



Excerpt from the Introduction to *Sotatsu: Making Waves*

In the last decades of the sixteenth century, the ravaged city of Kyoto, Japan's capital since the early ninth century, began its recovery from nearly 150 years of brutal and destructive armed conflict. The complex elimination game among regional warring feudal lords was drawing to a close. From 1582 through 1615, three powerful hegemony—Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu—formed an increasingly united polity.

The city's rebirth was celebrated in folding-screen paintings that depicted bird's-eye views of Kyoto—the *rakuchū rakugai zu* (Scenes in and around the capital). Partially documentary and occasionally aspirational, these paintings could reflect prominence and positioning based on a patron's desires. But they primarily told the truth about the big picture: beyond the grand temples and redoubts, perhaps the most striking and charming features were the wonderfully detailed shop fronts and occasional glimpses into their interiors. The inescapable message: mercantile strength. Not indicated on any known painting of this genre was the specific shop called Tawaraya, where folding fans were designed, made, and sold. Inventory was available for purchase and custom orders were taken too. The Tawaraya is mentioned in a piece of contemporaneous fiction and was said to be located on Gojō-dōri (Fifth Street or Avenue), an east-west road in the central city, nestled in an area dense with commercial activity.

The folding fan was more than an attractively functional accoutrement. As a gift, it might bear subtle or oblique messages. It could indicate the owner's social status. It could display images or calligraphy, or both. Carried in a sleeve, tucked in a sash, folded or open, it was a hand-held indicator of an internal state, a social tool of remarkable simplicity and sophistication.

Thanks to a series of charming legends, it also was imbued with an aura of ephemerality, fleeting beauty, and wordless emotions within a rigid social hierarchy. Sōtatsu, master of the Tawaraya studio, produced these vehicles of material discourse to great acclaim. The fan, in a very real sense, was the implement that formed his aesthetic sensibilities.

On a challenging curved format of alternating planes, the artist and his associates extracted myriad visual quotations from paintings that depicted tales of classical literature and legend—narratives of war, romance, and the founding of temples. In this way, he sent once-sequestered and little-seen imagery into the streets.

Ulak, James T. Excerpt from "Introduction." In *Sotatsu*, edited by Yukio Lippit and James T. Ulak, 11. Washington, D.C.: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2015.



Tawaraya Sōtatsu; *Screen with Scattered Fans*; early 17th century; six-panel folding screen; color, gold, and silver over gold on paper; 60 13/16 × 142 1/2 in (154.5 × 362 cm). National Museum of Asian Art, Freer Gallery of Art Collection, Gift of Charles Lang Freer (F1900.24).