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FUJIWARA, Kanta. A Study of *Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden* by Nagasawa Rosetsu: Focusing on Its Relation with the Literary Authority of the Subject

Nagasawa Rosetsu (1754–1799) is arguably one of the “eccentric” painters for his attempts in overcoming painting traditions through his unusual compositions and shaping. For that reason, paintings that were close to his master, Maruyama Okyo’s style attracted less attention. The painting examined in this study, *Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden* (collection of ShoJu-ji temple, Aichi prefecture), is one such example. Its precise depiction of a person’s features and intricate drawing of a rock reminds us of Okyo’s style. This work has not been regarded as an individual subject of research due to the challenge in examining its features from the perspective of Rosetsu as an eccentric painter; it has only been mentioned in passing as part of studies on Shojuji-temple’s sliding screens. Given that the focus of those studies were on the sliding screens, any consideration of the paintings was limited to a certain viewpoint and resulted in a narrow discussion.

In this paper, I will uncover the ideas concealed in his paintings by paying close attention to the link between literary authority of the theme and its representation in paintings. I will also further analyze the characteristics of an aspect of his drawing approach that has so far been overlooked.

The theme of this painting, *Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden*, is based upon the party that Su Shi held with the literati during the Northern Song Dynasty. Composed by Mi Fu, the proverb was accepted among literati as a source for such Western Garden depictions (*seiengashū-zu ki*, 西園雅集図記, hereafter *zuki*). In many Ming Dynasty paintings of the same subject, the numbers and representation of the characters differed from that described in *zuki*. Paintings from the middle Edo period modelled after Chinese paintings did not necessarily depict the contents of *zuki* as priority was given to matching the styles of preceding works.

Contrary to predominant sentiments, Rosetsu produced a work that was almost a verbatim replica of *zuki*. The close link between the art and the literary as demonstrated in this collection clearly distinguishes it from other works by Rosetsu’s contemporaries. In addition, aspects of images in Rosetsu’s *Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden* resemble preceding works on the same subject. However, these images were limited to works that were true to the *zuki*; images which appeared to contradict the *zuki* were replaced with images depicting the accurate content.

Hence, it is apparent that while Rosetsu referred to preceding works, he chose to focus on fidelity to the source during the selection of his references, and went a step further to develop more accurate depictions of the *zuki*. Interest in this particular piece of painting by Rosetsu only drew attention posthumously; this was apparent in the late Edo period, when attempts to examine the historical sources of his work took place. In other words, this painting was positioned as a pioneering piece of work that sought to break the tradition of adopting motifs that were inconsistent with their origins.

Rosetsu is more commonly seen as an “Eccentric painter”. However, works such as *Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden* reveal a novel side to Rosetsu. Instead of relying upon the whimsical depictions he is so known for, he can also be seen as an innovator who overcame traditions through his liberal approach to representing knowledge in his works.

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