

### ***View of West Lake by Shūgetsu Tōkan (1496)***

West Lake in Hangzhou, China, has appeared in Chinese legends, paintings, and literature since the Tang dynasty (618–907). Envoys, monks, and traders from Japan who went to China often visited Hangzhou during their travels, and the lake became well known among Japanese literati. Over time, West Lake came to epitomize Chinese ideals of natural beauty, capturing the imaginations of Japanese poets, painters, and aristocrats.

This hanging scroll dates to 1496, and it is the earliest extant Japanese depiction of West Lake. It was painted by Shūgetsu Tōkan (dates unknown), who studied under renowned painter Sesshū Tōyō (1420–1502). Originally, the painting was attributed to Sesshū himself because the brushwork of the mountains, temples, and trees is notably similar to Sesshū's painting style. However, the inscription in the upper left corner of the painting suggests a different origin.

The text reads, “This image of West Lake in Hangzhou was done on the third day of the third month of the ninth year of Hongzhi (1496) at the State Guesthouse in Beijing.” Records show that Sesshū was not in China in 1496, but Shūgetsu was. Shūgetsu likely sketched the lake in person, then later referred to Chinese paintings of the lake to complete his version while staying at the Beijing State Guesthouse. Because of the information provided in this inscription, the work was properly credited to Shūgetsu.

The names of different locations are written on the painting, such as “Six Bridges” underneath the line of bridges and “Lingyin Temple” above a small building nestled between the Northern and Southern Peaks in the center-back of the painting. Although Shūgetsu had to compress the scene to fit it on the paper, it is a realistic, almost map-like depiction with buildings and walls drawn cleanly and precisely. The realistic style lent credibility to the work, as it was proof that the painter had seen the landscape with his own eyes. Later Japanese painters, particularly those from the renowned Kanō school, used Shūgetsu's work as a model for their own paintings of the lake.

The Kanō School, established by Kanō Masanobu (1434–1530), dominated Japanese painting for over 300 years, receiving patronage from wealthy samurai, aristocrats, and the Ashikaga and Tokugawa shogunates. Kanō School artists specialized in ink paintings of Chinese subjects, such as Chinese landscapes and Buddhist patriarchs.

During the 1600s, Kanō painters who were unable to travel to West Lake themselves drew upon Shūgetsu's depiction of West Lake to produce their own works. Each artist added his own touch to the composition and brushwork, emphasizing certain features while minimizing others.

The museum holds four paintings of West Lake. In addition to Shūgetsu's, there are versions by Kanō Motonobu (1476–1559), Kanō Kōi (?–1636), and Kanō Tanyū (1602–1674). In the three later works, the mountains are taller, the buildings are less prominent, and clouds shroud the lake, creating a more ethereal tone. Compared to the faithful—albeit compressed—depiction of the lake by Shūgetsu, the works produced by Kanō School painters focus more on artistic ambiance. They also demonstrate a greater blend of Chinese and Japanese painting styles. Although the paintings are not usually on display due to their fragility, detailed images can be found on the museum's website.

Shūgetsu's *View of West Lake* was designated an Important Cultural Property in 1950.