

JAPANESE PROVERBS IN THE TRADITIONAL ART COMPARED TO PIETER
BRUEGEL THE ELDER'S *NETHERLANDISH PROVERBS* (1559)

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Abstract

People in the sixteenth century in Northern Europe had great passion for proverbs. After Erasmus' *Adagiorum Collectanea* was published in 1500 in Paris, many intellectuals were eager to collect and edit proverb books in their own languages. Almost at the same time, proverbs were carved in misericords in churches, and Frans Hogenberg's print, *Die Blav Hvick* (1559) inspired his contemporary print publishers to produce numerous adapted versions of his proverb print.

During the Edo period (1600-1867) in Japan the folk had an increasing interest in proverbs, which resulted in the publication of illustrated proverb books as tools to educate the middle class. In the meantime various proverb playing cards with accompanying texts and images were printed to teach children how to read and write the alphabet and to let them enjoy the humorous images. Unlike in Europe, numerous proverbial and alphabetical visualizations were produced in Japan on all kinds of items in parallel with proverb books. It is clear that the Japanese folk considered visualized proverbs as both decorative and an amusing source of popular wisdom.

This study points out that many old Flemish and Japanese proverbs are surprisingly similar when it comes to moral values, behavior and view of life, even though the phrasing of the proverbs may vary.

However, there are also important differences. Bruegel's painting and other artists' proverb prints instruct viewers on how to live honestly, guard against deceit, be wise and avoid foolish behavior. In contrast, most traditional Japanese representations of proverbs are less concerned with moral lessons; instead, they provide entertainment and provoke laughter with at times surprising satire.

Key-words: Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Frans Hogenberg, Erasmus, Donaes Idinau (Jan David), Anna Bijns, Flemish proverbs, The Netherlandish Proverbs, "Blue Cloak," Sebastiaan Vrancks, Japanese proverbs, Kuwagata Keisai, Santo Kyoden, Toba School, Kawanabe Kyōsai.

I. The Sixteenth Century in the Netherlands as the Golden Age of Proverbs

I will first discuss how proverb publications as well as visualized proverbs became popular in Bruegel's time. Then I'll provide background on proverb publications and visualized publications in Japan.

The rise in popularity of proverbs began before Bruegel's time with the publication of 818 proverbs in Erasmus's *Adagiorum Collectanea*. This work was the most important publication of proverbs, and went through several editions until, at the time of Erasmus's death in 1536, it had become a collection of 4251 proverbs. Erasmus' work inspired intellectuals all over Europe to translate his book and also to compile vernacular proverbs in their own languages. Symon Andriessoon's book, *Netherlandish Adagies or Proverb book*, dated in 1550 was one

noteworthy publication. As the author wrote about the meaning of proverbs, his book helps us understand interpretations of proverbs at that time.

In parallel, visualized proverbs became very popular from the first half of the sixteenth century, especially in paintings, engravings and sculptures. This is why I call the sixteenth century "The Golden Age of Proverbs." Bruegel's *Netherlandish Proverbs* (1559) represents the apex of the Golden Age for the pictorial world just as Erasmus's *Adagiorum* stands at the apex of written proverb works.

II. Bruegel, his contemporaries, and artists of later generations

There was no work in European painting before and after Bruegel comparable to his *Netherlandish Proverbs* (Fig.1). This painting illustrates the universal world of human behavior found in every society: folly, failure, deception, abuse and weakness. But proverbs



Fig.1. Bruegel, *Netherlandish Proverbs*, 1559, oil, Staatliche Museen, Gemälde Galerie, Berlin

do not only critique these human vices; they also offer comments on moral lesson, folk wisdom, daily advice and humor.

In an anonymous Flemish engraving dated the second half of the 16th century (Lebeer, 1939-40, p.174) Bruegel's intention is clearly explained. It reads, "Look here how the world is entirely wrong / I mean the proverbs from which man is taught / How things are going in the world / With people from all classes" ("Siet hier de weirelt gansch verkeert / Ick mejjne

spreucken daer men leert. / Hoe t' inde weirelt omme gaet / Bij 't volck van alderhande state"). Here are a few representative examples of the visualized proverbs created before and after Bruegel's *Netherlandsich Proverbs*.



Fig.2. *Proverbs*, the end of 15th century, tapestry, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

The fragmental tapestry in Boston with 9 proverbs (Fig.2) is one of the earliest proverbial images, dated from the end of the 15th century. Although the place of manufacture is still under discussion, it was probably produced in the Southern Netherlands, because the proverb on the left corner of the foreground represents a typical Flemish proverb for an unfaithful wife, "She hangs a blue cloak over her husband," which I shall discuss later.



Fig.3. Albrecht Gelmers, Choir Stalls, 1532-48, Sint-Katherinakerk, Hoogstraten

Carved proverbs in misericords (sculptures in choir stalls) are remarkable, and they are seen in such cities as Walcour, Hoogstraten, Diest, Aarschot in Belgium, and also Amsterdam, Kempen and Bolsward in the Netherlands. One of the most important choir stalls belong to the misericords (1532-48) by Albrecht Gelmers in Sint-Katherinakerk in Hoogstraten (Fig.3) where nine chairs among 54 misericords are identified with the proverbs in Bruegel's painting, such as "One shears sheep, the other pig" (One profits, the other doesn't). It is known that Bruegel's master, Pieter Coecke van Aelst, designed the stained glass of this church. Thus it is no wonder that Bruegel visited there as his assistant and enjoyed seeing a number of humorous proverb misericords.

The less famous but also interesting choir stalls related to Bruegel's painting are those in Saint-Materne (c.1510) in Walcour, with proverbs such as "One has to squirm if he wants to get through the world." The most important proverb image printed before Bruegel's work is *Blauw Huyck* (Blue Cloak) by Frans Hogenberg (Fig.4), which was probably produced one year before *Netherlandish Proverbs*.



The inscription written at the top reads: "This is generally called the Blue Cloak, but would be more appropriate to be called the world's follies." (DIE BLAV HVICKE IS DIT MEEST GHENAEMT MAER DES WEERELTS ABVISEN HË BETER BETAEMPT). Among 43 proverbs in this etching and engraving are 32 also found in *Bruegel's painting*.

Fig.4. Frans Hogenberg, *Blue Cloak*, c.1558, engraving and etching

At that time people called proverb prints or paintings "Blue Cloak".

After Hogenberg's proverb print, many adapted and enlarged "Blue Cloak" prints appeared in the Antwerp print market. For example, there are those by Johannes van Doetecum, Theodor Galle, Johannes Galle and several anonymous engravers mentioned in Lebeer (1939-1940). The early 17th century print by Franciscus van Hoeye is also titled "Blue Cloak". In this print each figure has a written Dutch proverb and compared to Hogenberg's 43 proverb images, there are 69. Sebastiaan Vranck's proverb painting dated around 1630 (Royal Museums of

Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels) depicts 202 proverbs (Grauls, 1960) and includes 53 of Bruegel's proverbs. The influence of the *Blue Cloak* tradition can be seen in the Vrancx's painting, especially in the inscription on a signboard next to the big birdcage. It reads, "Proverbs of the World's Follies which one names 'The Blue Cloak'."

Another example of the tendency in this period to refer to proverb prints or paintings as "Blue Cloak" can be seen in a letter by Willem Forchondt, the 17th century Antwerp art dealer, to his son (Dec. 6, 1669): "Recently I had an occasion to see two pieces by Bruegel the Elder, one is *Blue Cloak* and the other one is the hay field where Peasants are going to the market which is a beautiful painting I have never seen before."

III. The Edo period as the Golden Age of Proverbs



Fig.5. Kuwagata Keisai, *Gengaen*, detail, 1808, woodcut

During the Edo period (1600-1867) in Japan, both intellectuals and folk became very fond of proverbs. The great vogue for proverbs encouraged editors to publish illustrated proverb books for the amusement of the middle class. *Gengaen*, called *The Image Garden of Proverbs* by Kuwagata Keisai of 1808, private edition, is one of the best examples of these illustrated proverb books. Keisai also published for public *Keisai's Sketchy Image Garden of Proverbs* in the same year. It includes 150 proverbs (Fig.5). A later example is this 6.5 meter long picture scroll with 48 proverbs by Ryuko Takahisa (died in 1858) which accompany the 48 letters in the Japanese alphabet. Kawanabe Kyōsai is a painter who is well-known for his caricatures of folk morality using proverbs in his *Kyōsai's Hundred Illustrations* published before 1868. Masamizu Tokita, present proverb scholar and the biggest collector of visualized proverbs, assumes that 300 or 400 genres of proverbial decoration were produced on all kinds

of items, such as the wooden carvings in the frieze of a Shinto temple's gate depicting "Taking a horse from a gourd" (an incredible miracle occurs), sword-guards, clothing ornaments, combs, helmets, tea ceremony utensils, signboards, and interior decorations over sliding doors. It seems that Japanese folk viewed these visualized proverbs as decorations with the added value of popular wisdom. Professor Nobuo Tsuji states in his book, *Kazaru no Nihon Bunka* (The Decoration of Japanese Culture, 1998) that 'the ornament' is one of the essential features of old Japanese culture, and he interprets 'the act of the decoration' as proof of human being and an expression of the pleasure of life. Due to this rich proverbial tradition, I would call the Edo period the "Golden Age of Proverbs" in Japanese art. Thus the Edo period can be compared to Bruegel's time. One of the most popular proverb items was a pack of proverb playing cards.

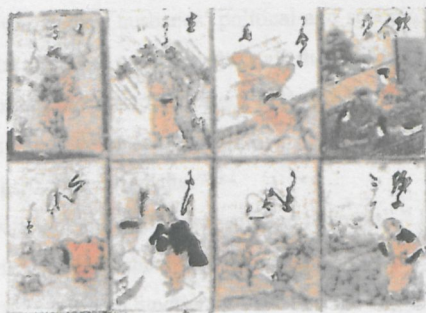


Fig. 6. Utagawa Kuniyosh, *Fifty Playing Cards of Proverbs*, mid-Edo period

One of the oldest *Fifty Playing Cards of Proverbs* was made by Utagawa Kuniyoshi from the mid-Edo period (Fig. 6) consisting of both text and picture cards. These cards were mainly produced for adults; however, in later times cheaper versions were printed for children's games, both for educational purposes and entertainment. The Ukiyo-e print by Utagawa Hiroshige illustrates that girls played with poem cards, and there is no doubt that children were mostly excited about how many poems they could memorize to win the game. At the same time they must have enjoyed looking at the pleasing images.

A Portuguese consul general, Wenceslau José de Sousa de Moraes, was the first person to translate 48 old Japanese alphabetical proverb cards into Portuguese. He was in Japan between 1899-1913, and he was impressed with how all the children memorized proverbs, and how those cards served to teach morality while they entertained.

For a comparison with the above mentioned inscription in the Flemish *Blue Cloak* print, the preface of the Japanese proverb book by Jippensha Ikku in the Edo period is: "Proverbs serve

as a sweet medicine to sleepy awake people. Adding short comic poems and illustrations to popular proverbs I could give some pleasure to women and children looking at them." Thus the cultures of the Netherlands and Japan were inspired to visualize proverbs for different purposes.

IV. A comparative analysis of proverbial images between both cultures

Bruegel's "She can bind the devil on the pillow" (Fig.7, "Zij zou de duivel op het kussen binden").

The proverb implies that if even a devil cannot protect himself against a strong woman, her husband would be helpless at home. A powerful woman ties up a devil on a pillow. The spindle beside her, a standard piece of household equipment, is ready to be used as a weapon against the devil. An interesting misericord, carved by Jan Borchmans around 1510-1520 Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk, Aarschot) shows us a frightening devil frothing at the mouth toward a violent housewife.



Fig.7. Bruegel, "She can bind the devil on the pillow," detail of Fig. 1



Fig.8. Monogramist WL, "Battle for Trousers," c.1560, engraving



Fig.9. Kawanabe Kyōsai, "A dog does not care about the quarrel of a married couple," ink colors Bietigheim Museum

This proverb is later repeated in Bruegel's *Dulle Griet* in 1562 in Mayer van den Bergh, Antwerp. Here several housewives bind devils on the ground. The name "Griet" was later mentioned by Carolus Tuinman, the Dutch humanist, in his *Netherlandish Proverbs* (*Nederlandsche Spreekwoorden*) in 1720: "It was the best Griet that one found, who bound the devil on a pillow." It is clear that an aggressive woman was called a "Dulle Griet" in the past.

Monogramist WL's woodcut dated around 1560 (Fig.8) also depicts fierce housewives holding a spindle or lifting their fists to frighten and subjugate their husbands. Women are fighting to get their husbands' trousers. The proverb "To wear her husband's trousers" is a caricature of dominant wives or the so-called "Dulle Griet". The Flemish inscription in the

margin of the print reads; “Where the wife holds the dominance, and wears a pair of trousers, Jan, husband, has to live submissively to the hood (his wife).

Kyosai’s “A dog does not care about the quarrel of a married couple”(“Fūfu genkawa inumo kuwanu”) from Kanagaki Robun’s *Bankoku Kōkai Seiyodōchu Hizakurig* (1870-1876) (Round Sea Trip of All Countries, The Comic Journey to Europe). Two wives descend upon a brothel, or so-called “Venus house” to assault their flirtatious husbands who left their houses for three or four days and they were found in a brothel. The wives look like Japanese Dulle Griet. The situation is very like the Flemish proverb, “To wear her husband’s trousers.”

François Caron, a 17th century chief of the Dutch Factory in his *Description of the Strong Kingdom Japan* in 1661 admired the way Japanese wives were obedient to their husbands and trained not to become involved in their husbands’ political and social affairs. Wives always stayed at home, and lived in a modest way, spending all their efforts on entertaining their husbands. In contrast, the rude and unsophisticated wives of the lower classes are often caricatured by proverbs during the Edo period.

Bruegel’s “a pillar biter” (Fig.10, “De pilaarbijter”)

The equivalent English proverb would be “Believe well and have well.” In Bruegel’s painting a man bites a church column, and his behavior is meant as that of a hypocrite or fanatical prayer, because the broken column has no function in Christian beliefs.



Fig.10. Bruegel, “A pillar biter,” detail of Fig. 1



Fig.11. Albrecht Gelmers, “A pillar biter,” misericord,1532-48, Sint-Katherinakerk, Hoogstraten



Fig.12. Toba School, “Faith makes one worship even the sardine’s head,” *Keihitsu Tobaguruma*, 1720, woodcut

With heavier irony, this misericord in Hoogstraten (Fig.11) depicts a fanatic monk biting a broken pillar, while a nun on the left peeps at the foolish act of the monk.

Toba School’s “Faith makes one worship even the sardine’s head” (Fig.12, “Iwashino kashiramo shinjinkara”). A woodcut accompanies the inscription, “What a venerable one, the aureole is shining!” A sardine’s head looks for fanatics to radiate aureole, if they pray deeply to it. The sardine was used as fertilizer in the Edo period and is still considered a cheap, lowly

fish. Thus the proverb caricatures the belief in trifling things and also the superstition that an item without any value can come to hold magical power.

Bruegel's, "He falls between two stools in the ashes" (Fig.13, "Hij zit tussen twee stoelen in de as").

One of the most popular proverbs in Europe, it first appeared in Greek literature and was introduced by Erasmus in 1500 as "Who chases two rabbits, catches nothing" ("Duos insequens lepores, neutrum capit"). The Jesuit priest Donaes Idinau (a pseudonym of Jan David), wrote about the theme of this proverb in his *Lot van wijsheyd ende goed geluck* (1606, *The Fate of Wisdom and Good Fortune*), a collection of proverbial poems. "Those who sit between two stools in the ashes / Those who fail to make the appropriate choice among many. / Too much confidence / and too much deceit / Often make things worse. / Follow the good advice, /and put your trust in God."

Jacques de Gheyn the Second depicts the same proverb; however, he shows a drunken husband blamed by his wife who has aged so much that she looks like his mother (Fig.14). The inscription below reads, "Thus, one who touches many things and understands little, must feel how it becomes one just to sit in the ash and between two chairs."

Kuwagata Keisai's "To catch neither a horsefly nor a bee" (Fig.15, "Abuhachi torazu")



Fig.13. Bruegel, "He falls between two stools in the ashes," detail of Fig.1



Fig.14. Jacques de Gheyn, "He falls between two stools in the ashes," the end of the 16th century, engraving



Fig.15. Kuwagata Keisai, "To catch neither horsefly nor bee," detail, 1808, woodcut, *Gengaen*

The corresponding Japanese proverb from Keisai's *The Image Garden of Proverbs* represents a servant of a Shinto shrine priest trying to get a big bee hive for honey. At the same time he tries to catch a horsefly for the chance to earn more profit, according to a folk tale, but instead is stung by a bee and a horsefly. The painter caricatures the man as a foolish person not able to catch anything except pain.

Bruegel's "She hangs the blue cloak over her husband" (Fig.16, "Zij hangt haar man de blauwe huik om").

This group of figures in the foreground plays a key role in Bruegel's *Netherlandish Proverbs*. As already mentioned, "The Blue Cloak" serves as a common title of Proverb prints and paintings in general. In Bruegel's scene, the behavior of the wife hanging a blue cloak over her husband apparently means that she is cheating on her husband. Unlike Hogenberg, Bruegel depicts an unequal couple. The husband is so old that he uses a cane and seems to have lost his teeth. The young wife is ready for her secret affair.



Fig. 16. Bruegel, "She hangs the blue cloak over her husband," detail detail of Fig. 1



Fig.17. "What the eyes don't see would not hurt the heart," French manuscript of proverb poem from the end of the 15th century

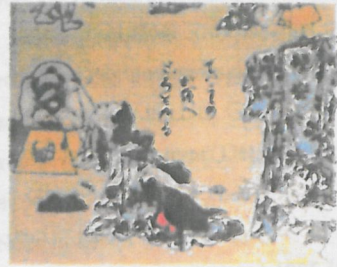


Fig. 18. Kawanabe Kyōsai, "She covers her husband's face with mud," c.1866, woodcut, Kyōsai Memorial Museum

Although Bruegel does not depict the young wife's boyfriend, the illustration of a French proverb poem in the end of the fifteenth century clearly shows the eternal triangle (Fig.17). The old husband with a cane arrives home. His young wife has had a pleasant time with her boyfriend while her elderly husband was away. In order to prevent her husband from seeing her boyfriend, she covers her husband's face with her head cloth. The accompanying French proverb poem reads, "My husband is too old to do his duty. I will cover his eyes so he does not see my boyfriend. In the meantime my boyfriend will be out of his sight. Surely my husband won't be happy to meet him. Avoiding troubles as much as possible, I will say, what the eyes don't see would not hurt the heart. "What the eyes don't see would not hurt the heart" is a proverb ("Ce qu'oeil ne voit au cuer ne duelt").

Bruegel might have been familiar with the woodcut of 1531 illustrated in *House of Fortune and House of Death*. This print carries a Dutch verse of a desperate old man, a showy fellow: "I sit here dried up as an old fool, now. / With love I smother myself, /this is my fortune now. / My sexual desire always burns from my insides. / It is better to be an old fool than a

sensualless man." An owl on a pole is clearly the symbol of a foolish act. The old man is interested in her youth and beauty, but she accepts his caresses only because of his heavy purse. This is a stereotype of an unequal couple.

Sebastian Vrancx depicts a helpless husband, an unfaithful wife and her boyfriend. While the boyfriend hangs a blue cloak over the husband, the wife tries to beat her husband with a pan which signifies another proverb, "She gives him a stroke with a pan." This depicts the eternal triangle like the illustration in the French proverb poem.

Kawanabe Kyōsai's "She covers her husband's face with mud" (Fig.18, "Teishuno kaoni doro o nuru").

This proverb means that the wife's action dishonors her husband. As her husband is naked, the hanging Kimono apparently belongs to him. After they are together, the elderly husband falls fast asleep while his young wife with messy hair invites her boyfriend in and gives him a love letter. She plasters mud on her husband's face so that he cannot see her love affair.

Bruegel's "One fills the well after the calf has drowned" (Fig.19, "Als 't kalf verdrongen is, dempt men de put").



Fig.19. Bruegel, "One fills the well after the calf has drowned," detail of Fig. 1



Fig.20. Kuwagata Keisai, "The day after the festival," 1808, woodcut, *Gengaen*

It is astonishing to see in Bruegel's painting how a careless peasant regrets the loss of his valuable calf which has fallen into an open well. He should have filled the well and avoided mishap. His face, with his hair blown back, is incomparably sad in comparison with the painting by David Teniers the Younger (c.1646-47, Belvoir Castle, Grantham). Teniers's peasant simply covers the well without showing any deep regret, and the cow in the water seems not to have died.

Kuwagata Keisai's "The Day after the festival" (Fig.20, "Atono matsuri")

The proverb from Keisai's *Gengaen* (The Image Garden of Proverbs) with the calligraphic lines is visualized by a masterly hand. The person dresses in a costume of Shinto religion: a bird helmet, a long-nosed mask, carrying a sword on his shoulder, and holding high wooden shoes in his hand. However he has arrived at the festival too late and has missed his chance to play an important role as the protagonist. I identified this character as a leader, the Sarutahiko God of the procession. This procession is still held in the city of Ise today.

Bruegel's "Casting roses before swine" (Fig. 21, "Rozen voor de varkens strooien").

This proverb is better known as "casting pearls before swine" (Matthew 7:6). Bruegel's proverb is not exceptional in its association of pigs with roses; by this time several works of literature already mention this combination. The misericord by Albrecht Gelmers in Hoogstraaten and that by Jan Borchmans (attrib.) around 1510-25 from Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk in Aarschot (fig.22) are good examples of the proverb.

After Kawanabe Kyōsai's "Gold coins to a cat" (fig.23, "Neko ni koban")

The image from the French author, F. Steenackers' *Cent Proverbes Japonais* dated 1885 is apparently based upon Kawanabe Kyōsai's album, *Kyosau Hyakuzu* (Hundred Proverbs).



Fig.21. Bruegel, "Casting roses before swine," detail of Fig. 1



Fig.22. Jan Borchmans, "Casting roses before swine," misericord, 1510 -25, Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk, Aarschot



Fig.23. After Kawanabe Kyōsai, "Gold coins to a cat," Francis Steenackers, *Cent Proverbes Japonais*, 1885

The French author adapted several motifs from Kyōsai's book. The cat is certainly disinterested in the gold coins scattered on the floor. In contrast, a Geisha girl and her servant look enthralled by the gold coins. (Edo period people jokingly gave a Geisha the nickname "cat", because she plays a musical instrument whose surface is made of cat's skin.)

Bruegel's "Big fish eat little ones" (Fig.24, "Grote vissen eten de kleine").

There are two meanings of the proverb, namely, the strong desire for power or the desire to conquer the weak. However, it is suggested that even a man with the strongest power could be

destroyed by the weakest folk. According to Wolfgang Mieder, this proverb was very popular in the Middle Ages as seen in the British misericords (Mieder, p.70).



Fig.24. Bruegel, "Big fish eat little ones," detail of Fig. 1

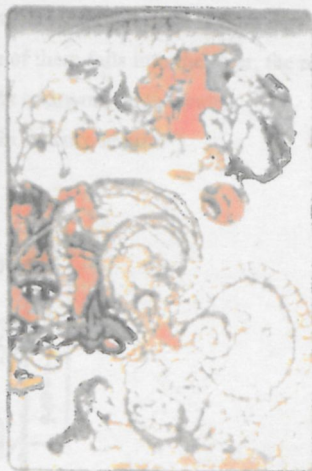


Fig.25. Kawanabe Kyōsai, "To be rolled by something long," woodcut

Hieronymus Bosch inserts the proverb in the central wing of his *Hay Wagon* triptych (Madrid, Prado Museum). On the left wing of the triptych a big fish swallows an entire fish, but Bosch intends this figure as a monster with a crocodile's tail carrying the tower on his back. Bruegel also placed it in his *Triumph of Death* indicating a human can be killed by an unexpected strong might in spite of his resistance.

As Donaes Idinau warns against the evil behavior of the strongest people, this proverb deals with not only the social situation between the weakest and the strongest, but also unreasonable suppression by the strongest. Idinau wrote a proverb poem in 1606, "Big fish eat little ones / That always leads to the evil. / When the rich people oppress the poor folk / Doubtless wicked deeds occur. / A greedy person deserves retribution."

Kawanabe Kyōsai's "To be rolled by something long" (Fig.25, "Nagai mononiwa makarero"). A Japanese proverb image equivalent to Bruegel's "Big fish eat little ones" can scarcely be found during the Edo period. "To be rolled by something long" was more familiar in that time. This proverb has a similar meaning, as it advises the weak not to resist the strong for a safe life. It is interesting to see the objects the painter uses for the long items. On the top several noodle boxes are turned over, because the porter fell down in fear at monsters. A big dog barked at a monster with an enormous one eye and a long rope-like neck. The monster attacks an old woman, rolling her with his long neck. In the foreground a young female monster also with a long string-like neck laughs at the old woman's predicament. There is the

exact same French proverb, “Il vaut mieux se laisser envelopper par quelque chose de long” (It works better to let oneself be wrapped by some long things).

Bruegel’s “If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Fig.26, “Als de ene blinde de andere leidt, vallen ze beiden in de gracht”).



Fig.26. Bruegel, “If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch,” oil, 1568, Naples, Museo di Capodimonte

In his *Netherlandish Proverbs*, Bruegel places the tiny figures of three blind men in the background near the sea. However, in his later painting of the same subject in Naples Bruegel paints this proverb on a much more monumental scale and also draws attention to the moral meaning of the verse Mathew 15:14. In the foreground a blind leader has already fallen into the river and his companions will soon meet the same end. Blind people passing the church will clearly fall into the river.



Fig. 27 Utagawa Toyokuni, “A blind leads blinds”, late Edo period

Bruegel probably wants to suggest religious blindness, because there were many folk turning away from the Catholicism and converting to Protestantism in his time. Bruegel’s contemporary, the Catholic humanist Anna Bijn (*Refereynen*) warned against Lutherans as dangerous heretics spreading “the worst of plagues and blind leaders.”

Utagawa Toyokuni (1770-1826), an Ukiyoe painter of the Edo period, depicts blind people crossing a log bridge (Fig. 27). The image suggests two proverbs: "A blind person leads blind public" ("Ichimo shumo o hiku"), and "A log bridge with blind masseurs" ("Zato no hitotsubashi"). This image represents a dangerous situation, because the bridge is both narrow and unstable, even for people who can see. It is clear if one of them falls into the river, the rest will follow suit. Toyokuni spares his viewers the tragic sight of anyone in the water. Santo Kyoden's, "A thousand blind" (Fig.28, "Meaki sennin mekura seninin")

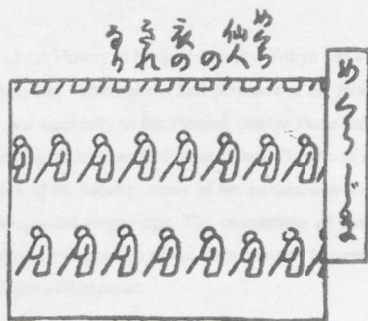


Fig.28. Santo Kyoden, "A thousand blind," woodcut

Another interesting image with a blind procession is provided by Kyoden. It is written, "A cloth depicting a thousand blind." The real proverb related to the inscription is, "a thousand blind, a thousand seeing" (Mekura sennin meaki sennin). That is, in this world there are as many clever people as fools." The designer uses the proverb in a humorous way as a pattern on cloth, but not for real use. He intends readers to enjoy the enigmatic design. Thus blindness in Japan also implies foolishness. It is very important to assert the essential difference between Bruegel and the Japanese artist. In fact two images look like similar as a blind procession, however, proverbs are different. In addition Bruegel's message is deeply didactic, while Kyoden uses the proverb in a humorous way as a pattern on cloth, but not for real use, so that the true meaning of blindness as foolishness is weakened.

In conclusion, the proverb images of Bruegel and Japanese artists have much in common when depicting human folly and morality. However, there seem to be significant differences as well. Bruegel's paintings, together with many *Blue Cloak* prints, show viewers how to behave honestly in daily life, to be wise in human relations, to avoid desire, deceit, infidelity, and foolishness and to live as pious Christians. The visualized images in Flemish art appear

serious, moralistic and are very often full of caricatures of people's manners. In contrast, Japanese artists in the Edo period avoided a serious or tragic tone and direct moralistic preaching. Instead, they included verbal as well as pictorial jokes and provided their clients with humor, amusement and decoration.

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My present paper for ACTAS ICP14 PROCEEDINGS is partly based upon my above mentioned article which was presented to the editors in 2015.

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Curriculum Vitæ

Yoko Mori is a Professor Emerita of Art History at Meiji University, Tokyo and a foreign associate of the Royal Academy of Archaeology of Belgium. She served as the first president of the Japanese Society of Paremiology, founded in 2009. Mori's expertise lies especially in the Flemish painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c.1525-1569) and his dynasty. She was the general commissioner of the exhibition, *The World of Bruegel in Black and White* in 2010 in Japan and the main author of the catalog. Many of her publications deal with the pictorial as well as literary sources of Bruegel's paintings and engravings. The comparison of Bruegel's proverb paintings and proverbial illustrations in old Japanese art is also one of her main research interests. Some of her publications in English are listed in the reference pages of this paper.

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