
# JAPANESE ZEN BUDDHISM AND THE IMPOSSIBLE PAINTING

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## INTRODUCTION

Zen art poses a conundrum.[1] On the one hand, Zen Buddhism emphasizes the concept of emptiness (Sanskrit: *śūnyatā*), which among other things asserts that form is empty, that all phenomena in the world are illusory. On the other hand, over the centuries a prodigious amount of artwork has been created in association with Zen thought and practice. A wide range of media, genres, expressive modes, and strategies of representation have been embraced to convey in some way or another the idea of emptiness, or related ideas about the nature of the mind. Form was used to express the essence of formlessness, and in Japan, over the centuries, this gave rise to a remarkable, highly diverse array of artworks that essentially negated their own affectivity, resulting in a tradition of self-negating art.

Two types of Japanese painting demonstrate the sheer range of visual profiles such artworks could assume. The first is the *chinsō* 頂相 (Chinese: *dingxiang*) or Zen portrait, which was most often used for the mortuary

FIGURE 1 | **Mutō Shūi 無等周位 (Japanese, active mid 1300s), with inscription by Musō Soseki 夢窓疎石 (Japanese, 1275–1351).** *Portrait of Musō Soseki*, ca. 1340–51, ink and colors on silk, hanging scroll, 120.0 × 64.5 cm. Kyoto, Myōchi'in Temple. Important Cultural Property.

rituals of prominent Zen monks. Despite their high degree of verisimilitude, *chinsō* were often accompanied by inscriptions suggesting that their likenesses failed to capture the essence of their sitters, in effect discursively negating their own realism. This is the case, for example, with the portrait of the prominent Japanese monk Musō Soseki 夢窓疎石 (1275–1351; fig. 1), whose inscription asserts the priority of "matters underfoot" or out of the realm of sight over appearances, no matter how convincing they might seem.[2] On the other hand, paintings from the eighteenth century by populist monks used abbreviated brushwork and gestural abstraction to achieve consonant ends, as in the case of a depiction by the Japanese monk Jiun Onkō 慈雲飲光 (1718–1805) of Bodhidharma (Japanese: Daruma 達磨), the first patriarch of Chinese Zen (fig. 2). The two large characters (*fushiki* 不識) inscribed above the image read "Not Know," or more appropriately in the context of the scene, "I Don't Know." They refer to a famous exchange involving Bodhidharma and Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty (502–57):

> The emperor said, "What then is true merit?"
>
> He answered, "It is pure knowing, wonderful and perfect. Its essence is emptiness. One cannot gain such merit by worldly means."
>
> Thereupon the emperor asked, "What is the sacred truth's first principle?"
>
> The master replied, "Vast emptiness, nothing sacred."
>
> The emperor said, "Who is it that now stands before me."
>
> The master replied, "I don't know."[3]

In contrast to the self-negating strategy of Musō's portrait, here the patriarch's sketchy portrayal suggests a visual analogue to its inscription. As both paintings demonstrate, however, it is the inventiveness and inner

**FIGURE 2** | **Jiun Onkō 慈雲飲光 (Japanese, 1718–1805).** *Daruma*, 1700s, ink on paper, hanging scroll, 121.9 × 53 cm. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts (2014.1483). Gift of Sylvan Barnet and William Burto.

mechanics of such negation that have constituted the richness and appeal of artworks associated with Zen Buddhism.

There is one painting, however, that stands alone in this regard, a work whose rendering of its subject and representational complexity are *sui generis* within the large corpus of Japanese artworks linked to Zen tradition. Titled *The Gourd and the Catfish* (Japanese: *Hyōnen zu* 瓢鮎図; fig. 3), it was painted by the monk-painter Josetsu 如拙 (active ca. 1405–23) and is now in the collection of the Taizōin 退蔵院, a subtemple of the Zen monastery Myōshinji 妙心寺 in Kyoto. *The Gourd and the Catfish* was made around the year 1413 for the warrior-ruler of Japan at the time, the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimochi 足利義持 (1386–1428), and its accompanying inscriptions involved no less than thirty-one of the leading Zen monks of Kyoto. Executed in the most innovative style of ink-based painting in Japan then being practiced, *The Gourd and the Catfish* is widely considered one of the most iconic works of Japanese Zen art today. Its subject matter appears straightforward enough; as stated in the preface inscribed on the work, a man standing on a bank holds a gourd in both hands, attempting to somehow capture or pin down the catfish swimming in the stream below. This is clearly an impossible task, a nonsensical act, underscored by the awkwardness with which the figure struggles even to hold his gourd. But this impossibility, as we shall see, is precisely the point.

Although its early reception history is unclear, the fame of *The Gourd and the Catfish* appears to have spread in the centuries after it was created. A common subject of Ōtsu-e 大津絵, a kind of folk painting popular in the Kansai region from the seventeenth century onward, was the caricatural rendering of monkeys using large gourds to attempt to capture even outsized catfish (fig. 4). As the Zen scholar Yoshizawa Katsuhiro 吉澤勝弘 has argued, however, although these pictures were usually titled "Gourd and Catfish" (*hyōtan-namazu*) and vaguely understood as depicting a Zen theme, they conveyed more than anything else the unenlightened status of monkeys and marked a considerable drift from the semantic complexity

**FIGURE 3** | **Josetsu 如拙 (Japanese, active ca. 1405–23).** *The Gourd and the Catfish*, ca. 1413, ink and light colors on paper, hanging scroll, 111.5 × 75.8 cm. Kyoto, Taizōin Temple. National Treasure.

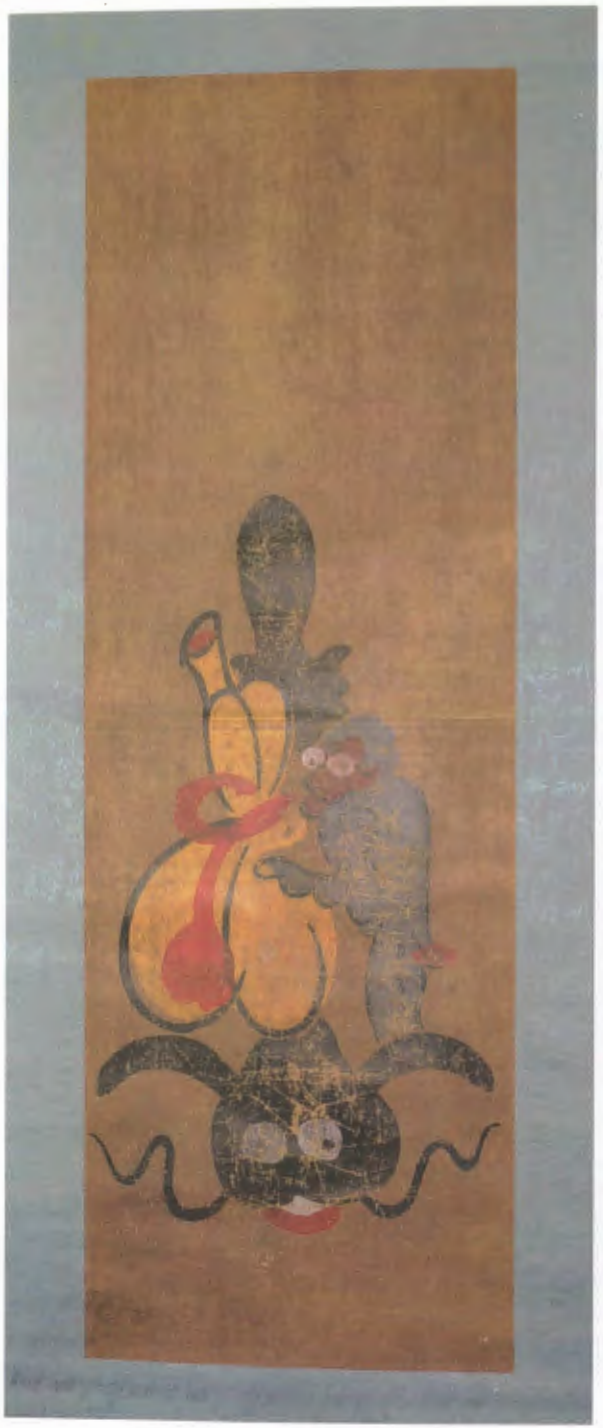


**FIGURE 4** | LEFT **Unknown Japanese artist.** *Otsu-e; Catfish, Monkey, and Gourd,* early 1900s, ink and colors on toned paper, hanging scroll, 68.3 × 22.8 cm. London, British Museum (1965,1013,0.1).

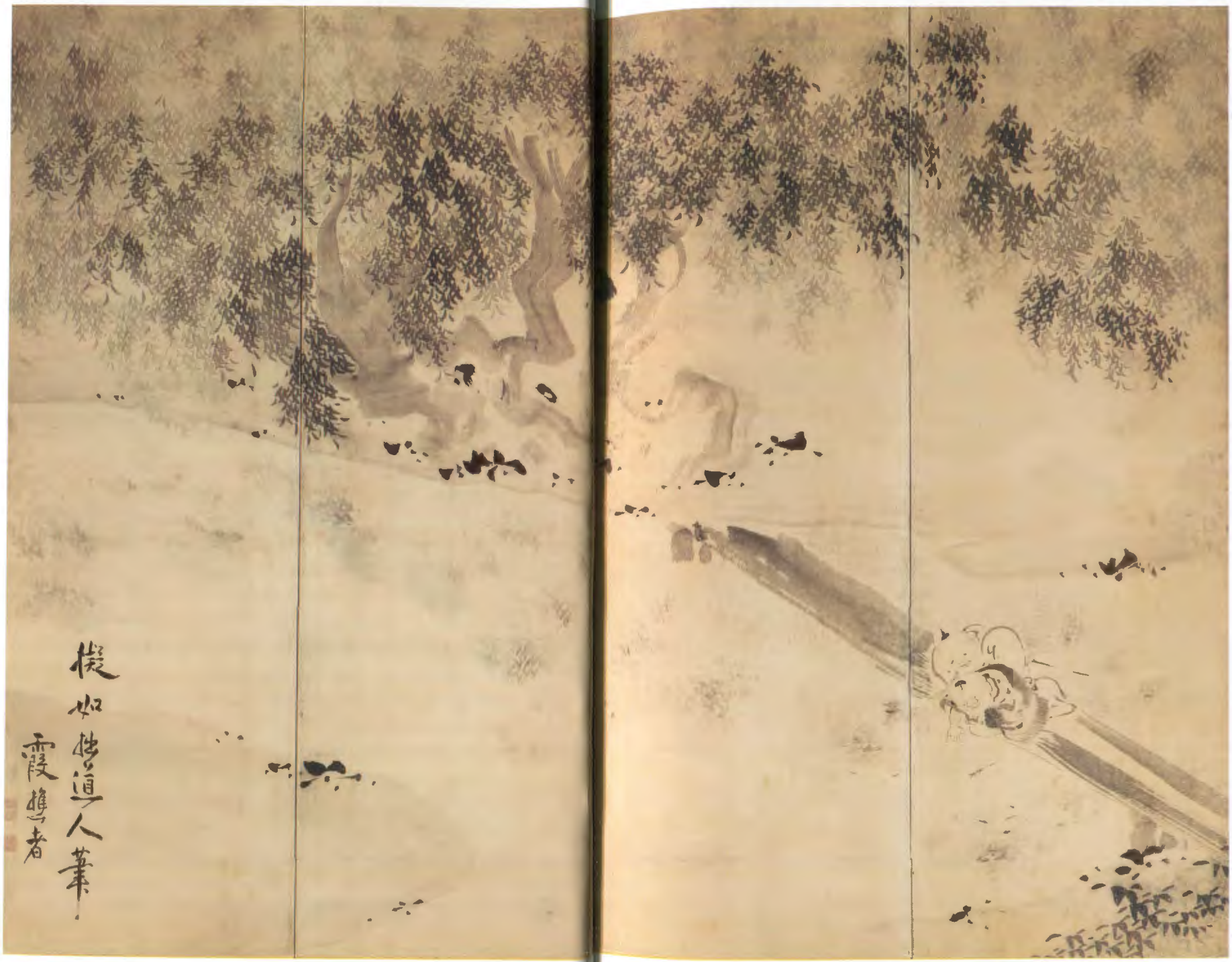
**FIGURE 5** | ABOVE **Ōoka Shunboku 大岡春卜 (Japanese, 1680–1763) after Josetsu 如拙 (Japanese, active ca. 1405–23).** *The Gourd and the Catfish,* 1740, woodblock print on paper, 27.2 × 17.8 cm. From Ōoka Shunboku, *Gakō senran* (Aspects of the hidden skills of painting), vol. 1 (Osaka: Tongaya Kyuhei, 1740), n.p. London, British Museum (1979,0305,0.94.1).

of *The Gourd and the Catfish*.[4] Nevertheless, the renown of Josetsu's painting continued throughout Japan's Edo period (1615–1868). It was reproduced by the artist Ōoka Shunboku大岡春卜(1680–1763) in the illustrated book *Gakō senran* 画巧潜覧 (Aspects of the hidden skills of painting; 1740) (fig. 5). In the mid-eighteenth century, the literati painter Ike no Taiga 池大雅 (1723–76) paid homage to it by transposing *The Gourd and the Catfish* into a painting of two children on a bridge striving to catch shrimp and small fish in the water below (fig. 6); here an inscription next to Taiga's signature makes clear the reference to Josetsu's work. And in recent years a close copy made by the daimyo and painter Hotta Masatami 堀田正民 (1781–1838) was discovered at Rinshōin 麟祥院, another subtemple at the same Myōshinji monastery.[5]

It was during the twentieth century, however, that *The Gourd and the Catfish* truly came to prominence as a frontispiece to the popular image of Zen. Because of its Ashikaga pedigree and provenance from a prominent Zen monastery, the painting was commonly illustrated in early art history publications, beginning with the art magazine *Kokka* 国華 (Flowers of the nation) in 1903.[6] It was designated a National Treasure during the prewar period, then quickly redesignated as one in 1951 when the system for ranking cultural properties was revised. Over the course of time, Josetsu's painting came to encapsulate pictorially the otherwise seemingly nonsensical, counterintuitive, and ineffable nature of Zen thought and practice. D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966), the great international popularizer of Zen, illustrated Josetsu's work in 1938 in his first English-language publication. The caption accompanying the illustration explains, "This represents a man trying 'to catch a catfish with a gourd'—which is a deed of impossibility. This fish for one thing is too slippery while the gourd is an absolutely unfitting instrument for the purpose. This reminds us of our useless attempt to 'catch' Zen by means of ratiocination."[7] While *The Gourd and the Catfish* served as a frontispiece for the evolving modern reception of Zen, however, it also accommodated a variety of other interpretations. After offering a series of unorthodox observations on the painting, including the impression that the catfish was flying through the air, the literary critic Kobayashi Hideo 小林秀雄 (1902–83) cast it in terms of the theater of the absurd, stating that "the more one looks at it, the more bizarre it becomes, wherein lies the brilliance of *The Gourd and the Catfish*."[8] The art historian Kobayashi Taichirō 小林太一郎 (1901–63), meanwhile, framed the work in moralistic terms as a parable of human desire in which the catfish represents an unattainable object.[9] And the cultural critic Hanada Kiyoteru 花田清輝 (1909–74) drew upon the folkloric association of catfish (*namazu*) with seismic disturbances in Japan when explaining the work as a satire on man's inability to control earthquakes.[10]

In and of itself, the pictorial rendering of a seemingly bizarre or nonsensical Zen theme is not unusual in East Asian painting. Such images generally took the form of literal representations of well-known episodes from widely circulating Zen texts. One example is Kano Motonobu's 狩野元信 (1477–1559) *Shigong Stretching His Bow, Sanping Baring His Chest* (*Sekikyō chōkyū Sanpei kaikyō zu* 石鞏張弓・三平開胸図; fig. 7). Although this painting postdates *The Gourd and the Catfish* by approximately one hundred years, it depicts a story that had been familiar within Zen communities for centuries. The story involves the Chinese monk Sanping Yizhong三平義忠 (781–872), whose religious master Shigong Huizang 石鞏慧藏 (dates unknown) was fond of alarming visitors by drawing his bow and arrow. One day Sanping, confronted with this belligerent act, suddenly uncovered his chest, thereby impressing his master (and by some accounts leading to Shigong's own enlightenment). While both paintings might appear equally inscrutable outside of a Zen exegetical framework, *The Gourd and the Catfish* differs from Motonobu's work and other Zen narrative paintings in two fundamental respects. The first is that the subject matter of *The Gourd and the Catfish* is without precedent, making it highly unusual in a tradition such as Zen Buddhism that normally privileges genealogy and authoritative historical examples. This lack of precedent raises the question of whether in fact it is truly related to Zen teachings. The second difference is the presence of a preface and myriad inscriptions

**FIGURE 6** | OVERLEAF **Ike no Taiga (Japanese, 1723–76).** *Children under Willow Trees* (detail showing left four panels), 1700s, ink and light colors on paper, eight-panel folding screen, 129.5 × 344.0 cm. Kyoto, The Museum of Kyoto. Important Cultural Property.


擬如仙道人筆
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that both introduce and respond to the pictorial situation. The prose preface asks how something as slippery as a catfish can be ensnared by something as smooth as a gourd, and the Chinese-style poems that follow grapple with this question. By including these inscriptions, *The Gourd and the Catfish* effectively draws the viewer into the episode at hand, confronting us with a preposterous query and inviting us to address it alongside an array of monks. The painting enables us to imagine and enter into the world of this nonsensical scene. It is as if we ourselves are participating in the performance of a Zen situation.

In order to understand as fully as possible what renders *The Gourd and the Catfish* unique, the present study explores three aspects of the painting that are rooted in the historical circumstances of its conception and initial presentation.[11] They address how the work was discursively and pictorially engineered, and can be divided into three primary rubrics. The first concerns the question of whether *The Gourd and the Catfish* should be understood as a Zen koan, that is to say, an exemplary story or dialogue that played a role in Zen study and practice. Defining it as such would associate it with one of the most traditional literary forms in Zen Buddhism. As discussed above, however, although most koans were drawn from canonical anthologies, the theme of *The Gourd and the Catfish* was newly conceived, generating scholarly debate on its meaning and points of reference. A second vector of inquiry concerns the original status of the painting as a pictorial object, along with the setting for its display. *The Gourd and the Catfish* was created as a screen in the private quarters of Ashikaga Yoshimochi's newly constructed shogunal palace. Considering further its objecthood and site specificity helps illuminate how the work was experienced by its initial audiences, and by extension, helps us to understand more fully the cultural and political dimensions of the work. A third line of exploration centers around the innovative pictorial practices

FIGURE 7 | **Attributed to Kano Motonobu 狩野元信 (Japanese, 1477–1559).** *Shigong Stretching His Bow, Sanping Baring His Chest,* ca. 1513, ink and colors on paper, from a set of sliding-door panels formerly at Daisen'in, Kyoto, now mounted as a hanging scroll, 176.0 × 91.8 cm. Tokyo, Tokyo National Museum. Important Cultural Property.

of *The Gourd and the Catfish*. These practices were recognized as such by the author of its preface, the monk Daigaku Shūsū 太岳周崇 (1345–1423), when he referred to them as the "new mode" (*shin'yō* 新様), which here may refer to the picture and the format of the work itself. Understanding the circumstances of the monk-artist Josetsu and the Chinese modes of painting he introduced to Japan not only illuminates how the painting could serve as a ground for Zen discourse but also internalizes that discourse within the visual representation itself. It was ultimately Josetsu's artfulness that enabled *The Gourd and the Catfish* to embody a new type of Zen painting in Japan, one that was incomparably more sophisticated than what had come before.

## WORD AND IMAGE

Let us take a closer look at *The Gourd and the Catfish*. Composed of a minimum of parts, it is relatively uncomplicated to describe (fig. 8). The scene mostly consists of an embankment in the foreground through which a stream winds from left to right, negotiating several rock clusters along the way and interrupted by tall, thin reeds before apparently emptying into a marsh-like watery expanse at right. The composition is anchored in the lower left corner by three thin stalks of bamboo that bend and sway like seaweed in the ocean. One of them reaches out toward the middle to canopy the central figure (fig. 9), a male with unkempt hair and beard, dressed in peasant clothing and awkwardly holding a gourd with both hands. His appearance reflects an East Asian visual trope for a rube or country bumpkin. Below him, to the right, is the catfish that serves as the scene's second protagonist, swimming away in the stream. In the background looms a mountain range rendered in the so-called boneless manner (*mokkotsubyō* 没骨描), that is to say, depicted without outline but instead only through washes of ink, suggesting that the entire scene is suffused with mist. Indeed, much of the surface is subtly inked with a light gradation of wash, taking advantage of the liquidity of ink-based painting to fuse atmosphere and landscape. The entire composition is crafted to focus attention on the figure, but it also manages to generate an ambiguous, otherworldly ambience



FIGURE 8 | Detail of *The Gourd and the Catfish* (see fig. 3) showing painting.

FIGURE 9 | Detail of *The Gourd and the Catfish* (see fig. 3) showing close-up of figure.



through evocative mist, minimal motifs, and abundant empty space, conveying the sense of viewing a diorama in a natural history museum, of witnessing a specimen of strangeness.

Above the painting is inscribed a preface by Daigaku, one of the most prominent monks of his time and religious adviser to the shogun, along with Chinese-style poems—mostly seven-character quatrains—by thirty-one Zen monks, including Daigaku himself (fig. 10).[12] All of the inscribers were notable members of Zen monasteries of the Five Mountains, named after the five major administrative temples of the Rinzai Zen sect in Kyoto.[13] No date is inscribed, but based on the known dates of activity of the inscribers, it is estimated that *The Gourd and the Catfish* was painted sometime around 1413.[14]

Daigaku's preface provides us with all that is known about the creation of the work. There it informs us that the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimochi commissioned the work and entrusted its realization in the "new mode" (*shin'yō* 新様) to the monk Josetsu, after which it was mounted as a "small screen" (*shōhei* 小屏) to be set at the shogun's "right-hand side" (*zayū* 座右).[15] The preface also explains the subject matter as follows:

> What soars aloft in the clouds is to be snared with a tethered arrow, what swims in the watery deep, to be snatched with a fisher's net; for this is the work of hunters and fishermen. Yet how, in the muddy expanse, is one to pin down a catfish, smooth and covered with slime, using an empty capacious gourd, slippery and rotund?[16]

Although the preface is traditionally understood as asking how one might *catch* a catfish with a gourd, as this translation suggests it can also be understood as how one *pins down* a catfish.[17] Whatever the case may be, a close look at the figure reveals his struggle with this improbable assignment. He holds the gourd awkwardly—pushing it downward rather than grasping it—all while taking the measure of the catfish below.[18] His wide stance, hunched shoulders, and facial expression, as well as the cock of his neck all convey determination and puzzlement in equal measure.

FIGURE 10 | OVERLEAF Detail of *The Gourd and the Catfish* (see fig. 3) showing inscriptions.

The poems were solicited to provide poetic responses to the situation presented in the painting.[19] Although space does not permit a full accounting of all thirty-one of them, the first four sample the range of tones and discursive strategies adopted to address the challenge posed by this scenario. Daigaku, after the preface, added a poem that mischievously recommends further complications to the task at hand:

> With the lively use of his hands,
> the gourd can capture the catfish.
> And for an even greater spectacle,
> try it with a dash of oil.

Next, Gyokuen Bonpō 玉畹梵芳 (1348–ca. 1420) envisions successful completion of the task and then playfully suggests a fish dinner, an ultimate act of transgression for a member of the Buddhist clergy, all of whom were in theory vegetarian:

> Pin the tail down with a gourd,
> then make some catfish soup.
> And what is one to do for rice?
> Cook some sand: that should be nice.[20]

Unrin Myōchū 雲林妙冲 (dates unknown), following Gyokuen, rolls his eyes at the spectacle and draws a lesson from the carefreeness of the catfish instead:

> Why must yet another strive
> to pin a catfish with a gourd?
> As if swimming in these expansive waters,
> let him lose himself in the Way.[21]

And finally, Gakuin Ekatsu 鄂陰慧豁 (1366–1425) underscores the seeming absurdity of the problem but also suggests a miraculous outcome:

> The gourd goes clickety-clack,
> the catfish, with short neck and round stomach, goes flippity-flop.
> If you want to catch it,
> Wait until it jumps up onto the bamboo.[22]



As Kageki Hideo 蔭木英雄 notes, these poems are composed in the form of Chinese-style linked verse (*renku* 聯句), in which each individual poem, as part of a collaborative, sequentially composed set, responds in some way to the one immediately preceding it.[23] As a result, one can follow common patterns of response among the versifiers. For example, the last line of Daigaku's verse, "try it with a dash of oil," is echoed by the final line of Gyokuen's poem, "cook some sand: that should be nice," in that both use culinary metaphors to suggest the impossibility of the task at hand. In the fourth, fifth, and sixth verses, the phrases "jumps up onto (the bamboo)," (*tōjō su*) "leap about" (*bottō*), and "fly upon (the bamboo)" (*hijō*) all echo one another while referring to the energetic elusiveness of the catfish. In this manner, common themes and resonant allusions provide an overarching sense of unity to an otherwise heterogeneous and even contrasting set of poetic responses.

## A ZENNISH PAINTING

One of the most arduously debated aspects of *The Gourd and the Catfish* has been the nature of its relationship to Zen Buddhism. This question is closely intertwined with its subject matter, which is unique in Japanese painting, as well as its dialogical mode of presentation. The query put forth in Daigaku's preface resembles the kind of unintelligible scenario most readily associated with a Zen koan, and the traditional assumption has been that this was indeed what the work pictorialized.

Originally a Chinese juridical term (*gong'an*) referring to a "public case," *koan* came to refer to a large corpus of anecdotes, dialogues, or quandaries associated with famous Zen monks of the past that served as case studies for contemplation and study by Zen practitioners. The majority of koans consisted of sequences of dialogue that resulted in seemingly surprising and inscrutable acts by renowned monks, which would then serve as a method of judging a practitioner's status or progress. In the popular literature, koans have tended to be represented in overly psychological or mystical terms as seemingly illogical riddles, among the most famous of these being the phrase "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" Or, as another

famous koan goes, "Master Zhaozhou was asked by a monk, 'Does a dog have the Buddha nature?' Zhaozhou replied, 'No.'"[24] This view, however, has been revised by scholars who have begun to examine closely the historical nature of koan practice.[25] Although koans could come across as enigmatic or impenetrable, they were nevertheless doctrinal in nature and tested one's ability to transcend normalizing, dualistic thought through exegesis.

By the fifteenth century, a considerable number of koans had been circulated throughout East Asia as part of influential "lamp histories" and koan anthologies such as *The Blue Cliff Record* (C. *Biyan lu*, J. *Hekiganroku* 碧眼録; 1128) and *The Gateless Barrier* (C. *Wumen guan*, J. *Mumonkan* 無門関; 1228). The absence of an encounter narrative or dialogue in any of them that could serve as a precedent for *The Gourd and the Catfish* has raised doubts as to whether this painting could in fact be understood as a representation of a koan. As a "Zen problem," it is utterly unique.

Some interpreters have understood the work as reflective of the folklore of the Japanese islands. The anthropologist Cornelius Ouwehand, for example, flatly refused to acknowledge any meaning related to Zen, prioritizing instead indigenous religious beliefs revolving around catfish.[26] The most famous such association concerned the idea that catfish could predict earthquakes, giving them special status in a seismically active archipelago and resulting in a long-standing tradition of catfish pictures. The art historian Ōnishi Hiroshi 大西廣, meanwhile, argued that the theme was based upon Japanese superstitions revolving around the gourd in Japan since ancient times. The gourd was understood to have mysterious powers that could control snakes and even supernatural creatures, or somehow contain the entire cosmos within its magical hollow.[27] Through a wide-ranging exploration of the iconology of the gourd and catfish in medieval Japan, Shimao Arata 島尾新 proposes that the painting was based upon a form of literary parlor game that drew playfully upon the rich cultural semantics of the dual motifs.[28]

In response, the Zen Buddhist scholar Yoshizawa Katsuhiro has recently shed new light on the meaning of the paired gourd and catfish through careful philological analysis of the inscriptions. According to Yoshizawa, the gourd and the catfish as interpreted in the inscriptions are



not folkloric objects but Zen metaphors for the mind (*shin* or *kokoro* 心). Drawing deeply and variously from established Zen texts, the versifying monks use the proposed dilemma to elaborate upon the nature of the mind as inherently elusive to oneself, ultimately impossible to grasp.[29] Although Yoshizawa's specific references are too numerous and complex to provide detailed exposition here, suffice it to say that the mind itself was a primary source of contemplation in Zen thought and practice, as encapsulated in the following famous exchange between Bodhidharma, the first patriarch of Chinese Zen (Chan), and his disciple Huike 慧可, the second patriarch:

> Huike said to Bodhidharma, "My mind is anxious. Please pacify it." Bodhidharma replied, "Bring me your mind, and I will pacify it." Huike said, "Although I've sought it, I cannot find it." "There," Bodhidharma replied, "I have pacified your mind."[30]

The mind was an illusory source of self and identity that prevented the practitioner from understanding the true nature of the non-self, one of the primary tenets of many forms of Buddhist thought, including Zen Buddhism. Thus *The Gourd and the Catfish* is about the impossibility of grasping the mind (the catfish) with the mind (the gourd), and by extension about the absence of an independent and substantial self. Although this analysis does not necessarily negate the possibility of more popular sources of cultural meaning informing these paired motifs, only those steeped in Zen texts and classical Chinese literary norms would fully appreciate the overall thematic emphasis on the nature of the mind.[31]

Thanks to Yoshizawa's parsing, *The Gourd and the Catfish* can be understood for all practical purposes to be a Zen koan. That is to say, it similarly expresses the elaboration of a doctrinal principle couched as an artful quandary. In doing so, it draws upon patterns of metaphor and allusion deeply embedded in Zen literary history. And although it does not follow a specific precedent in the koan tradition, it behaves very much like a koan does, posing a whimsical and seemingly impenetrable vignette that challenged interlocutors and solicited equally jocular exegesis in the form of Chinese verse. Indeed, it is precisely the lack of a precedent that allows it to be understood as being in the "new mode."

## SPACE AND PLACE

*The Gourd and the Catfish* can be considered a quasi-koan, however, only because it appears to cross-pollinate this highly rhetorical Zen form with another cultural practice that was embraced within the orbit of the Ashikaga shoguns and Zen community of its time, that of the poem-picture scroll (*shigajiku* 詩画軸). It is only when the work is situated at the intersection of these two practices that its format and structure become fully intelligible.

By the time *The Gourd and the Catfish* was created, the format of a painting accompanied by a preface and Chinese-style verse inscriptions was becoming increasingly common in the Five Mountains Zen community. Known as poem-picture scrolls, these works reflected continental literati practice and emerged in Japan during the 1370s.[32] Oftentimes they were made by groups of monks to commemorate an important occasion for one of their members, such as the commencement of a journey or retirement from monastic affairs. Poem-picture scrolls did this by presenting a landscape, invariably inked almost entirely in monochrome, or a poetic theme that allegorized the circumstances and social dynamic of the group, and then served as the common representational ground for both word and image. A good example is *New Moon over a Brushwood Gate* (*Saimon shingetsu zu* 柴門新月図; fig. 11), in which nineteen monks have added verse inscriptions expressing farewell to a young monk by the name of Nankei 南渓, who was affiliated with Kyoto's Nanzenji 南禅寺 monastery. To do so, both painting and poems invoke the last two lines of "Neighbor to the South" (*Nanlin* 南隣) by Du Fu 杜甫 (712–70), a celebrated poet of China's Tang dynasty (618–907): "White sand, jade-green bamboo, a riverside village at dusk; we bid farewell as the moon newly rises over the brushwood gate."[33] Almost all of the monks who inscribed Josetsu's painting were active in the production of similar works.

*The Gourd and the Catfish*, then, might be understood as an early example of the embrace of the *shigajiku* format in the Ashikaga sphere. In this case, the protocols of the poem-picture scroll were applied less to a social or commemorative occasion than to a pictorial puzzle intended to showcase the erudition and versifying skills of the leading monks of Kyoto. This transposition, however, also entailed changes to the way the painting was displayed. Although now mounted as a vertical hanging scroll, *The Gourd and the Catfish* was initially mounted as a screen. The original format is indicated in the preface, which refers to the work as a *shōhei* ("small screen") placed at the side of the shogun.[34] While hanging scrolls presuppose small, intimate gatherings of viewers, the mounting of *The Gourd and the Catfish* as a screen suggests a more public viewership within the residential spaces of an Ashikaga palace.[35]

The objecthood of *The Gourd and the Catfish* is significant because it allows us to understand the relationship of the painting to Ashikaga Yoshimochi's construction in Kyoto of a new kind of shogunal palace, the Sanjō-bōmon Palace 三条坊門殿, in which, for the first time, the shogun's private residential spaces to the east were separated from the public, official structures to the west.[36] Although the palace no longer survives, its basic layout can be gleaned from historical records.[37] Construction began soon after the death of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu 足利義満 (1358–1408), and Yoshimochi had moved in by the tenth month of 1409. In the years that followed, the Sanjō-bōmon Palace was slowly filled out with structures that reflected Yoshimochi's cultural and religious interests, especially as they related to Zen. As Shimao Arata has observed, *The Gourd and the Catfish* was most likely created for display in a structure titled Tangen 探玄 ("Searching for the mysterious"), a private Zen chapel for the shogun and his religious advisers. The relationship of the structure to Zen practice was made clear by the fact that it was approached through "the Essential Gate" (*Yōkan* 要関), which derived its name from *The Gateless Barrier*, perhaps the most influential of all koan anthologies. And to underscore its relationship to *The Gourd and the Catfish*, Daigaku, the author of the painting's preface, was also the inscriber of the building's name plaque (*hengaku* 扁額).

*The Gourd and the Catfish* can be understood as a key component of the elaboration of Yoshimochi's built environment because, as a screen, it was also a furnishing that served an architectural function. Screens were pictorial objects that could partition space as well as animate it with meaning, and thus to introduce a screen into a room was an act of architecture.

This dual function of the screen as both picture and furnishing has been likened by Wu Hung to the twin operations of metaphor and metonymy that linguists have proposed as fundamental to the workings of figurative language.[38] According to this idea, as a painted surface, the screen functions as a metaphor; that is to say, it establishes a similarity between two entities. When a screen is placed in any setting, it introduces through its picture a new semantics to an otherwise neutral space. It animates that space with specific meaning, thereby establishing a similarity between the world of the painting and the actual space onto which the screen opens. On the other hand, as a furnishing that partitions actual space, the screen functions as a metonym, that is to say, it establishes a continuity (as opposed to a similarity) between two sets of spaces. Metaphorically, *The Gourd and the Catfish* structures the shogunal salon as a space of Zen, animating the chamber around it with the dialectical practices that were inseparable to the study of Zen koans. Metonymically, because it was situated "at the shogun's side," we can understand it as linking Yoshimochi to Kyoto's leading Zen monks, a veritable dramatis personae of the Five Mountains community.

The insertion of such a screen into Yoshimochi's residence served both political and religious ends, especially in relation to Yoshimochi's attempts to erase the legacy of his father, Yoshimitsu.[39] After abdicating his position in 1394, Yoshimitsu installed his nine-year-old son in the shogunal seat. Far from ceding any authority to Yoshimochi, however, Yoshimitsu wielded it all the more forcefully from behind the throne. In the process, Yoshimitsu subjected the young shogun to all forms of humiliation, culminating in Yoshimochi's enforced absence when his father hosted a visitation by Emperor GoKomatsu 後小松 (1377–1433) at his Kitayama Villa in 1408. Upon Yoshimitsu's passing, his son promptly moved the shogunal seat to the Sanjō-bōmon Palace and began to dismantle the Kitayama Villa that Yoshimitsu had spent years building up into a grand estate. Yoshimochi also reversed many of Yoshimitsu's policies, most famously by cutting off relations with the Ming Empire in China that had been assiduously cultivated by his father. In the cultural sphere as well, in contrast to Yoshimitsu's embrace of aristocratic



**FIGURE 11** | **Unknown Japanese artist.** *New Moon over a Brushwood Gate,* 1405, ink on paper, hanging scroll, 129.2 × 31.0 cm. Osaka, Fujita Museum. National Treasure.

**FIGURE 12** | **Unknown Japanese artist.** *Portrait of Ashikaga Yoshimochi,* 1414, ink and colors on silk, hanging scroll, 113.6 × 59.0 cm. Kyoto, Jingoji Temple. Important Cultural Property.

FIGURE 13 | Ashikaga Yoshimochi 足利義持 (Japanese, 1386–1428). *Hanshan,* early 1400s, ink on paper, hanging scroll, 68.7 × 32.6 cm. Okayama City, Okayama Prefectural Museum. Important Cultural Property.

practices, Yoshimochi rejected courtly pastimes and immersed himself in the cultural norms of the Zen community, which had been more robustly engaged by the warrior class.[40] *The Gourd and the Catfish* takes on a political resonance when situated amid this dramatic shift in the shogunal orbit during the years immediately following Yoshimitsu's death. Among other things, it signified a reversal of Yoshimitsu's cultural proclivities and helped to define spaces in the shogunal palace that contrasted with those of the prior regime.

Within Yoshimochi's private quarters, it participated in the fashioning of Yoshimochi as a Zen sovereign. Yoshimochi (fig. 12) was known as the medieval shogun with the greatest personal interest in Zen, and his biography abounds with anecdotes revealing his erudition or curiosity regarding Zen teachings.[41] This was already evident in his youth; when Yoshimochi was fourteen, he was conferred the sobriquet "Kenzan" 顕山 by the monk Kūkoku Myōʼō 空谷明応 (1328–1407), after which he proceeded to solicit formal, written exegeses on the name from no less than six monks in the following years. Indeed, throughout his life Yoshimochi was known to have requested capping or response-verses (*jakugo* 著語) to koans from prominent monks, as well as to have organized gatherings in which they were discussed. Not only was Yoshimochi an avid student of Zen, but he was also known to paint portraits of Zen patriarchs and eccentrics, a small number of which have survived (fig. 13).[42] *The Gourd and the Catfish* can be understood as the most important surviving manifestation of the shogun's deep and abiding interest in the study of Zen. Indeed, such was Yoshimochi's knowledge of Zen texts and practice that even though Daigaku was the author of the painting's preface, it is probable that Yoshimochi himself conceived of the dilemma proposed therein.[43]



## THE NEW MODE

To realize the vision of Yoshimochi and the thirty-one monks, the painting of *The Gourd and the Catfish* was entrusted to Josetsu, about whom precious little is known. Until this era, Zen monk-painters in Japan were generally low-ranking ecclesiasts working obscurely in the orbits of religious masters; accordingly, little has been recorded about Josetsu.[44] Not even his birth and death dates are clear. It is known that his sobriquet was conferred by the abbot Zekkai Chūshin 絶海中津 (1336–1405), and that he was active during the first three decades of the fifteenth century at Kyoto's Shōkokuji 相国寺, the monastery through which the Ashikaga shoguns administrated the Five Mountains Zen temples.[45] Only two other surviving works are widely acknowledged as being from the hand of Josetsu: *The Three Creeds* (*Sankyō zu* 三教図) and *Wang Xizhi Brushing a Fan* (*Ōgishi shosen zu* 王羲之書扇図; fig. 14), both of which are mostly monochrome and convey less painterly sophistication than *The Gourd and the Catfish*.[46] Josetsu is also notable as the patriarch of a distinguished lineage of monk-painters based in Shōkokuji. His disciple Shūbun 周文 (active ca. 1423–54) would go on to serve as painter-in-attendance to the Ashikaga shoguns, while Shūbun's disciple Sesshū Tōyō 雪舟等楊 (1420–1506?) is now generally regarded as the most dynamic monk-painter of the Muromachi period (1336–1573).

Josetsu's emergence marks the rising status of the monk-painter in Japan, reflected in part by the very mention of his name in the preface, which was highly unusual among poem-picture scrolls.[47] Undoubtedly, a primary factor in the painter's rise was his mastery of the new pictorial modes reflected in Chinese works gathered in the Ashikaga treasury. Being based at Shōkokuji, the monastery with the closest ties to the shogunal court, gave Josetsu greater proximity to continental paintings in the Ashikaga collection.[48] His ability to adapt or amalgamate their compositions, brushwork, coloration, and general principles of design to the creation of new works is expertly reflected in *The Gourd and the Catfish*.[49] The short, choppy strokes that animate the clothing and general outline of its protagonist, for example, bear a close resonance to the figural style of the Chinese painter Liang Kai 梁楷 (active ca. 1200–1230), a member of the



**FIGURE 14** | **Josetsu (active ca. 1405–23).** *Wang Xizhi Brushing a Fan*, early 1400s, ink on paper, fan painting, later mounted as a hanging scroll, entire scroll: 83.1 × 32.6 cm. Kyoto, Kyoto National Museum. Important Cultural Property.

Song Imperial Painting Academy and greatly admired in Japanese collecting circles. Liang Kai's *The Sixth Patriarch Cutting Bamboo* (C. *Liuzu caizhu tu*, J. *Rokuso saichiku zu* 六祖裁竹図; fig. 15) shows a similar propensity to render the outline of its central figure with a dynamic panoply of clipped, agitated strokes.

Of even greater importance to the scenography of Josetsu's picture, however, are the landscape elements he transposes from Chinese paintings collected by the Ashikagas. Until this period, Japanese paintings of Zen figures consisted primarily of patriarchs or eccentrics against either blank backgrounds or minimally filled ones.[50] The monk-painter Kaō's 可翁 (d. 1345) *Xianzi the Shrimp Eater* (*Kensu zu* 蜆子図; fig. 16) reflects the abbreviated landscape elements and simple brushwork of a prior era of monk-painters. As minimal as it might seem in its own right, *The Gourd and the Catfish* is nevertheless far more sophisticated in its portrayal of setting. Particularly effective is its use of the one-corner compositional formula—common in Song academic landscape painting—to structure the picture, the use of ink wash to evoke an ambiguously expansive space, and the careful placement of motifs to generate pictorial meaning. In these respects, it recalls the picture-making of another Song Academy artist, Ma Yuan 馬遠 (active ca. 1200–1230), who specialized in figures-in-landscapes of a similar scale. A good example is *The Priest Dongshan Wading the Stream* (C. *Dongshan dusui tu*, J. *Tōzan tosui zu* 洞山渡水図; fig. 17), which depicts a famous episode from the biography of the Chan monk Dongshan Liangjie 洞山良价 (807–69) in which the monk catches a glimpse of his own reflection while fording a stream and attains awakening.[51] Ma Yuan's achievement is to elaborate just enough of a setting, without compromising the exacting technical standards of the Song Imperial Painting Academy, to allow the viewer to imagine the world of the anecdote, all while maintaining a clear focus on Dongshan. In addition, the visual conceit of a figure in transit or immersion lends itself well to the representation of an unanticipated epiphanic moment.

FIGURE 15 | **Liang Kai 梁楷 (Chinese, active ca. 1200–1230).** ***The Sixth Patriarch Cutting Bamboo,*** early 1200s, ink on paper, 72.7 × 31.5 cm. Tokyo, Tokyo National Museum. Important Cultural Property.



FIGURE 16 | Kaō 可翁 (Japanese, d. 1345). *Xianzi the Shrimp Eater,* 1300s, ink on paper, hanging scroll, 87.0 × 34.2 cm. Tokyo, Tokyo National Museum. Important Cultural Property.




FIGURE 17 | Attributed to Ma Yuan 馬遠 (Chinese, active ca. 1200–1230). *The Priest Dongshan Wading the Stream,* early 1200s, ink and colors on silk, hanging scroll, 81.0 × 33.1 cm. Tokyo, Tokyo National Museum. Important Cultural Property.

*The Gourd and the Catfish* world-makes in a manner similar to the Ma Yuan painting, providing just enough of a stage setting to catalyze the viewer's imagination. Its protagonist, too, is immersed in his Zen problem, full of concentration, and prepared for the possibility of epiphany. The implication is that this figure, a simpleton mired in his mundane task, might also achieve wisdom—may perhaps experience his own satori, precisely because he is otherwise engaged and in a position to be caught off guard. In this way, *The Gourd and the Catfish* offers an ideal mise-en-scène for a Zen subject, and it would not have been possible without a mastery of the most advanced artistic practices of the day.

Josetsu's picture, however, goes well beyond any of its antecedents by manifesting the essence of its Zen query in its own morphology, or visual structure. As Yoshizawa has demonstrated, the attempt to capture or pin down a catfish with a gourd can be understood as an allegorical expression of the elusiveness of the mind itself. This mutualism of the gourd and the catfish is reflected pictorially in the manner in which their curving, undulating outlines parallel each other. Their wavy silhouettes serve as a visual expression of the ungraspable slipperiness of the mind. This quality is emphasized by the versifying monks through their onomatopoeic descriptions of the motifs, in which repeating phonemes such as *korokoro* 葫蘆葫蘆 and *rokuroku* 轆轤, for example, designate the smoothness of the gourd. The undulating bends of the twinned motifs serve as visual analogues of these echomimetic sequences.

The sinusoidal curves outlining the gourd and the catfish serve as a structuring device for the entire landscape. They are apparent in the stalks of bamboo in the lower left corner that sway and twist in the ether. Sinuous, undulating outlines similarly characterize the flow of the stream and even the mountains in the background. It is in the foreground embankment, however, that this master curve is most conspicuous (fig. 18). Here it takes on a rather flamboyant profile, appearing as a scratchy, inky pair of calligraphic lines that stand out against the otherwise subdued brushwork elsewhere, almost like a secret signature embedded amid the forms of the landscape. The rhyming curves that suffuse the painting seem to propose the essence of the problem posed in the preface by visually suggesting an



FIGURE 18 | Detail of *The Gourd and the Catfish* (see fig. 3) showing the embankment.

equivalence among all things in the world. Here the mind, or *kokoro*, is not reducible to an individual psyche or sense of self but instead is exteriorized onto the landscape. Expressed here is a kind of ubiquity of mind, embedded within the picture through the resonant morphology of its motifs. *The Gourd and the Catfish* manages to elaborate a pictorial ground for Zen discourse, while at the same time visualizing that same discourse through the repetition of a principal curve that perpetuates itself like an algorithm throughout the scene. What results is essentially a mindscape, or if one accepts that the mind is simply too elusive to grasp, then a scene of no-mind or mindlessness. A neverland of the mind.

In the history of Japanese art, nothing resembling the complexities of *The Gourd and the Catfish* was ever created again. Paintings that expressed a koan would mostly do so through literal representations of some aspect of the episode, as in previous eras. Perhaps *The Gourd and the Catfish* was too closely linked to the persona of Yoshimochi, arguably the most ardent and knowledgeable Zen practitioner among all of Japan's premodern potentates. Maybe it was overly dependent upon the contingencies of early

**FIGURE 19** | **Tawaraya Sōtatsu 俵屋宗達 (Japanese, active ca. 1600–1640), with inscription by Karasumaru Mitsuhiro 烏丸光広 (Japanese, 1579–1638).** *Bulls* (detail), ca. 1631, ink on paper, from pair of hanging scrolls, each scroll: 94.8 × 43.6 cm. Kyoto, Chōmyōji Temple.

fifteenth-century Kyoto, with its flourishing Zen literary salons, the popularity of poem-picture scrolls, and dramatic shifts in shogunal politics. Or perhaps Josetsu's uniquely pictorial means of expressing the imponderability of the mind was simply too complex to serve as a basis for future artworks. Later historical eras, however, would occasionally witness remarkable new ways in which paintings could complement Zen thought and practice. Manipulation of the liquidity and its semi-accidental effects, for example, could manifest Zen-based ideas about the wandering mind or the ineffable quality of the Buddha nature residing in all sentient things. Works such as *Bulls* (*Ushi zu* 牛図; fig. 19) by the seventeenth-century painter Tawaraya Sōtatsu 俵屋宗達 (active ca. 1600–1640) did so by showcasing dramatic pooling and staining effects within the inked-in forms of its oxen.[52] These later examples, however, underscore the degree to which *The Gourd and the Catfish* embodied a unique if short-lived relationship between pictorial expression and Zen doctrine, one in which painting somehow engaged, engendered, and actively participated in the impossibility of meaning.



**Notes**

1. Despite the prevalence of the term "Zen art" in both general and specialized commentary, the degree to which objects related to Zen Buddhism constitute a coherent category or tradition of cultural production has been the subject of debate. Here the term is used loosely to refer to a broad group of artifacts and artworks associated in some way with the activities of Zen monks or the teachings of Zen Buddhism. For further reading, see Yoshiaki Shimizu, "Zen Art?," in Helmut Brinker et al., eds., *Zen: In China, Japan, East Asian Art* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1985), 73–98; Gregory Levine, "Two (or More) Truths: Reconsidering *Zen Art* in the West," in Gregory Levine and Yukio Lippit, eds., *Awakenings: Zen Figure Painting in Medieval Japan* (New York: Japan Society Gallery, 2007), 52–62; and Yukio Lippit, "The Zen Subject Position," in *Nihon bijutsu no tokushitsu: Festschrift for Professor Kobayashi Tadashi* (Tokyo: Geika Shoin, 2012).

2. See the analysis in Yukio Lippit, "Negative Verisimilitude: The Zen Portrait in Medieval Japan," in Vishaka Desai, ed., *Asian Art History in the Twenty-First Century* (Williamstown, MA: Clark Art Institute, 2007), 64–95.

3. See the discussion in Murase Miyeko, *The Written Image: Japanese Calligraphy and Painting from the Sylvan Barnet and William Burto Collection* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002), 154.

4. See Yoshizawa Katsuhiro, *"Hyōnen zu" no nazo: kokuhō saidoku hyōtan namazu o megutte* (Tokyo: Uejji, 2012), 230–42.

5. The copy was made in 1833 at the request of the abbot of Rinshōin. See Yoshizawa, *"Hyōnen zu" no nazo,* 196–97.

6. See "Hyōnen zu," *Kokka* 162 (1903). Publications illustrating *The Gourd and the Catfish* are too numerous to list here, but *Tōyō bijutsu taikan* 東洋美術大観 [Selected masterpieces of Far Eastern art], 15 vols. (Tokyo: Shimbi Shoin, 1908–12), is the earliest of the deluxe art history compendia to include the work (see vol. 3, pls. 166–67).

7. D.T. Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture* (Kyoto: Eastern Buddhist Society, 1938), 26. Cited in Yoshizawa, *"Hyōnen zu" no nazo,* 245.

8. Kobayashi Hideo's description is found in the preface to Takata Tamotsu, *Burari hyōtan dai ni* (Tokyo: Sōgensha, 1950). All translations from Japanese sources are my own unless otherwise indicated.

9. See Kobayashi Taichirō, "Ningen to yokubō," in idem, *Kobayashi Taichirō chosakushū* (Kyoto: Tankōsha, 1973–74), vol. 1, 18–29. Cited in Shimao Arata, *Josetsu hitsu Hyōnen zu: hyōtan namazu no ikonorojii* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1995), 102.

10. See Hanada Kiyoteru, "Namazu kō," in idem, *Nihon no runessansujin* (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1974), 109–19. Cited in Shimao, *Josetsu hitsu Hyōnen zu,* 103.

11. The pages that follow build upon the insights of the following studies of *The Gourd and the Catfish* that merit acknowledgment at the outset. Shimao Arata authored the first book-length study of the painting and framed important themes in its study in *Josetsu hitsu Hyōnen zu* (see note 9). Yoshizawa Katsuhiro provides an

alternative reading of the painting based upon a close reading of the inscriptions in *"Hyōnen zu" no nazo* (see note 4). In a chapter of a forthcoming study, Thomas Hare explores *The Gourd and the Catfish* from the perspective of medieval Japanese discourse and performance in "Edging Zen: Performance and Practice in Buddhist Japan" (unpublished manuscript). I would like to thank Professor Hare for allowing me to cite his manuscript before its publication.

12. The following discussion and translation of the inscriptions is indebted to several annotated translations into modern Japanese by Shimao, *Josetsu hitsu Hyōnen zu,* 107–13; Yoshizawa, *"Hyōnen zu" no nazo,* 22–188; and Shimao Arata, "Hyōnen zu," in Iriya Yoshitaka and Shimada Shūjirō, eds., *Zenrin gasan—chūsei suibokuga o yomu* (Tokyo: Mainichi Shinbunsha, 1987), 125–34. The discussions and English translations have also referred to Hare, "Edging Zen," specifically chap. 8, "Paradox, Figure and Form."

13. See Martin Collcutt, *Five Mountains: The Rinzai Zen Monastic Institution in Medieval Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1981).

14. The *terminus ante quem* is 1415, the death year of one of the monk-participants, Taihaku Shingen 太白真玄. Meanwhile, a seal on one of the inscriptions by Gyokuen Bonpō 玉畹梵芳 (1348–ca. 1420) was in use only from 1410 onward, further narrowing the date to between 1410 and 1415. Given other circumstances including the ongoing construction of the shogunal palace during these years (see below), 1413 appears to be a reasonable date for the work. For a discussion of Gyokuen's seals, see Usui Nobuyoshi, "Gyokuen no in," *Nihon rekishi* 171 (1962): 36–39.

15. Although Yoshimochi's name is not found in the preface, the title "Great Lord Chancellor" (Daishōkō 大相公) is understood to refer to Yoshimochi rather than another shogun such as his father, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu 足利義満 (1358–1408). This assumption is based upon the dating of the work to around 1413 (see note 14) and the participation of two inscribers, Taishū Shūchō 大周周奝 (1348–1419) and Kotō Shūkatsu 古幢周勝 (1370–1433), who were banished from Kyoto by Yoshimitsu but returned to the capital under the reign of Yoshimochi.

16. Translation by Hare, "Edging Zen," chap. 8, "Paradox, Figure and Form."

17. Hence the most common English title for the work has been *Catching a Catfish with a Gourd.* However, the phrase in question, *natsujūsen to yokusu* 捺住せんと欲す, implies the act of pressing down upon an object.

18. See the discussion in Shimao, *Josetsu hitsu Hyōnen zu,* 6–7. The reproduction in *Gakō senran* (1740) subtly adjusts the position of the man's hands to illustrate a more convincing grasp of the gourd, eliminating the suggestion that he is somehow pressing the gourd downward.

19. In order that the poems appear orderly in layout and properly fill out the three horizontal bands in which they are inscribed, the final poem, in the lower left, includes additional characters. Because of the special nature of this poem, Shimao argues that its author, Genchū Shūgaku 厳中周噩 (1359–1428), was the monk in charge of collating and presenting the verse inscriptions. See Shimao, *Josetsu hitsu Hyōnen zu,* 38–40. See also Yoshizawa, *"Hyōnen zu" no nazo,* 168–88.

20. Translation by Hare, "Edging Zen," chap. 8, "Paradox, Figure and Form."

21. Unrin makes reference here to a famous passage from the Chinese classic *Zhuangzi:* "Fish are born in water; man is born in Tao. If fish, born in water, seek the deep shadow of pond and pool, all their needs are satisfied. If man, born in Tao, sinks into the deep shadow of non-action to forget aggression and concern, he lacks nothing; his life is secure. All the fish needs is to get lost in water. All man needs is to get lost in Tao." (Translation by Thomas Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu,* [London: Allen & Unwin, 1965], 65.)

22. Gakuin makes reference to a famous Zen parable concerning a catfish climbing up bamboo. For a discussion, see Shimao, *Josetsu hitsu Hyōnen zu,* 52–65, and Yoshizawa, *"Hyōnen zu" no nazo,* 66–78.

23. See Kageki Hideo, "Hyōnen zu," in Iriya Yoshitaka and Shimada Shūjirō, eds., *Zenrin gasan—chūsei suibokuga o yomu* (Tokyo: Mainichi Shinbunsha, 1987), 134.

24. Perhaps the most influential text on the koan internationally has been Miura Isshū and Ruth Fuller Sasaki, *Zen Dust: The History of the Koan and Koan Study in Rinzai (Lin-chi) Zen* (Kyoto: First Zen Institute of America in Japan, 1966).

25. Recent studies that have informed my own understanding of its historical nature include Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, eds., *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Robert Sharf, "How to Think with Chan *Gong'an,*" in Charlotte Furth et al., eds., *Thinking with Cases: Specialized Knowledge in Chinese Cultural History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 205–43.

26. See Cornelius Ouwehand, *Namazu-e and Their Themes: An Interpretive Approach to Some Aspects of Japanese Folk Religion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964).

27. See Ōnishi Hiroshi, "Hyōnen zu to hyōtan no jujutsusei," in Amino Yoshihiko et al., eds., *Uri to Ryūja* (Tokyo: Fukuinkan Shoten, 1989), 411–14.

28. See Shimao, *Josetsu hitsu Hyōnen zu,* especially chaps. 3–5.

29. Yoshizawa first presented his close readings of the inscriptions in "Hyōnen zu saikō," *Zen bunka kenkyūjo kiyō* 26 (2012): 581–662. His findings were then elaborated upon in *"Hyōnen zu" no nazo* (see note 4).

30. See the discussion in Yoshizawa, *"Hyōnen zu" no nazo,* 35–41. The exchange is recorded in the *Jingde Chuangdeng lu* 景徳伝灯録 [Jingde era records of the transmission of the lamp] (compiled 1004).

31. One aspect not fully acknowledged by Yoshizawa concerns the abundant folkloric elements in Zen koans themselves, which have been explored in Steven Heine, *Shifting Shape, Shifting Text: Philosophy and Folklore in the Fox Kōan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999).

32. The early history of poem-picture scrolls in Japan is examined in Shimao Arata, "Shoki shigajiku no yōsō—'Kūgeshū' ni mieru 'unju zu' shigajiku o chūshin to shite," *Bijutsushi* 32, no. 2 (1983): 98–112. See also Shimada Shūjirō, "Muromachi jidai no shigajiku ni tsuite," in Iriya Yoshitaka and Shimada Shūjirō, eds., *Zenrin gasan—chūsei suibokuga o yomu* (Tokyo: Mainichi Shinbunsha, 1987), 10–31; Joseph D. Parker, *Zen Buddhist Landscape Arts of Early Muromachi Japan (1336–1573)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999); Yukio Lippit, "Of Modes and Manners in Medieval Japanese Ink Painting: Sesshū's *Splashed Ink Landscape* of 1495," *The Art Bulletin* 94, no. 1 (March 2012): 50–77; and Hare, "Edging Zen," chap. 2, "Place."

33. See Takahashi Noriko, "Shigajiku no kōzō to ba—Toho no shi'i zu o megutte," in Nagaoka Ryūsaku, ed., *Zōkei no ba*, vol. 4 of *Kōza Nihon bijutsushi* (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 2005), 151–80.

34. Traditionally the term *shōhei* was understood by scholars to refer to a small standing screen, known in modern Japanese as a *tsuitate* 衝立, as illustrated in Mujaku Dōchū's 無著道忠 *Shōsōrin ryaku shingi* 小叢林略清規 (Abbreviated rules of purity for small monasteries) of 1684. By extension, it was assumed that the painting and inscriptions were originally pasted on opposing sides of such a standing screen. Yoshizawa, however, demonstrates that *shōhei* could refer to a range of different types of screens or partitions. Moreover, a poem included in *The Gourd and the Catfish* inscribed by Ichū Tsūjo 惟忠通恕 (1349–1429) is introduced in the same monk's "recorded sayings" (*goroku* 語録) as inscribed on "a partition in the shogunal palace" (*sūfu shōji* 枢府障子). Further complicating the matter is that the recorded sayings of another of the inscribers, Sai'in Shunshō 西胤俊承 (1358–1422), appears to list a poem for a separate "gourd and catfish" *shōji* painting in the shogunal residence. Whatever the case may be, Yoshizawa observes that it was important to the representational agenda of *The Gourd and the Catfish* that the inscriptions and painting be viewable together, thus they must have constituted a single surface. See Yoshizawa, *"Hyōnen zu" no nazo*, 52–55.

35. Unfortunately Yoshimochi's palace no longer stands, and in any case only a few structures survive from the Ashikaga palaces of medieval Japan, so this space cannot be elaborately imagined.

36. The newness of the Sanjō-bōmon Palace in relation to earlier Ashikaga palaces is discussed in Matthew Stavros, *Kyoto: An Urban History of Japan's Premodern Capital* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 122–23.

37. For a history of Yoshimochi's palace, see Kawakami Mitsugu, "Kinkaku to Ginkaku," in *Kitayama, Higashiyama no bijutsu*, vol. 15 of *Nihon bijutsu zenshū* (Tokyo: Gakken, 1979), 134–45, and Kawakami Mitsugu, *Nihon chūsei jūtaku no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Bokusui Shobō, 1967); reprint, Tokyo: Chūōkōrōn Bijutsu Shuppan, 2002. For a discussion of Yoshimochi's private structures in the Sanjō-bōmon Palace, see Shimao, *Josetsu hitsu Hyōnen zu*, 29–31.

38. See Wu Hung, *The Double Screen: Medium and Representation in Chinese Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Although Wu Hung's discussion centers around Chinese screens, his insights apply equally to Japanese screens as well.

39. For a recent authoritative biography that analyzes Yoshimochi's relationship to Yoshimitsu, see Itō Kiyoshi, *Ashikaga Yoshimochi* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2008).

40. With regard to Yoshimochi's antagonism toward court culture, see Futaki Ken'ichi, "Ashikaga Yoshimochi," in Kuwata Tadachika, ed., *Ashikaga shōgun retsuden* (Tokyo: Akita Shoten, 1975), 126–46.

41. On Yoshimochi's relationship to Zen, see Tamamura Takeji, "Ashikaga Yoshimochi no Zenshū shinkō ni tsuite," *Zengaku kenkyū* 42 (1951): 20–43, republished in idem, *Nihon Zenshūshi ronshū* (Kyoto: Shibunkaku, 1981), 57–84; and Yoshizawa, *"Hyōnen zu" no nazo*, 202–7.

42. On Yoshimochi's paintings, see Matsushita Taka'aki, "Shōgun Yoshimochi no gaji," in idem, *Muromachi suibokuga daiisshū* (Tokyo: Muromachi Suibokuga Kankōkai, 1960), unpaginated; Yoshiaki Shimizu, "*Daruma*, by Ashikaga Yoshimochi," in Yoshiaki Shimizu and Carolyn Wheelwright, eds., *Japanese Ink Paintings* (Princeton: Art Museum, Princeton University, 1976), 54–59; Ikeda Hisako, "Ashikaga Yoshimochi hitsu 'Hotei zu,'" *De Arute* 8 (1992); and Shimao, *Josetsu hitsu Hyōnen zu*, 31–36.

43. This idea is most powerfully argued in Yoshizawa, *"Hyōnen zu" no nazo*.

44. The name Josetsu is an artistic sobriquet meaning "Seems Clumsy" and is a reference to a line from the classical Chinese text *Daodejing* that states, "Great skill seems clumsy." The artist's family and given names are unknown. Extant records on Josestu have been gathered together in Watanabe Hajime, "Tōyō bijutsu sōmokuroku san Josetsu," *Bijutsu kenkyū* 77 (1938): 17–34, included in idem, *Higashiyama suibokuga no kenkyū zōhoban* (Tokyo: Chūōkōron Bijutsu Shuppan, 1985), 30–49. See also Shimao, *Josetsu hitsu Hyōnen zu*, 40–48.

45. Shōkokuji's subtemple Rokuon'in 鹿苑院 was the seat of the Registrar of Monks (Sōrokushi 僧録司), through which the shogunate controlled the ranks of the Five Mountains temples and abbacy appointments. In 1398, Josetsu's religious master Zekkai Chūshin was appointed head of the Registrar. Daigaku, author of the preface to *The Gourd and the Catfish*, was head from 1404 to 1414, during the time the painting was created.

46. On these works, see, respectively, John M. Rosenfield, "The Unity of the Three Creeds: A Theme in Japanese Ink Painting of the Fifteenth Century," in John W. Hall and Toyoda Takeshi, eds., *Japan in the Muromachi Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 205–25; and Shimao Arata, "Dokyumento to shite no kaiga—'Ogishi shosen zu' no e to shi," *Bijutsu kenkyū* 363 (1996): 282–94.

47. See Yukio Lippit, "The Monk-Painter in Medieval Japan," in Doris Croissant, ed., *Splendid Impressions: Japanese Paintings 1400–1900 in the Museum of East Asian Art in Cologne* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 32–39.

48. For a recent discussion of the Ashikaga collection, see Yukio Lippit, *Painting of the Realm: The Kano House of Painters in Seventeenth-Century Japan* (Seattle:

University of Washington Press, 2012), 113–19.

49. The practice by which medieval Japanese painters based their picture-making on the modes of Chinese painters represented in the Ashikaga collection is referred to by specialists as "modal painting," or *hitsuyō seisaku.* For a recent discussion, see Lippit, "Of Modes and Manners," 57–60.

50. For more on early Zen figure paintings, see Gregory Levine and Yukio Lippit, eds., *Awakenings: Zen Figure Painting in Medieval Japan* (New York: Japan Society Gallery, 2007).

51. This work was first discussed in relation to *The Gourd and the Catfish* by Kumagai Nobuo, "Den Baen hitsu Tōzan tosui zu," *Bijutsu kenkyū* 3 (1932): 30–31. On Ma Yuan's painting, see Itakura Masa'aki, "Bukkyō kaiga to kyūtei—Nansō Baen 'Zenshū soshi zu' o chūshin ni," in idem, *Daijō Bukkyō no Ajia,* vol. 10 in *Shiriizu Daijō Bukkyō* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 2013).

52. See Yukio Lippit, "Tawaraya Sōtatsu and the Watery Poetics of Japanese Ink Painting," *Res* 51 (Spring 2007): 57–76.



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