

Traditionally Attributed to Ma Yuan (1139-1194)

A Gentleman in His Garden

China, Ming dynasty (1368-1644), 14th-15th century

Album leaf; ink and color on silk

Purchase, 1934

(4161)

At first glance, this intimate work appears to represent the court-painting style of the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279). Due to its “one-corner” approach, it traditionally was attributed to Ma Yuan, one of the most representative court painters of the 12th century.

However, it is likely to date to the early Ming period (1368-1644), when after the end of a century of foreign occupation under the Mongols, there was a revival of earlier court-painting styles, especially for official commissions. It was precisely at this time that Shūgetsu, whose handscroll *Landscape* is on display nearby, came to China, together with his teacher Sesshū. In the port city of Ningbo, Shūgetsu was exposed to this revived style, which he took back to Japan, where it became the impetus for a revolution in landscape painting. Original Southern Song dynasty paintings were collected by the Muromachi shogunate (1392-1573), and were already an influence on Japanese paintings before Shūgetsu went to China.

When compared to the earlier Southern Song style, which made extensive use of atmospheric washes and tended to have a clearly articulated foreground, middle ground, and background, Shūgetsu's *Landscape* reveals the influence of early Ming interpretations, with more stylized brushwork, less use of atmospheric washes, and a compression of middle and background to emphasize the foreground. This charming album leaf is a good representation of the revived court style of the early Ming that Shūgetsu would have seen during his travels.

Fang Xiyuan (Hō Sai'en) (1736-after 1793)

Magpies

China, Qing dynasty (1644-1911), 18th century

Hanging scroll; ink on paper

Purchase, the Richard Lane Collection, 2003

(RL2008.406)

During most of the Tokugawa shogunate (1615-1868), Japan's borders were officially closed, except for small communities of Dutch and Chinese merchants in the port city of Nagasaki. Along with these merchants came first refugees from China fleeing the collapse of the Ming dynasty in the mid-17th century, particularly Ōbaku monks, and later a number of skilled artists, some of whom were invited by the Japanese government in order to train Japanese painters in Chinese styles. Eventually this resulted in the development of the Nagasaki School, a Japanese-painting tradition that derived from professional styles of Chinese painting during the 17th and 18th centuries. The Nagasaki School is best known for exquisitely detailed "bird and flower" paintings (*kachōga*), such as this finely executed portrayal of magpies. However, Nagasaki School artists worked in a wide variety of genres, and were equally adept at figure painting and a distinctive decorative style of landscape painting.

Fang Xiyuan was among the most famous of the Chinese artists to visit Nagasaki during the 18th century. Like other artists from China, his work offered Japanese artists a rare opportunity to learn about the international art world and the most recent developments in the long-respected Chinese painting tradition. As such, his paintings were highly coveted, and widely imitated.

Mokuan Shōtō (1611-1684)

Blossoming Tree Peonies

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), 17th century

Hanging scroll; ink on paper

Purchase, Muriel H. Cooke Memorial Fund, 1970

(3714.1)

Mokuan was a Chinese monk from Fujian province in southern China. He was ordained at the age of 18, and trained on the sacred Buddhist mountain of Huangbo in Fujian, from which the Japanese term “Ōbaku” derives. He established an impressive career as a young man, serving as abbot of two monasteries. Upon the collapse of the Ming dynasty in the middle of the 17th century, several monks from Fujian fled to Nagasaki in Japan, where they were welcomed by the local Chinese merchant community, and eventually gained the support of the Japanese government, as well. Mokuan came to Nagasaki in 1655, where he served as abbot of Fukusaiji, the second most powerful position in the Ōbaku hierarchy. In 1660, he was invited to the capital area (Uji, near Kyoto) to help establish Manpukuji, the central headquarters for the Ōbaku sect in Japan; he eventually became the second abbot of Manpukuji.

Mokuan was a talented calligrapher and painter, with connections to elite Chinese artist families. In addition to his own talents as an artist, which were widely appreciated in Japan, he brought a collection of Chinese paintings and calligraphy that served as important models of the latest Chinese trends, with several examples of the Wu School tradition, codified by Wen Zhengming and his students in the Suzhou area during the 16th century.

Sengai Sei'an (1636-1705)

Calligraphy

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), 17th-early 18th century

Hanging scroll; ink on paper

Anonymous loan, 2008

(L40,537)

Unlike the famous later Japanese Zen artist of the same name, Sengai Gibon (1750-1838), Sengai Sei'an was a Chinese monk from Fujian province in southern China. Fujian was a center of resistance against the Manchu invasion at the end of the Ming dynasty in the middle of the 17th century, and many monks from this area fled to Japan. Sengai came to Nagasaki in 1657, and spent the rest of his life in Japan. He gained fame during the Nagasaki famine of the 1670s, during which time he helped people survive by distributing food. He was especially admired for his calligraphy, but was also known as a painter, and his painting style reflects considerable Japanese influence.

Among the most representative of all Ōbaku art forms is the single line of calligraphy, often intended to provide a subject of meditation. This hanging scroll reads:

Clouds arise, a thousand graceful peaks

Ōkura Ryūzan (1785-1850)

Winter Landscape in the Style of Wen Zhengming

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), 19th century

Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk

Promised Gift of Griffith and Patricia Way, 2008

(TD2008.33.4)

A lone traveler rides along a stream through a barren winter landscape. His red cloak stands out brilliantly against the snow, a single accent of color in an otherwise subdued palette. He moves towards a village in the distance, whose walls are accomplished with a pale red wash echoing the traveler's cloak. On a promontory above the village, an isolated pavilion offers the breathtaking scene of an impressive central massif, with a waterfall cascading down one side, and an expansive view opening on the other.

Ōkura Ryūzan was born into a family of sake merchants, but he entrusted the family business to a younger brother so he could focus his attention on literati pursuits. Together with his wife, who was an accomplished musician, he played an active role in defining literati culture in Kyoto through the middle of the 19th century. Ryūzan's title indicates that this painting was done in the manner of the Chinese artist Wen Zhengming (1470-1559), who himself was a cultural luminary in Suzhou, and a tremendously influential painter, guiding the Wu School of painting to a dominant position in China for most of the 16th century. A comparison with the handscroll *Clearing After Snowfall Along the River* on display nearby, done by an artist in Wen Zhengming's circle, provides an interesting comparison of a comparable scene, revealing both the similarities and differences between Ryūzan's style and its supposed source of inspiration.

Ōkura Ryūzan (1785-1850)

“Nine Similarities”

from the *Tianbao Chapter of the Shijing*

Japa, Edo period (1615-1868), 1847

Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk

Promised Gift of Griffith and Patricia Way, 2008

(TD2008.33.5)

Here Ryūzan takes as his subject an ancient Chinese theme, long popular among painters throughout East Asia: the “nine similarities” of the emperor to the natural world, as outlined in the Tianbao chapter of the *Shijing*. Each of these similarities, for example, that the emperor is eminent like a mountain or that he is like the rising sun, is literally depicted in the various elements that make up the painting. Paintings of the “nine similarities” typically were intended as wishes for the well-being and longevity of the emperor, which as a member of the cultured elite in Kyoto, would have been an understandable sentiment for Ryūzan. The fact that this painting dates to two decades before the restoration of political power to the emperor with the end of the last shogunate, which Ryūzan did not live to see, adds poignancy to the work.

The *Shijing*, or Classic of Poetry, is a compilation of poems from the Zhou dynasty (1122-256 BCE) in China. According to tradition, it was edited by Confucius, and it played a major role in the development of his philosophy. It is considered one of the Five Classics, the five most important ancient texts that form the foundation of Chinese culture.

Nakabayashi Chikutō (1776-1853)

Buddhist Temple Among Cloudy Peaks

Japan, Edo period (1615-1868), 19th century

Hanging scroll; ink on silk

Gift of London Gallery, 1975

(6162.1)

Nakabayashi Chikutō was a leading proponent for the literati painting style. As a young artist, he was supported by the Nagoya merchant Kamiya Ten'yū (1721-1801), who provided him with access to an impressive collection of Chinese paintings. The name Chikutō, meaning “bamboo grotto,” was supposedly chosen by Ten'yū after the artist expressed an interest in the Chinese painter Li Kan (1245-1320), who was famous for his paintings of bamboo. Since Chikutō was born in Nagoya and spent his formative years there, he is often understood as one of the leaders of a distinctive tradition of literati painting in Nagoya, but he settled in Kyoto in 1815 and spent the rest of his life there.

Among Chikutō's students in Kyoto was Ōkura Ryūzan, whose paintings are on display nearby. Although he was heavily influenced by the Chinese painting tradition, Chikutō was critical of Chinese artists from the Nagasaki School (represented in this exhibition by Fang Xiyuan), which he considered to be an example of craftsman-like professional painting. Instead, he promoted a scholar-amateur, or “literati” painting, style (*bunjinga*) that emphasized painting by elite educated artists as a means of self-cultivation.

In this painting, Chikutō uses a style particularly associated with the Chinese painter and calligrapher Mi Fu (1051-1107), heralded by later theorists as an early leader in the literati tradition. The use of loosely structured ink dots reminiscent of impressionist painting in Europe, known as “Mi dots,” is the defining feature of this style.

Traditionally Attributed to Wang Wei (701-761)

Clearing After Snowfall Along the River

China, Ming dynasty (1368-1644), 16th century

Handscroll; ink and color on paper

Gift of Mr. Robert Lehman, 1960

(2725.1)

This long handscroll depicts a river landscape covered with freshly fallen snow. The crystalline structure of the hills and rocks is derived from landscape conventions of the Tang dynasty (618-907), and this work was long attributed to Wang Wei, an association supported by the evidence of two other handscrolls that depict variations on different sections of the Academy's scroll (private collection, Japan, and National Palace Museum, Taipei).

Wang Wei was long admired as the first eminent scholar-painter in China, and was promoted as the patriarch of the Southern School (*nanga* in Japanese) of literati painting by Dong Qichang (1555-1636). It has been proposed that the Academy's handscroll preserves a style of painting associated with Wang Wei in the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), by which time already few reliable works could be attributed confidently to the great master.

The style and brushwork of the Academy's painting suggest that it is a Ming dynasty work from the circle of Wen Zhengming (1470-1559), who dominated the Wu School in the Suzhou area during the 16th century. Both the Wu School, of which Wen Zhengming was one of the greatest proponents, and the Southern School, of which Wang Wei was considered the founder, played a key role in Japanese painting during the Edo period, giving this scroll a doubled significance. It is particularly interesting to compare this work from Wen Zhengming's circle with the later hanging scroll by Ōkura Ryūzan in this exhibition, which Ryūzan intended to be an example of Wen's style.

Traditionally attributed to Guan Daosheng (1262-1319)

Celestial Immortals

China, Ming dynasty (1368-1644), 16th-early 17th century

Handscroll; ink on silk

Acquired through exchange, 1973

(4149.1)

This painting bears a spurious signature of Guan Daosheng, wife of the famous Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) calligrapher-painter Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322). However, stylistically it can be dated to the latter part of the Ming dynasty, during the 16th or early 17th century. It depicts a formal procession of celestial immortals, officials of the divine world that paralleled the Chinese imperial government hierarchy.

After the painting comes a long inscription by the Ōbaku monk Dokuryū Shōeki (1596-1672). From Hangzhou in China, Dokuryū fled the collapse of the Ming dynasty, arriving in Japan in 1653. He was admired as a seal carver and calligrapher, and also for his skills in medicine. He served as scribe to the first abbot of Manpukuji, but also spent time as an itinerant monk traveling throughout Japan. His inscription on this painting indicates that the painting was in Japan by the middle of the 17th century, and may have been brought by a Chinese monk refugee.

Shūgetsu Tōkan (c. 1440-1529)

Landscape

Japan, Muromachi period (1392-1573), 15th-16th century

Handscroll; ink and color on paper

Gift of Mr. Robert Allerton, 1957

(2390.1)

Shūgetsu took vows as a Buddhist monk in 1462, and only a few years later, in 1467, traveled to China for two years with his teacher Sesshū (1420-1506). As a young painter, Sesshū studied at Shōkokuji in Kyoto, where he would have had access to the painting collection of the shoguns, including a number of high quality Chinese paintings, particularly from the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279). When Shūgetsu and his teacher traveled to China, they found an active revival of the Southern Song style underway, which drew upon traditional compositional elements, brushwork, and use of ink, but sometimes with dramatically different results.

Sesshū and Shūgetsu brought this early Ming manner of painting back to Japan, where it was immediately appreciated, and quickly became the dominant style. Shūgetsu eventually was called back to his home prefecture of Satsuma in 1492, but he continued to promote the new style of painting introduced to Japan by Sesshū throughout his life, and of all Sesshū's students and imitators, Shūgetsu is generally considered to be the most faithful to the master's original style. This remarkable handscroll, monumental in its conception, utilizes a number of elements derived from early Ming painting, such as the dramatic "axe-cut" brushwork and the emphasis on foreground elements. The painting is particularly distinguished by the clarity of its brushwork, a feature that was to be highly influential in the continuation of this style for centuries afterwards.