



Friends of East Asia

Newsletter of the Bishop White Committee

Spring 2026

Message from the Co-Chairs

Deanna Horton and Mary Boyd

The Bishop White Committee is gearing up for an interesting Year of the Fire Horse! BWC is a program partner for a ROM event on March 8, 2026 focussing on the relationship between antique dealer George Crofts and ROM, which led to the creation of one of the world's finest China collections. Wen-Chien Cheng, Senior Curator Louise Hawley Stone Chair of East Asian Art will be speaking at the event, as will Sara Irwin, departmental associate in the China section of ROM, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art's Curator of Chinese Art, Hiromi Kinoshita.

BWC is also a sponsor of Shokkan, Material Encounters in Japanese Art, which is a ROM original exhibition curated by Akiko Takesue, Bishop White Committee Associate Curator of Japanese Art & Culture, opening April 4. This unique exhibition explores the relationship between artistic creation and the sense of touch.

We are also looking forward to the next in our Speaker Series which this year will celebrate Shokkan. We have invited a well-known Japan scholar and expert on Japanese robotics Professor Emerita Jennifer Robertson (University of Michigan) who will be giving the keynote presentation entitled "Touching Robots: Research, Risk, Reality", to be followed by a presentation by Dr. Takesue. The event takes place on May 4, and presentations will be followed by a Japan-themed reception where participants can also get a close-up view of artifacts from the ROM's Japan collection. Tickets are available on the ROM website.

BWC is continuing to promote the China, Japan and Korea collections through support for curatorial projects. Stay tuned for events and exhibits that are derived from BWC-related initiatives.

In This Issue

The spring issue of Friends of East Asia Newsletter proves that many hands make light work. We begin with a Message from the Co-Chairs Mary Boyd and Deanna Horton. They report on what is ahead for the Bishop White Committee in the Spring 2026 which includes the Shokkan exhibition, a celebration of the sense of touch as it relates to Japanese crafts.

What follows is a fascinating article by Deanna Horton about her time in Japan when she discovered the revolutionary designs of Japanese ladies' couturier extraordinaire, Issey Miyake. Our former librarian Jack Howard teamed up with Jane Liu submit an article on mimetic words and onomatopoeia from Japan that we associate with describing tactile sensations, in time for the Shokkan exhibition. Equally appropriate, as the George Crofts centenary lecture unfolds, Mary Boyd recounts visiting Luoyang in the footsteps of Crofts in 2025—the centenary year of his death. Marion Ho contributes an article on the Rafflesia giant plant and its relation to our Rafflesia arnoldii model in the Shad Gallery. Grace Lee has written on Korean binyeo from the Joseon Dynasty; in her piece she calls The Elegant Anchor. Jane Liu has shared for The Year of the Horse a story about how monkeys protected horses, in Bimawen the Stable Monkey. A big thank you to all who submitted articles, making this a thoroughly interesting and eclectic edition.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jane Liu and James Thompson.

The Feel of Issey Miyake

Deanna Horton, BWC Co-Chair

If you lived in Japan as a gaijin or foreigner in the early 1990s, you would have seen that Issey Miyake was everywhere. These were the final days of the so-called bubble years when Japanese fashion design was at its apex. At the time I was doing a lot of work in Miyake's hometown of Hiroshima, which is where I met Miyake-san for the first time. The city was capitalizing on one of its most famous sons by giving out Miyake designed products as gifts. The designer had started producing his seminal line of pleated clothing which later became "Pleats Please". Every year I went to a special sale (also later when I returned to Japan in 1998) of Miyake designs and started collecting his work. A few of

these pieces are now in the ROM's collection; the rest I am still wearing—stay tuned—the ROM might get them eventually.



Deanna wearing Issey Miyake in Yokohama late 1980s © Deanna Horton.



Deanna wearing Issey Miyake with geisha in Kyoto 1991 © Deanna Horton.

What is special about these Issey Miyake pieces is their revolutionary format—now there are many copycats, but at its inception, these products were unique. To have the feel of pleated clothing—light and easy to wear; to be rolled and twisted for storage—was a first for me. When I was invited to a Japanese special geisha performance in Kyoto, there was no question that I would wear Issey Miyake—for its beauty, comfort, and timeless style. When I participated in the opening of the new Canadian Embassy in Tokyo, once again I chose to wear Issey Miyake.

The key to understanding Miyake clothing is to know they are designed for movement—Miyake worked with choreographers and his work has reportedly been used in dance performances. There are no restrictions or pulls of the fabric. And because of the pleats, the products are very textural. Some of the heavier ones feel like corduroy.

During my time in Japan, I developed a deep appreciation for Japanese textiles and grew to appreciate truly the beauty of Japanese kimono. However, wearing a kimono is very constricting, so it is even more admirable that Issey Miyake was able to upend the tradition to create a new Japanese wearable aesthetic. Perhaps his most interesting work is (a piece of cloth) A-POC. These are garments created from a single tube of fabric—thus starting a textile reduction movement which still resonates today.

Issey Miyake has been quoted as saying that he was not designing clothing, but rather “creating tools for living.” His innovative approach has established him in the pantheon of Japanese designers, and his works have appeared in special exhibitions such as at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Victoria and Albert in London. His works are in the permanent collection of museums such as the MoMA and, of course, the ROM, where, quite fittingly, Miyake works will be on display in the Shokkan exhibition opening in April.

A Rich Japanese vocabulary for describing tactile sensations

Jane Liu, BWC Executive & Jack Howard, Retired Librarian of the former H. H. Mu Far Eastern Library



It's hot © Jane Liu.

Snap! Buzz! Wham! What are these words? How do they describe so well the sounds found in these words? Those words are called **onomatopoeia**.

Onomatopoeia means the formation of words from the sounds they represent. Words like sizzle and crash are great examples—the word and the sound are the same thing or quite nearly. The word onomatopoeia comes from the Ancient Greek word ὀνοματοποιία [onomatopoeia] which means word, and the suffix -poios, which means making.

Every language uses onomatopoeia to a certain extent. English describes words like a steak that sizzles, the pop of a can of soda when it opens, or the dog that woofs. In Japanese, onomatopoeia is a convenient way to express sensations in everyday life. It is widely used in Japanese manga and literary works.

Japanese uses onomatopoeia to a much greater extent than other languages. In Japanese onomatopoeia is further defined as giseigo [擬声語] onomatopes—words that imitate sounds made by people, animals, or objects—and gitaigo [擬態語], phenomime or mimetic words (which are imitative representations of the real world in art in the broadest sense). A mimetic word mimics an action, condition or manner that does not make a sound.

When speaking of textile fabrics, we are concerned with mimetic words to describe the sensations one has upon seeing or feeling an object. Examples are 'kirakira' きらきら (sparkle), hirahira' ひらひら (flutter).

Very importantly, Japanese is known to have numerous onomatopoeic words associated with tactile sensations.

Smoothness

- Sarasara (さらさら): Dry and smooth (e.g., silk, dry skin, sand).
- Subesube (すべすべ): Smooth and slippery (e.g., polished stone, soft skin).
- Tsurutsuru (つるつる): Very smooth and glossy (e.g., ice, glass).

Roughness

- Zarazara (ざらざら): Rough and dry (e.g., sandpaper, concrete).
- Jarijari (じやりじやり): Gritty or sandy (e.g., sand, gravel).
- Jorijori (じょりじょり): Coarse, like stubble.
- Dekoboko (でこぼこ): Uneven, rough, or bumpy.

Stickiness & wetness

- Betabeta (べたべた): Sticky and wet (e.g., sweat, glue).
- Betobeto (べとべと): Similar to betabeta, often used for thicker, oily stickiness.
- Nebaneba (ねばねば): Viscous and gooey (e.g., okra, natto).
- Nurunuru (ぬるぬる): Slimy and slippery (e.g., seaweed, oil).

Most of these are double words, but single words are also used. Koshi and fukurami as described below. Or words like "tappuri" たっぷり (plentifully) and 'chōdo' ちょうど (just right).



Issey Miyake, Dress & Trousers, polyester, linen
Heisei era, 1990. 990.62.1.1-2. A © ROM.

Issey Miyake's pleats, particularly in the Pleats Please line, for example, are often described with Japanese tactile terms that focus on structural lightness, comfort, and, to a lesser extent used in standard marketing. Technical fabric feels like Koshi 腰 (stiffness, a crisp, resilient and slightly firm, yet lightweight texture) and Fukurami 膨らみ (fullness, volume, lightweight and comfortable). The garments have been described as having a "lightweight," "wrinkle-free," and "fluid" sensation that moves with the body.

In the Footsteps of George Crofts

Mary Boyd, BWC Co-Chair

In October 1922 George Crofts, a Tianjin-based collector of Chinese antiquities and ROM donor, journeyed to Luoyang, in Henan province. His objective was to visit the Longmen Grottoes [龍門石窟], Buddhist cave sculptures clustered along both banks of the Yi River at Longmen, about nine miles south of Luoyang. These carvings date from the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534/535 CE) with later additions during the Sui and Tang dynasties. Luoyang has been inhabited since the neolithic era, and its location close to the Yellow River ensured it a central role in China's political life for many centuries. It became the national capital under the Northern Wei in 494 CE and served as a secondary capital for the Tang.



Longmen Grottoes Defaced carvings © Mary Boyd.



Longmen Grottoes, Binyang cave Buddha Statue © Mary Boyd.

Although I had spent many years living in China, I had never been to Luoyang, so my return visit to China in October 2025 (the centenary of Crofts' death) seemed a good opportunity to see Luoyang and, through following his itinerary, pay homage to Crofts. I took as my guide the description left by Croft of his visit, which included his meeting with officials from the local warlord government, headed by Wu Peifu (吴佩孚 1874-1939, a leader in the Zhili warlord clique) as well as his observations about the Longmen Grottoes and the surrounding countryside.

Crofts had travelled via a series of trains from his home in Tianjin to Luoyang and then made the journey to the Longmen Grottoes riding in a sedan chair, carried by six bearers. His sedan chair, and that of his companion, Mr. Tsui Tse, had been borrowed from Wu Peifu's official "fleet", while a third companion rode horseback, and all were escorted by soldiers provided by the warlord. Crofts refers to river crossings, where the sedan chairs were carried onto ferries by coolies, with the whole enterprise taking much time and labour. China travel in 2025 was of course vastly different from what Crofts faced. My own journey was far more comfortable, on a high-speed train followed by a Chinese-made electric vehicle.

Looting from the Longmen site as well as other historic locations was a serious problem in those chaotic warlord years, and Wu Peifu had evidently been trying to control the situation. Nevertheless, Crofts mentions the activities of local dealers, who regardless of Wu Peifu's efforts seemed at ease with trading antiquities: "several country people called with pottery and figures, and it was possible to arrange some small business".

There are cumulatively 1,352 caves in the Longmen complex (on both sides of the Yi River), with over 97,000 statues. Most of the statues had already been damaged or

removed at the time of Crofts' visit, mainly due to theft but also due to water seeping down the limestone cliffs. Not surprisingly, Crofts' description of the Longmen Grottoes centred on the large Buddhist figures in the Binyang caves complex 賓陽石窟 – these are beautiful, and portray Buddha in various manifestations, along with apsaras [celestial nymphs] and guardian figures. Crofts' remarks on clambering up and down the cliff face on slippery rocks and pathways resonated with me, as even now tourists need to be sure footed to view the caves.

Following his visit to the Longmen Grottoes, Crofts visited the nearby “Guan Hong God of War” temple (the Guanlin Temple (關林)), built during the Ming dynasty to commemorate Guan Yu, a Three Kingdoms general. It is a relatively conventional temple but was enlivened during my visit in 2025 by the presence of young local tourists in “Hanfu” (Chinese traditional dress) cosplay outfits.

Crofts' description of the countryside - observed from his railway journey, and from his sedan chair – indicate the historical wealth of the area. He notes the presence of ceremonial archways (牌樓 pailou) in villages, as well as avenues of stone statues leading to tombs. These are undoubtedly the processional figures constituting a “spirit way” (神道), traditionally placed as an entrance before tombs, and can still be observed around Luoyang.

Along with such archaeological treasures, Crofts noted the evidence of famine and economic hardship. He was conscious of the scarcity of pigs, chickens and village dogs as he travelled through the countryside and concluded that local roads were in fact “famine-built” as relief public works. Indeed, a lengthy drought in 1920-21 in North China had badly affected Henan province, causing many deaths.

In the 100-plus years since Crofts' visit, Luoyang has developed into a key industrial city with an urban population of 2.5 million. Apart from the Longmen Grottoes, its tourism campaigns focus on an annual peony festival, its proximity to the martial arts Shaolin Temple as well as newly excavated archaeological sites, including Xia and Shang dynasty remains, Sui and Tang dynasty Grand Canal shipping relics and Tang pottery kilns. Such treasures will benefit from China's ongoing museum construction spree and should ensure that visitors will continue to find much of interest in Luoyang.

My Charmed Encounter with A Giant Parasitic Plant – Rafflesia

Marion Ho, BWC Executive

The opening of the new Lee-Chin Crystal in 2007 was an eye-opening experience, showcasing the wonders of nature on Earth, particularly the *Rafflesia arnoldii* model in the Shad Gallery of Biodiversity. Instantly, I knew I would be going on an adventure to find this mysterious, elusive and alluring plant, but how and when?



The Group of Friends © Marion Ho.



Close look at a Rafflesia bloom © Marion Ho.

Through my dear friend, Dr. Iris Chong, I met Paul, Iris's nephew in 2017. He is one of the managers at Gardens by the Bay, Singapore. He found out when the next Rafflesia would bloom in the Ranau District of Sabah State, Malaysia. In November, 2025. I travelled via Singapore to Kota Kinabalu, the coastal capital of Sabah State. From there to Ranau where the UNESCO Heritage site of Kinabalu is located. Our Ecotour guide indicated we were lucky to see a 3-day-old Rafflesia. Then he received a message: another blooming was taking place several miles down the road. We immediately added this to our itinerary, paying the entrance fee at the next site. We ultimately saw a total of three instead of one *Rafflesia keithii*. That was a big surprise.

In Sabah, the Conservation Authorities (CA) have educated the indigenous farmers on how to recognize the buds of the *Rafflesia keithii*. Once they discover this in their terrain, they will inform the authorities. Officers from the CA will then monitor their growth. The profit from the sales of the ecotour to the site will be shared 50/50, as a reward to the farmers, urging them to be vigilant and solve the problem successfully. The indigenous people are now the stewards of their environment.



Photo of Buds © Marion Ho.



Photo of Flower © Marion Ho.

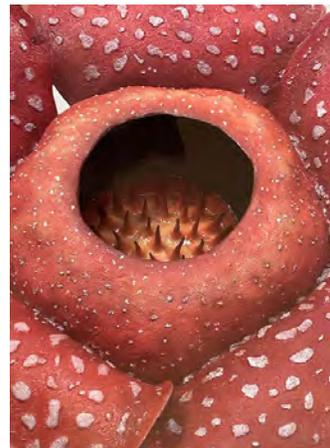
A tiny bud appears on the surface, and their survival rate is at 10-20%. The bud swells and matures, reaching almost the size of a cabbage.

Rafflesia is a parasitic plant lacking roots, leaves or stems. It latches onto a host plant to draw nutrients. Rafflesia flowers are dioecious. This means that individual flowers are either male or female. For a successful pollination, flies need to visit a male flower first to pick up pollen and subsequently visit a female flower to deposit the pollen. Given the rarity of Rafflesia blooms and short period in which they are open, a successful pollination can be quite challenge.

Rafflesia flowers emit a strong odor like that of rotting flesh, but I did not smell it at all. It may be due to its short bloom cycle, or specific weather conditions or the age of the flower, which could be either too young or too old.



ROM's large-scale model of *Rafflesia arnoldii* is located on the 2nd floor Schad Gallery of Biodiversity © Jane Liu.



ROM's model of *Rafflesia arnoldii* detail © Jane Liu.

The model of the *Rafflesia arnoldii* was made by Georgia Guenther, a highly experienced exhibit artist who had been at ROM for many years.

The Year of the Horse: Bimawen: A Stable Monkey

Jane Liu, BWC Executive

Deep Roots: Monkeys as Protectors of Horses

In the *Journey to the West*, a classic Chinese novel, the Jade Emperor appoints Sun Wukong 孫悟空, the Monkey King, to the post of Bimawen 避馬瘟—a low-ranking celestial stable hand—apparently to humiliate him. On a deeper level, however, the title draws on a long-standing folk belief that monkeys could “manage” or protect the health of horses.

Well before *Journey to the West* was written, Chinese popular belief had already linked monkeys with the care and safeguarding of horses. In pre-modern stables, horses were highly vulnerable to epidemics collectively known as mawen 馬瘟 (“horse plague”). Monkeys, regarded as intelligent, vigilant, and spiritually efficacious animals, were thought to ward off disease and malevolent forces. For this reason, images or representations of monkeys were sometimes placed in stables as protective talismans, invoking their power to guard horses from illness and misfortune.



Print of Bimawen reproduced after an early 20th century edition © 1878 - 2025 Western University.



922.1.188 hanging scroll of “May you rise rapidly in officialdom.” 141x 362cm, 18th century © ROM.

The picture of “Bimawen, a monkey in the stable” may not be familiar to us as another image; “Ma Sheng Feng Hou 馬上封侯, a monkey sitting on a horse that symbolizes “success is fast approaching.

The Elegant Anchor: Tracing the Binyeo from the Joseon Dynasty to Contemporary Canada

Grace K. Lee, BWC Executive

The binyeo (비녀)—a traditional Korean hairpin—embodies a unique intersection of aesthetic beauty and social meaning. While archaeological evidence traces hairpins back to the Neolithic period, the binyeo, as it is most widely recognized today, took shape and gained prominence during the Joseon dynasty, where it served as a visible marker of marital status and social order. This article focuses on that Joseon-era tradition as it is carried forward into the present, explored through modern practice, personal collection, and intergenerational experience.

A Symbol of Status and Adulthood



Grace K. Lee at her wedding © Grace K. Lee.



Grace's daughter Esther McLean at her wedding © Grace K. Lee.

In traditional Korean society, the binyeo was more than a tool to hold a chignon; it was a primary marker of a woman's transition to adulthood. Pinning the hair for the first time was a pivotal rite of passage, signaling that a young woman had reached maturity and was recognized as a formal member of the married community.

Materials and motifs were strictly dictated by social class. Gold, silver, and jade were reserved for royalty and high-ranking nobility, while commoners used humble materials like wood and bone. The decorative head of the pin carried deep symbolic meaning: phoenixes represented the Queen's authority, while floral motifs like peonies or plum blossoms symbolized wealth and virtue for the aristocracy.

Bridging Continents: My Personal Collection



Two binyeo © Grace K. Lee.

I own two binyeo that represent different chapters of Korean history. The top right is a brass binyeo adorned with chilbo (cloisonné enamel) for semi-formal use. This piece has a touching Canadian connection: it was generously given to me by Bessie Reynolds after I immigrated to Canada. Originally a gift she received from a Korean visa student in the early 1960s, it serves as a beautiful symbol of early cultural exchange between Korea and Canada.

The bottom piece is a ceremonial, phoenix-shaped binyeo with chilbo (cloisonné enamel). Traditionally associated with queens, phoenix motifs were permitted to ordinary women only on their wedding day—allowing them to be, symbolically, “queen for a day.” This modern piece reflects the continuity of Korean decorative heritage through contemporary craftsmanship.

A Living Legacy: From Mother to Daughter

While Western-style weddings are common today in South Korea, traditional ceremonies remain a vital link to our roots. When I married, the binyeo in my hair felt like the weight of my heritage. Decades later, seeing my daughter wear a binyeo at her wedding here in Canada was a profound moment of witnessing "living legacy."

The binyeo reminds us that cultural heritage does not live only in glass cases, but in memory and the love passed from mother to daughter.

Further Exploration



The binyeo collections can be seen in the Korean Gallery at ROM curated by Dr. Vicki Kwon. © Grace K. Lee.

Please consider joining our Committee!

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Friends of East Asia

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