An Interview with Professor Ide Seinosuke of Kyushu University

Yukio Lippit

In March of this year, Professor Ide Seinosuke (fig. 1) will retire from Kyushu University after twenty-one years as a faculty member, having previously worked for seventeen years (1987–2003) at the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties. Over the past four decades, Ide's path-breaking research has helped to establish a new framework for understanding the meaning, provenance, and local contexts of East Asian Buddhist painting, particularly during Korea's Goryeo dynasty (918–1392) and China's Song (960–1279) and Yuan (1279–1368) dynasties. His publications, in several languages, have exerted a strong influence on scholars across the globe; they have introduced numerous works and served as the basis for a wide array of international exhibitions. Along the way, Ide has overseen the digital imaging of important paintings and trained numerous scholars now active in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Europe, and the United States. It is no exaggeration to state that he has served as the primary portal through which overseas scholars have engaged with the many East Asian Buddhist artworks preserved in the Japanese archipelago.



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Ide Seinosuke
Photo courtesy of Ide Seinosuke

Ide's most notable early publications are on Chinese religious portraiture. Jianxin Laifu (1319–91) was a 14th century Chan monk known among specialists for a small handful of calligraphies and inscriptions on paintings in Japanese collections. In 1986 Ide introduced a portrait of the monk (fig. 2), discovered a year earlier at Manzai-ji Temple in Saga prefecture, which considerably advanced the understanding of interactions between Chan monks and scholars in Jiangnan during the Yuan era. Furthermore, Ide's analysis of the inscriptions on the portrait, which include Jianxin's own encomium as well as a eulogy by the scholar Zhang Zhu (1287–1368), inscribed by the literatus Yang Yi, demonstrates how portraiture served as a complex mechanism through which discursive frameworks of the self and the mind could be conceptualized (Ide, 1986, 2005). The study is noteworthy for the light it sheds on the function and meaning of Chan/Zen portraiture (J. *chinsō*) outside of a mortuary context, as well as its proximity to evolving literati norms of self-representation.

Ide's research on East Asian portraiture, which includes studies of Zhongfeng Mingben (1263–1323)



2
Portrait of Jianxin Laifu
Artist unknown; 14th century
Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk
Manzai-ji Temple, Tosu, Japan
Photo courtesy of Manzai-ji Temple

and Ikō Tokken (act. 14th century), established a research trajectory centred on East Asian religious paintings in Japanese collections, works that had gone largely unrecorded in Chinese or Korean sources and that were poorly known outside of Japan. Although his approach to these works was attentive to their afterlives in Japan, his primary focus was on understanding their local contexts of production and meaning. This is the case for a category of works now commonly known as 'Ningbo Buddhist Paintings': ritual scrolls created by professional ateliers in the Song and Yuan periods in and around the port city of Ningbo (present-day Zhejiang province) (Lippit, 2009).

Buddhist paintings from Ningbo, which generally depict *luohans* (arhats), hell kings, and other Buddhist ritual icons, had been commonly understood to have been made specifically for export, an idea reinforced by the inclusion of the street addresses of the painting studios in their signatures. In contrast, Ide has shown that the main constituencies for such works were local religious communities, in particular the network of Tiantai Buddhist temples associated with Yuanqing Si monastery (Ide, 1993). Founded in 951, Yuanqing Si became an important religious centre under the stewardship of the monk Zhili (960–1028), who promoted Tiantai Amitabha worship through

3
Parinirvana
By Lu Xinzhong (dates unknown); 13th century
Hanging scroll, ink, colour, and gold on silk; 157.1 × 82.9 cm
Nara National Museum, Nara
Photo courtesy of Nara National Museum





4
Luohan Manifesting Himself as an Eleven-Headed Guanyin
By Zhou Jichang (act. second half of 12th century); *c.* 1178
Ink and color on silk; 111.5 × 51.9 cm
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Denman Waldo Ross Collection
Photo © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

the development of a lay Pure Land Society. As Ide demonstrates, many Ningbo paintings reflect this syncretism in their combination of Tiantai and Pure Land iconography. A striking example is *Parinirvana*, by Lu Xinzhong (act. 13th century), in the Nara National Museum (fig. 3), in which Shakyamuni's nirvana scene, most commonly shown within a grove of sal trees, is instead flanked by a pair of seven-tiered jewelled trees typically found in representations of the Amitabha Pure Land.

Ide's research served as an important foundation for 'Sacred Ningbo: The Gateway to 1,300 Years of Japanese Buddhism', a landmark exhibition organized by the Nara National Museum in 2009, and the volume *Art of Ningbo and Maritime Cross-Cultural Interaction* (2009), for which he served as chief editor.

A related focus of Ide's research concerns his decades-long study of the monumental *Five Hundred Luohans* (fig. 4), originally a 100-scroll set created between 1178 and 1188 by the painters Lin Tinggui and Zhou Jichang (dates unknown). *Five Hundred Luohans* was brought to Japan sometime during the 13th or 14th century and eventually settled in the Zen monastery Daitoku-ji, although in the modern era, a dozen of its scrolls then entered American collections. While its artistry and peripatetic history have attracted serious scholarly attention since the 1950s, Ide was the first to explore its meaning in relation to local communities. The set's production was overseen by the monk Yishao of Huianyan Temple on the northwest shore of Lake Dongqian, southeast of Ningbo (Mingzhou), and surviving inscriptions on 48 of the scrolls indicate that they were sponsored by local families. As Ide proposes, it is likely that the set was hung for Water-Land Assemblies at the nearby temples Yuebo Si and Zunjiaoyuan, and that among the sponsors were prominent figures such as Shi Hao (1106–94), chief councillor during the reign of emperor Xiaozong (r. 1162–89), and his son Shi Miyuan. Ide even suggests that the work was not necessarily produced in professional studios in Ningbo, but rather in the Southern Song capital of Hangzhou, perhaps in one of the same ateliers that produced ritual icons for the imperial palace (Ide, 2009). Ide's engagement with the Daitoku-ji *Five Hundred Luohans* has included the digital imaging—alongside photographer Shirono Seiji—of all surviving 94 scrolls and 48 inscriptions, and a slew of landmark publications (e.g., Ide, 2014, 2018), culminating in *A Comprehensive Look: The Cultural Biography of the Daitokuji* Five Hundred Luohans *from Its Local to Global Contexts* (Ide, 2019), the proceedings of an international conference he organized the preceding year at Kyushu University.

Another field in which Ide's research has proven to be highly influential is that of Goryeo Buddhist painting. Most of the over 160 painted ritual icons that survive from the Goryeo dynasty were preserved in Japan, including the monumental *Water-Moon Avalokiteśvara* in Kagami Shrine (fig. 5), showcasing the artistry and technical virtuosity of the painting workshops associated with the Goryeo court during the 14th century. Ide's study of such works has,

among other things, argued for the subtle but pervasive doctrinal influence of the *Flower Garland Sutra* (*Avataṃsaka Sutra*). This is even the case for paintings of the Amitabha Pure Land, for which Ide argues that the Pure Land serves not as an ultimate destination but as a gateway or waystation to the Hwaeom (Flower Garland) Universe, which subsumes it and all other realms.

This reinterpretation has many consequences for how one understands Goryeo painted icons and their relationship to religious worldviews of the time, as they visualize in sophisticated and surprising ways the infinite interfusion of the Vairocana realm and all other realms. The visual manifestations of this all-encompassing cosmology, furthermore, can be gleaned from subtle details of Goryeo paintings such as the *srivastas* (auspicious Indian symbols) and *cakras* (dharma wheels) found on the palms and chests of many Goryeo deities. Such marks, according to Ide, reflect Vairocana 'branding' of other members of the Buddhist pantheon and visually signal the connectedness of all of these deities as manifestations of the Vairocana. Ide's research has informed numerous exhibitions, most recently the Kyushu National Museum's exhibition 'The Beauty of Prayer: Buddhist Art from the Goryeo and Joseon Dynasties' (2023), which extended these findings to the Joseon period (1392–1910).

Ide's research on Buddhist painting was recognized by the Japanese scholarly community when *Song and Yuan Buddhist Paintings in Japan* (*Nihon no Sōgen butsuga*) (Ide, 2001) was awarded the prestigious Kokka Prize. His imprint on the field of East Asian art, however, has taken numerous forms, including his theoretical and methodological writings on the nature of artistic influence (Ide, 2005) and on 'border art' (Ide, 2009), as well as his long-standing collaboration with Shirono on digital imaging, which culminated in the book *Light and*



5
Water-Moon Avalokiteśvara
By Kim Wumun et al. (dates unknown);
Goryeo dynasty (918–1392), 1310
Hanging scroll, ink, colour, and gold on silk; 419.5 × 101.5 cm
Kagami Shrine, Karatsu City, Japan
Photo courtesy of Kagami Shrine



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Ide's professors at Kyushu University: Hirata Yutaka (left) and Kikutake Jun'ichi (right)
Photo courtesy of Ide Seinosuke

Color: An Exploration of the Many Layers of Pictorial Expression (Ide, 2009) and includes his meditation on the future of art history in the era of super high-resolution 'digital content'. Although Ide continues to be engaged in numerous research projects, the occasion of his retirement from Kyushu University offers an opportunity to take stock of his formidable scholarly legacy to date. The following interview explores various aspects of the genesis and development of his research interests.

Yukio Lippit Although you are best known for your research on Buddhist painting, you started your scholarly career by writing on Xia Gui (act. 1020–90) and landscape painting in the Southern Song Imperial Academy. Why were you drawn to this topic initially?

Ide Seinosuke When I was a college senior, a fellow student, Yamashita Yoshiya, and I were called into the office by our two art history professors at the time, Hirata Yutaka (1931–2013) and Kikutake Jun'ichi (b. 1939) (fig. 6). They impressed upon us the importance going forward of studying the history of Japanese art with an interregional, East Asian perspective. Accordingly, it was suggested that we try and study Chinese art for a while. Yamashita replied that he wanted to continue his study of the Kano school. After thinking it over, I decided that I would indeed make the switch to Chinese art from what was then my research focus on the 'Ōtoku Nehan', a famous *parinirvana* painting on Mt Kōya dated to the year 1086 (Ōtoku 3).

In making this suggestion, my professors most likely had Chinese Buddhist art in mind. I, however, thought it would be best to choose the most outstanding work possible, and thus began my research with Guo Xi's *Early Spring* and painting treatise *Lofty Message of Forests and Streams* (*Linquan gaozhi*). I made this decision around the middle of June of my senior year. This coincided with the arrival of the aesthetics professor Imamichi Tomonobu to Kyushu University to teach an intensive course; he had just published the book *Aesthetics of East Asia*, for which *Early Spring* graced the cover, reinforcing its importance in my mind. And it was from that point on that I began to read Ogawa Hiromitsu's essay on *Early Spring* and imagination, as well as Toda Teisuke's various articles on copies. Suzuki Kei's four-volume history of Chinese painting had yet to be published, but his other writings served as inspiration.

In graduate school, I switched to the study of Xia Gui. The impetus for doing so was Professor Hirata's suggestion that I study a slightly later period of Chinese painting. By then I had travelled to mainland China and Taiwan, and it was around that time that the 'Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting' exhibition came to Japan. After viewing so many remarkable paintings directly, I became particularly interested in the expressive qualities of ink painting as witnessed in Xia Gui's *Twelve Views of Landscape* in the Nelson-Atkins Museum. When studying Guo Xi, I had become interested in his theory of 'The Three Distances', which became the foundation of my study of Xia Gui's style. Looking back now I am embarrassed, but in essence I was interested in considering how the Austrian art historian Alois Riegl's theory of 'near vision' (*Nahsicht*) and 'far vision' (*Fernsicht*) might prove useful in conceptualizing stylistic change in Song landscape painting.

YL Your father, Ide Sei'ichi (1928–80) (fig. 7), was a prominent oil painter based in Saga. Are there any ways in which your approach as an art historian is influenced by the fact that you are the son of an artist?

IS In Saga prefecture, where I was raised, my father was a fairly well-known artist, who himself had studied with the prominent painters Ebihara Kinosuke (1904–70) and Sakamoto Zenzō (1911–87). To borrow a concept from French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, one might say that I benefited from the cultural capital that he accrued. My father was a banker who quit his job to become a painter, and, aside from his trips to paint, he worked and interacted with people at home, which was important for my own upbringing. I believe the influence of my parents was enormous. And my father having become ill must have also been a factor in my decision to study art history upon entering college. My initial interest in studying 19th century French painting was undoubtedly due to his influence, as well as that of my mother, who supported his change in career and who regularly entertained guests with her singing of Japanese folk songs (*jojōka*) or Japanese-style chanson. They would also play an important role in my decision to spend a year in France in 1993 as a visiting researcher supported by the Ministry of Education.

Another early influence was the ten-part NHK [Japanese Broadcasting Corporation] series 'The Age of Impressionism' (1975–76), overseen by the art historian Takashina Shūji (1932–2024). Professor Takashina would eventually serve as the chair of the committee that awarded me the Kokka Prize. It was either then or perhaps on a separate occasion that he mentioned this NHK series reflected his best work from his early career.

At home, there were many gatherings with local cultural figures, of which I was obliged to be a part. Like my mother, I also sang and even played the guitar. A sneakily important aspect of my father's career was the fact that before he graduated from Kyushu University with a specialty in law and became a banker, he was a graduate of the Army Elementary School (Kumamoto 46th Class) and Army High School (61st Class). The Army School 61st Class included Kamata Shigeo, a famous scholar of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, and Kageki Hideo, a renowned expert on the Zen priest Ikkyū (1394–1481) and Zen culture.

YL Few young scholars are aware of the work and legacy of the art historian Hirata Yutaka, who was your teacher and mentor when you were a student at Kyushu University. How would you describe his scholarly legacy?

IS Professor Hirata's university lectures focused on the history of Japanese artists. I may have been the rare student who attended his entire cycle of lectures, beginning with Inshiraga, a painter said to have emigrated from Paekche to Japan in the 5th century,



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The Ide household in 1964, with Ide (age 5, second from right), his mother (centre), and his father, Sei'ichi (1928–80, second from left), who was a prominent oil painter
Photo courtesy of Ide Seinosuke

and ending with the age of Kichizan Minchō (1352–1431). As a young student I had neither the ability nor experience to place his teachings in a larger context, but it was clear that he offered a very different perspective on the history of painting than did either Akiyama Terukazu (1918–2009) or Yanagisawa Taka (1926–2003), who studied similar topics in Japan at the time. Professor Hirata himself was very cognizant of this. He was a modest and devout Catholic and used to read out loud in his classes, in French, the writings of the philosophers Étienne Gilson (1884–1978) and Jacques Maritain (1882–1973) on art.

If art historians aimed to develop what Michael Baxandall (1933–2008) called a 'period eye', Professor Hirata placed emphasis on researching the spirit (*seishin*), wisdom (*eichi*), and knowledge (*chiken*) that served as a foundation for this period eye—one might call this the intellectual history of the period. As a person, although formal and known to keep up appearances in public, among students and at dinner parties, he could let his guard down. As a scholar, he studied the spirit, wisdom, and knowledge of different historical eras, understanding that the handiwork of artists embodied these aspects to some degree. For this reason, Professor Hirata emphasized the important role played by monks and intellectuals in artistic production. Exemplary in this regard were monks such as Chōgen (1121–1206), Myōe (1173–1232), and Eison (1201–90). In my own work on Ningbo Buddhist painting, I have emphasized the importance of Siming Zhili (960–1028), the monk who re-established the Tiantai school during the Northern Song period, and in the case of Goryeo Buddhist painting, the significance of the scholar-monk Uicheon (1055–1101). This emphasis may be due to the influence of Professor Hirata.

Another teacher at Kyushu University to whom I am indebted is Professor Kikutake (see fig. 6). Yamashita Yoshiya and I were his earliest students, and much of my thinking about interregional East Asian art history is owed to him. He was the first art historian to survey the cultural properties of Tsushima, an island at the border of Japan. It was he who truly began the academic study of Goryeo Buddhist painting and sculpture. And Professor Kikutake was incredibly proactive in taking students to various regions within Kyushu to survey temple and shrine treasures. Much of my time before and during my service as a graduate student programme administrator (*joshu*) was spent participating in such surveys and organizing the resulting findings. Even though it has been difficult to achieve a balance between my own research, which tends to have an international purview, and these surveys, I was taught through these surveys how important it is not to neglect the local.

YL Some of your earliest articles, which are still highly influential today, concern Chinese portraiture, most notably that of the Chan monks Jianxin Laifu and Zhongfeng Mingben. Chinese portraiture continues to be an understudied field today, so it is remarkable that you were carrying out this research with such depth in the 1980s. How did your interest in this area come about?

IS Purely by coincidence!
Until graduate school, I had focused, on the one hand, on the surveys of temple and shrine treasures, and on the other, research on Xia Gui's landscapes. As neither of my professors was a specialist in landscape painting, there was even talk of asking Professor John Rosenfield at Harvard to take me on as a visiting student. Just then my *senpai* [upperclassman mentor] Dainobu Yūji became employed at the Tokyo National Museum, and I was suddenly elevated or thrust into the role of *joshu*, which is a university researcher who also serves as the programme administrator. Thus, after finishing my master's degree, I did not advance to the PhD programme but instead, at the age of 24, became a *joshu*. Just as my advisors were giving thought as to how I would 'debut' in the field, word began spreading that a portrait of the Chinese Chan monk Jianxin Laifu had been discovered in the mountains of Saga. It must have been around November of 1984. I first examined the painting in early December of that year, and it was decided that I should present on that work at the Annual Art History Association Conference the following year. Everything that followed was a blur: by February of 1985 I had to prepare a draft of my conference handout, in May I presented it, by October I had written up my article, and in January 1986 the article had appeared in print in the journal *Bijutsushi* (*Art History*, no. 119).

All of this happened over the span of only one year, at the beginning of which I had zero knowledge of portraiture. At the time, I could barely keep the names of Chan/Zen monks in my head! But I was young and had an abundance of energy. In the Jianxin Laifu article, the reason I was able to adopt such an interregional perspective on the portrait and Chinese



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Ide in a boat on the Grand Canal near Suzhou in September of 1995, retracing the itinerary of Japan's Ming envoys during the 15th century with fellow art historians Yamashita Yūji (center) and Shimao Arata (right), the latter a colleague at the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties
Photo courtesy of Ide Seinosuke

Chan culture in general was because the art historian Shimao Arata had recently published an article on early Japanese poem-picture scrolls ('Shoki shigajiku no yōsō' 'Aspects of Early Poem-Picture Scrolls'), which showcased for me the close relationship between Japanese and Chinese Zen communities at the time. This was precisely the context in which such a portrait had been made in China's Jiangnan region and eventually found its way to Japan. I understood from Shimao's article that the migration of Jianxin's portrait was part of a larger historical phenomenon by which the literati culture of Jiangnan's Chan communities was being transposed to Japan.

In his article, Shimao cited an oral presentation by the art historian Ōnishi Hiroshi on the internationalism of Zen culture at the time, which became another important point of reference. From Shimao and Ōnishi I learned that the Zen monk Ikō Tokken (act. late 14th century), who was responsible for bringing the Jianxin Laifu portrait to Japan but about whom little was known, was active in introducing Chinese Chan culture to Japan. I realized that he was survived by a surprising number of calligraphies, and while researching them, it became clear that they served to indirectly document his various activities in China.

After moving to a university position, I wrote another article on the Jianxin Laifu portrait, as my perspective had changed and I had a more holistic understanding of the issues. With regard to my Zhongfeng Mingben article, I wanted to continue to explore the issues that had been first examined with Jianxin Laifu, and to deepen my understanding of the field of portraiture. It was a genre for which there were fewer sources than for Xia Gui, and for which it was more difficult to examine in depth. And it was from my study of the Jianxin Laifu portrait that I came to appreciate how artworks are entangled in networks and relationships between individuals.

YL From 1987 to 2003, you worked at the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties (Tōbunken), where you produced many influential publications and established yourself as a leading scholar of, among other things, Chinese and Korean Buddhist painting. This institute is not a university. How did your employment there influence your scholarship?

IS At the Tōbunken, I spent most of every day processing images until well into the evening. For the first two years in particular, my time was consumed with work on the Institute's digital archive, meaning that I could only carry out my own research at night. In comparison to Kyushu University, however, there were far more books and resources. Most importantly, I was able to benefit from the suggestions of my colleagues and visitors to advance my research. The first article I published during my employment there was the study of Zhongfeng Mingben, but I had actually begun this research in Kyushu. There, however, the generation of scholars

above me, Professors Hirata and Kikutaka, were twenty years or more older, whereas at the Tōbunken I was able to interact with scholars of my own generation (fig. 8) and to see what interested art historians in their thirties. There was so much to learn and absorb. Working alongside outstanding senior colleagues such as Yonekura Michio, Suzuki Hiroyuki, Shimao Arata, and the Institute Librarian Nakamura Setsuko, I was taught above all the importance of prioritizing the twin goals of carrying out the most advanced individual research possible while making research materials available to others.

It could be that this attitude was a reaction to the more authoritarian reputation of the government arts bureaucracy of previous generations, and perhaps had its genesis in some indirect way in the student protests of the 1960s.

My time at the Tōbunken also exposed me to what at the time was called 'New Art History'. Yonekura, Suzuki, and Shimao took the lead in introducing the methodologies related to this movement to Japan, and we formed a study group to read the first few issues of the art history journal *Representations*, which had just started publication out of UC Berkeley. It was then that I first heard the names of Svetlana Alpers and Michael Baxandall, but I'm not sure to what degree I grasped the ideas associated with this movement in depth. Above all, it imparted to me the importance of considering an artwork's engagement with society and the role of the viewer, perspectives that are reflected in my 1993 article on Lu Xinzhong's *Parinirvana* painting in the Nara National Museum. It was just at that time that the 'Paintings Speak' ('E wa kataru') series began to be published out of Heibonsha, and Tōbunken scholars such as Nagaoka Ryūsaku, Okada Ken, and I, who were slightly younger than the authors of this series, felt the need to establish our own identity and art historical approach as well. In my case, this resulted in lengthy essays on Lu Xinzhong and the relationship between Goryeo Buddhist painting and the 'Samantabhadra's Vow' chapter of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. The articles by Okada and Nagaoka, who were also awarded the Kokka Prize, explored in great depth the production context of artworks.

One final aspect of my time at the Tōbunken worthy of mention concerns my engagement with institutional critique. Scholars of premodern Japanese and East Asian art began to take an interest in the history of Japan's reception of art and its associated practices and institutions. Government funding was procured for a research project, part of which resulted in a symposium ('The Present Speaks about the Past', 1997) and publication of the proceedings. As I was one of the organizers, it presented an occasion for me to solidify my own approach to methodology. Suzuki, Shimao, Yamanashi, Tanaka, and I also played leading roles in shaping the direction of a later symposium titled 'Moving Objects' in 2002.

With regard to my own research, because of the time I had been devoting to the processing of images, I began to think seriously about the direction in which I wanted to focus my energies going forward. One day I accidentally came across photographs in the Institute archives from a national survey that had been conducted by Professor Suzuki Kei of *luohan* and Ten Kings paintings in Japanese temples. These photographs had yet to be catalogued and were simply strewn about, but they inspired me to research Song-Yuan Buddhist painting in parallel with Goryeo Buddhist painting. Doing so mobilized many different aspects of my earlier experience, such as my participation in surveys of cultural properties in the Kyushu region, my study of the history of painters under Professor Hirata, my study of interregionalism under Professor Kikutake, and the continued development of concepts formulated through the study of landscape and figure painting from the Song period onward. Recently, there has been a renewed emphasis on rethinking art historical problems from local perspectives.

YL At the Tōbunken, you were involved in the creation of high-resolution digital content with the photographer Shirono Seiji that has yielded a remarkable amount of new information about otherwise well-known artworks. Could you talk about your collaboration and what you see as the important aspects of this work?

IS Even before my collaboration with Shirono Seiji (fig. 9), I had frequently participated in surveys of paintings that involved X-ray photography while at Kyushu University. My first two years at the Tōbunken were spent processing images, and since the section I belonged to was the 'Department of Archives', I was well attuned to documentary research based upon collaboration with a photographer.

But my commitment to this type of collaborative work also relates to the issue of the digitization of art historical images. One culmination of our work is



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Ide (centre) with the photographer Shirono Seiji (left) and Yukio Lippit (right), carrying out digital imaging of *Five Hundred Luohans* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in February 2009
Photo courtesy of Ide Seinosuke

encapsulated in the volume *Light & Color* (2009), and I still feel that what I wrote there is as important as ever. Needless to say, the digital content that results from this work is of the highest quality and furthers art historical research. At the same time, however, it forces us to reconsider the traditional relationship between the art historian and the 'cameraman', because Shirono's optical imaging is a form of art historical research in and of itself, one that is closely connected to his unique abilities and approach to photography. I understand this relationship as an important component of the entire art history ecosystem. Indeed, if it is not thought of that way, this type of collaborative work would be impossible to carry out.

The digital content generated by Shirono, which is ultimately independent of the conditions of human vision, is completely available to anyone with an interest in it. It can be scrutinized and critiqued, much like an artwork itself, and can also be adapted in order to correspond to traditional art historical forms of description. But the volume and quality of the entire archive of digital content far exceeds its uses thus far, and I believe that we need a structure that can properly preserve and activate the potential of this entire archive.

YL One of your most important publications is *Song and Yuan Buddhist Painting in Japan* (*Nihon no Sōgen butsuga*), published by Shibundō in 2001. This is a landmark book that was awarded the prestigious Kokka Prize. Could you talk a bit about how you view its legacy today?

IS Legacy?! Although I do not want to sound immodest, I would say that it helped to open up a new field, and shed light on a previously under-studied group of paintings. While boundaries and peripheries had been debated as a concept, few previous studies had actually demonstrated how they were formed. At the time, because there were no previous studies that had surveyed and framed the field of Chinese Buddhist painting as a whole, it was difficult even to introduce new works.

The Shibundō book originated in a presentation at the 1997 Tōbunken symposium. There I attempted to give concrete examples of works to which the label of 'boundary art' (*kyōkai no bijutsu*) had been applied, and to explore what insights could be gained when one strips artworks of their national identities. The Ningbo exhibition at the Nara National Museum in 2009 was a catalyst for the current generation of younger scholars to begin focusing on this issue. Although the discourse on East Asian Buddhist painting has gradually become more refined, the debate over how one might fill the void created by the hypothetical removal of national identities from artworks remains stagnant. The artworks included in the Shibundō book and Ningbo exhibition had previously been associated with diverse sites and historical eras, and had never been treated together as a whole. But I believe that we need to return to the original impetus for bringing them together.

YL Another field on which you have left a considerable imprint is the study of Korean Buddhist painting. Most recently, in 2023, you helped to

organize an exhibition at the Kyushu National Museum on Goryeo and Joseon dynasty Buddhist painting. How has this field evolved over the years?

IS If Professor Kikutake or Chung Woothak, a Korean specialist in Goryeo Buddhist painting, had not been present at Kyushu University, I would never have taken an interest in this subject. I feel it is important to carry out research on Goryeo Buddhist painting in parallel with the study of Song and Yuan Buddhist painting. Recently I've become more and more interested in the Buddhist painting of the early Joseon period. Not only because it is a continuation of Goryeo, but because the early Joseon period has its foundation in both Goryeo and Ming practices. Within the study of East Asian painting, furthermore, it is important to compare Korea to Japan. My own approach has been to carry out comparative research in all of these fields, and with each passing year there seem to be more and more opportunities to do so.

YL You are the scholar most closely associated with the study of the Daitoku-ji *Five Hundred Luohans* (1178–88), a famous work that was also the subject of a 2018 international symposium you organized at Kyushu University. How has the understanding of this monumental work changed since you entered the field?

IS I'm not sure how much my own understanding of the work has had an impact on others. Art historical perspectives on the work have shifted greatly over time. Initially it was treated as a representative work of the Southern Song period as a whole, and after that as an example of Ningbo painting, and more recently it has been associated with Southern Song Buddhist painting in Hangzhou. There are now more in-depth studies of various aspects of the *Five Hundred Luohans*.

I believe that the local context of the *Five Hundred Luohans* is essential to understanding it, including its relationship to Water-Land Assembly, the dredging of waterweeds from Lake Dongqian, and the status of Huianyuan Temple. One of the special characteristics of my research is that I have studied it through the lens of local society. When Professor Wen Fong presented on this work at the 2009 Nara conference (fig. 10), he stated that his own art historical perspective was that of a Chinese art historian with a western perspective, but that I was practising [what from an American vantage point would be termed] 'social art history'. He said that my work on the Daitoku-ji *Five Hundred Luohans* was successful as a result, which was highly encouraging to me.

YL You are retiring this month (March 2025) after 21 years of teaching from Kyushu University. You are still involved in many different areas of research concerning East Asian Buddhist painting. Are there any areas that you would like to see younger scholars focus on in the future?

IS Among the various areas I have researched throughout my career, younger scholars have been engaged with two in particular. The first is a project I am currently involved in and hope to pass on to younger generations, which examines Korean artworks and objects that have been transmitted in the Japanese islands. There are many such works in Japan, not only Buddhist paintings but also important Buddhist artworks such as sculptures, sutras, and bronze bells. It is crucial that these works and their data be documented as fully as possible.

In carrying out this project I am joined by Korean researchers who will lead the next generation of scholarship. The research that such scholars have been pursuing into their religious context and objects interred within has only just begun. Indeed, Japanese scholars have much to learn from these new directions.

Another area is the study of so-called Chinese-style painting (*kara-e*) during the Edo period from a broad, interregional perspective. This requires the inclusion of materials not traditionally emphasized, such as model works, copies, and attributed or inauthentic works. These materials are so important for understanding the history and circulation of images in East Asia, and they also offer a 'reverse perspective', that is, working backwards from a later historical era, they help us to understand which works were accessible, studied, or counted, and which paintings helped to shape later artistic production.

I would also like to see more research on art systems *before* the modern era. Not just through research on individual objects, but more holistic research on local cultural systems for the preservation of cultural objects throughout East Asia.

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10
Ide at the Daitoku-ji monastery with
Wen C. Fong (right) and Maxwell K. Hearn (left)
in August 2009
Photo courtesy of Ide Seinosuke

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