58th Founders' Memorial Lecture
"Netsuke and Their Role in Introducing Japan to the West"

GREETINGS

Your Excellencies, Cambridge alumni, ladies and gentlemen, friends new and old, I am delighted to be back in Cambridge, and, in particular, to be back in Girton as we celebrate her 150th year. I was last in Cambridge in 2009, during the 800th anniversary celebrations, and here at Girton for a special dinner. I am honoured and humbled to be asked to give the Founders' Memorial Lecture in this special year and I thank the Mistress of Girton, Professor Susan J. Smith, for having invited me to do so.

INTRODUCTION (reference to Cambridge, explanation of choice of subject for lecture)

I chose as my theme the subject of netsuke. As many of you know, my subjects at Cambridge were Chinese Studies for my Part I and Arch. and Anth. for my Part II. I was keen to study more about Shang bronzes under Professor Cheng Te-K'un, but he left for Hong Kong that year, and towards the end of my first term studying Chinese history, I went and discussed things with my Director of Studies, Dr Joan Oates. She gave me advice that I have passed on to others. She said that unless I needed it for a future career, I should just study something in which I was interested. She said that it was unlikely that I would ever again have the freedom to just decide to study something for pure interest, and she felt that I would get far more out of that than thinking that I had missed out on what I really wanted to study.

In fact, my Arch. and Anth. stood me in good stead as my father-in-law, Prince Mikasa, was an ancient historian and archaeologist, and he asked me to assist him personally at an important international conference over which he was presiding. I met my husband later, and I can assure you that it comes in very handy when you know your parents-in-law first!! I was able to help him entertain many archaeologists who visited, also able to follow his conversation.

Both he and my father encouraged me to keep up with some form of academic study, and, to cut a long story short, I again followed Dr Joan Oates's advice and did what I found interesting. I have been a Visiting Professor at the Osaka University of Arts for over 12 years and have used the subject of netsuke, from different angles, for my lectures. My doctoral thesis from the Osaka University of Arts is also on the subject of "netsuke".

Therefore, deciding that "netsuke" would be the subject of my lecture was not difficult. I was wondering which aspect of netsuke I would like to cover and it suddenly occurred to me that netsuke left Japan for reasons that I shall explain later, at around the time of the Meiji Restoration,

1868. We have been celebrating the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the Meiji Era in Japan. For the first five young ladies, the first students, the Girton Pioneers, it was the dawn of a new age, and for Japan, the Meiji was the dawn of a new age. I therefore thought that the subject of netsuke, and examining the role that they played in the west, would be fitting as the subject of my lecture in this, the 150th anniversary year of Girton.

I realise that some of you are probably very knowledgeable about netsuke, but for the sake of others who are not, we will start with an explanation of what they are. All the netsuke shown in this lecture are from the Takamado Collection.

I hope to be able to give you a sense of how netsuke played a role in introducing Japan to the world, by trying to get you to travel back in time to the days when "things Japanese" became a craze that swept through Europe, and to imagine these little "homeless" or "itinerant" netsuke in that setting.

Might you have been attracted to them? Might you have been a collector?

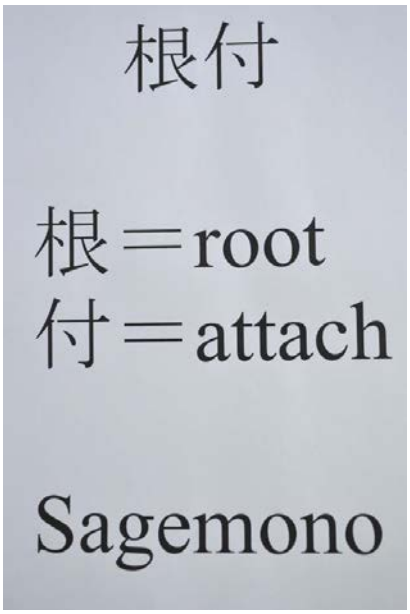
I will be showing you quite a few photos, despite being advised by friends to keep the numbers down, because netsuke tend to speak for themselves.

I hope that you will agree with me that netsuke served as goodwill ambassadors in introducing Japan to the West, and, all being well, that they will continue to do so.

I will finish by showing you a few contemporary netsuke from our collection at the end of the lecture.

So, without any further ado, let us start. This is how we write "netsuke".

根付 *The first part, "**根**—ne," is the character for "root," and "**付**—tsuke" is the character for "to attach".*



The name describes their function.

"Sagemono" means "suspended item" and is the term used to describe all things that hang from the netsuke

WHAT ARE NETSUKE

It is remarkable how many people have heard of netsuke since the publication of the Edmund de Waal book, “The Hare with Amber Eyes”. It so happens that I have never met him, but almost all the netsuke world has.

We invited him for this lecture, and he could not come as he seems at present to be lecturing at this very moment at another college in Cambridge. So near and yet so far! No worry, the day will certainly come!

His book does suggest that netsuke were to be found in almost all the larger houses in Europe, including the UK, Poland and Russia.

So, what are netsuke?

Well, first, we have the kimono, which is a T-shaped robe that is worn wrapped around the body and held in place by an *obi* sash or belt. In cultures around the world, when there is a belt, things are hung from them, and the Japanese were no exception.

Photo: Inrō *and netsuke worn*

Netsuke were toggles that anchored the *sagemono* literally “suspended items” to the *obi* sash or belt. This is how it looks when worn. It was at the height of its artistic finesse and popularity in the Edo and was, in the main, a gentleman’s fashion and utility item. The *obi* is the whitish sash in the

centre. The netsuke is pulled up behind the *obi* and catches at the top when the weight of the *sagemono* pulls downwards.

Please take special note of the way in which the set is suspended here.

Unique Development Of Netsuke In Japan

It is thought that "*netsuke*", as we know it, is a uniquely Japanese in the way it developed. However, having tools or decorative items suspended from the belt is not a custom or fashion particular to Japan.

Photo: Knives (Shōsōin Treasure House, Nara)

These examples are from the Imperial Household Agency Department of the Shōsōin Treasure House in Nara. I thought that because they are rarely displayed, you might enjoy seeing some photos of them. The first photo is of two little knives, that are suspended from the belt. They come from the Tenpyō era, 729 to 749, and they were probably brought back from China by the kentōshi, the envoys that went to the Tang court.

Here, the item which attaches the hanging item to the belt is not easily detachable from the belt.

The suspended item may be a decoration that remains attached or it may be a utility item, such as a knife, when the sheath remains attached to the belt. In the case of the Japanese netsuke, the netsuke and the *inrō* are detachable from the belt together.

I will show you one more example:

Photo: Fish shapes or uogata *(Shōsōin Treasure House, Nara)*

These are decorations in the shape of fish, or *uogata* **魚形**. in different coloured glass and crystal. They are from the same Tenpyō period.

Photo: Princess of the State of Chen

Here is a photograph from an archaeological study of a burial site in China. It is of the tomb of the Princess of the State of Chen, a princess of the Khitan peoples. Many nomadic tribes have a tradition of hanging things from their belts, even now.

The image shows the princess and her husband, Xiao Shaoju. We know the date of the burial as being 1018, and the princess at the time was only 18. You can see the many different items that are around the belt, some primarily decorative and others functional, including items very similar to those which I have just shown you, knives and fish ornaments.

You can also see that they were not easily removable from the belt.

In Japan, the "origin" of netsuke is at least two-fold:

1. One is purely practical, when natural objects like roots pieces of stag antler were attached to an item and the item was hung from the belt, much in the way the netsuke were used in the Edo, and as shown in the photograph of the person wearing one.
2. The other is fashionable.

Photo: Uneme, a female performer (Tokugawa Museum, Nagoya)

This is a picture of Uneme in a kabuki-zu painting in the Tokugawa Museum as she poses centre stage. She is a follower of Izumo-no-Okuni, who in 1603 (QEI) is said to have started a weird, exotic performance, wearing gaudy attire, that immediately became popular. This is going to date us, but it must have been the Flower People of Old Japan in the way it looked to people around them.

It seems that the female played the male role and the male played the female role in these performances, with the audience joining in the dancing at the end. It is said to be the origin of kabuki.

Photo: Uneme close-up

The *obi* at the time was narrow and not so stiff as the ones we wear now. In this image, you will how the narrow *obi* is wrapped around the waist and there is a ring on the very bottom. This image is a close-up, showing a *kinchaku* pouch and a gourd. This is from the Kabuki-zu, from the Tokugawa Museum.

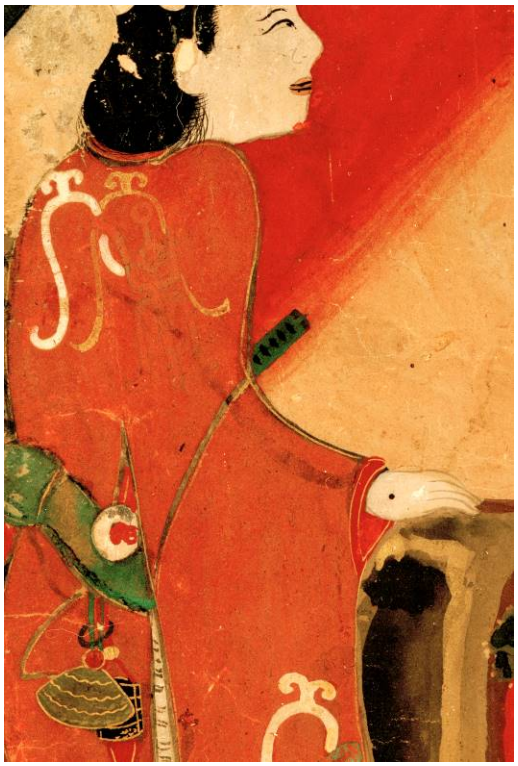


Photo: Thick ring netsuke with sagemono *(Royal Ontario Museum, Canada)*

However, with the appearance of the flat, wider *obi*, things begin to change. This image is of a screen that is at the Royal Ontario Museum. You can see that instead of having the *obi* passing through the ring, the netsuke is pulled up the back of the *obi* to rest on the top through the top. You will also notice that the ring has thickened, because then if you are not going to pass the cord

through the ring there is no need to have a big hole. Therefore, the hole gets smaller, the ring gets thicker, and the cord knot becomes larger so that it anchors effectively, stopping the suspended item from falling.

In any case, this very simple change in the style of usage, enabling the *sagemono* and netsuke to be easily removed as a set from the *obi*, is in one sense the origin of the concept of the netsuke as a stopper toggle that is uniquely Japanese. (THE UNIQUENESS being one of the reasons for its popularity in the West).

It is probably psychological that when there is greater visibility, people start becoming fashion conscious. Men used to buy expensive lighters in the days of smoking, and off hand, I would say that watches and wallets fall into this category. When netsuke became easily removable, they gained more visibility and therefore became fashion items as well. Some of the netsuke that was produced during the Edo period are truly works of art, and offer us glimpses into Edo society.

EXAMPLES OF SAGEMONO AND NETSUKE FROM THE EDO PERIOD

Photo: Inrō *with boars, signed Yoshimasa, with netsuke of boar*

In this photo, you see how the various parts were put together to form a functional set. The netsuke is the one on the top. The *inrō*, the medicine case, is the square container at the bottom. And the round bead in the middle is the *ojime*, which is used to open or close the *inrō*. I chose it because we are now both in the solar and lunar calendars, in the Year of the Boar, or if Chinese, the Year of the Pig.

Photo: Tobacco container of different fabrics with glass or crystal netsuke

This photo shows a rather elegant patchwork silk tobacco container. There is a thin strip of leather sewn around the edges and the fittings are fine metalwork.

Photo: Kiseruzutsu *or pipe-container and tobacco pouch*

Here, the tobacco pouch is made of leather and a pipe-container is attached. Netsuke were sometimes used in suspending both the container and the tobacco pouch, but it became the fashion to simply insert the pipe-container into the obi with the tobacco pouch hanging.

You will see from these images that the cords are of paramount importance because **without** the cords, you would not be able to hang anything.

Therefore, it follows that there must be cord channels in the *inrō* or a place to attach the cords for any *sagemono*, and the cords must somehow be secured to the netsuke at the other end.

Most netsuke have cord holes called *himotōshi*, but in some cases the design of the netsuke allows for the cords to be passed through some part of the netsuke. It could be between the legs or in

between the body and arm, and we sometimes refer to these as natural *himotōsh*. If there are no cord holes, they are miniatures and not netsuke.

Next, I would like to show you some depictions of netsuke and *sagemono* showing how they are worn. Being a utility item makes netsuke difficult to research academically and so it is customary to search for screens and other paintings that may be accurately dated which show them being worn. Here are some examples. You will see that they are worn across the whole spectrum of male society.

Photo: Yūrakuzu Byōbu *or* Sououji Byōbu *(Tokugawa Museum, Nagoya)*

This screen dates from the 17th century and in it are depicted" in front of the "several people wearing netsuke and *sagemono*. I am going to show you a close-up of the person wearing white dancing in the centre to the lower left.

Photo: Close-up of above photo

There is an *inrō* and a pouch suspended from the *obi* belt.

Photo: Card Game or Karuta-asobi *(Ritsumeikan Art Research Center, Kyoto)*

Here you can see a young man in black, probably the son of a wealthy merchant, sitting upright to the left. This painting is known to date from the early part of 17th century.

Photo: Close-up of above photo

The close-up shows that the netsuke, which is anchoring an *inrō* and a pouch to the *obi*, is carved into a cloud-like shape. As we know that the date of the painting, we can also say that netsuke were carved into shapes from at least the early part of the 17th century.

Photo: Schooling Horses or Chōba-zu *(Daigoji Temple, Kyoto)*

This screen shows sons of the samurai classes schooling horses.

Photo: Close-up of above photo

And this is a close-up. I know that you cannot see the netsuke, but from the hanging *inrō* and pouch, one knows that there must be something anchoring them to the *obi*.

From the three photos,

MEIJI ERA

The Role of *OYATOI-GAIKOKUJIN* (hired foreign advisors) and ART DEALERS. With the Meiji Restoration in 1868, life in Japan changed dramatically. We opened our ports, and our minds, to the West. We chose to modernize by importing a western lifestyle that included wearing western forms of dress. For netsuke, this conversion to western forms of dress had the greatest impact, as they

suddenly lost their raison d'être. As a fashionable utility item suspending *sagemono* from the obi, their existence was dependent on the kimono.

The opening-up of Japan, which had excluded most foreigners until then, also had a tremendous impact in the West. Many exciting hitherto unseen art items come out of Japan. The government actively promoted Japan to the West, trying to show her in the best light.

The year before the Meiji Reformation, the government exhibited a Japanese pavilion at the Expo in Paris, and showed Japanese artwork, including a small number of netsuke, at the Expo in Paris. They took part again in the Expo in Vienna in 1873, this time including forty netsuke.

We invited many Westerners to Japan to help us westernise and of these *oyatoi-gaikokujin* (literally: "employed foreigners"), several, including Edward Sylvester Morse and Ernest Francisco Fenollosa and Williams Sturgis Bigelow, collected netsuke.

Albert Brockhaus (1855–1921), a German, wrote in his book on netsuke, published in 1905 (Netsuke: Versuch einer Geshichte der Japanischen Schnitzkunst or An attempt at a history of Japanese carved art).

> *"The Paris Japan dealer Philippe Sichel had already travelled in 1874, a few years after the opening of Japan—the land, and all its beauty—in order to acquire everything that seemed to him to be art objects for commercial sale. He succeeded in bringing together an extremely interesting collection of over 5000 works"*

Philippe, and his brother August, Sichel sold Japanese art in Paris to clients who travelled from all over Europe to buy things Japanese.

Sasaki Chūjirō also writes in his *Netsuke of Japan*: (It is a long quotation..)

> *"Since the beginning of the Meiji era, when the traffic between Japan and foreign countries began to increase, the netsuke native to Japan were widely admired in foreign countries because the netsuke, which are small but very artistic and exquisite, are rarely obtained in their own countries. Therefore, netsuke became very popular among those who were interested in appreciating and collecting them. Those who visited Japan wanted to bring back the decorative netsuke and to display them as souvenirs of Japan. They were likely to esteem them highly and to set a high value on them as ornaments in the drawing room. And in this manner the Japanese netsuke became well known to foreigners, and the term "netsuke" was in circulation among several nations in the West, and at last netsuke became a proper name and merited its own entry in foreign dictionaries. As a consequence, the netsuke which were widely publicised in the West became a kind of noted Japanese object."*

In around 1892 Iwasaki Yanosuke and his son Koyata, who belonged to the family that founded Mitsubishi, began to collect Japanese antiques in order to prevent the exodus of Japanese arts and cultural assets overseas, including netsuke and *inrō.* They are kept in the Seikadō Bunko Art Museum in Setagaya Ward, Tokyo.

Even in the 1920s and 1930s, the exodus of netsuke overseas continued and Baron Gō Seinosuke began to collect netsuke with the purpose of donating them to the Tokyo National Museum.

However, the netsuke collected by the Japanese were nothing in comparison to the amazing numbers that went into private collections in the West.

Each of these netsuke presented its owner with a tantalizing invitation to discover more about it. What was the material used, what was the figure depicted, what was it doing, what were the implications of the image?

It was a gateway into Japanese mythology, Japanese folklore, Japanese lifestyles, even into Japanese interpretation of Chinese legends and mythical creatures.

Some museums put together big collections, by collecting and through bequests.

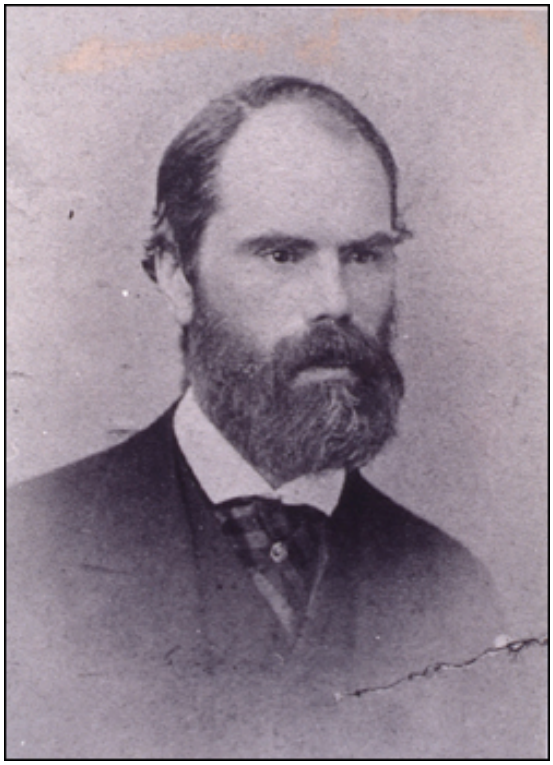


Photo: Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks

For instance, in the British Museum, you will find the collection of Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks.

Photo: Tall Figures

Photo: Interior of Musée d'Ennery, Paris

This photo is of the d'Ennery Museum in Paris, but shows the sheer numbers and scale of "Japanese things" that might have been collected by a wealthy family. Madame d'Ennery used to hold salons in this house for her husband.

So having explained briefly the historical background, I am now going to show you some netsuke images, and I believe that in seeing them you will be convinced that netsuke played a role in introducing Japan to the West.

NETSUKE IMAGES

My late husband always used to refer to collecting netsuke as a form of disease. And the disease, unfortunately, happened to have been transmitted by me to him. I started collecting almost immediately after I graduated.

The Takamado Collection is primarily a contemporary collection, but my late husband and I felt that as members of the Imperial Family, we should aim to have a collection that showed the overall history of netsuke. My late husband used the collection as an educational tool to encourage people to understand this traditional Japanese art form. He also felt that he should support contemporary netsuke carvers.

Today, we are talking about the netsuke that travelled abroad in the Meiji, and many of the netsuke that I am about to show you have been purchased from collections in the West, so some of them will have been amongst those netsuke that played a role in introducing Japan to the west. It may sound a little romantic, but I always appreciate them just that little bit more, when I think that they have contributed in fostering understanding.

Some Basic Rules In Shape - Types Of Netsuke

Netsuke are made to be worn.

We do not want projections on them that are likely to break. We also don't want them to damage our *obi*s or our kimonos. The concept is to make them as round as possible, and, because they are visible 360 degrees, they must be carved or worked all the way around.

Photo: Basic manjū *netsuke*

First some round netsuke. Called *manjū* netsuke (round dumplings), this is the most practical shape for netsuke. This one is a basic shape, developed from the ROM ring that you saw earlier. Banko

stoneware from near Yokkaichi city in Mie Prefecture, depicting auspicious cranes.

Photo: Carved manjū *netsuke*

The next image shows another type of *manjū* netsuke. The subject matter is Su Shih, the famous statesman, writer, poet, artist, calligrapher of the Song Dynasty. This is made from imported wood valuable at the time, most probably rosewood. It measures 4.7 centimetres in diameter and dates from around the middle of the 18th century.

Photo: Kagamibuta *netsuke*

The next image is of a type of netsuke we call *kagamibuta* netsuke. "Kagami" means "mirror," and "futa" means "lid", and the metal plate is a mirror-like lid to the bottom bowl. The design on the lid shows the bottom of the Raku tea bowl, the Raku-*jawan*. You will see the signature for Raku on the side. The man who made it is a very famous master craftsman for metalwork, called Kano Natsuo. Natsuo was the person who made the sword fittings for the Meiji emperor. He also did work for the Osaka Mint Bureau. The next image shows the bottom bowl which is carved out of lignum vitae. The person who did the *maki-e* is a man called Kawakami Kangetsu.

Photo: Inside the kagamibuta *netsuke*

In the next image, you can see on the side the signature of Natsuo. And, you can also see how the cord is attached. The lid is fitted with a ring or eyelet in the centre, and there is a corresponding hole in the centre of the bowl. The weight of the *sagemono* will pull the lid into place. There is a theory that the lid might have developed as a way of trying to cover or hide the knot. Another reason for the development of the metal lid is that the Edo period was very peaceful, many samurai had become peasants and there was little demand for swords. The metal workers who made decorative fittings for *katana* swords were no longer in demand, and therefore they used their skills to make something else.

Photo: Gōsu-gata *netsuke (container-type* manjū *netsuke)*

This is another type. Many people call them *manjū* netsuke. I call them "gōsu-gata" netsuke. "Gō" means to match and indicates that the container is in two parts, and we use the term for lidded boxes and containers. This one is a lacquerware netsuke, embellished with *maki-e* by Komakyūhaku. This type of very sophisticated netsuke was probably worn with very sophisticated *inrō*, and used when the nobility went to the palace. It was part of the required attire in the presence of the shogun.

Photo: Sukashibori *or* Ryūsa *netsuke*

The next one image is of an open-work netsuke. It's called *Ryūsa* netsuke, but I prefer to call it *sukashibori* (open-work) netsuke. This is made by Ozaki Kokusai, the father of Ozaki Kōyō, the writer. In order to do this type of carving, the artist needs to make different tools to cover the needs of whatever design of netsuke he is carving. The material is ivory, and I am deliberately showing you the back so that you can see the attachment for the cord and the signature. The design is chrysanthemum and water.

Photo: Walnut katabori *netsuke of quail*

Next, we have examples of netsuke that are carved in the round. We call them *katabori*-netsuke, and they are the most popular type of all the netsuke. It may be made of any type of material: wood, tusk, antler, but as netsuke sit on top of the obi, they must be worked all round. The material for this one is a walnut! Just the right size and shape for a netsuke! The artist is Hidari Ichizan from Aizu. It is a 19th century piece.

Photo: Ivory katabori *netsuke of zodiac animals*

This next one is an older piece from the 18th century by Izumiya Tomotada. Zodiac animals were popular as a design. People wore their own zodiac animal or the zodiac animal that was six animals away. They believed they were protected by having an animal at the other end of the zodiac spectrum. You will see that it is very worn and rounded in some areas. The fine hair work has disappeared in places, the horn and the nose are very shiny, and this patina results from years of treasured usage.

Photo: Black Raku-ware netsuke of eggplant

This next image shows a Raku-ware in black, made by Raku Kichizaemon, during his middle stage 1854-1871, when he used the name of Keinyū it depicts an eggplant. We know the dates from the seal that he uses on the back. As a matter of interest, the present head of the Raku family says that he has seen a green and yellow boat in the British Museum with the same seal.

Photo: Karakuri *or trick netsuke in the shape of a peach*

The next one is a *karakuri* or trick netsuke. The subject is Xi Wangmu or *Seiōbo* in Japanese, the Great Queen Mother of the West. It is a peach made of Bombay blackwood. *Seiōbo* is often depicted with a peach, because she was said to have a special orchard of peach trees. These peaches ripened every 3,000 years and gave longevity and immortality. The next picture shows how the netsuke opens to show the Queen Mother of the West with her retinue of female goddesses. Her palace is on Mount Kunlun. The person who carved this is a man called Ueshima Kagetoshi. He worked in Kyoto and he excelled in these fine-detailed scenery carvings.

Photo: Inside is the goddess with her retinue – karakuri *or trick netsuke*

The next image is a tiger, also a zodiac animal, with a cub. It has that nice motherly look, and so I believe it to be a tigress and cub. The artist is Tanaka Minkō. It is from the 18th century. He is a carver from Tsu near Ise in Mie Prefecture. He is famous for his renditions of tigers. The eyes are inlaid with brass and with a steel piece in the center. There are red lines around the eyes, the

tongue, the ridges of the teeth, and the paws are very, very full and rounded as they should be, very powerful. Because tigers are not indigenous to Japan you will find that not only with netsuke but in paintings as well, there are depictions of tigers with flat heads and big eyes, and this is probably because they were looking at imported skins of tigers and leopards.

Photo: Minkō – tigress and cub

You will see that the cub has spots. There again, perhaps the Japanese were referring to the skins of tigers and leopards and believing that were male and female or perhaps, as in the case of deer and boars, that when they were young, they had different patterns to the adult.

Photo: Close-up of the tigress and cub

ALL TYPES, ALL ENCOMPASSING, EVERYTHING AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Having seen some netsuke, I think that you would agree that they are wide-ranging in material and in subject matter. Being a functional item, the rule of thumb would have to be that they function properly. So far as one complies with this, then there is total freedom of creativity. (And strangely enough, sometimes there is greater freedom to be gained because of a few simple restrictions, such a shape and size. The same applies in many of our traditional martial arts, in dance and in ikebana, where there is a freedom that comes as a result of the restriction).

For the collector, that means that one can be surrounded by all forms of Japanese traditional craftsmen skills, different mythological tales, legends, images of animals, vegetables, plants, depiction of dancing, acting, daily life, etc. That sense of adventure into lands and customs unknown must have been so exotic in those days, because I know that all collectors even now feel that there is something charming and romantic about them. Smitten, we are, to say the least.

WOMEN AND NETSUKE PLUS SAGEMONO

I know that we have said that this is for men and so it is. Yes, it did start with women performers, but no, it is primarily for men. Practically the female obi being wider makes it difficult to pass the netsuke through the back.

But, yes, women are very innovative, so of course we do find examples of women using netsuke. Especially in the case of the tobacco pouches and the pipe-holder, the *kiseruzutsu*, because they were inserted from the top.

Photo: Print showing women with pipe and tobacco pouch (Seikadō Bunko Museum)

Cherry Blossom Viewing at Asukayama by Katsukawa Shunchō **勝川春潮** Late Edo

Photo: Geisha from Asakusa, Tokyo dancing

And recent photos of Geisha in Asakusa wearing them.

Photo: Close-up geisha with inrō *and netsuke*

They have rather cleverly pulled the netsuke through the soft cloth that they wrap around the top of the obi to hide the cushion that holds the obi up.

THE CONTRIBUTION MADE BY THE WEST T0 THE STUDY OF NETSUKE

People often lament about the fact that netsuke, together with other “things Japanese,” were taken out of Japan. They call it “draining,” and they complain about the “draining” of Japanese artwork. There are netsuke in museums and collections throughout the world, but we do not have many in Japan. However, if we look at this from a different perspective, the fact that they left Japan meant that they were saved for future generations. The word “drain” is not appropriate.
Not only that, the enthusiasm led to compilations that we use even today.

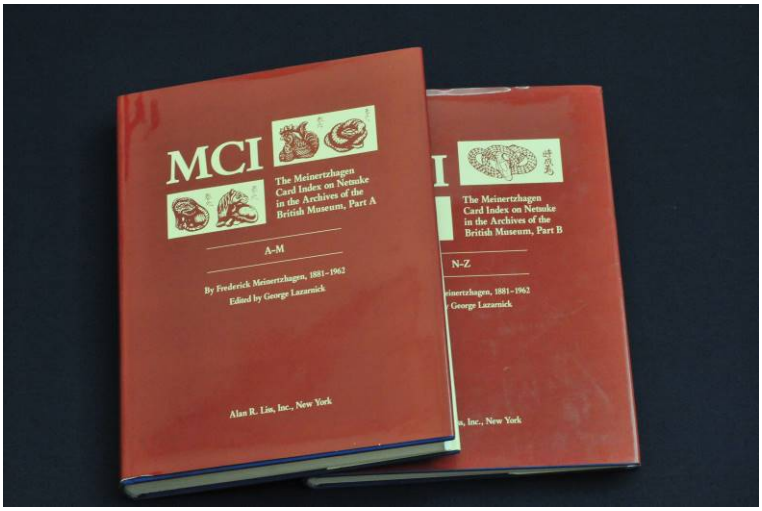


Photo: Meinertzhagen Card Index of Netsuke in the British Museum

Frederick Meinertzhagen (1881-1962) recorded every netsuke that he collected and sold. Collector and dealer.

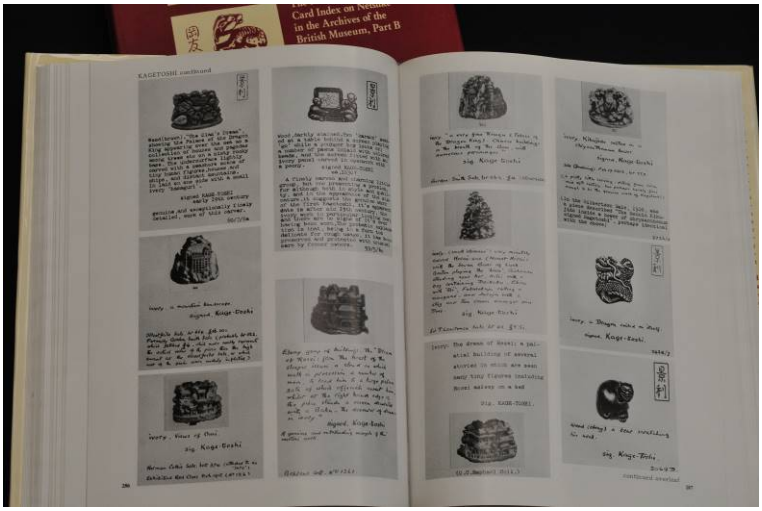


Photo: Inside one of the books

The Cards he kept are now in the archives of the British Museum and Charles Lazarnick then compiled them into a two-volume book.

This compilation surely counts as a Labour of Love!

TAKAMADO COLLECTION IN THE FUTURE

It was my late husband's wish that the Takamado collection be used as an educational tool. Therefore, I have been trying to continue what the netsuke did in the 19th century, which is to introduce Japan to the West, in introducing Japan to the Japanese!

I have held many exhibitions of the collection throughout Japan, have donated half the original collection (by original, I mean the collection that my husband and I put together until his passing in 2002) to the Tokyo National Museum, and the remainder of this original collection will be donated to them in the next couple of years. I still have a large enough collection to carry on with exhibitions around Japan.

And I have attempted to photograph netsuke in different settings in a series called "Travelling Netsuke".

Travelling Netsuke

In the days of old, people wore netsuke and moved around with them, so netsuke got to travel. Nowadays collectors will have them either in boxes or on the shelf, and netsuke never get to see the world. So, I decided to take netsuke with me to various places and then I started to take photographs of them in different settings. People usually find this very strange and ask me what I am doing, which gives me the chance to introduce netsuke to them.

Photos of Travelling Netsuke (Japanese artists' names, surname first):

Photo: The Lucky Mouse, by Cornel Schreider taken in Highgrove House

Photo: The Dutch Wigmaster, by the late Michael Birch, taken by a canal in Amsterdam, Netherlands

Photo: Chesspieces, by Mukaida Yoka taken at the Royal Palace, Stockholm

Photo: Shiba-Inu by Hitomi Koma taken in a garden in Ireland

Photo: Nocturne, Mukaida Yoka, taken in Beethoven's House in Bonn, on top of the piano console that he played. (With the permission of the person in charge and without using flash!)

Photo: Kasugaryūjin (Dragon God of Kasuga), the one to the right, by Morikawa Toen and to the left, Ōta Yoshio. Both worked for the shrine, but separated by time. Morikawa Toen lived from 1820-1894, and Ōta Yoshio is contemporary, still working. Taken together in Kasuga Shrine, Nara, with their famous lanterns lit.

Photo: Ghost, by Komada Ryūshi, taken in the house of Lafcadio Hearn, in Matsue, Shimane. The gentleman standing next to it is the grandson of Lafcadio Hearn who was famous for a series of ghost stories that he wrote. Lafcadio Hearn was an Irishman of Greek descent and had the Japanese name of Koizumi Yakumo.

Lastly,

Photo: Blakiston Fish-owl, by Kitazawa Izumi, a ceramic netsuke, taken in a tree in Hokkaido. These owls were considered gods by the Ainu people that lived by the rivers in Hokkaido, a natural habitat for these owls. Now, these owls are an endangered species.

Perspective

People sometimes lament over something that has happened. (Crying over spilt milk or Murphy's law…). They lament the fact that netsuke, together with other "things Japanese," were taken out of Japan.

Now, one of the things that Cambridge taught me was to always look at things from different angles.

Looking at this owl, you would think that this was real, That is because there is nothing next to it to indicate its size, and we are seeing it “out of perspective”.

Put into context, I feel that it was not a “draining of netsuke”, but that their mass export from Japan was what saved them. They were saved from being completely forgotten, discarded perhaps, by the foreign interest that occurred after their arrival in the West.

The interest in “things Japanese” meant that the netsuke had the chance to act as ambassadors for their country.

In concluding, please allow me to show you three last images.

Photo: The Aged Monkey by Takamura Kōun *(Tokyo National Museum)*

First, the very well-known, *The Aged Monkey* by Takamura Kōun. It’s in the Tokyo National Museum. It stands at around 105 centimetres. It was exhibited at the Expo in Chicago of 1893.

Photo: The Aged Monkey by Mori Tetsurō

And here, we have *The Aged Monkey*, by Mori Tetsurō, a contemporary netsuke artist. It looks just as powerful and big, but is only 4.0 centimetres.

Photo: Mori Tetsuro monkey hand held

You can only see the difference when it is set against my hand. A lesson in perspective, indeed.

Netsuke, are tiny, but they invite you to understand Japanese history, culture, and society, at the same time Chinese history, and literature. The have played a very big role in bridging the East and West, and they have played with great finesse a diplomatic role as goodwill ambassadors for Japan.

There is a line in the **Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon. Almost a diary written in 990s by a court lady. In it she writes about things that are to charming and adorable, and she finishes it by saying:**

> *“なにもなにも、ちひさきものはみなうつくし。　枕草子”*
>
> **“…not only lotus leaves, but little hollyhock flowers, and indeed all small things, are most adorable.”**

I consider myself lucky to be the custodian or keeper of this collection and I fully intend to release the antique netsuke so that others will be able to enjoy them as much as I did.

In the words of Edmond de Goncourt (1822–96):

> *"My will is that my drawings, my stamps, my knick-knacks, my books, and at last my art works, which have given me joy during my life, will not be placed in the cold tomb of a museum to be regarded blindly by passers-by, and I ask that they are all divided under the blow of the auctioneer's hammer and that the joy that I accrued in the acquisition of each of them may be given to others in the inheritance of my taste."*

I would like to thank Professor Susan J. Smith and Girton College for having given me this opportunity to talk about netsuke to you, and I do hope that in the process, I have managed to introduce a little bit of Japan to you all as well. Thank you.