Russian Japanology Review, 2024, 1, pp. 78–109
DOI: 10.55105/2658-6444-2024-1-78-109

Symbolism in Shiba Kōkan's (1738/1747–1818) Painting *The Meeting of the Three Sages of Japan, China, and the West*

E. K. Simonova-Gudzenko

Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of a little-known scroll by the 18th century Japanese artist Shiba Kōkan[1]. The provenance of the scroll and the reasons for its poor study are considered. The main attention is paid to the analysis of the history of the scroll and the symbolism of three elements of images on it: wave, triad, and flame-fire.

These three elements are important components of the Japanese cultural and artistic code, forming it since ancient times while changing over time and retaining their significance in contemporary culture. The multiple meanings of the symbolism of the images on the scroll allow us to propose at least two possibilities for its interpretation: as a separate and independent work and as an illustration of the artist's diary-pamphlet written by him at the end of his life. In this article, we deal primarily with the first possibility.

The duality of the perception of the wave and the sea in the cultural code is reflected in the scroll. The islanders realized the sea not only as a physically surmountable barrier, but also as a kind of translator of information. The central part of the scroll depicts a meeting at the table of three wise men from Japan, China and the West, which is analogous to the illustration of the famous Chinese parable *Three Wise Men Tasting Vinegar*. The article analyzes in

[1] Hereinafter, the colon after a vowel denotes its value, which in Japanese is a meaning-distinguishing factor.

detail the portraits of the three participants of the meeting, considers possible prototypes of the Japanese character and the collective images of the Chinese and the European ones, confirmed by the carefully studied symbolism of their appearance, as well as the objects spread out in front of them.

The burning Buddhist pagoda depicted at the top of the scroll and the three groups of people trying to extinguish it seem to be an allegory for the gathering around the table. It is also seen in the use of different ways and means of extinguishing the fire by groups of Japanese, Chinese, and Europeans. It seems that the scroll also has Buddhist connotations. The image reflects the irony, mockery, and laughter, which are among the characteristics of Edo culture. The final part of the article speculates on the possible dating and authorship of the scroll.

Keywords: Shiba Kōkan, scroll, *rangaku*, wave, fire, three wise men, *mon*, pump.

Acknowledgements

I would also like to express my gratitude to L. M. Ermakova for her constructive criticism and valuable feedback, which contributed to enhancing the quality of this research.

In cherished memory
of Viktor Sanovich, our friend and mentor

"Japanese people have a diversely smart mind, kind heart, and tenacious memory. <...> They are seekers of all kinds of wisdom". *Cosmographia* 1670. Chapter 70.	«Японские люди многосмышлены, добробразны, памятны. <...> Всяких премудростей искатели» *Космография* 1670. Глава 70

The Tokugawa era (1603–1868), like any other in the history of Japan, has its own peculiarities. One of them in the 18th and early 19th centuries was the fascination with the achievements of Western civilization and their mastering, first of all, of the fields of natural sciences, medicine, and technology. As a result, a system of European knowledge about man and nature was formed, which was called *rangaku*, or the Dutch studies. Scholars of this direction, the *rangakusha*, studied the Dutch

language, medicine, astronomy, technical achievements, and translated works on the above sciences from Dutch to Japanese. "Most *rangakusha* were primarily interested in medicine, which had the widest practical application (the concept of medicine included botany, chemistry, and other natural sciences). Many were also engaged in astronomy, which was encouraged by the government, interested in compiling an accurate calendar" [Nikolaeva 1996, p. 151]. However, the Japanese were impressed not only by the science and the technical achievements of the Europeans, but also by the fine arts. Thus, the famous artists Shiba Kōkan, Hayashi Shihei (1738–1793), and Hiraga Gennai (1728–1780), who practiced traditional types of painting and engraving, became major masters in the genre of European painting (*yōga*). Mastering the artistic techniques of Western masters was viewed by Japanese artists of the Tokugawa era in an obligatory connection with the pursuit of Western sciences. They depicted Western technical innovations and their devices, plants, animals, humans, illustrated anatomical encyclopedias, were interested in the achievements of Western geographical thought and cartographic skills, and drew maps.

One of the most important painters of the *yōga* genre was Shiba Kōkan (born Andō Kichi(ji)rō (Katsusaburō))[2], who has been called "the father of Western painting in Japan". He received the traditional art education of the time. As a boy, he was trained at the Kanō school of traditional Japanese painting, but very soon he moved on to study with the master Sō Shiseki (1715–1786) of the Nampin school, specializing in the Chinese *flowers and birds* genre. Calvin French notes that, during his studies, Kōkan also gained knowledge of Chinese classics and poetry [French 1974, p. 19]. Moreover, Kōkan paid attention to the engravings of Suzuki Harunobu (1724–1770), which made a great impression on him. It is believed that, shortly before the master's death, he became his unofficial pupil [Nikolaeva 1996, p. 157]. It is surprising that, having

[2] *The Dictionary of Japanese Artists* lists numerous pseudonyms for Shiba Kōkan: Fugen Dōjin 不言道人, Harushige 春信, Kokan 江漢, Rantei 蘭亭, Shumparō 春波楼. Please refer to [Roberts 1980, p. 88].

already gained fame as a master of the Chinese painting style, he began to cut and print engravings in the style of Harunobu and even to sign them with the master's name, as was customary among students belonging to the workshop of a prominent artist. However, he soon took his own name, Harushige, with which he began to sign his prints, although he continued to work in a style very close to that of Harunobu [French 1974, p. 29–33]. Through his acquaintance with Hiraga Gennai (1728–1780), a pharmacist, inventor, painter, ceramist, writer, and one of the most notable men of his time, Shiba Kōkan began to study Western painting and learned about copper engraving. It is probably not an exaggeration to say that it was Hiraga Gennai who imparted to the young man the first notions of the Western sciences, *rangaku*. During his lessons with Hiraga Gennai, Kōkan met Odano Naokata (1749–1780), a young painter from Akita Domain, who, as researchers believe, had a greater influence on Kōkan in the field of painting than Gennai [French 1974, p. 80].

Like many talented people of his time, Siba Kōkan showed great talent in a variety of fields and left a great legacy, both artistic and literary. He wrote a treatise entitled *Discourses on Western Painting*; wrote and illustrated the *Explanations of the Copernican Theory* [3]; illustrated books on the natural sciences; created the world map *Chikyū Zenzu* (1792)[4], the first copperplate map of the world in Japan, and the first to be printed in two hemispheres rather than an oval projection: prior to this, world maps had been modeled on Matteo Ricci's map[5]. (It is generally accepted that copperplate printing is more accurate than wooden printing.)

---

3 Kopperu temmon zukai 刻白爾（コッペル）天文図解.

4 地球全図 Chukyū zenzu (Map of the whole world). Japanese & Chinese Classics // Kotenseki Soga Database of Waseda University Library's Collections. *Waseda University*: https://www.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kotenseki/html/ru11/ru11_00809/index.html

5 World map by Matteo Ricci – 坤輿萬國全圖 Kūnyú Wànguó Quántú (Map of numerous countries), 1602. The world map was made by the Catholic missionary Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) at the request of the Chinese Emperor Wanli (1563–1620).

The bibliography of Japanese, Western, and Russian studies devoted to the works by Shiba Kōkan is extensive, covering various aspects of his activities, but still predominantly artistic. Among many Japanese researchers, perhaps, one of the most devoted to his hero is Naruse Fujio, author of *Shiba Kōkan* [Naruse 1977] and *Shiba Kōkan shōgai to gagyō – sakuhinten* (*The Life and Artistic Works of Shiba Kōkan – an exhibition of works*) [Naruse 1995]. However, the scroll discussed here is not found or mentioned in the studies of this specialist. In Western historiography, the above-mentioned monograph by Kelvin French *Shiba Kōkan. Artist, Innovator and Pioneer of the Westernization of Japan* [French 1974] can be considered the most comprehensive study so far, while among the relatively recent ones we should mention the remarkable study by T. Screech *With Lenses in His Heart* [Screech 2002], a significant part of which is devoted to Shiba. In Russian Japanese studies, the greatest attention to the personality and work of Shiba Kōkan was devoted by N. S. Nikolaeva in her book *Japan-Europe. Dialogue in Art* [Nikolaeva 1996]. None of these studies mentions the scroll we consider in this article. Information about the artist is full of contradictions and uncertainties. Researchers agree that Shiba Kōkan was an indefatigable experimenter, a man of versatile talents, a scientist, artist, and naturalist.

The scroll *The Meeting of the Three Sages of Japan, China and the West* (silk, 102.2 x 49.3 cm, ink and color painting) [6] has long been of little interest to researchers of the artist's work. The article is devoted to the provenance, history, and exhibition of the scroll by Shiba Kōkan, and analyzes the history and symbolism of the three images on it: a wave, a triad of sages, and a fire. These three images are important components of the Japanese cultural and artistic code formed since ancient times. They have been influenced from the outside and changed over time but retain their significance in contemporary culture. Studies of images from past epochs and other cultural traditions present

[6] There is also another title of the painting *The Meeting of Japan, China and the West*.

a special difficulty due to the fact that they were understandable, easily readable by compatriots and contemporaries, while for us, after hundreds of years, they, coming from another time and another cultural space, often look incomprehensible and sometimes mysterious. Accordingly, all our conclusions are tentative; we offer them as hypotheses with a greater or lesser degree of probability[7].

Perhaps the poor study of the scroll can be explained by the fact that it was unknown until it appeared at Christie's auction in 2001. The auction abstract briefly describes the two parts of the painting, mentioning the three representatives of Japan, China, and Europe (possibly Holland) gathered around the table. More details are given about the upper part of the scroll, on which representatives of the three civilizations are fighting the flames of a burning pagoda-like building.

Fig. 1. Shiba Kōkan. *The Meeting of the Three Sages of Japan, China, and the West*. Source: *Minneapolis Institute of Art*: www.artsmia.org [9]

[7] In our study we do not consider the peculiarities of the master's artistic style.

[8] I thank D. Hotimsky for the scan of the scroll, without which this study could not have taken place.

Literally a few words are devoted to the objects lying on the table in front of the participants of the meeting. The conclusion draws attention to the fact that *The Meeting of the Three Venerable Ones* is a variant of the popular image of the unity of the three faiths represented by Buddha, Laozi and Confucius, or the image of the triple union of Buddha, Laozi and Jesus common among representatives of the Japanese school of *rangaku* of the 18th century" [Christie's auction 2001].

At the auction, the scroll was acquired for the Ruth and Sherman Lee Collection, and in 2002–2003 was presented at an exhibition of the collection in several museums in Japan, for which a catalog, *Delightful Pursuits: Gems of the Lee Collection at the Clark Center Institute of Japanese Art*, was produced [Ishida & Yamamoto 2002, p. 196–197]. Perhaps, it contains the most detailed description of the scroll. It is noteworthy that, at the end of the article, the authorship of the painting is doubted: "Although the manner in which the rocks are depicted demonstrates the traditional style of painting, the effects of light and shadow show a mastery of realism that could only be mastered by an artist intimately familiar with Western painting. The scroll has a sign: "Shumparōjō 春波楼上 [Shumparō's workshop] Kōkan Shiba Shun kore-wo utsusu" 江漢司馬峻寫之 [redrawn by Shiba Kōkan]", and seals: one in the shape of a calabash with the letters "*shi*" 司 [engraved] + "*ba*" 馬 [inscribed], while the other in the shape of a square with the text "Shun in 峻 [illegible (印)]"[9]. These signatures and seals are apparently intended to attest to the authorship of Shiba Kōkan, "the father of the Western style (*yōga*) of painting in Japan," but there is not a single work by the artist with such signatures and seals among the confirmed works. So is the stylistics of the painting, which is somewhat different from other works painted by Siba Kōkan himself. Many aspects of this scroll, including the individual traits of the characters depicted and the relationship between the upper and lower parts of the painting, as well as some unusual stylistic devices, fill it with fascinating mystery, delight and testify to the uniqueness of the work" [Ibid.].

9 春波楼上江漢司馬峻　之春波楼上江漢峻写之

If we bring to notice the text of the caption ("this [scroll] was copied by Kōkan Shiba Shun in the workshop of Shumparō"), it would be possible to view the scroll as an illustration of Shiba Kōkan's essay *Shumparō Hikki* [10]. The name of the author of the notes, Shumparō, is one of Shiba Kōkan's artistic pseudonyms. The artist wrote this diary at the end of his life. In this work, he not only reflected on life and creativity, but also criticized the orders and customs established in the country. In this article, we will try to present several versions of possible interpretation of the symbolism of the scroll.

In 2004, the scroll could be seen at the exhibition *Contacts: The Encounter between Asia and Europe 1500–1800* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Again, its description, albeit very concise, appears in the exhibition catalog of the same name: "...the scroll depicts three men of science from Japan, China, and Europe discussing scientific problems, [while] behind them three groups of also Japanese, Chinese, and Europeans are trying in various ways to put out a fire. The artist, probably Shiba Kōkan, the father of Western painting in Japan, combines Japanese and European styles of painting to create a unique depiction of the meeting of cultures and technologies." [Jackson & Jaffer 2004, p. 5]. The scroll is dated to the end of the 18th century, attributed to the brush of Shiba Kōkan both in the attribution under the illustration and in the description of the painting.[11]

In the following years, the painting was often published in print media and on websites, but usually only the lower part of it, which depicts a meeting between representatives of Japan, China, and the West. Neither monographs nor articles devoted to the scroll could be found at the moment, with the exception of an article by G. Tarantino in an Italian historical journal in 2016 [Tarantino 2016]. Probably, until 2013, when

---

[10] I would like to thank Prof. Mashimo Atsushi for his proposed version of the interpretation of the images on the scroll, which we will discuss below. Although we cannot accept everything in his version, it certainly opens up new dimensions and possibilities in the interpretation of the scroll.

[11] I thank A. I. Yusupova for the opportunity to use the exhibition catalogs.

the private collection of Japanese art by Ruth and Sherman Lee, which included the scroll, was transferred to the Minneapolis Museum of Fine Arts, it was difficult for researchers to access it.

In his article *Disasters, Emotions, and Cultures: the unexpected sign of Siba Kōkan (1738–1818)* G. Tarantino tells the story of the scroll's appearance for the first time at Christie's auction in 2001, its sale, and its fate [Tarantino 2016]. Unfortunately, however, his work is rife with inaccuracies. The author does not mention the 2002 exhibition catalog, emphasizing that the scroll was first reproduced in 2004 in the book *Contacts: The Encounter between Asia and Europe 1500–1800* (edited by A. Jackson and A. Jaffer). There are also some inaccuracies in the description of the scroll. For example, when interpreting the figures seated at the table, Tarantino points out that the hand of the Japanese man, clearly a samurai, is resting on the hilt of a katana, a traditional curved Japanese sword with a single-sided sharpening and a long hilt for two-handed grip. He goes on to emphasize that only samurai, the military nobility of the Middle Ages and early modern times, were allowed to carry swords, although there was little need for them in the calm, peaceful Tokugawa era [Ibid., p. 659]. However, even on the reproduction of the scroll with which we had to work, it is quite clearly seen that the samurai's left hand rests on the fan's tip, not on the hilt of the sword. The folding *suehiro* fan,[12], literally "expanding towards the end," is traditionally a metaphor for development, blossoming. The fan, like the ceremonial *kataginu* with family emblems and the white snake on the arm, was probably intended to indicate that the young samurai depicted belonged to a noble military clan.

G. Tarantino also offers a version of the dating of the scroll, believing that the scroll could have been written after the second edition of the

[12] *Suehiro* 末広 is a small folding fan, a symbol of samurai power and status. The literal translation of the hieroglyphs means "end – wide", possible interpretation is "gradual expansion, development" (*Japanese Russian Dictionary*. Suehiro: https://japanese-words.org/dictionary/view/49788).

Anatomical Atlas *Kaitai Shinsho* (*New Book of Anatomy*)[13] in 1798, when the image of a human skeleton was first printed [Ibid., p. 661–662]. However, this assumption is doubtful, because the image of the skeleton is already present in an earlier copy of the Atlas of 1774, kept in the Science Museum in Tokyo.[14] In the Japanese edition of the Atlas, the illustrations were copied by Odano Naotake and taken not only from the work of Johannes Kulmus (1689–1745), but also from the editions of the Spanish anatomist Juan Valverde de Amusco (1516–?), Dutch physician Godfried Bidloo (1649–1713), while the primary source of all these works was the work of the famous Flemish surgeon, the founder of scientific anatomy A. Vesalius (1515–1564). The scroll shows an anatomical atlas open on a table in front of the European.

We have not yet managed to find in the world historiography neither the history of creation, nor storage, nor any detailed description of the scroll. In addition to all the above enigmas, there is the multivalent symbolism of the image on the scroll.

Let us turn to the image. It consists of two almost equal parts: the upper part is a scene of a fire, while the lower part is a meeting at a table of representatives of three cultures: Japanese, Chinese, and European. Each part can be reproduced quite independently, which is probably why only one part, mainly the lower one, is often published as an illustration of the "meeting" – the mutual influence of East and West. The artist placed the parts together, perhaps viewing the upper image as an allegory or metaphor for the lower one – three groups of people, representing the same peoples as those at the table, are involved in putting out the fire.

Let us try to consider and analyze the main elements of the images on the scroll.

---

13 解體新書

14 Kaitai Shinsho // Wikipedia. The free encyclopedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaitai_Shinsho#/media/File:First_Japanese_treatise_on_Western_anatomy.jpg

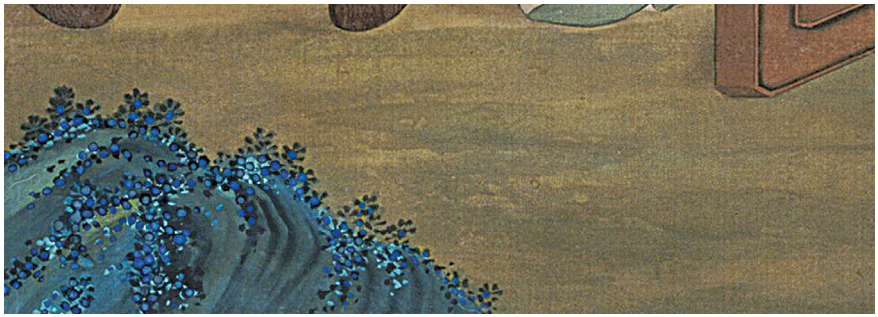

Fig. 2. *The wave*. Fragment of Shiba Kōkan's scroll *The Meeting of the Three Sages of Japan, China, and the West*.

In the left corner of the lower part of the scroll, a blue-colored wave draws attention, and the wave has a rich semantics in Japanese culture. Painted clearly and colorfully, the wave looks a bit strange here, given that it rolls up on the surface on which the table where the heroes of the image are seated, giving the impression that the table is standing directly on the seashore, at the water's edge.

The wave is somewhat stylized, but still it seems that it is depicted traditionally and is similar to the ornament *ryūsuimon*, (*running water, waves*),[15] widespread in medieval Japanese art, which originated in ancient times. It is found on ceramic vessels of the Jōmon period, and then on bronze *dōtaku* bells [Iofan 1974, p. 22]. The ornament is used widely on fabrics, ceramics, etc. One of the versions of its origin claims that it is related to the most important elements of world ornamentation, such as zigzag (wave), meander. The wide spread of the ornament in the

[15] Ceramics 流水紋土器 *ryūsuimon doki*. For example, the depiction of a wave in Hokusai and on *ryūsuimon* pottery reveals similarities (Hokusai-no "ha" to Jōmon doki wa guruguru Uzumaki kyōtsūten [Hokusai's "Wave" and Jōmon ceramics have in common the depiction of a whirlpool]. *Japan Waraku Magazine*: https://intojapanwaraku.com/art/1546/).

island country is quite understandable, as it was in maritime ancient Greece, where it is often found.[16]

As the study shows, there is nothing random in the painting. Perhaps, water in the lower part of the painting and fire in the upper part symbolize two of the five elements (*wu-xing*), the main categories of Chinese philosophy, according to which water defeats fire, in contrast to Buddhist ideas about all-consuming, purifying fire. It can also be assumed that the depicted wave emphasizes the remote, island position of Japan, on whose land the three heroes of the painting are gathered.

The image of the sea and waves, from ancient times to the present day, is often found both in the Japanese written tradition and in fine art, which is quite natural for an island culture. The sea was perceived ambiguously by the islanders, and the duality of its perception in the cultural code, we believe, is reflected in the scroll.

The sea symbolized Japan's distance from the mainland with its high culture. However, the islanders learned how to overcome the barrier, which earned them respect at the court of the Chinese emperor. In the chronicle of the Chinese Tang Dynasty, in the references to the arrival of Japanese embassies in 702 to the court, the Chinese emperor's command is given: "It is necessary to gather a feast in honor of Japanese envoys, because their [the ambassadors'] state is located far away, but they still arrived, having overcome the stormy, cold sea, to present gifts to the court"[17] [Quan Tang wen].

The inhabitants of the islands realized the sea not only as a physically surmountable barrier, but also as a kind of information transmitter. Various ideas, beliefs, and knowledge came to the distant archipelago despite the sea or with its help.

---

[16] It is believed that the ornament "meander" is one of the most ancient symbols of the elements, the name is associated with the hydronym of the winding river Meander in Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Refer to: D&P Holding: http://www.dpholding.ru/dosie/?action=photo&id=384.

[17] I thank M. V. Grachev for his help in finding information on the reception of Japanese embassies in China.

It should be noted that, in the works of Shiba Kōkan, the image of a wave rolling up, splashing on the shore, is quite common. In the world art criticism, there is a widespread view that the artist's picture *View of the Coast of Shichirigahama in Kamakura, Sagami Province* (1796), originally written as a votive, cult image and hung in Atago Shrine in the city of Edo, could be seen by Hokusai, and it influenced his famous print *The Great Wave of Kanagawa*. Kōkan made a total of 12 such images and presented them to Shintō shrines. T. Clark emphasizes that the eccentric artist made this gesture for the sake of attracting people's attention to the European painting style [Clark 2017, p. 15]. It seems that not only his aspirations to popularize the Western style of painting are important here, but also the fact that, in the painting, he depicted the landscape of one of the sacred places of the archipelago – the seashore with a view of Mount Fuji and the sacred island of Enoshima. It is also significant that the artist chose Shintō shrines to exhibit his paintings. This interpretation may seem far-fetched, but I dare to suggest that the wave depicted on our scroll is a kind of allusion to Shiba's votive depiction placed in Atago shrine,[18] which is dedicated to protecting the people of Edo from fires.

It seems that the scroll also contains Buddhist connotations, not always obvious, but allowing us to assume such a concept: nowadays, the sea brings to Japan unprecedented knowledge and inventions of the West, but there is a significant precedent for it: in ancient times, the sea became a transmitter for Buddhist teachings brought from India through China. This is told, for example, in the legend from *Konjaku*

[18] Large votive paintings in frames, called *daiema* 大絵馬, begin to be placed in shrines in the Muromachi era (1336-1573) (Wikiwand.Ema: https://www.wikiwand.com/ja/%E7%B5%B5%E9%A6%AC). Atago-jinja was founded in 1603 by Tokugawa Ieyasu on Atago Hill in the present-day Minato district of Tokyo and is believed to have been built to protect the city's residents from fires. The main deity worshipped at the shrine is Homusubi-no-kami, the deity of fire.

Monogatari [Konjaku Monogatari shū 1974, p. 27–29],[19] replete with toponyms: one tengu,[20] being in India, heard in the sounds of distant waves the recitation of a Buddhist sutra and decided to find out where such waves are, to prevent the pronunciation of the sutra. All along the way, as he flew from India, over China and the Sea of Japan, over Hakata harbor in Tsukushi, over Moji outpost, over provinces and rivers, he kept hearing the increasing sounds of the Buddhist sutra as he approached, until he reached Lake Biwa in Ōmi Province and, at the foot of Mount Hiei, he found the Four Heavenly Kings (*Shiten'ō*),[21] the guardians of the Buddha's law, sitting on the bank of a stream with their attendants. The water of the stream was the source of the sounds he heard from afar. The kings said that the spring sings a sacred text, so it is protected as a sacred place for the learned monks of Mount Hiei. Tengu is then reborn in the form of a man and becomes abbot of the Jōdoji Monastery.[22] This story may have served Shiba as material for comparing two powerful streams of cultural borrowing.

---

19 This interpretation of the wave symbolism would not have appeared in the article without the prompting and help of V. S. Sanovich, a connoisseur of Japanese literature. In the archive of the departed Japanese scholar was found a rough translation of the above legend from *Konjaku monogatari* (1077).

20 Tengu 天狗 (from Chinese *tiangou*) – "heavenly dog", in Japanese mythology, folklore, folk beliefs – a teratological creature; depicted as a man of enormous height with a red face, long nose or beak and wings (in a fairy tale, he flies with the help of a miraculous fan), in the clothes of a mountain wizard (*yamabushi*); endowed with great power, hostile to fertility [Mify narodov mira 1982, p. 536].

21 *Shiten'o:* 四天王 – *Four Heavenly Kings* guarding the sides of the world. According to Buddhist cosmology, they reside on the slopes of Mount Sumeru. In the interpretation of the legend, one can see the inherent tradition of the Japanese religious complex to "transfer" the localization of Buddhist heroes and plots to the territory of the Japanese islands.

22 Jōdoji is one of the Buddhist temples on the grounds of Enryakuji Monastery on Mount Hiei in Kyoto, founded in the late 8th and early 9th century by the monk Saichō (767–822).

While studying Western sciences, Shiba Kōkan, like other rangaku figures, was sometimes critical of Buddhism and Confucianism. He criticized Confucians and Buddhists for their lack of scientific knowledge: "...if one does not know the natural sciences, how can he pretend to know something else..." [French 1974, p. 148], but it is known that he spent the last years of his life in the Zen monastery Engakuji in Kamakura. Only the *kami* deities Kōkan treated more favorably, as he wrote: "Our [country] is the Land of the Gods, and there can be no other faith than Shinto in it" [Ibid.].

In the main, central part of the scroll, a meeting at the table of three scientists-sages of Japan, China, and the West, is depicted. The analogy in the depiction of the representatives of the three cultures with the illustration of the famous Chinese parable *Three Wise Men Tasting Vinegar* is pointed out in the Christie's auction abstract [Christie's auction 2001].

Let us remind the summary of the parable. Three great sages, Kongzi, or Confucius (left), Buddha (center), and Laozi (right), stand around a barrel of vinegar and taste it.[23] Kongzi has a sour expression on his face, Buddha has bitterness on his forehead, and only Laozi is smiling. Vinegar in this case is interpreted as a symbol of life/vitality. To Confucius, vinegar tasted sour because in the present time, man on earth has stopped following the Way of Heaven, which the whole universe follows. To Buddha, the taste was bitter since life on earth is filled with attachments and desires that lead to suffering. Laozi alone was quite satisfied with the taste because he recommended not to turn away from reality, from the "perishable world," and advised to merge with it. From the Taoist point of view, bitterness and disappointment come from an ungrateful mind.

In the scroll we are considering and in its possible Chinese prototype, the accents are arranged differently. In traditional

[23] One of the meanings of the hieroglyph 酢 is "thanksgiving (to the gods)" [Big Chinese-Russian Dictionary 1983, p. 745]. Rituals of thanksgiving to the gods were performed with offerings and libations of wine. Probably, vinegar as a derivative of wine retained its sacredness and symbolism.

Fig. 3. *Three Sages*. Fragment of Shiba Kōkan's scroll *The Meeting of the Three Sages of Japan, China, and the West*.

illustrations of the parable, the Buddha is the central figure, often depicted larger than the other two sages. On our scroll, however, the Japanese man is a little larger. Traditionally, in the vinegar barrel image, all three figures are positioned without being in any pronounced proximity to each other or separate from each other. In our scroll, the Japanese and the European are seated close to each other, while the Chinese is somewhat apart.

The subject of the parable *Three Wise Men Tasting Vinegar* has probably been popular in Japan for centuries and has become an element of the Japanese cultural code. The great Sesshū (1420–1506) in his triptych *The Three Creeds and the Lotus Pond* (*Sankyō hasu ike*)[24] also depicted this subject, slightly altering the composition of the Chinese

[24] 拙宗等揚筆　三教・蓮池図 Juemon-blog-achives. Sesshū : https://juemon.com/blog/archives/4927

version. He placed Buddha and Laozi sitting side by side, and Confucius not only opposite them, but at a distance from both, with his back to the viewer and looking away. In addition, the artist reinforced the Buddhist component with two additional parts depicting lotuses, the sacred flower of Buddhism, symbolizing wisdom, spiritual purity, enlightenment, and nirvana. It seems that, in this triptych, the Buddhist monk Sesshū expressed his adoration of Buddhism, a teaching, from his point of view, not comparable to other spiritual concepts. It seems that the author of the scroll might have considered the Sesshū triptych as a prototype rather than Chinese illustrations.

The Japanese islanders' perceptions of the triad were broadened by the introduction of mainland religious teachings, which made it possible to interpret the triad as part of a multicomponent polyreligious complex. Perhaps one of the most common interpretations was the projection of the Buddhist triad onto the trinity of "native deities," and one of the first religious-philosophical justifications devoted to "the correlation of the three borrowed religious-philosophical teachings (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism)" was monk Kūkai's work *Three Teachings Show and Direct* (797) [Kukai 2005]. It is curious that another stage of reinterpretation of the triad probably occurred during the period of borrowing the achievements of Western culture starting from the 16th century, and not under the influence of Christianity, which was not accepted everywhere and not completely, but mainly of European scientific thought. It seems that our scroll is an example of this rethinking, especially as the image continues to change over time under the influence of new scientific, ideological, and other preferences.

It seems that, even though we do not know whether this is the first time that a meeting of representatives of the three cultures was depicted on the scroll, the idea of such a composition seems to have been present in Japanese culture at least in the eighteenth century. Later, in the mid-nineteenth century, the same composition of participants, but in a modified form and with a narrower aspect, namely medicine, is found on the scroll *Portraits of the Four Founders of Medicine of Japan, China,*

and Europe.[25] While in Shiba Kōkan's scroll the medical aspect was also represented by an anatomical atlas open on the table in front of the European, a bouquet of medicinal plants next to the Chinese, and a white snake, a Taoist symbol of immortality, on the hand of the Japanese. Such attention to medicine seems quite logical, since it was medicine that was one of the main turning points from which the comprehension of Western culture in Japan began.

Let us return to our scroll. The central figure of the company gathered around the table is the Japanese, and not only because he is located in the center and painted somewhat larger than the other two characters, but he is also distinguished by the meticulousness of his depiction. Art historians have noted that the face of the Japanese is drawn in an extremely realistic manner and is probably a portrait of a person well known to the artist, while the images of the Chinese and the European are more likely to be collective images of scholars in China and the West, without specific prototypes [Ishida & Yamamoto 2002, p. 196].

The scroll depicts a young man of noble descent, as evidenced by the ceremonial dark blue *kataginu* [26] with white family emblems,

---

[25] 医道四祖画象. The scroll depicts Oonamuchi-no-mikoto and Sukunabikona-no-mikoto in the top row, two deities of the earth's organizer, who, according to *Nihon Shoki*, "joined forces, merged hearts, and established ways to cure diseases." In the bottom row are Hippocrates (ca. 460–370 B.C.), an ancient Greek physician and philosopher, the "father of medicine," and Shen-nung (Yandi, Yaowan), one of the most important cultural heroes of Chinese mythology, patron of agriculture and medicine. The scroll is dated 1850. Researchers associate it with the Nakatsu domain in Buzen province (present-day Oita prefecture), known for the study and practical mastering of Western medicine methods during the Tokugawa period [Oita rangaku jishi 2005, p. 54]. The image of the *Four Founders of Medicine* was shared with the author by A. M. Dulina.

[26] *Kataginu* 肩衣 is a sleeveless shirt with exaggerated shoulders, an element of Edo-era samurai clothing.

a black kimono, probably denoting the importance of the moment of the meeting, a fan, and a white snake wrapped around his right hand, which rests on the tip of a folding *suehiro* fan. The white snake on the right wrist is probably a reference to ancient Taoist beliefs. According to them, the white snake is a symbol of immortality and wisdom. The white snake was also a symbol of the goddess Benzaiten, one of the Shichifukujin,[27] or *Seven Gods of Happiness*. The Japanese man's left hand rests calmly on the table.

The family emblem (Jp. *mon*), even if it is not associated with the Japanese depicted, must be thought to belong to a vassal of one of the most enlightened clans of the time. It is noteworthy that the possessions of the family were located in the northeast of Japan archipelago, not in the southwest, where the most enlightened, "pro-Western" part of Japanese intellectuals concentrated around Nagasaki. The most probable initial image of the emblem could correspond to two clans: Ishioka-han and Ishikura-han.

The Ishikura domain was in Kōzuke province (present-day Gumma Prefecture), but information about the clan that possessed this domain is uncertain.[28] Ishioka clan owned the lands of Fuchū in Hitachi province (present-day Ibaraki Prefecture), included in the larger domain of Mito, which belonged to one of the three branches of Tokugawa [Kinsei hansei hankō daijiten 2006, pp. 329–330]. The second daimyō of Mito, Tokugawa Mitsukuni, created in 1657 the Shōkōkan, a historiographical society that laid the foundation

---

[27] Benzaiten 弁財天 is a goddess of wealth, arts, and love, one of the seven gods of happiness and good fortune (Shichifukujin). Derived from the Indian goddess Sarasvati, according to the Rigveda, who defeated the three-headed Vritra (Ahi), she is often depicted surrounded by snakes. The second character in the Japanese spelling of the goddess's name 財 "wealth/money" clearly indicates that she is the giver of financial good fortune.

[28] I thank A. A. Rechkalova, a rare specialist in Japanese heraldry, for her help in identifying the emblem on the kataginu, and A. M. Gorbylev for information on the Ishioka 石岡藩 and Ishikura 石倉藩 clans.

of the Mitogaku trend.[29] The domain was famous for its highly educated samurai. Perhaps because the Japanese in the portrait was a representation of a real person, some carefully drawn details were deliberately distorted by the author of the scroll, which is related to the Edo-period prohibition for artists, writers, and playwrights to depict representatives of noble clans among their characters.

Still, the hints made by the artist allow several assumptions to be made. The artist could have depicted an emblem of an insignificant family, unrelated to the person depicted. Let us assume that the prototype could be Odano Naotake (1750–1780), with whom Shiba Kōkan, despite the differences in social class, was friends. In addition, we see some similarities with the portrait of Odano.[30] Odano was a vassal of daimyo Satake Yoshiatsu (1748–1785) of the Akita domain, while Kōkan was a simple citizen. Both artists underwent similar stages of training, beginning at the Kanō school, then mastering *ukiyo-e*, working in the style of Suzuki Harunobu, trained in Chinese painting with Sō Shiseki, and introduced to Western painting through Hiraga Gennai. Odano Naotake died young but managed to inscribe his name in the history of Japanese art by establishing, with his lord, the Akita-ha school of Western-style painting.

In 1773, Satake Yoshiatsu sent Odano to Edo to study metallurgy, but the young man spent most of his time studying Western painting. In 1774, Odano was asked to illustrate a book by Ōtsuki Gentaku (1757–1827) on *rangaku*, or *Western sciences*." It must be emphasized that

---

[29] Mitogaku, or the Mito school, originated in the domain of Mito (present-day Ibaraki Prefecture) in 1657, when the second head of the house, Tokugawa Ieyasu's grandson, Tokugawa Mitsukuni (1628–1700), established the Shōkōkan Library, and a community of scholars emerged to research the country's history and Shintō beliefs. Mitsukuni commissioned them to compile the *Dai Nihonshi* (*History of Great Japan*).

[30] I express my gratitude to T. I. Redko-Dobrovolskaya, who shared her bold guess, which seems quite reasonable, that the prototype of the Japanese man on the scroll could be Odano Naotake.

the daimyo of Akita patronized his vassal because he did paint too and was interested in Western painting. When Odano began to study and master Western painting, Shiba Kōkan was still practicing *ukiyo-e* prints. Based on surviving documents, Calvin French notes that it was Odano who introduced Shiba Kōkan to the basics of Western painting [French 1974, p. 79–84]. The emblem, possibly belonging to the Ishioka/Ishikura family, points to the possessions in the northeast of Honshu Island, where the domain of Akita was located.

Let us also consider the version that the scroll is an ironic, perhaps even satirical illustration of the *Notes of Shumparō*, in which case in the depicted Japanese one can see a portrait of Matsudaira Sadanobu (1759–1829), which, albeit indirectly, is indicated by the family emblem on the *kataginu*. The emblem, as already stated, very likely belonged to the Ishioka clan, of the Fuchū Domain, Hitachi Province. The history of the domain shows that, in 1700, it was given to the 5th son of the founder of the Tokugawa *bakufu*, Matsudaira Yoritaka (1630–1707), and was ruled by the Matsudaira clan (Mito branch) until the *bakuhan* system was abolished in 1871. In this reading, the white snake on the Japanese man's hand can be interpreted as an allusion to Matsudaira Sadanobu's financial reforms, which formed an important part of the so-called Kansei reforms (1789–1793).[31]

Let us also reveal the assumption expressed by the authors of the catalog of the Ruth and Sherman Lee collection that the portraits of the Chinese and the European are collective portraits. In the portrait of the Japanese, the artist limited himself to the image of the hero, while he felt it necessary to supplement the portraits of the Chinese and the European with objects indicating their occupation and social status. Let us turn to the objects laid out on the table.

In front of the Chinese man, there is a vase with plants on the left and a *ruyi* scepter, a symbol of scholarship and high social status,[32] and

[31] Interpretation by Prof. Mashimo Atsushi.

[32] The scepter *ruyi* 如意 (literal translation "as you wish") is one of the most benevolent symbols. In fine art, if a brush symbolizing a scholar or official

a scroll, apparently Confucian, on the right. The bouquet consists of two medicinal plants, aconite and a species of buttercup,[33] which confirms the hero's scholarly pursuits, most likely medicine. The Confucian character of the image is reinforced by the pose of the portraitist – hands hidden in the sleeves. A significant part of Chu Lung-hsing's article is devoted to a detailed analysis of the pose, when the arms are folded on the chest, hands closed with sleeves, symbolizing Confucian modesty and humility. Examining the self-portrait of Shiba Kōkan (created in 1810), on which the artist depicted himself in a similar pose, the Taiwanese art historian compares it to the portraits of Shen Zhou (1427–1509) and Toyo Oda

---

and a silver money boot are added to the image of the scepter, it means a wish for professional and social success and growth [Eberhard 1986, p. 318]. It seems that the scroll drawn next to the scepter indicates that the portrait shows a scientist, and the headdress and a fragment of a red shoe show that the person depicted can be a high-ranking official, most likely a scientist in public service. I am grateful for hints in determining the scepter to K. M. Tertitsky.

33 *Buttercup quelpaertensis* (also *Ranunculus quelpaertensis* (H. Lev.), *Nakai, kitsune no botan* (キツネノボタン, "fox peony") is a medicinal, highly toxic, analgesic plant. *Corydalis yanhusuo* is a subdivision of the buttercups, of poppy order, which used against inflammatory and neuropathic pain. Aconitum (ウズ, 烏頭, 於宇, 布須伊毛, 伊布須) is a highly toxic plant, an analgesic. The scientific name of the genus Aconitum comes from the name of the city of Akone (Aconae) in Greece, where, according to myth, Heracles, performing his twelfth feat, brought out of the underworld Cerberus, the watchdog of Hades, a monster with three heads: barking, the dog scattered a whitish foam on the meadows, from which grew flowers that received malignant power. Ancient scientists called aconite "the Mother Queen of Poisons". It must be handled with extreme caution, as the poison, even in simple contact with the plant, penetrates the body. In Tibet, aconite is considered the "king of medicine" because it helps with severe diseases where other remedies are powerless. For help in identifying plants, I thank Georges Metallier, a specialist in the historical flora of China.

(1420–1506) [Chu 2008, p. 4–5]. The high ethical qualities of the Chinese man are emphasized by the leopard skin on the stool on which he sits. The leopard in China is a symbol of courage and valor, it was also attributed the ability to expel evil.[34] The Chinese participant's clothes, headdress, and a fragment of a shoe show that he is a capital official. We would like to draw attention to the fact that shoes, even if only a small fragment, are shown only on the portrait of the Chinese.

As the marker of the European, the artist chose an anatomical atlas, unfolded on a page depicting a human skeleton. Citing the opinion of Timon Screech, a well-known expert on the history of Japanese art, the authors of the catalog of the Ruth and Sherman Lee collection believe that the scroll depicts Lorenz Geister (1683–1758), a German botanist, anatomist, physician, surgeon, and founder of German surgery [Ishida & Yamamoto 2002, p. 196]. His main work, *Surgery*, was translated into Japanese and became famous in Japan.[35] Several explanations can be offered for the discrepancy between the portrait of the European physician and the author of the opened book: either, at the time of writing the scroll, the artist was not yet aware of the existence of a translation of Geister's work, but the surgeon's name was known to him; or he wanted to emphasize in this way that there were many learned men in the West who knew, practiced, and taught surgery; or, unlikely as it may seem, he simply did not have a portrait of Adam Culmus. In our opinion, G. Tarantino's remark about the ironic accent that marks the image of the skeleton on the scroll deserves attention. In the original atlas, from which the Japanese edition of the book is supposed to be redrawn, both arms of the skeleton are stretched along the torso, while, on the scroll, the left

[34] The leopard skin was a mystery for a long time, which M. V. Grachev helped to unravel.

[35] The translation was made from the Dutch edition of *Heelkundige Onderwijzingen enz.* (Amsterdam, 1755). Individual sections were first translated under different titles in 1792 and were distributed only to physicians; the complete translation was published in 1825.

arm of the skeleton is bent at the elbow and directed to the side, while the right arm is stretched along the body. G. Tarantino notes that such a pose is often found in Dutch male portraits [Tarantino 2016, p. 663], such as in the portraits by Frans Hals (1650s).

The European is depicted wrapped in a brown cape, his white shirt with a soft tie, a pink vest, a white cuff, and a wig on his head are also visible. The thoroughness of the depiction of the wig, shirt and vest does not suggest that the artist did not know the other components of the European costume; more likely, he did not find it necessary to depict them, which is why he "wrapped" the European in a cape.

The chair on which the European sits is a marvelous creation, a kind of combination of a European chair and a Chinese stool, where the backrest, upholstery, and three bizarrely curved legs do not correspond to each other. The only explanation for the appearance of such a "furniture monster" in the image can be the assumption that the artist has not seen the European chair and imagined the design as he could.[36] However, this assumption has a basis only if the picture was painted before the artist's trip to Nagasaki and his visits to the homes of Europeans, since there are still drawings by Shiba Kōkan in his work *Journey to the West* (1794)[37] depicting chairs. There also remains the possibility that the scroll was not authored by Shiba, but by an unknown artist; or that the appearance of such a "chair" is an irony of the artist, as is the joke with the skeleton.

In the upper part of the scroll, the artist depicted a burning building and people trying to put it out. The tongues of flame devouring the structure, which resembles a pagoda or temple gate,[38]

---

[36] I am grateful to E.V. Volchkova for her help with the definition of a "European" stool.

[37] Sayu ryodan 西遊旅譚.

[38] According to the concept proposed by Prof. Mashimo Atsushi, this is not a cult building, but a secular one, rather the residence of a high-ranking official, possibly Matsudaira Sadanobu. In our opinion, there are no sufficient grounds for such an assumption at the moment.

Fig. 4. *The fire*. Fragment of Shiba Kōkan's scroll
The Meeting of the Three Sages of Japan, China, and the West.

are drawn similar to the images of fires on scrolls of the 13th and 14th centuries.[39]

However, I see allegory not only in the depiction of the strength or, conversely, the failure of Buddhism, but also in the depiction of the three teams involved in extinguishing the fire, representatives of the same cultures as of those sitting around the table.

---

[39] *Jigoku Sōji Emaki* (*Illustrated Scroll of Notes from Hell*), 12 c., *Kitano Tenjin Engi Emaki* (*Illustrated Scroll of the Life of Kitano Tenjin*), 13 c., *Hōgen monogatari Emaki* (*Illustrated Scroll of the Tale of Disturbance of the Hōgen Years*), 14 c., *Shūro Jigoku Ezu* (*Picture of Underground Dungeons From the Bell Tower*), 17 c. I am grateful to N. N. Trubnikova for the proposed list of illustrated scrolls of medieval fires.

In the center, a group of five Europeans extinguish a fire with a fire hose connected to a pump. To the right, on a dais, between three large barrels of "water" is a group of seven mighty, half-naked Japanese, who, with their look and dress ("aprons"), are similar to sumō wrestlers. They calmly observe what is happening. In the annotation of the Christie's auction catalog, the author drew attention to "Japanese standing aside, using water for ablution" [Christie's auction 2001]. This explanation seems ill-founded, and it is not clear what ablution we can talk about. On the left, above the Europeans but below the Japanese, there is a detachment of Chinese with a commander on horseback and his subordinates, some of them running around with small vessels (basins) in their hands, pouring fire. Both the Chinese and the Japanese are depicted carrying banners. This seems to be an illustration of the technical superiority of the Europeans, while the Chinese operate in the old-fashioned way. The Japanese watch them with a touch of superiority, apparently demonstrating their unwavering faith in *kami*, since the depiction of them as sumō wrestlers, as well as *shimenawa*, (*the sacred rope*)[40] with which the barrels are tied, refers to native Japanese beliefs and ancient rituals.

The carefully drawn contents of the barrels, however, bear little resemblance to water, but rather to some solid substance. In the Tokugawa era, *sumō* competitions were also held in Buddhist temples, called *Kanjin sumō*.[41] The competitions were held to collect alms for

---

[40] *Shimenawa* 注連縄 is a rope of rice straw enclosing a sacred place.

[41] *Kanjin sumō* 勧進相撲. *Kanjin* (Buddh. benefactor), a collection of donations for religious needs. Sumō is a type of martial art that originated in the Japanese islands in antiquity, was performed at Shintō shrines, and was part of *matsuri* rituals. During the Tokugawa era, bouts began to be held in Buddhist temples in order to raise donations for the construction of new temples and the repair of destroyed ones. Between 1648 and 1742, this activity was banned by the bakufu, and when the ban was lifted, competitions were held regularly in Edo in winter and spring, in Kyoto in summer, and in Osaka in fall.

the construction and repair of Buddhist temples and Shintō shrines. During these competitions, large sacks of rice were placed around the dueling site to make a circle barrier, later four poles were placed at the corners with a roof stretched between them. By placing fire barrels loaded with rice on the scroll, the artist was probably showing that, while the Europeans and the Chinese were fighting the fire, the astute Japanese were already preparing to hold competitions to raise donations to rebuild the pagoda destroyed by the fire. In this image, the artist is again ironic, but this time with regard to his compatriots.

I would like to say a few words about the fire pump and the hose. The catalog of the Ruth and Sherman Lee collection draws attention to this unit. The authors note that a similar image is found on one of the screens of *Southern Barbarians* (1797) from the collection of the National Library of France, and, in *Nagasaki Kembunroku*, or *Diary of Nagasaki* (1797), there is a detailed description of this mechanism and its name – "an unusual mechanism for water movement (*mizuage kiki*)" – is given [Ishida & Yamamoto 2002, p. 197]. Fires in the history of Japan were one of the most frequent and destructive disasters, with cities particularly suffering from them. Edo, the largest and most populous city in the country, suffered more often and more than others. During the 265 years of the Tokugawa era (1603–1868), historians count more than 1,500 fires, of which about 50 were large. The Meireki fire of 1657 was the worst, killing more than a hundred thousand people. It left a deep trace in memory and was reflected in fine art and literature,[42] and in 1772 there was another great Meiwa fire.

Fire prevention measures were provided for when the shogun's castle was built, but the rest of the city, especially where ordinary citizens lived, remained unprotected until the early 18th century, before measures in the form of fire brigades introduced by Shogun Yoshimune (1684–1751). The Meiwa fire of 1772 was extinguished using inefficient

[42] *Musashi Abumi* by Asai Ryōi (?–1690), novels by Ihara Saikaku (1642–1643), engravings by Utagawa Kunisada (1786–1865) and others.

hand-held wooden fire pumps called *ryūdosui*.[43] The scroll probably depicts a pump from the *Brandspuyten-boek*, a fire-fighting training manual by the Dutch artist and inventor Jan van der Heijden (1637–1712), which Shiba Kōkan may have seen while traveling to Nagasaki. The machine seen by the artist must have impressed him so much with its technical capabilities that he considered it a kind of emblem of European achievements along with medicine.

Overall, the scroll is filled with numerous symbols and hints. Even our primary research allows us to draw some conclusions. The realism and thoroughness of the details of the image, we think, show us important elements of the cultural code of the eighteenth-century Japanese, emphasizing their changes over time. Let us name the main ones:

1) a sea wave, demonstrating the surmountable remoteness of the archipelago in relation to spiritual concepts and knowledge;

2) a triad, or three figures sitting at a table – a Japanese, a Chinese, and a European, the characters' poses and objects lying on the table symbolizing the most important spiritual components for a Japanese of the 18th century: honor, nobility (the face of a samurai), inclination to development, wisdom (a *suehiro* fan, a white snake on the wrist of a Japanese); scholarship (a scepter of *rūyi*, a scroll, a vase with medicinal plants), courage (a leopard skin), modesty (the pose of a Chinese); the latest knowledge and technical inventions (anatomical atlas, a European's fire hose and pump);

3) flame/fire.

Many of the images on the scroll may have Buddhist connotations: a wave; a Japanese man placed in the center of the depicted encounter, as if he were an incarnation of the Buddha; a burning structure resembling a Buddhist pagoda; *sumō* wrestlers, and barrels of "rice."

---

[43] *Ryūdosui* 竜吐水: https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E7%AB%9C%E5%90%90%E6%B0%B4 History of firefighting in Japan: the Edo period (1600–1868): https://fire-truck.ru/encyclopedia/istoriya-pozharov-i-pozharnogo-dela-vyaponii-period-edo-1600-1868-godyi.html

It seems that, if the author of the scroll was Shiba Kōkan, the scroll was painted in the artist's late years, when he converted to Buddhism and lived in a Buddhist monastery. However, a parsing of the symbolism on the scroll shows that the author was more likely to believe in the polyreligious complex characteristic of the archipelago's inhabitants throughout their history.

Irony, mockery, and laughter, which characterize the Edo period culture, are reflected in the scroll. There are ironic hints in the change in the posture of the skeleton in the drawing of the anatomical atlas, the chair on which the European is sitting; the Japanese as sumō wrestlers and the fire barrels filled with rice rather than water; and, if one accepts the version that Matsudaira Sadanobu is depicted, then it is possible to interpret the depiction of the Japanese as ironic and caricatured. If the scroll was indeed made as an ironic illustration for one of Shiba Kōkan's last works, *Shumparō Hikki*, it seems important to note that it nevertheless reflects the ancient traditional ideas of the inhabitants of the Japanese islands regarding the sea wave, fire, the triad, and so on.

Perhaps the three types of culture – Japan, China, and the West – represented twice in the painting, in the main part and in the allegory, represent to some extent the three main components of the artist's work: Chinese painting, late medieval Japanese *ukiyo-e* prints, and Western painting.

Although the dating and authorship of the painting are uncertain, it seems that if it was painted by Shiba Kōkan, it was done in the second half of his life; and if it was created by someone else, it was probably by someone close to him, perhaps his student, who knew the life, interests, and hobbies of the master well.

Let us try to speak on behalf of the artist, the author of this painting: "From across the distant blue sea, just as Buddhism once came to Japan, now, in new times, previously unheard knowledge and devices have come. They have been created by strange long-nosed people, with "taking-off" hair, speaking a difficult and little understood language. They have outstanding knowledge and complex

mechanisms, and we are not always able to understand and appreciate them yet, but still we too have qualities worthy of appreciation: honor, courage, and wisdom".

References

Big Chinese-Russian Dictionary. (1983). Ed. by I. M. Oshanin. Vol. 2. Moscow: Nauka. (In Russian).

Christie's auction (New York Rokfeller Plaza). 22 March 2001 (Sale 9606, lot 241). Retrieved from https://www.christies.com/lotfi nder/lot/shibakokan-a-meeting-of-japan-china-2008323

Chu, Lung-hsing. (2008). The Meeting of China, Japan and Holland: Dutchmen in Japanese Prints During the Edo Period. In: *Design History Society Annual Conference* (pp. 1–20). University College Falmouth, UK. P. 1–20.

Clark, T. (2017). *Hokusai. Beyond the Great Wave*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Eberhard, W. A. (1986). *Dictionary of Chinese Symbols*. London, New-York: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Ermakova, L. M. (2005). *Vesti o Yapan-ostrove v starodavnei Rossii i drugoe* [News About the Island of Japan in Old Russia and Other]. Moscow: Yazyki slavianskoi kultury. (In Russian).

French, C. L. (1974). *Shiba Kōkan. Artist, Innovator, and Pioneer in the Westernization of Japan*. New. York., Tokyo: Weatherhill.

Iofan N. A. (1974) Kul'tura Drevney Yaponii [The Culture of Ancient Japan]. Moscow: Nauka. (In Russian).

Ishida, Y. & Yamamoto, Y. (Eds). (2002). *Delightful Pursuits: Highlights from the Lee Institute for Japanese Art at Clark Center*. Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shimbun.

Jackson, A. & Jaffer, A. (Eds). (2004). *Encounters: The Meeting of Asia and Europe 1500–1800*. London, New-York.: V&A.

Kinsei hansei hankō daijiten [Big Dictionary of Early Modern Japan's Domains and Domain Schools]. (2006). Ed. by Oishi Manabu. Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan. (In Japanese).

Konjaku monogatari shū. Part 3 (1974). In: *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* [Complete collection Collection of Classic Japanese Literature]. Vol. 23. Tokyo: Shōgakukan. (In Japanese).

Kukai (Kobo daishi). (2005). *Tri ucheniia ukazyvaiut i napravliaiut (Sango shiiki)* [Three Teachings Show and Direct (*Sangō Shiiki*)]. Translated by N. N. Trubnikova. Moscow: Izdatel Savin S. A. (In Russian).

Mify narodov mira [Myths of the peoples of the world]. (1982). Vol. 2. Moscow: Sovetskaya entsyklopediya. (In Russian).

Naruse, Fujio. (1977). *Shiba Kōkan*. Tokyo: Shūeisha. (In Japanese).

Naruse, Fujio. (1995). *Shiba Kōkan shōgai to gagyō – sakuhinten* [The Life and Artworks of Shiba Kōkan – An Exhibition]. Tokyo: Yasaka shobō. (In Japanese).

Nikolaeva, N. S. (1996). *Yaponiya – Evropa. Dialog v iskusstve* [Japan and Europe. A Dialogue in the Arts]. Moscow: Izobrazitelnoe iskusstvo. (In Russian).

Oita rangaku jishi. Bummei kaika e no michi [The Beginnings of *Rangaku* in Oita. Towards the Civilization and Enlightenment]. (2005). An Exhibition catalogue. Historical Museum of Oita Prefecture. (In Japanese).

Quan Tang wen [Full collection of Tang prose]. In: *Zhongguo lidai jiben dianji ku* [Collection of Basic Chinese Classics of Previous Epochs]. Vol. 17. Sui, Tang and the Five dynasties. Retrieved from: http://www.guoxue.com/wenxian/wxji/qtw/0017.htmhttp://www.guoxue.com/wenxian/wxji/qtw/0017.htm (In Chinese).

Roberts, L. P. (1980). *Dictionary of Japanese Artists. Painting, Sculpture, Ceramics, Prints, Lacquer*. New-York, Tokyo: Weatherhill.

Screech, T. (2002). *The Lens Within the Heart. Western Scientific Gaze and Popular Imagery in Later Edo Japan*. London.: Curzon Press.

Tarantino, G. (2016). Disaster, Emotions and Cultures: Unexpected Wink of Shiba Kōkan (1738–1818). *Rivista Storica Italiana*. 2016. No. 2. P. 642–666.

SIMONOVA-GUDZENKO Ekaterina Kirillovna – Professor, Head of the Chair of Japanese History and Culture. Moscow State University Institute of Asian and African Studies. 11, Mokhovaya str. 125009 Moscow, Russia.

E-mail: eksimonova@iaas.msu.ru

This article was originally published in Russian. The reference for primary publication is:

Simonova-Gudzenko, E. K. (2021) Simvolika v kartine Siba Kōkan (1738/1747–1818) "Vstrecha tryokh mudretsov Yaponii, Kitaya I Zapada" [Symbolism in Shiba Kōkan's (1738/1747-1818) Painting "The Meeting of the Three Sages of Japan, China, and the West"] In: *Teksty magii I magiya tekstov: kartina mira, slovesnosty I verovaniya Vostochnoy Azii* [Texts of Magic and the Magic of Texts: World Picture, Narrative Culture and Beliefs of East Asia]. / Ed. By I. S. Smirnov et als. (Orientalia et Classica. II (LXXIII). Moscow: HSE Publishing House. Pp. 33–60.