

## Why Did The Patriarch Cross The River? The Rushleaf Bodhidharma Reconsidered

Se non è vero, è ben trovato  
(Old Italian proverb)

The theme of "The Ch'an Master Bodhidharma crossing the Yangtze River on a reed" (frequently referred to as the "Rushleaf Bodhidharma"; Ch.: *lu-wei Ta-mo* 蘆葦達磨; J.: *royō Daruma*) is one of the most popular and persistent motifs in the visual culture of East Asia. It occurs not only in paintings (figs. 1, 2), but also in engravings, sculpture, ceramics (figs. 3, 4; appended) and other media. Indeed, the theme was so well known that it came to be parodied in Chinese painting and, even more frequently, in the humorous "re-vision" (*mitate* 見立て) of the Japanese *ukiyo-e* 浮世繪 print masters.<sup>1</sup>

Nonetheless, the Rushleaf theme has been largely ignored by art historians and Buddhologists alike,<sup>2</sup> a victim of various methodological presuppositions (discussed below) and of analytical imbalances that generally characterize the study of Chinese art. As a result of these imbalances, our overall knowledge of the field is wildly unev-

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<sup>1</sup> In a work entitled "Sixteen Arhats," the Chinese painter Wu Pin 吳彬 (fl. 1583-1626) shows Bodhidharma crossing the Yangtze on wheels; reproduced in Wen Fong and Maxwell K. Hearn, "Silent Poetry: Chinese Painting from the Douglas Dillon Galleries," *T* (1981-82), pl. 42. For a well-known Japanese example, see the print "A Courtesan As Bodhidharma Crossing the Sea," by Suzuki Harunobu 鈴木春信 (1725?-1770); reproduced in Jack Hillier's *Suzuki Harunobu* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1970), pl. 41.

<sup>2</sup> One of the few scholarly articles to treat this theme at length is Chu-ting Li, "Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangtze River on a Reed: A Painting in the Charles A. Drenowatz Collection in Zurich," *Asiatische Studien* 25 (1971), pp. 49-75; Li offers surprisingly little interpretation and makes several problematical assertions (see below). A recent monograph on Bodhidharma, H. Neill McFarland's *Daruma: The Founder of Zen in Japanese Art and Popular Culture* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1987), deals extensively with visual representations, but has only one paragraph on the Rushleaf theme (p. 32).



Figure 1. *Bodhidharma on a Reed* (detail), 14th c.  
Hanging scroll; color on silk; 102.4 × 38.5 cm.  
Anon.; inscription by Kozan Ikkyō 固山一峯  
(1295–1360).  
Gyokuzō-in Temple, Kyoto.



Figure 2. *Bodhidharma on a Reed* (detail), 14th c.  
Hanging scroll; ink on paper; 89.2 × 31.1 cm.  
Anon.; inscription by Liao-an Ch'ing-yü 了庵清欲  
(1288–1363).  
Cleveland Museum of Art, John L. Severance  
Fund, 64.44.



Figure 3. *Bodhidharma*, ca. 1650–1700  
Blanc-de-chine porcelain.  
Peking Palace Museum.



Figure 14. *Daruma Doll*, 20th c.  
Painted wood; 15 cm.  
Shibumi Trading Company Brochure.



Figure 4. *Bodhidharma on a Reed*, late-16th c.  
Dish painted in underglaze blue and  
colored enamels.  
Topkapi Saray Museum.



Figure 5. *A Long Roll of Buddhist Images*  
(detail), 1173–1176  
Handscroll; ink, colors and gold on  
paper; 30 × 1881.4 cm.  
Attr. to Chang Sheng-wen 張勝溫  
National Palace Museum, Taipei.

en, and there are precious few areas that have been as thoroughly mapped as their western counterparts. Thus, while such individual Chinese painters as Pa-ta Shan-jen 八大山人, T'ang Yin 唐寅, and Tung Ch'i-ch'ang 董其昌, or a genre like *mo-mei* 墨梅 ("ink-plum"), have had elaborate exhibitions and monographs in their honor,<sup>3</sup> other important subjects and themes have remained untreated or unrecognized. To put this in another perspective, a recent article in *Art Bulletin* listed chronologically in an appendix seventy-eight published interpretations of the curtain that appears along the upper borders of Raphael's "Sistine Madonna." Examples of these are: "a window curtain," "a vision," "heaven," "an altar curtain," "a theater curtain," "an artistic boundary," "a tomb curtain," "a balcony curtain," "a heavenly veil," "a covering for the painting," and, finally, that it is inexplicable.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, whether early or late, Chinese or Japanese, painting or engraving, sculpture or dish, serious portrait or parody, analysis of the Rushleaf theme has in general terms always operated inside the view that such images are narrative exemplifications of the "miraculous" events incorporated into Bodhidharma's biography in the centuries after his death.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Recent monographs are those by Anne de Coursey Clapp, *The Painting of T'ang Yin* (Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1992); Wang Fangyu and Richard Barnhart, *Master of the Lotus Garden: The Life and Art of Bada Shanren (1626-1705)* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1990); and Wai-kam Ho, ed., *The Century of Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555-1636)* (Kansas City: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1992); the last two were prepared as exhibition catalogues. On genres, see Maggie Bickford et al., *Bones of Jade, Soul of Ice: The Flowering Plum in Chinese Art* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1985); and John Hay, *Kernels of Energy, Bones of Earth: The Rock in Chinese Art* (New York: China Institute in America, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Johann Eberlein, "The Curtain in Raphael's Sistine Madonna," *Art Bulletin* 65.1 (1983), pp. 61-77.

<sup>5</sup> Variations of this view appear in McFarland, *Daruma*, p. 15; Jan Fontein and Money L. Hickman, *Zen Painting and Calligraphy* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1970), p. 53; Hiroshi Kanazawa, *Japanese Ink Painting: Early Zen Masterpieces* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1979), p. 55; Kano Hiroyuki 狩野博幸, "Daruma zu no shosō" 達磨圖の諸相, in *Zen no bijutsu* 禅の美術 (Kyoto: Kyoto National Museum, 1983), pp. 231-32.

I use the term narrative in conformity with the usual practice of art history, although such usage would not be accepted by most "narratologists." When applied to the Rushleaf theme, what is meant is that the work illustrates (rather than narrates) a presumably historical event, in contradistinction to "iconic" works, which are static and ahistorical (a point taken up in greater detail, below). On the concept of narrative in Chinese aesthetics, see Dore J. Levy, *Chinese Narrative Poetry* (Durham: Duke U.P., 1988), esp. Introduction and chapter 1.

This standard explanation, however, fails to ask a variety of important questions: why was this particular event added to the biographical record in the first place;<sup>6</sup> what functions did this (and other) visual images serve in Ch'an practice; and why were other, equally dramatic, events in Bodhidharma's biography (such as his famous "No Merit!" encounter with emperor Wu of Liang 梁武帝) artistically ignored? Furthermore, implicit methodological assumptions, particularly the notion that "narrative illustrations" are necessarily preceded by a literary text, have recently been challenged by art historians. Concerning the relationship between narratives and their illustrations, James Cahill has observed that:

[W]here older studies took somewhat simplistic views . . . , considering the text as primary and a constant to which illustrations served as embellishment and amplification, recent studies see a more organic interaction. In the newer model, the works in verbal and visual media adapt flexibly to each other. For instance, illustrations may generate a new version of the text, or the choice of excerpts to be illustrated . . . leads to a shift of emphases within the narrative.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Several commentators suggest that the story of Bodhidharma crossing the Yangtze evolved from a misreading. Stephen Addiss, for instance, writes that "the Chinese character that had once meant 'reed boat' and 'reed' lost its first meaning over the course of time"; *The Art of Zen: Paintings and Calligraphy by Japanese Monks 1600-1925* (New York: Abrams, 1989), p. 57. But the urge to distance Ch'an (or Zen) from miracles and superstition has largely run its course. When Addiss writes, "As a rule, Zen has had little use for miraculous deeds, stressing instead the enlightenment of the everyday world" (ibid.), he does not give consideration to numerous studies of Ch'an ritual practice, such as Robert H. Sharf's "The Idolization of Enlightenment: On the Mummification of Ch'an Masters in Medieval China," *History of Religions* 32.1 (1992), pp. 1-31; nor does he consider studies of the eminent-monk literary genre itself, such as Koichi Shinohara's "Two Sources of Chinese Buddhist Biographies: Stupa Inscriptions and Miracle Stories," P. Granoff and K. Shinohara, eds., *Monks and Magicians: Religious Biographies in Asia* (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1988), pp. 119-228.

<sup>7</sup> James Cahill, "Types of Text-Object Relationships in Chinese Art," address delivered September 1, 1983, to the Thirty-first International Congress of Human Sciences in Asia and North America; the passage quoted here is from pp. 1-2 of the conference copy of the lecture. For a summary, see *31st CISSHAN: Abstracts of Papers* (Tokyo: Toho Gakkai, 1983) 2, p. 276.

In other words, the assertion of textual primacy, which has long been an integral part of iconological studies, is no longer routinely accepted as inherently self-evident; in fact, this tendency to look through a picture in order to identify a background text may cause narratives to be found where they were never intended to be.<sup>8</sup>

In this essay, I reexamine early representations of Bodhidharma in relation to their ostensible literary sources, and also in the light of this "newer model" of interpretation I address in particular the fundamental issue of how to account for the tenacity and persistence of the Rushleaf theme. I begin with a brief discussion of the evolution of Bodhidharma's biographical accounts — a necessity simply to establish the role of an accepted "text" — and then consider the extent to which the theme of "crossing the Yangtze on a reed" can be seen as a narrative illustration born of this textual tradition. Finally, I suggest alternative interpretive strategies.

## BIOGRAPHICAL EVOLUTION

The earliest surviving mention of Bodhidharma is preserved in *Lo-yang ch'ieh-lan chi* 洛陽伽藍記, Yang Hsüan-chih's 楊街之 547 AD account of the Buddhist monasteries of Lo-yang. Yang's description of the Yung-ning Monastery 永寧寺, which was established in 516, contains the following passage:

In those days there was a monk from the West called Bodhidharma, a Persian who had come to the central lands from remote and desolate parts. When he saw the golden discs reflecting the sunlight beyond the clouds and heard the bells in the wind sending their chimes up to the sky he chanted a eulogy and sighed with admiration for what was indeed a divine construction. "In my 150 years," he said, "I have been everywhere and travelled in many countries, but a temple of this beauty cannot be found anywhere else in the continent of Jambudvīpa and all the lands of the Buddha." He held

<sup>8</sup> See Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1983).

his hands together and chanted "namah" for several days on end.<sup>9</sup>

This abbreviated record hardly qualifies as a complete biography, yet it is the only source of information about Bodhidharma prior to *Hsü Kao-seng chuan* 續高僧傳 (*Continuation of the Lives of Eminent Monks*), compiled by Tao Hsüan 道宣 (596–667) in the mid-seventh century.<sup>10</sup> According to that work, Bodhidharma was the son of a south Indian Brahmin and came to China during the Liu-Sung 劉宋 dynasty (420–479); he subsequently went north, into the state of Wei 魏 (386–535), where he taught meditation (Ch.: *ch'an* 禪; Sk.: *dhyāna*). It states further that he acquired two disciples, Tao-yü 道育 and Hui-k'o 慧可, and reiterates his claim to be over 150 years of age. Moreover, we learn that Bodhidharma transmitted *Lankāvatāra sūtra* in four *chüan*.

*Ch'uan fa-pao chi* 傳法寶記 (*Record of the Transmission of the Dharma Jewel*), of 710 AD, largely accords with the account of the *Hsü Kao-seng chuan*, although it provides two new anecdotes that thereafter recur with regularity.<sup>11</sup> The first states that several attempts were made to poison Bodhidharma while he was staying at the Shao-lin Monastery 少林寺. The second states that a Wei envoy, Sung-yün 宋雲, returning to China from India, claimed to have passed Bodhidharma going the opposite way in the Pamir Mountains. As a consequence of his report, Bodhidharma's tomb was excavated and, true to Sung-yün's word, found empty.

The next substantial elements in the biography of Bodhidharma are found in "P'u-t'i-ta-mo nan-tsung ting shih-fei lun" 菩提達磨南宗定是非論 ("On Establishing the True and False about the Southern School of Bodhidharma"), written in 732 by Tu-ku P'ei 獨孤沛 (oth-

<sup>9</sup> Trans. W. J. F. Jenner, *Memories of Loyang: Yang Hsüan-chih and the Lost Capital (493–534)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 151.

<sup>10</sup> Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigoku 渡衛銑旭, eds., *Taishō shinshū daizokyo* 大正新修大藏經 (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1932; hereafter *T*), vol. 50, *chüan* 16, "Dhyana Practitioners" 習禪, p. 551.

<sup>11</sup> A fragment is preserved in *T*, vol. 85, p. 1291; other details are found in the summary provided in Philip B. Yampolsky, *The Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1967), pp. 5–10.

erwise unknown).<sup>12</sup> This work records the details of Shen-hui's 神會 (684–758) attack on the Northern Ch'an lineage, which traced itself through Shen-hsiu 神秀 (606–706).<sup>13</sup> It contains the oldest extant reference to the legendary meeting between Bodhidharma and emperor Wu of Liang (r. 502–550), and to their exchange concerning pious merit. Further, it mentions a robe, which was passed from generation to generation as a sign of the patriarchate.

In 774, *Li-tai fa-pao chi* 歷代法寶記 (*Record of the Dharma Jewel through the Dynasties*) increased the number of Bodhidharma's disciples from two to three, and was the first text to tell of his calling them together and transmitting his "flesh" to one, his "bones" to another, and his "marrow" to the third.<sup>14</sup> Finally, it mentions that Sung-yün had noticed that Bodhidharma was wearing but one shoe when they crossed paths in the mountains, and relates that its mate was later found in his otherwise empty tomb.

By the late-eighth century, then, the nucleus of Bodhidharma's "official" biography was essentially fixed, although some later accretions — such as "facing the wall" at the Shao-lin Monastery and the story of Hui-k'o's asking to have his mind calmed (*an-hsin* 安心) — appeared in ninth-, tenth-, and eleventh-century texts. Indeed, it is precisely this phenomenon of ever-increasing detail and embellishment that is one of the most striking features of Bodhidharma's biographical evolution. To demonstrate this more graphically, the biographical details supplied by twelve major texts, ranging in date of composition from 547 to 1061, have been recorded in the addendum table.

As can be seen, the most recent texts contain the most complete information, and once an element makes an appearance it tends to persist. Surprisingly enough, some of the most familiar elements of the later Bodhidharma biographies appear infrequently or not at all.

<sup>12</sup> This text was discovered among the Tunhuang manuscripts in Paris and identified by Hu Shih 胡適; see his *Shen-hui ho-shang i-chi* 神會和尚遺集 (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1930). A translation appears in Jacques Gernet, *Entretiens du Maître de Dhyāna Chen-houei du Ho-tsü (686–770)* (Hanoi: Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1949), pp. 81–91.

<sup>13</sup> See John McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 1986).

<sup>14</sup> *T*, vol. 51, pp. 179–96.

For instance, not one of the twelve texts mentions "crossing the Yangtze River on a reed," or a "mind-to-mind transmission" 以心傳心, and only one reports Bodhidharma's teaching about "directly pointing to the mind" 直指人心.

The pattern that emerges from this brief synopsis is not unique. Revisions of life-accounts are typical of Buddhist hagiography (and in a broader sense, the use of the biography as a didactic tool is in keeping with traditional Chinese attitudes toward historical writings in general). It should be borne in mind, as well, that the evolution we discern in Bodhidharma's biographies is not merely the product of whimsy or serendipity, with events added, deleted, or expanded at will; rather, these changes must be understood as direct responses to particular historical situations. The visual evolution of Bodhidharma's "pictorial biography" must be similarly understood.

## EARLY REPRESENTATIONS OF THE TRANSMISSION OF THE DHARMA

Referring to an image of Bodhidharma in the famous "Long Roll of Buddhist Images" attributed to Chang Sheng-wen 張勝溫 and painted between 1173 and 1176 (fig. 5; appended),<sup>15</sup> Helen Chapin perceptively noted that some of the earliest representations of the first patriarch, where he is presented as thin and non-hirsute, seem somehow at odds with his later, well-known portrayals as beetle-browed, bearded and scowling (see figs. 1, 2).<sup>16</sup> Chapin deduced that the early images may preserve the "real" likeness of a monk who was transformed into the mythic Bodhidharma, a figure whose "ideal" portrait later evolved in a text-driven response to unexplored changes in Bodhidharma's biography. Unlikely physiognomic speculations aside for the moment, what these and several other early images

<sup>15</sup> See Helen B. Chapin, "A Long Roll of Buddhist Images," originally published in *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* in 3 parts: June and December 1936, and June 1938; revised (with commentary) by A. C. Soper, *Artibus Asiae* 32 (1970), pp. 5–41; 157–99; and 259–306.

<sup>16</sup> Helen B. Chapin, "Three Early Portraits of Bodhidharma," *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 1 (1945–1946), pp. 66–95.

more importantly have in common, I would argue, is that each explicitly situates Bodhidharma in the context of patriarchal transmission.

The Tun-huang version of *The Platform Sūtra* (*Liu-tsu t'an-ching* 六祖坦經; ca. 830), an important Ch'an Buddhist text which purportedly contains the teachings of the sixth Chinese patriarch, Hui-neng 慧能, relates the following:

In this corridor they intended to present paintings of stories from *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, together with paintings of the five eminent patriarchs transmitting the robe and the dharma, so that they might remain as a remembrance for later generations.<sup>17</sup>

That the illustration of this theme of the patriarchal transmission was a popular one at an even earlier date, and that it remained so for several centuries, is corroborated by a number of sources. An inventory of the imperial painting collection during the reign of the emperor Hui-tsung 徽宗 titled *Hsüan-ho hua-p'u* 宣和畫譜 (compiled around 1120) lists "Portraits of the Six Patriarchal Ch'an Masters" (*"Liu-tsu ch'an-shih hsiang"* 六祖禪師像) in its entry for the eighth-century painter Ch'en Hung 陳闕. Furthermore, a work entitled "Patriarchs Transmitting the Dharma and Receiving the Robe" (*"Tsu-shih ch'uan-fa shou-i"* 祖師傳法守衣) is attributed to the Northern Sung literatus Li Kung-lin 李公麟 (1049–1106).<sup>18</sup>

One of the oldest surviving visual examples of this theme is in the form of a little-known handscroll that carries the title "Sangoku Soshi Ei" 三國祖師影 ("Portraits of Patriarchs and Teachers of the Three Countries"), and which was produced in Japan in the sixth year of Kyūan 久安 (1150).<sup>19</sup> Although later copies of this scroll exist, the 1150 version is itself patterned on an earlier work, probably by the Shingon monk Ningai 仁海 (951–1046), and derives partly from a Chinese prototype. Employing a typical *pai-miao* 白描 ("plain outline")

<sup>17</sup> Yampolsky, *Platform Sūtra*, pp. 128–29 (with slight alterations).

<sup>18</sup> *Hsüan-ho hua-p'u* 宣和畫譜 (pref. 1120; I-shu ts'ung-p'ien edn.; Taipei: Shih-chieh, 1974), pp. 161, 207.

<sup>19</sup> Takahashi Masataka 高橋正高, *Sangoku soshi ei no kenkyū* 三國師影の研究 (Kyoto: Benrido, 1969).

style, the scroll depicts forty-six figures in all, each accompanied by a brief, identifying inscription. The first eight figures represent the traditional patriarchs of the Chen-yen 真言 (J.: Shingon) school; next come eleven of the school's most prominent teachers, all of whom were active in the ninth century (a fact which may offer a clue to the dating of the original); these are followed by the six traditional patriarchs of the Ch'an school; and lastly pictured are twenty-one assorted monks, bodhisattvas, and exalted personages, among them Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子 (574–622), the great Japanese imperial patron of Buddhism.

The section of the scroll showing "The First Patriarch, Master Bodhidharma" (fig. 6) associates him in the inscription with the East Mountain dharma (*Tung-shan fa* 東山法), a reference to the teachings of Tao-hsin 道信 (580–651) and Hung-jen 弘忍 (600–674), the fourth and fifth patriarchs, respectively.<sup>20</sup> Seated cross-legged, both hands visible and in the form of a mudra of appeasement, the rather slight figure wears a traditional robe and is oriented spatially towards the second patriarch, Hui-k'o, who occupies the adjacent frame. While his nose is somewhat prominent, Bodhidharma's facial features are otherwise regular, and more Chinese than Indian. Although the other figures in the scroll are treated singly, Bodhidharma and Hui-k'o are treated more as a unit: the two appear to be exchanging gazes, and Bodhidharma's mouth is clearly shown as open, as if arrested in speech — perhaps a reference to their famous dialogue. If so, this reference is underscored by the dramatic representation of Hui-k'o. The one-shouldered robe reveals the stump of his mutilated appendage, while perpendicular to his body lies the amputated portion of the arm — palm up, fingers slightly curled — graphically surrounded by a pool of blood.

Another early work depicts Bodhidharma and Hui-k'o similarly. This is the "Illustrated Scroll of the Established Patriarchs Transmitting the Dharma and Correct Teaching" (*"Ch'uan-fa cheng-tsung ting-tsu t'u-chuan"* 傳法正宗定祖圖卷), originally part of a work called *Ch'uan-fa cheng-tsung* compiled by the well-known Northern Sung monk Ch'i-

<sup>20</sup> See McRae, *Northern School*, chap. 6.



Figure 6. Portraits of Patriarchs and Teachers from Three Countries (detail), dated 1130. Handscroll, ink and light color on paper. Daigoji, Kyoto.



第廿八祖菩提達磨  
國人姓刹帝利王其國王之子也彼教  
軍出家得法付法謂是觀音菩薩之  
迹其後六十年乃以法來東唐其  
授直指人心見性成佛不立文字初至  
豫章下榻乃住止觀寺高僧多傳其  
道其後果以大法付惠可并以其鉢  
傳法之初祖也後世少林常服此鉢  
吾本末上 傳法啟迷情  
一花開五葉 結果自然成

Figure 7. Established Patriarchs Transmitting the Dharma and Correct Teaching (detail), copied 1154. Handscroll, ink on paper; 30.5 × 1286.7 cm.

sung 契嵩 (1011–1072).<sup>21</sup> The oldest known copy of the illustrated portions is preserved in the Kanchi'in 觀智院 of Tōji Monastery 東寺 in Kyoto, and, according to the colophon, was copied in the fourth year of Nimpō 仁平 (1154) by the monk Jōen 定圓. Strong evidence suggests that it may have been modeled on a rubbing taken from a stele erected in 1064 in Su-chou at the Longevity Hall, or Wan-shou Ch'an-yuan 萬壽禪院 (where the first edition of Ch'i-sung's text was printed that same year).<sup>22</sup>

The scroll is divided horizontally into two sections, and vertically into thirty-three panels, for the twenty-eight Indian and five Chinese patriarchs. The lower register of each panel carries a brief biography of its occupant and a transmission verse, while the upper register of each shows the particular patriarch seated on a chair; the heir is typically kneeling before him, only to be given a chair himself in the subsequent frame. The only deviation from this pattern is in the thirty-third frame, which shows Hui-neng, the final Chinese patriarch, with five monks (identified as his disciples) kneeling before him.

The biographical section that accompanies the Bodhidharma panel (fig. 7) labels him as the "Twenty-eighth [Indian] Patriarch," although he is further described as "the first patriarch to transmit the dharma in this land [China]" 此土傳法之初祖也. Moreover, the biography states, this was done by passing his robe and bowl to Hui-k'o. It is apparently this very act that is illustrated above the text, where we see Hui-k'o kneeling in the lower left corner of the frame, wearing the robe of succession and holding the patriarchal bowl in his right hand. Bodhi-dharma is shown seated in a high-backed chair, grasping a staff with one hand and making a gesture of teaching with the other. His demeanor is generally that of a much older monk than the one portrayed in the *Sangoku* scroll, although he is again depicted with essentially Chinese, rather than Indian, features. Between the two figures stands a tall-legged table, on top of which have been placed the remains of the second patriarch's arm, fastidiously draped

<sup>21</sup> This scroll is reproduced in *T*, vol. 95 (*Zuzō* 圖像, vol. 10), pp. 1409–54; for a biography of Ch'i-sung (by Jan Yün-hua) see Herbert Franke, ed., *Sung Biographies* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1976) 1, pp. 185–94.

<sup>22</sup> See Chapin, "Three Early Portraits," pp. 78–85.

with a piece of cloth that covers all but the hand.

A third early depiction of Bodhidharma and Hui-k'o, titled "Portraits of the Six Patriarchs" 六祖像, is preserved in the Kōzanji 高山寺 in Kyoto (fig. 8).<sup>23</sup> It was copied in the thirteenth century from a Chinese woodblock print dated to 1054; thus, although the copy was produced somewhat later, the prototype of this work and that of the "Established Patriarchs Transmitting the Dharma" are separated by a mere ten years, and it is likely that this representation was originally presented as a textual illustration in a similar format.

The drawings are executed in ink on two large sheets of paper that have been joined together. As they now appear, the scenes move alternately right and left down the page — the first patriarch occupying the upper-right-hand corner, the sixth the lower-left — and each scene is accompanied by a brief caption naming the patriarch and his posthumous title, and identifying some of the other pictured participants. As in the "Established Patriarchs" scroll, Bodhidharma is shown seated in a high-backed wooden chair, grasping a staff. His left foot is placed firmly on the ground, but the right is pulled back and resting on the chair's bottom cross-rung; curiously, it has been slipped out of the right sandal, which remains on the ground (perhaps a subtle allusion to the "one shoe" story). As in the previous work, he is depicted as being rather slender and has been given Chinese facial features.

Surrounding the central image of Bodhidharma are several other figures. Standing behind him are a hunched-over monk and a moon-faced young nun, identified by an inscription as the disciples Tao-yü 道昱 and Tsung-chih 攄持; to his left stands a disproportionately small figure who, though not specifically identified, is probably the monk Tao-fu 道副, a third disciple often mentioned in connection with Tao-yü and Tsung-chih.<sup>24</sup> To Bodhidharma's right, and further back in the picture plane, is another small figure, identified in a caption above him as "the second patriarch when he was a practicant"

行者. Dressed in layman's clothing and wearing a hat, he is seated on the ground, with his right knee raised up. In front of him is a large knife, apparently the instrument with which he has amputated his left arm (the remains of which are pictured, as well, the curled fingers seeming almost to be beckoning to Bodhidharma), and a cascade of blood is spurting from his exposed stump.

It should be clear from the above examples that the portrayal of Bodhidharma in the context of patriarchal succession and the transmission of the dharma was a popular, early motif. It is equally clear that such representations must have originated as illustrations intended to accompany the Ch'an "transmission histories" that began in the T'ang period with *Ch'uan fa-pao chi* and culminated in the Northern Sung with *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu* 景德傳燈錄 (*Ching-te Era Record of the Transmission of the Flame [or Lamp]*) and *Ch'uan-fa cheng-tung chi*. As John McRae points out, "The legend of the 'transmission of the lamp' of the teachings from one master to another was one of the most important innovations of early Ch'an";<sup>25</sup> it was also one of its most effective weapons in the struggles over legitimation that first arose in the T'ang. Such histories were used by the Ch'an school to assert superiority over other branches of Buddhism, and to counter the growing antagonism and resistance to Ch'an engendered by the flowering of neo-Confucianism in the Northern Sung period.<sup>26</sup> They were also used within the Ch'an school to assert the superiority or orthodoxy of a given lineage.

In a very direct sense, then, these "transmission of the flame" illustrations can be seen as the visual counterparts of the legends preserved in the "transmission of the flame" texts, and in both cases the narratives must be interpreted in light of the larger function they were intended to serve. As McRae writes:

The single most important task facing the modern student of early Chinese Ch'an Buddhism is the accurate discrimination

<sup>23</sup> Reproduced in *T*, vol. 95 (*Zuzō*, vol. 10), pp. 1436-42; this also appears in Fontein and Hickman, *Zen Painting*, catalog no. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Note that Tao-yü and Tao-fu are incorrectly identified by Fontein and Hickman, *Zen Painting*, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> McRae, *Northern School*, p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> For a concise and cogent discussion of the relationship between Ch'an and neo-Confucianism during the Sung, see Erik Zürcher, "Chinese Ch'an and Confucianism," H. Brinker et al., eds., *Zen in China, Japan, [and] East Asian Art* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1985), pp. 29-46.



between legend and history. Each has its own distinctive value: Legend reflects the school's total creative output and is an important guide to its self-image, whereas history is the modern understanding of the dynamic cultural and intellectual realities of the school's development. . . . [S]tatements made within the context of this legendary format cannot be taken automatically at face value as historical assertions to be judged as either true or false and correlated with other "facts." While such "historical" assertions may have bases in fact, we must not forget that they occur within a context determined by the propagandistic or polemical purposes of the given texts.<sup>27</sup>

Accordingly, the depiction (whether literary or visual) of Bodhidharma transmitting the dharma to Hui-k'o should be viewed as a creative fiction whose primary function was to reinforce a certain image of itself that the Ch'an school wished to project. And while this narrative account may have had little, if any, basis in historical reality, it nonetheless stands as a revealing paradigm of the Ch'an school's professed understanding of the ideal master-pupil relationship, crystalized in the famous formulation (traditionally attributed to Bodhidharma himself) of "A special transmission outside of the teachings 別傳教外/ Not dependent on words or letters" 不依文字.<sup>28</sup> It is precisely this "special transmission," of course, which is the cornerstone of the Ch'an claim to a legitimate, unbroken succession extending all the way back to the historical Buddha.

In the case of the transmission of the dharma-lamp, then, the relationship between word and picture seems unquestionably simple and direct, the illustration having clearly evolved as a distilled and dramatic emblem (with an equally didactic purpose) of the textual narrative. The situation with regard to the Rushleaf motif, however,

as shown below, is far more complex.

## CROSSING THE YANGTZE RIVER ON A REED

While placing the first patriarch and Hui-k'o together is clearly a dominant compositional theme among the early representations of Bodhidharma, it is oddly enough the format least likely to be encountered among later paintings where, instead, depictions of Bodhidharma crossing the Yangtze River on a reed are favored. The oldest known original treatment of this theme can be dated to the early-thirteenth century, and carries an inscription by Chang-weng Ju-ching 長翁如淨 (1163-1228), an influential monk with whom the Japanese Buddhist pilgrim Dōgen 道元 studied while in China;<sup>29</sup> unfortunately, however, only photographs of this now-lost work remain. Executed in ink on paper, the painting shows Bodhidharma in three-quarter profile, wearing a bulky robe, which conceals his hands as it billows around him, seemingly filled with a wind that blows from behind. The ankles and bare feet are clearly visible and indicate by their positioning that Bodhi-dharma is securely balanced on the slender reed beneath him. All of these effects are achieved by means of loose, fluid, and abbreviated brushwork, though the head is done in a somewhat more careful manner. Also, and in contrast to the other representations encountered thus far, Bodhidharma is here given a dark, thick beard.

A second anonymous Rushleaf Bodhidharma (fig. 9), preserved in the Tokugawa Art Museum, is also executed in ink on paper, and can be dated to the first half of the thirteenth century.<sup>30</sup> This work carries an inscription by the Ch'an master Wu-chun Shih-fan 無準師範 (1177-1249), and while the basic composition is quite similar to

<sup>29</sup> The painting is discussed and reproduced in Helmut Brinker, "Shussan Shaka in Sung and Yuan Painting," *Ars Orientalis* 9 (1973), pp. 29-30, fig. 4; Brinker mentions unidentified Japanese sources that claim the painting was destroyed during the Second World War. For an account of how Ju-ching became Dōgen's "authentic teacher," see Takashi James Kodera, *Dōgen's Formative Years in China* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 51-57.

<sup>30</sup> Toda Teisuke 戸田禎祐, *Mokkei Gyokkan* 牧谿玉澗 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1973), pl. 44 (in *Suiboku bijutsu taikai* 水墨美術大系, vol. 3).

<sup>27</sup> McRae, *Northern School*, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> See Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History* (New York: Macmillan, 1958) 1 (India and China), p. 85.

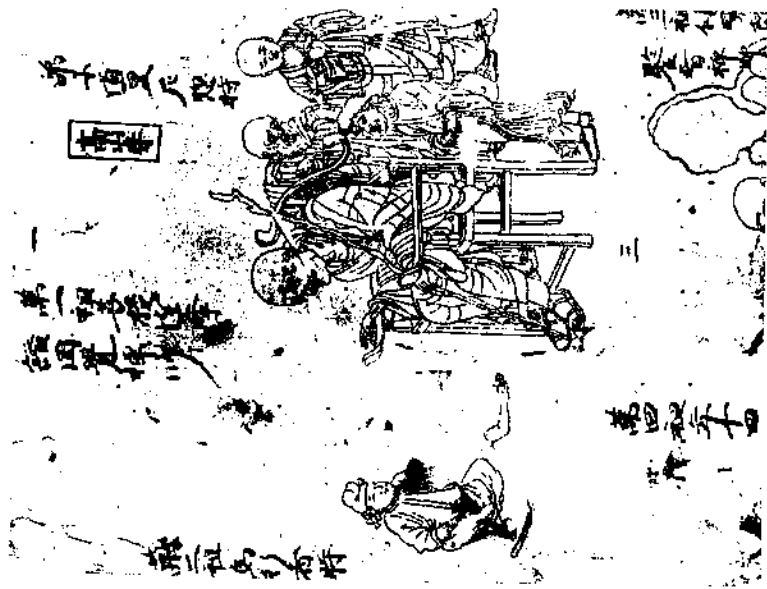


Figure 8. Portraits of the Six Patriarchs (detail), 13th-c. copy of Chinese woodblock print dated 1054. Ink drawing on paper; 579 x 100.4 cm. Kōzanji, Kyoto.

Figure 9. Bodhidharma on a Reed (detail), 13th c. Hanging scroll; ink on paper; 89.1 x 31.7 cm. Anon.; inscription by Wu-chun Shih-fan 無準師範 (1178–1249). Tokugawa Reimeikai Foundation.

that of the hanging scroll inscribed by Ju-ching, it nonetheless differs from it in several respects: as pictured here, Bodhidharma is distinctly stocky, his head is covered by a cowl, and the dark slash of his down-turned mouth, coupled with his heavy beard and riveting eyes, seem to lend him an aura of determination and forbiddingsness.

While these two paintings are among the earliest extant original treatments of this motif, a rubbing taken from a stone at the Shao-lin Monastery suggests that the theme was already well known by the mid-eleventh century (fig. 10).<sup>31</sup> According to the inscription, the stele from which this impression was made was cut in 1308; however, the image is accompanied by an encomium by the Northern Sung emperor Jen-tsung 仁宗 (r. 1023–1064), and there is little reason to doubt that the stone preserves a design from that era. From a stylistic point of view, certainly (and allowing for what subtleties may have been lost in the translation from ink and paper to stone), the treatment of the drapery, with its lineament of unvarying thickness, and the diaper-pattern used to indicate the surface of the water, are well in keeping with eleventh-century practices.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the fact that the basic iconographic features — such as the billowing, hooded robe, the covered hands, and the bearded countenance — that characterize later examples are already present here would seem to indicate that these were established even earlier.<sup>33</sup>

Despite a few minor variations, all three of these works (and countless others like them) preserve a remarkably unified image of the first patriarch, and the subject matter of these depictions would not appear to be open to question: what we have here are illustrations of the famous story of Bodhidharma crossing the Yangtze River on a reed, following his audience with emperor Wu of Liang. As the enco-

<sup>31</sup> Tokiwa Daijō 常盤大定 and Sekino Tei 關野卓, *Shina bunka shiseki* 支那文化史蹟 (Tokyo: Hozokan, 1939–1941); rpt. 1975 as *Chūgoku bunka shiseki* 中國文化史蹟, vol. 2, pl. 97.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. the renderings of watery surfaces in Chao Kan's 趙幹 (fl. 961–975) "River Journey at First Snowfall" and Li T'ang's 李唐 (1050–1130) "Mountains by a River," both discussed and reproduced in Robert Maeda, "The 'Water' Theme in Chinese Painting," *Artibus Asiae* 33 (1971), pp. 247–90.

<sup>33</sup> Chu-tsing Li writes that the halo given to a Rushleaf Bodhidharma of 1480 is "an entirely new feature" ("Bodhidharma Crossing," p. 57), though this is clearly not the case.

mium "Wu-chia cheng-tsung tsan" 五家正宗讚 ("In Praise of the Correct Teaching of the Five Houses [of Ch'an]") of 1254 tells it: "So he broke off a reed, crossed the river, and went to the Shao-lin Temple."<sup>34</sup> This standard interpretation of the visual images of Bodhidharma on a reed as illustrations of the textual event fails, however, to overcome a perhaps serious obstacle; namely, the fact that the existence of this image predates the oldest surviving written anecdote by roughly fifty years, at minimum.

As shown above, the Rushleaf motif was established by the mid-eleventh century, yet the first text known to have included this fabled crossing in Bodhidharma's biography dates to 1108; more importantly, perhaps, it did not become a standard feature of major Ch'an histories until the mid-thirteenth century, from which point on it was invariably included.<sup>35</sup> It could be argued, I suppose, that the relevant texts have simply not survived, but this fails to take into account the silence of important texts that we do have. The "Transmission of the Flame" (see table), for example, which was dedicated to the emperor Jen-tsung, says only that Bodhidharma "crossed over into Wei"; yet, the presence of Jen-tsung's inscription on the engraved stone at the Shao-lin Monastery supports the contention that the visual theme was certainly known at the time. It also raises the question of why this dramatic incident would have been excluded from contemporary records — unless, of course, the representation of Bodhidharma on a reed had a different meaning at that time than it was later to assume.

But if the existing evidence indicates that the visual "crossing the river on a reed" antedates its literary counterpart, then what are the origins of the pictorial representation? Perhaps the Rushleaf motif evolved in response to various artistic problems. Although no conveyance was specified, the idea that he somehow crossed the river was a standard feature of Bodhidharma's life history by the mid-T'ang, and was thus available as a theme that an artist could choose to

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Fontein and Hickman, *Zen Painting*, p. 54.

<sup>35</sup> The question of priority is not absolutely crucial to the argument I want to develop here; that is, even if some incontrovertibly earlier textual source were to come to light, this in and of itself would still not be compelling enough explanation for why this particular image held such a prolonged position of privilege.



Figure 10. Bodhidharma on a Reed  
Rubbing from a stele engraving of 1308.  
Shao-lin Monastery, China.

illustrate, provided, of course, that a mode of transport could be found. The nature of this dilemma is similar to that described by Meyer Shapiro:

If some illustrations of a text are extreme reductions of a complex narrative — a mere emblem of the story — others enlarge the text, adding details, figures, and a setting not given in the written sources. Sometimes the text itself is not specific enough to determine a picture, even in the barest form. Where the book of Genesis tells that Cain killed Abel, one can hardly illustrate the story without showing how the murder was done. But no weapon is mentioned in the text and the artists have to invent the means.<sup>36</sup>

So, too, would Chinese artists have had to invent the means by which Bodhidharma could be ferried across the Yangtze, although on the surface at least, the rushleaf would not appear to be the obvious solution.

In seeking alternative explanations for the origins of this theme, a number of factors need to be considered, such as other available pictorial models, and other potential literary sources. Furthermore, we must consider the question of why such images were made in the first place: what purposes were they intended to fill?

## MODELS AND SOURCES

In *Art and Illusion*, E. H. Gombrich demonstrates his contention that "[t]he familiar will always remain the likely starting point for the rendering of the unfamiliar; an existing representation will always exert its spell over the artist, even as he strives to record the truth."<sup>37</sup> While Gombrich emphasizes the fact that this phenomenon frequently occurs despite the artist's intention, in the case of the Rushleaf theme

<sup>36</sup> Meyer Shapiro, *Words and Pictures: On the Literal and Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, rev. edn. (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1961), p. 82.

it would appear that Chinese painters quite consciously chose at least two familiar images as their point of embarkation. The first of these is "Arhats crossing a river," a theme now known primarily through Ming and Ch'ing examples but thought to have originated in the T'ang period, when the cult of the arhats — literally "stream winners" — flourished in China.<sup>38</sup> This motif is clearly related to the notion of "crossing to the other shore," an image that is frequently invoked in Buddhist literature as a metaphor for reaching nirvana;<sup>39</sup> in addition, the arhats were often depicted as struggling to ford a stream, and thus came to symbolize spiritual determination and fortitude.<sup>40</sup>

A second familiar representation related to the Rushleaf theme is that of "Shākyamuni emerging from the mountains," or *Shussan Shaka* 出山釋迦, as it is commonly called.<sup>41</sup> An early, typical example housed in the Seattle Art Museum (fig. 11) was produced in Japan in the thirteenth century at the workshop of the Kōzanji, although it is thought to have been copied from a twelfth-century Chinese prototype.<sup>42</sup> The structural similarities between it and the Rushleaf motif are striking: the bearded face, the concealed hands, the wind-whipped robe, and the firmly planted feet are all typically echoed in representations of Bodhidharma (fig. 12). Indeed, without a caption, the two

<sup>38</sup> For a general overview, see Wen Fong, *The Lohans and a Bridge to Heaven* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1958). On "arhats crossing a river" as a T'ang pictorial theme, see Nishigami Minoru 西上実, "Ō I tosui rakan zu ni tsuite" 王維渡水羅漢圖について, *Bulletin of the Kyoto National Museum* 8 (1985), pp. 61-73.

<sup>39</sup> Edward Conze explicates the famous final stanza of the *Heart Sūtra* thus: "The unwholesome states are compared to a flood, or to a river in full spate. We are on the hither shore, beset with fears and dangers. Security can be found only on the other shore, beyond the flood, which has to be crossed by means of the ship, or raft, of the Dharma"; *Buddhist Wisdom Books* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972), p. 106.

<sup>40</sup> The particular appropriateness of showing Bodhidharma on the water may have been further underscored by the fact that he was often connected with the *Lankāvatāra sūtra* (see table), a text in which the imagery of waves and water figures prominently as a description of the mind; for a discussion of this imagery see Whalen Lai, "Ch'an Metaphors: Waves, Water, Mirror, Lamp," *Philosophy East and West* 29.3 (1979), pp. 243-53.

<sup>41</sup> See Helmut Brinker, *Shussan Shaka: Darstellungen in der Malerei Ostasiens* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1983).

<sup>42</sup> See Sherman E. Lee, "Japanese Monochrome Painting at Seattle," *Artibus Asiae* 14.1-2 (1951), pp. 43-61.



Figure 11. *Shussan Shaka*, 13th c.  
Anon.  
Hanging scroll; ink on paper, 90.8 × 41.9 cm.  
Seattle Art Museum, Eugene Fuller Collection (50.124).



Figure 12. *Bodhidharma on a Reed*  
Hanging scroll; ink on paper, 85.6 × 34.21 cm.  
Yao-fu 李翹夫 (13th cent.); inscription by  
Ishan I-ning 一山一寧, (1247–1317).  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, Dillon Fund  
Gift (1982.1.2).



Figure 13. *Kuan-yin with a Willow Branch*, 13th c.  
Anon.  
Hanging scroll; ink on paper, 91.1 × 43.7 cm.  
Private collection.

themes are not that easily told apart. Helmut Brinker suggests that "certain motifs and stylistic details to be observed in many Bodhidharma paintings of this kind ["Crossing the Yangtze on a Reed"] actually came into existence through an encounter with Shussan Shaka representations."<sup>43</sup> But despite having drawn attention to these parallels, he is of the further opinion that the Shākyamuni-Bodhidharma link is merely "typological," since "the two subjects have basically nothing in common, except for the fact that both personages are Indian protagonists of Ch'an."<sup>44</sup> Howard Rogers writes that the similarity of the two representations suggests that the artists followed a common prototype, and identified their figures through such details as the reed beneath Bodhidharma's feet and the ushnisha on Shākyamuni's head. "This blurring of iconographic lines and the reduction of complex subjects to formulae which could easily be reproduced are symptoms, one might feel, of a decline not only in artistic vitality but in Ch'an itself."<sup>45</sup>

Implicit in both of these views, of course, is a notion that the Rushleaf theme is somehow negatively derivative of the Shussan Shaka motif. Neither critic seems to consider the possibility that Rogers' "blurring of iconographic lines" was intentional (and effective). For instance, quite to the contrary of Brinker's assertion, it can be argued that Bodhidharma and the Buddha do indeed have much in common, in the important sense that they are both religious founders; and while Bodhidharma was viewed as the first patriarch of Ch'an in China, he was also claimed as the twenty-eighth Indian patriarch, in a lineage stretching back to the historic Buddha himself. Thus, even in a general sense, the visual equation between the two would seem to involve something much more fundamental than the simple (and according to Brinker and Rogers, meaningless and derivative) appropriation of form. In fact, it invokes the reduplication of Shākyamuni's enlightenment experience and the unbroken "mind-to-mind" (silent) transmission that the Ch'an school claimed as uniquely its own. Moreover, to the extent that both motifs embody paradigms of

decisiveness and determination, the specific linking of the Shussan Shaka and the Rushleaf themes has an even deeper level of appropriateness.

A third pictorial motif that deserves at least a brief mention in this context is that of "Kuan-yin with a Willow Branch" 楊柳觀音. An early example, now in a Japanese private collection (fig. 13),<sup>46</sup> has much in common with the Seattle Shussan Shaka discussed above, in terms of origins (it, too, was once owned by the Kōzanji, and is likewise probably a thirteenth-century Japanese copy of a twelfth-century Chinese prototype), execution (boldly modulated monochrome ink-outline), and composition (in both works, the placement of the hands and feet, the slightly-curved torso, and the wind-whipped robe are strikingly similar). Moreover, the bodhisattva firmly poised on a floating lotus is clearly evocative of the first patriarch balanced on a reed — and vice versa. I would argue once again that this is neither fortuitous, gratuitous, nor symptomatic of artistic decay or religious decline, but rather another instance of a kind of iconographic synergy and resonance. Parenthetically, this visual typology, which links Buddha, bodhisattva, and Bodhidharma, is mirrored in popular Ch'an tradition, where Bodhidharma is an avatar of both Shākyamuni and Kuan-yin.<sup>47</sup>

In addition to the general Buddhist literary imagery, discussed earlier, which likely informs the Rushleaf motif, the following ode (no. 61) from the "Wei feng" 魏風 section of the *Shih ching* 詩經 (*Classic of Poetry*), which has hitherto been overlooked in this context, may also be pertinent:

Who says the river is wide?/On a single reed you can cross it!  
Who says Sung is far?/On tiptoe you can see it!  
Who says the river is wide?/It won't hold a knife blade!  
Who says Sung is far?/You can get there before the morning's  
out!<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> See Toda Teisuke 戸田禎佑, "Hakubyō Yōryū Kannon zu" 白描楊柳觀音圖, *Kokka* 128 (1989), pp. 47-49.

<sup>47</sup> Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1992), p. 105.

<sup>43</sup> Brinker, "Shussan Shaka in Sung Painting," pp. 29-30.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>45</sup> Howard Rogers, "The Reluctant Messiah: Shākyamuni Emerging from the Mountains," *Sophia International Review* 5 (1983), p. 29.

The four-character phrase "On a single reed you can cross it" 一葦行之 is precisely the expression that is commonly used to describe Bodhidharma's ostensibly miraculous feat, and the larger context of the ode makes it unlikely, I think, that this is mere coincidence. As Hans Frankel notes, "[T]he river is the Yellow River; the state of Wei is north of the river, and the state of Sung is south of the river. It is an obvious exaggeration to say that this river can be crossed with a reed. It is an equally obvious exaggeration to say that one can see Sung from Wei . . . and 'tiptoe' simply enhances the hyperbole."<sup>49</sup> Thus we have a linked set of deliberately hyperbolic images that are clearly not meant to be taken literally; moreover, they are intended to underscore the speaker's determination to overcome the merely topographical obstacles that separate him (in Wei) from his heart's desire (in Sung), and I would maintain that the Rushleaf's evocation of this trope is as deliberate as is its visual allusion to the Shussan Shaka motif.

## CONCLUSIONS

The earliest visual images of Bodhidharma, all of which emphasize the act of transmission, must be interpreted in the context of the transmission literature that dominated Ch'an until the mid-eleventh century; the subsequent emergence of the independent hanging scroll on such themes as "Crossing the Yangtze on a Reed" must also be situated in a larger, institutional context, specifically, one wherein visual images served important ceremonial and ritualistic functions.

I would further suggest that direct correlations can be made between historical, literary, and pictorial phases in the early-Ch'an tradition, with the Buddhist persecutions of the mid-ninth century, the subsequent fall of the T'ang dynasty, and the disruptions of the Five Dynasties period, serving as a kind of dividing line (or better,

chasm). That is, the Ch'an school, as it emerged over the course of the Northern Sung, was a far more ecumenical entity than it had been earlier: the succession struggles were long over, and all lineages now traced themselves through Hui Neng and Bodhidharma. It is in this phase that the Discourse Records (*yü lu* 語錄) of individual masters replaced the transmission histories as the dominant literary genre, and that individual portraits replaced the transmission pictures, which had earlier held sway. Over the course of the Sung period the "Patriarch Hall" or "Portrait Hall" became a standard feature of the Ch'an monastery, and portraits came to serve at least two important ritualistic roles. First, the funerary rites for a deceased abbot, which are elaborately described in Sung monastic codes, became centered not so much on the abbot's lifeless corpse as on his portrait, which, as Sharf and Foulk put it, "served not only to represent the spirit of the deceased abbot, but also, in some sense, to embody it."<sup>50</sup> (The monastic code *Ch'an-yüan ch'ing-kuei* 禪苑清規 of 1103, for example, describes in great detail how the portrait of the deceased abbot occupies his dharma seat, is the focus of offerings and incense burning, and is even fed twice a day.)<sup>51</sup>

A second use of the patriarchal portrait, specifically involving portraits of Bodhidharma, is described in monastic codes in connection with the *ju-shih* 入室 or "entering [the abbot's] room" ceremony:

In this formal procedure the abbot's disciples would come before him one at a time to receive his instruction in a semi-private setting. Bodhidharma's portrait . . . was hung in the abbot's outer quarters with an offering table set before it. At the start of the ceremony, before withdrawing to his room, the abbot himself would make prostrations before the portrait. Prior to entering the abbot's room each disciple would face the portrait and make an offering of incense and prostrations, whereupon he would enter the room, approach the abbot [and] . . . "speak his mind." . . . [Thus] the portrait of the first

<sup>49</sup> Burton Watson, *The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry: From Early Times to the Thirteenth Century* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1984), p. 25 (with slight emendation).

<sup>50</sup> Hans H. Frankel, review of Burton Watson, *The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry*, in *HJAS* 46.1 (1986), p. 292.

<sup>51</sup> T. Griffith Foulk and Robert Sharf, "On the Ritual Use of Ch'an Portraiture in Medieval China," *Cahiers d'Extrême Asie* 7 (1993-1994), p. 192.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 191.

patriarch Bodhidharma, sitting outside the abbot's room, not only served as a reminder of the exalted spiritual patrimony of the abbot, but it also helped to frame the mythic context of the rite: the exchange between the abbot and his disciple ritually re-enacted the countless dialogues recorded in Ch'an biographical collections, in which the redoubtable masters of old sought to test the fortitude and insight of their students.<sup>52</sup>

The conceptions of imagery attested by the general use of portraits in the funerary rites mentioned above, and the specific use of portraits of Bodhidharma described in the "entering the room" ceremony, stand in sharp contrast to the usual position that Ch'an practices involving portraiture were aniconic and without reference either to transcendence or surrogate reality.<sup>53</sup> These assertions, however, seem to ignore all evidence about actual monastic practices: they accept Ch'an apologetic rhetoric about "not relying on words and images" at face value and approach Ch'an painting with the confirmed preconception that there are no icons to be found there — that Ch'an imagery is narrative virtually by definition.

The Rushleaf motif, however, is not in essence a biographical narrative, as heretofore believed, but rather a layered and polysemous icon of the paradigmatic patriarch, an image that structurally and thematically makes simultaneous reference to both the Buddha and his momentous decision to emerge from the mountains; to the attainment of nirvana by "crossing to the other shore"; to the arhats who diligently struggle to ford the stream; and to the poetic voice (from the *Classic of Poetry*) that will not be kept from its desired goal by merely physical obstacles. In some way, each of these strands inscribes the self-salvific effort and determination that the Ch'an school championed in general and invested in Bodhidharma in particular. I would submit, moreover, that it is no coincidence that the second most common image of Bodhidharma, depicting him in his nine-year vigil facing the wall, carries much the same semantic import.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>53</sup> For examples of such claims, see Helmut Brinker, *Zen in the Art of Painting* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), pp. 23, 26, 145.

There is no denying that this iconic image was eventually transformed by narrative impulses, as the figurative was taken literally (and made literary); but curiously enough, however, for all of the vicissitudes that the image of Bodhidharma has undergone over the centuries, it is precisely the qualities of self-effort and determination that still inhere in many examples of contemporary Darumabilia (fig. 14), vestigial traces, perhaps, of an earlier patriarchal potency, and testament to the often underestimated power of images.<sup>54</sup>

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經

<sup>54</sup> I use this phrase in deliberate reference to David Freedberg's *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1989). Freedberg claims that the power of images to evoke human responses is much greater than is usually admitted. "People are sexually aroused by pictures and sculptures; they break pictures and sculptures; they mutilate them, kiss them . . . and [are] incited to revolt" (p. 1). An instance of the passionate responses stirred by images was recently provided when a photograph of Pope John Paul II was torn to pieces by the Irish pop star Sinéad O'Connor on a popular late-night television show. O'Connor was chastised by the network, widely criticised in the media, booed off the Madison Square Garden stage at her first appearance following the defacement, and publicly scolded by the entertainer Madonna (who was quoted in *The Irish Times* as saying "I think there is a better way to present her ideas than ripping up an image that means a lot to other people").