



Symbols of Japan: Thematic Motifs in Art and Design

Merrily C. Baird

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" . . . It is in the nature of man to both think and express himself symbolically. Moreover, the power of symbols is magnified when a society has broadly shared experiences, a deep knowledge of its cultural traditions, and common sentiments about those experiences and traditions. The fact that these conditions exist in Japan to a striking degree has insured that the country continues to enjoy a cultural life meaningfully enriched by the use of symbols."

So begins Merrily Baird's definitive guide to the symbols of Japan. Beginning with a brief but insightful explanation of the development of symbols throughout Japanese history, the book looks at thematic motifs encountered in both the classical fine arts and the applied arts. The motifs are organized according to broad thematic categories such as "the cosmos, heaven and earth" and "animals of the land and sea," among others, allowing for broad reading on a number of topics of interest to a wide variety of readers, including collectors of Asian art and students of Japan.

Nearly every symbol is illustrated with fine examples of art and design from major public and private collections, offering the reader a wealth of visual information to enrich the expert commentary on each subject. Beautiful objects of a variety of media are represented: painting, sculpture, woodblock prints, *netsuke* and *inro*.

The book is the culmination of more than twenty years of research by the author, much of which was conducted while she lived in Japan. Baird's text reflects recent developments in Japanese scholarship but her prose is as accessible as it is informative, making this book an indispensable volume for both those already familiar with Japanese culture and those newly introduced to its rich complexities.

In this indispensable guide to Japanese symbols, the author, Merrily Baird, offers the reader the most lucid study of the symbolism of Japan's fine and applied arts in print today. Organized according to broad thematic categories, nearly every symbol is illustrated with fine examples of art and design from major public and private collections in the U.S., Europe, and Japan. The book is organized to allow collectors of East Asian Art and students of Japan to both research specific symbols and read broadly on such diverse topics as plants and flowers, animals of the land and sea, demons and dieties, among others. As beautiful as it is informative, *Symbols of Japan* is destined to be the cornerstone of every art and design library.

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