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INFORMATIVE AND ENTERTAINING

Japanese Picture Books

WITH ART BY BAIREI KŌNO

Introduction

A picture book is a set of pictures, each with little or no explanatory text, which have been bound together along with protective front and back covers. In Japan, picture books were published to inform and (or) entertain their purchasers. Three types of **informative** picture books were identification guides, models for artisans and models for art students. An identification guide depicted objects of a particular type (e.g., plants, animals, famous places or people) to help viewers identify and distinguish between these objects. Models for artisans included pictures of a variety of objects that would be suitable for decorating man-made products (e.g., household goods, clothing). Models for art students also included pictures of a wide range of objects but each picture was much larger in size. Students either copied or traced these pictures to help develop their artistic skill. **Entertaining** picture books included a series of emotive scenes drawn to express or trigger human emotions. Scenes could include depictions of human daily life, beautiful landscapes or plants and animals symbolically associated with a particular human emotion or trait. Some entertaining picture books were also intended to be informative. These books included pictures of emotive scenes drawn in a particular artistic style which were chosen by an editor or publisher to inform art-lovers about this style. These **entertaining-and-informative** picture books could illustrate either one or more than one artistic style.

Japanese artists typically drew pictures for either informative or entertaining picture books rather than both types. One exceptional artist, Bairei Kōno (born 1844 and died 1895), produced both types of picture books and was also well represented in entertaining-and-informative picture books published to provide examples of artistic style(s). Bairei favored plant and animal subjects for his art. This virtual exhibition presents eighteen examples of his plant-animal art, each taken from a different picture book in the Reader Collection of Japanese Art, to highlight Bairei's contribution to the art of the Japanese picture book. Each picture is accompanied by a brief description of the picture book from which it was taken and the eighteen picture books are arranged as follows: (1) identification guides, (2) models for artisans, (3) models for art students, (4) entertaining picture books and (5) entertaining-and-informative picture books.

Additional Reading

Hillier, Jack. 1987. *The Art of the Japanese Book*. Sotheby's Publications, London.

Identification Guide

Chigusa No Hana (Flowers of a Thousand Varieties) by Bairei Kōno, published in 1890-91.

This four volume picture book included pictures of two hundred flowering plants found in Japan. The name of each plant was given along with a brief description of its characteristics. Plant shape and color were both true-to-life so this book would have been a useful aid to plant identification.

Left – plum (*Prunus mume*)

Right – Goering's cymbidium orchid (*Cymbidium goeringii*)



Identification Guide

Sōka Hyakushu (One Hundred Kinds of Flowers) by Bairei Kōno, published in 1901-4.

This second, four volume picture book of flowering plants by Bairei depicted an additional one hundred plants found in Japan. The name of each plant was given but no additional description was provided, unlike his previous plant picture book. Plant shape and colors were drawn true-to-life as in the first plant picture book.

Left – Japanese flowering cherry
(*Prunus lannesiana*)

Right – Japanese kerria (*Kerria japonica*)



Identification Guide

Bairei Hyakuchō Gafu (Picture Album of One Hundred Birds by Bairei) by Bairei Kōno, published in 1881.

Bairei chose one hundred of the most common birds found in Japan for inclusion in this three volume picture book. Each bird was shown in a setting where it was most likely to be encountered (e.g., the blue-rock thrush on a rocky mountain slope and the brown-eared bulbul eating berries). The shape and size of birds were drawn accurately but color was reduced to shades of grey with reddish highlights. The bird's name was given but the absence of true-to-life color would have made it challenging for purchasers of this picture book to match every bird illustrated with its counterpart in the real world.

Left – blue rock-thrush
(*Monticola solitarius*) and false
snowparsley (*Tilingia ajanensis*)

Right – brown-eared bulbul (*Ixos
amaurotis*) and heavenly
bamboo (*Nandina domestica*)



Identification Guide

Bairei Hyakuchō Gafu Zokuhen (Picture Album of One Hundred Birds by Bairei, Sequel) by Bairei Kōno, published in 1884.

Bairei drew an additional one hundred birds in natural settings in this sequel to his 1881 picture book of birds. These birds were not as common as those depicted in the first book so the lack of true-to-life color would have been even more frustrating for purchasers who wished to match these birds with those seen in the real world.

Pair of jungle nightjars (*Caprimulgus indicus*) and a brown hawk-owl (*Ninox scutulata*) sitting on adjacent branches of a Japanese chestnut (*Castanea crenata*) tree



Models for Artisans

Kōgyo Zukushi (Sketches for Artisans) by Bairei Kōno, published in 1883.

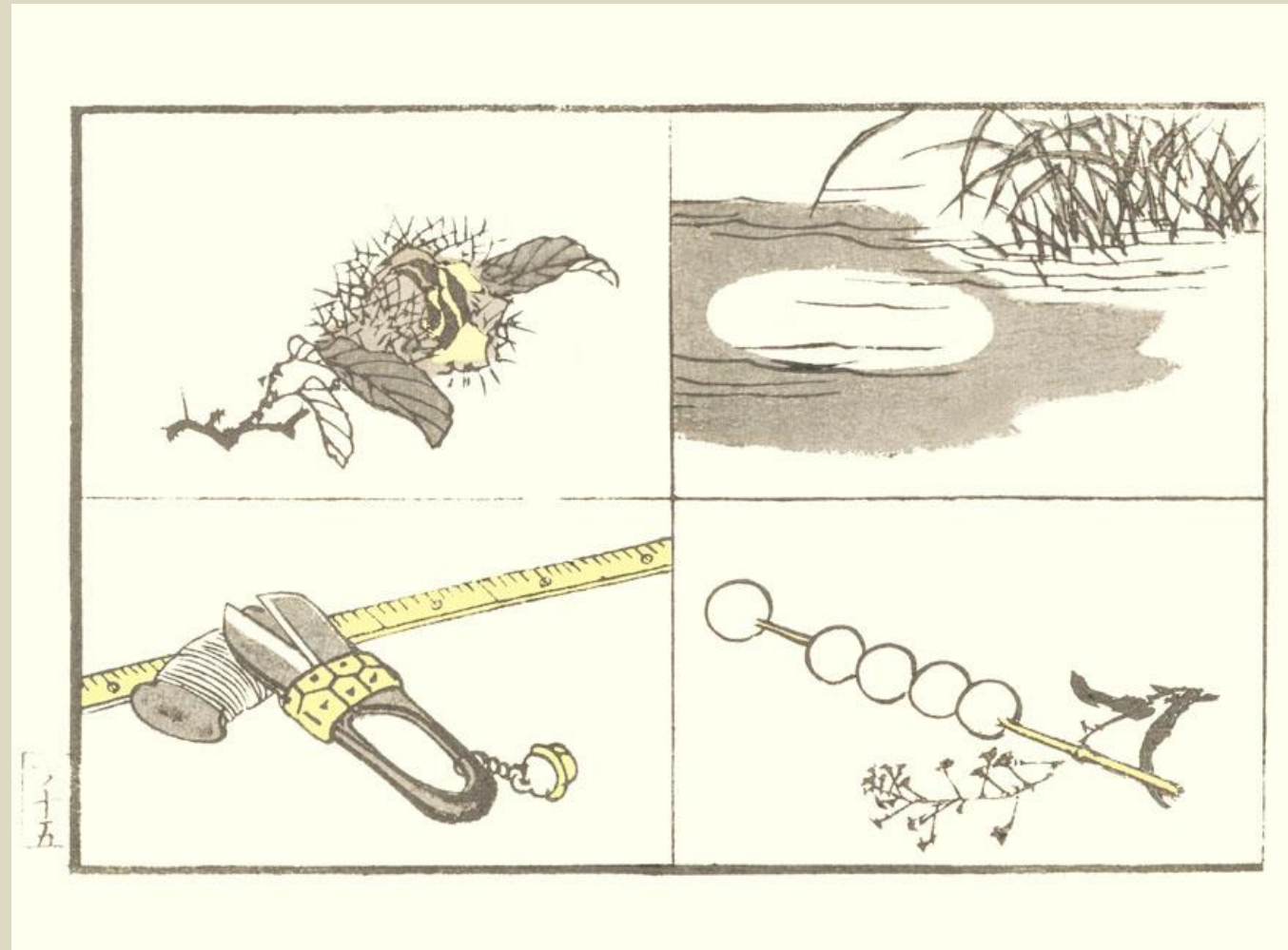
Close to four hundred drawings of objects and people were included in this five volume picture book. Each picture was relatively small and most pages included multiple pictures, as shown below. Pictures were only intended to give artisans ideas for decorating their products so the small size of pictures and the absence of true-to-life color are understandable.

Top left – Japanese chestnut
(*Castanea crenata*)

Bottom left – scissors, thread
and ruler

Top right – common reed
(*Phragmites australis*) in
water

Bottom right – rape (*Brassica
napus*) and a counting device



Models for Art Students

Bairei Gakan (Bairei's Drawing Methods) by Bairei Kōno, published in 1913.

Each of the seven volumes in this picture book included fifteen drawings of a diverse range of single objects. Each object occupied a double page. Pages were glued at the edges and bound in accordion style with a center fold which allowed students to copy the object by placing a piece of tracing paper on top of the double page.

Large-billed crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*)



Entertaining Picture Book

Bairei Gafu (Picture Album by Bairei) by Bairei Kōno, published in 1886.

Plants, birds and insects were featured in this three volume picture book which included a total of seventy-five pictures. The composition of each picture was much more complex than in the informative picture books described above. Each picture illustrated a scene from real life which would generate an emotional response by viewers. Fear is a feeling likely generated by sight of a praying mantis about to be attacked by a bunting in the picture below.

Praying mantis (Family Mantidae), chestnut-cheeked bunting (*Emberiza fucata*) and eggplant (*Solanum melongena*)

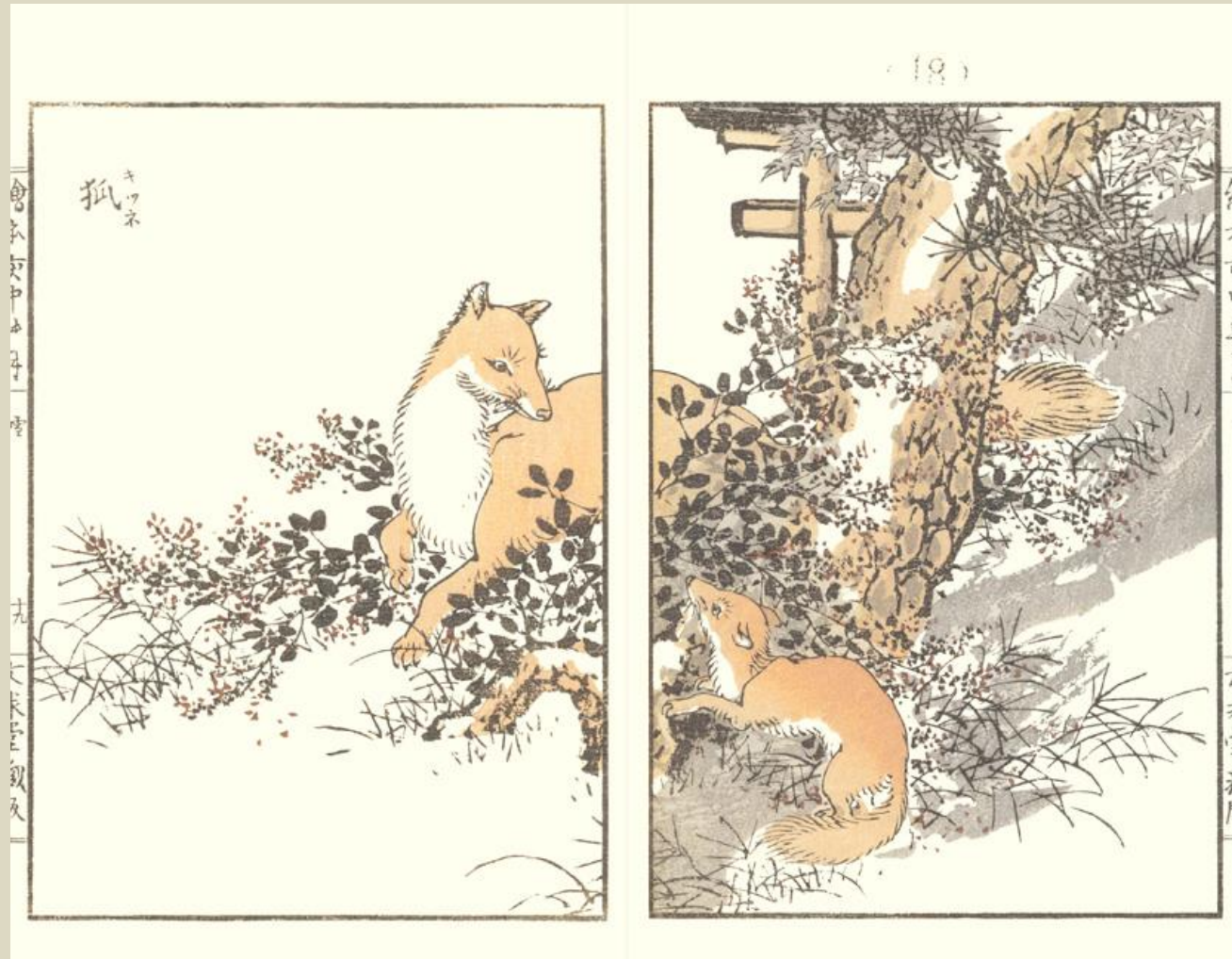


Entertaining Picture Book

Inaka no Tsuki (Moon on the Twentieth Night of the Month) by Bairei Kōno, published in 1889.

This single volume picture book with its intriguing title included twenty-five pictures of animal subjects placed in an appropriate setting. The fox picture below likely stimulated mixed feelings in viewers. In Japanese folklore the fox is a demon but this picture suggests parental concern for an offspring which is the opposite of demonic behavior.

Japanese red fox
(*Vulpes vulpes*),
lespedeza (*Lespedeza*
sp.) and a pine tree
(*Pinus* sp.)



Entertaining Picture Book

Bairei Kiku Hyakushu (One Hundred Varieties of Chrysanthemums by Bairei) by Bairei Kōno, published in 1891-6.

Bairei presents one hundred variations on the theme of chrysanthemum flowers in this three volume picture book. Chrysanthemum flowers have many symbolic associations in Japan, including power, longevity, delicacy, happiness, courage, honor and purity. Chrysanthemums dominated the foreground of each picture while the background showed either a natural or human-influenced landscape.

Florist's
chrysanthemum
(*Chrysanthemum
grandiflorum*)



Entertaining Picture Book

Bairei Kachō Gafu (Picture Album of Flowers and Birds by Bairei) by Bairei Kōno, published in 1883 and again in 1899.

Fifty pictures of flowers and birds associated symbolically with a particular season of the year were included in this two volume picture book. The example below would trigger pleasant thoughts of spring in the minds of Japanese viewers.

Peach (*Prunus persica*), violet (*Viola* sp.), field horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) and green pheasant (*Phasianus versicolor*)

Left – 1883 edition

Right – 1899 edition with less elaborate border, coloring and text



Entertaining and Informative Picture Book

Bairei Kachō Gafu (Picture Album of Flowers and Birds by Bairei) edited by Gessai Fukui, published in 1893.

This picture book is one of more than twenty edited by Gessai Fukui to provide art enthusiasts with examples of works by famous Japanese artists. Twelve examples of the flower-and-bird art of Bairei were included in this book.

Japanese creeper
(*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*)
and Daurian redstart
(*Phoenicurus auroreus*)



Entertaining and Informative Picture Book

Seikajō (Refined Pictures of Flowers and Birds) edited by Naosaburō Yamada, published in 1892.

Bairei was one of the twenty artists chosen for inclusion in this picture book which profiled notable Japanese artists whose work was influenced directly or indirectly by Ōkyo Maruyama. Ōkyo was the first Japanese artist to add elements of western realism to the prevailing style of Japanese painting then influenced by Chinese idealistic art.

Dandelion (*Taraxacum* sp),
field horsetail (*Equisetum*
arvense) and Eurasian tree
sparrow (*Passer montanus*)



Entertaining and Informative Picture Book

Bijutsu Sekai (World of Art) edited by Seitei Watanabe, published in 1892-5.

This picture book was appropriately titled because it included over four hundred pictures illustrating three centuries of Japanese art. A picture by Bairei was included in nine of the twenty-five volumes. Bairei's favorite subjects, plants and animals, were depicted in most of these pictures. A typical example is shown below.

Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*) and cicada (Family Cicadidae)



Entertaining and Informative Picture Book

Miyo no Hana (Flowers of the Imperial Reign) edited by Kōtarō Yamada, published in 1892-8.

This eight volume picture book included one hundred and thirty-five examples of a variety of seventeenth to nineteenth century Japanese art styles, similar to Bijutsu Sekai above. One of the two pictures by Bairei chosen for inclusion is shown below.

Showy Japanese lily (*Lilium speciosum*), Daruma pond frog (*Rana porosa*) and wasp (Family Vespidae)



Entertaining and Informative Picture Book

Kaiga Chō (Album of Pictures) edited by Kanpo Araki, published in 1892.

Two of the forty-four pictures in this two volume picture book were by Bairei. Other pictures illustrated the work of Bairei's contemporaries. In the picture below Bairei drew a spring scene featuring a plum tree and a Japanese bush-warbler which are the plant and bird used most often in Japanese art to represent this pleasant time of year.

Plum (*Prunus mume*) and
Japanese bush-warbler
(*Cettia diphone*)



Entertaining and Informative Picture Book

Meika Gafu (Picture Album by Celebrated Artists) edited by Naosaburō Yamada, published in 1913.

Three of Bairei's pictures were included in volumes five and six of this seven volume picture book. This picture book presented more than two hundred and fifty examples of the Japanese painting style prevalent at the time. One of Bairei's favorite flowers, the chrysanthemum, was the main subject of the picture shown below.

Florist's chrysanthemum
(*Chrysanthemum grandiflorum*) and land snail (Suborder Stylommatophora)



Entertaining and Informative Picture Book

Kokon Garin (Forest of Paintings For All Ages) edited by Jiroemon Ueki, published in 1891-2.

Viewers of the picture below likely sympathized with the great tit getting wet as it flew in the rain. This picture by Bairei was included in volume one of Kokon Garin which profiled the work of late nineteenth century Japanese artists in each of its four volumes.

Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*) and great tit (*Parus major*)



Entertaining and Informative Picture Book

Miyako No Nishiki (Brocade of the Capital) edited by Jihee Tanaka, published in 1891.

The great tit in this picture by Bairei is looking for insects which are hiding in the fruits, flowers and leaves of balsam-apple. Bairei was one of twenty-six late nineteenth century artists whose work was shown in this deluxe, one volume picture album.

Balsam-apple
(*Momordica charantia*)
and great tit (*Parus major*)



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