

# Artistic Legacy of the Fifteenth Century Selections from Japan: The Shaping of Daimyo Culture, 1185-1868

Translated by **Kyoko Selden**

Kyoko Selden translated the Japanese contributions to the catalogue for the exhibit on Japan: The Shaping of Daimyo Culture, 1185-1868, held at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. from October 1988 to January 1989. This expansive exhibit was the first anywhere, including Japan, to present the artistic legacy of daimyō (regional lords) from the rise of warrior rulers at the end of the Heian period in the twelfth century to the dissolution of the feudal system in 1868. Featured were portraits, calligraphy, religious sculpture, painting, armor, lacquer, ceramics, textiles, tea-ceremony utensils, and artwork related to Noh theater. The following two excerpts convey Kyoko’s appreciation of art, her ability to translate classical poetry and various genres of prose across the centuries and her knowledge of Japanese history and culture.

## Daruma



**Daruma (S: Bodhidharma), Bokkei Saiyo (fl. 1452-73), hanging scroll, ink on paper**

**110.0 x 58.3 (43¼ x 23), Muromachi period, no later than 1465, Shinju-an,**

### Kyoto, important cultural property

Bodhidharma (J. Daruma) was an Indian prince of the early sixth century A.D. who went to South China to spread the practice of meditation. At first unsuccessful, he crossed the Yangzi River and went north to Mount Song, where he meditated for nine years facing the cave wall at the Shaolin monastery. Daruma's teaching subsequently evolved into a forceful religious movement, which became known as Chan (Zen, in Japanese) Buddhism, which survives vigorously to this day. Many different types of portraits of Daruma exist, all imaginary representations of the patriarch based on various narrative accounts. Here Daruma is represented in half-length, casting a concentrated stare with bulging eyes. He is clad as a monk, in a plain cassock, and his arms are folded in front of him. The long fingernail on the left thumb marks Daruma as an ascetic; the earring on the left earlobe marks him as a princely personage. At the lower right are stamped a two-character relief seal, Bokkei, and a circular relief seal, Saiyo, below it. They are the seals of the artist of the Soga clan, Bokkei Saiyo, otherwise known as Hyōbu Bokkei.

The written history of Zen Buddhism starts with the pseudo-biography of Daruma, the founding patriarch of the school, which informs us that the teaching he transmitted to China was fundamentally different from that which had been taught and practiced by other traditional Buddhists. Daruma taught that the Buddha's doctrine should be transmitted from mind to mind, by directly pointing at the heart of a man so that he would see his nature and attain his own Buddhahood.

The history of Daruma portraiture dates from as early as the eighth century A.D. in China. As the commemorative portrait of the founding patriarch of the Zen school, a Daruma portrait would be displayed by Zen adepts on the fifth

day of October for the memorial ceremony honoring his death. Many different types and styles of Daruma portraits were painted in both China and Japan. The half-length type had appeared already before the twelfth century in China.

The inscription above is by the famous Zen monk of Daitokuji Ikkyū Sōjun (1394-1481). As Daruma faces to the left, the inscription is written from left to right:

Followers in China and India conjure  
your spirit;

Half the figure, a portrait, reveals your  
entire body;

What did the grass mat at Shaolin  
[Temple] accomplish?

At the Palace of King Xiangzhi, spring of  
plums and willows.

The sixth year of Kansei [1465], day of  
spring; [signed] fifth generation  
descendant of Daitō [Kokushi or the  
National Master] and formerly of the  
Tokuzenji Temple [subtemple], Jun Ikkyū  
respectfully eulogizes [stamped with a  
square relief seal Ikkyū]

The poem is recorded, with slightly different wording, in Ikkyū's collection of literary works *Kyōun shū* (Mad Cloud Collection). The Palace of King Xiangzhi mentioned in the last line of Ikkyū's poem is a Chinese name for the palace of the father of Bodhidharma, thought to have been situated in South India, corresponding to present-day Madras. Fifth generation descendant of Daitō refers to Ikkyū's position in the transmission line of teaching; fifth from Daitō (Great Lamp) Kokushi (National Master) to the monk Shūho Myōchō (1282-1337), the founding abbot of the Daitokuji Monastery in Kyoto. Tokuzenji Temple is a subtemple of the Daitokuji Temple, which had been refurbished by Ikkyū sometime around 1459 when he was

appointed its abbot.

The artist Bokkei Saiyo was the earliest of the group of artists known by the family name Soga, who served the warrior clan Asakura in Echizen Province (now Fukui Prefecture located on the Japan Sea coast). The Asakura, in turn, were for generations vassals of the Shiba family who, as a branch family of the Ashikaga, had been kanrei (deputy shogun) in control of the Echizen region. At the time this Bodhidharma painting was executed Echizen was ruled by Asakura Toshikage (also known as Takakage, 1428-81), the powerful warrior and enlightened ruler of Echizen proper who controlled the area as shogodai (deputy constable). The Asakura family came under the influence of and actively patronized Ikkyū, and Bokkei is recorded as one of his disciples. At least two portraits of Ikkyū were painted by Bokkei Saiyo, one dated 1452 and the other 1453. On the basis of the dates of these paintings, it is assumed that this Bokkei is “Hyōbu Bokkei” who is mentioned in the collection of literary works of the scholar monk Kisei Reigen (1403-88) as a student of the painter Shūbun, a frequent companion of Ikkyū, and who died in Ise in 1473. Not much else is known about our painter.

In this work, the bold brushstrokes that delineate Daruma’s robe are the mark of a Soga painter. The half-length type of Daruma portrait, with the robe executed in sketchy brushwork, and with more carefully described facial features, was transmitted to Japan from China during the Muromachi period. The later Japanese versions are distinguished from the Chinese precedents by the bolder use of dark ink tones resulting in abstract, patterned forms, especially in the definition of the robe. The style of Bokkei, his immediate successor Soga Shōjō, and two generations of Soga Chokuan of the sixteenth century consistently show strong individualistic brushwork and the achievement of dramatic tonal contrasts, marking them as expressionistic artists who

had emerged in the provinces after the mid-fifteenth century.

### Listening to the Pines Study

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**Listening to the Pines Study, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 103.0 x**

**31.8 (40½ x 12½), Muromachi period, no later than 1433, Seikadō Bunko, Tokyo, important cultural property**

A tall, gnarled pine tree, its roots precariously clinging to a rocky bank, rises at the right. A pavilion is framed by the trunk and branches of the tree. Behind the pavilion soars a second, equally gnarled pine tree, painted in ink so pale that it appears to be almost a shadow of the first. A mountain path leads from the left side of the landscape, across a timber bridge over a cascading stream on the left, to the pavilion. A jagged mountain towers in the center, its lower portion obscured by the wafting mist.

Five inscriptions, written at different times over a twenty-five year period, are brushed at the top of the painting in a disorderly fashion. In fact, visible seams between the inscriptions indicate that they have been reorganized. The earliest of these, the one at the upper right, is by the Zen monk Ishō Tokugan (1360-1437). It contains a short preface, *Listening to the Pines Study* (Chōshōken), poem composed for Attendant (Jisha) Ryūko [Iwa...], and a postscript, *On the third day of the second month of the year Kichū* [Corresponding to 1433]. These relate for whom and when the poem was written. The main body of Ishō's poem reads:

I hear there is a man of high virtue in the realm of the west, who lives at Nanmei;

High above the hut soar tall pine trees, offering their green canopies;

A lamp casting spots of light behind the tiny window must indeed make me long to get there.

Sounds of the wind blend with the reading voice all night long.

Japanese scholars have recently argued that the scroll was produced in Kyoto on behalf of a

certain young monk, Attendant Ryūkō of Nanmeizan monastery, also known as Jōfukuji Temple, in Suō (now Yamanashi Prefecture), located on the western tip of Honshu island. This would explain the reference in the poem to “the realm of the west.” Suō was governed by the powerful Ōuchi family. Ryūkō Shinkei, who wrote the poem just across from Chōjū’s, enjoyed the patronage of the Ōuchi family while in Kyoto, and later went to Suō.

While “Attendant Ryūkō [ ]wa” remains unidentified, he is assumed to have been a young Zen monk at Jōfukuji Temple, whose scholarly ambitions were embodied in his study-retreat, real or imaginary, which became the theme of this scroll. The title of the painting, as well as that of the poem “Listening to the Pines Study” (Chōshōken) was appropriately chosen for the scholarly hermitage in this work, for it refers to the idea of listening to “whispers of pine winds and sounds of stream waters,” a Chinese phrase well known in Japan. The term “Chōshō,” a recurring literary and pictorial theme and name in China, became a model for the Japanese.

Originally, the scroll had only Ishō’s inscription, but in subsequent years, and presumably as the scroll was moved back and forth between Kyoto and Suō, four more inscriptions were added. It exemplifies the dissemination of the early fifteenth-century shosizu (painting of a scholar’s study) to the provinces by the second quarter of the fifteenth century. Jikuun Tōren (1391-1471) added the final inscription, written at the upper left in 1458, twenty-five years after the first. It reads:

Trek, trek up the precarious path, the road through the mountains goes on and on;

The hermit’s abode between the moss-covered cliff and the deep green stream;

Hermitage, after all, is no more than a

trifling way of life;

Whispers of pine trees may lure you on, but don’t let leisure turn into lethargy.

[signed] Chōkonsō (an alternative literary sobriquet of Jikuun) Tōren invites those who aspire to retire by his clumsy verse. The end of the second year of Chōroku (1458).

The five inscriptions, written at different times over the span of a quarter of a century, function differently from those of early fifteenth-century shosaizu (landscape paintings with verse inscriptions) where laudatory poems were written during a gathering of many like-minded poet-monks. The inscriptions on this work form a collection of individual poems, each a personal response to the scroll and to the idea of the hermetic practice. Tōren’s poem seems to contain a measure of irony about the futility of such retirement. Such sentiment reflects a new attitude of reservation toward the practice. Occurring at the same time, in the mid-fifteenth century, was the diminution of patronage of the literary gatherings at Zen temples, which had been championed by such men as Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimochi (1386-1428), and a corresponding increase in the bureaucratic nature of the activities of the temples.

Stylistically, the painting exhibits some unusual features. The choppy brushstrokes, each showing marked thinning and thickening, suggest a stylistic model different from that which is assumed to have been behind earlier shigajiku examples. The model might have been a Chinese painting or a Korean work done in the Li Cheng (919-67) or Guo Xi (circa 1020-90) tradition. The rocks in the foreground, the pine trees, and the mountain above are rendered by contour lines that consist of a series of twisted brushstrokes that reveal the choppy, nervous movement of the hand. Along with monochromatic ink washes, reddish browns and blue-greens have been extensively used,

though much of the original pigment has been lost.

These selections are taken from the exhibition

catalogue Japan: The Shaping of Daimyo Culture, 1185-1868, ed. Yoshiaki Shimizu (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1989), 139-42 and 144-46.

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Three Heian Poems, translated with calligraphy by Kyoko Selden

**Kyoko Selden** (1936-2013) taught Japanese language and literature as a senior lecturer at Cornell University until her retirement in 2008. Author, translator, artist and calligrapher, she was the translation coordinator of the Asia-Pacific Journal. Her major works as translator centered on Japanese women writers, the atomic bomb, the Ainu and the Okinawans. Her major translations included [Japanese Women Writers: Twentieth Century Short Fiction](#), [More Stories By Japanese Women Writers, An Anthology](#), Kayano Shigeru’s [Our Land Was a Forest](#), Honda Katsuichi’s [Harukor: Ainu Woman’s Tale](#), [The Atomic Bomb: Voices From Hiroshima and Nagasaki](#), Shin’ichi Suzuki’s [Nurtured by Love](#), and Cho Kyo’s [The Search for the Beautiful Woman, A Cultural History of Japanese and Chinese Beauty](#).