

The Kongō-ji Screens: Illuminating the Tradition of *Yamato-e* 'Sun and Moon' Screens

Michele Bambling

Among the screens that have survived from Japan's Muromachi (1336-1573) and Momoyama (1568-1600) periods are a small group that depict the sun and the moon together in the sky. These 'sun and moon' screens are part of a tradition of polychromatic Japanese painting known as *yamato-e*, which flourished alongside a tradition of Chinese-inspired monochromatic ink painting during these periods. One of the most important, yet least understood, examples is a late fifteenth century pair in Kongō-ji in Kawachi-Nagano, Osaka prefecture (Fig. 1). The earliest extant 'sun and moon' screens in Japan, the Kongō-ji screens are critical works in

analyzing the development of the 'sun and moon' genre within the history of *yamato-e* screen painting. With their odd mix of Japanese and Chinese elements, sacred and secular imagery, and painting and craft techniques, they are central works around which other 'sun and moon' screens may be organized and understood.

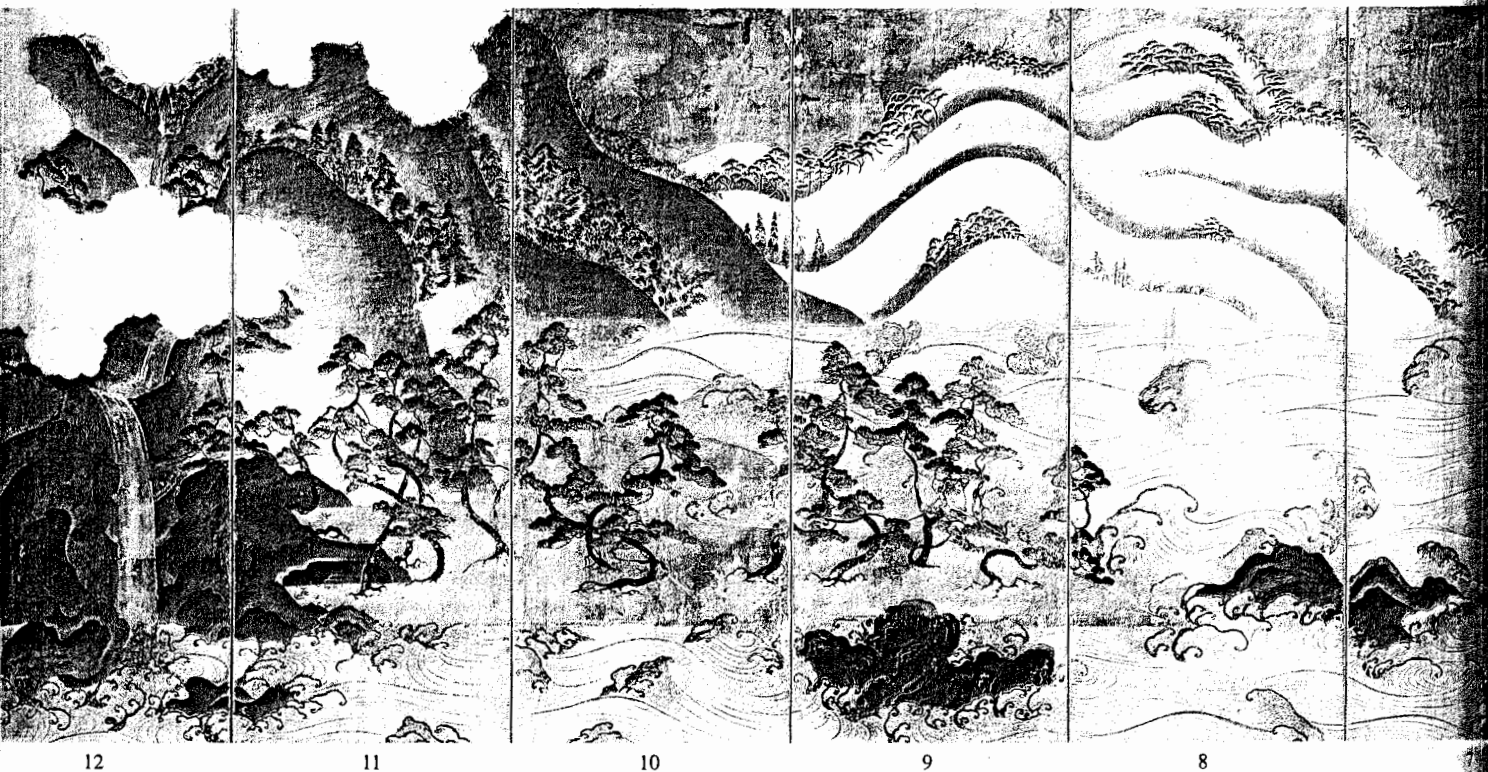
Although designated Important Cultural Property by the Japanese government and widely recognized as masterpieces of Japanese art, the Kongō-ji screens have long perplexed scholars. They are unsigned, lack seals and are not accompanied by documentation that might provide information about their origin. Moreover, no firmly attributed or dated screens have survived that are comparable. The Kongō-ji screens usually are dated between the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, primarily through visual analysis. Their unorthodox synthesis of *yamato-e* style painting

with craft techniques, as well as the spiritual force of the painting, suggest that the painter was an *e-busshi* – an artist affiliated with a Buddhist institution.

The lively depiction of the sky, land and sea, and the interaction of natural forces imbue the Kongō-ji screens with a rarefied energy, if not a spiritual presence. The cycle of a day – with the sun rising and the moon setting – is superimposed onto the cycle of a year with its four seasons. Thus, the eternal passage of time is expressed through the 'sun and moon' iconography and the transition of seasons within the dynamic cyclical composition.

The most distinguishing elements of the two, six-panel paper screens are the gilt sun and the silver-leaf crescent moon placed between mountain peaks on the outer third panels of each screen. The sun rises in the east on the right screen as the moon sets in the west on the left screen. Reading from right to left, sunshine fol-

(Fig. 1) 'Sun and Moon' landscape
Muromachi period, late 15th century
Pair of six-panel screens, ink, colour,
gold, silver and mica on paper
Each: height 147 cm, length 313.5 cm
Kongō-ji, Kawachi-Nagano, Osaka prefecture
Important Cultural Property



lowed by moonlight marks the passing of a single day. Radiant mist and clouds, consisting of gold and silver leaf cut and torn by various techniques, fill the sky, reflecting the light of the sun and moon. The once brilliant heavens have tarnished due to oxidation. Under the sky, a mica sea connects the screens' whole composition, sparkling with swirling patterns of gold and silver paint, silver-leafed crests and sprinkled silver spray. The beach shimmers, and silver even shines through the waterfall that drenches the gold-edged rocks. The sheer abundance of precious materials and their labour-intensive application on this pair of screens introduces a new aesthetic taste for reflective materials and craft techniques within *yamato-e* landscape screen painting.

Between the sky and sea a vast blue and green *yamato-e* landscape composed of five mountain groups spreads in an ellipse across the two screens. The right screen shows a series of high, rounded mountains surrounded by sandy shoals. The solid green and blue mountains in the foreground are echoed from behind by taller mountains covered with ivy and various species of carefully rendered trees, including cherry, oak, bamboo, cedar, willow and pine, depicted in precise detail. The left screen features a long beach lined by sinuous pines, snow-covered mountains and a three-tiered waterfall that tumbles into the sea. While rich in natural elements, the scene lacks any

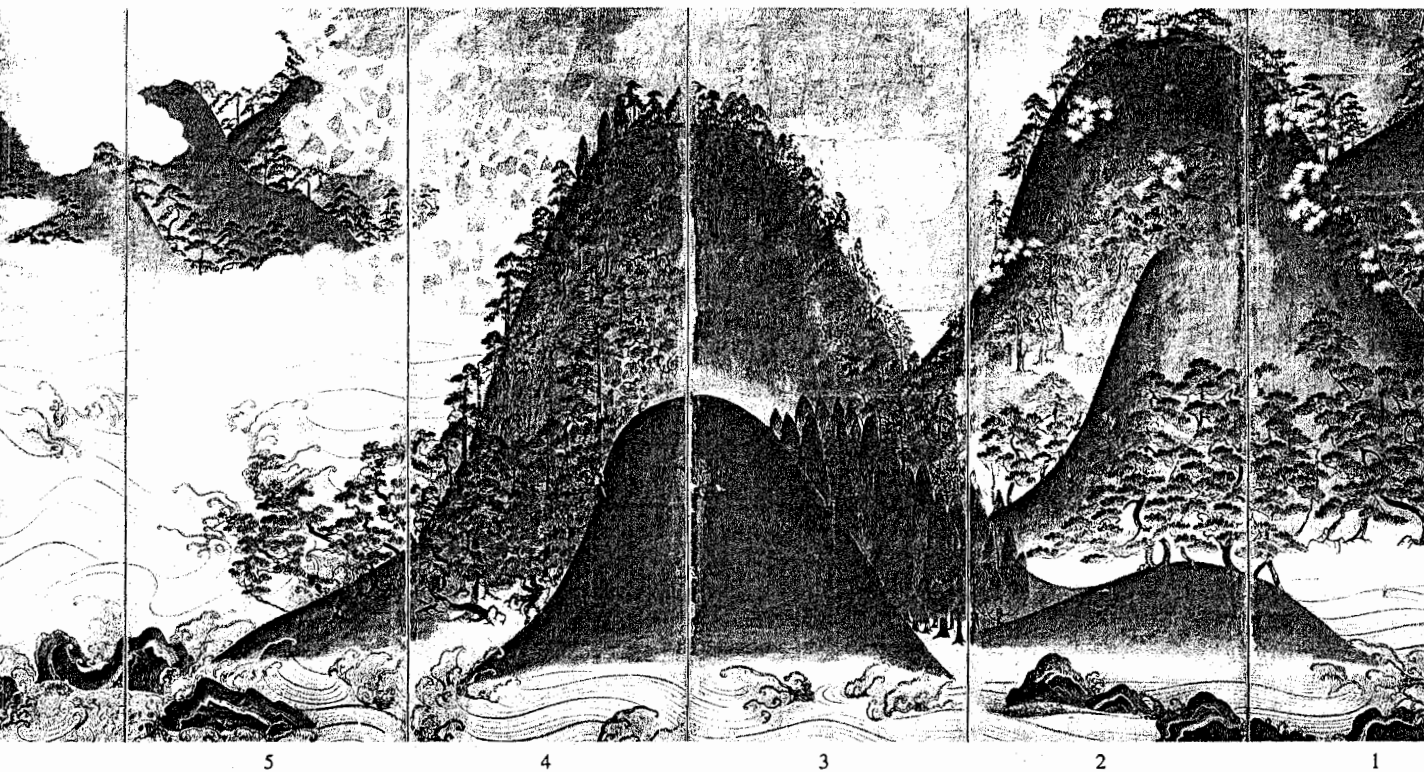
indication of animal or human life.

The passage of a year is represented by the seasonal imagery painted within this landscape, and careful attention has been paid to the transitions between each season. In the first two panels of the right screen (counting from right to left), spring cherry buds burst into full bloom (Fig. 1.1-2) with the transition to summer indicated in the following panel by tender summer willow leaves that grow into long, mature strands (Fig. 1.3). On the left screen, the brown leaves that cling to autumn limbs change quickly into snow-blanketed evergreens (Fig. 1.9-10). The green and blue pigment becomes thicker and darker as the verdant foliage grows from spring to summer in the right screen, and then thins as autumn gives way to winter in the left. Meanwhile, the calm waves of spring become progressively rougher as the seasons advance, culminating where the waterfall cascades into the churning sea in the last panel of the left screen (Fig. 1.12). Strong, conflicting winds whip the waves in opposite directions causing their exaggerated, claw-like silver crests to literally rise out in high relief from the picture surface. Bulbous rocks, contoured in gold, withstand the turbulent surge of the waves. Fantastically twisted pine trees become tangled with the crashing waves, their exposed roots clinging to the mica sands.

A full examination of the iconographic meaning of the 'sun and

moon' motif is beyond the scope of this article, which will therefore examine the motif's incorporation into the development of *yamato-e* screen painting. Introduced from China and Korea, the earliest examples of the 'sun and moon' motif in Japanese painting are found in seventh century tombs (for example, the Takamatsuzuka tomb near Nara). It thus constitutes one of the earliest motifs in Japanese art, and was employed as a sacred symbol in funerary, religious and imperial contexts, as well as a purely ornamental element in the decorative arts. However, Heian period (794-1185) records do not mention 'sun and moon' iconography on screens, nor are there any known poems from this period inspired by a painted screen (*byōbu-uta-e*) that allude to the sun and moon together. Heian period *waka* poetry only rarely celebrates both the sun and the moon in a single verse (Ienaga Saburō, *Jōdai Yamato-e Nempuō*, Tokyo, 1966), and because the themes of screen painting were inextricably linked to the *waka* tradition until the eleventh century, the 'sun and moon' motif was not prevalent on *yamato-e* screens during the Heian period.

Indeed, it was probably not until the development of a continuous composition across a paired screen format in the fourteenth century that 'sun and moon' iconography was taken up in screen painting. The earliest screens in Japan consisted of six panels, each treated as an



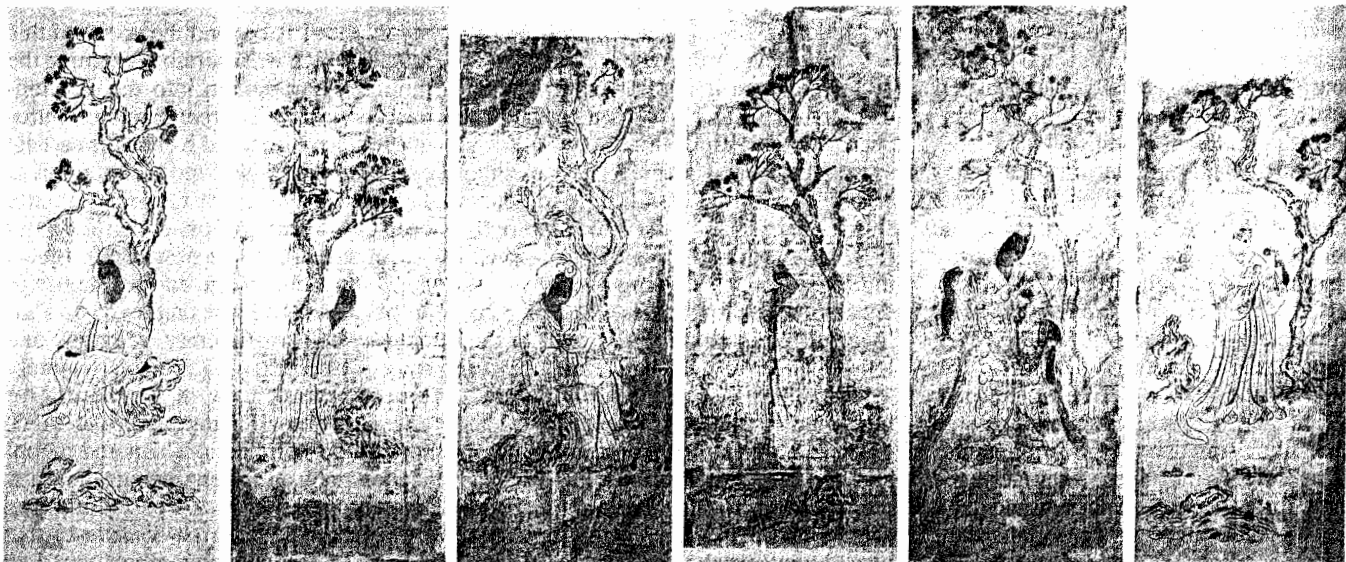
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1



(Fig. 2) *Beauty Beneath a Tree*
China, c. 756
Six-panel screen, ink, colour and
feathers on paper
Height 146 cm, length 336 cm
Shōsō-in, Tōdai-ji, Nara
National Treasure

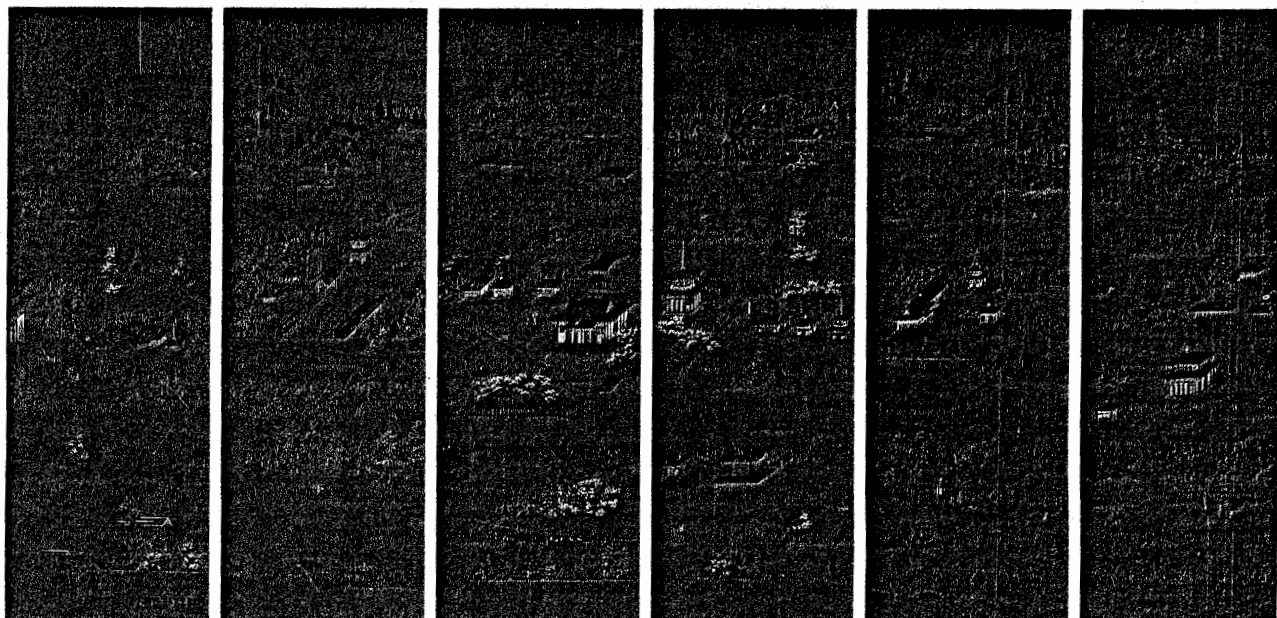
individual pictorial unit and separately bordered in the manner of the *Beauty Beneath a Tree* screen, which entered Emperor Shōmu's (701-56) repository, the Shōsō-in of Tōdai-ji in Nara, in 756 (Fig. 2). Gradually, compositions were carried over two panels, framed in three pairs on a single screen. An example of this is the pair of thirteenth century screens entitled *Landscape of Mt Kōya* (Fig. 3). Compositions next expanded to cover all six panels, with the entire screen encompassed by a single brocade frame. An example is the picture of a screen showing an uninterrupted image of the moon over autumn grasses depicted in the handscroll *Ishiyama-dera Engi*, dated 1497 and attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu (1434-1525) (Fig. 4). During the fourteenth century, two screens came to be placed together in pairs to form a

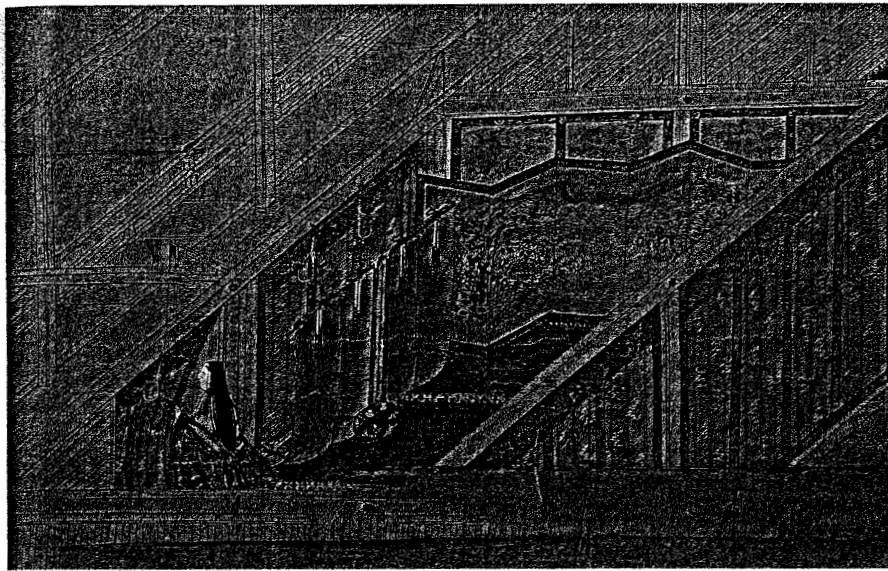
single, unified composition spanning twelve panels – as in the case of the Kongō-ji screens.

With the popularity of the paired-screen format came a desire for themes that carried across all twelve panels, but that still emphasized the contrast inherent in opposing right and left screens. The 'sun and moon' motif was particularly well suited, since it captured the contrasts of light and dark, morning and night within the cycle of a single day. This predilection for placing the sun and moon on opposite sides of an object is also found in the decorative arts – for example, on the front and back of fans or on the outer and inner lids of lacquerware.

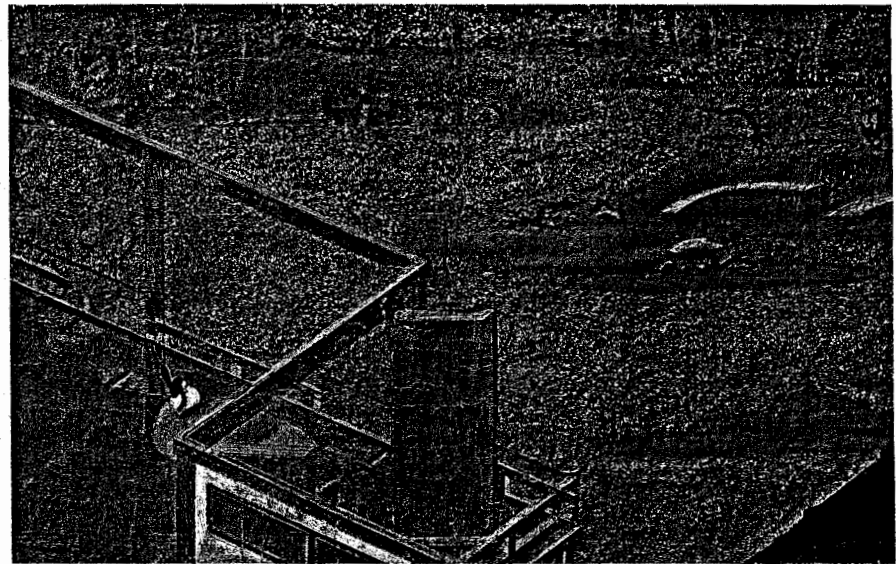
The development of the paired-screen format also brought a change in the painting surface of screens from silk

(Fig. 3) *Landscape of Mt Kōya*
Kamakura period, 13th century
Pair of six-panel screens,
ink and colour on silk
Each: height 45.9 cm, length 134.5 cm
Agency for Cultural Affairs, Tokyo
Important Cultural Property



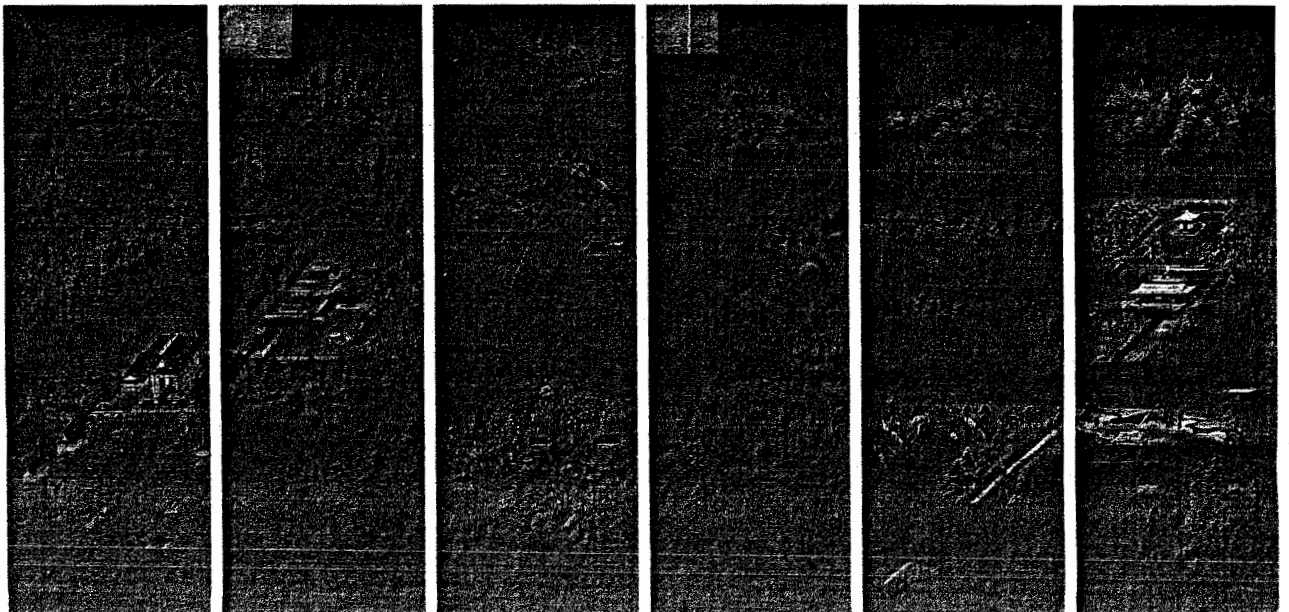


(Fig. 4) Detail of *Ishiyama-dera Engi*
 Attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu (1434-1525),
 dated 1497
 4th scroll, 3rd paper sheet,
 ink and colours on paper
 Ishiyama-dera, Shiga prefecture



(Fig. 5) Detail of *Ise Monogatari*
 Late Kamakura period (1185-1333)
 4th section of handscroll, 3rd paper sheet,
 ink, colour, gold and silver on paper
 Kuboso Memorial Museum of Art, Osaka

to paper, which in turn led to a revival of Heian period paper ornamentation by artists facing the challenge of covering large paper surfaces with images. The gold and silver particles that simulate the glow of the moon in the late Kamakura period (1185-1333) handscroll illustrating the *Ise Monogatari* (*Tales of Ise*) (Fig. 5), for example, anticipate the enlarged foils that appear to emit from the sun, like tangible pieces of sunlight, on the late fifteenth century *Flowers and Birds of the Four Seasons with the Sun and the Moon* screens in the Idemitsu Museum of Arts in Tokyo (Fig. 6). The assimilation of ornamentation into *yamato-e* screen painting increasingly led to the use of gold, silver and mica, rather than pigment, for the depiction of light and its changing effects. This development complemented the use of the 'sun and





(Fig. 6) *Flowers and Birds of the Four Seasons with the Sun and the Moon*

Muromachi period, late 15th century
 Pair of six-panel screens, ink, colour,
 gold and silver on paper
 Each: height 140 cm, length 308.2 cm
 Idemitsu Museum of Art, Tokyo

moon' motif as well, since the sun lent itself to the warmth and brightness of gold and the moon to the cool light of silver.

Although not strictly within the genre of 'sun and moon' screens, the *Ten Realms of Reincarnation* screens at Taima-dera in Nara (Fig. 7) are the earliest example of Japanese screens in which the 'sun and moon' motif appears. They demonstrate that by the fourteenth century the motif had been appropriated onto paired, six-panel screens, where the two orbs were contrasted compositionally. The sun, moon and sky in the Taima-dera example are treated in gold and silver

techniques revived from Heian period paper decoration, and their iconography has explicit religious significance on these screens. Twenty-four square cards (*shikishi*) bearing *waka* from various poetry anthologies and sutras are attached to the screen. The poem placed near the sun (4th *shikishi* from the right), by Ninna-ji Kakushō from the late Heian anthology *Senzai Shū* (*Collection of [Japanese Poems] of a Thousand Years*), associates the morning sun with the Buddha. The poem adjacent to the moon (24th *shikishi* from the right), a *waka* by Senshi Naishinnō compiled in the late Heian *Kin'yō Shū* (*Collection of Golden*

(Fig. 7) *Ten Realms of Reincarnation*
 Late Kamakura/early Muromachi period,
 14th century

Pair of six-panel screens, ink, colour,
 gold and silver on paper
 Each: height 142.2 cm, length 295 cm
 Taima-dera Okunoin, Nara
 Important Cultural Property





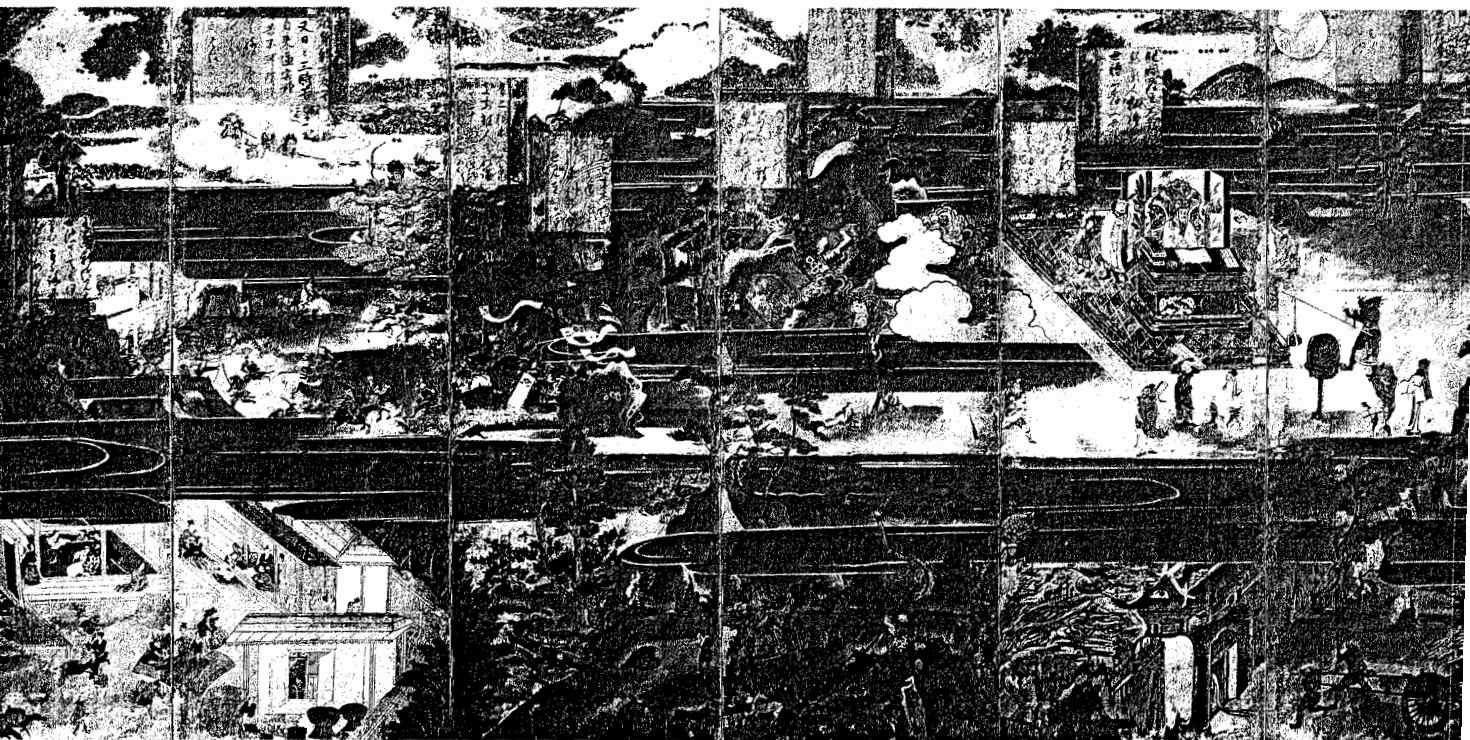
Leaves [of Japanese Poems]), alludes to the disappearance of the moon in the west as a sign of Amida Buddha (Takagishi Akira, 'Taima-dera okunoin shozō jukkai-zu byōbu ni tsuite' presented at the '49th Bijutsushi Gakkai Zenkoku Taikai', Tokyo, 25 May 1996). The Taima-dera screens depict religious and secular narratives within landscape cells where the painting style is similar to *yamato-e*. The sacred meaning of the 'sun and moon' motif, and the integration of gold and silver leaf within a *yamato-e*-like landscape, make the *Ten Realms of Reincarnation* screens precursors of the Kongō-ji screens. Yet, the 'sun and

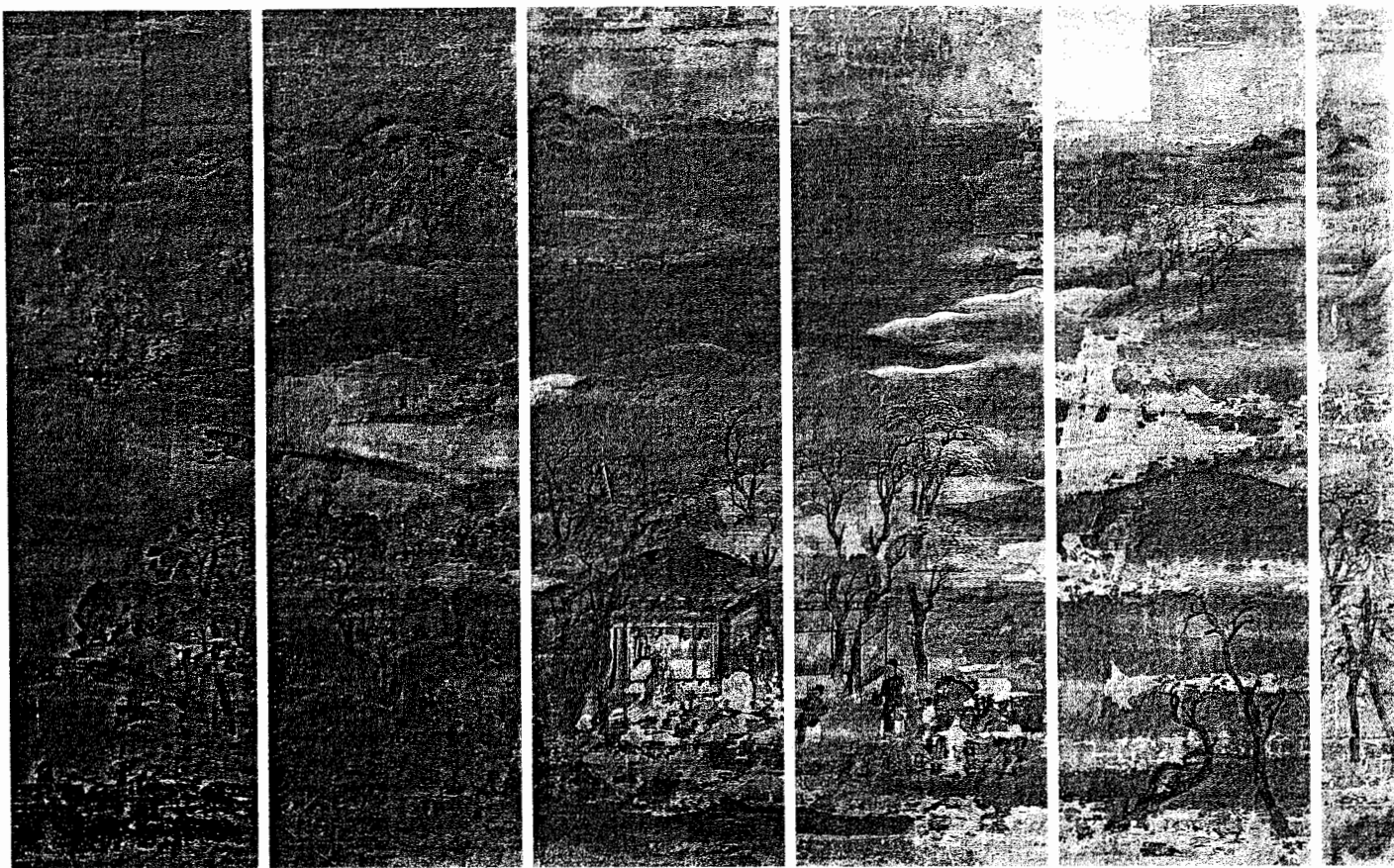
moon' motif is not so prominent or central to the meaning, and the landscape not so fully developed as to merit their inclusion in the genre of *yamato-e* 'sun and moon' screens.

The *yamato-e* style developed during the late ninth century, ultimately as a derivation of the blue-green landscape style transmitted along the Silk Road during China's Tang period (618-906). A comparison of the Kongō-ji landscape with the only extant Heian period screen, the late eleventh century landscape screen formerly in the collection of Tō-ji in Kyoto (Fig. 8), reveals many common

yamato-e landscape features: the gently sloping, simple hill shapes; vivid, thickly applied green malachite and blue azurite mineral pigments; the lack of descriptive ink brushwork in the mountain interiors; the depiction of local seasonal foliage; an open body of water where the screens connect; the flat, non-illusionistic spatial treatment; and the birds-eye view of the panoramic landscape.

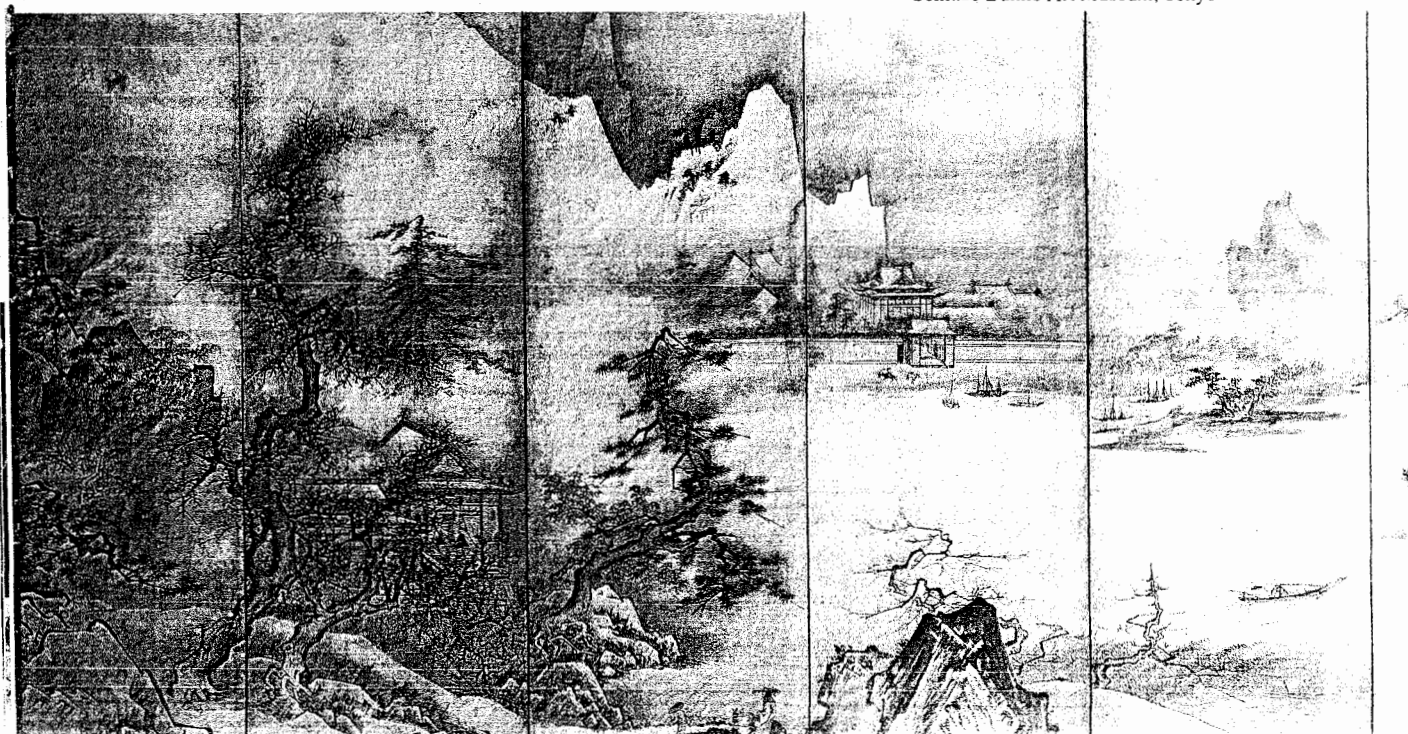
Despite these stylistic similarities, the Kongō-ji screens are fundamentally different from earlier extant *yamato-e* paintings. There are no birds or animals of any sort. There are no people, or any sign of their existence. These living





(Fig. 8) Landscape
 Heian period, late 11th century
 Six-panel screen, ink and colour on silk
 Height 146.4 cm, length 256.2 cm
 Kyoto National Museum (formerly in the collection of Tō-ji)
 National Treasure

(Fig. 9) *Landscape of the Four Seasons*
 Attributed to Shūbun (act. 16th century), 15th century
 Pair of six-panel screens, ink and light colour on paper
 Each: height 155.5 cm, length 329 cm
 Seikadō Bunko Art Museum, Tokyo



things are the subjects of the narrative tales and poetic associations so central to many *yamato-e* paintings. In contrast, the Kongō-ji screens depict a charged, sacred realm where waves and trees intertwine with an animistic fervour and the sun and moon appear together in the sky as divine symbols illuminating a landscape with all four seasons reaching their peak simultaneously.

Perhaps the most striking contrast to the orthodox *yamato-e* style is the ordering of the seasons on the Kongō-ji screens. Most *yamato-e* screens depict a seasonal progression unfolding in a direct linear sequence across the paired screens: spring on the right, summer and autumn moving across the centre, and finally winter on the left. The seasons on the Kongō-ji screens, however, progress clockwise in a circular manner. Early spring begins in the left far ground panels of the right screen, and then swings around to spring in the right middle ground, where the landscape gradually changes into summer as it unfolds across the foreground of the screen from right to left. On the left screen, autumn begins in the foreground of the left panels, winding back midway through the screen into winter in the right far ground. The cycle of a year repeats itself when the winter mountains of the left screen merge with the peaks of early spring of the right screen – the juncture where the landscape of the two screens meets. This cyclical arrangement is found in Chinese-inspired works, such as a fifteenth century

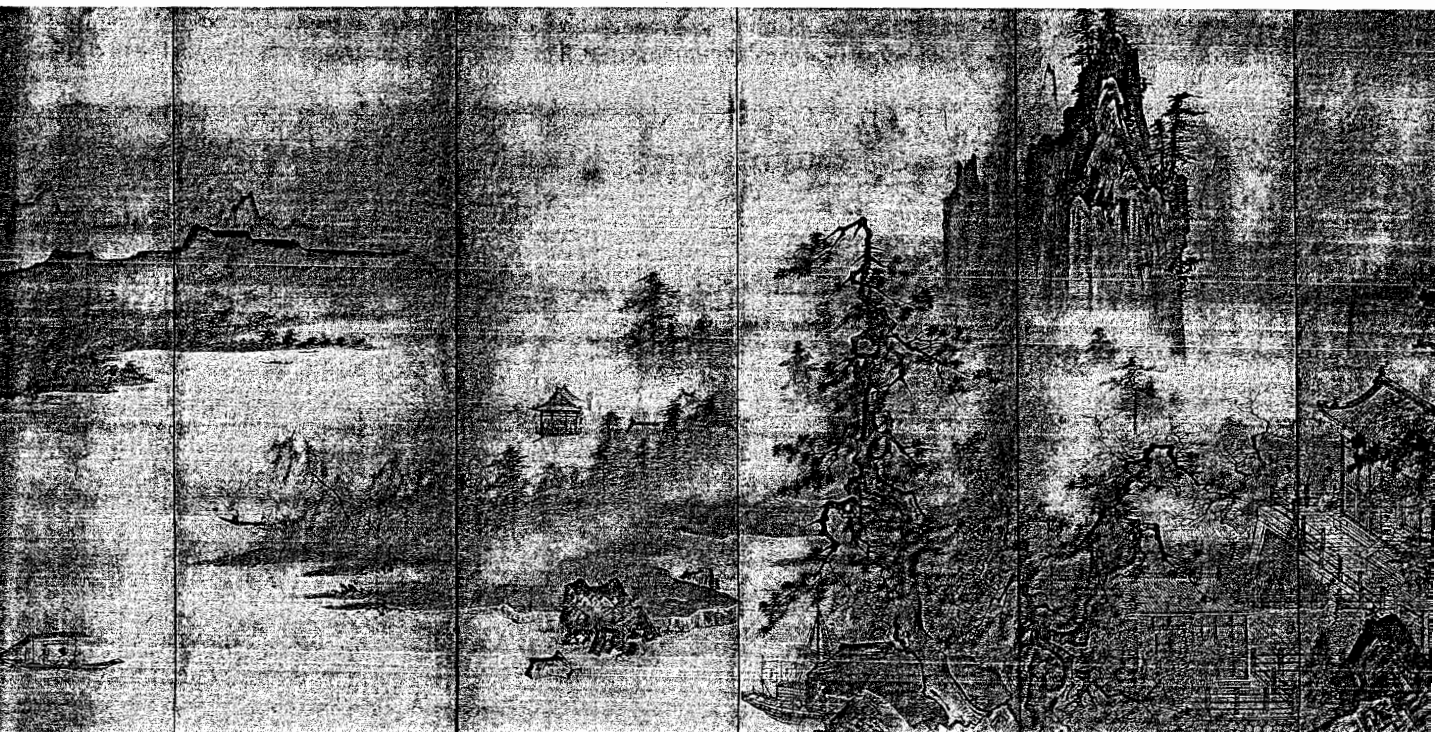
pair of four-season landscape (*shiki-e*) screens painted in ink and light colour on paper and attributed to Shūbun (act. 16th century) in the Seikadō Bunko Art Museum in Tokyo (Fig. 9).

Principles of Chinese Daoist geomancy (*yin* and *yang* and the Five Elements Theory) underlie this cyclical compositional structure (Ogawa Hiromitsu, 'Daisen-in hōjō fusuma-e kō', *Kokka*, no. 1121 [February 1989], pp. 33-49). According to Daoist concepts of space and time, the cycle of a year occurs with spring in the east, summer to the south, autumn in the west and winter to the north. Thus, within the overall composition of the screens, the four seasons correspond to the four cardinal directions. The screens reflect this Daoist order in other ways, as well: the sun and moon, and mountain and sea contrast as *yin* and *yang* elements; the five mountain groups represent the five sacred peaks and the five sacred elements; and the mountains that rise out of the sea conjure up associations with the island of Penglai Shan, the abode of immortals in the Eastern Sea.

The Kongō-ji screens may have another layer of meaning, one that associates the screens with esoteric Buddhism (Mikkyō) and the court of the Emperor Godaigo (r. 1318-39) (Michele Bambling, 'The Kongōji Sun and Moon Landscape Screens: a Legacy of the Southern Court', in the proceedings of 'Japanese Art History Workshop for Graduate Students IV', 22-24 March

1996). While research into these issues is still in progress, the meaning of the Kongō-ji screens – and particularly the 'sun and moon' motif – may be rooted in the Nanbokuchō era (1336-92), when Godaigo's southern court struggled against a rival northern line for imperial authority. During this time of conflict, Godaigo employed the 'sun and moon' motif on war banners and Buddhist ceremonial garb to symbolize his legitimate right to the throne. Kongō-ji itself was deeply enmeshed in the conflict, serving as a military ally of Godaigo and a temporary palace for his successors, Gomurakami (r. 1339-68) and Chōkei (r. 1368-83).

The screens may have entered Kongō-ji through the temple's association with the southern court. Since Heian times, *yamato-e* screens had been set up at court as backdrops for the imperial family. Such screens were also used in the reception rooms of Mikkyō temples, where court nobles waited to participate in rituals. Left behind, or dedicated to these temples, the screens gradually came to be set up in Mikkyō ordination (*kanjō*) ceremonies. Landscape screens were utilized in ordination ceremonies as early as 1182, when documents note the use of one for a ceremony at the Mikkyō temple Ninna-ji in Kyoto. The late eleventh century example long preserved at the Mikkyō Tō-ji (see Fig. 8), is also believed to have been utilized in ordination ceremonies. From the Muromachi period onwards, landscape screens were





(Fig. 10) *Sun and Moon with Cranes and Pine*
Late Muromachi period, early 16th century
Pair of six-panel screens, ink, colour, gold and silver on paper
Right screen: height 157 cm, length 352.4 cm
Left screen: height 157 cm, length 366.8 cm
Mitsui Bunko, Tokyo

in frequent use in ordination ceremonies held at Mikkyō temples (Murashige Yasushi, 'Kanjō yōgu toshite no senzui byōbu', *Bijutsushi*, no. 74 [September 1969], pp. 37-48), one example being the *Landscape of Mt Kōya* in Figure 3. Indeed, Kongō-ji, also a Mikkyō temple, has passed down an oral tradition that its 'sun and moon' landscape screens were employed at the temple during ordination ceremonies.

may help explain some of the sense of a sacred territory the screens convey. More than a four seasons *yamato-e* landscape, the Kongō-ji screens were possibly painted as a syncretic Buddhist/Shinto mandala representing well-known sites – such as Yoshino and Nachi Falls – within the sacred sphere of the southern court.

(Fig. 11) *Four Seasons with the Sun and Moon*
Momoyama period, late 16th/early 17th century
Pair of six-panel screens, ink, colour, gold and silver on paper
Each: height 147.3 cm, length 301 cm
British Museum, London

It is possible that the Kongō-ji screens were painted in the distant aftermath of the Nanbokuchō conflict as a legacy of Godaigo's southern court. This

Over the course of the fifteenth, sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, distinct changes in style, composition and technique can be seen in 'sun and moon' screens, for example the fifteenth century pair in the Idemitsu mu-





seum (see Fig. 6), the early sixteenth century pair in the Mitsui Bunko in Tokyo (Fig. 10) and a late sixteenth/early seventeenth century pair in the British Museum in London (Fig. 11). Although these screens prominently display the 'sun and moon' motif and have some of the same Daoist undertones as the Kongō-ji screens, the integration of the motif into the landscape imagery and overall compositions differs markedly. There is a shift in perspective – from a vast mountain and seascape to close-up, intimate landscape settings – and birds, animals and humans are present. Further-

more, the compositions are structured on a linear, rather than cyclical, seasonal arrangement, precluding a direct correlation of seasons and directions according to Daoist principles. Backgrounds are increasingly covered in gold, rather than silver; a richer, more colourful palette comes into use, and metal boards covered in gold and silver leaf begin to be inserted directly onto the surface of the screens. The Daoist symbolism becomes assimilated and subverted within layers of literary associations that become the primary basis of the screens' meanings, and the 'sun and moon' motif comes to be treated

primarily as a decorative element.

Instead of conjuring up a vast Daoist universe, the intimate setting of the Idemitsu screens, for example, evokes the poetic world of Heian *waka* and the linked verse (*renga*) of the Muromachi period (Adachi Keiko, 'Muromachi jidai yamato-e byōbu jitsugetsu kachō-zu byōbu ni tsuite', *Kokka*, no. 1083 [May 1985], pp. 13-32; Shimao Arata, 'Kachō-zu byōbu no zuzōgaku – idemitsu bijutsukan zō jitsugetsu shiki kachō-zu byōbu ni tsuite', *Kokka*, no. 1201 [November 1995], pp. 22-29). Cherry petals scattered on the warm ground of Mt Yoshino



and scarlet maple leaves floating down the Tatsuta river are celebrated in classical verse. The screens' pheasants and deer symbolize spring and autumn, respectively, in *waka* and are praised for their devoted conjugal and parental relationships in Muromachi *renga*. Such allusions to vernacular poetry are not easily read into the Kongō-ji screens.

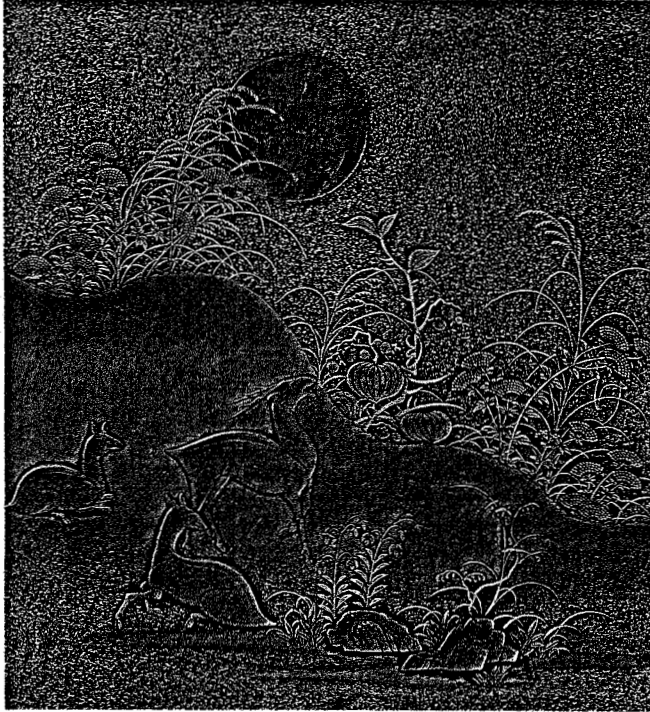
In these screens, the sun and moon are not suspended high in the sky above sacred mountains, but instead appear

within a profusion of enlarged colourful seasonal motifs, forming a collage that approaches abstraction on the pictorial surface. The extremes of this decorative treatment of the 'sun and moon' motif can be seen in the gold and silver, sun and moon-shaped metal boards inserted onto the screens in Figures 6, 10 and 11, the use of which highlights an aesthetic appreciation for opulent display during the late Muromachi and Momoyama periods. (The incorporation of metal boards

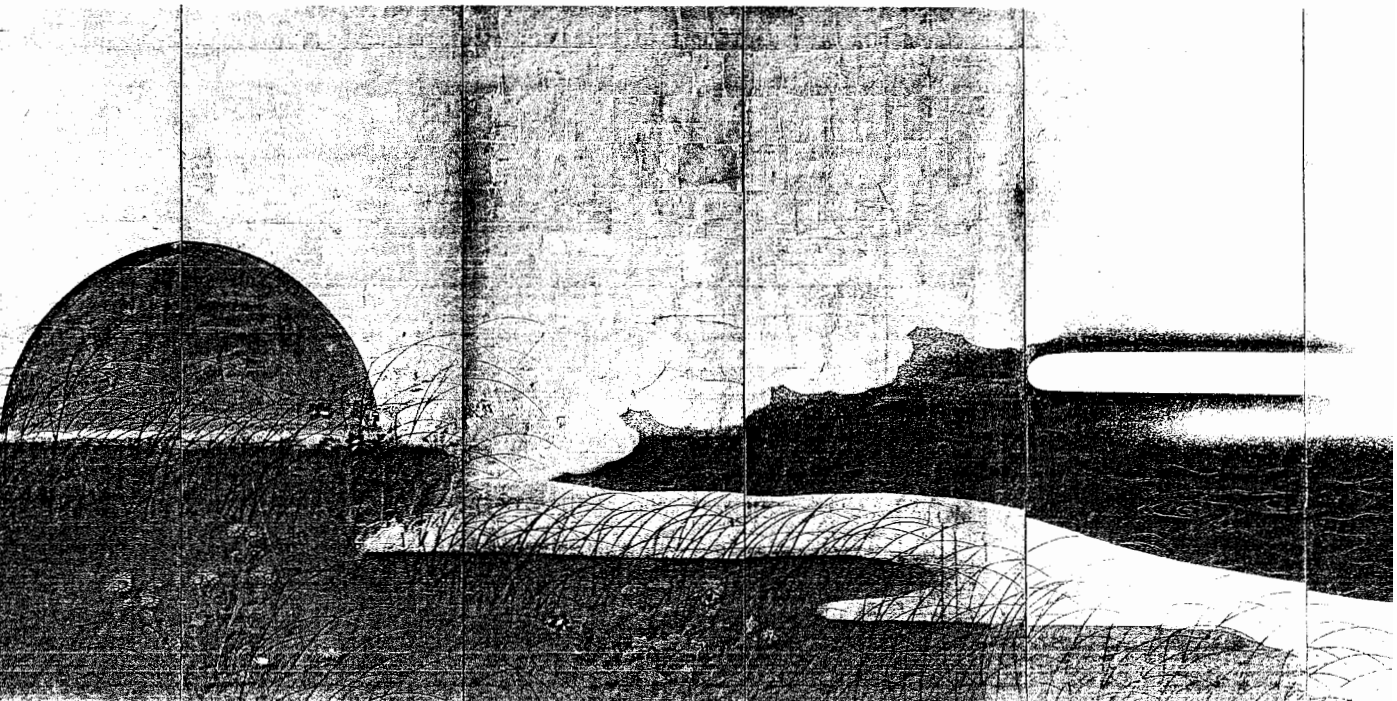
on a screen painting also underscores the technical and thematic similarities that existed between *yamato-e* painting and craft during these periods. An inkstone box in the Nezu Art Museum, Tokyo [Fig. 12], like the Idemitsu screen, poignantly shows a deer crying under an inset autumn moon.)

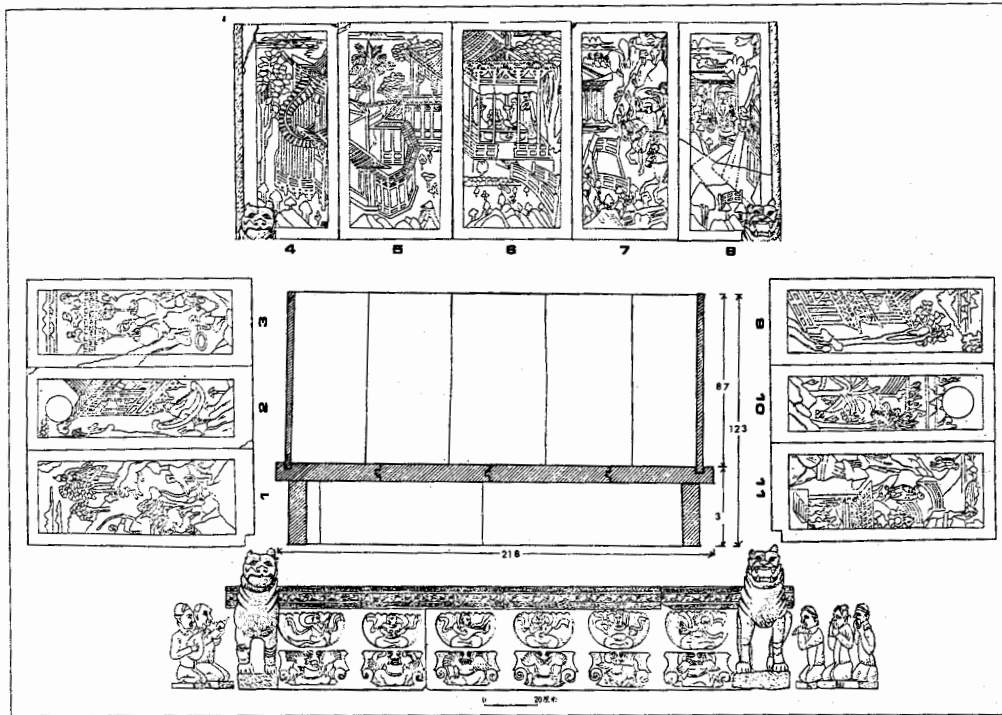
In the early seventeenth century, the 'sun and moon' motif was occasionally included in paintings of the Musashino fields, a subject that became popular in various schools of painting at the time. First mentioned in Heian period *waka*, the theme was revived in Edo period (1615-1867) poetry. In poetry and painting, the Musashino fields were described as a desolate place where, with no mountains to hide behind, the moon rises and sets into tall grasses. In a pair of screens at the Nezu museum, a red sun and silver moon are set in dramatic contrast, appearing as enormous half-circles on the horizon of a vast plain representing the Musashino fields (Fig. 13). The composition is simple, focusing on only a few pictorial motifs juxtaposed against the stark background of a low-lying gold stream and a deep blue stream. Not only has religious and imperial content disappeared in these screens, there is also little

(Fig. 12) Inkstone box
Muromachi period,
15th century
Lacquerware with
maki-e decoration
Nezu Art Museum, Tokyo
Important Cultural
Property



(Fig. 13) *Musashino Fields*
Edo period, early 17th century
Pair of six-panel screens, ink, colour,
gold and silver on paper
Each: height 147.9 cm, length 331.8 cm
Nezu Art Museum, Tokyo

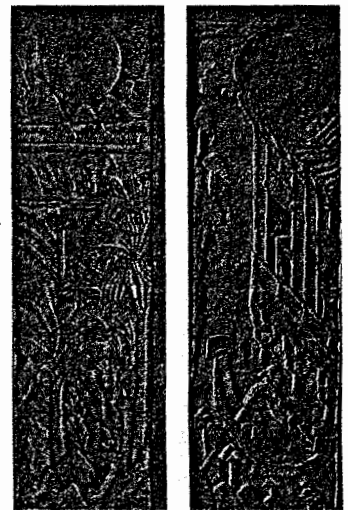




(Fig. 14) Funerary screen with 'sun and moon' iconography
Sui/Tang dynasty,
late 6th/early 7th century
Eleven-panel screen, carved sandy
shale stone with traces of gold,
silver and polychromy
Each panel: height 87 cm
(approximate)
Tianshui Municipal Museum,
Tianshui, Gansu province

(Fig. 14a) Photographic detail of the
screen represented in Figure 14,
showing the panel with the image of
the sun (Panel 10)

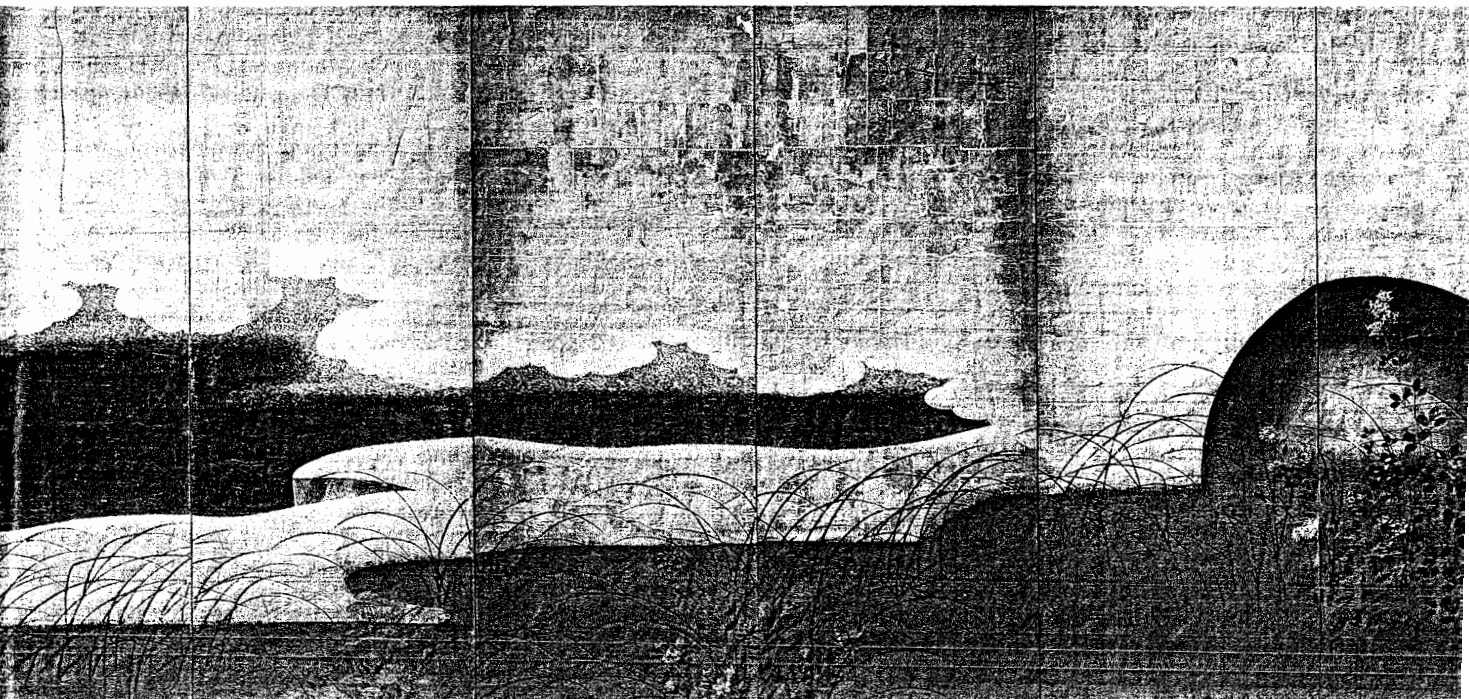
(Fig. 14b) Photographic detail of the
screen represented in Figure 14,
showing the panel with the image of
the moon (Panel 2)



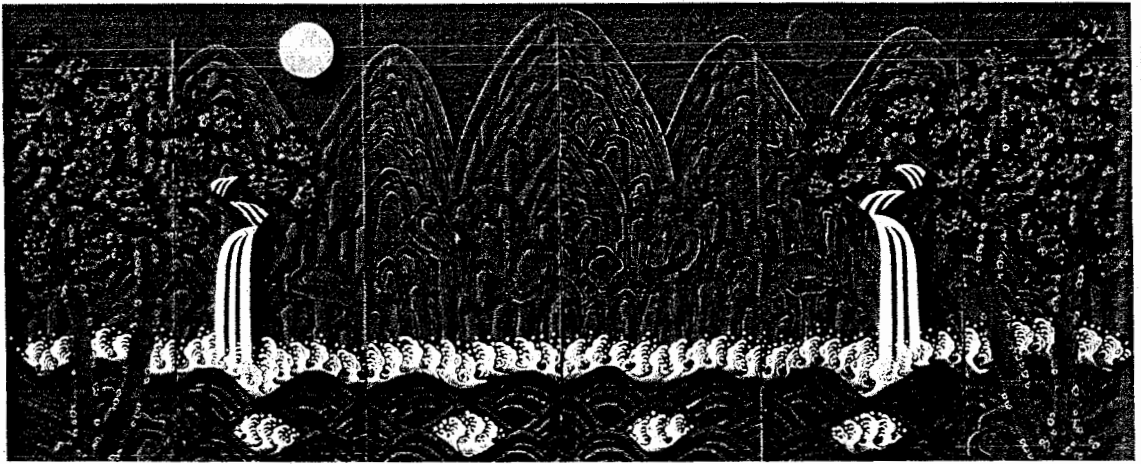
experimentation with ornamental gold and silver techniques – no attached metal disks – and no attempt to present four seasons imagery. Instead, the Nezu screens seem to hark back to the poetic theme of the moon over autumn grasses painted on the screen depicted in the *Ishiyama-dera Engi* handscroll (see Fig. 4).

By the early eighteenth century, 'sun and moon' screens appear to have gone out of style. In 1721, the Kano school painter Hayashi Moriatsu mentioned that

the 'sun and moon' motif was banned from his school because its decorative quality was more appropriate for craft than screen painting. Nineteenth century commentators remarked, upon seeing the 'sun and moon' motif on sliding doors and pictures, that it gave a strange impression (Adachi Keiko, 'Jitsugetsu byōbu to musashino-zu byōbu', in *Byōbu-e Syūsei*, Tokyo, 1977, pp. 136-44). Either just the moon, or less frequently, just the sun, came to be painted on screens – such as those depicting the



(Fig. 15) *Sun, Moon and Five Peaks*
Late Chosŏn period
(1392-1910)
Six-panel screen, ink
and colour on silk
Height 196.2 cm,
length 360 cm
Ch'angdŏk Palace,
Seoul



theme of the Uji Bridge.

The Kongō-ji screens mark an initial stage of the absorption of the 'sun and moon' motif into the *yamato-e* tradition. What, however, inspired the application of the 'sun and moon' motif into *yamato-e* in the first place? The aesthetic developments outlined above – the emergence of the paired-screen format, the revival of paper ornamentation – may well have been encouragements to incorporate such a motif onto *yamato-e* screens. It is also possible that the motif was taken from the decorative arts, or came from Buddhist/Shinto mandalas (*suijaku*) or pilgrimage mandalas (*sankei*) that show the 'sun and moon' motif over a sacred landscape. However, these explanations fail to explain fully the extent to which the 'sun and moon' motif is integrated into the highly sophisticated conceptual framework found in the Kongō-ji screens' compositional alignment of the four seasons and four cardinal directions, contrast of *yin* and *yang* elements, and reference to the five sacred peaks and five elements. Nor does it help account for the probable use of the screens as a backdrop for eminent personages in a ritual context. Therefore, inextricably associated with these elements in the Kongō-ji screens, it is doubtful that the 'sun and moon' motif was simply drawn from works that did not have these associations.

Although further investigation is needed, this author's research has raised the possibility that the Kongō-ji screens may be part of a larger tradition of 'sun and moon' screens originating as much as one thousand years earlier in China. The discovery of a late sixth/early seventh century stone funerary screen (Fig. 14) at Tianshui, Gansu province presents the first empirical evidence of sun, moon and landscape imagery depicted on a screen format in early China (Michele

Bambling, 'Kanshukusyō tensui-shi hakken no zuimatsu tōsho no jitsugetsu byōbu ni tsuite', *Bukkyō Geijutsu Ars Buddhica*, no. 222 [September 1995], pp. 15-40; Tianshui Municipal Museum, 'A Sui-Tang Period Tomb with a Stone Coffin-bed and a "Screen" Discovered in Tianshui City', *Kaogu*, 1992:1, pp. 46-54). Comprising eleven panels attached by dovetail joints, the Tianshui screen surrounds a stone funerary couch on three sides, thus providing a backdrop for the deceased, who was laid out in a wood coffin placed on the couch. The couch and attached screen were positioned in the centre of a north-facing burial chamber. The back panels of the screen were in the south, the side-wing bearing the sun (Fig. 14a) placed to the east, and the side-wing with the moon (Fig. 14b) in the west. The sun has traces of gilding and the moon may have traces of tarnished silver. The carved and painted panels depict a sequence of events that appear to unfold from spring to autumn, which, together with the sun and moon, align with the directions. The deceased would have been surrounded by a world in which the seasons and sun and moon revolve eternally in the screen's panels. The Tianshui screen's use of the 'sun and moon' motif and seasonal iconography, strong Daoist associations, mix of gold leaf and pigment, and use as a backdrop are all striking similarities to the Kongō-ji screens.

'Sun and moon' screens that closely resemble the Kongō-ji screens were also produced in Korea. *Sun, Moon and Five Peaks* – a late Chosŏn period (1392-1910) six-panel screen at the Ch'angdŏk Palace in Seoul (Fig. 15) – depicts a sun and moon over a landscape with five mountain peaks and a pair of three-tiered waterfalls dropping into a turbulent sea marked by claw-like whitecaps stretching across the entire foreground. The landscape includes contorted pines, and

shows no human or animal presence. This screen was utilized as a backdrop for the Chosŏn king to place him symbolically at the centre of the Daoist universe (Hongnam Kim, *Splendor and Simplicity, Korean Arts of the Eighteenth Century*, New York, 1993). Although this screen, and others like it, are dated after the Kongō-ji screens, they may be part of a tradition of 'sun and moon' screen painting that crossed national boundaries. Throughout the fifteenth century, for example, gold screens were sent from Japan to Korea and China. According to the *Daitō ni itaru goshinmotsu betsu fukubun*, dated 1541, the Suwo daimyo, Ōuchi Yoshitaka commissioned Kano Motonobu (1476-1559) to paint three gold screens as tributary gifts to the Jiajing emperor of China's Ming dynasty (1368-1644). One of the screens depicted the sun and moon, paulownia, peacocks and phoenix (Bettina Klein, 'Japanese Kinbyōbu: the Golden Leafed Folding Screens of the Muromachi Period [1333-1573]', *Artibus Asiae*, no. 45 [1984], pp. 5-33).

The conceptual framework into which the 'sun and moon' motif is integrated on the Kongō-ji screens and the screens' similarities to 'sun and moon' screens in China and Korea reinforces the notion that an established 'sun and moon' screen painting tradition may have been incorporated into the *yamato-e* Kongō-ji screens. This would mean the Kongō-ji screens are not only important within the context of *yamato-e* screen painting, but also stand as significant works in what may be one of the most enduring traditions of East Asian screen painting.

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