

Chikurin Shichiken 竹林七賢

Seven Wise Men of the Bamboo Thicket Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove

[Below text from Japan Architecture and Art Net User System \(JAANUS\)](#)

Chn: Zhulinqixian. Lit. Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. A pictorial theme based on seven Chinese literati who, to escape the social chaos of the Wei-Jin period, fled to a secluded bamboo grove chikurin 竹林 where they could express their personalities freely by the enjoyment of pure conversation seidan 清談, music, and wine. The Seven Sages are: Ruan Ji (Jp: Gen Seki 阮籍; 210-263), Ji Kang (Jp: Kei Kou 稽康; 223-266), Shan Tao (Jp: San Tou 山濤; 205-266), Xiang Xiu (Jp: Kyou Shuu 向秀; 221-300), Liu Ling (Jp: Ryou Rei 劉伶; ca. 225-280), Wang Rong (Jp: Oujuu 王戎; 234-305), and, Ruan Xian (Jp: Gen Kan 阮咸, nephew of Ruan Ji). All were famous for the purity of their reclusive spirits, their strong Taoist and anti-Confucian values, and their strikingly eccentric personalities. The Seven Sages are mentioned in several Chinese texts, most notably Shushuoxinyu (Jp: SESETSU SHINGO 世說新語; ca 5c) or New Specimens of Contemporary Talk. The earliest depiction of the subject is found on a set of late 4c or early 5c clay tomb tiles from the Xishanqiao 西善橋 area of Nanjing 南京. Typical Chinese iconography shows gentlemen playing musical instruments and writing poetry as well as drinking wine. The subject was popular with Japanese painters of the Momoyama and early Edo periods who tended to transform the theme into a rather generalized image of reclusive scholars engaging in literary pursuits. Thus, the Seven Sages theme was often mixed with depictions of the four accomplishments kinki shoga 琴棋書画 or paired with the Four Hermits at Mt. Shang Shan shouzan shikou 商山四皓. Noteworthy examples include works by Kanou Motonobu 狩野元信 (1476-1559, Tokyo National Museum), Kaihou Yuushou 海北友松 (1533-1615, Kenninji 建仁寺, Kyoto). Sesson 雪村 (act. 16c) took early liberties with the theme, painting his famous "Dancing Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove" Chikurin shichiken butou-zu 竹林七賢舞踊図 (private collection) in 1574. The Seven Sages theme, with its philosophical Chinese overtones and popularity with military and priestly patrons, later became a favorite target for parody pictures mitate-e 見立て絵 by ukiyo-e 浮世絵 artists substituting beautiful women for the gentlemen.



16th Century Scroll, Photo from the Tokyo Nat'l Museum Exhibit Catalog "A Selection of Japanese Art from the Mary & Jackson Burke Collection," May-June 1985.

Resources:

New York Met <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/53231>
Exhibit Catalog [Japanese Art: Selections from the Mary and Jackson Burke Collection](#)