

SODA, Megumi

Reconsidering *A Journey Around Hell and Paradise* by Kawanabe Kyōsai: The Symbol of the End of the Edo Period and the Beginning of the Meiji Era and the Figure of Commemoration

This article focuses on the diversely talented Kawanabe Kyōsai's *A Journey Around Hell and Paradise*, a work that has attracted considerable attention in recent years. Zeroing in on three of the 40 pictures that make up the work, the author explicates and clarifies the requiem intentions behind the motif sources, the *mitate-e* (pictorial similes) and background imagery, while also commenting on the rich wit of the early Meiji period.

This work was created as a requiem offering for Tatsuru, the beloved daughter of the Katsuda family of merchants in the Nihonbashi district, who died at the young age of 14. The family commissioned the work on the first anniversary of her death. Focusing on three paintings in the series: the 1st: “Butterfly and Japanese Mirror;” the 23rd: “A Kabuki Actor as Depicted by Utagawa Toyokuni III” and the 37th: “Train Going to Paradise”, Soda advances her argument by considering the symbolic iconography of forms shown from death through a journey through hell before rebirth in paradise. In the first painting in the series, she indicates that the motif of the two family crests facing the two *tenjin* (heavenly beings) seen on the back surface of the Japanese mirror are based on images of Maya, the historical Buddha's mother, and heavenly beings found in the Hōryūji's *Gohōmotsu zue*, a pictorial compendium that reflects the late Edo period interest in ancient treasures. After firmly asserting that Kyōsai had used this *Gohōmotsu zue* as his model, she indicates that the *ensō* (Zen circle) seen in the 2nd picture “Tatsuru and a Farewell Poem ” is indivisibly linked to the *Gohōmotsu zue* or the imagery of the 1st picture. Finally she presents the convincing argument that the two pictures are based on the definition of the single character “kagami [鏡 mirror]” drawn from Tatsuru's posthumous name” 清鏡院寿式貞讚大姉”.

A large image of a kabuki actor is shown in the 23rd picture that shows Tatsuru heading towards paradise. The actor, wearing a pale blue kimono with a *gyōyōgiku* crest and with a *tachibana* (citrus tree) seen in the background, was previously identified as Ichikawa Danjūrō VIII, but Soda determined that the combination of

crest and *tachibana* equaled the Ichimuraza Theater, and hence identifies the figure as Onoe Kikugorô V, and states that he is shown in off stage mode. Soda further mentions the patronage relationship between the Katsuda family and Kikugorô, referring back to the face of the heavenly being in the 1st picture, suggesting that this was intended to be a quasi-marriage between Tatsuru and Kikugorô. Kyôσαι's sensitive desire to reassure Tatsuru's parents can be seen in the inclusion of the felicitous concept of marriage within the sadness of a requiem offering.

The final 37th picture was added two years after the first anniversary of Tatsuru's death, and is a rebirth in paradise scene in the form of a train heading towards paradise, thus ably conveying a sense of the Meiji era's modernizing and Westernizing trend. The bodhisattva greeting the souls in paradise resembles Tatsuru, and thus shows the deceased Tatsuru attaining maturity and Buddhist enlightenment after death. Regarding the belief that Kyôσαι's lack of technical knowledge can be seen in the train depiction, Soda considers that Kyôσαι intentionally depicted a fantasy construct with decoration based on the *kawaraban* (popular newssheets) of the day.

The identification of motif sources is an common step in art historical research, and Soda's careful investigation of the *ukiyo-e* artists, the kabuki world, and customs and modernization that were all part of the background of this work and Kyôσαι's career led to her praiseworthy clarification of the intricate relationships between these various influences. It is likely that the connections between Kawanabe Kyôσαι and the Katsuda family and Tatsuru went beyond the simple relationship of painter and patron to one of strong affection, and thus Kyôσαι worked particularly hard to produce this splendid composition. Soda adroitly proves these factors. Indeed, Soda's development of her argument stimulates the desire for an explication of the entire *Journey Around Hell and Paradise* series. Of further note is how the contents of this article not only present her arguments on the subject; they also fully convey the fascination of Kyôσαι himself.

For these reasons we have awarded the Bijutsushi Article Prize to Soda Megumi.