The Fish as a Motive in Chinese Art.
A bronze vase of the Han Period. (See page 399.)

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BENTEN, THE JAPANESE GODDESS OF DIVINE LOVE.
From a relief preserved in the Field Museum. (See page 391.)

Frontispiece to The Open Court.
THE FISH AS A MYSTIC SYMBOL IN CHINA AND JAPAN.

BY THE EDITOR.

China is perhaps not as rich in folklore as India, for the Chinese are more prosaic and less poetic than other Asiatics; nevertheless the mystical significance of the fish appears as predominant here as in any other country, and the same must be said of Japan.

Professor Hirth publishes in his Scraps from a Collector's Note Book\(^1\) an attractive picture which illustrates an episode of an ancient Chinese fairytale taken from the Liec sien chuan. The story reminds us of Arion riding on a dolphin, the more so as the hero is a musician and his name K'in Kau, the first part of which means “lute.”

The story goes that the king of the country had engaged K'in Kau as court musician on account of his musical talent, but in addition to his musical accomplishments the royal court musician indulged in some magic feats, among which his preference for living in the water is most noticeable. He used to swim the rivers of China and haunt the ocean. Finally he disappeared from his home and was no longer seen. His relatives and friends built a little temple by the riverside in memory of him, but how great was the general astonishment of the inhabitants when after 200 years K'in Kau returned by the riverside riding on a huge red carp. He carried a sword in his hand and a sun-hat on his back, tokens of his adventures and journeys in distant parts of the world.

It will not be difficult to recognize in K'in Kau a fairy-tale representation of the hero of resurrection and of life immortal. He

\(^1\) Published by E. J. Brill, Leyden, 1905.
is the solar deity that disappears in the western ocean and after crossing the waters of the deep where lies the realm of the dead, returns in the east with undiminished vigor. Time does not affect him, and centuries are to him no more than so many hours to a mortal man.

The fate of K’in Kau reminds us of European fairy-tales. In the Greek story Arion is represented as a human being, a mortal man, but when we consider that the story is a fairy-tale and originally an ancient myth, we shall not miss the meaning of it if we look upon him as a god, either Dionysus or Eros or a kindred deity that travels over the ocean on a fish.

The story of K’in Kau also reminds us of Rip van Winkle, who disappears for a long time but comes back and is astonished at the changes which in the meantime have occurred in the world.
Washington Irving incorporates in his story of Rip van Winkle the materials of those ancient German fairy-tales which are preserved in "The Sleeping Barbarossa," and also in the legend of the monk of Heisterbach who being alone in the woods one morning, forgot himself, the world and time in an ecstatic state of heavenly rapture, and lived as it were for a moment in eternity. When he

returned to his earthly existence, a century had elapsed and he found the conditions of the monastery in which he had stayed entirely changed.

The fairy-tale of K'in Kau is very popular in Eastern Asia, and it was quite natural that it traveled also to Japan where it has been illustrated by the famous Hokusai, who pictures K'in Kau on
a big carp which seems to swim through clouds, part of the fish being hidden in the fog.

Kwan-yin on the Fish.
By Hokusai.

The same artist furnishes us with a beautiful picture of Kwan-yin on the fish. This divinity is a female form of Buddha which
originated in China. She is considered the divinity of mercy, charity, love and motherhood, so that her pictures are very similar in spirit to those of the Virgin Mary in Christianity. It is not possible that the prototype of Kwan-yin is an ancient Chinese goddess who became thus transformed when Buddhism entered the country and changed its traditions. She is also claimed to be of Indian origin. That Kwan-yin is somehow connected with the fish
appears from the fact that dolphins sometimes ornament the pedestal of her statue and Hokusai paints her as riding on a fish.

Among the new acquisitions of the Field Museum of Natural History of Chicago, we find several beautiful Kwan-yin figures of a special type, different from the Kwan-yin riding on the fish and representing her as a poor woman, without ornaments, carrying a fish to market.

A poem accompanies a picture of this figure which is preserved in the Museum Pei-lin of Singan-fu and dated 1451:

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Her hair dishevelled over the two temples, she is too easy-going to comb her hair;
Holding a fish she goes to market.
Not wearing her petticoat and her glittering necklace,
Who would divine that it is a Bodhisatva descending on Jambudvipa (the universe)?
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Judging from the poem this goddess is regarded as a divine in-

*We here publicly express our thanks to the Field Museum of Natural History of Chicago for permission to utilize its new collection of Asiatic antiquities recently procured through Dr. Berthold Laufer, even before the objects have been catalogued; and also for the generous courtesy of supplying us with photographs of several monuments. The director, Mr. F. J. V. Skiff, as well as Dr. Laufer, have thereby rendered us no small and thoughtful help in our researches, and enabled us to render important material accessible to our readers.*
carnation which unbeknown to mortal ken represents divinity on earth.

The frequency of Kwan-yin with the fish indicates what a favorite this peculiar goddess was, and she must have been a saviour in female form.

Among the seven popular gods of Japan the goddess of divine love Benten corresponds to this special conception of Kwan-yin and is practically identified with her. A beautiful carving of this goddess in high relief is preserved in the Field Museum. Here she is represented carrying a fish like Kwan-yin. (See our frontispiece.)

Another one of these seven gods of bliss (Shichi Fukujin) is always represented with rod and fish. Mr. Teitaro Suzuki in his article on "The Seven Gods of Bliss" (Open Court, XXI, 400) says of him: "Ebis—in spite of his name which means 'foreigner' or 'stranger'—is a thoroughly indigenous production of Japan. He belongs to the mythical age of Japanese history. He was the third child of Izanagi-no-Mikoto, the first mythical hero of Japan, and was the younger brother of the famous sun-goddess Amateras. He somehow incurred the displeasure of his elders and was expelled to the Western sea, where he spent his remaining life as a fisherman. Accordingly, he always wears an ancient Japanese court dress, carrying a fishing rod in his right hand and a large reddish braize under his left arm. This fish, which is zoologically known as *pagrus cardinalis* or *major*, is considered by the Japanese the most delicious provision on the table, and as indispensable at all important festivals as is turkey at an American Thanksgiving dinner."

Ebis appears usually in the company of Daikok, another of the seven jolly gods easily recognized by the money-dripping mallet in his hand. Mr. Suzuki says:

"Daikok may be said to be principally a patron of farmers, and Ebis of merchants and tradesmen. The birthday of Ebis which falls in November, is celebrated by the commercial people, especially the dry-goods dealers, by offering the public a special sale. Some think that any fancy needle work made of the material bought on Ebis day brings the owner good luck."

A drawing by Hokusai is characteristic of the influences which these divinities exercise upon Japan. It represents four of the gods of bliss. Ebis with the fish is uppermost at the right hand, while underneath we see Daikok who has just thrown his mantle over a carrot-like plant with two roots. It is a *daikong* (literally translated "horse radish") a typically Japanese plant, which is one of
THE SEVEN GODS OF BLISS.
DAIKOK.

Japanese medallion.

DAIKOK.

From photographs of impersonators.
the most popular of their vegetables. In English it is called the "gigantic Japanese radish."

Another picture of four gods of the seven shows a carriage drawn by two dappled stags. Jurojin, the god of longevity, is the
charioteer and blows a big trumpet. Bishamon, the god of strength and wealth, gallantly helps the goddess Benten, the Japanese Venus, to enter the carriage. The god Ebis flies high in the air on his fish smiling with glee upon some poor fellows who are in desperate pursuit after good fortune. One of them is turned over in the blizzard, while the other one gesticulates wildly with his hands in despair at not being able to reach the god of luck. Everything typifies the spirit of good humor for which Ebis has been especially famous.

We add on the next page an illustration of a scene in Japanese folklore in which a ragged demon carrying a flask and a fish is accosted by a hungry friend of the animal world. We reproduce the picture from a collection of Hokusai's drawings but are unable to offer an explanation.

The figure of a carp is commonly used as a paper flag all over Japan denoting male heirs or boys.

We learn from an interesting essay by Berthold Laufer on "Chinese Pottery of the Han Dynasty" that during the Han period in China cooking-stoves were buried in the graves of the dead obviously with the same purpose as when the Egyptians painted all
kinds of refreshing meats and drinks on the walls of their funerary chambers. These pictorial supplies were intended to provide the

dead with sufficient food so that they would not go about as hungry ghosts molesting their descendants and other people with frightful
apparitions. Mr. Laufer says on the subject: "The burial of clay cooking-stoves in the imperial graves of the Han dynasty is expressly mentioned in the 'Annals of the Later Han Dynasty.' Two were used for the emperor, but there can be no doubt that they were then a favorite mortuary object also for all classes of people."

But the peculiarity which causes these stoves to be of interest to us in connection with the fish appears in the fact that some of them bear on their top plain pictures of fishes. They may have no other intention than to indicate the food to be used by the spirit of the deceased, but they are evidence that fish was supposed to be an acceptable diet for the dead.
We may add in this connection that the fish was a favorite ornament in those days in ancient China. We reproduce here from the same source a bronze basin of the Han dynasty the inscription of which declares that this basin is dedicated to the memory of the teacher by his sons and grandsons of the third generation. The words of the inscription begin with the characters "great year"; then follows the date; further down the words "to the deceased master by the third round of sons and grandsons." The Chinese inscription in the corner explains the subject to be a "pair-of-fishes basin," and it is dated "Han dynasty Ch’u P’ing (i. e., First Peace Period), fifth year (194 A. D.)"
Here we see the fish used in connection with honor paid to the dead, and here too we find the fish doubled, in the same way as in the zodiac, in Indian scriptures and on Indian coins as well as frequently also in the Christian catacombs.

Another instance of the double fish pattern for funerary use has been found on a bronze mirror of the Sung period discovered in a grave of the Shantung province (Laufer, op. cit., Plate LXXIII, No. 7). A. Volpert (Anthropos, Vol. III, p. 16) describes a number of mortuary stone chambers of the Han period and mentions that in one of them he saw two rows of fishes represented on the lower edge of the lateral stone slabs enclosing the coffin.

Concerning the fish as an ornament Dr. Laufer add as a footnote (loc. cit.): "The fish is indubitably one of the most ancient motives in Chinese art. I have here inserted a Han bronze vase after the Hsi ch'ing ku chien (Book 21, p. 19) called 'vase with wild ducks and fishes,' showing ducks holding eels in their bills, and others with fishes in front of them, besides rows of swimming fishes (probably carp) with tortoise interspersed."

We must remember that tortoises have a similar significance as the fish, being a common emblem of longevity. The same is true of birds of passage such as wild ducks, wild geese and wild
swans. I am unable to explain why some ducks are represented holding eels in their bills.

There are many more traces of mysterious fishes and fish sym-

bols on the ancient monuments of the Middle Kingdom but the explanation of their meaning has in most instances been lost. Chavannes has published in his *La sculpture sur pierre en Chine* a great number of reproductions of ancient monuments and illustrations
to which we have no key. We find for instance a stone bas-relief illustrating an army of fishes going to war, thus presupposing the existence of a Chinese fish-epic which may have been a battle of the fishes corresponding to the Homeric Battle of the Frogs and Mice.

Other Chinese illustrations of the fish bear a close resemblance to European legends in which the fish symbolizes the sun. We must remember that according to the Babylonian and Hebrew world-conceptions the waters were divided into the waters above the firmament and the waters in the deep under the firmament. The former are the waters of the clouds, the source of rain and occasionally the cause of a deluge; the latter comprise the ocean and the waters below the earth coming forth in the form of springs. The sun-god passes through these waters either as a fish or in his barge. The sun-arge was known to both the Egyptians and Babylonians. In Greece and Rome the idea changes to a chariot or a wheel but we may assume that the idea of the sun as a fish is the older. This conception explains also why Oannes the Babylonian mediator between God and mankind appears as a fish emerging in the morning from the Erythrean sea in the East and descending in the evening into the Western Ocean.

The same legend must have existed in China although none such has been discovered and does not now seem to be extant. But we reproduce here from Chavannes\(^3\) several panels which seem to bear witness to a similar myth. In one of them we see a monster in dragon form pursuing a fish and being in turn pursued by a tiger. Another panel shows the same combination except that the fish is held by a man. A third panel represents another scene of the same incident. It shows the dragon and the tiger running away in the other direction. Above the tiger floats a fish, while underneath we see the same man holding a fish and below him another fish. No explanation is given.

Are we not justified in identifying the fish here with the sun and may we not assume that the Chinese at a certain period of their mythical development were in possession of the same conception of the sun as a fish? In such a case the scenes on these panels would symbolize an eclipse just as German myths account for the same phenomena by saying that the sun is swallowed up by a wolf. This view is strengthened by another monument which pictures a similar monster turning against a man who holds in his hands a face representing the sun in a style very similar to that in which

THE BATTLE OF THE FISHES.

The original is on a stone bas-relief of the Han dynasty forming part of the sepulchral chamber of the Wu family preserved in Shantung Province at the foot of the Wu-tse-shan. These sculptures may be dated roughly at about 150 A. D. The photograph has been made from an original rubbing taken from this bas-relief, in the Field Museum, and our attention has been called to it by Dr. Berthold Laufer of that institution. He writes: "The idea of the fish representing a warrior is, curiously enough, also expressed by a famous Confucian scholar of the later Han Dynasty, Ma Yung (79-166 A. D.) who interprets its scaly armor as a symbol of martial efficiency."
the sun is frequently pictured by prehistoric peoples in Mexico and other places.

Corresponding in China to the Babylonian Oannes who revealed to mankind the arts of writing, agriculture, and other means of civilization, stands Fuh-Hi who is generally pictured with the mystic tablet containing the first symbols of the Yang and Yin, the mysteries of heaven and earth. It is a very strange coincidence, if not positively the indication of an historical connection, that this same Fuh-Hi together with his consort and retinue is pictured as posses-
sing a fish-tail. This monument appears in the same place as those mentioned before on the fourth stone in the rear compartment among many other strange figures and is here reproduced from the same source. Fuh-Hi's connection with the water further appears from the fact that the writings which he reveals to mankind are carried by a tortoise emerging from the waters of the Ho, and that the dragon-horse which bore the mystic tablet rose from the same river.

The dragon-horse (Lung Ma) is also called a hornless dragon

* Yellow River or Huang-Ho, commonly known as Ho which means the river.
and among the dragon tribe it is said to be the most honored one, the Yellow Dragon. Yellow has become the imperial color in the course of history, presumably because it was the color of the Buddhist monks who came dressed in yellow robes. And the mysterious animal that brought to Fuh-Hi the elements of writing came from

the Yellow River. The elements of writing are sometimes said to be written on a scroll, sometimes on a map or tablet and we here offer two illustrations representing both interpretations. We must bear in mind that the interpretations are more recent and the original tradition simply insisted on a divine revelation which Fuh-Hi received through supernatural animals.
From other monuments we here reproduce from the same source a very strange illustration for which no explanation is offered. It shows a savage ape in the center with a man on his right hand and a fish on his left.

The fish figures also among the Chinese symbols of good luck, and besides the single fish we find the double fish and also the twin fish. The double fish is frequently used as an artistic ornament,

THE DOUBLE FISH AS ORNAMENT.
From Fang shih mo pu (1588), in the possession of Dr. Laufer.

for a religious symbol originally used for protection naturally changes little by little into a purely ornamental design. This is true of the cross in Christianity, of the swastika, of the solar wheel so frequent in prehistoric monuments, especially in Mycenae, and of other symbols. We reproduce here a design taken from a Chinese book in the possession of Dr. Berthold Laufer which shows the double fish moving playfully in the water among fish green. The design in this case is apparently artistic but the position of the
double fish is the same that we find in funerary offerings and also in the pictures of the constellation Pisces.

Dr. Laufer informs us that the fish has become the symbol of harmony and marital union. The idea is based on the observation that the fish can live only in the water and is therefore in harmony with that element (expressed by the phrases yú shuǐ xiāng huo, "the mutual harmony of the fish and the water," or yú shuǐ huo huan, "fish and water are happy in their union").

Different from the double fish is the twin fish which is peculiar to China. The double fish has made its way from Babylon over Europe into the symbols of modern astronomy, but the twin fish together with other twin formations, a twin duck, other twin birds, a twin horse, etc., are not found elsewhere so far as we know.

The fish as a good omen appears with one special application in the shape of a carp jumping up a cataract, referring to the passing of a government examination. Such illustrations are sent to the successful candidate as congratulations. Dr. Laufer sends us the following explicit explanation:

"A frequent subject in Chinese and Japanese art is a carp attempting to swim against a stream or to jump over a waterfall. This originally goes back to the ancient legend that the sturgeons ascend the Yellow River in the third month of each year and those among them which succeed in passing over the rapids of the Dragon-
Gate (Lung-men) become transformed into dragons. It is obvious that this notion sprang from the name of the Dragon-Gate; it is usually understood in a figurative sense for successful graduation at the literary examination. The young student is looked upon as a fish who after passing the cataract of the examination becomes a dragon, as in the good old times the German freshman, or fox, was called an ass and became promoted to the title of horse in his capacity of Bursch as a full-fledged university student. A picture of a carp trying to jump the fall, presented to the assiduous young scholar, accordingly implies the wish, 'may you succeed and prosper in the competitive examinations!' The fish is therefore, in this case, the symbol of diligent perseverance and endurance."

Other interesting information concerning the fish has been communicated to us by Dr. Laufer. He says: "There are several ref-
erences in Chinese literature to written messages that have been found in the bellies of fishes. In an ancient song it is said: 'A stranger having come from afar has presented me with two carps. I bade my servant cook them and, lo! a letter written on silk is discovered in them.' Hence expressions like 'fish-document,' 'pair of fish' or 'pair of carp' have come to assume the meaning of letter. An emperor of the Han dynasty when hunting in his park once killed a wild goose to whose foot a piece of cloth was attached, containing the words, 'Su-Wu and his companions are away in a certain marsh.' At once messengers were despatched to the Hiung-nu and the prisoners believed dead were released.' Hence the origin of the phrase yü yen wang lai, 'the coming and going of fish and goose,' meaning the same as correspondence.

"The faculty of knowing man's heart is attributed to fish. Kiang T'ai Kung was a virtuous statesman living in the twelfth century B. C., and his virtue was even acknowledged by the fishes for which he angled. Though he had the eccentric habit of angling with a straight iron rod without bait, thus offering no inducement to the fishes, they were attracted simply by his virtue and voluntarily impaled themselves on his hook. This has given rise to the familiar saying: 'Kiang T'ai Kung is fishing—only those that are willing are taken,' employed as illustration of spontaneity of action. He is supposed to have sat on his fishing perch in entire disregard of the entreaties of the numerous ministers of State who begged him to come down and become engaged in political affairs. Hence the proverb: 'See him seated on his fishing-terrace, he will not move,' which is said of one who takes no interest in an affair. He did not come down until the king himself besought him and then he exchanged the straight rod for the staff of civil office. (A. H. Smith, Proverbs from the Chinese, p. 94).

"In regard to two celebrated beauties in Chinese history it is recorded that they washed clothes by the river-side, and that the fish, illuminated by the light of their resplendent countenances, were dazzled and sank to the bottom (A. H. Smith, Proverbs and Common Sayings from the Chinese, p. 122)."

In addition to the coincidences between Chinese monuments and western mythology we must include one more remarkable case, which is the combination of the fish and the bird. This reminds us of the goddess Astarte in Hierapolis with the two emblems, the fish and the dove, and we find the same combination in the catacombs where the fish is explained as a symbol of Christ and the dove either as the dove of peace sent out by Noah or as the Holy Ghost. The Chi-
nese bird used in conjunction with the fish is explained as the heron, but the position is very similar to that of the fish and dove as it appears in the *Roma Sotterranea*.

From a Chinese book in the possession of Dr. Laufer.

From a number of illustrative Chinese pictures we select one taken from a Chinese book entitled *Kin Shih So*, also in the possession of Dr. Laufer.

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The facts here presented prove that the fish was held in awe in Eastern Asia as well as in Europe, in Egypt and in ancient Babylon. In prehistoric times it possessed a religious sanctity. It was a symbol of immortality as which it is found in different styles in graves, and it is freely used as an emblem of good luck. Most popular, however, is its use in connection with the female Saviour who in one of its most favorite forms appears as a woman carrying a fish in a basket.