
KARA-E: CLASSIC CHINESE PAINTINGS OF THE OWARI TOKUGAWA CLAN

Foreword

In contrast to the Japanese paintings exemplified by the National Treasure *Tale of Genji Illustrated Handscrolls* that were known as *yamato-e* (literally, "pictures from Yamato[=Japan]"), paintings that crossed the sea to Japan from China have long been known as *kara-e*, or "pictures from Tang China." The Owari Tokugawa family inherited the deep respect for such Chinese things that had characterized the preceding Muromachi period and acquired many Chinese paintings, with a particular focus on works from the so-called Higashiyama Gomotsu collection, which is said to have been owned by the Ashikaga shogunal family. Over the course of the 350 years of the Owari Tokugawa family's long history, many works in the collection have been dispersed or lost, but fortunately, many catalogues documenting the contents of the collections have survived, making it possible to trace the actual status of the collection at various moments in time.

This exhibition brings together the Chinese paintings passed down within the Owari Tokugawa family, including works originally in the Higashiyama Gomotsu collection, bringing us closer to a complete understanding of the reception of Chinese paintings by this leading daimyo family.

Section 1

Exploring the Chinese Paintings of the Owari Tokugawa Family

Chinese paintings were imported goods that symbolized wealth and power, so they were often used by daimyo households on official or public occasions, such as for tea ceremonies or gifts, or to adorn the special palaces constructed for a shogun's official visit. Perhaps for this reason, records mentioning these

paintings often include the name of the artist and the title of the painting, presenting a high likelihood that details such as the time of acquisition and specifics of when and how they were used could be determined from historical documents.

However, the documents and collection catalogues of most daimyo families have been scattered and lost, making it difficult to grasp the full picture of their Chinese painting collections. In light of this rarity, the 500 volumes of collection catalogues of the Owari family, as leading branch of the Tokugawa clan, that are now held by the Tokugawa Art Museum are invaluable. This section will take a look at some of these documents and introduce the Owari Tokugawa collection of Chinese paintings.

Section 2

Song- and Yuan-dynasty Paintings in the *Kundaikan sōchōki*

The main standard used in acquiring Chinese paintings, not only by the Owari family, but by all daimyo families in the Edo period, was the section of the *Kundaikan sōchōki* manual ranking painters in three categories: upper, middle, and lower tier. The *Kundaikan sōchōki* was an instruction manual for the proper display of artworks said to have been compiled by Nōami and Sōami, who were aesthetic advisors to the Muromachi shogunate. In the Edo period, this book heavily influenced tea ceremony culture and the practice of decorating special palaces for official shogunal visits. The section ranking painters constituted a list of Chinese artists, primarily of the Song and Yuan dynasties, and artworks by painters whose names appeared on this list were considered to be suitable for use in adorning palaces or for presenting to the shogun. The Owari family particularly revered and collected works by artists listed in the "upper" category of this ranking list.

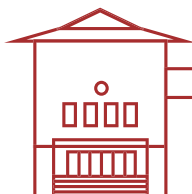
Section 3

Chinese Paintings of the Ming and Qing Dynasties

The number of paintings by artists of the Song and Yuan dynasties that made their way to Japan was limited, and as time progressed, demand exceeded supply, making them difficult to obtain by the Edo period. At the same time, Ming- and Qing-dynasty paintings began to be imported through trade, filling the demand.

In Japan, the literati paintings of the Wu school, which became the mainstream in China during the Ming dynasty, hardly circulated at all, and a uniquely Japanese view of painting formed based on the more familiar painting styles of the Song and Yuan dynasties. Instead, Ming-dynasty paintings of the Zhe school (Lin Liang, Lu Ji, Xie Shichen, et al.) of Zhejiang province, which drew on the tradition of the Southern Song-dynasty court painters, were widely accepted in Japan, perhaps because they had more in common with the style of the Song- and Yuan-dynasty paintings that already existed here. As for Qing-dynasty works, bird-and-flower paintings by Sun Yi and Shen Nanpin also circulated widely.

The Owari family's acquisitions of Chinese paintings tended to focus on Song- and Yuan-dynasty works. However, among the surviving artworks and historical records, there appear to be some that may have served as reference material for acquiring Ming-dynasty paintings as well.



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