

Painting and Living: A Study of *Setsu* (拙) in Tanomura Chikuden*

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between the painting theory and way of life of the late Edo-period literatus painter Tanomura Chikuden (田能村竹田, 1777–1835) through the concept of *setsu* (拙). In this paper, I first analyze Chikuden's usage of *setsu* in *Jigadaigo* (自画題語) and clarify its various interpretations. Then, I contextualize *setsu* within Chikuden's painting theory by examining its antonym, *kō* (工), as discussed in *Sanchujinjozetsu* (山中人饒舌). Furthermore, I will argue that *setsu* is not merely a technical concept related to painting but is deeply connected to Chikuden's way of life, particularly influenced by Tao Yuanming (陶淵明, 365–427). By reconsidering *setsu* as a fundamental principle that integrates both artistic practice and way of life, this paper reevaluates its significance within Chikuden.

(本論は、江戸時代後期の文人画家・田能村竹田(1777–1835)の画観と生き方の関係を「拙」という概念を通して考察するものである。まず、竹田の『自画題語』における「拙」の使い方を分析し、それがさまざまに解釈可能であることを明らかにする。次に、『山中人饒舌』をひもとき、特に「拙」とその対義語である「工」との比較を介して、竹田の画観における「拙」の位置づけを試みる。最後に、「拙」が単なる文人画の制作に関する概念にとどまらず、竹田の生き方に深く関わっていることを、陶淵明(365–427)からの影響を踏まえて明らかにする。以上の考察を通じて、竹田における「拙」の重要性の再評価を試みたい。)

Keywords: Tanomura Chikuden, Late Early Modern Literati, The Theory of Literati Painting, Tao Yuanming, Hasegawa Saburo

Introduction

Once, there was a painter who, perhaps feeling uncomfortable in the Japanese art world, went to the United States in search of a new beginning. His name was Hasegawa Saburō (長谷川三郎, 1906–1957), known as a pioneer of Japanese abstract painting. Although not widely recognized, he wrote a remarkable essay about literati painters titled “Life to Paint: *Nanga* and Modern Time (描くために生きる－南画と現代)” (1951). This essay was written during a period when Hasegawa, having met one of his best friends, Isamu Noguchi

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(1904–1988), was focusing on creating works using black ink (墨). At the beginning of the essay, he asks, “Does a painter paint to live, or live to paint?” He suggests that those who paint to live become artisans, focusing on skills and techniques. However, Hasegawa declares, “Let us live to paint,” because that is the path to being free or avant-garde. However, such a way of life is often accompanied by becoming “losers (劣敗者: it seems that this word is connected to *setsu*, which will be explained later)” in the real world. Among those figures, Tanomura Chikuden (田能村竹田), the subject of this paper, was also included.

Tanomura Chikuden was born in 1777 in the Bungo Oka domain (豊後岡). His father served as the domain physician, but Chikuden himself did not pursue a career in medicine because of health issues, particularly of his eyes. Instead, he became a teacher at Yuigakukan (由学館: the domain school) in 1798. From 1811 to 1812, there was a major uprising centered on the Oka domain. In response to this incident, Chikuden submitted a proposal to the domain advocating for political reform, but it was never accepted. Chikuden, who had always longed for a life of seclusion, likely decided to retire after this incident. He resigned from Yuigakukan and entered a life of seclusion, leading an elegant lifestyle focused on painting, poetry, the tea ceremony, and travel until his death in 1835 at the residence of the Oka domain in Ōsaka.

Chikuden was not only an outstanding painter but also an excellent theorist and critic of literati paintings. Chikuden’s *Sanchujinjozetsu* (山人饒舌: the book containing his theory of literati painting, 1834) has been regarded as one of the best books about literati painting theory in Japan. However, Chikuden’s views of literati painting cannot be understood by reading the book alone. It is also necessary to read and understand the inscriptions (賛: Chinese classical texts or poems written on paintings) in his *Jigadaigo* (自画題語: anthology of Chikuden’s inscriptions, 1839) and other works, for Chikuden often expressed his thoughts on these. The *setsu* that is the subject of this paper is mainly found in his inscriptions.

The concept of *setsu* (拙) has already been discussed in several previous studies, including Sasaki Gōzō’s *Chikuden* (1970), as a key term essential for elucidating Chikuden’s view of painting. In those studies, it was first questioned whether *setsu* indicates humility or self-confidence. However, its interpretation has not yet been defined. Thus, in contrast to preceding research, this paper refrains from defining the meaning of *setsu*, as I think that its diverse interpretations arise from varying contexts or frequently ambiguous connotations. I accordingly investigate why Chikuden emphasized this concept.

Valuable references for this purpose are Kuroda Taizō’s “Tanomura Chikuden’s ‘Setsu’” (1998) and Ishikawa Chikako’s “Tanomura Chikuden’s ‘Setsu’ in his painting theory” (1993). According to them, by using the concept of *setsu*, Chikuden was able to see his own works objectively and to develop his own unique expression.

A more important point for this study was raised in Sugimoto Yoshihisa’s *The Paintings of the Samurai* (2020). Sugimoto states, “Chikuden regarded the sincere expression of ‘emotion (情)’ as the foremost requirement for excellent works, viewing ‘setsu’ as an essential condition for expressing ‘emotion’, and thus adhered to a lifestyle devoid of pursuit for fame and fortune” (p. 454). I consider this observation extremely important because the creative

activity of the literati included not only the production of paintings, but also Chinese poetry and other art works, as well as the way of life of the literati themselves. However, Sugimoto does not explore this point in detail in his book. Nevertheless, there are quite a few hints in Chikuden's remaining works that prompt consideration of this issue. Therefore, in this paper, I will examine these works and then proceed to analyze the relationship between Chikuden's way of life and the concept of *setsu*.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: In the next section, I will examine some inscriptions found in *Jigadaigo* and confirm how Chikuden used *setsu*. In the following section, I will focus on *Sanchujinjozetsu* and discuss the significance of *setsu* in his theory of painting. In the final section, I verify that *setsu* was a concept deeply connected to not only his theory of painting but also his way of life.

1. Chikuden's use of *setsu* in his inscriptions

Regarding Chikuden's frequent use of *setsu*, Shinozaki Shōchiku (篠崎小竹, 1781-1851), a Confucian scholar from Ōsaka of the same generation, wrote the following in the preface to the second part of *Jigadaigo*.

孫興公示其賦於人曰卿試擲地当作金谷声米元章自跋所画曰世人競欲得余画然非具頂門上慧眼者不足識余所以画古人以芸自負往々如此而竹田々翁自画題跋一々自遜其拙如与古人相反然画品詩格亭々屹立不従人步趨自成一家者不可掩焉翁之自謙乃其所以自負也耶[...]乃謙遜自訟至死不変其由芸進德実非孫米諸人可擬則向者之以自謙為自負者, 吾過矣[...].

(*Jigadaigo*, Preface of Vol. 2)

The above quotation broadly states the following: Sun Chao (孫綽, around the 4th century) and Mi Fu (米芾, 1051-1107), among others from ancient times, extolled their own works with self-confidence. Chikuden, unlike such people of old, was modest, often expressing *setsu* of his own works in his inscriptions and postscripts. However, his works, which defied trends, were evidently exceptional, creative, and unrivaled. I (Shōchiku) believed that Chikuden's modesty reflected self-confidence. Yet, he (Chikuden) retained his humility until his death. While Chikuden's works reflect his high virtue, it would be something that even Sun Chao and Mi Fu could not imitate. Therefore, Shōchiku stated, it was a mistake to think of Chikuden's humility as self-confidence.

In the above passage, Shōchiku mentioned that people in the past often spoke of their self-confidence in their own works. However, the reality is that *setsu* had been emphasized in literati painting theory, especially since the Yuan dynasty (an idea drawn from *Tao Te Ching* 莊子). For example, Kuwayama Gyokushū (桑山玉洲, 1746-1799), a literatus painter from the Kii domain (紀伊), contrasted *setsu* with *kō* (巧, skillfulness) and *sakuki* (作気, the display of skill in paintings, similar in meaning to *shūki* 習気) in his *Gyokushūgasyū* (玉洲画趣, 1790) and *Kaijihigen* (絵事鄙言, 1799), referencing *Pei wen zhai shu hua pu* (佩文齋書画譜, 18th century) and other works. Thus, he argued that literati painters seek to be *setsu* to differentiate their paintings from those made by artisans (for example, painters em-

ployed by the shogunate or the court).

Urakami Shunkin (浦上春琴, 1779–1846), who was one of Chikuden's best literati friends, also explained *setsu* in his *Zoku Rongashi* (続論画詩, 19th century). According to Shunkin, *setsu* is an indispensable element in literati paintings, and it is in *setsu* that the artist's spirituality is expressed (In fact, he used the term *kosetsu* 古拙, here 古 means simplicity or artlessness). However, if the *setsu* becomes mannered, and thus mundane, works themselves would become trivial.

As mentioned above, *setsu* was regarded as a highly significant concept in literati painting theories. However, its meaning has not been clarified. In fact, Shunkin states in his book that the true essence of *setsu* cannot be explained in words (this inability to explain reminds me of “*le je-ne-sais-quoi*”). This is also true of Chikuden. In fact, I do not think that he had identified at what point his paintings are *setsu* either. Therefore, *setsu* to represent his mindset of avoiding being *kō* (工 : skillfulness, which has almost the same meaning as 巧).

Thus, I would like to verify how *setsu* is actually used by Chikuden. Since it is not possible to cover all the examples, I will focus here on four of them; in chronological order, they are the inscription of *Shunsōgunjaku kan* (春叢群雀卷 : a picture scroll depicting a flock of sparrows and spring flowers; 1827), *Sansuijikkei gasatsu* (山水十景画冊 : a book of ten landscape paintings; 1831), *Unrin-no hou-ni nara-u syoukei* (仿雲林法小景 : a small landscape painting according to Ni Zan (倪瓚)'s method; 1831), and *Keizanyūi* (溪山幽意 : a landscape painting depicting a quiet mountain valley away from the secular world; 1834). The first example is the inscription of *Shunsōgunjaku kan*. This is included in the first inscription of the first volume of *Jigadaigo*. The first half is quoted below:

此卷嘗觀明人所作，今髣髴其万一矣，蓋似而不似即是竹田生最得意處。
 此日熱甚，脫衣箕踞，飲酒大醉，余酣弄筆，偶得斯卷，意之所到，赭墨隨手俱下，
 画之所拙，即意之所快也。
 予画固拙，然其拙處，雖大方名家，亦或有所不能也，蓋名家之病，多在不拙處。
 [...]

(*Jigadaigo*, Vol. 1)

The citation is as follows: *Shunsōgunjaku kan* was inspired by a Ming painter's painting that I (Chikuden) once saw (Chikuden stayed in Nagasaki from September 1826 to October of the following year. During this time, he interacted with Chinese paintings). While this scroll resembles his painting at first glance, it differs significantly. My strong point is here. Today it is sweltering. I discarded my kimono, stretched out my legs and indulged in copious amounts of sake. I wielded my brush in a drunken fervor, resulting in the creation of this picture scroll. Driven by an urge to paint, black and colored ink was applied to the paper guided by the movements of my hand. Certainly, the painting I have created is *setsu*. However, it is precisely because of this that I am delighted. In fact, my paintings are inherently *setsu*. And it is precisely this *setsu* that even masters of painting are unable to depict. I (Chikuden) believe that lacking *setsu* is a flaw of masters of painting.

The second example is the inscription of *Sansuijikkei gasatsu*. The following quotation rep-

resents the first part of its postscript.

或曰，竹田生善画。非也。又曰，善学古人。亦非也。生之筆拙，非善画也。生之所作，乃生之画，而非善学也。 [...]

(*Jigadaigo*, Vol. 2, Part 2)

The quote reads as follows: Someone said that I (Chikuden) am a good painter, but that is not true. Someone else said that I have studied the past paintings, but this is also a misunderstanding. My brushstrokes are *setzu*, and my drawings are not good. The paintings I draw are my own paintings, not the well-studied paintings of the past.

The third example is the inscription of *Unrin-no Hou-ni Nara-u Syoukei*.

能教心淡筆能淡
自使心清墨自清
有人如要清兼淡
二者俱從静裏生

越人稻兄訪余索画兄固学春琴翁善画因係短句見意併乞是正不知者觀之或謂画拙而言大不知其量之甚矣辛卯三月望識于小石氏用拙居

(*Jigadaigo*, Vol. 2, Part 2)

The above quote reads: If someone can keep their minds unattached to anything, the brushwork will naturally become smoother. If someone can keep their minds purified, the ink they draw with will naturally become pure. If someone wants their minds to be unattached and purified, these qualities will arise from stillness (that is to say, someone must place themselves in stillness). Tō-kei (稻兄: unknown person from Koshi province 越国), a good painter who studied under Shunkin, approached me and requested a painting. Therefore, I (Chikuden) wrote a Chinese quatrain that represented my mind in the painting and at the same time urged him to critique it. If someone who does not know me were to look at this piece, they would think that I am boasting while my painting is *setzu*, and they would think how ignorant I am of my own abilities.

Last is the inscription of *Keizanyūi*.

我画在自娛
不在使人娛
運毫無矩度
行墨只模模
秋容知水冷
晚影覺雲孤
写終看且笑
可見拙而迂
[...]

(*Jigadaigo*, Vol. 2, Part 4)

The above Chinese poem means as follows: My (Chikuden's) paintings are *jigo* (自娛 : for one's own pleasure), not for others' pleasure. There are no rules for brushstrokes; the ink I (Chikuden) draw flows vaguely. In this landscape, the river water running through the beautiful autumn scenery is cold, with lonely clouds drifting across the twilight sky. After completing the scene, I gazed at it and chuckled. How *setsu* and *u* (迂 : not current and use-less) my painting is.

In addition to the above, some inscriptions include *setsu* in *Jigadaigo*. Among these are idiomatic phrases such as *setsuretsu* (拙劣 : unskillfulness) or *seppitsu* (拙筆 : inept at brushstrokes).

Based on the four inscriptions above, Chikuden's use of *setsu* can be understood in several ways. First and foremost, the fundamental premise is that *setsu* is used by Chikuden to denote his unskillfulness in painting and the poor quality of his own drawings. However, it is not used in a negative sense; rather, it serves as a symbol of humility toward his own paintings. This is evident from his statement, “画之所拙，即意之所快也自身。” If Chikuden really had thought his paintings were poor, he would have used the word ashamed instead of delight. Therefore, *setsu* can also be interpreted as an indication of self-confidence. Furthermore, Chikuden used *setsu* to assert his uniqueness. This is evident from phrases such as “然其拙处，雖大方名家，亦或有所不能也” and “生之所作，乃生之画，而非善学也。” Thus, it seems that the connotations of *setsu* vary depending on the context (of course, we should not forget that the ambiguity of the meaning of *setsu* stems from the fact that each work is created in a different context).

Nevertheless, why did Chikuden so prize *setsu*? To explain this, I consider the antonym of *setsu*, *kō* 工 (skillfulness) in the next section and explore the significance of *setsu* in Chikuden's theory of painting.

2. About the importance of *setsu* in Chikuden's painting theory

Several instances of *setsu* appear in *Sanchujinjozetsu*. However, unlike in Shunkin's *Zoku Rongashi*, the term seems less significant. Instead, *Sanchujinjozetsu* provides some explanations of *kō*, which is antonymous with *setsu*. Therefore, my first task is to determine how Chikuden viewed *kō*. This should naturally reveal his intention to avoid *kō* in favor of *setsu*. For example, he stated the following:

百年前書法画理。不能若今日之考究精博。悉力無遺也。而今人却不能及。愈詳面愈降。益工而益俗。無它。古之学者為己。今之学者為人。

(*Sanchujinjozetsu*, Vol. 1.)

This reads: Theories of calligraphy and painting from a century ago cannot be compared to the well-developed theories of today, yet the calligraphy and paintings created today do not match the quality of those from a century ago. The more detailed the thought, the poorer the result, and the more skilled the craftsmanship, the more mundane it appears. This is because the ancient scholars studied for themselves, whereas today scholars study others. The last phrase, “古之学者為己。今之学者為人,” is a quote from *Analects* (Xian asked, Chap.

14; 論語, 憲問, 第14). In context, “學者 (scholars)” should be replaced with painters.

The first half of the sentence, “古之學者為己,” easily recalls *jigo* (自娛), which is Chikuden’s most important concept. This is expressed as follows: Regarding *jigo*, the inscription of *Keizanyūi* quoted in the previous section states “我画在自娛” and “写終看且笑可見拙而迂.” These words seem to convey something in common with the following statements in *Sanchujinjozetsu*:

文泉子云, 夫十為文. 不得十如意. 於画亦然. 而遇少如意. 觀之自娛. 藏享弊帚.
或有人探篋笥取去. 悵然久之. [...]画之工不工. 固不敢言. 至其溺愛一也. 可發一笑.
(*Sanchujinjozetsu*, Vol. 2.)

The above quote reads: Liu Tui (劉蛻, Tang dynasty, pseudonym 文泉子) said, “Even if I made literature ten times, not all of them would be my best work,” and the same applies to painting. If a painter created paintings, they engaged in *jigo* when looking at them and stored them away, much like discarding a torn broom (which here symbolizes poor-quality drawings, or *setsu*). When another person comes and removes the box containing the painting, the painter will be sad for a long time. It does not matter whether the painting technique is *kō* or not. In any case, the passion for one’s own work remains unchanged. People will laugh when they see this.

It is clear from the two quotes above that for Chikuden, painting is something done for oneself, not for others. Therefore, whether the work is executed skillfully is not a fundamental issue. Furthermore, Chikuden believed that in painting, it is more important to express one’s spirit (so-called *qi*, 氣) than to demonstrate *kō*. In fact, in the last section of *Sanchujinjozetsu*, he states, “不患用筆不工, 而患精神不到. 用筆工者. 特宜撫仿古人. 精神到者. 自家立脚 (Do not worry if the brushwork is not *kō*, but rather if the spirit is not concentrated. Those skilled in brushwork should emulate the ancients, while those concentrated in spirit will produce original works)” (*Sanchujinjozetsu*, Vol. 2). This statement clearly resonates with the passage “生之所作, 乃生之画, 而非善学也” in the inscription of *Sansuijikkei gasatsu* quoted above. Of course, Chikuden did not deny the study of past paintings. On the contrary, he affirmed it, but argued against their mere imitation. This is discussed in alignment with literati painters’ avoidance of realism.

Here, I would like to once again draw attention to the passage from *Sanchujinjozetsu* quoted at the beginning of this section. After “古之學者為己,” it continues, “今之學者為人.” Through this phrase, Chikuden seemed to assert that painters should not create art for the sake of fame and profit, for if it were so created, it would merely become mundane. This notion is closely linked to the central assertion of *Sanchujinjozetsu*. Chikuden counters those who deem painting futile thus:

朝夕披对. 愈久愈熟. 則心自静心静而意自清. 嗜欲消焉. 聰明生焉. 不可動之以名利也. 從是以往. 仁者樂寿境亦為不遠.

(*Sanchujinjozetsu*, Vol. 2)

The passage reads: If one carefully observes a painting from morning until evening, the mind naturally becomes tranquil and pure. Desires fade and one becomes clear-minded. This experience cannot be attained through pursuit of fame and profit. By contemplating paintings and remaining in a state of tranquility, one can approach a state in which one enjoys longevity, like a virtuous person.

According to *Sanchujinjozetsu*, the benefit of painting is longevity, which can only be realized when the viewer is in a state of *sei* (静: tranquility). This passage helps us to understand why the inscription of *Unrin-no Hou-ni Nara-u Syoukei* states, “能教心淡筆能淡，自使心清墨自清，有人如要清兼淡，二者俱從靜裏生。” Chikuden believed that painters and viewers communicate through the medium of painting. Therefore, for the viewer to experience tranquility, the painter must also have a tranquil mind.

It should be clear that *jigo* and *sei* are related to Chikuden's way of life beyond the world of painting. This is because these were thought to be related to enjoying longevity. And *setsu*, which is closely related to them, is no exception. In the next section, I consider how this was related to Chikuden's life.

3. *Setsu* as a way of life

According to Hayuka Masanori's "Genealogy of 'clumsiness'" (1992) and Yagi Akiyoshi's "On the genealogy of 'clumsiness' in the Chinese mind" (2016), one of the most significant figures who used *setsu* in a positive sense is Tao Yuanming. In addition, according to Yagi, *setsu* in Tao Yuanming refers to ineptness at navigating the world. It denotes a way of life that is straightforward and does not conform to the currents of the world. Moreover, it expresses assertion rather than humility. In fact, for example, in his *Fu of Feeling Moved by the Ill-Fated Scholar* (感士不遇賦), he said, “誠謬會以取拙，且欣然而歸止 (If I should mistime becoming an official, I intend to uphold '*setsu* (clumsiness)' and gladly return to my hometown).”

Tao Yuanming's concept of *setsu* is closely related to that of Chikuden, as Chikuden appears to have been strongly influenced by him (Chikuden's other artist name, Denshaji (田舎児), is also thought to have been influenced by him). As evidence of this influence, I note Chikuden's *Jisyō* 自照 (1818). This is the inscription written on the portrait of Chikuden painted by a member of the family of Fuchino Shinsai (淵野真斎, 1760–1823), one of Chikuden's masters (it is thought to have been painted by Fuchino Tenkō (淵野天香, 1797–1825), the eldest son of Shinsai, but this is not certain). The content expressed in the poem below pertains not to Chikuden's thoughts on his paintings, but rather to his evaluation of himself.

貌出那個乞食兒
被髮垢面破壞衣
瓢杓之外無一物
葷酒魚蒜口所隨
耳聾不得開毀譽
目眇奚能弁妍媸
如風如狂又如顛

惟迂惟拙更惟痴
 況經二堅交相攻
 拳醜不入時宜
 絕無一技可人目
 唯有至幸值清時
 朝乞食去花間路
 暮乞食來月下扉
 朝乞暮乞偏醉飽
 居然糜盡一生涯
 常日唔咿兩三思
 陶靖節翁冥報詩

(*Chikuden ikou* (竹田遺稿: Chikuden's Collection of Posthumous Manuscripts), Vol. 1)

The poem means the following: Whom does this painting depict as a poor person? His (Chikuden's) hair is disheveled, his face dirty, and his clothes in tatters. He has nothing but a ladle with which to drink. He doesn't mind eating smelly vegetables and fish. His hearing is impaired, making him unaware of his own reputation. His eyes are not very good, so he cannot distinguish between beauty and ugliness. He looks like a wild and insane person. He is *u* (迂: not conforming to the ways of the world), is *setsu* (inept at navigating the world), and is *chi* (痴: foolish). He has been afflicted by illness and is not good-looking. He does not have any skill or talent that people would praise him for. He simply enjoys the fact that he was born into a peaceful time. In the morning, he goes out and walks along the path of blooming flowers to beg some food, and in the evening, under the light of the moon, he walks home. In the morning and in the evening, he receives food and merely gets drunk. In this way, he lives his life as it is. Often, when he reads, he is reminded of Tao Yuanming's poem in which he vowed to repay his blessings from the underworld.

The last line of the above, “陶靖節翁冥報詩,” refers to Tao Yuanming's poem *Begging for Food* (乞食). The poem expresses the following: Tao Yuanming, suffering from hunger, wandered around and found a house. The master of the house, understanding Tao Yuanming's inability to speak well, blessed him with food and drink. However, he had no way to repay the kindness to the household. Therefore, he vowed at least to send repayment from the underworld. It is interesting for this paper that the word *setsu* is also used in this poem in the phrase “拙言辭 (clumsy language).” I think that *setsu* here means not only not to speak well, but also to be inept at life.

The above poems reveal Chikuden's deep sympathy for Tao Yuanming's *setsu* lifestyle. Chikuden was not a wealthy man either. He likely empathized with Tao Yuanming's repeated government service and eventual resignation to return to his hometown. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Chikuden also resigned from government service early in life and withdrew from public life. In the case of Chikuden, the *setsu* in his way of life and the *setsu* in his painting were by no means unrelated. This is most clearly demonstrated in the following passage of *Kakigasatu-ni batsu-su* (跋花卉畫冊: postscript to the book of flower

paintings (undated) included in *Chikuden sensei bunkou* (竹田先生文藁: Chikuden's collection of essays, poems, and letters):

如此拙筆，如是拙趣，茫々宇内千万画史，終日苦思適復不能肖似也，蓋生之稟性拙甚，目見，耳聞，手動，足踏，百為千造，悉無不拙，而第一于祿拙，第二讀書拙，第三吟詩拙，第四写字拙，第五作画最拙，生涯莽蕩死活海陬不得展觀名冊秘本考究奧論奇說凡運筆用墨賦色取景皆從拙心中鬼腕上而拓出來不知董巨荆閔諸子三尺存在何處焉嘗自題其画曰三千世界小如瓜唯隨吾意禿頭筆其痴頑略如此宜乎宇内画史不能肖似也夫学古人而不及以其極工也擬生而不及以其極拙也相距拙之与工一間而已而齊得之天嗚呼又孰怨孰尤

(*Chikuden sensei bunkou*)

The quote states the following: How *setsu* the brush strokes are! How *setsu* the quality is! In this vague world, with countless paintings already created, even if I labored all day, I could never produce a picture that could compete with theirs. I think that I am truly *setsu* by nature. Everything I do, whether it be seeing, hearing, or moving my arms and legs, is all *setsu*; there is nothing that is not. First, regarding seeking official positions and requesting salaries, I am *setsu*. Second, regarding reading books, I am *setsu*. Third, regarding composing poetry, I am *setsu*. Fourth, regarding writing calligraphy, I am *setsu*. Fifth, regarding painting, I am most *setsu* of all. Not paying attention to worldly affairs, I live in seclusion by the sea. Therefore, I could not get a chance to see the finest painting books and think about profound and unusual painting theories. My brushwork, ink application, color blending, and depiction of landscapes all stem from my own heart and are executed with my inexperienced skills. I do not grasp the essence of painting styles such as those of Dong Yuan (董源, 934–962), Juran (巨然, 10th century), Jing Hao (荆浩, around early 10th century), or Guan Tong (閔同, around early 10th century). In one of my paintings, I once inscribed that the entire universe of Buddha enlightenment (三千世界) is as small as a gourd. These words reveal my foolish and obstinate nature. It is no wonder that my paintings do not resemble those of others. The reason why we cannot paint like the ancients even if we study their paintings is because they were extremely *kō*, and the reason why you cannot paint like me even if you imitate my pictures is because my paintings are extremely *setsu*. Nevertheless, the gulf between *setsu* and *kō* is negligible, as both are innate. Whom shall I blame? Whom shall I resent?

The above quote states that Chikuden was inherently *setsu*, and then five aspects of his *setsu* are pointed out. “第一于祿拙” likely refers to the fact that he had not been able to lead a wealthy life since retiring. He continues pointing out *setsu* in reading, poetry, and calligraphy, and finally mentions his painting. Chikuden maintains a consistent perspective from the initial issue of salary to the final issue of painting, suggesting that for him, life and painting, and by extension, all creative activities, had a parallel relationship.

I conclude this section by focusing on the last part of the quotation about Chikuden's painting activity. He states that he could not surpass the *kō* of the ancient painters if he followed them. About this, Chikuden mentioned the same opinion in a section of *Sanchujinjozetsu* that deals with the Osaka literatus Kimura Kenkadō (木村兼葭堂, 1736–1802). Chikuden writes

that Kenkadō thought “其意蓋在自娛。不必抗衡古人 (painting was for *jigo* and did not need to compete with the painters of old) (*Sanchujinjozetsu*, Vol. 2),” and so, Chikuden held him in high regard. Instead of the *kō* of the ancient painters, he had *setsu* which created the individuality of his paintings. This idea is common to the phrases “然其拙處，雖大方名家，亦或有所不能也” in *Shunsougunjaku kan* and “生之所作，乃生之畫，而非善學也” in *Sansuijik-kei gasatsu*, both discussed in the first section of this paper, and it is consistent with phrases like “自家立脚” in *Sanchujinjozetsu*, which was discussed in the second section of this paper.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored the relationship between Tanomura Chikuden’s painting theory and his way of life, focusing on the keyword *setsu* (拙). Previous studies have primarily referenced the inscriptions found in *Jigadaigo* in this regard. However, I have demonstrated that the interpretation of *setsu* varies depending on the context, as these inscriptions are poetic texts attached to individual works. The diverse interpretations of *setsu* were examined in the first section of this paper. In the second section, I have contextualized *setsu* within Chikuden’s theory of painting by analyzing *Sanchujinjozetsu*. While *setsu* is not explicitly mentioned in *Sanchujinjozetsu*, its antonym *kō* (工) is. Through this exploration of *kō*, I have shown that *setsu* is intricately linked to crucial concepts in Chikuden’s painting theory, such as *jigo* (自娛) and *sei* (静). This leads to the conclusion that the concepts central to Chikuden’s painting theory should be deeply linked to his way of life. In the third section, I have examined *Kakigasatsu-ni batsu-su* and confirmed that Chikuden considered his creative activities and way of life to be parallel. In doing so, I have highlighted the strong influence of Tao Yuanming on his way of life.

As a brief afterword, I would like to refer to Hasegawa Saburō once again. When Hasegawa wrote his essay “Life to Paint,” he was searching for a way to reevaluate Japan’s past traditions and incorporate their essence into new art (here, especially abstract art). During this process, he focused on the literati of the Edo period. However, that is not all. It seems that there was another reason why he focused on the literati. The seemingly negative term “loser” that he used for literati is, in fact, a form of praise. I think that Hasegawa saw himself in these literati painters, of course including Chikuden — just as they struggled to navigate life, he saw his own struggle in having his work accepted by the Japanese art world (Yoshizawa Chū once described Chikuden’s life as a defeat, whereas Kōno Motoaki described it as a victory). Nevertheless, the empathy he felt for the lives of great painters of the past must have encouraged and propelled him in his artistic endeavors. This was one of the motivations behind his writing that essay. The same sentiment applies to Tanomura Chikuden, also mentioned in Hasegawa’s essay: for Hasegawa, Chikuden was what Tao Yuanming was to Chikuden.

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