa Ebizō V as Prince Suzuka (Suzuka no Ōji) and Ichikawa Danjûrô VIII as Yamanoue Gennaizaemon*. Utagawa Kunisada. 1852.

Figure 9: *Hachimantarō Yoshiie Abe Sadatō : Sadatō Tsuma Sodehagi.* Unidentified kabuki play. Utagawa Kunisada, 1847 or 1848.

Although originating in a fable of Buddhist or Jain origin, the fable of the blind men and the elephant was embedded into popular culture as evidenced by its many depictions in art and on utilitarian objects. In this parable, a group of blind men are asked to describe an elephant, and the one who feels its leg describes it as a tree, the one with the ear thinks the elephant is like a fan and so forth, each describing the animal differently depending on which part he is touching. It is meant as a cautionary tale, to avoid making judgements

Figure 10: *Blind monks examining an elephant*. Hanabusa Itchō.

based on insufficient information and narrow views. Its popularity, however, suggests the appeal extended beyond the moral, to a joy in the absurdity.

Elephants of the imaginary intertwined with the memory of the living elephants. The poem by Ōta Nanpo above clearly shows this memory of previous live elephants even as he wrote about the one from 1813. Similarly, Don Pedro has been associated with another famous hero, Kato Kiyomasa (1561-1611), who served under Hideyoshi and is perhaps best known as one of the top three generals in the war with Korea. In 1594, three years before the arrival of Don Pedro, Kato presented a live tiger to Hideyoshi.[46] In one popular Edo-period version of the biography of Hideyoshi, it is recorded that Kato gave the elephant to Hideyoshi along with the tiger as a gift from the troops still in Korea. The misconception is understandable in that they probably co-existed but seems not so much a mistake, as a way to build on the symbolic power of the animals. The elephant was described in the book as well-trained, while the tiger was wild and required chains and several men to restrain it.[47]

Figure 11: Triptych*: Kiyomasa Ryōjū o Ikedorite Denka no Jinchū ni Hikashimu (Ehon Taikōku: maki chū)* Utagawa Yoshiiku. 1863.

This work was also made into a kabuki play. These popular depictions demonstrate the interconnection between history and belief that populate the phrenic landscape.

Affirmations of reality

Elephants are different from some animals that thrived in Japanese myth and religious practice because there was a sense of their reality. Even the earliest encyclopaedia, *Wamyosho* (c.938), had a definition of the elephant that read, "A beast similar to the water buffalo, with big ears, a long nose, narrow eyes and long tusks."[48] In other words, it is reasonably accurate. Compare this, for example to the entry in the same book, for lion, another example of a non-indigenous animal with Buddhist connections. The book merely says that lions are similar to tigers and panthers with no elaboration.

Thereafter, elephants make an appearance in a wide variety of reference materials but by the eighteenth century there is a marked increase. This is due first, to the fact that literacy and the availability of books greatly increased as a result of a thriving economy that had exhibited steady growth through the seventeenth century. Secondly, scholarship in Western sciences began to increase, because Tokugawa Yoshimune's interest in it lifted the self-censoring that had arisen in response to the anti-Christian suppression of the early seventeenth century. This was apparent even before the elephant arrived for Yoshimune in 1728. For example, the hundred plus volume encyclopaedia of 1713, *Wakan sansai zue* has a detailed entry on elephants. Author Terajima Ryōan described elephants as coming from Yunnan and India, that there were two colours (grey and white) and that they needed their trunk to eat and drink water. Compared to, for example, the entry in this book for the narwhal, which is only depicted by its horn and inaccurately at that because it is classified as a "wild beast", this is quite specific and generally accurate.[49]

However, the Vietnamese elephant brought to Yoshimune a few years later, in 1728, inspired even greater scientific interest. Notably, an entire book was penned by an anonymous author about elephants entitled *Zōshi* [Treatise on Elephants]. It

Figure 12: *Zōshi*. 1729.

describes the journey of the elephant, and details with reasonable accuracy their habitat and physical characteristics as well as various Buddhist legends about elephants and common misconceptions such as that they are afraid of mice. It apparently had a fairly large distribution, judging by the number of copies that have survived and the fact that it was simultaneously published in Edo, Kyoto and Osaka, the three most significant cities in early modern Japan.

Knowledge about elephants was also contained in medical practice. Sources based on Chinese texts suggested that elephant meat was an anti-inflammatory that when applied to boils would make them heal. In extreme cases the ashes of the meat were used. The author of *Zōshi* alleged that use of elephant flesh for boils on the nose should be avoided because it might cause death.[50] The liver, fat and spleen of the elephant were also thought to have medicinal properties. Gensuke, who had taken Yoshimune's elephants, even applied for permission to sell a medicine made from the elephant scat that purported to cure small pox.[51]

The Japanese, who had been prohibited from travelling abroad in 1635, relied on Dutch and Chinese trading partners to bring them many different medicines and on rare occasions this included elephant parts. Dutch records, which are more extensive than records of Chinese trade, show that Dutch factory members occasionally gave elephant fat, spleen and liver as gifts to Japanese officials.[52] As foreign trade was the only route for elephant medicine to enter, and Japanese medicines generally eschewed the animal parts utilised by many Chinese medicines, it is unlikely that these types of cures were widely adopted or available.

Nevertheless, discussions of the efficacy of elephant cures were a firm part of the scientific literature.

In contrast to the scientific language of *Zōshi*, another book from this period, *Zō no mitsugi* [Tribute of an Elephant] by Nakamura Heigo was written for a wider audience. It romantically describes the tearful parting this elephant had with its mother in Vietnam, of the elephant sent to Hideyoshi, and of the customs surrounding elephants in other countries.

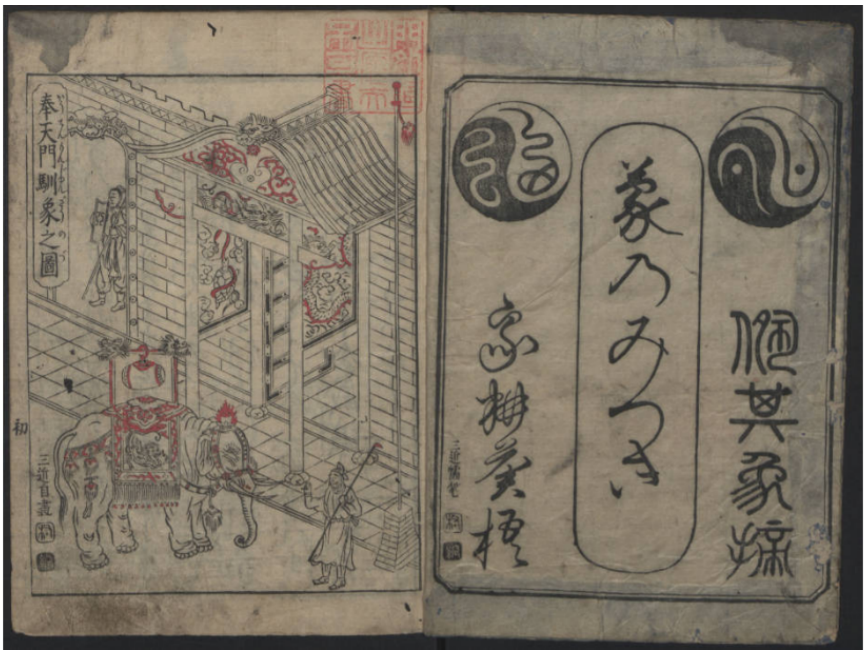

Figure 13: *Zō no mitsugi*. 1729

Other forms of knowledge

Elephants lived not just in books but in the physical world too, in place names such as "Crying Elephant Hill" and in Sanuki Province (present-day Kagawa Prefecture) "Elephant Head Mountain" (Zōzusan) and in the material world created by Japanese artisans and arts, inspired by reality, myth and religious belief. The ancient saddle mentioned above was owned by an elite, but nearly everything, from armour and weapons to personal accoutrements like netsuke, which were used by many different social classes, were adorned by elephants in the early modern period. These representations exploded after the arrival of Yoshimune's elephant. Toy representations were reportedly produced in large numbers as he passed through major cities.[53]

One example of how reality and imagination intertwined was the elephant float paraded at the June Sanno festival of Hie Shrine in Edo (Tokyo). This shrine had been founded by Ōta Dōkan (1432-1486), the founder of Edo, in 1478. When Ieyasu moved to Edo in 1590, he made the shrine the guardian of Edo. Consequently, the Sanno festival, which occurs in mid-June, became one of the most important festivals in Edo and continues to be so in present-day Tokyo. After the elephant arrived in Edo, a large elephant was included among the floats paraded through the streets. These floats have been out of use since 1885 because they could no longer pass through the streets due to the construction of street overpasses, but until then the float allowed the people of the city to recall the visit of the 1728 elephant.

Another example of crossover between reality and imagination was *wa-sarusa*, or Japanese printed cotton textiles. Colourful imported cotton textiles from India and Southeast Asia were an important part of foreign trade. The origin of the world *sarasa* is unclear and has been variously attributed as derived from the Gujarati port of Surat, the Latin name for a tree used for dying (*Saraca indica* or *Saraca asoca*) or from similar-sounding words in Portuguese, Spanish or Javanese. It can refer to calico or chintz or even batik. *Sarasa* refers

less to technique than it does to elaborate patterns from South and Southeast Asia. As imported textiles were expensive, and these patterns were popular, by the eighteenth century, Japanese imitations were produced, usually using stencils rather than the block prints common in India. Elephants were a popular motif in these Indo-Japanese textiles. Some of these images appear to have been directly copied from imported textiles, but others seem to be copied from prints produced of the elephants or actual observation.[54]

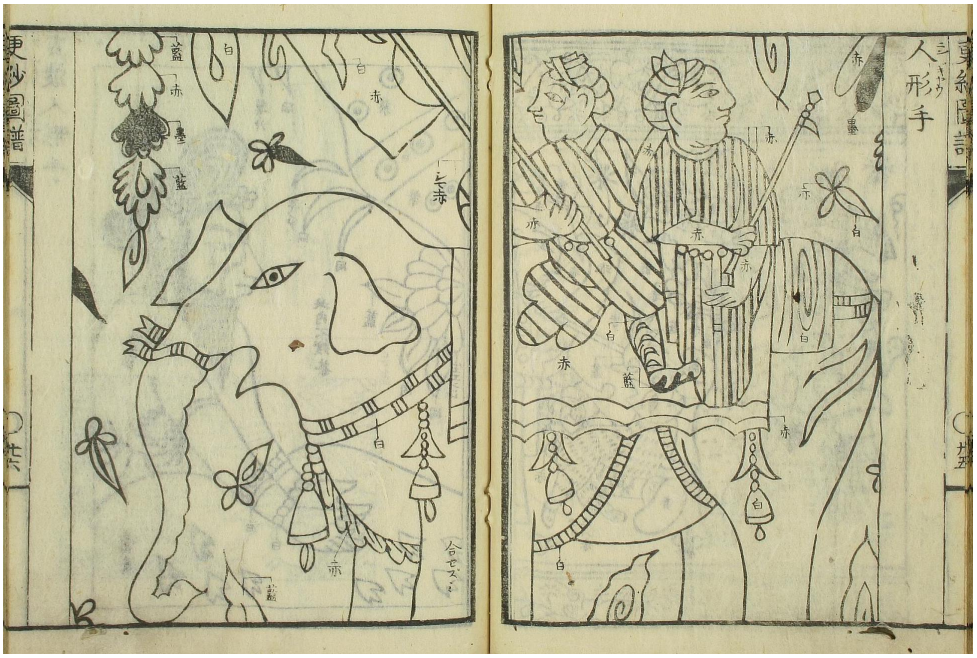

Figure 14: *Sarasa zufu* by Inaba Michitatsu. 1785.

Through their foreign inspiration, these textiles reinforced the reality of elephants as creatures that existed in foreign lands.

Back to reality

There is one other significant way in which the reality of elephants was reinforced in early modern Japan – through their tusks. Unlike the word ivory, an Anglo-French term that evolved from Egyptian via Latin, which in fact can refer to a variety of animal materials such as walrus tusk, boar tusk and hippopotamus tooth, the Japanese word for elephant, or true, ivory is formed as a compound from the characters for elephant [象] and for tusk [牙], which constantly reinforced the idea that ivory came from a specific animal called an elephant.

Japanese use of ivory is quite ancient, but it was only available in very small amounts, probably through diplomatic contacts with China and Korea. Ivory usage really only spread outside of a tiny fraction of the ruling elite in the second half of the seventeenth century. This came about through a combination of increased supplies as a result of Dutch and Chinese trade, increased prosperity among the merchant class and the resulting explosion of applications that fuelled demand in the early modern period. It is ironic that isolationism, or government policies of self-sufficiency promoted in the late seventeenth century did not effectively put any sort of damper on demand. With the exception of a few diplomatic gifts – a bird cage in 1646, some cups in 1647, and a veneered cabinet in 1779,[55] and periodic imports of ivory spectacle frames, for which there seemed to be a distinct preference, ivory was always imported to Japan in the raw state. This was probably because craftsmen of ability soon appeared in Japan and because the applications were generally culturally specific. One of the earliest compendiums of professions, *Jinrinkinmozue* (1690), describes ivory carvers as producing hair ornaments, scroll ends, netsuke, ojime (fastening beads), lids for tea ceremony objects and powder horns.[56] Of these, only ornamental combs and powder horns were carved in other ivory-consuming regions.

Hair ornaments of any sort were not common until the mid-seventeenth century. The comb was the oldest of what evolved to be a rather and large diverse array of functional and decorative items inserted in women's hair to designate social status, prosperity and profession. A basic set consisted of a decorative comb, *kanzashi* (bodkin) and a barbell shaped piece known as a *kōgai* around which hair was wrapped to produce any of a wide assortment of chignons. These ornaments were not exclusively ivory, but were nearly always made of the most expensive material the owner could afford. This included tortoiseshell, silver, exotic woods and coral. According to one mid-eighteenth-century source, a prohibition against the use of silver and gold *kanzashi* led to the popularity of ivory and other materials.[57]

Figure 15: Portrait of a woman with tortoiseshell and ivory ornaments against a sarasa background. *Kushi*. Kitagawa Utamaro. 1780s.

The male counterpart to the personal expression provided by hair ornaments for women was the netsuke. Netsuke are toggles used to counterweight the things that men carried around, such as tobacco pouches or pen cases by sliding a cord through the obi. This hanging system was one solution to the fact that kimono have no pockets. Initially simple objects, netsuke became increasingly elaborate as they came to represent expression of identity and taste. Although a variety of materials were used to carve these miniatures, boxwood and ivory were by far the most common. Ivory, even today, is considered the best

material for netsuke because it can be carved in great detail, it ages beautifully, it can take colour if desired, and it had weight for its size. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, netsuke were used widely among both the warrior class and commoners alike. Ojime, the fastener beads used to keep the items hanging from the cord closed, were also frequently carved from ivory.

Because ivory is such a versatile material, its uses went far beyond personal accoutrements. One interesting example is in the tea ceremony – a misnomer for the ritualised consumption of tea. It was originally part of a meditative practice but became an expression of connoisseurship. Where and why ivory came to be an important part of the tea ceremony is shrouded in mystery. It predates any of the other applications listed in the *Jinrinkinmozui*, even the formalisation of tea ceremony. For example, Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa, who reigned from 1449 to 1473, was known to have owned a tea jar with an ivory lid. These ivory lids came to be an essential component of tea, and a myriad of styles developed around the various schools. Ivory was also sometimes used for the tea spoons, and as fastener pegs for the elaborate cloth protective covers for tea implements.

As ivory supplies within Japan increased in the eighteenth century, ivory was put to countless uses not listed in the *Jinrinkinmozui*. One of the most common was, and still is the name seal, or *hanko*. As writing came in from China in the third century so did the custom of signing important documents with a seal. Although the use of *hanko* has sometimes been associated with illiteracy, in fact the more literate people were the more they were involved in transactions that required a paper trail. The first recorded use by a farmer was even before the beginning of the Edo period, in 1592.[58] Ivory was an expensive material and thus was not widely used for seals until the 18th century. It is, however, still considered the best material for making these stamps because it has weight for its size, feels nice in the hand, and can be carved to a much finer degree of detail than almost any other substance. Those that could not afford a solid ivory *hanko* would sometimes put an ivory cap on water buffalo horn. This created an aesthetically pleasing combination of black and white and offered the same taste of the exotic.

A description of the objects manufactured in ivory in early modern Japan could fill a book, but to list a few; parts of musical instruments such as the plectrum, and pegs of the shamisen, and the bridges and “nails” of the koto (a form of zither); game pieces such as dice, mah jong tiles, shōgi (Japanese chess), or go pieces; articles of religion such as rosary beads, the fibula of a priest’s robe, or personal shrines; and chopsticks. All parts of the tusk were put to use, even the powder residue from carving was used as an emery powder, burned to make ink, or put into medicines. It was a luxury material, but one that was not out of reach for merchants and wealthy farmers.

Conclusion

There were many imaginary creatures in the cultural landscape of Japan, but the elephant was not one of them. This is evident in the way elephants were depicted—as real if not always realistically. They did not have to be seen for belief in their existence.

With modernity came more elephants, knowledge, and eventually travel, but as Hanako shows, the Japanese romance with the elephant has continued. The criticisms of Hanako’s living conditions reflect modern perceptions of animal care, not lack of concern as her long life in comparison to many of her predecessors indicates. Love for her was demonstrated with a statue of her erected in front of Kichijōji Station, a suburb of Tokyo, in 2017.

Few live elephants were seen, but knowledge of the elephant spread through Buddhism, art, literature, scientific texts and objects in such a way that elephants became embedded in the consciousness of the Japanese people. The relative abundance of tusks brought to Japan by maritime trade in early modern Japan reinforced the physicality of the elephant. Japan may have been isolated politically and geographically, but the presence of elephants was a reminder of a world beyond those borders.

Figure 16: Statue erected in honour of Hanako in Kichijōji.

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NOTES

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3. Alexandra von der Geer et al, *Evolution of Island Mammals: Adaption and Extinction of Placental Mammals on Islands* (2010), Chichester UK: John Wiley, 235-236.

4. Hiroaki Aiba, Katsuyoshi Baba and Masaki Matsukawa (2010) "A New Species of *Stegodon* (Mammalia proboscidea) from the Kazusa Group, Hachioji City, Tokyo, Japan and its Evolutionary Morphodyamics" *Palaeontology*, Vol. 53, Part 3, 471.

5. Keiichi Takahashi, Yuji Soeda, Masami Izuho, Goro Yamada, Morio Akamatsu and Chun-Hsiang Chang (2006) "The chronological record of the woolly mammoth (*Mammuthus primigenius*) in Japan, and its temporary replacement by *Palaeoloxodon naumanni* during MIS 3 in Hokkaido (northern Japan)" 1-10 in *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology* 233: 1.

6. "Über japanische Elephanten der Vorzeit" (1882)

7. Van der Geer, *Island Mammals*, 241.

8. Yuichi Nakazawa and Christopher J. Bae, "Quaternary Paleoenvironmental Variation and its Impact on Initial Human Dispersals into the Japanese Archipelago (2018) *Paleogeography, Paleoclimatology, Paleoecology* 512, 148, 151.

9. Nelly Naumann, *Japanese Pre-History: The Material and Spiritual Culture of the Jōmon Period* (2000) Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz, 1. They are carbon dated to 140,000 years ago, but carbon dating may give false dating because of the CO_2 in the volcanic soil of Japan.

10. T**.** Shinbori (1985) "A bone scraper excavated from Tategahana Lake Nojiri Central Japan" in *Quaternary Research*: 110-1.

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12. Ōba Osamu (May 1999) "Sino-Japanese Relations in the Edo period –Part 8 The Travels of Elephants", Joshua Fogel, trans. *Sino-Japanese Relations*, vol. 11 no. 2, 58.

13. In the *Taejongsillok* (Annals of King Taejong). Shin Byung-ju, "Korea's Unrivaled Recordkeeping Culture" in *Koreana* vol. 16 no. 3 (Autumn 2002) http://koreana.kf.or.kr/view.asp?article_id=4597

14. Part of the information on Don Pedro is from an unpublished paper, *Elephant Story*, written with Omri Bassewitch-Frenkel.

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16. Blair and Roberson, *The Philippine Islands*. Vol. 9, 171. Letter from Governor Tello to Philip II.

17. Blair and Roberson, *The Philippine Islands*. Vol. 10, p. 160.

18. *Tsūkō ichiran* (1912-13) vol. 171 Tokyo: Kokusho kankokai, 483. Tana Li Nguyễn (1998) *Cochinchina: Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998, 61.

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22. See Martha Chaiklin (2003) *Cultural Commerce and Dutch Commercial Culture*, Leiden: CNWS, Chapter 4 for a discussion of Yoshimune's requests.

23. Paul van der Velde & Rudolf Bachofner, *The Deshima Diaries- Marginalia 1700-1740* (Tokyo: Japan-Netherlands Institute, 1992), 210. Ōba "Sino-Japanese Relations," 51.

24. van der Velde & Bachofner, *Diaries*, 326, 331, 353.

25. Ibid, 311, Ōba "Sino-Japanese Relations", 51.

26. Matsuoka, "Introduction," 52.

27. *Kannan jushi hakuzō*

28. Ōba "Sino-Japanese Relations," 55.

29. An area in the palace for the female relatives of the shogun and their servants.

30. Ōba "Sino-Japanese Relations", 57-58. *"*Edomeishozu" in *Kojiruen Dobutsu hen*, 458. Katō Ebian (1971)*, "*Waga koromo" in Tanigawa Kenichi, ed. *Nihon shomin shiryō shūsei* Vol. 15, Tokyo: Sanyosha, 9.

31. From a painting in M. Paske-Smith, ed. (1971), *Report on Japan*. London and Dublin: Curzon Press, n.p. Paske-Smith does not identify the source of the painting. The illustration states the elephant is from Bengal.

32. Letter from the Government of India to Stamford Raffles, M. Paske-Smith, ed. *Report on Japan*, 18.

33. See Martha Chaiklin (2012), "The Merchant's Ark: Live Animal Gifts in Early Modern Dutch-Japanese Relations", *World History Connected* for a discussion of this.

34. Jedo was a contemporary spelling for Edo. Letter from Stamford Raffles to the Secret Committee of the East India Company. Paske-Smith ed. *Report on Japan*, 80, also 102,125, 157.

35. Paske-Smith ed. *Report on Japan*, 80.

36. Era name for period from 1394-1428.

37. Era name for period from 1716-1736.

38. Translated by Timon Screech in Sumie Jones and Watanabe Kenji, ed. (2013) *An Edo Anthology: Literature from Japan's Megacity, 1750-1850*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 478.

39. J. Edward Kidder (1987) "The Fujinoki Tomba and Its Grave-Goods" *Monumenta Nipponica* Vol 42 No.1, 74-75.

40. See Tamamura Fumio (2009) "The Development of the Temple Parishioner System" *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* Vol 36 No. 1, 11-26 for a detailed description of this process.

41. Yoshiko Dykstra (1977) "Miraculous Tales of the Lotus Sutra: The Dai Nihonkoku Hokkegenji" *Monumenta Nipponica*, 189-210 Vo, 32 No. 2 (Summer): 200-201.

42. See Michele Marra (1993) *Representations of Power: the Literary Politics of Medieval Japan* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 92-94.

43. Royall Tyler (1992) *Japanese Nō Dramas* London: Penguin Books, 81.

44. See James H. Sanford (1991) "Literary Aspects of Japan's Dual Ganesa Cult" in Robert Brown, ed. *Ganesh: Studies of an Asian God*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 287-326.

45. Upendra Thakur (1986) *Some Aspects of Asian History and Culture*. New Delhi: Shaki Malik, 191. Thakur gives this figure to show how popular Kangiten was but in fact this is a miniscule number. There are well over 1600 temples in the city of Kyoto alone.

46. See Chaiklin (2012) "The Merchant's Ark" for a discussion on tigers.

47. Takeuchi Kakusai (1914) *Ehon taikoki*, Tsukamoto Tetsu, ed. Tokyo: Yohodo 3:288. This was a simplified version of Oze Hoan's *Taikoki* of 1625. It was originally published from 1797-1802. The illustrations were by Okada Gyokuzan (1737-1812).

48. Kojiruien, *Dōbutsu hen* , 455.

49. Terajima Ryōan (1985) *Wakan sansai zue*, Shimada Isao, et al. eds. Tokyo: Heibonsha Vol 6, 58, 63.

50. *Zōshi*.

51. Katō Ebian (1971), "Ware koromo", in *Shomin seikatsu shiryō shûsei* Vol. 15 Tokyo: Sanichi shobō, 9.

52. van der Velde & Bachofner, *Diaries*, 391.

53. Ōba "Sino-Japanese Relations." 56.

54. See, e.g. Kumagai Hiroto's blog "Wasarasa omoshiro gara 8" *Yokohama kimono Asobi – Lifestyle with Kimono*

http://yokohama-kimonoasobi.com/wasarasazooshi/wasarasazooshi11.html

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56. Asakura Haruhiko, ed. (1960) *Jinrin kinmō zui*, Tōyō Bunko No. 519. Tokyo: Heibonsha, 178.

57. Katō Ebian, "Warekoromo", 16.

58. Richard Rubinger, *Popular Literacy in Early Modern Japan* (2007) Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 52.

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

Fig. 1: Hanako in 2006 at Inokashira Zoo. Wikicommons.

Fig. 2: The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, The New York Public Library. *Indian mahout astride the elephant.* Dated 1813.

Fig. 3: *Shaka triad with Fugen riding a white elephant*. Hanging scroll. Thirteenth Century. H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929 Metropolitan Museum of Art

Fig. 4: *Eguchi no kimi*. Hanging Scroll. Katsukawa Shuntei. Late eighteenth-early nineteenth century. Mary Griggs Burke Collection, Gift of the Mary and Jackson Burke Foundation, 2015 Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 5: *Eguchi* from the Series of No Performances. Tsukioka Kōgyo. 1898. Frederick W. Gookin Collection. Art Institute Chicago.

Fig. 6: Image of Kangiten from *Besson zakki*, by Shingon Priest Shinkaku (1117-118?) Vol. 42

Fig. 7. *Baku*. Ivory netsuke. Attributed to Gechū. Eighteenth Century. Collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Fig. 8: Pulling the Elephant (Zôhiki): Actors Ichikawa Ebizō V as Prince Suzuka (Suzuka no Ōji) and Ichikawa Danjûrô VIII as Yamanoue Gennaizaemon. Utagawa Kunisada. 1852. The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, The New York Public Library.

Fig. 9: *Hachimantarō Yoshiie Abe Sadatō : Sadatō Tsuma Sodehagi* in unidentified kabuki play. Utagawa Kunisada 1847 or 1848. Collection of the Library of Congress.

Fig. 10*: Blind monks examining an elephant*. Hanabusa Itchō. Collection of the Library of Congress.

Fig. 11: Triptych: *Kiyomasa Ryōjū o Ikedorite Denka no Jinchū ni Hikashimu (Ehon Taikōku: maki chū)* Utagawa Yoshiiku. 1863 Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Gift of the Friends of Arthur B. Duel

Fig. 12: Zōshi. 1729. Published by Yasui Kihei, 1729. Collection of the National Diet Library

Fig. 13: *Zō no mitsugi*. 1729. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum

Fig. 14: *Sarasa zufu* by Inaba Michitatsu. 1785. A book of *sarasa* patterns. Collection of Waseda University Library.

Fig. 15: Portrait of a woman with tortoiseshell and ivory ornaments against a sarasa background. *Kushi*. Kitagawa Utamaro. 1780s. Later Reproduction. Collection of the Library of Congress.

Fig. 16: Statue erected in honour of Hanako in Kichijoji. Wikicommons.