PAPERS COMMUNICATED

24. *A Group of Wall-Paintings by Sanraku.*

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Sanraku (1559–1635), a master-artist of the Kano School, was noted for his rare talent in producing wall-paintings in palaces. In ancient palaces and temples in Kyoto and elsewhere, there remain to this day quite a number of wall-paintings usually ascribed to the great painter's brush, none of them, however, having any indisputable testimony of authenticity. As for works of other kind than this, it is true, there exist some specimens bearing the artist's own stamp, and yet of wall-painting and *fusuma-e*, or painting done on sliding-screens, not a single example as authentic was found—a fact to be deplored, because of the important place Sanraku's painting occupies in the history of Japanese art, and especially because of the great importance of his mural pictures as representing the prevailing taste and culture of his age.

Recently, however, an authentic example of this line of his work has been disclosed, by chance, in Prince Michihide Kujō's residence in Tokyo. Now it must be remembered that the former generations of the Kujō family, one of the oldest noble families in this country, patronized the painter Sanraku and his son Sansetsu and also their descendants, so that the Kujō family has naturally handed down a number of works by those artists, including not a few wall-paintings and *fusuma-e*. The ancient mansion of the family in Kyoto was destroyed by fire in 1788, and their present residence in Tokyo built in 1886 is, needless to say, an altogether different thing from it. Nonetheless, the Tokyo residence is known to store a large collection of old paintings which, it might be supposed, were formerly kept in the Kyoto mansion. This we knew, but nobody ever dreamed, until quite lately, that one of them would turn out to be a great wall-painting by a master hand. I refer to the pictures decorating the inner sitting room of the Prince. They have hitherto been totally unknown to the connoisseur, as few but the members of the family have ever been admitted into the room. Last autumn, however, the late Prince Michizane generously allowed me to examine the pictures. At first sight I judged it to be a work by Sanraku, but could find therein neither his signature

nor his stamp as was usual with the mural paintings in those days. Fortunately, however, there is preserved in the same family an old written record which would strongly support this judgement. That is a diary kept by Prince Yukiie, one of the former heads of the family, in which is found an entry, under the date of the 3rd of the 6th moon, 1655, to the effect that the Prince once caused Sanraku and Sansetsu to paint pictures for his own sitting rooms and three adjacent parts of the mansion. It is probable, then, that the pictures decorating the same sitting room, somehow surviving the fire mentioned above, were later removed to the new Tokyo residence to be used as ever by the succeeding princes as their private chamber. Besides, as the diary tells us, the father and son collaborated at their work, and thus we may understand that Sanraku took up the more important part of it, that is, the painting of the wall-pictures for the principal one in the Prince's sitting room, letting his son work at the rooms of minor importance. Moreover, this is fully confirmed by the style of the painting; for the paintings in the sitting room by far excell as well as differ from Sansetsu's style,—a style, the characteristics of which are perfectly evident from a fairly large number of his extant works, including wall-paintings as well as smaller pieces. Thus I am inevitably induced to think that the paintings in question must have come from the brush of the senior artist.

This group of paintings is done on the walls of the *tokonoma* alcove and behind the *chigai-dana* (ornamental tier-shelves), and continued to the four *fusuma* (sliding screens) and the lower parts of the eight *shōji* (paper sliding screen). The work as a whole represents landscapes in the four seasons interspersed with houses and human figures. Its greatest merit lies in its conception showing perfect freedom combined with fine unity. Again, the ease and freedom of the brush-strokes is surprisingly admirable, and the mode of colouring is also superb. Altogether, this may justly be claimed to be one of the very best of the wall-paintings by Sanraku, and by taking it as a standard we shall be able to give a final opinion upon those works hitherto ascribed to his brush but without any solid testimony. In this sense, the new discovery of the wall-paintings is not merely important for the study of the painter, but will be of no small value to students of our art and cultural history.

A part representing Spring, on the *Tokonoma* alcove.

Another part representing Spring, on the *Chigai-dana* Shelves.