

An **Ashgate** Book



# *Zen Paintings in Edo Japan (1600–1868)*

*Playfulness and Freedom in the Artwork of  
Hakuin Ekaku and Sengai Gibon*

---

GALIT AVIMAN

An Ashgate Book



# *Zen Paintings in Edo Japan (1600–1868)*

*Playfulness and Freedom in the Artwork of  
Hakuin Ekaku and Sengai Gibon*

---

GALIT AVIMAN

## ZEN PAINTINGS IN EDO JAPAN (1600–1868)

In Zen Buddhism, the concept of freedom is of profound importance. And yet, until now there has been no in-depth study of the manifestation of this liberated attitude in the lives and artwork of Edo period Zen monk-painters. This book explores the playfulness and free-spirited attitude reflected in the artwork of two prominent Japanese Zen monk-painters: Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768) and Sengai Gibon (1750–1837). The free attitude emanating from their paintings is one of the qualities which distinguish Edo period Zen paintings from those of earlier periods. These paintings are part of a Zen ink painting tradition that began following the importation of Zen Buddhism from China at the beginning of the Kamakura period (1185–1333).

In this study, Aviman elaborates on the nature of this particular artistic expression and identifies its sources, focusing on the lives of the monk-painters and their artwork. The author applies a multifaceted approach, combining a holistic analysis of the paintings, i.e. as interrelated combination of text and image-with a contextualization of the works within the specific historical, art historical, cultural, social and political environments in which they were created.

*Galit Aviman received her PhD at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel in cooperation with Kyoto University, Japan. She conducted her postdoctoral studies at the Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, Harvard University, USA. She lived in Japan for ten years in total. Currently she is a lecturer at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, The Hebrew University and Tel-Aviv University.*

# Zen Paintings in Edo Japan (1600–1868)

Playfulness and Freedom in the Artwork of  
Hakuin Ekaku and Sengai Gibon

---

Galit Aviman

---

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK



First published 2014 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

Copyright © 2014 Galit Aviman

Galit Aviman has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notice:

Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

### **British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

### **The Library of Congress has cataloged the printed edition as follows:**

Aviman, Galit, 1970–

Zen paintings in Edo Japan (1600–1868): playfulness and freedom in the artwork of Hakuin Ekaku and Sengai Gibon/by Galit Aviman.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4094-7042-7 (hardcover: alk. paper) 1. Hakuin, 1686–1769—

Criticism

and interpretation. 2. Sengai, 1751–1837—Criticism and interpretation. 3. Ink painting, Japanese—Edo period, 1600–1868. 4. Calligraphy, Japanese—History

—

Edo period, 1600–1868. 5. Zen painting—Japan. 6. Zen calligraphy—Japan. I. Title.

ND2073.H35A95 2014

759.952—dc23

2014019219

ISBN 9781409470427 (hbk)

# Contents

[\*List of Illustrations\*](#)

[\*Acknowledgements\*](#)

[Introduction: Playing with Words and Images](#)

[1 Evolution Towards Zen Paintings in the Edo Period](#)

[2 An Independent Artistic Language](#)

[3 Liberation From Rules](#)

[4 Letting Go of Common Conceptions](#)

[5 Emancipation from Social Conventions](#)

[6 Humor as an Expression of Freedom](#)

[Conclusion: Ultimate Freedom](#)

[\*Bibliography\*](#)

[\*Index\*](#)

[\*Plates\*](#)

# List of Illustrations

## COLOR PLATES

1 Hakuin Ekaku, *Sekiri Daruma*, 1757, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 193.0 × 107.8 cm. Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Ryōgakuji, Nagano

2 Hakuin Ekaku, *Monkey*, one of a pair of hanging scrolls, ink on paper, 117.3 × 57.4 cm, Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

3 Sengai Gibon, *Monkey Trying to Catch the Moon*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 97.5 × 36.3 cm, Idemitsu Museum of Art

4 Hakuin Ekaku, *Otafuku Okyū*, hanging scroll, color and ink on paper, 56.7 × 64.5 cm, Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

## BLACK AND WHITE FIGURES

### 2 An Independent Artistic Language

2.1 Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma*, 1719, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 92.4 × 36.1 cm. Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Private collection, Numazu

2.1a Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma* (detail), 1719, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 92.4 × 36.1cm. Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Private collection, Numazu

2.1b Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma* (detail), 1719, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 92.4 × 36.1 cm. Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Private collection, Numazu

2.2 Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma*, 1751, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 222.8 × 136.3 cm. Photographed by

Tsuneo Horide. Shōjūji, Aichi

2.2a Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma* (detail), 1751, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 222.8 × 136.3 cm.

Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Shōjūji, Aichi

2.3 Hakuin Ekaku, *Sekiri Daruma* (detail), 1757, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 193.0 × 107.8 cm.

Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Ryōgakuji, Nagano

2.3a Hakuin Ekaku, *Sekiri Daruma* (detail), 1757, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 193.0 × 107.8 cm.

Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Ryōgakuji, Nagano

2.4 Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma*, 1767, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 133.0 × 91.0 cm. Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Seikenji, Shizuoka

2.4a Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma* (detail), 1767, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 133.0 × 91.0 cm.

Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Seikenji, Shizuoka

2.5 Sengai Gibon, *Hotei*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 28.5×36.5 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

2.6 Replica of a painting attributed to Kanō Motonobu, *Hotei*, 1779, ink on paper, 28 × 40 cm. Fukuoka Prefectural Museum of Art

2.7 Sengai Gibon, *Kanzan and Jittoku*, 1813, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 122.7 × 51.2 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

2.8 Sengai Gibon, *Bukan and Kanzan Jittoku*, 1822, pair of six-panel folding screens, ink on paper, 148.4 × 363.4 cm. each. Genjūan, Fukuoka

2.8a Sengai Gibon, *Bukan and Kanzan Jittoku* (detail), 1822, pair of six-panel folding screens, ink

on paper, 148.4 × 363.4 cm each. Genjūan, Fukuoka

2.8b Sengai Gibon, *Bukan and Kanzan Jittoku* (detail), 1822, pair of six-panel folding screens, ink on paper, 148.4 × 363.4 cm each. Genjūan, Fukuoka

2.9 Sengai Gibon, *Fudō Myōō*, 1837, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 102.9 × 36.1 cm. Fukuoka Art Museum

2.10 Replica by Taikan Yokoyama of Mokkei (Ch. Mu-qi), *Kannon, Monkey and Crane* (detail), Kamakura period (thirteenth century), triptych of hanging scrolls, ink and slight color on silk, right scroll: 173.9 × 98.8 cm. Daitoku-ji, Kyoto

2.11 Attributed to Shūbun, *Kanzan and Jittoku*, Muromachi period (first half of the fifteenth century) hanging scroll, ink on paper, 100.4 × 37.6 cm. Tokyo National Museum. Important Cultural Property

2.12 Sengai Gibon, *Kanzan and Jittoku*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 47.7 × 30.2 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

2.13 Hakuin Ekaku, *Kanzan and Jittoku*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 37.0 × 53.2 cm. Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Ryuunji Collection, Tokyo

2.14 Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 27.6 × 49.5 cm. Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

2.15 Sengai Gibon, *Self-Portrait*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 43.1 × 64.1 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

### **3 Liberation from Rules**

3.1 Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma*, 1767, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 130.8 × 57.4 cm. Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

3.2 Hakuin Ekaku, *Kanzan and Jittoku*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 85.5 × 25.3 cm. Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

3.2a Hakuin Ekaku, *Kanzan and Jittoku* (detail), hanging scroll, ink on paper, 85.5 × 25.3 cm. Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

3.3 Sengai Gibon, *Hotei*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 89.8 × 27.7 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

3.4 Sengai Gibon, *Kensu*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 111.3 × 27.8 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

3.4a Sengai Gibon, *Kensu* (detail), hanging scroll, ink on paper, 111.3 × 27.8 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

3.5 Kaō, *Kensu*, middle of the fourteenth century, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 87 × 34.2 cm. Tokyo National Museum. Important Cultural Property

#### **4 Letting Go of Common Conceptions**

4.1 Sengai Gibon, *A Broken Piece of Rope*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 27.0 × 31.7 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

4.2 Hakuin Ekaku, *Snake*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 56.6 × 33.8 cm. Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Private collection

4.3 Hakuin Ekaku, *Monkey Grasping at the Moon*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 118.8 × 27.8 cm. Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Ryuunji Collection

4.4 Hakuin Ekaku, *Monkey, The first founder, Hossu*, triptych of hanging scrolls, ink on paper,



111.8 × 18.3 cm each. Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

4.4a Hakuin Ekaku, *Monkey* (detail), one of a triptych of hanging scrolls, ink on paper, 111.8 × 18.3 cm. Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

4.5 Hakuin Ekaku, *Dragon Staff*, 1762, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 125 × 28.5 cm. Gitter-Yelen Collection, New Orleans

4.6 Sengai Gibon, *Monkey*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 45.0 × 54.6 cm. Fukuoka Art Museum

4.7 Sengai Gibon, *Tiger*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 28.5 × 35.3 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

4.8 Sengai Gibon, *The end of the brush monument*, 1832, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 54.9 × 48.8 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

4.9 Sengai Gibon, *Family Precept*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 20.0 × 31.4 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

4.10 Sengai Gibon, *Crane and Turtle*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 156.4 × 143.6 cm. Shōfukuji, Fukuoka

4.11 Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma*, hanging scroll, color and ink on paper, 130.8 × 56.4 cm. Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

4.12 Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma*, hanging scroll, color and ink on paper, 117.0 × 54.0 cm, Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

4.13 Sengai Gibon, *Tōkian*, 1823, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 130.0 × 52.5 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

## **5 Emancipation from Social Conventions**

5.1 Hakuin Ekaku, *The Sixth Patriarch's Robe and Bowl*, hanging scroll, color and ink on paper, 94.0 × 28.0 cm. Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

5.2 Sengai Gibon, *The Gate Pines for the New Year*, pair of hanging scrolls, ink on paper, 78.3 × 32.4 cm each. Idemitsu Museum of Art

5.3 Hakuin Ekaku, *Virtue*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 117.3 × 55.2 cm. Gitter-Yelen Collection, New Orleans

5.4 Hakuin Ekaku, *A Pike-bearer Pees*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 37.8 × 53.7 cm. Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Osaka Municipal Museum of Modern Art

5.5 Hakuin Ekaku, *Feudal lord's procession under Mt. Fuji* (detail), hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 57.2 × 132.8 cm. Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Jishōji, Nakatsu

5.5a Hakuin Ekaku, *Feudal lord's procession under Mt. Fuji* (detail), hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 57.2 × 132.8 cm. Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Jishōji, Nakatsu

## **6 Humor as an Expression of Freedom**

6.1 Sengai Gibon, *The Three Laughers of the Tiger Ravine*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 49.2 × 59.3 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

6.2 Sengai Gibon, *Dragon and Tiger*, pair of hanging scrolls, ink on paper, 128.5 × 55.3 cm each. Idemitsu Museum of Art

6.3 Sengai Gibon, *Bodhidharma*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 90.3 × 29.8 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

# Acknowledgements

This is a wonderful opportunity for me to express my gratitude to all those people who helped me with making this book possible.

I would like to thank Yad Hanadiv-Rothschild Fellowships 2010–2011 for funding my postdoctoral studies at the Edwin O. Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies at Harvard University, where I dedicated most of my time to work on the book. A special thanks to Yukio Lippit, my host professor at Harvard, for his professional advice and for inviting me into such a wonderful environment for study and research. I would also like to thank Theodore J. Gilman, Executive Director of the Edwin O. Reischauer Institute and the Assistant Director, Stacie Matsumoto, for providing me and my family the opportunity to stay at the Edwin O. Reischauer house, where I could quietly work on my book in Reischauer's own office, complete with beautiful view and relaxed atmosphere.

I would like to extend my gratitude also to the Japan Foundation Fellowship Program for supporting my research in 2012 at the International Research Institute for Zen Buddhism at Hanazono University (IRIZ). I owe a special thanks to Yoshizawa Katsuhiro, who invited me to take part in his seminars and use the library facilities at Hanazono. I would also like to thank Yoshizawa and his assistant, Tomimasu Kentaro, for their great assistance in obtaining permission to use some of Hakuin's images.

My deepest gratitude goes to my advisor, Izumi Takeo, who served as my supervisor during my MA studies at Kyoto University in Japan, continued to guide me as a second supervisor during my PhD, and was always ready and willing to provide help and support. I owe deep gratitude also to Katrin Kogman-Appel, who was my primary PhD advisor and who guided me through my studies at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

I would like to express a special thanks to my friend James Mark Shields, for professionally editing my book, for his helpful advice, and most of all for his friendship.

And to all my friends and colleagues who were there for the advice and support at different stages of my research: Jean-Sebastien Cluzel, Mori Toshiko, Aono Tomusuke, Leigh Chipman, Sara Offenberger, Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, and Daniel Unger.

Finally, I would like to thank my extended family with special thanks in particular to my beloved children and husband, for being who they are.

# Introduction: Playing with Words and Images

This book explores the free attitude and the playfulness reflected in the artwork of the two prominent Japanese Zen monk-painters from the Edo period (1600–1868)—Hakuin Ekaku 白隠慧鶴 (1685–1768) and Sengai Gibon 仙厓義梵 (1750–1837). The particular evolution of Zen paintings during the Edo period, including the artwork of Hakuin and Sengai, is usually referred to as Zenga 禅画; lit. Zen paintings). These paintings are in fact part of a long tradition of Zen ink painting that began following the importation of Zen Buddhism from China at the beginning of the Kamakura period (1185–1333). Zenga is usually referred to as the revival of the early Zen painting of the Kamakura and early Muromachi periods (1333–1573), though in some aspects Zenga differs from those paintings, particularly from those of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The free attitude reflected in the paintings is one of the qualities that distinguish Zenga from Zen paintings of earlier periods. This book strives to understand the nature of this particular expression and to identify its sources, focusing on the lives of the monk-painters and their artwork. The emphasis is on the powerful interaction and the close collaboration that exists between words and images in the paintings.

The aim of the book, thus, is not primarily philosophical or religious discussion of freedom, but rather an exploration of this expression in the artwork through a multifaceted approach, one that combines a holistic analysis of the paintings—i.e. as interrelated combination of text and image—with a contextualization of the works within the specific historical, art historical, cultural, social and political environments in which they were created.

# Freedom In Context

The word freedom is a highly charged word with various meanings, depending on the cultural and historical context in which it is used. Hence it is important to clarify the specific meaning and context of the word in this book. When I speak of freedom I point to a fundamental notion in the Chan/Zen Buddhist traditions. It is important to specify this particular notion precisely due to the specific meaning it carries in the Chan and Zen traditions and as opposed to the way it was understood by early Western interpreters of Zen. Being part of the critical scrutiny against the idealized images of Chan/Zen Buddhism, Dale Wright in his book *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism*<sup>1</sup> dedicates a whole chapter to the concept of freedom, including the way it was misinterpreted by early Western scholars and students of Zen. As Wright argues, in accordance with the modern Western version of "freedom" and through the eyes and spirit of the time of early Western interpreters, freedom was regarded and understood as the absence of constraint, presupposing a tension between freedom and authority. As Wright puts it, "Modern western thought has tended to place freedom and obedience in a dichotomous relation."<sup>2</sup> Although Wright focuses mostly on John Blofeld's (1913–1987) writings on Zen, he speaks about the general tendency in early western Zen literature "from the 'Beat Zen' of Jack Kerouac to the more academic style of [Alan] Watts and [Erich] Fromm, but also, and more influentially, in the English language writings of D.T Suzuki who drew upon Western proclivities in introducing Zen to the west."<sup>3</sup> Below I will return to the "romantic" approach to Chan/Zen traditions and its influence on modern research on Zenga. A fuller discussion of Western interpretations of freedom in contrast to the Chan/Zen notion, based largely on the formulation provided by Dale Wright, will be conducted in chapter three of the book. At this point, it is important to emphasize that "freedom" in Chan/Zen traditions is referred to in various ways: liberation of mind, emancipation, "letting go,"

enlightenment and so on, terms which all attempt to transmit a broad view that I will refer to in this book as an *attitude* or even *mentality* of freedom.

As mentioned above, while philosophical and religious discussions of the concept of freedom are not the main concern of this book, these will serve as a background and a means to deepen our understanding of the *expression* of freedom as reflected in the artwork discussed herein.

Thus, when I speak of the expression of freedom and playfulness in the paintings of Hakuin and Sengai, I refer to the way this is reflected in both the formalistic aspects of the paintings and in their content. In other words, I focus on the looseness of the lines, composition, strokes and so on, together with exploring the themes, texts and narratives of the paintings that express the notion of freedom.

My claim is that this expression is not merely a reflection of the artistic style of the monk-painters, but it is in fact part of an entire outlook on freedom deeply rooted in the thought of Zen Buddhism. This general attitude significantly affected both the lives and the artwork of the monk-painters, and it is imbued in the artwork in a way that it is expressed through both text and image.

At the base of the attitude of freedom stands the breaking of rules, conventions and conceptions. For Hakuin and Sengai, Zen practitioners who were both monks and painters, this breaking of rules is expressed in both aspects of their lives, the religious and artistic worlds. Thus, when I speak of freedom of expression in their artwork, I mostly refer to the breaking of the rules and conventions of Zen Buddhist tradition, which includes the Zen ink painting tradition. However, as I will show, this free attitude at times transcends the specific context of the Zen Buddhist world, and is manifested also through breaking the rules and conventions of the general artistic standards that dominated during the Edo period. This occasionally included the breaking of political rules and standards of this period. When I speak of "expression of freedom," therefore, I mean a breaking of the religious, artistic, social and even political rules, conventions and conceptions dominant during the Edo period.



As Zen monks, Hakuin and Sengai were part of the Rinzai Zen Buddhist tradition and were obviously familiar with Rinzai Zen texts and stories. Many of the stories and sayings of this tradition were transferred orally by Zen masters to their disciples while others were written down. In either case these stories became part of the tradition and undoubtedly influenced the artwork of both Hakuin and Sengai.

Several prominent Rinzai Zen texts that present the attitude of freedom most clearly will be presented here. Rather than discuss the contents of these texts separately, I have integrated this discussion with an analysis of the artwork. This will allow a close identification of the concept of freedom in Rinzai Zen Buddhism with the artwork of both Hakuin and Sengai.

The main and most important source of this book, however, is the artwork of Hakuin and Sengai. With three exceptions, where I use pieces of their calligraphy to support my ideas, I base my analyses on paintings that include both an image and an inscription within the painting.

Both Hakuin and Sengai at some point in their lives were engaged in artistic activities; nevertheless, they were not professional artists. From a young age they devoted themselves to the religious path—they were primarily monks. Indeed, both became abbots of famous Rinzai Zen temples. Their true painting period began only at a late age, in their sixties, and they continued to paint until their deaths. The viewers of Hakuin and Sengai's paintings were Zen monks, disciples, laymen and common people who were in contact with the monk-painters. Often the paintings were given by them as presents. This fact that the viewers of the artwork were not anonymous but were all related in some way religiously or secularly to the world of the Zen temple, had an effect on the creations of these monk-painters. When Hakuin and Sengai painted they often knew, or could assume, who their target viewers were: a small circle of people who were familiar with the world of Zen in one way or another, and therefore their paintings were created accordingly.

Among Zenga painters, Hakuin and Sengai's works are particularly eminent. Their artwork constitutes the largest and the most representative collection of Zenga from the Edo period. It has also been the most influential

both among other Zenga painters in Japan and in the West. The themes of their paintings are often traditional, similar to those of early Zen paintings of the Kamakura and Muromachi periods. At the same time, secular themes also appear, as do those which are the monk-painters' own creations.

The works of art presented in this book are the paintings that I consider to best represent the Hakuin and Sengai's expression of freedom, even though we can generally say that the expression of freedom characterizes most of their paintings. The paintings I have selected display a variety of themes, from traditional to completely original. Some are secular in theme and strongly connected with the social, cultural and political contexts of the Edo period, while others are more religious and more closely connected with Rinzai Zen Buddhist thought and traditions.

Hakuin and Sengai's biographies serve as a significant source of information for this book, as well. I have used their biographies, first of all, as the foundation for understanding their religious and artistic worlds, together with an understanding of the role each world played in their lives. They are also used as sources of information on the monk-painters' personalities via stories, important events and significant decisions they made during their lives. The biographies also provide us with some poems and other writings created by the monk-painters.<sup>4</sup>

## New Perspectives in Research on Zenga

The critical approach to Chan/Zen Buddhist studies of scholars such as Dale Wright, Bernard Faure, Robert H. Sharf, T. Griffith Foulk and so forth,<sup>5</sup> which has questioned the traditional understanding of Chan/Zen and criticized the romanticized and idealized images of these traditions, includes criticism on the way the "Zen Arts" have been presented and approached, especially by Suzuki Daisetsu and Hisamatsu Shinichi. Sharf, for example, criticizes the way in which the "Zen Arts" were put under one category:

"Hisamatsu shares with Suzuki the dubious honor of popularizing the notion that Zen is the foundation of virtually all of the Japanese fine arts ... everything from Chinese landscape painting and calligraphy to garden design and Noh drama are expressions of the Zen experience."<sup>6</sup> Levine adds an art historical critique of the mystical readings of visual forms that characterized Suzuki's "Zen Art" and goes on to criticize Hisamatsu's approach, which grants exclusivity to those who have attained Zen religious realization in seeing and understanding "Zen Art."<sup>7</sup>

This general tendency, presented above, to "romanticize" Zen and "Zen Art" had an effect also on the research of Zenga. The important questions need to be raised here: How did this approach affect the way in which the paintings were treated? Even more, were there other voices that brought new perspectives to this research?

Significant interest in Zenga in the United States and Europe began after the Second World War. This was part of a general wave of interest in Japan and in Zen Buddhism in particular. In Japan at that time, Zenga were still not honored and appreciated as much as the early Zen ink painting of the Muromachi period, which was greatly admired for its highly skilled artists. Zenga, it seems, was considered to be outside the mainstream of Japanese paintings during the Edo period. Starting from the 1960s and 1970s, the growing interest in Zen in the United States and in Europe led to an increasing number of books on Zen, Zen art and Zen culture, including Zenga, written by both Japanese and non-Japanese authors.<sup>8</sup>

This new wave of works on Zenga is highly valuable for having opened a new window for an understanding of Zenga and for expanding the knowledge and appreciation of this art form in Japan, the United States and Europe. At the same time, it is important to recognize, as I argue, that the circumstances in which research on Zenga first developed greatly affected the nature of research in later years, and led to its being shaped in a limited way. Due to the fact that in many cases the paintings were approached merely as a means to deepen an understanding of Zen Buddhism and its principles, they were analyzed mostly iconographically. Furthermore, in many cases the work done on Zenga took the form of exhibition catalogues,

which naturally did not allow for in-depth discussion of the paintings, and which caused some paintings to remain virtually untouched by analysis, simply appearing in catalogues with no further treatment.

It is generally acknowledged that one of the pioneers in dealing with Zenga was Kurt Brasch, a Swiss scholar who was born in Japan and wrote two books, published in German and in Japanese: *Hakuin and Zenga* (1957) and *Zenga* (1962).<sup>9</sup> Around the time of publication of these works Brasch organized a traveling exhibition on Zenga, which was shown for a year (1959–60) in several European cities. It is important to note, however, that the term “Zenga” had been used several decades earlier in an article on Hakuin and his works published by the Japanese writer and Buddhist scholar Okamoto Kanoko 岡本かの子 (1889–1939).<sup>10</sup> Thus, while Kurt Brasch is certainly one of the pioneers of Zenga scholarship in the West, the term itself existed prior to his works.

During the 1960s and 1970s, several important works were published on Zenga. In addition to being one of the first works to reclaim the term Zenga, Kurt Brasch's work is also significant for the criticism it aroused, mainly concerning the usage of the term itself.<sup>11</sup> This criticism was frequent, especially among Japanese authors. Takeuchi Naoji's criticism, for example, focuses on the term Zenga, which he argues had served the paintings poorly by treating them as a popular product. Instead, he suggested calling them “the art of the Zen sect” or “the ink painting of the Zen sect” and not “the paintings of Zen,”<sup>12</sup> as Zen in fact has no paintings. At the same time, Kurt Brasch's work can also be viewed as stimulating other Japanese authors to write on Zen paintings, while embracing the new interest in Zen paintings coming from outside Japan. Works such as Awakawa Yasuichi's *Zen Painting*, Hisamatsu Shinichi's *Zen and the Fine Arts*, and Suzuki Daisetsu's *Sengai: The Zen Master*, are some of the most prominent examples.<sup>13</sup> Whatever the reaction of Japanese scholars described above, there was no major change in perspective. Research still focused on the iconography of the paintings, out of a single-minded attempt to understand their religious meaning, while giving importance to questions that deal with the *essence* of Zen through these paintings, such as What are Zen paintings? Is “Zenga” a

proper term? and so forth. Furthermore, these last works, present in many ways the idealized, romantic and "pure" view of Zen Buddhism mentioned above. The paintings, as a result, were treated from a one-sided angle: out of the single attempt to promote the spirit and thought of Zen. Borrowing Levine's critique of Suzuki's approach to the Zen art of painting: "Suzuki didn't do the hard looking and archival digging needed to sense the visual and historical warp and weft of specific paintings, styles, and painters. Instead of letting the paintings recount their own stories, Suzuki gave them all the same tale to tell."<sup>14</sup>

Interest in Zenga continued during the 1980s until the mid-1990s.<sup>15</sup> A real change in perspective towards an art historical approach, however, began to take place with the publication in 1989 of the important book *The Art of Zen*, written by Stephen Addiss.<sup>16</sup> In 1995, Izumi Takeo and Mizukami Tsutomu published a volume dedicated solely to Hakuin and Sengai's artwork, as part of a series on ink painting masters called *Suibokuga no kyoshō*. This later research on Zenga began to put the paintings and the monk-painters at the center of its attention. It also allowed, at least in some cases, for the integration of a discussion of form and content.

This beginning of a change in perspective did not, however, continue to develop and remained confined largely to exhibition catalogues and introductory textbooks—formats that limited the ability to offer in-depth discussion of the paintings. From the mid-1990s until the present the number of books written on Zenga has decreased.<sup>17</sup>

The most recent significant book on Hakuin's artwork was Yoshizawa Katsuhiro's *Hakuin—Zenga no sekai*, published in 2005 and translated into English in 2009 under the title *The Religious Art of Zen Master Hakuin*.<sup>18</sup> Although the book explores the religious meaning of Hakuin's artwork and therefore does not utilize an art historical perspective, it analyzes the paintings through the innovative approach of taking into consideration the historical and cultural contexts of the Edo period in which the paintings were created.<sup>19</sup>

As shown, a great need to study Zenga from different perspectives still remains. The lacuna, however, is not merely methodological; although the concept of freedom is an issue of considerable importance in Zen Buddhism, no in-depth research has yet been undertaken on the reflection of this free attitude in the lives and artwork of Edo period Zen monk-painters, such as Hakuin and Sengai. It is hard to tell why the visual expression of this fundamental attitude of freedom was never profoundly examined; perhaps it is connected to the early approach of the research which regarded the paintings as expressions of the "Zen thought" as a whole, without the attempt to unravel this idea through the option of isolating one notion and examine it profoundly, as I suggest in this book.

This book thus undertakes an in-depth investigation into varied manifestations of the visual expression of freedom from a multitude of perspectives: by focusing on the paintings, especially the interconnection of texts and images, as well as the biographies and writings of the monk-painters themselves—all set against the historical, social and cultural background of the Edo period.

To build an investigation that tackles the expression of freedom from different angles, I have organized the present study into six chapters that build the discussion gradually. [Chapter 1](#), "Evolution Towards Zen Paintings in the Edo Period," covers first the historical development of Zen paintings and later examines Hakuin and Sengai's paintings and the expression of freedom in the specific historical context in which these paintings were created during the Edo period. I review the historical evolution of Zen painting from its early stages during the Kamakura and the Muromachi periods up to the specific emergence of Zenga during the Edo period, followed by a short review of the lives of the monk-painters. [Chapter 2](#), "An Independent Artistic Language," focuses on the expression of freedom in the paintings of Hakuin and Sengai solely through analysis of the visual components and the formal aspects of the paintings. The first part deals with the development and change that Hakuin and Sengai's artwork underwent, showing how the expression of freedom in their paintings changed as they aged. The second part examines the relationship of Hakuin and Sengai's



artwork with the tradition of Zen ink painting, showing in what ways the monk-painters continue the tradition and in what ways they are free and independent of it.

The next chapters of the book analyze the expression of freedom and its manifestations, via both text and image, approaching these through a synthesis of all aspects, including historical, cultural and art historical ones. [Chapter 3](#), "Liberation from Rules," begins by tracing the roots of the concept of freedom in the thought of Rinzai Zen Buddhism through various related Zen texts and continues with an analysis of selected paintings by Hakuin and Sengai that express this notion of freedom. [Chapter 4](#), "Letting Go of Common Conceptions," deals with the expression of freedom through the liberated approach of Hakuin and Sengai towards some of our common conceptions. [Chapter 5](#), "Emancipation from Social Conventions," deals with the freedom towards social conventions Hakuin and Sengai expressed in their paintings. In both [chapters 4](#) and [5](#), matters that at first glance seem unrelated to freedom are revealed to be alternative manifestations of this attitude. In [chapter 6](#), "Humor as an Expression of Freedom," the last and concluding chapter, I focus on humor in the paintings and on its relation to the attitude of freedom. Humor is shown to be an artistic tool or an artistic style but at the same time an expression and a manifestation of freedom itself.

## Notes

- [1](#) The chapter is entitled "Freedom: the Practice of Constraint"; Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 119–38. For a fuller discussion of this topic see chapter 3 of the present work. See also Wright, "Concept of Freedom," 113–24. See also Faure, "Chan and Zen Studies," 1–35.
- [2](#) Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 128.
- [3](#) Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 124 fn. 18.
- [4](#) For short biographies of the monk-painters, see chapter 1.



- [5](#) For state-of-the-field reports see Faure, "Chan and Zen Studies," 1–35; Robson "Formation and Fabrication," 311–49. On critical Buddhism see also Shields, *Critical Buddhism*, 1–16.
- [6](#) Sharf, "Zen of Japanese Nationalism," 107–60. For another critical scrutiny by Robert Sharf with T. Griffith Foulk on *chinzō* see Sharf and Foulk, "Ritual Use of Ch'an Portraiture," 74–150.
- [7](#) Levine, "Two (or More) Truths," 52–61. For a critical scrutiny of other forms of art related to Zen in Japan see: Yamada, *Shots in the Dark*. See also Elkins, "Conceptual Analysis of Gardens," 189–98. See also Sharf, "Zen of Japanese Nationalism," 107–60 on Brinker, *Zen in the Art of Painting*.
- [8](#) See Addiss, "Reflections on Zenga," 14–18. See also Guth, "Nanga and Zenga," 203–11.
- [9](#) See Yamashita, "Reconsidering 'Zenga,'" 19–28. See also Brasch, "Zenga, Zen Buddhist Paintings," 58–63.
- [10](#) Okamoto, "Hakuin no Gazen ni Tsuite," 465–72. See also Yoshizawa, *Hakuin —Zenga no sekai*, 17.
- [11](#) See also the exhibition catalogue Addiss, *Zenga and Nanga*.
- [12](#) In Japanese, *zenrin bijutsu* (禅林美術; arts of the Zen sect) or *zenrin suibokuga* (禅林水墨画; Zen sect ink painting). Takeuchi, *Nihon bijutsu*, 14.
- [13](#) For full details, see bibliography. See also Suzuki—*Zen and Japanese Culture*. Tsuji Nobuo's book from this same period, *Edo no shūkyō bijutsu*, is notable for its art historical approach, studying both form and content equally. It should therefore be regarded as exceptional in relation to previous research.
- [14](#) Levine, "Two (or More) Truths," 55–6.
- [15](#) In the early eighties the collected works of Furuta Shōkin were published; they included essays on Zen art and on Hakuin and Sengai. He also wrote *Sengai—Master of Zen Paintings*, which follows the earlier approach. For full details, see bibliography.
- [16](#) A year later, an exhibition catalogue of the important Gitter-Yelen collection, with introduction and commentaries by John Stevens, *Zenga Brushstrokes of*

*Enlightenment*, was published. See also Nakayama Kiichirō's book *Sengai—sono shogai to geijutsu*. For full details, see bibliography.

- [17](#) There were several exhibition catalogues: the catalogues *Zenga—The Return from America* (2000), which presents some critical views on the field such as Yamashita Yuji's article "Reconsidering 'Zenga'—In Terms of America, in Terms of Japanese Art History." For another catalogue exhibition see: *Hakuin: Zen to Shouga* (2004). A recent exhibition catalogue on Hakuin's paintings in English is *The sound of one hand* (2010) written by Addiss and Yoshiko Seo. A recent exhibition catalogue on Hakuin's paintings in Japanese written by Yamashita and Yoshizawa is: *Hakuin—The Hidden Message of Zen Art* (2012); see bibliography.
- [18](#) The translation is by Norman Waddell. For full details see bibliography.
- [19](#) A recent paper by Yoshizawa is published in *Kokka* 1379 (2010), in a special issue dedicated to Hakuin; see bibliography.

# 1 Evolution Towards Zen Paintings in the Edo Period

Zen paintings of the Edo period, as mentioned in the introduction, are usually referred to as Zenga 禅画. Although Zenga literally means “Zen paintings,” they are distinguished from Zen paintings of earlier periods and have their own characteristics. In order to better understand the specific characteristics of these paintings, particularly the expression of freedom in the works of Hakuin and Sengai, it is important to situate their emergence within the continuum of the historical development of the tradition of Zen ink paintings. The purpose of this chapter is a threefold contextualization of the paintings: 1) to recount and analyze the historical development of these paintings from their early stages; 2) to examine them in the specific historical context in which they were created during the Edo period; 3) to recount brief biographies of both Hakuin and Sengai, which may form a basis for understanding the personal contexts in which their paintings were created.

## **Zen and Ink Painting—Early Stages (Mid-twelfth Century—Early Seventeenth Century)**

In order to situate the emergence of Zen paintings during the Edo period within the continuum of the historical development of the Zen ink paintings tradition, and since a full recount of the historical developments is beyond the scope of this work, I will here focus on a particular motif: the historical dynamics of the interrelation between the technique of ink painting and Zen

Buddhism. This bond went through an interesting process of evolution and change throughout history. At times, ink paintings and Zen Buddhist thought were strongly intertwined and at times they were less connected. These changes can be divided roughly into three main phases. The first phase, the period in which the paintings were first introduced to Japan from China, including the first Japanese creations, fell during the Kamakura and the beginning of the Muromachi (1333–1573) periods; the second phase occurred during the Muromachi, Momoyama (1573–1600) and Edo periods; and the third phase is the emergence of Zenga *within* Zen temples during the Edo period.

One of the implications of this dynamic interaction between ink paintings and Zen thought was that already from an early stage there were two types of ink painters in Zen temples: the amateur monk-painters who cultivated painting as part of their religious life, and the professional specialist painters who happened to be Zen monks. A tendency towards professionalism was indeed already inherent in the early stage; however, during the second phase this tendency gradually increased and there were more and more painters who devoted themselves more to art than to the religious life of a Zen monk. Gradually, interest in ink paintings spread beyond Zen temples and was adopted by secular professional painters, some of whom were not even affiliated with the Zen sect. During the third phase a new evolution *inside* the Zen temples emerged, a phase where a strong bond between ink painting and Zen was recreated and the amateur monk-painters who cultivated painting as part of their religious life became active once again. This movement, as mentioned, emerged parallel to the developments of professionalization and distancing from Zen Buddhist contents—i.e. beyond Zen temples.

Before we move to the arrival of Zen paintings in Japan during the Kamakura period, let us look briefly at the origins of this connection between ink painting and Zen Buddhism. In China, black ink was used as early as the Han Dynasty (207 BCE–221 CE) for the art of calligraphy and for paintings using lines of ink. During the Tang Dynasty (618–907), unorthodox methods of painting in ink, or the “untrammeled” manner of painting (ippin

逸品 in Japanese), such as the use of ink splashes, drawing with only few strokes of the brush and using the hands as a brush in landscape paintings, began to emerge. These methods gradually spread during the Five Dynasties period (907–960) and succeeding Song Dynasty (960–1279), when ink painting became an important and popular genre in Chinese art.<sup>1</sup>

Gradually, ink paintings with these nonconformist methods became popular among Chan artists. The unconventionality of this genre corresponded to the Chan idea of rejecting the canonical texts of Buddhism; i.e. minimalistic strokes and painting in monochrome matched Chan thought. The nurturing of ink painting within Chan monasteries resulted in the creation of themes related to the world of Chan, such as portraits of Chan masters (Jp. Chinsō 頂相), which were important for the maintenance of the Chan religious lineage. Other themes were Chan patriarchs, the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, arhats, i.e. sages who had attained liberation from the cycle of rebirth and who were viewed as models for spiritual life. Another group of paintings, known as Zenkiga 禅機画, “paintings of Zen activities,” suggested paths leading to enlightenment; e.g. paintings that show a Chan monk in the act of attaining enlightenment or others that show meetings between teachers and pupils. Secular subjects, such as landscapes, birds and flowers, were also assimilated into Chan art. It is important to note that these themes were painted not only by the Chan monks but also by artists who were unaffiliated with the Chan sect and whose primary role was that of an artist. This is an important fact that can be regarded as the seed for a similar development that would occur later on in Japan among both monastic and professional artists.<sup>2</sup>

The first historical evidence for the introduction of Zen to Japan dates from the end of the seventh century, but it was not until the end of the twelfth century, during the Kamakura period, that Zen began to spread throughout Japan. Myōan Eisai 明庵栄西 (1141–1215) and Dōgen Kigen 道元希玄 (1200–1253) are considered to be the founders of the two main Zen sects in Japan, Rinzai-shū (臨在宗) and Sōtō-shū (曹洞宗), respectively.<sup>3</sup> Eisai entered the monastic life at the age of fourteen under the Tendai sect of Buddhism, travelled to China for several years and devoted himself to the

study of Linji (Jp. Rinzai) Zen.<sup>4</sup> Four years after his return to Japan in 1191, he founded Shōfukuji (聖福寺) in Hakata, Kyushu, which is considered to be the first Zen temple in Japan. Roughly six centuries later, Sengai Gibon, the great Zenga painter, would become the 123rd abbot of the same temple. Eisai, who died at the age of seventy-five, was an important pioneer in the institution of Zen in Japan. After Eisai's death there were other Japanese monks who traveled to China to study Zen and returned to Japan to teach. They too contributed to the establishment of the Rinzai school in Japan. Some important Chinese Chan monks who came to Japan to teach Zen at this time also helped in making the school of Rinzai independent. Dōgen is known as the founder of the other major Zen sect in Japan – the Sōtō school. However, it became an independent sect only after Dōgen's death. Dōgen, who studied under one of Eisai's disciples, went to China for several years and was particularly attracted to the Caodong (Jp. Sōtō) school. He returned to Japan in 1227 and began teaching and writing. This continued for many years until he moved to Eihei-ji (永平寺) in Echizen province (now Fukui prefecture), where he spent his final years. Eihei-ji would become one of the two head temples of the Soto school. Dōgen died in 1253. During the Kamakura period, Zen flourished in Japan. The two Zen sects, Rinzai and Sōtō, soon became widespread, with the Rinzai sect mainly centered in the cities and Sōtō in the provinces. Zen was fortunate in obtaining the patronage of the *bakufu* (幕府), the newly established military regime.

From the middle of the twelfth century, there was an increase in cultural exchange between Japan and Song China. The regular back-and-forth movement of Japanese and Chinese monks during the Kamakura period gave the flourishing Chan Buddhism of the Song period entry into Japan. In addition to profound religious insights, Japanese pilgrims returned from China with artistic materials, ritual objects, paintings, statues of Buddhist deities and Buddhist iconographical drawings, including Zen ink paintings, which were introduced to Japan at the end of the thirteenth century. Mu Qi (c. 1210–1270; Jp. Mokkei 牧谿), the famous Chinese master whose works were brought to Japan, together with the Japanese Zen masters Mokuan

Reien 黙庵靈淵 (d. 1345) and Kaō 可翁 (d. 1345), are some of the prominent monk-painters during the Kamakura and the early Muromachi periods.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, during the Kamakura period, centuries of evolution in Chinese ink painting were adopted in a relatively short time. In this respect the Kamakura period should be seen as a transitional period, while from the perspective of the interaction between Zen and ink painting it should be regarded as the first stage of this bond in Japan. There were two types of ink painters in Zen temples: the amateur monk-painters who cultivated painting as part of their religious life, and professional specialist painters who happened to be Zen monks, similar to the original types of painters in the Chinese Chan tradition described above.

The main subjects treated during this stage were a large number of Chinsō (portraits of Zen masters), Dōshakuga 道釈画 (paintings of Daoist and Buddhist figures who were taken as Zen models), and bird-and-flower paintings. Most of the ink paintings brought from China were initially installed in Zen temples, but many of these masterpieces were also kept in the shogunal collections.

With the passage of time the influence of the Zen sect increased, and it developed an organization of its own. After the beginning of the fourteenth century the Five Mountains (*gozan* 五山) system, a formal ranking of Zen temples, was established. The shogun and the upper level of the warrior class selected Zen as their ideology for political purposes, and the *gozan* system served as a means of strengthening the political and economic power of the central government. The entire system was under the control of the state and a special office for Zen temples was established.<sup>6</sup>

Ink paintings, as well, became more and more fashionable. Ink painting during the first half of the Muromachi period can be characterized by the artists' increased specialization, with landscapes as their main theme. By the end of the fourteenth or the beginning of the fifteenth century, ateliers began to be established in Zen temples. In some of the main temples these painting schools were led by priests who were employed as professional painters, receiving stipends from the shogun. Examples of such figures are Josetsu 如拙 (1394–1428) and his successor Shūbun 周文 (d. c. 1450) who



worked at Shōkokuji 相国寺, a very high-ranking temple in Kyoto that had strong links with the shogunate. Other temples, like Tōfukuji 東福寺 and Daitokuji 大徳寺, also had schools of painting.<sup>7</sup>

One of the main art forms of this period was Shigajiku 詩画軸 (lit. poetry and painting scroll), which developed mainly in the hands of Zen monks. Landscape paintings, a popular theme during this period, are to be found in the large-scale sliding door (*fusuma* 襖) and screen paintings (*byōbu* 屏風), which exhibit a use of professional techniques.<sup>8</sup>

With the appearance of ateliers, Zen painting entered a new phase in which many of the artists became professional, devoting most of their time to producing works of art. The close relationship with the shogun, and the fact that the painters received stipends from him, to a large extent caused a withdrawal from the original Zen context of ink painting. The life of Sesshū Tōyō 雪舟等楊 (1420–1506), a prominent painter from the second half of the Muromachi period, illustrates this shift towards professionalism.

Sesshū, who was Shūbun's student, differed both from the amateur painter-monks of the earlier period and from the professional painter-monks of the early fifteenth century. During his twenties and thirties he practiced Zen at Shōkokuji temple in Kyoto. By his forties he had already left Kyoto to establish a studio in the Yamaguchi region. Although during this period it was rare for a Japanese painter to go to China in search of Chinese art, in 1468 Sesshū travelled to China, where, besides undertaking further practice in Zen discipline, he sought training in Chinese painting. He studied under a number of famous Chinese painters in order to learn new techniques. At the age of fifty, he returned to his studio in Japan where he stayed till the end of his life.<sup>9</sup>

The leadership of the central academy, which had been held by the Zen monks Josetsu and Shūbun, was now turned over to lay painters. Therefore, Sesshū's existence as a kind of outsider working on his own, independently, was even more significant. Sesshū, whose primary subject was landscape, was influenced by Shūbun but developed his own personal and individual artistic style without being affected by the traditional academic style of the day.

Several new schools of painting, inspired by the style of Sesshū, emerged in the second half of the Muromachi period, all still within the cultural sphere of the Zen temples. Sesshū's training as a monk no doubt influenced his art as well, but his individual consciousness as an artist reached such heights that he represented a new trend towards artistic independence and a move away from religious paintings to purely aesthetic ones. This should perhaps be seen as part of a general process where ink painting gradually became a form of art intended for aesthetic appreciation alone, outside of the religious context.

By the end of the Muromachi period, Zen priests like Josetsu and Shūbun no longer held exclusive control of the central painting academy. Many other artists who influenced the cultural life of the court surrounded the shogun. The Ami school, for example, centering around three professional painters, No-ami 能阿弥 (1397–1471), Gei-ami 芸阿弥 (1431–1485) and Sō-ami 相阿弥 (c. 1455–1525), achieved a status equal to that of the painters of the Shōkokuji tradition. This school, along with a general trend of the time, played a role in the drift of the academy away from the influence of Zen on the paintings. The character of the academy had shifted from one dominated by Zen monks to one controlled by professional painters who followed the tastes of the military rulers. Another provincial painter whose paintings manifested Zen ideas was Sesson 雪村 (1504–1589), one of the few painters who were also monks during this period. His individual Zen-informed art, however, stands apart from the general trends of the academic mannerism of the time.<sup>[10](#)</sup>

Up to the late Momoyama and early Edo periods, there existed a climate of factionalism among the painting schools of the different regions. Only with the beginning of the Edo period were they brought together, with the creation of a central authority under the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 (1542–1616). Until then, these local schools developed independent styles attuned to their own particular regions. Individual artists produced works with a realistic attitude, not by merely absorbing Song and Yuan Chinese styles, but by creating styles of their own.

# Zen Buddhism, Art and Zen Paintings During the Edo Period (Seventeenth Century–Nineteenth Century)

The Edo period, which began with Tokugawa Ieyasu's victory at Sekigahara in 1600, was a period lasting for over two hundred and fifty years during which Japan enjoyed national peace and stability after more than a century of war and turmoil. At the same time, the Tokugawa government is often described as harsh and oppressive. The government ruled with strict centralization, rigid rules and restrictions; the country was closed to foreign influence (*sakoku* 鎖国, lit. national seclusion) and society was divided into four classes: the samurai, who were the highest class, the peasants, the craftsmen, and the lowest class—the merchants.<sup>[11](#)</sup>

An example of these new laws is a set of laws for Buddhist institutions, which intervened in the internal affairs of the temples. During the Edo period, Buddhism, which been the dominant philosophical system for centuries, fell from its position of dominance and was replaced by Chinese Neo-Confucianism. Buddhist temples were registered and rearranged under main temples (*honji* 本寺) and branch temples (*matsuji* 末寺), and families were required to register their names at a Buddhist temple with a specific Buddhist sect. Neo-Confucianism became the dominant ideology of the Edo period; it attracted the leadership, which pursued Confucian learning, and it influenced the lifestyle of Japanese society.<sup>[12](#)</sup>

The new situation affected Zen Buddhism as well, as the political significance and the influence of Zen on the government in previous periods diminished and the Five Mountain system, the formal ranking of Zen temples, died out. At the same time, Buddhism and Zen Buddhism survived; the Zen schools, which by then were deeply rooted in Japanese culture, were well-regulated during the Edo period.

Naturally, the establishment of the Tokugawa government affected the Japanese artistic world. Patronage was no longer given to Zen painters or to

semi-professional artists at temples as it had been during the Muromachi period; instead, large-scale commissions were given to professional ateliers such as the Kano 狩野 school. The Kanō family, which maintained close connections with the military rulers of Japan from the late Muromachi period onwards, was established during the Edo period as the government's academy. In 1617, when Kanō Tanyū 狩野探幽 (1602–1674) was only fifteen, he was named official painter to the shogunate. The Kanō family, which had originally lived in the old capital of Kyoto, gradually moved to Edo. They had been given the official designation of painters of the inner court (*oku-esshi* 奥絵師) and by the end of the seventeenth century members of the family founded the four Kanō sub-schools.

The Kanō school set the artistic standards of this period, according to which the works of other schools were judged. Basic principles as guidelines for paintings were written by one of Tanyu's brothers. In these detailed Secret Guidelines for the Art of Painting (*Gadō Yōketsu*) the formalities, styles, methods, and manners of the handling and movement of the brush, and even the quality of the paper and ink, were regulated. All those who identified themselves with the Kanō school had to follow these standards. Most artists began by studying in the Kanō school, and only those who refused to sacrifice their individual styles dissociated themselves and founded their own studios.<sup>13</sup>

The Kanō school thus devoted itself primarily to creating works that reflected the policies and ideals of the rulers. The works synthesized Chinese styles with Japanese decorative requirements. Although ink painting was still in use, due to the fact that Zen Buddhism was no longer popular with the Tokugawa rulers, the Kanō painters and other schools chiefly depicted secular themes, executed in large-scale formats with an extensive use of gold and color.

These circumstances during this third phase led to an interesting, perhaps surprising, new evolution *inside* the Zen temples and among Zen monks, a phase where the bond between ink painting and Zen was recreated. Despite, or perhaps because of, the new circumstances, a revival of Zen paintings flourished in the temples. Precisely because Zen monks were relieved of the

support and patronage of the government, they were free to create their own artworks, rather than painting for the shogun. Hence, the specific historical conditions that developed during the Edo period prepared the ground for greater freedom of creation. This new tradition, Zenga, can be regarded as a revival of the past—i.e. a form of artwork that was similar to the first Zen paintings to arrive in Japan. Once again the creations sprang from individual religious practice: monk-painters who had devoted themselves to the religious life expressed their insights visually through paintings.<sup>14</sup>

In a departure from the landscape scenes of Muromachi, ink painting, poems, Zen stories and Zen ideas were often integrated into the works, similar to the early paintings of the Kamakura and early Muromachi periods, such as the work of Mokkei, Mokuan Reien and Kaō. At the same time, as a phenomenon of the Edo period, Zenga differ from these earlier Zen paintings; the details and elaborations of technical skill were replaced with liberated brushstrokes, looseness and freedom of expression.<sup>15</sup>

Although a discussion of ink paintings by professional painters outside Zen temples during the Edo period is beyond the scope of this work, it is important here to clarify some points. The original bond between Zen Buddhism and ink painting beyond the bounds of Zen temples did not vanish completely during the Edo period. This tradition was never forgotten, and although new styles and forms of art were dominant, many professional painters created some works in ink, including Zen themes and with reference to the great masters of the past.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, free expression and playfulness are obviously not the exclusive property of Zen monk-painters such as Hakuin and Sengai. There were some individualists, at times eccentric professional Edo painters "whose personalities and activities transcend the boundaries of normal behavior."<sup>17</sup> My focus however is on the recreation of Zen paintings *inside* Zen temples, by amateur painters who did not get the government's support and were primarily Zen monks who devoted themselves to Zen religious life.

The creation of Zenga during the Edo period began in the Kyoto area. The first Zenga of this time emerged at Daitokuji. Takuan Sōhō 沢庵宗彭 (1573–1645), who became the abbot of Daitokuji temple in 1609, was an important

Zenga painters of the early seventeenth century. However, monks from the countryside created Zenga as well. Fūgai Ekun 風外慧薫 (1568–1654), for example, did not follow the tradition of residing in a temple. After a year of Zen training under the Soto Zen sect, he spent many years wandering about living in caves, and eventually settled in a hut in a mountain village. It is said that when Fūgai needed rice he would draw an ink painting and hang it outside his cave, and the local farmers would leave rice for him and take the painting. Many of his paintings still remain in local village houses. Unlike most Zenga monk painters, Fūgai did not have students, but his teachings are found in his poetry, calligraphy and paintings.<sup>18</sup>

Other Zenga painters during the Edo period—such as Suiō Genro 遂翁 元廬 (1717–1789), Reigen Etō 靈源慧桃 (1721–1785) and Torei Enji 東嶺円慈 (1721–1792) – continued the tradition of Zenga and were influenced primarily by one of the most influential monk-painters of the time, Hakuin Ekaku 白隠慧鶴 (1685–1768). At the same time they developed their own individual expression and style.<sup>19</sup>

Hakuin and the later monk-painter Sengai Gibon (1750–1837) are considered to be the two most prominent monk-painters during the Edo period. Sixty-five years separate the two monk-painters. Sengai was aged eighteen when Hakuin died; hence they most probably never met each other. At the same time, they had much in common: they both belonged to the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism; both were primarily monks, not professional artists; both became head priests of famous Zen temples, and both began their true painting period at an advanced age, while in their sixties. Above all, Hakuin and Sengai's works provide the best representation of the characteristics of the revival of Zen paintings during the Edo period.

The original bond between ink painting and Zen, as we saw, went through an interesting process of evolution and change throughout history, resulting in a continual back-and-forth between amateurism and professionalism. As shown above, the tendency towards professionalization began as early as the Kamakura and early Muromachi periods, escalated during the Muromachi and Momoyama periods and reached its peak during the Edo period. This bond, which began with creation within the Zen



temples, spread beyond them and was eventually adopted by secular professional painters distant from Zen context. During the Edo period Zen lost its political power and therefore received less support from the government, a circumstance that led to a phase where the bond between ink painting and Zen was re-created. This re-creation is characterized by freedom of expression — a type of freedom that is better understood in light of the historical evolution of the bond between ink paintings and Zen Buddhism and against the background of the artistic landscape of the Edo period in which it developed.

## Hakuin and Sengai: Following a Religious Path

In the following section I will recount the biographies of the monk-painters Hakuin Ekaku and Sengai Gibon. Although both Hakuin and Sengai at some point of their lives were engaged in artistic activity, they were first of all monks, and from a young age they devoted themselves to the religious path. While details of biographical information related to their artistic activity will be integrated and analyzed in the next chapters, the focus in this section will be mainly on their Zen religious life, including stories that can shed light on their personalities.

### Hakuin Ekaku

Although the focus of this book is Hakuin's artwork, it is important to recognize the significant role Hakuin played as a reviver of Zen Buddhism in eighteenth-century Japan. One of Hakuin's great achievements was the development of the *kōan* system and in particular the priority given to it



compared with other practices. The kōan 公案, which originated in China, is a method leading to enlightenment via an account of a Zen master's actions or statements, including questions and answers. The term kōan (Ch. *gong'an*, lit. "public cases") "refers to enigmatic and often shocking spiritual expressions based on dialogical encounters between masters and disciples that were used as pedagogical tools for religious training in the Zen (C. Ch'an) Buddhist tradition."<sup>20</sup> Hakuin especially stressed the power of doubt produced by the kōan, regarding this doubt as necessary for the experience of enlightenment. One of the kōans that Hakuin discovered on his own and assigned to his disciples is "the sound of one hand clapping" (*Sekishu no onjō* 隻手の音声), which he particularly praised for the high quality of the state of enlightenment attained through practicing it. Hakuin also had an important role in spreading Rinzai Zen among the common people. He taught Zen to anybody who sought it, regardless of their social background.

Most of the information we have on Hakuin's life is based on two main sources: his biography, *A Chronological Biography of Zen Priest Hakuin* (*Hakuin Oshō Nenpu* 白隠和尚年譜), compiled by his disciple Tōrei Enji (1712–1792),<sup>21</sup> and Hakuin's autobiography, called *Wild Ivy* (*Itsumadegusa* 壁生草), which he wrote at the age of eighty-one, two years before his death.<sup>22</sup>

Hakuin's life can be divided roughly into three main periods. The first period lasted from 1685, when he was born, until 1699, when at the age of fifteen he left his home to become a monk at Shōinji 松蔭寺. The second period ran from his first year at Shōinji as a new monk, through his years of pilgrimage that lasted until 1716 (age thirty-two), when he returned to his hometown due to his father's illness and became the abbot of Shōinji. The third period continued through his years in Shōinji as abbot until his death in 1768, at the age of eighty-four.<sup>23</sup>

Hakuin was born to the Nagasawa (長沢) family in the small village of Hara 原, today the city of Numazu 沼津, near the foot of Mount Fuji. He was the youngest son of a merchant.<sup>24</sup> His father, who was born to a samurai family, became the head of the Hara station on the Tōkaidō 東海道, the main road that linked Kyoto and Edo (today's Tokyo). The Hara station

originally belonged to the Nagasawa family, the family of Hakuin's mother, who were devout Nichiren Buddhists. Hakuin's mother used to take him with her to listen to sermons at the local Nichiren temples.<sup>[25](#)</sup>

One famous story from Hakuin's childhood, which he relates in his autobiography, took place when Hakuin was eleven years old.<sup>[26](#)</sup> During one of Hakuin's visits with his mother to a lecture meeting at the local Nichiren temple in Hara, he heard the preaching of a famous priest who was known for his powerful sermons. People came from all over to hear him. "I went with my mother, and we heard him describe in graphic detail the torments in each of the Eight Scorching Hells," Hakuin tells us in his autobiography, "My whole body shook in mortal terror." A few days later, when Hakuin was taking a bath, his mother, who liked to have the water in the tub boiling hot, added more and more wood until "the flames would rush madly up and around, shooting out like angry waves." Remembering the priest's description of the torments inflicted on sinners in hell, Hakuin burst into tears and no one could get him to stop. He got over his fear only after his mother suggested that he worship the deity of Kitano shrine: Tenjin.<sup>[27](#)</sup> Following his mother's suggestion, he hung up a portrait of Tenjin, lit some incense and began to recite the *Tenjin Sutra*. This story shows us the sensitivity of the child Hakuin, who was exposed already from a young age to the Buddhist world and faith.<sup>[28](#)</sup>

From then on Hakuin's desire was to leave home and become a priest. The second period of Hakuin's life began in 1699, at the age of fifteen, when he finally left his home and moved to Shōinji to study under the monk Tanrei 単嶺. He became a monk and was given the name Ekaku 慧鶴, which means "Wise Crane." In 1701, his teacher Tanrei passed away; two years later, in 1703, Hakuin left for his pilgrimage. Even before leaving, however, questions and doubts about the Way started to occur in Hakuin's mind. Once, after reading the *Lotus Sutra*, as described in his biography by Tōrei, "He closed the book with a sigh ... he began to doubt the means employed in Zen's 'special transmission outside the scriptures.'"<sup>[29](#)</sup>

In 1704 Hakuin was informed of his mother's death. Beginning in 1705, and continuing for the next three years, Hakuin travelled to different

temples attending lectures and taking part in special retreats and training sessions. In 1708, at the age of twenty-four, Hakuin experienced his first enlightenment on a trip with some other monks to attend a lecture at Eiganji 英巖寺, in today's Niigata prefecture. Upon arrival, Hakuin went to a local shrine and sat in meditation (*zazen* 座禪) day and night for one week. No one in Eiganji knew where Hakuin was, not even the monks he had come with. "At around midnight on the seventh and final night of my practice, the boom of a bell from a distant temple reached my ears: suddenly, my body and mind dropped completely away." Overwhelmed with joy, Hakuin shouted loudly.<sup>[30](#)</sup>

Through a new monk who became Hakuin's friend at the temple, Hakuin heard of a priest named Shōju Rōjin 正受老人. (1642–1721), "The Old Man of Shōju-an Hermitage." His real name was Dōkyō Etan 道鏡慧端 and Hakuin was eager to visit him. Not long after that, during the same year of 1708, the two monks left for the remote village of Iiyama 飯山, in today's Nagano prefecture, in order to meet Shōju. Hakuin received permission to be admitted as a student and stay at Shōju-an.<sup>[31](#)</sup>

Shōju Rōjin, who recognized that Hakuin was proud and arrogant after experiencing his first enlightenment, was very hard on Hakuin. He assigned him a series of kōans, and each time Hakuin would enter the room for an interview, Tōrei tells us, "Shōju would look at him and say, 'Ahh! You're down inside a hole. A deep, deep hole. It's like peering down at a man at the bottom of a well from the railing of a pavilion.'"<sup>[32](#)</sup>

One day Hakuin went into the village on a begging round, standing outside the gate of a house and totally absorbed in his kōan. From inside the house, a voice yelled out, "Get away from here! Go somewhere else!" "I was so preoccupied," Hakuin tells us,

I didn't even notice it. This must have angered the occupant, because suddenly she appeared flourishing a broom upside down in her hands. She flew at me, flailing wildly, whacking away at my head as if she were bent on dashing my brains out ... I was knocked over and ended heels up on the ground, totally unconscious. I lay there like a dead man.<sup>[33](#)</sup>

When Hakuin opened his eyes he found that the unsolvable kōans he had been working on had now been completely penetrated. He hurried back to the hermitage in an ecstasy of delight. Shōju knew from the look on Hakuin's face what had happened, and gave him a joyous welcome. Hakuin stayed at Shōju-an for eight months. One of Hakuin's realizations under Shōju Rōjin was that he should never remain satisfied with small achievements: "Going forward after your first *satori* and devoting yourself to continued practice—and when the practice bears fruit, to continue on still further."<sup>34</sup>

In 1715, Hakuin decided to look for a remote place where he could devote himself quietly to meditation. He found a small hut up in the mountains of Iwataki 巖滝, in Mino province. He lived there by himself, completely isolated from the world, for over a year, until one day a family servant traced him, finding his way up the mountain and appearing at Hakuin's little hut. Hakuin could not believe his eyes. The servant had come all the way to tell Hakuin about his father's illness. "Reverend priest, while you hide here, enjoying your spiritual exercises like this, Shōinji is without a priest. Besides, your father is very ill — no one can say how much longer he has left. Don't you feel an obligation to return home and repay some of the debt that you owe him?" At the end of 1716, Hakuin returned to Shōinji.<sup>35</sup>

This was the beginning of the third and final period of Hakuin's life. For the next fifty-two years, until his death in 1768, Hakuin lived in Shōinji. In 1717, his father passed away. In 1718, aged thirty-four, Hakuin received the rank of First Monk (*Daiichiza* 第一座) from the Myōshinji 妙心寺 head temple in Kyoto and officially became the abbot of Shōinji. This is also when he adopted the name Hakuin 白隠. Shōinji was in a very dilapidated condition at the time of his return. According to Tōrei, "At night stars shone through the roofs ... It was necessary for the master to wear a waterproof as he moved about the temple attending to his duties." However, as Hakuin looked back at the time he had spent in the mountains of Iwataki, he composed the following poem:

The good times and the hard times too  
Have faded far away;  
I'm so happy now—  
Never will I seek  
Another mountain again.<sup>36</sup>

In 1721, Hakuin's great teacher Shōju Rōjin died. During his first years as abbot at Shōinji, Hakuin concentrated on giving lectures and running the temple affairs. In 1726, one night while Hakuin (then aged forty-two) was reading the *Lotus Sutra*, from outside came the chirp of a cricket. The instant the sound reached Hakuin's ears, "He suddenly became one with the deep principle of the *Lotus*. The doubts and uncertainties that had arisen at the beginning of his religious quest and had remained with him ever since dissolved all at once and ceased to exist." This event was a turning point in Hakuin's life. From then on he dedicated himself to the transmission of all he had learned for the first forty years of his life, passing those teachings on to others.<sup>37</sup>

Hakuin continued to give lectures on different Zen texts at the temple and occasionally at the residences of laypeople. The number of monks residing at the temple grew every year, and in 1736 the construction of a new Monk's Hall was completed. In 1737, for the first time, Hakuin (by now aged fifty-three) agreed to give a lecture in another temple where over 200 people attended.<sup>38</sup> In 1740, over 400 people attended a lecture he gave at Shōinji. This lecture, writes Tōrei, "established the master's reputation as the foremost Zen teacher in the land." Monks from all over the country began to come to Shōinji. "They stayed in lodgings spread over a radius of three or four leagues around Shōinji. The surrounding woods and hills were transformed into a great practice center."<sup>39</sup>

Two of Hakuin's chief disciples and heirs began their study under him during this period: Tōrei Enji (1712–1792)<sup>40</sup> in 1743, and Suiō Genro 遂翁元廬 (1717–1789) in 1746. Tōrei would be appointed as Hakuin's successor as the abbot of Ryūtakuji 龍沢寺, a temple Hakuin had himself constructed. Suiō would become the abbot of Shōinji after Hakuin's retirement in 1764.<sup>41</sup> Hakuin continued giving lectures at Shōinji and other temples until the last

years of his life. Invitations came from other temples and laypeople around the country asking Hakuin to conduct lectures. From his sixties on, Hakuin turned more and more to writing, painting, and calligraphy. Many of Hakuin's writings were printed during his lifetime, some were published by his disciples after his death, and others remained in manuscript form until the publication of Hakuin's collected works.<sup>[42](#)</sup>

During his eighties, signs of declining health began to appear. In 1764, aged eighty, Hakuin retired as abbot of Shōinji, turning the position over to Suiō; yet despite his weakness, he continued to give lectures. In 1768, at the age of eighty-four, Hakuin died. "The master was sleeping very peacefully, lying on his right side. He made a single groan, 'UNNN!' and passed away,"<sup>[43](#)</sup>

## Sengai Gibon

Although Sengai is known more for his paintings, he was first of all a Zen monk and served as abbot of the important Shōfukuji 聖福寺 temple for more than twenty years. Shōfukuji was the first Zen temple to be built in Japan, having been founded in 1195 by Myōan Eisai, as noted above. Six centuries after it was first established, Sengai became the 123rd abbot of the temple. To this day there is a wooden board hung at the top of the main gate of the temple saying "Japan's first Zen temple" (*Fasō saisho zen kutsu* 扶桑最初禅窟), a sentence Sengai wrote in many of his paintings as part of his signature.<sup>[44](#)</sup>

Unlike Hakuin, in Sengai's case we do not have a written autobiography or biography. The two most important sources for Sengai's writings, from which we can also gather information on his life, are *The Manuscripts of Priest Sengai* (*Sengai oshō ikō* 仙厓和尚遺稿), compiled by Kuramitsu Daigu 倉光大愚 in 1931, which includes poems, inscriptions, prose and letters written by Sengai. The other source is a book by Nakayama Kiichirō 中山喜一郎, published in 1992, which includes most of the writings



compiled by Kuramitsu together with two additional chapters on Sengai's life and art.<sup>[45](#)</sup>

Sengai's life can be divided roughly into two main periods: the first period lasted from 1750, the year of his birth, until 1789 when he moved to Kyushu to become the head monk of Shōfukuji in Hakata city. The second period begins with his years in Hakata and continues until his death in 1837, at the age of eighty-eight.

Nothing written by Sengai or by his disciples concerning his hometown, parents or childhood is extant; hence, the information we have is not always clear. Nevertheless, it is commonly agreed that Sengai was born in 1750 to a poor family of farmers, the second son of Itō Jinpachi 井藤甚八, in Mino 美濃 province, in the south central part of today's Gifu prefecture.<sup>[46](#)</sup>

In 1760, at the age of eleven, Sengai left his house and became a monk, probably due to his family's poverty. He studied under the guidance of Kūin Enkyo 空印円虚 (1704–1787) at Seitaiji 清泰寺, not far from his birth place—present-day Mino City. Sengai, who received his name Gibon 義梵 during this period, could study under Kūin for only a few years, due to the fact that Kūin retired and handed over his position to one of his disciples.<sup>[47](#)</sup>

In 1768, at the age of nineteen, Sengai left for his first pilgrimage. He arrived at Tōkian 東輝庵 temple, near present-day Yokohama, and started his training under the guidance of Gessen Zenne 月船禅慧 (1702–1781). Sengai studied under Gessen for thirteen years until the latter's death in June 1781. Aside from some anecdotes about Sengai during this period, we have no information concerning these years at Tōkian. After Gessen's death Sengai, then aged thirty-two, left for his second pilgrimage.<sup>[48](#)</sup>

This second pilgrimage continued for seven years until Sengai's arrival in 1788, at the age of thirty-nine, at Shōfukuji temple in Hakata city on Kyushu. A lack of information concerning Sengai's second pilgrimage leaves us again with some unclear matters. Sengai's own diary of this trip, which literally translates as "Moving clouds flowing water record" (*Kō-un-ryū-sui-ki* 行雲流水記), is now lost. Nevertheless, we can gather some information through Sengai's other writings and poems.<sup>[49](#)</sup>

Some anecdotes concerning these seven years of pilgrimage have survived. One of them tells us about Sengai's return to his hometown in Mino province. As we saw above, at the age of eleven Sengai had already left home. Then, at the age of nineteen, he left Mino to begin his pilgrimage, ending up in far-off Yokohama. Hence, Sengai's connection to his birthplace seems to be rather loose. One anecdote tells us that at the age of thirty-two, after Gessen's death, Sengai returned to Mino. He went back to Seitaiji, the temple where he first started his Zen training, with a letter of recommendation that he become the abbot of the temple. However, because of Sengai's origin, i.e. coming from a farmer's family, he was refused.

Another anecdote tells us that Sengai was expelled from Mino as a result of his criticism of the clan government (*han* 藩 there. After that, according to the story, Sengai composed a short poem (*tanka* 短歌 that includes some hints concerning his attitude towards his hometown: "Opening a *karakasa*/ Even if it rains down from the skies/ Mino is unnecessary." A *karakasa* is a Japanese umbrella made of bamboo and paper. Sengai plays on the term "mino," which means a straw raincoat (*mino* 蓑), but is at the same time a homophone for the name of his birthplace, Mino 美濃. In the poem he employs the Chinese character of *mino* 蓑 which means a straw raincoat.<sup>50</sup>

While the historical veracity of these two anecdotes remains uncertain, it is clear that Sengai was not strongly connected to his birthplace; moreover, since the existing records of Sengai's words make no mention of the period of his birthplace, childhood, youth, or Seitaiji temple, "we can only conjecture that there may have been some sense of unease connected with these periods of his life," as Furuta comments.<sup>51</sup>

The turning point for Sengai came in winter 1787, at the age of thirty-eight, while he was continuing his pilgrimage. Following a recommendation from Myōshinji, the headquarters of the Myōshinji school of Rinzai Zen, he was invited by Shōfukuji temple in Hakata, Kyushu to study under the 122nd abbot of the temple, Bankoku Shōteki 盤谷紹適 (d. 1792). Thus, in the following spring, Sengai, who was probably staying in Kyoto at the time, moved to Kyushu.



The second period of Sengai's life began in 1789, at the age of thirty-nine, when he became the 123rd abbot of Shōfukuji.<sup>52</sup> Sengai served in this position for more than twenty years until he resigned at the age of sixty-two. After his resignation, in 1812, he moved out to the sub-temple of Genjūan 幻住庵 where he remained until the end of his life. He died at the age of eighty-eight.

In 1798, the 600th anniversary of the death of the Shogun MinamotoYoritomo 源頼朝 (1147–1199), who supported the foundation of Shōfukuji at the time, was celebrated at Shōfukuji. Sengai, then aged forty-nine, was offered the "purple robe" in a ceremony where he officially became qualified as an abbot by the head temple Myōshinji. Sengai, however, refused the honor. In fact, Sengai refused the "purple robe" three times in his life; the second time was he was fifty-three and the third when he was eighty-six. Sengai, it seems, was little concerned with matters of rank or pride. Being the abbot of the first Zen temple established in Japan was already a great honor for him.<sup>53</sup>

Ten years after becoming the abbot of Shōfukuji, Sengai concentrated his efforts on reconstructing the temple. He aimed at two complexes of buildings: the Sōdō 僧堂 or Zendō 禅堂, which is the monks' residence, and the Hōjō which is the abbot's quarters. The reconstruction of the Sōdō started in 1800 (when Sengai was aged fifty-one) and ended two years later. Sengai reconstructed it to be the meditation hall (*zendō*) of the temple. In 1803, when Sengai refused the offer of the "purple robe" for the second time, he actually excused himself on the grounds of illness. According to Nakayama, however, the remains of the money that had been given to him by the government for his trip to Myōshinji were used for the purposes of reconstructing the Hōjō, the abbot's quarters. The reconstruction of the Hōjō started in 1808; however, the money was still insufficient and to Sengai's disappointment, it was not completed before his death.<sup>54</sup>

Another important matter during this period is related to Sengai's disciple Tange Tōi 湛元等夷. In 1805, Sengai presented a report to the clan government on his five new students, among whom was Tange Tōi.<sup>55</sup> One of the best known anecdotes about Sengai, and one that can teach us

something about Sengai's personality, is related to this student. Tangen, according to the anecdote, used to sneak out of the temple at nights to enjoy the local district's nightlife. He would climb over the wall by stepping on a rock. When Sengai discovered this, he went there one night, sat on the rock in meditation (*zazen* 座禅) and waited for his student to return. Tangen came back in a good mood, climbed the wall and was trying to reach the rock with his leg — but instead of a rock he touched something else that moved under his weight. Surprised, he was unable to conceive what living thing he had stepped on; he slipped, fell and fled in the darkness straight to his bed. The next morning there was an uproar inside Shōfukuji, connected with a rumor that Sengai was injured. Trainees who visited Sengai saw he had a bump on his head, probably from Tangen's wooden clogs (*geta* 下駄). While trying to cool their teacher's head, they asked Sengai how on earth he had hurt himself. Sengai replied that, since he was no longer young, while taking care of some matters outside in the garden he had fallen and hit his head. Tangen, who was not scolded by Sengai and whose name was not even mentioned, turned pale and from that time onwards avoided wine and women.<sup>[56](#)</sup>

Twenty-three years had passed from the time Sengai became the abbot of Shōfukuji when, in 1811, at the age of sixty-two, he retired. There were several events prior to Sengai's retirement that may have led to this decision. In 1810 Tangen, who was regarded as a possible successor to Sengai, returned to Shōfukuji after training at the head temple Myōshinji in Kyoto. In May 1811, Sengai's request for money for the reconstruction of the Hōjō was refused by the clan government. In September of the same year, Sengai submitted a retirement letter to the clan government. The refusal of the clan government to support the completion of the Hōjō, Nakayama suggests, may have affected Sengai's decision to retire.<sup>[57](#)</sup>

In October 1811, Sengai's student Tangen Tōi became the 124th abbot of Shōfukuji. On New Year's Day of the following year Sengai moved to his retirement place at Kyohakuin 虚白院, located inside Genjūan 幻住庵, both nearby sub-temples of Shōfukuji. Sengai's next twenty-six years were busy with teaching, traveling, receiving visits from people of all social classes and

making many different acquaintances. Retirement gave him the time to write poems, draw calligraphy and paint. Sengai also visited many places during this period. In 1823, he returned to Seitaiji in Mino province, where he had studied under Kūin Enkyo, in order to attend a lecture. In 1825, Sengai returned to Kyoto to attend a ceremony marking the seventh anniversary of the death of his old master at Tōkian, Seisetsu Shūcho.<sup>58</sup>

In Sengai's late years, a very regrettable event occurred. In 1836, Tangen Tōi was exiled to Ōshima Island by the local clan government. Tangen had displeased the clan government and was accordingly dismissed from his job in Shōfukuji. He was ordered to show repentance; however, without expressing regret for what had happened, he left for Kyoto without the clan government's permission. In response, Tangen was ordered to return and was then exiled to Ōshima Island. As a result, Sengai, at the age of eighty-six, was compelled to return for the second time to Shōfukuji, as the 125th abbot of the temple. This sad event must have affected Sengai. In September of the following year (1837), Sengai became ill, and in early October he sent a letter to the clan government asking for permission to retire. Sengai died at the age of eighty-eight in October 1837.

We have seen that both Hakuin and Sengai devoted themselves primarily to the religious life: they served as monks and became abbots of famous Zen temples. Although both were engaged in artistic activity at some point of their lives, neither were professional artists and both began their true painting period only late in life. They were first of all monks, and from an early age they devoted themselves to the religious path. What was, then, the role of paintings in their lives? Or in other words, what is the place of paintings and art for both, given that most of their painting was done late in life? And above all, is there any relation between the expression of freedom in their artwork and the fact that art became significant only late in their lives? The next chapter of this book will deal with some of these questions.

## Notes

- [1](#) Zen Buddhism originated in China; its beginnings, however, are unclear. According to the legend, Chan (Jp. Zen) was brought to China by Bodhidharma, the prince from the south of India who came to China at the beginning of the sixth century, crossed the Yangtze on a reed, and spent nine years in meditation in front of a wall at the Shaolin temple, a monastery in Northern Wei province. He is considered to be the first patriarch of Zen Buddhism.
- [2](#) For more on Chinese ink paintings see Fontein and Hickman, *Zen Painting and Calligraphy*, xxi; xxiv-xxxii, see also Ford, "Introduction," 13-27.
- [3](#) The third major Zen sect, known as Ōbaku-shu (黄檗宗), did not arrive in Japan until around the middle of the seventeenth century. For more see Baroni, *Obaku Zen*.
- [4](#) Eisai went to China twice, first in 1168 for about six months, and then in 1187, for four years.
- [5](#) For more on this period see Lippit, "Awakenings," 34-52.
- [6](#) More on this period and the gozan system see Parker, *Zen Buddhist Landscape*.
- [7](#) On Daitokuji see Levine, *Daitokuji: The Visual Cultures of a Zen Monastery*.
- [8](#) On Shigajiku see Parker, *Zen Buddhist Landscape Arts*.
- [9](#) For a recent work on Sesshū see: Lippit, "Of Modes and Manners in Japanese Ink Painting," 50-77.
- [10](#) For more on Sesson see Tanaka, *Japanese Ink Painting*, 144-7.
- [11](#) The Edo period is named after the city of Edo (present-day Tokyo), which became the capital under Tokugawa Ieyasu. For more on the centralization of the Edo period, mostly the *scmkin kōtai* policy, see chapter 5 of this book. For more on the Edo culture and society see Nishiyama, *Edo Culture*. See also Nakane and Shinzaburō, *Tokugawa Japan*.
- [12](#) The new Buddhist regulations were called the *Shoshū jiin hatto*. For more on Buddhism during the Edo period see De Bary, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, vol. 2 pt. 1, 432-58.
- [13](#) For recent discussions on the school of Kanō during the Edo period see Lippit, *Painting of the Realm*, and Screech, *Obtaining Images*, 135-64. See also Guth,

*Japanese art*, 95–8. On the Kanō school's regulations see Sasaki, "The Era of the Kanō school," 647–56.

[14](#) See Addiss, "The Revival of Zen Painting," 50–61; Stevens, "Visual Sermons," 203–7; Addiss, *Art of Zen*, 9–15; Stevens, "The Appreciation of Zen Art," 68–81. See also Kawai, "Hakuin and Zenga Painting," 119–37. On collecting Zenga today see Sweet, "Collecting the Art of Zen," 14–27.

[15](#) See also Addiss, *Art of Zen*, 9–15.

[16](#) Hasegawa Touhaku 長谷川等伯 (1539–1610) is an early example of a painter during the Momoyama period. Painters such as Soga Shōhaku 曾我蕭白 (1730–1781) and his work of "Kanzan and Jittoku," Ogata Korin 尾形光琳 (1658–1716) and his work of "Hotei Kicking a Ball" are some examples from the Edo period.

[17](#) Itō Jakuchū 伊藤 若冲 (1716–1800), Soga Shohaku and Nagasawa Rosetsu 長沢 芦雪 (1754–1799) among others, are prominent examples. See Guth, *Japanese art*, 81–4. See also Ulak, "Three Eccentrics," 103–18.

[18](#) For more on Fūgai see Addiss, *Art of Zen*, 44–58.

[19](#) For further reading on these three painters see Addiss, *Art of Zen*, 130–51; On Hakuin's influence beyond the Zen Rinzai sect see pp. 152–75; On Nantembō Tōjū (1839–1925) see pp. 186–203. See also the exhibition catalogue—Yamashita, *Zenga*.

[20](#) Heine and Wright, *Kōan: Texts and Contexts*, 3. For more on the transformation the kōan underwent during the Edo period see Mohr, "Emerging from Nonduality," 244–79.

[21](#) A Japanese edition by Katō Shōshun of the biography was published in 1985; in English a translation by Norman Waddell appeared in the journal *The Eastern Buddhist* in 1994; see bibliography.

[22](#) A Japanese edition of a collection of Hakuin's complete work was published by Yoshizawa Katsuhiko in 1999. An English translation by Norman Waddell, also from 1999, is called *Wild Ivy*; see bibliography. Another version of Hakuin's autobiography is called *Goose Grass* (*Yameugura* 八重葎).

[23](#) Ages have been calculated according to the traditional Japanese way, called *kazoedoshi* 数え年, i.e. at birth, a child is already one year old. The pilgrimage or

*angya* 行脚 in Japanese means: "To go on a walking tour throughout the country in search of a true Zen master" (*Japanese-English Zen Buddhist Dictionary*, 8).

[24](#) The Nagasawa family had five children, three boys and two girls. Hakuin or Iwajiro, as his childhood name, was the youngest. The surname of Hakuin's father was originally Sugiyama 杉山; he took his wife's surname, Nagasawa, after their marriage.

[25](#) For more on the fifty-three stations of the Tōkaidō see chapter 5.

[26](#) See Waddell, "A Chronological Biography," no. 1, 102–4.

[27](#) Tenjin 天神 (lit. "heavenly god") is the name given to the early Heian-period scholar Sugawara Michizane 菅原道真 (845–903) after his posthumous deification. Michizane died an untimely death while in exile from Kyoto due to a false accusation. He is the principle deity of Kitano shrine in Kyoto, and later came to be worshipped throughout the country as the *kami* of scholars and letters.

[28](#) For more on this story see Waddell, *Wild Ivy*, 8–17.

[29](#) The quotation is taken from Waddell, "A Chronological Biography," no. 1, 108. The *Lotus Sutra* (*Hokkekyō* 法華經) is one of the most important documents of Mahayana Buddhism. The sutra claims to consist of twenty-eight chapters of the historical Buddha's preachings. See also Watson, *The Lotus Sutra*.

[30](#) Waddell, *Wild Ivy*, 26.

[31](#) The monk who introduced Hakuin to Shōju Rōjin was Sōkaku 宗格, who studied under Shōju Rōjin before befriending Hakuin. For more on Hakuin's year at Eiganji, see Waddell, *Wild Ivy*, 26–30.

[32](#) Waddell, "A Chronological Biography," no. 1, 123.

[33](#) See Waddell, *Wild Ivy*, 33–4.

[34](#) See Waddell, *Wild Ivy*, 33–4. *Satori* 悟り is a term for Zen enlightenment.

[35](#) Waddell, *Wild Ivy*, 147.

[36](#) Waddell, "A Chronological Biography" no. 1, 148–9. The poem in modern Japanese can be found in Tōrei Enji, *Hakuin Oshō Nenpu*, 158.

- [37](#) See also Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 168, and Waddell, "A Chronological Biography," no. 1, 154.
- [38](#) Rinzaiji 臨濟寺 in Izu 伊豆 province (now Shizuoka prefecture).
- [39](#) Waddell, "A Chronological Biography," no. 2, 88–9.
- [40](#) The compiler of the Chronological Biography of Hakuin (*Hakuin Oshō Nenpu*); see above.
- [41](#) Ryūtakuji is located in Mishima, Izu province.
- [42](#) For a collection of his work in Japanese see Yoshizawa, *Hakuin Zenji Hōgo Zenshū*. For translations into English see works by Norman Waddell, Philip Yampolsky and R.D.M Show; see the bibliography for more details.
- [43](#) Waddell, "A Chronological Biography," no. 2, 126.
- [44](#) The temple belongs to the Myōshinji School of the Rinzai Zen sect; the sentence was written by the emperor of the time, Gotoba 後鳥羽 (1180–1239). For more on Eisai, see above.
- [45](#) For full details of these two books see the bibliography. Much of the information on Sengai's life here is based on Nakayama Kiichirō's book.
- [46](#) Suzuki talks about Sengai as the third child in the family; however, according to other scholars who base their information on the registry of Eishōji 永昌寺 temple, to which the Itō family belonged, Sengai was born in 1750 and had an older brother.
- [47](#) Kūin, who studied under Kogetsu Zensai 古月禅材 (1667–1751) was a well-known monk in the district. See Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 175 and Nakayama, *Sengai—sono shōgai to geijutsu*, 22; 24.
- [48](#) Gessen Zenne also studied under Kogetsu Zensai, which means that both Kūin and Gessen belonged to the Kogetsu line; see Nakayama, *Sengai—sono shōgai to geijutsu*, 26. The second pilgrimage is commonly called in Japanese *shokoku angya* 諸国行脚, which means the pilgrimage of the various countries (areas).
- [49](#) It is clear that during the second pilgrimage, Sengai managed to visit various places in Japan, such as Kyoto, Shiga, Gifu, the Tōkai district, Edo, Fukushima, and Miyagi; see Nakayama, *Sengai—sono shōgai to geijutsu*, 29.



- [50](#) *Karakasa o hirogetemireba ante ga shita tatoe furutomo Mino wa tanomaji* から傘を広げてみれば天が下たとへ降るとも蓑(美濃)はたのまじ; my translation. For an alternative English translation see Addiss, *Art of Zen*, p. 178; See also Nakayama, *Sengai—sono shōgai to geijutsu*, p. 28; Sato, Ishigami and Muranaka, *Sengai*, p. 23. After Sengai left Seitaiji, according to the anecdote, he returned to Tōkian and completed his training under the master Seisetsu Shūcho 誠拙周樗 (1745–1820), who had been his senior during the previous period at Tōkian.
- [51](#) Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 15; see also Nakayama, *Sengai—sono shōgai to geijutsu*, 28.
- [52](#) Taishitsu Genshō 太室玄昭, Sengai's friend who studied with him under Gessen, was also a friend of Bankoku. Taishitsu, it seems, according to a letter he wrote to Sengai, must have recommended Sengai to Bankoku; Nakayama, *Sengai—sono shōgai to geijutsu*, 30–31; Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 17.
- [53](#) A "purple robe" (*shi-e* 紫衣) is a robe bestowed by the Imperial Court. "In Japan Eisai and Dōgen were the first persons to be given this robe" (*Japanese-English Zen Buddhist Dictionary*, 636). The ceremony for the "purple robe" is called "Zuise no gi" 瑞世之儀, which literally means "the ceremony for the auspicious world." According to Furuta, Sengai only refused the "purple robe" twice; see Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 19. See also Nakayama, *Sengai—sono shōgai to geijutsu*, 35–6; 43.
- [54](#) Traditionally, the Sōdō used to be the monks' residence, meaning a place to eat, sleep and meditate. Sengai made it into a place only for meditation. From the modern period the monks' residence has been separated from the meditation hall. Sengai separated the complexes in the same manner. Sengai, in fact, asked the *han* to finance the completion of the reconstruction in 1811. However, as mentioned above, it was only completed after Sengai's death by the 126th abbot of the temple. See Nakayama, *Sengai —sono shōgai to geijutsu*, 42; 44 and Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter* 19–20.
- [55](#) In 1804, Sengai wrote a letter to Tangen, who at the time was still a trainee at Jiunji 慈雲寺 in Suwa 諏訪, now Nagano prefecture. Since Tangen arrived to the temple a year after he received the letter from Sengai, we might conclude that Tangen was



invited by Sengai to come to the temple; however, there is no clear evidence of this. This letter is the earliest evidence for the existence of some kind of connection between Sengai and Tange prior to the latter's arrival in Shōfukuji. See Nakayama, *Sengai—sono shōgai to geijutsu*, 45.

[56](#) See Nakayama, *Sengai—sono shōgai to geijutsu*, 46; Addiss, *Art of Zen*, 178.

[57](#) Nakayama, *Sengai—sono shōgai to geijutsu*, 56.

[58](#) According to Tsuji, Tange was only twenty-four when he became the abbot; Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 176. On Sengai's retirement see also Addiss, *Art of Zen*, 179; Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 23.

## 2 An Independent Artistic Language

We saw that although Hakuin and Sengai devoted themselves primarily to the religious life, served as monks and became abbots of famous Zen temples; and although neither of them was a professional artist, at the same time, from their sixties onward, paintings and calligraphy played an important role in their lives and became for them a significant mode of expression. In this chapter, I examine the role of art in the lives of Hakuin and Sengai, including their artistic background and the significance of paintings in their lives. Moreover, I analyze the expression of freedom in the paintings of Hakuin and Sengai through two different angles: 1) via the development and change that Hakuin and Sengai's artwork underwent over time, showing how the expression of freedom in their paintings changed as they aged; and 2) through an examination of the relationship between their artwork and the tradition of Zen ink painting, showing in what ways the monk-painters continue the tradition and in what ways they are free and independent of it.

These inquiries will be addressed through an examination of the expression of freedom in the monk-painters' artwork, together with scrutiny of some biographical facts. At this stage of the discussion, however, I focus mainly on the formal aspects and the visual components of the paintings, setting aside their content. While this is indeed an artificial move, it allows for a gradual analysis that leads to a more holistic and integrated discussion in the following chapters.

## **Freedom of Expression and Spiritual Training**

The expression of freedom, in this first inquiry, will be examined in several paintings by Hakuin and Sengai from four different stages of their lives: extant paintings from an early stage—before their sixties—and paintings from their sixties, seventies and eighties. Since it is important to show the development of the paintings chronologically, I have selected, in most cases, paintings that are clearly dated and are the best representatives of the development of freedom in their work. In addition, the changes and developments will be viewed in accordance with the biographies of the monk-painters, that is, taking into consideration biographical information, including anecdotes about their lives, which can shed light on their ties with the world of art.

We have no clear evidence concerning either Hakuin's or Sengai's artistic background. We have no straightforward answers to questions such as "Did they study painting under a professional teacher, or any teacher at all?" "When exactly did they begin painting?" and so on. At the same time, we know they had some sort of connection to the artistic world and that they acquired, at least partly, some skills in painting and calligraphy.

I shall begin with Hakuin. One of the most significant events in Hakuin's life connected with artistic activity occurred during his pilgrimage. While leaving for his pilgrimage in 1703, at the age of nineteen, Hakuin began to doubt his religious path. As Tōrei tells us in his master's biography, "Whenever he saw a sutra or Buddhist image, his disgust for them only increased."<sup>1</sup> He decided to turn his attention to the study of painting and calligraphy and the composition of Chinese poetry. "I would try to earn universal praise as one of the master artists of the age," as he writes in his autobiography. Or, as Tōrei tells us, Hakuin "gave himself up to the pleasures of literature, and engrossed himself in the study of painting and calligraphy."<sup>2</sup>

This may be considered the period when Hakuin established the foundation of his artistic skills and developed his technical abilities in both calligraphy and painting. Nevertheless, this period did not last long. Drawn by stories of a monk who was famous in the field of poetry and letters, he traveled to Zuiunji 瑞雲寺 in the province of Mino 美濃 in 1704.<sup>3</sup> There he

could improve his skills in poetry. However, he soon realized that even if he attained a high level of skill in poetry, it still would not bring him peace of mind. Only several years after that, following an event that occurred in 1706 (aged twenty-two), did Hakuin realize that developing one's spiritual and mental abilities was more important than developing the technical skills of a painter or a calligrapher.

In one of his visits to Shōjūji 正浄寺 in 1706, Hakuin participated in a memorial feast given at the residence of a high-ranking official. The host brought out a collection of hanging scrolls, among them a piece of calligraphy by a famous Rinzai priest of the time.<sup>4</sup> Hakuin was very impressed with the scroll. "This is the product of truly enlightened activity," he wrote in his autobiography. According to Torei:

The brushwork was unstudied, almost offhand. There was no evidence of any great or unusual skill. The master was elated as he realized that the merit of the calligraphy, the quality which commanded such respect, had nothing whatever to do with the skillfulness with which it was written. After that he gave literature, painting and calligraphy a wide berth and focused his energies solely on the practice of the way.<sup>5</sup>

After realizing this, Hakuin burned all the artwork he had done up to then:

As soon as I got back to the temple, I went to my quarters and assembled my small collection of inscriptions and paintings—about a score in all—some copybooks of calligraphy that had been made for me, drawings and calligraphy others had done at my request (which I had always treasured), as well as a few specimens of my own brushwork. Bundling them up, I took them out into the cemetery, put them in front of one of the egg-shaped tomb-stones, and set fire to them. I watched until they were completely consumed by the flames.<sup>6</sup>

This story can be viewed as an important turning point in Hakuin's artistic life, illuminating the direction his artistic style would take in the future. We can assume that by this time Hakuin had already developed some sort of technique and skill and had reached a certain level of prowess in calligraphy and painting.

In the following years till his mid-thirties, however, we have no information about Hakuin's painting activity, nor do we have any paintings

from this period. Since these years are the main years of Hakuin's pilgrimage, we can only assume that since he was engaged with his religious quest he did not have time for artistic activity.<sup>7</sup> Although there are extant paintings from Hakuin's mid-thirties, his true painting period, as noted above, began only from his sixties.

There are two main conclusions we can draw from these details. The first is that Hakuin acquired, to a certain extent, foundations of artistic skill and developed his technical abilities in both calligraphy and painting, already early in his life. The second is that Hakuin's ties with artistic activities were closely connected to his religious insights; beginning early in his life, Hakuin swung between the religious path and the artistic world. After shifting for a while towards artistic activities, Hakuin turned back to the religious world with the realization that what is more important than developing one's technical skills as a painter or a calligrapher is strengthening one's spiritual and mental abilities. Hakuin, the monk-painter, realized that he was more monk than painter. This realization, I suggest, was the fundamental insight of Hakuin's life—and one that guided him to the end of his life. It continued to lead him when he began his true painting period and it is reflected in his paintings.

One of the most popular themes in Hakuin's paintings is Daruma 達磨.<sup>8</sup> Daruma, or Bodhidharma, was a semi-legendary prince from the south of India who is said to have come to China during the beginning of the sixth century. According to the legend, Bodhidharma crossed the Yangtze on a reed and spent nine years in meditation in front of a wall at Shaolin temple, a monastery in Northern Wei province. He is considered to be the twenty-eighth patriarch after the historical Buddha, the first patriarch of Zen Buddhism and the one who brought Chan (Jp. Zen) from India to China. Daruma is a common theme in the tradition of Zen ink painting; stories and legends about Daruma, such as Daruma Crossing the Yangtze on a Reed (Jp. *Roy on Daruma* 芦葉達磨), Bodhidharma Returning West with One Shoe (Jp. *Sekiri Daruma* 隻履達磨 and so on, were often depicted by Chinese and Japanese monks throughout the history of Zen paintings.<sup>9</sup>



[2.1](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma*, 1719, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 92.4 x 36.1 cm. Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Private collection, Numazu

Hakuin, too, painted numerous works in a variety of themes related to Daruma. There are Daruma paintings by Hakuin already from his early phase as a monk-painter, escalating during his seventies—the peak of his



creation. The first work I will discuss is a Daruma painting created by Hakuin at the age of thirty-five (Figs. [2.1](#); [2.1a](#)). The painting, which is dated 1719, is considered to be the earliest extant painting by Hakuin. By this time, Hakuin had already returned from his pilgrimage to his home town and had become



[2.1a](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma* (detail), 1719, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 92.4 x 36.1 cm.  
Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Private collection, Numazu

the head monk of Shōinji. This painting, therefore, is one of Hakuin's first paintings as a head monk.<sup>[10](#)</sup>

Hakuin's early Daruma has a serious expression and is meticulously painted. The figure of Daruma is portrayed with balance and proportion that give an expression of stability and vigor. Concentrating on the brushstrokes and lines of the painting, we can see that they are clear, showing no hesitation, and are very precise. Daruma's face is depicted with fine and detailed lines, such as the outline of the forehead, the eyes and the head. The hair, beard and eyebrows are depicted with straight lines and in a very exact way. Daruma's robe is painted with darker and wider brushstrokes, which are in contrast to the lighter and finer lines of his face, a contrast which reinforces the expression of strength. The inscription, which is in the upper part of the scroll, is written with straight lines and clear characters, in the common manner of writing an inscription.

In a much later painting from his late sixties, at the age of sixty-seven, Hakuin depicts a Daruma with a much softer expression (Fig. [2.2](#)). This painting, dated 1751, does not have the thin lines that make the earlier painting look like a sketch. The thick brushstrokes are much warmer in expression and are generally similar in tone, with the exception of the ring, the upper eyelids and parts of Daruma's robe, a fact that helps to soften the dramatic expression of the early painting.<sup>[11](#)</sup>

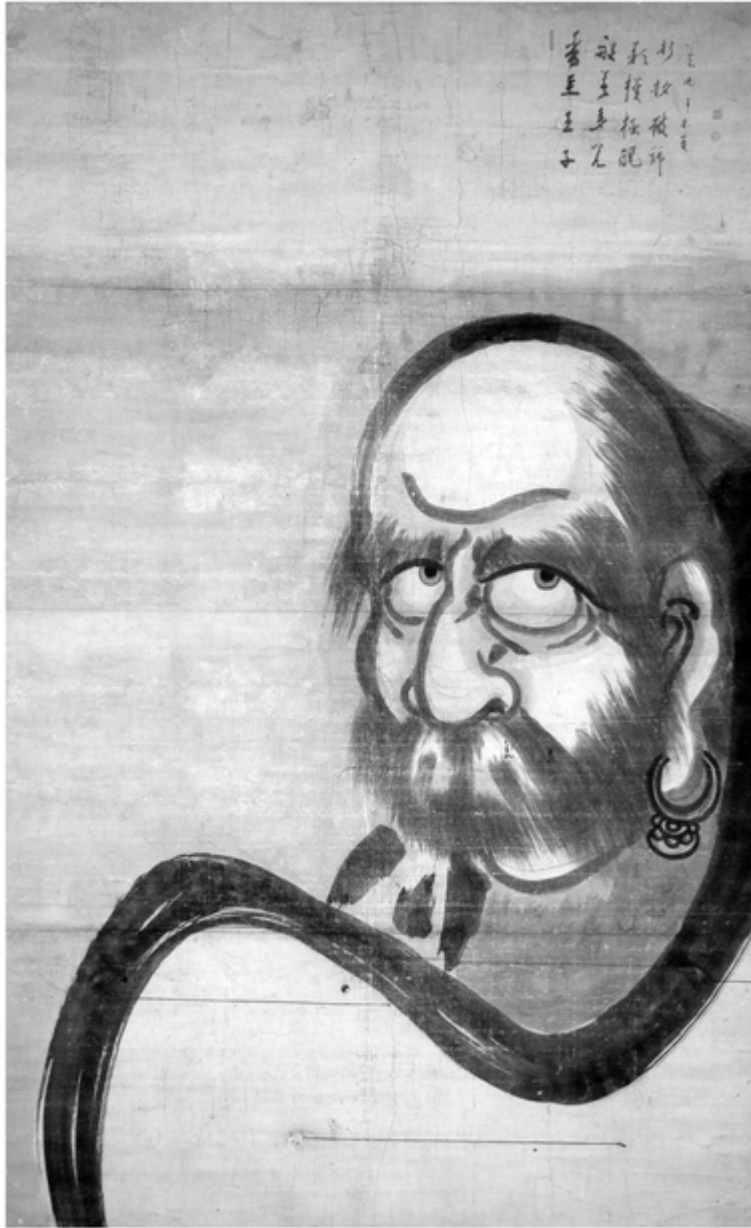
The brushstrokes of the later Daruma painting were made with less care and are not as precise as the early one; we can occasionally see stains or splashes of ink on the painting, such as the stain on Daruma's beard and the splash under the wavy stroke of the robe. In addition, the outline of Daruma's head has a dark line that seems like a mistaken brushstroke that was replaced by a lighter one on top of it. Moreover, one can see thin lines of ink in the bottom part of the scroll, which may have been caused by the ground on which the painting was created.

Hakuin's Daruma from 1751 has a softer expression; it is not as serious or dramatic as the early painting. Hakuin treats it with less care and he is indifferent to mistakes or other stains of ink on his painting. The brushstrokes naturally flow and are freer in expression. At the same time,



the painting is still in proportion and expresses stability and balance. The brushstrokes continue to be precise and at times detailed, such as Daruma's earring and his beard. The inscription in the upper part of the scroll is still written in straight and clear characters and in the conventional way.

The next painting to be discussed dates from 1757 ([Plate 1](#); Fig. [2.3](#)) when Hakuin was seventy-three. By this time, Hakuin felt confident in the depth and maturity of his religious understanding. This is expressed through Hakuin's own words, in a remark he made at a lecture meeting the following year: "Whatever I hold up to elucidate for you—even if it is only a shard or



[2.2](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma*, 1751, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 222.8 x 136.3 cm.  
Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Shōjūji, Aichi



[2.3](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Sekiri Daruma* (detail), 1757, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 193.0 x 107.8 cm. Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Ryōgakuji, Nagano

a pebble—is transformed into a piece of purest gold. Where I am now, even when I'm sitting and joking and chatting informally with people, I'm turning the great Dharma wheel."[12](#)

This painting of Daruma, which differs from the previous Daruma paintings shown above, is called *Sekiri Daruma* 隻履達磨図 (*The One Shoe Daruma*), and simply presents Daruma holding one shoe in his hand. It is based on a legend telling how three years after Daruma's death in China he was seen by a Chinese official, walking around holding one shoe in his hand and claiming that he was going back to India.[13](#)

This painting, which is almost two meters high, is outstanding not only due to its dimensions but also because of its remarkable expression. The disproportion between Daruma's head and the rest of his body, together with the fact that the blank space of the head is painted in vermillion and therefore emphasizes the head even further, gives an unbalanced feeling. In addition, the inscription written above Daruma's head in dark ink pulls the whole weight of the painting to the upper part of the scroll and increases the sensation of instability even more.

The indifference to mistakes and stains of ink felt in the previous painting (Fig. [2.2](#)) by Hakuin is even more strongly expressed in this painting. The remains of a first sketch in a light color can still be seen underneath the brushstrokes of Daruma's figure—lines of a sketch that, in the event, Hakuin did not follow. The inscription in dark ink above Daruma's head is written in a very different way than the inscriptions on his previous Daruma paintings (Figs. [2.1](#); [2.2](#)): now Hakuin is using all the space left above his painted figure in order to write the inscription, which is composed in untidy lines.

As we can see, gradually, over time, the expression of Hakuin's paintings becomes looser and freer; the older Hakuin becomes the more he allows himself to disregard the common, conventional way of painting. The strength and quality of his paintings derive less and less from the technical skillfulness with which they are painted.

Finally, let us examine a painting dated 1767 (Fig. [2.4](#)), when Hakuin was aged eighty-three—the last year of his life.<sup>14</sup> Daruma's face, depicted here in close-up, is unbalanced; the space between the chin and the nose is disproportionate to the space between the nose and the crown of his head. The painting, which seems like a caricature, expresses the fact that Hakuin is less and less concerned with the appearance of his painting in terms of common stylistic conventions. Here again we can see some extra lines on Daruma's face, together with some ink stains, which show that Hakuin is less concerned with the skillfulness with which his painting is rendered.

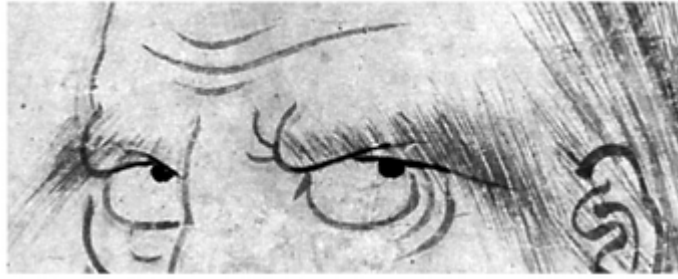
The inscription, although written in large characters, is unclear due to extra water mixed with the ink. It is written along Daruma's face as if presenting Daruma's words, as is done in caricatures.<sup>15</sup>

In order to fully illustrate the change that occurs in Hakuin's painting over time, I will focus only on Daruma's eyes as they are depicted in these four paintings (Figs. [2.1b](#); [2.2a](#); [2.3a](#); [2.4a](#)). Eyes, in addition to being significant as proverbial windows to the soul, are particularly important in the context of Daruma. The following four lines are traditionally attributed to Bodhidharma:



[2.4](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma*, 1767, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 133.0 x 91.0 cm.  
Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Seikenji, Shizuoka





[2.1b](#) 1719 (age 35)



[2.2a](#) 1751 (age 67)



[2.3a](#) 1757 (age 73)



[2.4a](#) 1767 (age 83)

Separate transmission outside teachings  
Not depending upon words and letters  
Direct pointing at one's mind  
Achieving *Kenshō* becoming a Buddha.<sup>[16](#)</sup>

These four lines are fundamental in Hakuin's world as a Zen monk and are repeated in the inscriptions of many of his Daruma paintings.

Daruma's eyes in Hakuin's paintings "directly point at our minds." If we look at the eyes of Daruma in all four paintings (Figs. [2.1b](#); [2.2a](#); [2.3a](#); [2.4a](#)), we can see how, as time passes, the eyes become more and more significant and momentous for Hakuin. Not only do the eyes become bigger and bigger over time, they also become disproportionate compared with the other parts of Daruma's face in each painting, creating an unbalanced expression. The white of the eye grows larger and larger in each painting together with the pupils, which gradually move to the center of the whites.

These eyes of Daruma, which become more and more conspicuous with time, express clarity and focus. This clarity I suggest, represents Hakuin's clarity of mind, which developed along with his age. The older Hakuin became, the better he understood what was important for him to emphasize in his painting. Therefore, he paid less and less attention to the appearance of his painting and instead emphasized more and more the message of directly pointing at the mind.<sup>[17](#)</sup>

This idea is expressed through the development of the expression of Daruma's eyes towards a more direct and clearer appearance over time. Hakuin here translates his early realization, that it is more important to develop one's spiritual and mental abilities than to develop one's technical skills as a painter or a calligrapher, into practice through the paintings.<sup>[18](#)</sup>

As previously mentioned, in the case of Sengai we do not have any biographical writings or any other information, beside some anecdotes, concerning Sengai's relationship with artistic activities early in his life. Most of our evidence is his paintings. Before looking at Sengai's artwork, however, I would like to present an anecdote that, naturally, cannot serve as solid

evidence, but can perhaps give us a hint as to Sengai's relationship to the artistic world in the early stages of his life.

The anecdote tells that during the period of his stay at the temple Tōkian, where Sengai studied and trained under Gessen Zenne for thirteen years, one day while sweeping the garden Sengai, using the back of his broom, drew a picture of his master Gessen with a wide open mouth, as if scolding someone. Sengai, who had to leave quickly to get some water, did not have time to erase his drawing. Gessen happened to pass by and seeing it, assumed that the drawing was of the Zen master Rinzai shouting loudly. Gessen admired the drawing and asked Sengai to depict the painting once again with a brush on paper. As an *unsui* 雲水, a monk in his training period, Sengai had no choice but to accede to his master's request and was again praised by him for the resemblance of the painting to Rinzai.<sup>19</sup>

Compared to Hakuin, however, Sengai is much more direct and communicative concerning his attitude towards his artwork in some of the inscriptions of his paintings. His free attitude is clearly stated in the inscription on several examples of paintings. "Worldly paintings have laws, Sengai's paintings are lawless/ Buddha says: laws are principally lawless." This inscription, which appears in at least two examples of paintings by Sengai,<sup>20</sup> will be shown to be a central attitude that changed and developed towards a freer expression in Sengai's later paintings.

Judging from Sengai's early paintings, one can see a possible stylistic influence of the most prominent school during the Edo period—the Kanō school. Nakayama suggests that during the period 1760 to 1768, the years he lived in Seitaiji (aged eleven to nineteen) studying under Kūin Enkyo, Sengai must have been exposed to the paintings of a teacher from the Kyoto Kanō school.<sup>21</sup>

The first painting I would like to discuss is an early painting by Sengai; although the exact year it was painted is unknown, we can assume it is from his early forties. The painting is of Hotei 布袋図 (Fig. 2.5) and belongs to the Idemitsu Museum of Art. Hotei (Ch. Budai) is a semi-legendary potbellied Buddhist monk from tenth-century China, who became a popular theme in Chinese and Japanese ink painting. Legends say he used to walk around



town with a staff on his shoulder bearing a hemp bag, which contained all his daily necessities.<sup>22</sup>

In 1986, Nakayama estimated another very similar work of Hotei by Sengai, to be a painting from Sengai's early forties. According to Nakayama, the fact that the painting is very detailed and is rendered with very fine and careful lines, including the wavy lines of the kimono, may be regarded as showing the influence of the Kanō school, a style that Sengai may have been exposed to early in his life, as noted above.<sup>23</sup>

In a later catalogue of an exhibition of Sengai's paintings in the Ishimura collection, organized by the Fukuoka Art Museum in 2005, it is reported that important evidence was discovered by the museum that supports and strengthens Nakayama's early assumptions.<sup>24</sup> The catalogue presents a painting of Hotei (Fig. 2.6) that belongs to the Fukuoka Prefectural Museum's collection and which closely resembles Sengai's painting.

According to the catalogue, the painting, which was found with some other material from the Edo period belonging to the Fukuoka clan, is a replica, by an unknown painter from 1779, of a painting attributed to Kanō Motonobu 狩野元信 (1476–1559).<sup>25</sup> Since Sengai arrived in Fukuoka to become the abbot of Shōfukuji 聖福寺 in 1789, ten years after the painting was created, there is a good possibility that he was exposed to this replica around the time of his arrival, meaning in his early forties. In any case, this discovery is important for revealing some of the possible ways in which Sengai acquired his artistic



[2.5](#) Sengai Gibon, *Hotei*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 28.5x36.5 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art



[2.6](#) Replica of a painting attributed to Kanō Motonobu, *Hotei*, 1779, ink on paper, 28 x 40 cm. Fukuoka Prefectural Museum of Art

skills, together with providing information on the specific style on which he based his studies, i.e. the Kanō style.<sup>[26](#)</sup>

Concentrating on the brushstrokes and lines by which Sengai's painting is rendered we can see that it has a precise, tight and serious expression. The

lines are very fine and the image is depicted in detail, such as Hotei's face, the fan he holds in his right hand and his fingers and toes. The lines of his clothes and his bag are wavy and painted in a style resembling that of the Kano school. Hotei, who is portrayed seated, has a firm body and an inflexible posture. The inscription is written on the right side of the scroll with straight lines and clear characters, in the conventional manner.



[2.7](#) Sengai Gibon, *Kanzan and Jittoku*, 1813, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 122.7 x 51.2 cm.  
Idemitsu Museum of Art

The next painting is dated to 1813 (Fig. [2.7](#)), when Sengai was aged sixty-four. By this time, Sengai was already retired and had lived at his retirement place of Kyohakuin, located inside Genjūan, both nearby sub-temples of Shōfukuji, for almost two years.<sup>27</sup> The theme of *Kanzan and Jittoku* 寒山拾得図, two semi-legendary Zen eccentrics who are often shown together, is common in the tradition of Zen ink painting and was depicted by both Hakuin and Sengai. The poet Kanzan 寒山 (Ch. Hanshan; lit. Cold Mountain) is often associated with his poems and Jittoku 拾得 (Ch. Shide; lit. Pickup), who worked at the kitchen of a temple, is usually depicted holding a broom, while both are dressed in shabby clothes. This theme will be discussed in further detail below; here I shall focus mainly on the visual components of the changes in the expression of freedom.<sup>28</sup>

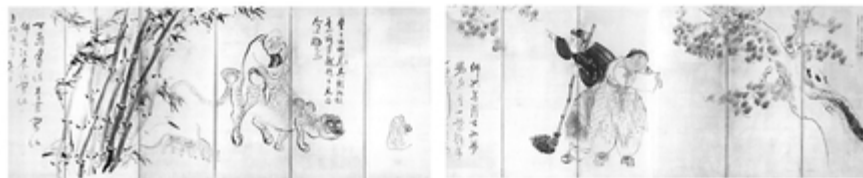
In the painting under discussion (Fig. [2.7](#)), Jittoku is bent forward, angling his back as a rack for Kanzan to stand on, thus enabling Kanzan to write his poems on the rocks with a brush and ink. The painting is simple and depicted with loose brush strokes; if we compare it to the earlier painting of Hotei, we can see a development from a precise, tight and serious expression to lightness and playfulness. The images are much more flexible and dynamic, compared with the rigid posture of Hotei. The painting is much less detailed and the faces of Kanzan and Jittoku are depicted with only a few brush strokes. At the same time, the lines in which Kanzan and Jittoku's clothes are depicted still resemble the classic lines of the Kanō school. The inscription, although it is written in a slightly freer and more open manner, is still in straight lines and in proportion with the painted image. Although portrayed in a simple and humorous manner, the figures in general are in proportion.

Less than ten years later, in 1822, the jolliness and playfulness in this last painting develop into a caricature in a pair of folding screens entitled *Bukan and Kanzan Jittoku* 豊干・寒山拾得図屏風 created by Sengai at the age of seventythree (Figs. [2.8](#), [2.8a](#) and [2.8b](#)). Sengai portrays their images like caricatures, filled with humor: their disproportionate bodies, the funny faces of Kanzan, Jittoku, Bukan and the tigers, and the exaggerated and emphasized round eyes of the tigers (Figs. [2.8a](#); [2.8b](#)).<sup>29</sup>

If we compare only the images of Kanzan and Jittoku with the earlier painting on the same theme from 1813 (Fig. [2.7](#)), we can clearly see the change. The jolly and almost innocent images of Kanzan and Jittoku in the early painting have become much more mature and sophisticated. The later painting is a complete caricature; this is best illustrated in Kanzan's face, which is distorted and seems almost like an animal's face. Sengai did not lose his skills as a painter over time; on the contrary, his paintings became more developed and freer in expression.

Nevertheless, Sengai is still following some of the conventions, and not all images are depicted unconventionally. Viewing his paintings, one can occasionally see the performance of a developed technique, such as in the play of the ink color in the bamboo grove painted on the screen with Bukan, or the movement of the pine trunk, on the other screen. In addition, the images are still quite detailed and in places, such as the lines on Kanzan and Jittoku's clothes and the tigers' bodies, the effort is obvious. The inscription here as well, although it is written in a slightly freer and more open manner, is still in straight lines and in a conventional structure.

Fifteen years later, in a painting (Fig. [2.9](#)) dated 1837 — the year of his death at the age of eighty-eight—Sengai painted a painting named *Fudō Myōō* 不動明王図. Fudō Myōō is a guardian deity in Buddhism, who exorcises all traces of



[2.8](#) Sengai Gibon, *Bukan and Kanzan Jittoku*, 1822, pair of six-panel folding screens, ink on paper, 148.4 x 363.4 cm. each. Genjūan, Fukuoka



[2.8a](#) Sengai Gibon, *Bukan and Kanzan Jittoku* (detail), 1822, pair of six-panel folding screens, ink on paper, 148.4 x 363.4 cm each. Genjūan, Fukuoka



[2.8b](#) Sengai Gibon, *Bukan and Kanzan Jittoku* (detail), 1822, pair of six-panel folding screens, ink on paper, 148.4 x 363.4 cm each. Genjūan, Fukuoka

worldly desires. He is commonly depicted with art expression of anger on his face, protruding teeth, holding a sword in the right hand and a rope in the left and shown seated or standing on a rock, surrounded by flames.<sup>[30](#)</sup>





[2.9](#) Sengai Gibon, *Fudō Myōō*, 1837, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 102.9 x 36.1 cm. Fukuoka Art Museum

The painting is depicted with light and loose brush strokes, possibly partially due to Sengai's physical weakness at the age of eighty-eight. Yet we can still speak of a change in expression, especially compared with previous paintings by Sengai from earlier stages. The painting is much less detailed;



the fingers and toes are partially depicted and at times not even painted at all. The head and the rest of the figure's body are disproportionate and it is difficult to recognize what the deity holds in his hands. The free lines of the fire surrounding the deity give a misty feeling and the impression of an imaginary scene. The inscription of the painting is written on both the upper and lower parts of the painting and in different tones and sizes.

With time, as we can see, Sengai's paintings became freer in expression and common themes in the tradition of Zen ink painting gradually develop into unconventional depictions. The paintings gradually become more humorous and caricature-like, portrayed with loose and liberated brush strokes and playfulness.

As we have seen, both Hakuin and Sengai acquired at an early stage of their lives, at least partly, some skills in paintings and calligraphy. A chronological examination of their paintings shows that the style of their paintings naturally changed and developed over time. We can recognize a process of gradual neglect of the conventional ways of painting; instead, a subtle shift towards an individual, free way of expression takes place. The older the painters became, the freer their paintings became. Compared with the early paintings of both Hakuin and Sengai, their later paintings gradually become simpler and are depicted with untrammelled and light brushstrokes; they are freer technically and are less precise. As time goes by, we can see how matters of style such as proportion, stability and composition become less important and how at times even the contrary happened, when "unskillful" expressions were presented deliberately.

This process of change, I suggest, occurred not simply due to a change of aesthetic style, as can happen with professional painters, but was primarily due to a mental change related to the monk-painters' religious insights. The development of Hakuin and Sengai's mental maturity as monks, together with the religious experiences they underwent over time, is reflected in their artwork and is presented as a general tendency towards a freer expression. In the next section I wish to examine the way in which Hakuin and Sengai relate to the tradition of Zen ink painting, focusing mainly on the way they treat some traditional themes.

# Addressing Traditional Themes in a Non-Traditional Way

In this section I suggest an examination of a similar development of the monk painters' artwork from another angle; I shall investigate the relation of their artwork with the tradition of Zen ink painting, prior to the Edo period. Although the artwork of Hakuin and Sengai, as already mentioned, is regarded as part of the tradition of Zen in general and as part of the Zen ink painting tradition in particular, and even as a revival of the earliest Zen paintings to arrive in Japan, at the same time their paintings differ from this tradition in many ways.

This tendency can be best illustrated by the examination of several examples of some traditional themes, as will be undertaken in this section. Since the purpose is to elucidate the general tendency towards freedom from traditional conventions, I selected the works that most clearly represent this development. At this stage of the discussion, I shall focus mainly on the formalistic aspects and visual components of the paintings, while selecting several examples of paintings that are the clearest representatives of this notion of freedom.

Our first example concerns the way the monk-painters portrayed monkeys, a theme depicted in the tradition of Zen ink painting in a very specific style. The depiction of monkeys in Zen painting can be traced back to the early Zen art of the Kamakura period, connected with the Chinese Zen monk-painter Mu Qi (Jp. Mokkei). Mu Qi, who had a strong influence on Japanese ink painters in general, influenced in particular the style in which monkeys were drawn by generations of ink painters to follow. Mu Qi's influence was so significant that there is a term in Japanese "Mokkei-zaru" 牧谿猿, which means "Mokkei-monkey," indicating the image of a monkey drawn with long arms.<sup>31</sup>

In order to illustrate the simplification that this theme underwent in Hakuin and Sengai's depictions, I will present two prominent examples of

early paintings from two different periods prior to Hakuin and Sengai's time. The first painting, which is a National Treasure, is Mu Qi's famous triptych of three hanging scrolls called *Kannon, Monkey and Crane* (*Kannon enkakuzu* 観音猿鶴図) from the Kamakura period, thirteenth century. The second painting is a pair of scrolls and an Important Cultural Property by Hasegawa Tōhaku 長谷川等伯 (1539–1610) called *Monkeys in Withered Trees* (*Kobokuenkōzu* 枯木猿猴図) from the Momoyama period, sixteenth century.<sup>32</sup>

Mil Qi, the Chinese monk-painter, was visited by some Japanese Zen monks who were impressed with his paintings and took several paintings with them back to Japan. *The Kannon, Monkey and Crane* triptych was among them and was preserved in Daitokuji in Kyoto.<sup>33</sup> Approximately three hundred years later the prominent sixteenth century painter Hasegawa Tōhaku, who was likely exposed to Mu Qi's painting and clearly influenced by it, created the painting *Monkeys in Withered Trees*.<sup>34</sup>

Looking at the painting of the monkey, one of the three paintings of Mu Qi's triptych (Fig. [2.10](#)), together with Hasegawa Tōhaku's famous painting (not presented here) *Monkeys in Withered Trees*, especially the scroll with the two monkeys, the similarity of these two paintings is impressive. Hasegawa paints the same type of long-armed monkey with long feet depicted by Mu Qi; the monkey's face, its fur and the darker ink in which the long feet and features of its face are painted are all painted in a similar manner.<sup>35</sup>

There are numerous paintings of monkeys by Hakuin and Sengai, some which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.<sup>36</sup> Here I wish to focus on two of them; the first, by Hakuin, is called *Monkey* ([Plate 2](#)) and the second, by Sengai, is called *Monkey Trying to Catch the Moon* ([Plate 3](#)). Both depictions present the same type of monkey with long arms and feet, parallel to the "Mokkei-monkey." The hands, the feet and the features on the monkey's face are depicted with darker ink, similar to the traditional paintings. At the same time, one cannot miss the difference in expression of Hakuin and Sengai's paintings compared with the earlier depictions.<sup>37</sup>



[2.10](#) Replica by Taikan Yokoyama of Mokkei (Ch. Mu-qi), *Kannon, Monkey and Crane* (detail), Kamakura period (thirteenth century), triptych of hanging scrolls, ink and slight color on silk, right scroll: 173.9 x 98.8 cm. Daitoku-ji, Kyoto

The monkeys of Hakuin and Sengai have undergone simplification: they are much sketchier, much less detailed and exact and are rendered with far fewer strokes. For instance, the monkey's arms in both paintings by Hakuin

and Sengai are painted with one stroke, while the traditional arms are covered with meticulously depicted fur; in fact, both monkeys by Hakuin and Sengai have lost their furriness. The features of the monkey's face in both paintings are very sketchy and caricature-like, which contributes to the comical expression of the paintings. Hakuin and Sengai's paintings are much more playful and humoristic; they are simplified and seem amateurish compared with the other earlier examples.<sup>38</sup>

Another common theme, which was presented partially in the previous section, is Kanzan and Jittoku.<sup>39</sup> Through the following examples I wish to illustrate once again the simplification and caricaturization that this theme underwent in Hakuin's and Sengai's works. The first example is the wellknown early Zen ink painting of the fourteenth century, an Important Cultural Property by Mokuan Reien 默庵靈淵 (?-1345) entitled *The Four Sleepers* (*Shisui* 四睡). In this painting (not presented here), Kanzan and Jittoku are depicted seated together with the third eccentric monk Bukan and his accompanying tiger.<sup>40</sup> The second example is attributed to the wellknown painter Shūbun 周文, who was active in the first half of the fifteenth century, and was Sesshū Tōyō's teacher. The painting (Fig. [2.11](#)) which is also an Important Cultural Property, is entitled *Kanzan and Jittoku* 寒山拾得図, and depicts the two figures standing close to each other with unkempt hair, loose clothes and their familiar uproarious laugh, while Jittoku is holding his broom.<sup>41</sup> Although Shūbun's painting is much more detailed and realistic than the earlier depiction by Mokuan, both paintings are precise and meticulously rendered, in particular the hair and faces of Kanzan and Jittoku.

Now let us look at an example of this theme by Sengai entitled *Kanzan and Jittoku* (Fig. [2.12](#)).<sup>42</sup> Here Kanzan is portrayed holding a scroll and Jittoku is holding a broom, as is conventional. However, Sengai's painting expresses simplicity and minimalism compared with the earlier examples. It is clear that Sengai's painting is closer in expression to the early Zen paintings by Mokuan rather than to Shūbun's depiction. Moreover, through comparison of Mokuan's and Sengai's paintings, we can better understand why Zenga is regarded as a revival of early Zen paintings in Japan. At the

same time, it is difficult to ignore the degree of plainness and lightness with which Sengai's painting is rendered. The figure of Jittoku appears more like a rough sketch than a painting, with no details of his face and body and with only one finger pointed, while Kanzan's face is so simple that it seems like a child's painting. As noted above, the details and elaborations of technical skills in the early examples are replaced with liberated brushstrokes and freedom of expression in Sengai's painting.

The caricaturization of the theme can be illustrated through another painting created by Hakuin. In this painting (Fig. [2.13](#)), Hakuin presents his own authentic variation on the traditional theme of Kanzan and Jittoku by depicting Kanzan reading one of his poems written on a large banana leaf. Jittoku is holding the leaf, which covers most of his body, allowing Kanzan to read the poem. It is particularly important to focus on the way in which he depicted his figures, as compared with the early examples of this theme painted by Shūbun and Mokuan. Not only are Hakuin's figures painted with far fewer details and much less elaboration than the early examples, they are depicted with humor and seem like caricatures. Kanzan's face, for example, although relatively detailed, is exaggerated and portrayed in a disproportionate manner. His legs, which seem like two straight sticks, are depicted in an unrealistic way. His entire body is out of proportion and looks like a caricature.





[2.11](#) Attributed to Shubun, *Kanzan and Jittoku*, Muromachi period (first half of the fifteenth century) hanging scroll, ink on paper, 100.4 x 37.6 cm. Tokyo National Museum. Important Cultural Property

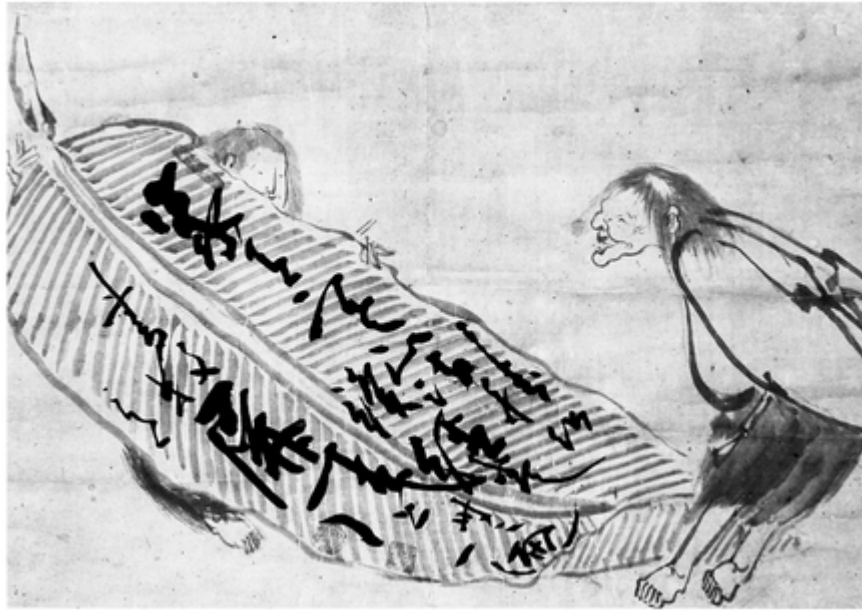
The simplification of Hakuin and Sengai's renderings, as shown through the examples of the last two themes of the monkey and of Kanzan and Jittoku, turns into symbol and abstraction in the next theme I will present.



Daruma, as noted above, is a very common theme in the tradition of Chinese



[2.12](#) Sengai Gibon, *Kanzan and Jittoku*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 47.7 x 30.2 cm.  
Idemitsu Museum of Art



[2.13](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Kanzan and Jittoku*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 37.0 x 53.2 cm.

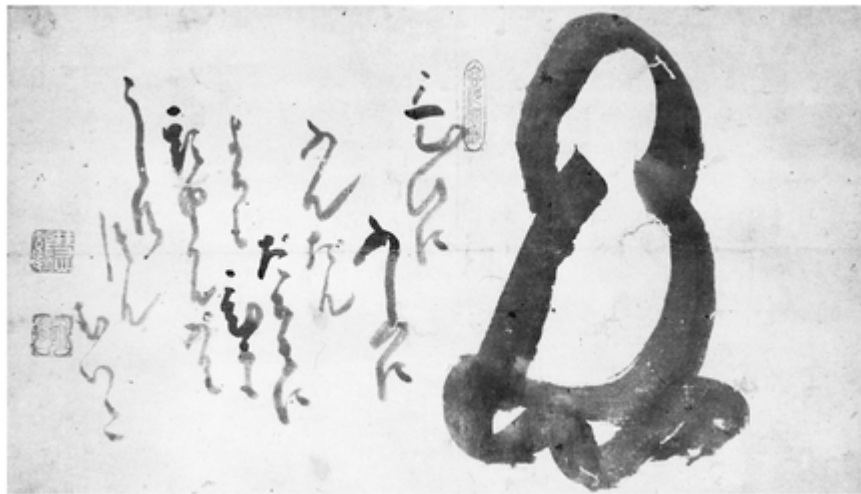
Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Ryuunji Collection, Tokyo

and Japanese Zen ink painting.<sup>[43](#)</sup> A prominent example of Daruma seated in meditation is that of the well-known painter from the fifteenth century Muromachi period, Sesshu Toyo.<sup>[44](#)</sup>

The painting (not presented here), an Important Cultural Property called *Menpeki Daruma* 面壁達磨 (*Wall gazing Daruma*), is based on the legend according to which Bodhidharma crossed the Yangtze on a reed and spent nine years in meditation in front of a wall at Shaolin temple. While facing the wall, Daruma was visited by his disciple Huike 慧可 (Jp. Eka; 487–593), who presented his own severed left arm to Daruma as a sign of his sincerity and determination to be accepted as Daruma's disciple. Sesshu, who painted this theme in 1496, at the age of seventy-seven, depicted both figures in profile, with Daruma seated, gazing at the wall in meditation while Huike, painted in the bottom left side corner, presents his left arm to Daruma.<sup>[45](#)</sup>

There are numerous paintings by both Hakuin and Sengai of the "Wall gazing Daruma." Here I present two examples that can be considered archetypes of the tendency towards abstraction and simplification in their

artwork. The first example is a picture of the seated Daruma by Hakuin, which expresses an extreme simplification that almost reaches the level of a symbol (Fig. 2.14). Daruma is depicted with merely two or three strokes, which technically resembles calligraphy and which visually seems like a Chinese character.<sup>46</sup> In another example of this simplified Daruma, Hakuin writes in the inscription "It may not look like it, but they say this is great master Bodhidharma facing the wall."<sup>47</sup> Hakuin thus minimizes the visual presentation of Daruma and turns it into an abstraction, which creates a great gap from the early example of the same theme by Sesshū.

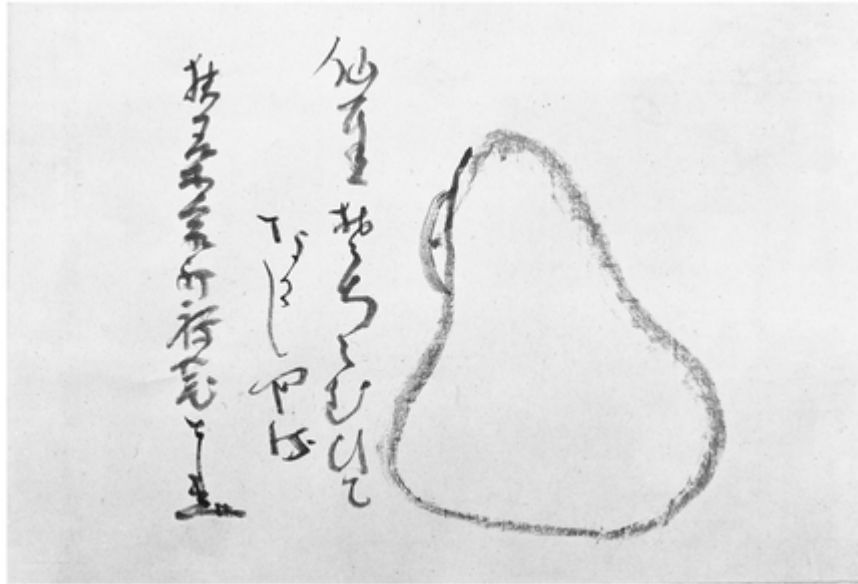


[2.14](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 27.6 x 49.5 cm. Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

In another painting in a similar manner, Sengai painted his self-portrait in the form of the wall gazing Daruma (Fig. 2.15).<sup>48</sup> With just two or three strokes, Sengai portrayed himself in the position of Daruma gazing at the wall. If we go back to the Muromachi period *Wall gazing Daruma* by Sesshū, we can visually comprehend the transformation this theme has undergone in both Hakuin and Sengai's depictions. All the features and details of Sesshū's painting are minimized into a mere two to three strokes that symbolize the whole scene and narrative of this theme. These two paintings of Daruma by Hakuin and Sengai are exemplars of the tendency towards an

artistic freedom from traditional conventions, expressed in the paintings through abstraction and simplicity.

Obviously, not all the traditional themes depicted by Hakuin and Sengai are exceptionally unconventional. My aim, however, has been to present some examples that express most forcefully the tendency of the monk-painters towards emancipation from the traditional patterns and forms through simplification and abstraction. Both Hakuin and Sengai are part of the Zen tradition and are part of the long tradition of Zen ink painting in many aspects; they use the same techniques of ink painting, and they portray many traditional themes, as shown above. At the same time, their artwork expresses a freedom from the old patterns: a general tendency towards a freedom from traditional conventions through simplification, abstraction and caricaturization of the themes. Details and elaborations of technical skills were replaced with untrammelled brush-strokes and freedom of expression. On the one hand, Hakuin and Sengai adopt the tradition and are part of it; on the other hand, however, they are free of this tradition and its conventions, while each of them has his own individual way of expressing this. In other words, although Hakuin and Sengai's artwork is regarded as part of the Zen ink painting tradition, it is important to identify the fact that they were also, at the same time, free of this tradition in many ways.<sup>[49](#)</sup>



[2.15](#) Sengai Gibon, *Self-Portrait*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 43.1 x 64.1 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

In the following chapters, I wish to go beyond the study of the expression of freedom through the formal aspects and the visual components of the paintings. I wish to examine this artistic freedom as part of a whole attitude that is deeply rooted in Zen Buddhism and, I shall argue, is expressed through both the text and image of Hakuin and Sengai's artwork, allowing for a more holistic perspective on the work of these monk-painters.

## Notes

- [1](#) Waddell, "A Chronological Biography," no. 1, 109. See also chapter 1.
- [2](#) Waddell, *Wild Ivy*, 19. See also Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 170.
- [3](#) The monk's name was Baō 馬翁 (1629–1711), the founder of Zuiunji ("A Chronological Biography" no. 1, 109).
- [4](#) His name was Daigu Sōchiku 大愚宗築 (1584–1669). For more on the priest, see Torei Enji, *Hakuin oshō ncupu*, 85 and Waddell, *Wild Ivy*, 133 n. 50.
- [5](#) Waddell, "A Chronological Biography," no. 1, 114.

- [6](#) See Waddell, *Wild Ivy*, 23–4.
- [7](#) See Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 170.
- [8](#) For more on Bodhidharma as a theme in Zen paintings see Brinker, *Zen Masters of Meditation*, 149–53; Fontein and Hickman, *Zen Painting and Calligraphy*, xiv. Kanazawa, *Japanese Ink Painting*, 47–55.
- [9](#) For some early representations of Bodhidharma from the medieval period see Levine and Lippit, *Aioakenings*, 72–83.
- [10](#) According to Tsuji, the calligraphy is clearly signed by Hakuin and therefore, most probably the painting was painted by him as well. For more relatively early paintings by Hakuin see Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 170–73.
- [11](#) For more on this painting see Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 200 and Izumi and Mizukami, *Suibokuga no kyoshō*, 29.
- [12](#) This quote is taken from Waddell, *Wild Ivy*, xxxvii.
- [13](#) The legend appears in the *Keitohi dentō roku* 景德伝燈録, normally translated as the "Transmission of the Lamp," a work composed by the Chinese monk Daoyuan in 1004; it contains the biographies of a total of 1701 Indian and Chinese Zen masters. However, it can be found in an earlier record from the late eighth century; see Izumi and Mizukami, *Suibokuga no kyoshō*, 98. For more on paintings of *Sekiri Daruma*, see the catalogue: *Hakuin: Zen to shōga*, 37, and Izumi and Mizukami, *Suibokuga no kyoshō*, 98; Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 200–201.
- [14](#) On this figure see also chapters 3 and 6.
- [15](#) For more on this painting see Yamashita, *Zenga: The Return from America*, 186–7 and Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 201.
- [16](#) A fuller discussion of these lines will appear in chapter 3. On Daruma's eyes in one of Hakuin's paintings see also Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 174.
- [17](#) See also Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 174 and Katsuhiko Yoshizawa, Hakuin kata Daruma zō no seiritsu. *Kokka* 1379 (2010): 23–45.
- [18](#) See biographical section on Hakuin in chapter 1.



- [19](#) According to Nakayama, the story must have been created much later, perhaps only after Sengai became famous, therefore we cannot base any solid argument on this anecdote. However, it can perhaps hint at Sengai's relationship with painting during his early life. Nakayama, *Sengai—sono shōgai to geijutsu*, 26–7.
- [20](#) See Figures 2.8, 3.3.
- [21](#) Nakayama, *Sengai—sono shōgai to geijutsu*, 24; see also Eto, Ishigami and Muranaka, *Sengai*, 107, who claim that Sengai studied under a Kyoto Kanō school teacher in Mino, his home town. They even indicate the name of the teacher: Katō Eiboku 加藤永朴. For more on Sengai's biography see chapter 1, for more on the Kanō school during the Edo period, see chapter 1.
- [22](#) On Hotei, see also chapter 3. For more on Hotei as a theme in the ink painting tradition, see Brinker, *Zen Masters of Meditation*, 138–41. For early representations of Hotei see Levine and Lippit, *Awakenings*, 92–103.
- [23](#) See Nakayama in the exhibition catalogue: Fukuoka-shi Bijutsukan Kyōkai, *Sengai ten*, 43,154 and in Nakayama, *Sengai—sono shōgai to geijutsu*, 223. The work belongs to a private collector.
- [24](#) See the exhibition catalogue: Fukuoka-shi Bijutsukan Kyōkai, *Sengai: Ishimura Collection*, 87–9. The catalogue does not provide full details on the painting by Kanō Motonobu; the details on the painting are provided by the Fukuoka Prefectural Museum.
- [25](#) The replica belongs to the Ogata family 尾形家.
- [26](#) For a discussion of the act of copying paintings of masters during the Edo period see Jordan and Weston, *Copying the Master and Stealing His Secrets*.
- [27](#) See chapter 1. This painting was depicted on October 1813; see Nakayama in Fukuoka-shi Bijutsukan Kyōkai, *Sengai ten*, 159.
- [28](#) The theme will be further discussed in chapter 3.
- [29](#) Bukan 豊干 (Ch. Fenggan; lit. Big Stick) is an eccentric monk who is often depicted together with Kanzan and Jittoku. Bukan will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3. For more on these folding screens, see Izumi and Mizukami, *Suibokuga no kyoshō*, 99.



- [30](#) Other iconographical forms of Fudō Myōō are also common. For more on this painting, see Nakayama in Fukuoka-shi Bijutsukan Kyōkai, *Sengai ten*, 167.
- [31](#) There is another term, Oshō-yō 和尚様, meaning "Monk's painting style," indicating Vfu Qi's painting style in general. On Mu Qi see also Fontein and Hickman, *Zen Painting and Calligraphy*, 28–9.
- [32](#) For a recent discussion of the triptych see Lippit, "Seer of Sounds: The Muqi Triptych," 243–66. For more on the paintings see also Barnet and Burto, *Zen Ink Paintings*, 15–21.
- [33](#) The painting presented here is a replica by Taikan Yokoyama. On this painting see also chapter 4.
- [34](#) The painting belongs to Ryūsen-an, Kyoto. There are additional paintings by Hasegawa Tōhaku depicting monkeys in the same manner, such as "Monkey Reaching for the Moon," which is a four-panel sliding door at Konchiin temple 金地院 in Kyoto.
- [35](#) The monkey drawn is most probably a gibbon, a small ape with long arms and feet that is native to China.
- [36](#) See chapter 4.
- [37](#) On these paintings, see further details in chapter 4. On plate 2 see also the exhibition catalogue of Kyoto Bunka Hakubutsukan, *Hakuin: Zen to Shōga*, 72–3; Izumi and Mizukami, *Suibokuga no kyōshō*, 101–2. On plate 3 see also Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 124.
- [38](#) I dedicate a whole chapter, chapter 6, to the discussion of humor and freedom.
- [39](#) The theme will be further discussed in chapter 3.
- [40](#) On Mokuan, see chapter 1. On Bukan, see above and chapter 3. For more on this painting see Levine and Lippit, *Awakenings*, 106–7; Fontein and Hickman, *Zen Painting and Calligraphy*, 70–73; Barnet and Burto, *Zen Ink Paintings*, 46–7.
- [41](#) For more on this painting, see Barnet and Burto, *Zen Ink Paintings*, 42–5; Fontein and Hickman, *Zen Painting and Calligraphy*, 111–13. For more on Shubun see Tanaka, *Japanese Ink Painting*, 67–105.

[42](#) For more on this painting, see Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 78–9.

[43](#) See above.

[44](#) For more on Sesshū see Tanaka, *Japanese Ink Painting*, 105–29.

[45](#) For another depiction from the thirteenth century of the same theme, see Levine and Lippit, *Awakenings*, 72. For more on this painting by Sesshū see Barnet and Burto, *Zen Ink Paintings*, 30–33.

[46](#) Tanahashi suggests that the painting is based on the abbreviation of the Chinese character, in cursive style, of the right hand part of the character *in* 隱 from Hakuin or the character *gu* 愚 from the name of the Zen master Gudō Tōshoku 愚堂東寔 (1577–1661); Tanahashi, *Penetrating Laughter*, 120. Yoshizawa presents several examples of "word-pictures" (*moji-e* 文字絵) by Hakuin, including a discussion of their origin in the Muromachi period; see Yoshizawa, *Hakuin —Zenga no sekai*, 186–215. For more on this painting by Hakuin, see the exhibition catalogue of Kyoto Bunka Hakubutsukan, *Hakuin: Zen to shōga*, 44.

[47](#) Tanahashi, *Penetrating Laughter*, 120. The English translation is taken from Tanahashi

[48](#) For more on this painting, entitled "Self-Portrait" (*Jigazōgasan* 自画像画賛), see Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 98.

[49](#) See also Addiss, *Art of Zen*, 9–11.

### 3 Liberation From Rules

After examining the historical context in which Zenga was created, including an overview of the lives of Hakuin and Sengai, and after analyzing the formal aspects and visual components of the artwork of both monk-painters, I shall now approach their paintings as a whole from a broader perspective. The expression of freedom is much more comprehensive than a mere visual articulation caused by historical circumstances. I will show that it is part of a whole attitude and mentality of freedom, reflected in the lives and artwork of the monk-painters. Hence, in this chapter I explore the philosophical and religious roots of the concept of freedom, and study the paintings by synthesizing all factors involved, using a holistic perspective which takes both text and image into consideration.

The concept of freedom, which is "an issue of considerable importance in Zen, and an issue that has been at the forefront of western interpretations of Zen since the very beginning,"<sup>1</sup> is the subject of an entire chapter in Dale Wright's book, *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism*.<sup>2</sup>

Wright criticizes early western interpreters of Zen and their understanding of the concept of freedom. He suggests that freedom in Chan or Zen in fact differs significantly from the way it was understood by early western interpreters of Zen. Based on the common idea that obedience to traditional authority prevents the development of one's own creative, imaginative spirit, according to Wright, modern western thought has tended to dichotomize between freedom and constraint, or in other words, has regarded freedom as the absence of constraint.

Wright shows, however, that there are in fact two voices, or two images, in Zen literature concerning freedom, which seemingly contradict each other. On the one hand, prominence is given to regulation, hierarchy, authority, and constraint, but on the other hand, there is appreciation and respect for rule breakers and free-spirited individuals who are spiritually awakened. Students of Zen are required to learn from such individuals and

to attempt to reach this free state of mind. One of the most prominent expressions of the latter attitude is the Zen tendency to emphasize independence from sacred literature and to reject the Buddhist canon.

This contradiction, however, is revealed to be so only on the surface. As Wright shows, freedom in Zen Buddhism is in fact the practice of constraint, and not its absence. The acceptance of limitations as a voluntary act is already in itself the practice of freedom. The student of Zen is expected to construct, out of a variety of models, a new one of his own:

Zen literature offers an incredible array of models to imitate. Out of this variety each Zen student must construct a new one. Each must synthesize a certain set of chosen images into one more or less coherent life. New creations, new forms of freedom and selfhood, appear through Zen history as new sets of models are brought together under new historical circumstances.<sup>3</sup>

Hence, freedom in Zen Buddhism, according to Wright, should be regarded as the outcome of obedience and constraint and not their absence.

Through a close examination and exploration of the different manifestations of freedom in the paintings of Hakuin and Sengai, we can see that it corresponds in many ways with the way freedom is described by Wright. As stated already in the introduction to this work, my primary aim here is not a philosophical or religious discussion of freedom in Zen thought, but rather an analysis of its visual expression through the artwork of Hakuin and Sengai. Hence, while analyzing a variety of paintings by Hakuin and Sengai that express freedom, I refer at times to Wright's work, which serves as the philosophical basis for understanding the expression of freedom in Hakuin and Sengai's artwork.

## Hakuin: Independence from Doctrines

Separate transmission outside teachings  
Not depending upon words and letters.

Direct pointing at one's mind  
Achieving kensho becoming a Buddha.

—traditionally attributed to Bodhidharma<sup>4</sup>

The four lines quoted above translate a set of four phrases, each of four characters, which are traditionally attributed to Bodhidharma, the first patriarch of the Zen sect. They represent a fundamental set of principles in Zen thought, which encourages practitioners to seek direct experience for themselves, rather than depending on the words of sacred scriptures and the explanations of masters.

This idea of not relying on scriptures will be shown to be the religious and philosophical source and base of the expression of freedom reflected in the paintings of Hakuin and Sengai. In this chapter I will examine the explicit and direct way in which this idea is manifested in the artwork of Hakuin and Sengai, in both form and content. This examination will be supported by passages from relevant Zen texts, such as *Recorded Sayings of Chan Master Lin-chi*, *Gateless Gate* and the *Zen Teaching of Huang Po*, which will help us comprehend the religious sources of the attitude of freedom. The first part will focus on paintings by Hakuin while the second part will focus on works of Sengai.<sup>5</sup>

Before beginning the discussion, I would like to start with a Zen kōan, which provides us with a first hint towards understanding the idea of *Not depending upon words and letters* and the general Zen attitude of freedom. The kōan, which is called *Spit at Buddha*, is taken from an annotated translation into English of *The Sayings of Master Kidō* (Jp. *Kidōgoroku*).

Once there was a monk who accompanied a (not of Zen) Buddhist priest to a Buddhist temple. There the monk spat at the statue of Buddha. The priest said, "You have little sense of propriety! Why do you spit at Buddha?" The monk said, "Show me the place where there is no Buddha so that I can spit there." The priest was speechless.<sup>6</sup>

One of the most popular themes in Hakuin's paintings is Daruma. Stories and legends about Daruma, a common theme in the tradition of Zen ink painting, were often depicted by Chinese and Japanese monks throughout

the history of Zen paintings. Hakuin, as we saw above, painted numerous paintings of Daruma, depicting him in a variety of ways. I shall focus here on Hakuin's half-figure portraits of the patriarch, which are normally referred to as *Daruma*.<sup>7</sup>

In [chapter 2](#), I focused on the formal aspects of the paintings through the development and change in Hakuin's Daruma paintings as he aged; here I shall expand the discussion and also take into consideration the content of the paintings, as presented in the inscriptions of many Daruma paintings by Hakuin. I shall focus on two examples from Hakuin's late work, created when he was eighty-three. These two works bear the same inscription (Figs. [2.4](#), [3.1](#)), which reads as follows:

Direct pointing at one's mind  
Achieving *kenshō* becoming a Buddha  
Under the sāla-tree, the 83-year-old monk  
Old Hakuin is painting without his glasses.<sup>8</sup>

Hakuin's inscription is based on the set of four phrases quoted above that are traditionally attributed to Bodhidharma. Hakuin cites here the last two lines of the original phrase.

Beyond doubt, these words of Daruma are fundamental to Hakuin's world as a Zen monk; Hakuin repeats this inscription in many Daruma paintings. As mentioned above, one of the recurring themes throughout the literature of Zen Buddhism is the "Zen tendency to reject the Buddhist canon, showing disdain for sacred literature of any kind," as Heine and Wright put it.<sup>9</sup> This tendency is not a mere rejection of the Buddhist scriptures, but in fact part of a general attitude of freedom towards authority and tradition in general, expressed in its different forms in the paintings of Hakuin and Sengai. Before proceeding with the analysis of the paintings, I would like to articulate this idea through some important Zen texts and stories.

Linji Yixuan (Jp. Rinzai Gigen; d. 866) was the founder of the Linji (Jp. Rinzai) school of Chan Buddhism in China, the school to which Hakuin and Sengai belonged. The *Recorded Sayings of Chan Master Linji*, one of the most important texts of Zen, contains a description of the life and teachings

of Linji. In the *Recorded Sayings* the master says "Because people don't have enough faith, they cling to words, cling to phrases. They try to find the Dharma of the Buddha's by looking in written words, but they're as far away from it as heaven is from earth."<sup>10</sup>

True understanding, Linji teaches, is not to be found by clinging to words and phrases. He continues: "Students these days haven't the slightest comprehension of the Dharma. They're like sheep poking with their noses — whatever they happen on they immediately put it in their mouths ... People like that come to the way with twisted minds, rushing in wherever they see a crowd." Linji taught his student to be independent, not to rely solely upon words and letters, and to be selective.<sup>11</sup>

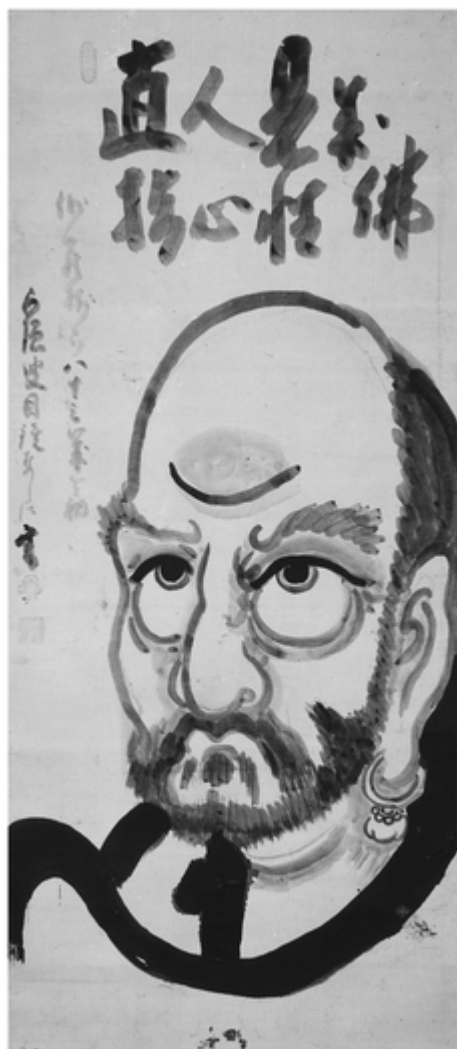
Wright draws our attention to the western view of a sheep as a metaphor for "uncritical acceptance," while here in Linji's text, the master says "The failure of individual discrimination is seen, not in the sheep's tendency to follow others, but in its failure to eat selectively" This crucial difference can illustrate the Zen perception of freedom as an outcome of constraint and monastic restriction and not as its absence. Rejection of the tradition and scriptures comes only after first accepting them, and as an outcome of this acceptance, an idea that I will return to later on.<sup>12</sup>

But what is "the separate transmission outside the scriptures"? Through what medium, then, will the teachings be transmitted? In a perfect example of a story about the historical Buddha, which appears as Case Six ("The Buddha's Flower") in the kōan collection *The Gateless Gate* (*Mumonkan* 無門関),<sup>13</sup> it is told that once when Śākyamuni Buddha was about to give a discourse in front of a congregation of monks, he merely held up a flower and kept quiet. At this time all were silent except Kāśyapa, Śākyamuni's first disciple, who only smiled. Then Śākyamuni said: "I have the eye of the true law, the Secret Essence of Nirvana, the Formless Form, the Mysterious Law-Gate. Without relying upon words and letters, beyond all teaching as a special transmission, I pass this all on to Mahakāśyapa."<sup>14</sup>

The smile of Kāśyapa, one of the principle disciples of Śākyamuni, was a very meaningful smile, a smile that expressed his understanding. This is interpreted as the "separate transmission outside teachings," a realization



that is not dependent on written or spoken language, an intuitive understanding between the student and his teacher, through which the master transmits his mind directly to his disciple. These direct means are a "mind-to-mind transmission" — *ishin denshin* 以心伝心 in Japanese — from master to disciple.<sup>[15](#)</sup>



[3.1](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma*, 1767, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 130.8 x 57.4 cm. Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

Although the classic Zen texts are not necessarily texts upon which Hakuin or Sengai directly based their paintings, they are fundamental texts and stories in the Zen tradition and represent a general attitude that was

most probably part of the monk-painters' world. Let us go back to Hakuin's paintings of Daruma (Figs. [2.4](#); [3.1](#)), which include in their inscription, as noted, the two last lines attributed to Bodhidharma that are fundamental to the Zen tradition in general, and to Hakuin's world as a Zen monk, in particular.

Hakuin was in the last year of his life when he painted these works in 1767, at the age of eighty-three. Both are powerfully depicted with large eyes and large pupils as if "pointing directly" at us — at our minds. In both paintings the first two lines of the inscription are written close to Daruma's face and are emphasized, giving the impression that these words are Daruma's words, as is often done in a cartoon. Daruma's face in both paintings is not in proportion; the space between the chin and the nose is disproportionate to the space between the nose and the crown of Daruma's head. Both the disproportion and the emphasized inscription close to Daruma's face give the impression of a caricature. Hakuin, however, is less concerned with matters of proportion than with presenting a message, especially at this point of his life, when he had weak eyes that needed glasses, as pointed out in the text.<sup>[16](#)</sup>

Hakuin, with the clear arid focused eyes of Daruma, as opposed to his own eyes, i.e. those of an eighty-three-year-old man, is asking us to "point directly at our minds" and become a Buddha. Moreover, Hakuin is less concerned with the appearance of Daruma; he is painting Daruma without using his glasses, and intentionally provides us with this information. What interests him more are Daruma's words. As a non-professional painter and a monk, Hakuin is concerned more with the message transmitted to us by Daruma's words, and therefore, the form in which he presents Daruma to us is treated with less care.

In Fig. [3.1](#), which is held in the Hosokawa collection, we may even notice some ink traces in the bottom of the painting that stained the paper by mistake. In the Seikenji painting (Fig. [2.4](#)), some extra lines on Daruma's face can be seen, making the painting seem like a sketch. For Hakuin, matters of form are less important than getting across the message. Using the big and

clear eyes of Daruma, he is asking us to point directly at our minds and not to depend on scriptures.

Hakuin is giving priority and emphasis to the text, and he is less concerned with the image. He is not trying to exhibit his technical skills as a painter and he is not trying to depict this traditional theme of Daruma in the common and customary way; he frees himself from the orthodox rules of painting just as he frees himself from the conventions of a long tradition. This freedom corresponds to the attitude of freedom to reject scriptures and of independence from words discussed above. Hakuin, as a Zen master and a painter, presents through his painting this free attitude which is reflected in both text and image. In this way, there is unity between the form and the content of Hakuin's painting of Daruma: the freedom of the painted image, and the text and message of the painting, complement each other and teach the viewer to be free.

Although Hakuin follows the tradition of Zen ink paintings, using brush and ink and depicting a traditional theme, he does it in his own individual and authentic way. In other words, he was not opposed to the rules of painting — he had mastered at least the basic rules of ink painting and he is part of the Zen tradition — yet he creates his painting in his own individual way.

In a text on Huangbo Xiyun 黄檗希運, (Jp. Ōbaku Kiun, d. 850), another influential ninth-century Chinese Chan master (and teacher of Linji), Huangbo says "If one does not actually realize the truth of Ch'an from one's own experience, but simply learns it verbally and collects words, and claims to understand Ch'an, how can one solve the riddle of life and death?" Wright, as noted above, criticizes the early western interpreters of Zen for their tendency to dichotomize between freedom and constraint, based on the common modern western idea that obedience to traditional authority prevents the development of one's own creative, imaginative spirit. The student of Zen, however, is expected to construct a new model out of a variety of models he is shown, and as in Huangbo's text, out of "one's own experience." Hence Hakuin's paintings can be regarded as a visual expression of this idea; on the one hand, his paintings express the prominence given to

tradition, but on the other, they reflect the expression of a rule breaker and free-spirited individual who has been awakened.<sup>[17](#)</sup>

This idea is also supported by some biographical facts about Hakuin, discussed in detail in the previous chapter. Early in Hakuin's life, he decided to turn his focus to the study of literature, calligraphy and painting. Several years after that, following an event where he was exposed to a piece of calligraphy by a famous priest, Hakuin realized that developing one's spiritual and mental abilities is more important than developing the technical skills of a painter or a calligrapher. Hakuin, who described calligraphy in his own autobiography as a "truly enlightened activity," decided to burn all the artwork he had done up to that point. As already noted, although there are extant paintings from Hakuin's mid-thirties, his true painting period started only in his sixties.<sup>[18](#)</sup>

Hakuin realized early in his life that his real training was inner training — the training of his spiritual and mental state. Although he had a fundamental knowledge of painting, he neglected art and devoted himself to the religious path. Hakuin returned to painting only late in his life — spiritually trained and experienced.

Age and experience, as we can see, play an important role in the development of a free attitude. In Zen texts we can recognize similar ideas: Rinzai teaches his students to be critical of their own masters and teachers, and asks them to throw away all they have learned:

Followers of the way, you take the words that come out of the mouths of a bunch of old teachers to be a description of the true way. You think, "This is a most wonderful teacher and friend. I have only the mind of a common mortal, I would never dare try to fathom such venerableness." Blind idiots! ... Followers of the way, the really good friend is someone who dares to speak ill of the Buddha, speak ill of the patriarchs, pass judgment on anyone in the world, throw away the Tripitaka.<sup>[19](#)</sup>

Although the Zen scriptures teach their students from an early stage as monks not to be blind and to reject the teachings of the Buddha, these acts of rejection are often connected with the experience of enlightenment. As Wright says, "Enlightenment narratives for most of the great masters of Zen

include at least one act in which some form of authority is radically rejected."<sup>20</sup> This rejection comes from a deep understanding and after a long journey of learning and experience, which allows this stage to occur. Then at the moment of enlightenment, one frees himself from all that he had learned.



[3.2](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Kanzan and Jittoku*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 85.5 x 25.3 cm. Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

The idea of not relying on scriptures expressed in the four sentences attributed to Bodhidharma is broader, as we can see, than a mere rejection of scriptures. It is a rejection of authority in general, a rejection of Zen masters, tradition, social conventions and common conceptions, as will be further shown in the following sections through the paintings of Hakuin and Sengai.

In another painting by Hakuin, the centrality of this idea of the rejection of scriptures is expressed through both text and image. In the inscription of this painting (Figs. [3.2](#); [3.2a](#)) Hakuin quotes a poem by the semi-legendary Chinese Buddhist eccentric from the Tang Dynasty (618–907), Kanzan 寒山 (Ch. Hanshan), who was mentioned in the previous chapter. Very little evidence for Kanzan's biography has survived, but his poems, which are collected in a work known as *Kanzanshi*, "The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain," can teach us something about his background.<sup>[21](#)</sup>

Kanzan lived in a cave in the Chekiang province and called himself Cold Mountain after the name of the cave. He often visited the Kuoching temple, a day's walk from his cave, where he used to meet with two of his friends Bukan 豐干 (Ch. Fenggan; Big Stick) and Jittoku 拾得 (Ch. Shide; Pickup).<sup>[22](#)</sup> Bukan, who was a monk at this temple, picked up the ten year-old Jittoku, who had been abandoned by his parents, brought him to the temple, and called him Pickup. Jittoku, who worked in the kitchen of the temple, used to supply the remains of the food to his friend Kanzan.<sup>[23](#)</sup> As shown in the previous chapter, Kanzan and Jittoku are often depicted together in the tradition of Zen ink painting. Kanzan is often associated with his poems and Jittoku is usually depicted holding a broom, while both are dressed in shabby clothes.<sup>[24](#)</sup>

Kanzan wrote more than 300 poems on the trees, rocks and walls around the temple. Hakuin quotes here the last poem in the collection:

If you have Kanzan's poems at home  
They're better for you than reading the sutras!

Write them out and paste them on a screen  
Where you can glance at them from time to time.<sup>[25](#)</sup>

"Separate transmission outside teachings" and "Not depending upon words and letters" are understood here on another level. The eccentric Kanzan, who lived a secluded life away from society, is a favored theme of the Zen painting tradition. Kanzan represents the Zen tendency to reject the Buddhist canon and all forms of ordinary language, and exemplifies the emphasis in the Zen tradition on intuitive forms of practice.

Hakuin quotes the poem as it is, painting a hanging scroll, which takes most of the space of his own, and adding the two eccentrics Kanzan and Jittoku to the painting. Kanzan, shown as the archetypal eccentric with long hair and loose clothes, is depicted in front of the painted screen. Jittoku is painted with his face to the viewer, hiding behind the painted scroll while gazing at the poem written on it.

Yoshizawa gives this work as an example of a common motif of Hakuin's paintings which he calls a "scroll within a scroll,"<sup>[26](#)</sup> meaning a painting in which another painting or piece of calligraphy is depicted. He goes on to discuss other examples of paintings by Hakuin using this same motif. Yoshizawa claims that by using this motif, Hakuin causes the viewer to identify with Kanzan, so that both the viewer and Kanzan examine his poem.

I agree with Yoshizawa and would like to reinforce this idea. Hakuin chose to portray a hanging scroll which takes up most of the space of his own scroll in the center of his painting, as described above. The two figures — Kanzan and Jittoku — are gazing at the scroll, while Kanzan (Fig. [3.2a](#)), who is depicted with an open mouth, is perhaps even reading the poem aloud. In this way, Hakuin invites the viewer into his painting, making him read the poem together with Kanzan. Moreover, Hakuin, in this way, directs his viewers: he draws the viewer's attention to the words, i.e. Kanzan's poem. Hakuin is making a statement: what is significant in this painting are the words written by Kanzan. He does not allow the viewer to shift his or her attention to any other direction. Kanzan's poem is at the center of



everybody's attention — for Kanzan, Jittoku, the viewer and, needless to say, Hakuin himself.



[3.2a](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Kanzan and Jittoku* (detail), hanging scroll, ink on paper, 85.5 x 25.3 cm.  
Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

Hakuin is not simply transmitting Kanzan's poem to us; he translates Kanzan's words into actions by actually writing it out on a screen and presenting this screen to us. He is giving us his own example; he himself is following Kanzan's advice to write his poem on a screen. Kanzan, as noted above, represents the Zen tendency to reject the Buddhist canon, and therefore Kanzan's poems are better for us than reading the sutras. Similarly to Hakuin's painting of Daruma, where the words of Daruma are written in

bold letters through his big and focused eyes, in the painting of Kanzan and Jittoku Hakuin is transferring to his viewers the same message of rejection of scriptures and independence from doctrines.

A visual articulation of the idea of not depending on scriptures that we see in Hakuin's paintings also exists in the painting of Sengai, which will be presented next. Each of these monk-painters had his own individual way of translating the same message into a visual expression.

## Sengai: Laws Are Principally Lawless

Worldly paintings have laws, Sengai's paintings are lawless  
Buddha says: laws are principally lawless.

— Sengai Gibon<sup>[27](#)</sup>

As demonstrated in the previous section, Hakuin freed himself from the rules of painting and the conventions of a long tradition, expressing a free attitude that is rooted in the idea of freedom from scriptures. This association between the idea of independence from scriptures and the world of painting expands and becomes even more explicit through Sengai's paintings.

This brings us back to Kanzan and Jittoku, the two eccentric friends who are so often portrayed together in the tradition of Zen ink painting. Another common depiction of Kanzan and Jittoku is them together with the third eccentric monk, Bukan, also mentioned in the previous section. Bukan, who lived as a monk in the Kuoching temple, resided in a room behind the temple's library. Bukan was the one who picked up Jittoku as a small child, and brought him to the temple. He is often depicted as bald-headed and bearded, accompanied by a tiger, with which he appeared one day, riding on its back in front of the temple.<sup>[28](#)</sup>

In a pair of folding screens painted by Sengai in 1822, at the age of seventythree (mentioned above in [chapter 2](#)), the three eccentrics, Bukan, Kanzan and Jittoku appear (Fig. [2.8](#)). On the right screen, Kanzan and Jittoku are painted under a pine tree, dressed in shabby clothes. Kanzan is holding a scroll, probably with poems written on it, and Jittoku is holding a broom and pointing at the moon. On the left screen, bald-headed and bearded Bukan is riding on the back of a tiger-like animal, surrounded by tiger cubs in a bamboo grove.<sup>[29](#)</sup>

In the painting of Kanzan and Jittoku (right screen), Sengai begins the inscription written in small letters in the right side of the screen with the words "The painting is unskillfully depicted due to the poor quality of the screens."<sup>[30](#)</sup> In the inscription on the left screen, where Bukan is depicted riding on the back of an animal that looks like a tiger, Sengai writes bombastically (the right side of the screen) "The tiger that Bukan is riding on is a kind of a dragon (*mizuchi* 蛟) that I saw clearly in my previous life; now, I have completed my painting."<sup>[31](#)</sup> Sengai however continues in the same inscription (the left side of the screen):

Worldly paintings have laws, Sengai's paintings are lawless  
Buddha says: laws are principally lawless.<sup>[32](#)</sup>

The word "law" here has two contexts: The Buddhist law, the teachings of Buddha, i.e., the religious world, and the laws of painting, the laws of the brush, i.e. the world of art. Sengai makes an association between these two contexts: In each case, for Sengai, the laws are principally lawless. Sengai, therefore, does not follow any conventional rules, neither the rules of form, i.e. technical skills, nor the rules of content, i.e. conventional concepts. This attitude of Sengai towards his artwork is not just an idea; it is expressed practically, not only through his words in the inscriptions of the paintings, but also through the way in which he paints, together with the dynamics between the form and the content of his paintings. In contrast to Hakuin's paintings above, Sengai here explicitly connects the idea of independence from rules to the world of art by applying it to the laws of painting, too.

Viewing Sengai's scroll, the viewer goes through a gradual process of comprehension. It is important, therefore, to view the paintings as one long scroll, starting with Kanzan and Jittoku's painting and continuing to Bukan's screen, in which a story develops through the inscriptions and images from right to left, presented to us here like a cartoon.<sup>33</sup>

In the inscription on the painting of Kanzan and Jittoku — the right screen, as described above — Sengai excuses his painting, declares that his paintings are not outstanding for their technical execution, and explains that this is not due to his poor technique but rather due to the poor quality of the screen. We may think (perhaps Sengai wants us to think) that he in fact intended to paint technically adroit pictures, yet for reasons unconnected to his skills, he failed.

When we look at his painting and at the way in which he depicted the figures, however, we realize the gap between his words in the inscription and the actual picture — a gap which provokes laughter. After reading the inscription, we expect to see faults that are caused by the poor quality of the screen; however, looking at the figures we immediately realize Sengai's wit and humor. The three eccentric characters together with the tigers are depicted like caricatures (Figs. [2.8a](#); [2.8b](#)). The ridiculous faces of Kanzan, Jittoku, Bukan and the tigers, their disproportionate bodies and the large and emphasized round eyes of the tigers are filled with humor. The viewer understands immediately that the comical expression of the figures is depicted intentionally, and cannot be blamed on the poor quality of the screen.

Then comes Sengai's revelation concerning Bukan's tiger, claiming that it is in fact not a tiger but a kind of a dragon from Sengai's previous life, although the viewer would most likely be familiar, through long tradition, with the convention of depicting Bukan accompanied by a tiger.<sup>34</sup> At this point, we realize that Sengai is not simply trying to be funny but is trying to teach us something; with this realization on the viewers' part, Sengai "completed his painting," as he writes in the inscription. Finally, Sengai reveals in the last inscription that in fact "Sengai's paintings are lawless," therefore we come to understand that there was probably no intention or

attempt from the beginning to follow (or not to follow) any rules — as Buddha says: "Laws are principally lawless."

This last part of the inscription appears in another painting by Sengai, one of Hotei (Fig. [3.3](#)). It appears to have been important for Sengai to convey the idea that "Laws are principally lawless," which is in fact another version of the idea of independence from words and letters discussed above, and which is summarized in the four phrases attributed to Bodhidharma.<sup>[35](#)</sup>

In this stage of his life, at the age of seventy-three, Sengai is indeed free from all rules; he uses a very common theme in the tradition of Zen and Zen ink painting in his own playful, free and creative way. This is expressed technically in the way he treats the figures and in the playfulness with which he depicts the tiger, by telling us that it is in fact a kind of imaginary dragon. Sengai is playing with the form and the content of the painting in a way in which they unite.



[3.3](#) Sengai Gibon, *Hotei*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 89.8 x 27.7 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

At the same time, Sengai is not opposed to skillful technique. Viewing his paintings, one can occasionally see the performance of a developed technique, such as in the play with the color of ink in the bamboo grove painted on the screen with Bukan, or the movement of the pine trunk in the other screen. This fact reinforces the message of Sengai, who actually is

endowed with artistic skill. However, since painting with good technique is not Sengai's concern or intention, it does not stand out in his work.<sup>[36](#)</sup>

Just as with Hakuin's paintings presented above, on the one hand, Sengai's paintings express the pre-eminence given to tradition, through the subject matter and the message transmitted, but on the other hand, they reflect a rule breaker and a free-spirited individual who has been awakened. This freedom, as Wright points out, is both the practice and the outcome of constraint, and not an indication of its absence.

Unlike Hakuin, however, in Sengai's case, as we have seen, we have no information about his artistic background that can serve as a biographical support for this attitude of freedom. What we do know is that although there are extant paintings of Sengai from a younger age, he started his true painting period late in life; retirement enabled him to concentrate more on his paintings, which became freer in their expression the older he became, just as with Hakuin.<sup>[37](#)</sup>





[3.4](#) Sengai Gibon, *Kensu*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 111.3 x 27.8 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

In the beginning of this chapter, I spoke of the appreciation and respect that exists in Zen thought for rule breakers and free-spirited individuals. Wright emphasizes the fact that this appreciation does not contradict the pre-eminence given to regulation, hierarchy, authority, and constraint; this free attitude is in fact the outcome of such constraint. The three characters

presented above, i.e. Kanzan, Jittoku and Bukan, who are the subject of Hakuin and Sengai's paintings together with Hotei, are favorite characters in the Zen tradition. They represent unconventionality, foolishness and humor and express the free attitude that is appreciated in the Zen thought. As Wright describes it, "Zen masters were widely thought to be rule breakers, free-spirited individuals whose 'awakenings' enable them to laugh uproariously in the face of normal social constraint."<sup>38</sup>

Another eccentric Zen monk, a character of the same type as Kanzan, Jittoku, Bukan and Hotei, who is also a common theme in the tradition of Zen paintings, is the semi-legendary Chinese monk from the ninth century named Kensu 蜆子 (Ch. Xianzi), literally "Clam Priest." He used to wander along lakes and river-banks eating shrimps and clams, despite the Buddhist requirement of adherence to a vegetarian diet. One day, he attained enlightenment while catching a shrimp.<sup>39</sup>

Although violating this Buddhist law, Kensu is a favorite theme in Zen art. He is depicted often as bald-headed, wearing shabby clothes and holding a shrimp in one hand and a net in the other and is the subject of many Zen ink paintings. Sengai, being part of the Zen ink painting tradition, created numerous paintings of Kensu. Nevertheless, the particular depiction of Kensu by Sengai in the following painting (Figs. [3.4](#); [3.4a](#)) expresses a free attitude that breaks the patterns of the tradition in many ways.



[3.4a](#) Sengai Gibon, *Kensu* (detail), hanging scroll, ink on paper, 111.3 x 27.8 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

In Sengai's painting of Kensu, the inscription reads: "Do not kill; release living creatures" (*kaisatsu hōjō* 戒殺放生).<sup>40</sup> Sengai's Kensu is very simple and minimalist, portrayed in soft and round strokes. He is depicted as bald-headed and half-naked, standing in the water holding a net in his one hand and a shrimp in his other lifted arm. His head is lifted up looking at the shrimp he has just caught. Kensu is depicted with minimal strokes: his hands, fingers, legs and face are portrayed with almost no details.

In [chapter 2](#), I dedicated a whole section to Hakuin and Sengai's relation to the tradition of Zen ink painting, including the presentation of some traditional examples. There I focused mainly on the formalistic aspects of the paintings. I wish to discuss, once again, an example of an early depiction of Kensu. Here, however, I want to emphasize the way in which Sengai's

paintings, on the one hand, are part of the tradition, and on the other hand, express authenticity and freedom from the traditional patterns, this time taking in consideration both text and image.



[3.5](#) Kaō, *Kensu*, middle of the fourteenth century, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 87 x 34.2 cm.  
Tokyo National Museum. Important Cultural Property

An early example of a Zen painting from the fourteenth century is the famous depiction of Kensu by Kaō 可翁 (?–1345) who was active during the middle of the fourteenth century. Kao's painting (Fig. 3.5) is an Important Cultural Property held at the Tokyo National Museum.<sup>41</sup> Kao's Kensu is also bald-headed, portrayed as dressed in shabby clothes on the bank of some kind of river or pond, holding a net in one hand and a shrimp in his other, raised, arm. His head is lifted up looking at the shrimp he has just caught. An overhanging cliff with trailing vegetation is depicted above his head.<sup>42</sup>

One can see that Kao's Kensu is depicted with round and loose strokes, with not many details and expressing spontaneity and freedom; yet when we look again at Sengai's painting, we realize how much softer and rounder Sengai's Kensu is. In Sengai's painting there are no vertical and horizontal straight lines, as there are in the earlier painting of Kensu — it is even less detailed and is rendered in a light and playful way. Sengai's half-naked Kensu is completely free, enjoying his own merry world.

The interesting dynamics that exist between the inscription and the image of Kensu illustrate Sengai's authentic way of reflecting the contradiction, through a visual means, which as discussed above only seems to exist between the Buddhist law and freedom. The inscription in Sengai's painting, written above Kensu's head, is minimalist, very short and concise: "Do not kill; release living creatures." Although Kensu as a Zen monk was familiar with this regulation, he had just caught a shrimp and violated the Buddhist law.

One can immediately feel the tension between the concise, clear and serious message floating above Kensu's head, and Kensu's joyfulness and freedom. The viewer's natural sense of obedience makes him or her feel unease with this tension, a feeling that makes Sengai's message so profound and powerful. Sengai, by executing his painting in this way, emphasizes the conflict that seemingly exists between the image itself and the inscription, i.e. the Buddhist law and the free action of Kensu, or in other words, a conflict which exists between the form and the content of Sengai's painting.

This conflict, however, exists only apparently. Wright's insight on freedom as the outcome of constraint and monastic restriction, rather than the

absence of constraint, is expressed here visually. The law and the freedom from the law appear harmoniously in Sengai's painting; there is no contradiction between the law and Kensu's action and no contradiction between the text and the image of Sengai's painting. Sengai's viewers are familiar with the story of Kensu and know that Kensu is in fact appreciated for his action, the free action of a rule breaker, an awakened and enlightened person whose mind ignores distinctions and who can "laugh uproariously in the face of normal social constraint."<sup>43</sup>

Sengai's depiction expresses his own freedom of mind. He is part of the Zen tradition, conveying its messages through a conventional theme, but at the same time he presents this theme in an innovative and free way. The idea of independence from scriptures is expressed through both the inscriptions and images of Sengai's paintings in his own authentic way, as Sengai declares: "Sengai's paintings are lawless, Buddha says: laws are principally lawless."<sup>44</sup>

The free attitude expressed in the art work of both Hakuin and Sengai is based on the fundamental idea of rejection of scriptures. This idea, which is summarized in the four phrases attributed to Bodhidharma, is deeply rooted in the thought of Zen Buddhism. However, it is not a mere rejection of scriptures — it is broader than that. It is a rejection of authority in general, a rejection of Zen masters, tradition, social conventions and common conceptions.

This rejection comes from a deep understanding and after a long journey of learning and experience, which allows this stage to occur. It is, therefore, connected with the experience of enlightenment, when a person frees himself from all that he has learned. In the Zen painting tradition, this free attitude is strongly associated with certain personalities who were eccentric, free-spirited individuals and rule breakers, whose awakening enabled them to laugh in the face of social conventions and constraints.

Both Hakuin and Sengai, who were non-professional painters, began their true painting period at a late age, after their sixties, when they were spiritually trained and experienced. Their paintings reflect, on the one hand,

a pre-eminence given to the tradition, through the subject matter and message transmitted; on the other hand, they express authenticity and freedom from the traditional patterns. These two approaches can be reconciled, adopting Wright's idea, if we understand that obedience to traditional authority does not necessarily prevent the development of creativity. On the contrary, after a long period of spiritual training and understanding of the tradition, an outcome is the free spirit that is naturally expressed and reflected in the paintings.

The emphasis on the message and content in the artwork of both Hakuin and Sengai's paintings is not the result of their lack of skill and is not due to mere personal preference of aesthetic style. Rather, it is due to their understanding early in their lives that what is important for them is focusing on spiritual training and the transmission of the message, and therefore they are less concerned with displaying high technical skill. There is a break, sometimes even intentionally, with the visual patterns of the Zen ink paintings' tradition, resulting in an authentic free expression reflected in both the form and the content of their paintings.

In the following three chapters, I will focus on other manifestations of freedom by examining a variety of paintings and themes by Hakuin and Sengai. Freedom will be shown to be expressed both through the direct and obvious subject matters of the paintings and through other issues which seem at first glance unrelated to freedom. All of these, however, are revealed to be strongly connected to the idea of *Not depending upon words and letters* and the general attitude of freedom discussed above.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 119.

<sup>2</sup> See Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 119–38 and also the chapter entitled "Enlightenment: the Awakening of Mind," 181–206. See also Wright, "The Concept of Freedom," 113–24.

<sup>3</sup> Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 134.



[4](#) *Kyōge betsuden* 教外別伝; *Furyū monji* 不立文字; *Jikishi ninshin* 直指人心; *Kenshō jōbutsu* 見性成仏. These lines appear in numerous Zen texts; often partially — only half of the verse, or a combination of three phrases together — and as the words of Bodhidharma. They appear partially, for instance, in a Story in the *Mumonkan* 無門関 (see below) from the thirteenth century, where they are attributed to the historical Buddha. According to Dumoulin, although these lines are traditionally attributed to Bodhidharma, they were in fact formulated much later, during the Tang Dynasty (618–906). See Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism* vol. 1, 85; see also Miura and Sasaki, *Zen Dust*, 229–30; Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 227–8. These four phrases were previously mentioned in chapter 2. For more on the idea of the "separate transmission" see Foulk, "Sung Controversies," 220–94.

[5](#) As Zen monks and abbots of famous Zen temples, Hakuin and Sengai were almost certainly familiar with the Zen texts I will quote, either through oral transmission or by directly reading them.

[6](#) This book is an important text for Zen practitioners, written by the Chinese master Xutang Zhiyu lit 虚堂智愚 (Jp. Kidō Chigu, 1185–1269). The translation is taken from Hoffmann, *Every End Exposed*, 69. See also in the same book, a related story called *Tell Me Where I Can Spit*, 76. On *kōan* and Hakuin see also chapter 1, above.

[7](#) For the discussion of Daruma see chapter 2, above.

[8](#) In Japanese: 直指人心/見性成仏/沙羅樹下/八十三歳老納/白隠叟/眼鏡なしに書; above is my translation. *Kenshō* is normally translated as awakening or enlightenment. I retained the Japanese term in order to distinguish it from the word *satori*, which is also translated as enlightenment but has a wider meaning. The historical Buddha entered *nirvana* under a sāla-tree (*Ficus religiosa*); it is also called the Bodhi tree or the Bo-tree.

[9](#) Heine and Wright, *Zen Canon*, 3.

[10](#) The translation brought here is taken from Watson, *Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi*, 29–30.

[11](#) Watson, *Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi*, 31.

[12](#) Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 121 n. 9; 123.

- [13](#) The *Mumonkan* is a Zen text from the thirteenth century, a collection of 48 Zen kōans compiled by the Chinese monk Wumen Huikai 無門慧開 (Jp. Murnon Ekai, 1183–1260). For more on the *Mumonkan* and kōans see Dumoulin, *Zen Enlightenment*, 65–76, and Miura & Sasaki, *Zen Kōan*.
- [14](#) The translation is adapted from R.H. Blyth, *Zen and Zen Classics* vol. 4, 76.
- [15](#) On the transmission from mind to mind see Miura and Sasaki, *Zen Dust*, 38 n. 3; Hori, "Zen Kōan Capping Phrase Books," 171.
- [16](#) On Fig. 2.4 see also chapter 2. For more on this painting see Yamashita, *Zenga: The Return from America*, 186–87 and Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 201. For more on Fig. 3.1 see Kyoto Bunka Hakubutsukan, *Hakuin: Zen to Shouga*, 34.
- [17](#) The quote is taken from Chang, *Original teachings*, 105, which is a selection from the *Transmission of the Lamp*. For more on Huang Po, see Blofeld, *Zen Teaching of Huang Po*. See also Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 119; 134.
- [18](#) Waddell, *Wild Ivy*, 23–4. For this particular event in detail, see chapter 2, above.
- [19](#) Translation from Watson, *Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi*, 44. For another translation see Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 121. *Tripitaka* is the Buddhist canon of scriptures.
- [20](#) Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 120.
- [21](#) For a bilingual translation of the full collection see Pine, *Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*. On Kanzan, Jittoku and Bukan see chapter 2.
- [22](#) Chekiang province is at the base of Hanyen, or Cold Cliff, two days' walk from the East China Sea. See Pine, *Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*, 4. The collection of the poems of Cold Mountain translated by Pine also includes poems by Bukan and Jittoku.
- [23](#) In addition to the poems, another source through which we can learn something about Kanzan, Bukan and Jittoku is the *Keitoku Dentō Roku*. For more on the three monks, see Pine, *Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*, 3–18; Brinker and Kanazawa, *Zen Masters of Meditation*, 142–8.

- [24](#) For some early representations of Kanzan and Jittoku in the medieval period see Levine and Lippit, *Awakenings*, 104–11. See also Kanazawa, *Japanese Ink Painting*, 59–65.
- [25](#) Song number 307 in Pine, *Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*, 257. The translation into English is taken from the exhibition catalog Hanazono University Historical Museum, *Hakuin: Zenga to Bokuseki*, vii. In Japanese: 家に寒山の詩あらば/あなたが経巻を読むに勝れり/屏風の上に書き放きて/時々に見ること一編せよ. In Chinese: 家有寒山詩勝汝讀經卷書放屏風上時々看一遍
- [26](#) I translated this term directly from Yoshizawa's Japanese: 軸中軸. See Yoshizawa, *Hakuin – Zenga no sekai*, 181–2.
- [27](#) Taken from the inscription of Sengai's painting called "Bukan and Kanzan Jittoku"; 豊干寒山拾得図屏風, Fig. 2.8.
- [28](#) For more on Bukan, see above.
- [29](#) For more on this theme and this specific painting see chapter 2. See also Izumi and Mizukami, *Suibokuga no kyoshō*, 99.
- [30](#) My translation is from the Japanese version: 絵が拙いのは屏風の造りが粗要なせいだ, in Izumi and Mizukami, *Suibokuga no kyoshō*, 99. This part of the inscription is written in small letters in the Chinese style poem.
- [31](#) In the Chinese style poem: 豊干所御虎其形如蛟厓也前生/親視之天台今以図焉, see Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 210 and Nakayama, *Sengai – sono shōgai*, 71–3.
- [32](#) My translation. In the Chinese style poem: 世画有法厓画無法/仏言法本法 無法. For other translations into English see Stevens, *Zenga: Brushstrokes of Enlightenment*, 13 and Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 34.
- [33](#) The screens, part of the Idemitsu museum's collection, are displayed annually, but not necessarily in the form of one long scroll as I suggest. Sengai rarely used the format of folding screens. Perhaps he chose this format in this specific case precisely because it allows the viewer to experience a process.
- [34](#) As mentioned in the introduction to this book, most of Sengai's viewers would have been familiar with the world of Zen Buddhism to some extent, even lay people.

- [35](#) The painting is a hanging scroll of Hotei called: *Hotei zu* 布袋図. For more on the painting see Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 34. On Hotei see chapter 2, above; also Brinker, *Zen Masters of Meditation*, 138–41.
- [36](#) See also Izumi and Mizukami, *Suibokuga no kyoshō*, 97.
- [37](#) For a full discussion of age and freedom, see chapter 2.
- [38](#) Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 119. For a discussion of these personages see Lippit, "Awakenings," 40–41 and Faure, *Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 115–24.
- [39](#) The story of Kensu appears in the *Keitoku dentō roku*. For more on Kensu with the exact references to the original story see Brinker, *Zen Masters of Meditation*, 148–9; Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 227 n. 5; Barnet and Burto, *Zen Ink Paintings*, 40; Lippit, "Awakenings," 41.
- [40](#) Translation adapted from Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 29. See also Suzuki, *Sengai: The Zen Master*, 159.
- [41](#) Kaō's identity is uncertain, but he is commonly considered to be a Japanese Zen monk who went to China and stayed there more than ten years. On his return he became the abbot of some famous Zen temple.
- [42](#) For more on this painting see Barnet and Burto, *Zen Ink Paintings*, 40–41. See also Levine and Lippit, *Awakenings*, 116–19. For other early representations of Kensu see Levine and Lippit, *Awakenings*, 112–15; 120–21.
- [43](#) Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 119.
- [44](#) Dale Wright speaks of the way in which imitation is conceived in the modern west as an antithesis to freedom. He suggests that in Zen thought there is in fact a distinction between an "authentic practice of imitation and an inauthentic miming that never penetrates to the depths of experiential practice," therefore only certain forms of imitation are conceived as being antithetical to freedom. If we may borrow this idea and apply it to the way in which Hakuin and Sengai relate to their past and tradition, we can say that their authentic paintings express a very high level of freedom. See Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 129–32.

## 4 Letting Go of Common Conceptions

This mind is no mind of conceptual thought and it is completely detached from form. So Buddhas and sentient beings do not differ at all. If you can only rid yourselves of conceptual thought, you will have accomplished everything. But if you students of the way do not rid yourselves of conceptual thought in a flash, even though you strive for aeon after aeon, you will never accomplish it. Enmeshed in the meritorious practices of the Three Vehicles, you will be unable to attain Enlightenment.

—Huang Po<sup>1</sup>

The discussion in the previous chapter focused on the paintings by Hakuin and Sengai that illustrate in the most explicit and direct way their adherence to the idea of the rejection of scriptures. In this chapter and in the following one, additional paintings that express the attitude of freedom in its broader sense will be analyzed. The rejection of scriptures, as shown, is part of a broader attitude of rejecting authority, including the rejection of Zen masters, tradition, social conventions and common conceptions. The latter will be the focus of this chapter.

In the artwork of Hakuin and Sengai, as will be shown, common perceptions are regarded as restricting and blinding. Through letting go and releasing ourselves from them we can gain freedom and pave our way to enlightenment. The discussion will center on two main issues: illusion, which will be discussed in the first part, and the concept of beauty, in particular the significance we commonly give to beauty and to external appearances, which will be discussed in the second part.

## **Taking the Seeming for the Real**

The arising and the elimination of illusion are both illusory. Illusion is not something rooted in Reality; it exists because of your dualistic thinking ... This is the meaning of: "I

will let go with both hands, for then I shall certainly discover the Buddha in my Mind."

— Huang Po<sup>2</sup>

Let me repeat that Enlightenment cannot be bodily grasped ... In reality there is nothing to be grasped (perceived, attained, conceived, etc.)—even not-grasping cannot be grasped. So it is said: "There is NOTHING to be grasped."

—Huang Po<sup>3</sup>

The focus of this section will be the paintings by Hakuin and Sengai whose subject matter is illusion. My main goal here is to show how the presentation of illusion in these paintings is connected with the attitude of freedom. As part of this discussion I will also examine the relation of illusion to enlightenment. As shown already in the previous chapter, enlightenment and freedom are closely related. Illusion, however, will be shown to be an obstacle on the path to enlightenment. I shall focus on two themes depicted in a variety of paintings by Hakuin and Sengai: the rope mistaken for a snake, and the monkey.

The first theme is depicted by both Hakuin and Sengai in a similar way: several figures standing around a piece of a rope reacting to it as if it was a snake. This theme has a deeper meaning than the simple narrative of a rope mistaken for a snake. The physical mistake of the eyes, the illusion of seeing a snake instead of a rope, is more than a mere optical illusion. The state of illusion also represents the mental state of being deluded. This theme, therefore, is an allegory of the mind's delusion due to misconceptions.

I will begin first with a painting by Sengai (Fig. [4.1](#)) held in the Idemitsu collection and called *A Broken Piece of Rope* (Jp. *kirenawa* 切れ縄). The painting depicts two figures, a male and a female, on the right side of the scroll. At the bottom of the scroll, two pieces of rope are painted, one of which touches the foot of the male figure. At the top of the scroll the sky is painted with a misty moon on the top left side.<sup>4</sup>

The inscription written on the top right side of the scroll says:

In a broken piece of rope (*kirenawa ni*),  
There is no mouth, but ... (*kuchi wa nakeredo* ...)

A misty moon (*oborozuki*).<sup>5</sup>

Sengai plays with the similar sound of the phrase *kuchi wa nai* 口はない in the second line of the inscription, which means "there is no mouth," and the word *kuchinawa* 朽縄, an old word for snake, literally "rotten rope," because a snake resembles a rotten rope. The meaning of the second line of the inscription thus can be switched to the other meaning, which is "snake"; a broken piece of rope/snake has no mouth, but under a misty moon it may appear as if it does. Or, put differently, under a hazy moon a broken piece of rope that has no mouth may seem like a snake.<sup>6</sup>

Under the misty moon the two figures mistake the rope for a snake and seem surprised and frightened. The male figure seems to be running away from the two pieces of rope while the female figure appears to be leaning forward towards the pieces of rope, stretching her two hands wide open. With her open mouth she seems to be yelling in panic. The facial expression and body language of both figures is exaggerated, creating a comical scene.

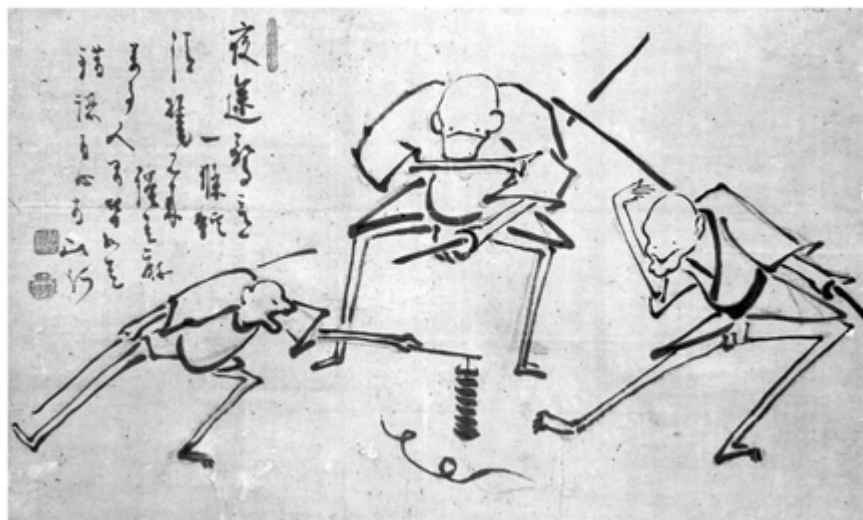




[4.1](#) Sengai Gibon, *A Broken Piece of Rope*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 27.0 × 31.7 cm.  
Idemitsu Museum of Art

Sengai's painting, hence, seems to describe the situation where, in poor lighting, a rope resembles a snake. However, is Sengai's painting really just a picture of a broken piece of rope resembling a snake? Is it merely a play on words? As a first step towards answering this question, we can already say that this theme is not Sengai's own personal invention. The same theme had been previously painted by Hakuin.

Hakuin's painting (Fig. [4.2](#)), which is held in a private collection and is called *Snake* (*hebi* 蛇) or *Snake on the street at night* (*yo-michi no hebi* 夜道の蛇),<sup>7</sup> adds some information about the meaning of this scene. Here there are three figures depicted around a piece of rope. The figures, probably male, hold some kind of sticks in their hands, trying to fight with the frightening "rope." The figures are portrayed with very long legs and arms, the shapes of their heads are disproportionate and their faces are depicted with almost no detail. Their facial expressions and body language is exaggerated, giving the impression of both a very dramatic scene and a caricature, quite similar to Sengai's painting.



[4.2](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Snake*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 56.6 × 33.8 cm. Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Private collection

The inscription, which is written on the upper left side of the scroll, reads:

A snake surprises the night travelers.  
Under a bright lantern it is just a rope.  
That's the way everything is with human beings  
Who mistakenly see "mind" as they walk among mountains and rivers.<sup>8</sup>

Thanks to the inscription, we can say clearly that this is the same theme portrayed by Sengai. Here, however, Hakuin adds some additional information: He compares the situation of mistaking a rope for a snake to human nature in general. Although the last line of Hakuin's inscription remains somewhat ambiguous, we can understand that the scene of mistaking a rope for a snake is not a mere physical mistake of the senses.<sup>9</sup>

The idea of the snake and the rope is also described through a specific Buddhist term, *jajōma* 蛇繩麻, literally "snake-seeming (hemp) rope." This theme is thus not a personal invention of the monk-painters; rather it is based on the Buddhist tradition that both Hakuin and Sengai were most likely familiar with. Hakuin and Sengai were not interested in merely painting a situation in which people mistakenly see a rope as a snake; they use it as an allegory for the common misconception of taking the seeming for the real, of being deluded by mere appearances.

Through another common theme, that of the monkey, painted by both Hakuin and Sengai, we can see even more clearly how the mistake of the eyes is conceived as an allegory for our mental misconceptions. Through this theme I shall elaborate more specifically the relation of illusion to freedom — or in other words, in what way the deluded mind is conceived of as an unliberated mind.

The specific theme is called *Monkey Trying to Catch the Moon* (Jp. *Enkōsokugetsu zu* 猿猴捉月図). As discussed in [chapter 2](#), the monkey is a traditional theme in Zen ink painting, dating back to the early Zen painting of the Kamakura period, and being closely associated with the Chinese Chan monk-painter Mu Qi (Jp. Mokkei), who influenced the style in which monkeys were depicted in generations of ink paintings to follow (Fig. [2.10](#)).<sup>10</sup>

Here, I will focus on the specific theme of the monkey attempting to catch the moon. My examination of several examples of this theme will be conducted first through a look at the iconography of the paintings, including relevant Zen texts, followed by analysis of the expression of the same ideas through the formal aspects of the painting—the image itself. Through separately analyzing the text and the image I wish, however, to emphasize the opposite—that the text and the image are very closely connected, so that in fact the text expresses the image and the image expresses the text.



[4.3](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Monkey Grasping at the Moon*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 118.8 × 27.8 cm. Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Ryuunji Collection

I will begin with a painting by Hakuin called *Monkey Grasping at the Moon* (*Enkōsokugetsuzu* 猿猴捉月図; Fig. [4.3](#)) from the Ryuunji collection. The image of the monkey occupies the larger lower part of the hanging scroll while the inscription appears in the upper part. The monkey is portrayed with long arms, hanging by one arm from the branch of a tree while the

other is trying to reach out to a circle depicted at the bottom part of the scroll, which is the moon. The moon that is reflected in the water is mistaken for a real moon by the monkey, who tries to catch it with his hand.

The monkey is depicted with minimum strokes, while most of its body is portrayed with light ink, except its face, fingers and toes. This style follows the Zen ink painting tradition, especially the early paintings of the Kamakura period, a style that was appreciated and valued for generations. However, what seems to be a piece of art that simply follows the Zen ink painting tradition is discovered to be quite different, as I will show.

The inscription of the painting, written in light ink in the upper part of the scroll, reads "If he would let go of his hand, he will sink in the deep spring. The ten directions' light, a graceful brightness."<sup>11</sup> In order to understand the inscription, it is necessary first to examine the origins of the story of the monkey attempting to grasp the moon. It can be traced back to the earliest collection of Buddhist writings, the *Tripitaka*.<sup>12</sup> In the seventh chapter of the first part of the *Tripitaka*, "the Book of Discipline" (*Vinaya Pitaka*), there is a story told by the Buddha in order to criticize his cousin Devadatta. Devadatta, who was jealous of the Buddha and his success, attempted to kill him on several occasions, eventually, as tradition has it, falling into hell.<sup>13</sup>

The story of the monkeys was told by the Buddha to his disciples. Five hundred monkeys wandering in the forest see a well with the reflection of the moon in it. The monkey's leader arranges all 500 monkeys, hand to tail, while he, as the first in the chain, holds a branch in order to catch the reflected moon. However, due to the heavy weight, the branch breaks and all 500 monkeys fall into the well.<sup>14</sup>

The story is usually interpreted as an allegory of a deluded person who, taking the seeming for the real, attempts to reach what is beyond reach and to grasp the unattainable—an illusion that leads to frustration and failure. The monkey who mistakes the moon reflected upon the water for the real moon is an allegory for the unenlightened mind deluded by mere appearances.<sup>15</sup>

The relation between monkeys and delusion can be found in several Buddhist terms, such as *chikō* 癡猴, which means "a deluded monkey": "The deluded monkey seizing the reflection of the moon in the water, e.g. unenlightened men who take the seeming for the real."<sup>16</sup> Another Buddhist term related to monkeys is *shinen* 心猿, which means "monkey-like mind," referring to "the mind as a restless monkey in its pursuit of objects of desire."<sup>17</sup>

Let us go back to Hakuin's inscription. The two lines of the inscription are in fact part of an inscription of four lines that appears in another painting by Hakuin. This painting, which is held in the Hosokawa collection, was discussed briefly in a previous chapter ([Plate 2](#)).<sup>18</sup> The full inscription reads as follows:

The monkey seeks for the moon in the water  
Continuously till death.  
If he would let go of his hand, he will sink in the deep spring.  
The Ten Directions' light, a graceful brightness.<sup>19</sup>

Reading Hakuin's full inscription leaves us puzzled as to the meaning of the last sentence. The monkey, who continuously seeks the moon in the water, leads himself to his own death. However, the last sentence describes the act as a positive thing—as "a graceful brightness." In other words, by letting go of his hand, the monkey will in fact gain "a graceful brightness" and the light of the Ten Directions.

If we separate the inscription into two parts, the first two and the last two lines, as I suggest, we can solve this apparent confusion. In the first two lines, Hakuin describes the situation in which a monkey is deluded by the moon reflected in the water and by trying to reach it, finds its own death—a situation that is an allegory for a deluded person. The second two lines, however, should be read as an explanation of the allegory and not as a continuation of the narrative itself. When Hakuin says "If he would let go of his hand" in the third line, he does not mean it literally but allegorically. The problem with a deluded mind, like our monkey's, is that it clings to an idea and is unable to let go; therefore Hakuin explains in the second two lines

that if in fact the monkey would let go of his hand, he would gain a graceful brightness—a moment of enlightenment.

Thus, Hakuin shifts from the narrative itself in the first two lines to an explanation of the allegory in the last two lines. Our mind is attached to the narrative of the first two lines, where the monkey is described as seeking the moon, so that when we read the next two lines, we are sure that Hakuin is continuing to describe what has happened to the monkey. However, Hakuin by then had already moved to explaining the allegory.

"Letting go" is thus a central concept in Hakuin's inscription. He uses it in two senses: the literal meaning of the monkey's releasing his hand from its grip on the branch of the tree, and the allegorical meaning of neglecting an idea or giving up a desire for something. The ideas of "letting go" and "grasping" appear several times in the text of Huangbo. Huangbo associates "grasping" with illusion: "The arising and the elimination of illusion are both illusory. Illusion is not something rooted in Reality; it exists because of your dualistic thinking ... This is the meaning of: 'I will let go with both hands, for then I shall certainly discover the Buddha in my Mind.'"<sup>20</sup> The deluded monkey is in a state of illusion due to its attempt to grasp the reflected moon, just as a person remains in a state of illusion if he fails to give up a desire to reach something.

In the previous section, I discussed the relation between rejection of rules and enlightenment. At the moment of enlightenment, one frees himself from all that he has learned. An example is the case of the priest Kensu, who despite the Buddhist requirement to adhere to a vegetarian diet, attained enlightenment while catching a shrimp. This freedom from the Buddhist law, as we have seen, is related to the experience of enlightenment, while "letting go" is part of that same freedom. "Letting go" is to free oneself from clinging and grasping. As Huangbo says, "Above all, have no longing to become a future Buddha; your sole concern should be, as thought succeeds thought, to avoid clinging to any of them ... hasten to rid yourself of any desire to cling to him."<sup>21</sup> Or, as it is stated in the quotation at the beginning of this section, "Let me repeat that Enlightenment cannot be bodily grasped."<sup>22</sup>

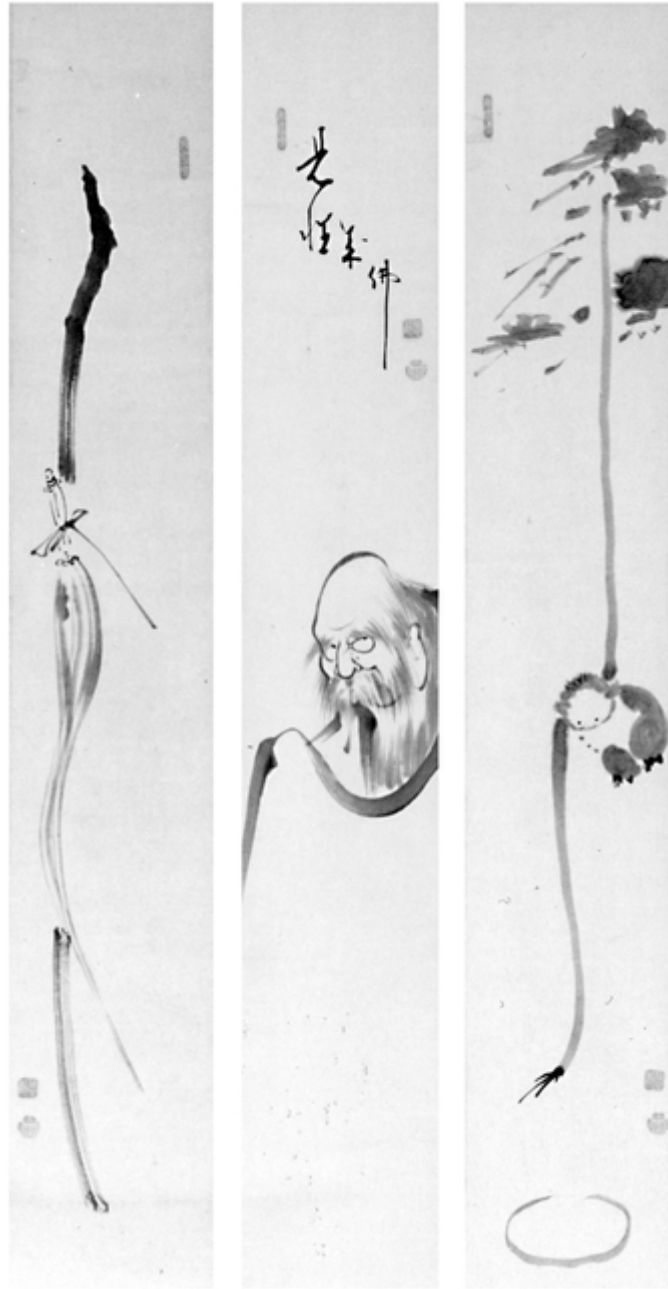


In another work by Hakuin, "illusion" and "enlightenment" are presented as two different states of mind; the painting expresses the process of change that one experiences, from an illusionary state of mind to a state of enlightenment. This painting, which is held in the Hosokawa collection, is a triptych of three scrolls (Fig. 4.4). The first scroll to the right, titled *Monkey* (*Enkō* 猿猴), is a depiction of the same theme of the "Monkey Trying to Catch the Moon" (Fig. 4.4a). The monkey is depicted as the traditional long-armed monkey, hanging by one hand from the branch of a tree and trying to reach for the moon reflected in the water with the other.<sup>23</sup>

The second, middle scroll, is called *The first founder* (*Shosozu* 初祖図), and is the only scroll of the three with an inscription. It is a painting of Daruma, the first founder of the Zen sect, as implied in the title of the painting. Daruma's face is depicted in the middle of the scroll while above, in the upper part of the scroll, there is an inscription reading "Achieving *kenshō* becoming a Buddha" (*kenshō-jōbutsu* 見性成佛).<sup>24</sup>

The left-hand and final part of the triptych is called *Hossu* 払子, which means a flywhisk. It is depicted vertically from top to bottom of the scroll. However, the flywhisk is not portrayed alone; it is painted in front, while underneath there is a depiction of a staff, a monk's walking stick (*shujō* 拄杖). The flywhisk and the staff are both used by Buddhist monks. The flywhisk is made out of hemp, silk or animal hair. It originated in India and was used by wandering Buddhist monks who used to carry it with them in order to sweep small creatures out of their paths, so that they would not step on them. Chan masters in ancient China used the flywhisk and it became a symbol of the "transmission from the heart-mind to heart-mind"; as such it was passed down from a Zen master to his dharma successor.

There are numerous paintings by Hakuin of a staff and a whisk painted together. Hakuin gave these paintings to his own disciples as a certificate (Jp. *inka* 印可): "Approval of the enlightenment of the disciple by the teacher. An acknowledgment of the disciple's ability to be a teacher in her/his own right."<sup>25</sup> In many cases they were painted and given by Hakuin after a



[4.4](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Monkey, The first founder, Hossu*, triptych of hanging scrolls, ink on paper, 111.8 × 18.3 cm each. Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

disciple had passed a *kōan*.<sup>[26](#)</sup> One example of such certificate-painting is held in the Shinwa-an Collection (Fig. [4.5](#)), a painting that was created by Hakuin in 1766, at the age of eighty-two. Here the staff is painted in the

shape of a dragon's head and therefore is called Dragon Staff. The inscription of this painting, written on both sides of the staff, certifies the success of the man who received the painting.<sup>[27](#)</sup>

As the monkey is an allegory for an unenlightened mind, a person who is deluded by mere appearances, the whisk and staff in the third scroll of the triptych are associated with the enlightened masters (Fig. [4.4](#)). Hakuin, who made use of such staff and whisk paintings as certification of his disciples' enlightenment, uses the same theme here for a different purpose. Here the painting is one of three stages in a process that one experiences on the way to enlightenment. The state of illusion is the first stage, which is represented by the painting of the deluded monkey grasping at the moon (Fig. [4.4a](#)). The second stage is enlightenment, which is expressed through the painting of Daruma, the enlightened one who reaches this stage of enlightenment by directly pointing at the mind, without depending upon words and letters.<sup>[28](#)</sup>



[4.5](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Dragon Staff*, 1762, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 125 × 28.5 cm. Gitter-Yelen Collection, New Orleans

The final scroll symbolizes the third—post-enlightenment—stage. The process, as can be seen, does not end with the achievement of enlightenment. The staff and whisk are symbols of the transmission of teachings by a master to his disciples. This transmission is the "separate

transmission outside teachings" which is not dependent on written or spoken language; it is an intuitive understanding between the student and his teacher through which the master transmits his mind directly to his disciple—the "mind-to-mind transmission."

"Illusion," therefore, is a state of mind that can be in fact the first step in the process of achieving enlightenment. As Huangbo says: "It is only in contradistinction to greed, anger and ignorance that abstinence, calm and wisdom exist. Without illusion, how could there be Enlightenment?"<sup>29</sup>

Let us now return to the first painting discussed above (Fig. [4.3](#)) and examine the ways in which Hakuin expresses the same idea of clinging to perceptions and being deluded by appearances through the image itself. Having explored the idea through text and iconography we shall now look at the way it is expressed through the formal aspects of the painting.

As implied above, when one first looks at this work it appears to be another example of a Zen monkey-painting, a familiar theme in Zen ink painting dating back to the Kamakura period. "Mokkei's monkey," with its long arms, shows its traces once again. However, things are not so simple, as we can already see from the iconography of the painting. Despite appearances, Hakuin is not interested in merely reiterating a traditional theme. Rather, I suggest that he intentionally tries to give a first impression of a painting that simply follows the traditional theme of a monkey, attracts the viewer's attention to the familiar theme and in this way challenges the viewer to examine his painting deeply in order to realize its true meaning.



[4.4a](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Monkey* (detail), one of a triptych of hanging scrolls, ink on paper, 111.8 × 18.3 cm. Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

Hakuin creates this appearance in different ways. First, the monkey is depicted with the long traditional arms of Mokkei's monkey and it is painted in the same manner and style as early Zen ink paintings. As shown in detail in the previous chapter, depicting most of the monkey's body with light ink, with only a few dark strokes in some parts of the image, is typical of early Zen ink painting.<sup>[30](#)</sup> Furthermore, although the theme is the monkey's

attempt to grasp the moon, the moon itself is drawn in bottom of the scroll and depicted in a very light ink, so that it can easily be ignored by the viewer. In addition, the inscription, written in the upper part of the scroll, is rendered in light ink and is not emphasized at all. Despite the fact that the inscription is the grounds for understanding the content of the painting and realizing that this monkey is different than the traditional one, the words are not emphasized. If we compare this painting to other examples of Hakuin's paintings, we can see that writing an inscription in light ink is not necessarily typical for him. We can even say the opposite, as in the case of the Daruma paintings mentioned in the previous parts (Figs. [2.4](#); [3.1](#)). As a result, in this painting the monkey captures most of our attention, as it is easy for our eyes to focus on the center of the painting and to ignore both the inscription and the moon. Thus, both the form and the content of Hakuin's painting are recruited to express "illusion" and even to create the experience of illusion for the viewer. Only after letting go of our first impression of the painting's appearance, with its traditional patterns, do we come to realize Hakuin's intentions and become "awakened" to Hakuin's true message.

This employment of both form and content in order to express the idea of illusion is not accidental; it appears in another painting by Hakuin on the same theme. The painting, mentioned above ([Plate 2](#)), is entitled simply *Monkey* (*Enkō*) and bears the full inscription quoted above. The image of the monkey covers most of the hanging scroll, with the inscription written on the upper part. The monkey is portrayed with long arms, hanging by one arm from the branch of a tree while the other is stretched towards the bottom part of the scroll. Here, however, there is no moon at all. Most of the monkey's body, just as in the previous painting, is depicted with light ink, except for its face, fingers and toes, following the style of the Zen ink painting tradition. This time, however, the monkey is portrayed from a closer point of view, while the inscription is again written in light ink.

Here, we can see that the emphasis on the monkey as the center of our attention is even stronger than in the previous painting. The moon here is omitted completely and remains outside the scroll's frame. The inscription is



written in a similar gray tone to that of the falling branches. In addition, the letters are written in the cursive style and lie very close to the falling branches of the tree, while one of the branches is even depicted on top of one of the characters. As a result, when looking at the painting from a distance the viewer might mistake the written characters with the branches of the tree and easily ignore the inscription.

Once again, the viewer takes the seeming for the real and actively experiences the idea of clinging to perceptions and being deluded by appearances. Only by taking a very close look with undivided attention can the viewer awaken to the realization that not only is this not a mere traditional monkey but there is also a profound message expressed through the light lines of the inscription.

This theme was not depicted only by Hakuin. Sengai also portrayed the same theme of the "Monkey Trying to Catch the Moon" ([Plate 3](#)). Sengai emphasizes another aspect of the state of illusion, in addition to what appears above. In Sengai's painting, which was briefly presented in the previous chapter, there are two monkeys depicted hand to tail, while the first monkey holds a branch and the other is stretching his arm in order to catch the reflected moon. This depiction is even closer to the original story of the 500 monkeys.<sup>[31](#)</sup>

The inscription, written along the left side of the scroll, reads:

To what shall we compare this world of ours?

A monkey's arms:

One is stretched out

And the other gets shorter.<sup>[32](#)</sup>

In his painting, too, Sengai expresses the situation of the monkey attempting to catch the moon as an allegory for the delusion of mind due to misconceptions; however, in the inscription he expands the idea. Here Sengai describes the idea of trying to achieve the unattainable as an existential problem. We can never fully gain what we desire; even if we gain something with one hand, we lose it with the other.

Thus, Sengai is not only describing the situation of delusion due to the misconception of taking the seeming for the real, but he also presents the problem inherent to desire itself. "Grasping" in itself is a problem when one is not able to "let go" holding on to some idea or conception. Through this desire, one loses something else, an experience that we all undergo in this world of ours, as Sengai's words imply.

Illusion, as it is presented through Hakuin and Sengai's paintings above, is not simply a physical mistake of the eyes. The problem is more than a mere optical illusion; illusion is presented as an allegory for the delusion of the mind due to misconceptions. The state of illusion occurs due to the inability to neglect an idea or give up a desire for something, the inability to "let go" and be free from them. At the same time, illusion is seen almost as a necessary stage in a process that leads to the freedom of mind and the attainment of enlightenment. By letting go and releasing ourselves from conceptions, we gain freedom and we can pave our way to enlightenment.

As we can see, in these paintings Hakuin illustrates the idea of illusion through both text and image. In addition, he transmits the experience of being deluded by mere appearances through actively making his viewers experience illusion. Only by letting go of our traditional patterns and by releasing our minds from clinging on to the mere appearance of Hakuin's paintings are we able truly and profoundly to comprehend his message.

Being deluded by mere appearances, as we can see, was applied by Hakuin also to the world of art. He presented his figures in a way that could lead the viewer to judge the paintings by their externals and thus by their mere appearance. This leads us to questions concerning the way Hakuin and Sengai regarded their own paintings and their ideas about the act of painting in general, questions that will be discussed in the next part of this chapter.

## **The Attitude towards Beauty and Painting**

This play of mine with brush and inkstone  
Neither calligraphy nor painting.  
Mingling with ordinary people's feelings—  
It's calligraphy, it's painting.

—Sengai Gibon<sup>33</sup>

I will continue the discussion of delusion of mind due to misconceptions by raising some questions concerning the monk-painters' attitude towards beauty and painting, together with questions about their attitude towards their own paintings and towards the activity of painting itself. Unfortunately we have no written texts concerning these questions. What we do have are their paintings and calligraphies, which will be at the center of the discussion and will be analyzed in terms of both text and image, together with the support of some biographical information.

I will show that Hakuin and Sengai's attitude towards beauty and painting is in fact closely related to the idea of being deluded by mere appearances discussed in the previous section, as well as to the idea of the rejection of scriptures. As we saw in previous sections, one of the manifestations of the idea of rejection of scriptures expressed in Hakuin and Sengai's paintings is freedom from the conventional rules of painting. What is important for both monk-painters is the transmission of the message, and therefore they are less concerned with the appearance of their paintings in terms of common aesthetic conventions.

I will start with Sengai. In the following two examples, Sengai deals with the representation of images that normally follow common conceptions and conventions. Sengai, as I will show, tries to break down our common perceptions of a painted image, by blurring the appearance of his images. In his painting called *Monkey* (*saruzu* 猿図; Fig. 4.6), Sengai is trying to break down the convention according to which a monkey is normally painted. This painting, which is held in the Fukuoka Art Museum, depicts a monkey. The only way for us to know this information, however, apart from the title of the painting, is through Sengai's words in the inscription. In the inscription

written to the left of the image, Sengai writes "As good as a monkey" (*Saru hodo ni yoku dekimashita*).<sup>[34](#)</sup>

But Sengai's monkey does not look like a conventional monkey. The body of the image looks more like a dog's body, while the face, which is depicted with an emphasized and exaggerated large nose and round eyes, makes the image seem fantastic or imaginary. Does Sengai really think that the monkey he painted is in fact "as good as a monkey"? And if not, then why would he write such a thing on his painting?



[4.6](#) Sengai Gibon, *Monkey*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 45.0 x 54.6 cm. Fukuoka Art Museum

Obviously, Sengai knows what a conventional monkey looks like, and even more, he knows how to paint a common conventional monkey, as we saw in a previous painting by Sengai, *Monkey Trying to Catch the Moon* ([Plate 3](#)), where he depicted two monkeys in the traditional way with long arms, like Mokkei's monkeys from the Kamakura period. Yet, he paints this

specific painting in a way that should be regarded, in fact, as expressing his creativity and freedom of mind.

Sengai, I suggest, with his humorous taste, plays with the obvious. When he writes "as good as a monkey" next to his image, he knows that we are aware of his painting skills and that we, the viewers, in fact know that he is joking. Sengai is trying to break down the common conceptions and conventions of an image. In his inventive way, he is unraveling the traditional image of a painted monkey – the traditional long-armed monkey—but more than that, he is unraveling the universal perception of a monkey. With loose and free strokes and an imaginary image, together with an inscription filled with wit and humor, Sengai expresses his free attitude through both text and image. Sengai's paintings aim to waken the viewer from their conventional way of thinking, by stimulating us to let go of our usual perceptions and to free our minds.

A similar example of a painting that tears down our frequent perceptions is a work held at the Idemitsu Museum of Art and called *Tiger* (*Tora zu* 虎図) (Fig. 4.7). The inscription, which is written to the left of the image, says *Neko ni nita mono*, which means "Something resembling a cat."<sup>35</sup> Here again, as with the painting of the monkey above, the "tiger" is portrayed with large, round and exaggerated eyes, which gives it the humoristic taste of a caricature. It is not clear what Sengai's painting represents; the painted image could be either a cat or a tiger. Moreover, the title of the painting is *Tiger*, yet the inscription says "Something resembling a cat." The viewer is left confused, unable to label the depicted image.<sup>36</sup>



[4.7](#) Sengai Gibon, *Tiger*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 28.5 x 35.3 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

If Sengai was really making an effort to paint something that looks like a tiger, as Izumi says, he wouldn't have depicted the eyes so big and round like cat's eyes, but perhaps a bit smaller and more dignified.<sup>[37](#)</sup> Thus, Sengai intentionally tries once again to blur the viewer's distinction between common conceptions of images of a cat and a tiger. Sengai's cat-tiger is rendered free from any concept or convention by loose strokes and a witty inscription. In Sengai's painting, a tiger can look like a cat and a monkey, just as in the previous painting can look like Sengai's own individual monkey. Sengai wants us to know that he is aware of this; and in fact, this is how Sengai's paintings are by nature, free of any rule or perception.

Sengai's unconventionality and freedom of mind is expressed through some anecdotes from his life, as well. The great love of the people of Hakata, the city where Sengai lived for almost fifty years, towards Sengai and his paintings is expressed in an anecdote, telling how people used to come to Sengai's temple asking for his paintings and calligraphy. The fame of Sengai and his paintings had spread so far and wide that Sengai could not keep up with all the requests. In 1832, Sengai announced that he would no longer paint, writing a poem on a stone monument erected in Kyohakuin

monastery. The two Chinese characters written on the stone were 絶筆 (zeppitsu), meaning "The end of the brush." However, Sengai, who made a painting of the stone monument with a poem written on it, continued to paint (Fig. 4.8).<sup>38</sup>

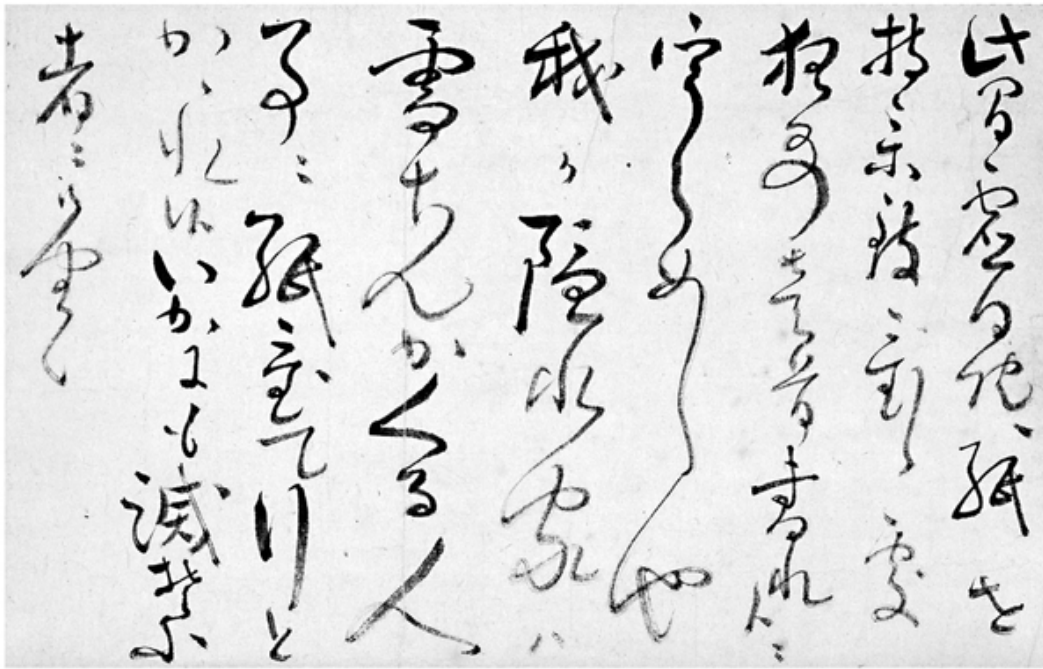


4.8 Sengai Gibon, *The end of the brush monument*, 1832, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 54.9 x 48.8 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

In a piece of calligraphy held in the Idemitsu museum's collection called *Family Precept* {*Kakun*; 家訓), Sengai wrote:

How deplorable!  
Is my house of seclusion  
A toilet?  
Every visitor I receive brings  
Pieces of paper and leaves them here. (Fig. 4.9)<sup>39</sup>





[4.9](#) Sengai Gibon, *Family Precept*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 20.0 x 31.4 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

In another painting by Sengai we can learn something about the way in which he conceived of his own paintings. Held at Shōfukuji temple, this painting is called *Crane and Turtle* (*Tsuru keme zu* 鶴亀図); Fig- [4.10](#)). In the last part of the painting's inscription, Sengai writes:

Worldly people's paintings and works of calligraphy are like a beautiful woman—  
they don't like to be laughed at by people,  
Sengai's paintings and works of calligraphy are like a caricature—  
they are pleased with people's laughter.<sup>[40](#)</sup>

Through this inscription we can learn about Sengai's relationship with the world of art, the way Sengai perceives his own paintings and the way he perceives himself as the creator of the paintings. Sengai clearly states that his paintings are not done for the sake of common art; he has no intention of creating beautiful paintings. His paintings are like caricatures, and as such,

the laughter of people viewing his paintings is pleasing. Sengai does not regard himself as a usual painter, who presumably would be concerned with the appearance of his paintings in terms of ordinary stylistic conventions, in the same way that a beautiful woman who takes herself and her beauty seriously would be concerned with her appearance.



[4.10](#) Sengai Gibon, *Crane and Turtle*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 156.4 x 143.6 cm.  
Shōfukuji, Fukuoka

Sengai distinguishes between his own paintings and works of calligraphy and the "worldly people's paintings and works of calligraphy," which like a beautiful woman are concerned with their appearance. The common conception and convention, as described by Sengai, is to give importance to

appearances, just as a beautiful woman does. Sengai, however, is less concerned with the appearance of his paintings in the conventional way; his paintings are lawless and free and therefore are pleased with people's laughter.<sup>41</sup>

Hakuin, in contrast to Sengai, is not so direct in the expression of his attitude towards painting and beauty. On the other hand, we have more information from Hakuin's biography that can shed light on his attitude towards painting. As shown in detail in the previous chapters, in 1703, when Hakuin was at the age of nineteen, he decided to turn his focus to the study of literature, calligraphy and painting. Only several years after that, however, following an event that occurred in 1706 (aged twenty-two), did Hakuin realize that developing one's spiritual and mental abilities is more important than developing the technical skills of a painter or a calligrapher. Although Hakuin returned to painting at a late age, this early realization, as previously shown, was a fundamental insight on Hakuin's part, one that guided him throughout his life and is projected in his paintings.<sup>42</sup>

Hakuin, just like Sengai, was less concerned with the appearance of his paintings in terms of common stylistic conventions; he is more concerned, however, with the content of his paintings. This notion is expressed in a painting ([Plate 4](#)) held in the Hosokawa collection, called *Otafuku Okyū* お多福お灸図 or *Otafuku's Moxibustion*.

Otafuku お多福, which literally means "much happiness" or "much fortune," also known as Okame, is a well-fed, laughing maiden who represents prosperity. She is usually depicted simply as a face with a small nose, flat forehead and bulging cheeks.<sup>43</sup> *Okyū* お灸 refers to moxa treatment or moxibustion, a traditional Chinese medical practice that spread to Japan. It involves the burning of small cones of dried leaves on various points of the body.

The painting depicts two images, a male and a female. The female portrayed in the right side of the scroll is Otafuku. She sits on her heels (in *seiza* 正座), holding chopsticks in her right hand and leaning over towards the male figure. The male figure, depicted more to the center of the scroll, is down on his hands and knees leaning on his elbows. He is positioned with

his backside towards Otafuku, receiving a moxa treatment from her, a cure for his hemorrhoids.<sup>44</sup>

Both Otafuku and the male figure are wearing traditional Japanese clothes. On both of them, there is a Chinese character written twice: *kotobuki* or *ju* 寿, which means longevity, on Otafuku's kimono, and *kane* 金, which means money, on the male figure's clothing. In both cases the characters are large and emphasized in a way that makes them hard to ignore.<sup>45</sup>

The inscription is written on the upper left side of the scroll, above the male figure's head:

For someone with hemorrhoids, a bit of fire.<sup>46</sup>

The inscription is based on one of the first sentences of a book called *Jitsugokyō* (実語経) ("Teachings of the words of truth"), attributed to Kūkai 空海 (Kōbō Daishi 弘法大師, 774–835), founder of the Shingon school of Buddhism in Japan.<sup>47</sup> According to the *Kōjien* (fifth edition), this book, which was in fact written during the Kamakura period, is a list of sentences that teach morals and values and therefore was used, during the Edo period, as a textbook for students. The original sentence in its English translation is:

Respect is not given to a man for his richness  
It is given to a man for his wisdom.<sup>48</sup>

Hakuin has based his inscription on the second part of the original sentence by repeating its structure: Hakuin's inscription in Roman letters reads *Ji aru o motte, tatta hi to bi*, while the second part of the original sentence in Roman letters is *Chi aru o motte tōto shi to nasu*. Hakuin is playing with the sound of the word *chi* from the original text, which means wisdom – 智, and *chi* in his inscription which means hemorrhoids – 痔 (alternative reading: *ji*).

While basing his inscription on the sentence from the *Jitsugokyō*, Hakuin gives the viewer a hint about his own message and intentions. Respect is not given to a person for his richness, like the rich male figure being treated; it is given to a person for his (or her) wisdom—such as the wisdom of Otafuku,

Otafuku is the one to be respected and to gain longevity; she is appreciated for her personal inner merits without giving importance either to her appearance or her social status, which are external things. The man who has the character of money written on his clothes is sick and needs treatment. Money, therefore, is associated with misfortune and illness. Otafuku is the one who knows how to cure the wealthy man's chronic illness and therefore she is the fortunate and happy one, as her name suggests.<sup>49</sup>

Hakuin does not give importance to the conventional outward aspects of things, such as a woman's looks, money, or even his own painting's appearance. What is more important and significant for him are a person's inner qualities and merits and—as a painter—the message he conveys through his paintings. What seems at first glance to be a simple depiction of a scene where a man gets a moxa treatment for his hemorrhoids turns out to be something quite different. The appearance of the painting, portraying an unpleasant and even embarrassing scene, differs from its real meaning that is to be read "between the lines" of the painting. Only after discovering the origin of the inscription in the *Jitsugokyo* can we understand the connection between the scene and the characters written on the figures' clothes. Only then do we realize that this is not simply a painting of a moxa treatment, but that there is another level that needs to be understood.

Moreover, if we look at the way in which the male figure is painted, we can see the outlines painted by Hakuin in light ink as a sketch alongside the darker lines of the figure. Hakuin is less concerned with how his figure looks and he is even careless enough to show us the old lines that were part of the process of painting. At the same time, compared to his depiction of the male figure, he treats Otafuku with much more care: she is painted much more precisely, with more colors and details. Hakuin, hence, transmits his idea to us not only through the text, but also through the images and the different way in which he treats his figures. Through these differences in the way he treats the two figures we learn that being careless about appearances is not merely due to his stylistic preference but is part of his message, and that he can play with his technical skills according to the message he wishes to convey.

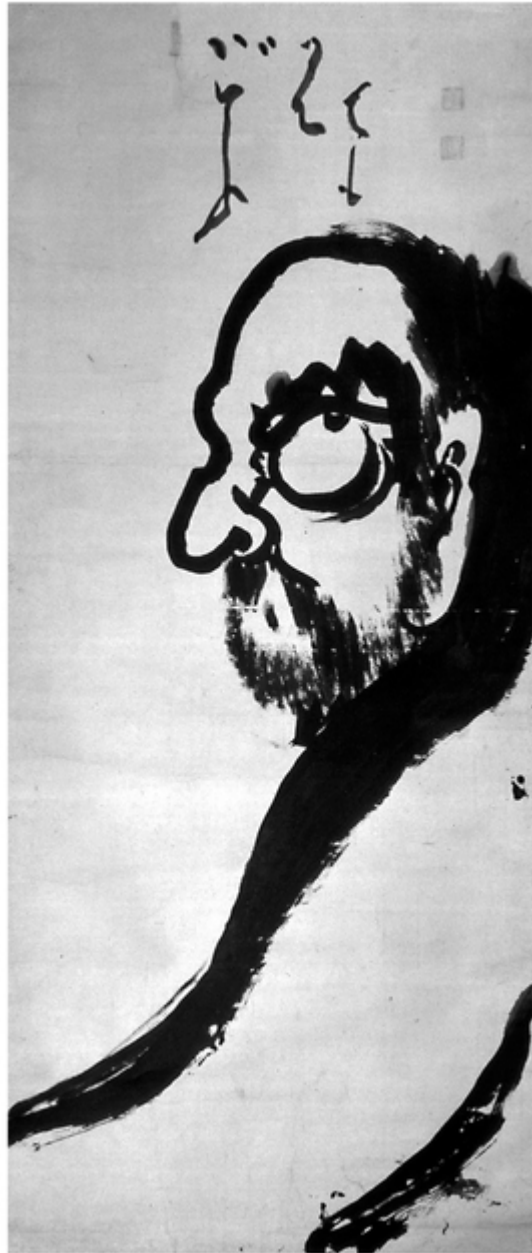


Another painting can help us see that the transmission of the message is more important to Hakuin than presenting a skillful painting. The painting entitled *Daruma* is a depiction of Daruma in profile, wearing his robe (Fig. [4.11](#)). The inscription in the upper part of the scroll says: "However you look" (Dō mite mō; どう見ても).<sup>50</sup>

This painting of Daruma by Hakuin is quite exceptional in form and in content, compared with his other paintings of Daruma. It is in fact a mixture of the two types of portrait paintings of Daruma: Daruma seated in meditation and in half-figure. Fig. [4.12](#) is an example of a Daruma seated in meditation with the common inscription—*Achieving kensho becoming a Buddha* (*Kenshō jōbutsu* 見性成仏). The painting (Fig. [4.11](#)) seems like a Daruma seated in meditation, but at the same time it lacks the lower part of Daruma's body, that is, his legs crossed in meditation, and hence seems also like a depiction of a half-figured portrait. This depiction is unconventional compared with the traditional Daruma, but it is also less common even in relation to other paintings by Hakuin himself.<sup>51</sup>

It is possible, of course, to claim that this unusual depiction is purely accidental. However, when we read the inscription we cannot rule out the possibility that Hakuin consciously painted his painting in this way. In many of Hakuin's paintings of Daruma the inscription is a quotation of either the full or the partial version of the set of four phrases attributed to Daruma (Separate transmission outside teachings/ Not depending upon words and letters/Direct pointing at one's mind/ Achieving *kenshō* becoming a Buddha), as shown above. In many other cases, the inscription is related in some way to stories and legends related to Daruma. In this painting, however, the inscription is quite different.<sup>52</sup>

The inscription can be translated literally as "However you look" (どう見ても). At the same time, it is important to note that in Japanese the meaning of this sentence can also be "Whoever looks." Hence, one of the possible interpretations of this inscription is this: However you look at the painting and whoever looks at it—this is Daruma.<sup>53</sup> If we return to the way Hakuin depicted his Daruma as a mixture of the Daruma seated in meditation and the half-figure portraits of Daruma, we can add another meaning to the



[4.11](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma*, hanging scroll, color and ink on paper, 130.8 × 56.4 cm. Eisei Bunko, Tokyo





[4.12](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma*, hanging scroll, color and ink on paper, 117.0 × 54.0 cm, Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

inscription: "However you paint it"—this is Daruma. Or better, however you look at it; whether as Daruma seated in meditation or as a half-figure portrait—it still remains Daruma. Through the inscription, I suggest, Hakuin transmits his idea that what Daruma looks like is less important than the

message he carries. Therefore, it is much less important how Daruma is depicted, in what form he is portrayed and what he looks like, which are all external things; what is more important is the essence and message of Daruma.

I would like to return to Sengai and conclude this section with one of Sengai's works through which we can learn explicitly about Sengai's attitude towards his own paintings, together with the way in which he conceived himself as the owner of his paintings. In a painting called *Tōkian* 東輝庵 (Fig. 4.13), created in 1823, when Sengai was aged seventy-four, he painted a view of Tōkian hermitage. This hermitage, founded by Sengai's teacher, the priest Gessen Zenne (1702–1781), was the place where Sengai stayed for thirteen years, under Gessen's guidance.<sup>54</sup>

The painting seems like a simple landscape painting depicting a view of Tōkian hermitage. The inscription is written in the upper part of the scroll, as in conventional landscape painting. In the first part of the inscription, Sengai tells us that he painted this painting at the request of Araki Shōju 荒木柱受, a doctor who was a close associate of his. Reading the last part of the inscription, however, we discover that this is not simply a landscape painting. Sengai states:

This play of mine with brush and inkstone  
Neither calligraphy nor painting.  
Mingling with ordinary people's feelings—  
It's calligraphy, it's painting.<sup>55</sup>

Sengai distinguishes clearly between the way he regards his activity with brush and inkstone, which is "neither calligraphy nor painting" and the conventional understanding of such. Similarly as we saw with his previous painting, *Crane and Turtle* (Fig. 4.10), he distinguishes between his paintings and works of calligraphy and the "worldly people's paintings and works of calligraphy"—which, like a beautiful woman, are concerned with their appearance.

This "play" of Sengai with brush and inkstone can indeed be misunderstood. If we fall into the ordinary way of thinking, this activity may

indeed be regarded as simply calligraphy and/or simply painting, Sengai adds in the last two lines.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, looking at the painting at first glance, we could easily think it is another landscape painting that simply follows the Zen ink painting tradition. However, Sengai himself regarded his work differently. He leaves no room for doubt, stating clearly "This play of mine with brush and inkstone is *neither calligraphy nor painting*" (*hisho-higa* 非書非画).



[4.13](#) Sengai Gibon, *Tōkian*, 1823, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 130.0 × 52.5 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

The Zen monk-poet Ryōkan Taigu 良寛大愚 (1758–1831) who was born only a few years after Sengai, wrote many poems and calligraphy and even painted some paintings. In one of his poems he writes:

Who says my poems are poems?  
My poems are not poems.  
After you know my poems are not poems,  
Then we can begin to discuss poetry!<sup>[57](#)</sup>

Ryōkan's poem expresses a similar attitude to Sengai's attitude towards his paintings. Sengai did not regard himself as a professional painter, nor did he regard his works as painted for the sake of conventional art.

The attitude towards common conceptions expressed in the artwork of Hakuin and Sengai, as shown, is connected strongly with the attitude of freedom. Judging things by their mere appearances can be delusive, like the monkey trying to grasp the reflected moon and the snake-seeming rope. Evaluation of things merely by their external looks can be misleading, just like the beauty or ugliness of a depicted figure. Through letting go and releasing oneself from conventional perceptions, or in other words with freedom of mind, one can reach enlightenment. In the next chapter I wish to continue the discussion of the attitude towards appearances through an examination of Hakuin and Sengai's attitude towards social conventions.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Blofeld, *Huang Po*, 33.

<sup>2</sup> Blofeld, *Huang Po*, 59.

<sup>3</sup> Blofeld, *Huang Po*, 111.

<sup>4</sup> On this painting see also chapter 6.

- 5 My translation. In Japanese: 切れ縄に口ハなけれど朧月. For another translation into English, see Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 110.
- 6 The inscription is in fact a poem in the form of 5-7-5 syllables. See also Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 110; Furuta, *Sengai*, 91.
- 7 According to Tanahashi, *Penetrating Laughter*, 46, it is called "Snake" and according to Yamanouchi, *Hakuin*, 83, it is called "Snake on the street at night."
- 8 Translation taken from: Tanahashi, *Penetrating Laughter*, 46. In the Chinese verse: 夜途驚意一条蛇 / 清縄見来僅是麻 / 万事人間皆如是 / 錯認有心歩山河 (Yamanouchi, *Hakuin*, 83).
- 9 According to Tanahashi this is a common Indian motif, which can be traced back to Upanishadic literature (Tanahashi, *Penetrating Laughter*, 46). For reference to an Upanishadic text where the story of the rope seeming like a snake is explained as an allegory of the understanding that all phenomena are nothing but mental presentations, including a translation into English of the original text, see Watanabe, "A Study of *Mahāyānasamgraha* III," 89–90.
- 10 As described in chapter 2, Mokkei's influence was so significant that the term "Mokkei-zaru" (牧谿猿), meaning "Mokkei's monkey," is used to indicate the style in which monkeys were portrayed with long arms; see more in chapter 2. For more on the monkey in Mokkei's triptych see Lippit, "Seer of Sounds: The Muqi Triptych," 243–66.
- 11 My translation is based on the Japanese verse which appears in Izumi and Mizukami, *Suibokuga no kyoshō*, 102. A longer version of the inscription appears below, with all the relevant information. For other translations into English see plate number 25 in Hanazono University Historical Museum, *Hakuin: Zenga to Bokuseki*, vii, and Miura and Sasaki, *Zen Dust*, 123. In my translation I leave the Buddhist term the Ten Directions (Jp. Jippō 十方) as is.
- 12 The most common version of the *Tripitaka* is *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經, popularly known as *Taishō Tripitaka*, a modern standardized edition published in Tokyo in the late 1920s. On the origin of the story see also Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 257.

- [13](#) On Devadatta's attempts to kill the Buddha and on the way he ended his life-falling into hell, see Conze, *Buddhist Scripture*, 58.
- [14](#) The name of the text where the story is found in Japanese is *Maka-sōgiritsu* 摩訶僧祇律; *Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya* in Sanskrit. Here it is quoted from the Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (CBETA): [http://www.cbeta.org/result/normal/T22/1425\\_007.htm](http://www.cbeta.org/result/normal/T22/1425_007.htm) (accessed November 24, 2013).
- [15](#) See also Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 257 and the Hanazono University Historical Museum, *Hakuin: Zenga to Bokuseki*, 62.
- [16](#) The Digital Dictionary of Buddhism: <http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xprddb.pl?q=%E7%99%A1%E7%B6%B1> (accessed November 24, 2013). According to the dictionary, *chikō*, the "deluded monkey" seizing the reflection of the moon in the water is mentioned in another Buddhist text called *Maka shikan* 摩訶止觀, a major text of the Tendai School.
- [17](#) The Digital Dictionary of Buddhism: <http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xprddb.pl?q=%E5%BF%83%E7%8C%BF> (accessed November 24, 2013).
- [18](#) See chapter 2. This painting is in fact one scroll out of a pair. For more on this painting see the exhibition catalogue of Kyoto Bunka Hakubutsukan, *Hakuin: Zen to Shouga*, 72–3; Izumi and Mizukami, *Suibokuga no kyoshō*, 101–2.
- [19](#) My translation is based on the Japanese verse which appears in Izumi and Mizukami, *Suibokuga no kyoshō*, 102: 猿猴、水月を探り、死に到るまで休歇せず。手を放てば深泉に没す、十方の光、皓潔たり。The inscription is originally written in the Chinese-style poem: 猿猴探水月/到死不休歇/放手没深泉/十方光皓潔. "The Ten Directions": "(J. Jippou 十方) the four cardinal directions, the four in-between directions, and up and down" (Hori, *Zen Sand*, 714). For another translation into English of the full inscription, see Miura and Sasaki, *Zen Dust*, 123.
- [20](#) Blofeld, *Huang Po*, 59.
- [21](#) Blofeld, *Huang Po*, 106. For more on the relation between enlightenment and "letting go" see Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 198–200.
- [22](#) See the full quotation in the beginning of this section, Blofeld, *Huang Po*, 111.

- [23](#) For more on this painting see Kyoto Bunka Hakubutsukan, *Hakuin: Zen to Shouga*, 70–71.
- [24](#) On Daruma as a theme see chapters 2 and 3, above.
- [25](#) See <http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?q=%E5%8D%B0%E5%8F%AF> (accessed November 24, 2013).
- [26](#) Often the *kōan* "What is the sound of the single hand?"; on *kōans* in general see chapter 1. See also Addiss, *Art of Zen*, 121.
- [27](#) The Dragon Staff is based on another *kōan* from the twelfth-century collection of Chan Buddhist *kōans*, the "Blue Cliff Record" (*Hekiganroku* 碧巖録). The painting was given to a man named Suzuki Tetsugorō, who "penetrated my two massive barriers to discover the sound of one hand; I therefore write this certificate to honor this heroic man," as Hakuin wrote. See Addiss, *Art of Zen*, 121. For more on the Blue Cliff Record see Cleary, *Blue Cliff Record*.
- [28](#) See chapter 3.
- [29](#) Blofeld, *Huang Po*, 42.
- [30](#) For more on the early Zen ink paintings including some specific examples see chapter 2.
- [31](#) On this painting see also chapter 2.
- [32](#) The translation is taken from Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 124. In Japanese: 世の中をなに/喩へん猿猴の/かた手申ぶればかた手短かし.
- [33](#) Taken from the inscription on Sengai's painting "*Tōkian* 東輝庵," Figure 4.13.
- [34](#) My translation. In Japanese: “さるほどによく出来ました。” On this painting see also chapter 6. For more on this painting, see the exhibition catalogue Fukuokashi Bijutsukan Kyōkai, *Sengai ten*, 110.
- [35](#) In Japanese: “猫二似タモノ。” On this painting see also Izumi and Mizukami, *Suibokuga no kyoshō*, 71 and chapter 6.
- [36](#) Even without the title, the image is depicted in a way that makes it difficult to determine what it actually represents.



- [37](#) Izumi and Mizukami, *Suibokuga no kyoshō*, 106.
- [38](#) See Nakayama in Fukuoka-shi Bijutsukan Kyōkai, *Sengai ten*, 26. The full poem in its English translation can be found in Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 214.
- [39](#) The translation is taken from Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 202. In Japanese: うらめしや、わがかくれ家は雪隠か、来る人ごとに紙おいていく。For more on this calligraphy see Furuta, *Sengai*, 183; Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 176; Hisamatsu, *Zen to geijutsu*, 289; Stevens, *Zenga Brushstrokes of Enlightenment*, 13.
- [40](#) My translation. The Japanese verse is taken from Izumi and Mizukami, *Suibokuga no kyoshō*, 97: 世人の書画は美人の如し、人の咲うを悪む。厓画は戯画の如し、人の咲うを愛す。For the full inscription as a Chinese-style poem, see Fukuoka-shi Bijutsukan Kyōkai, *Sengai ten*, 177. On this painting see also chapter 6.
- [41](#) On freedom and humor see chapter 6.
- [42](#) See chapter 2.
- [43](#) For more on Otafuku's character during history and on Otafuku in Hakuin's paintings see Yoshizawa, *Hakuin—Zenga no sekai*, 61–82.
- [44](#) There are more paintings by Hakuin of Otafuku. She appears in a very similar way in all his paintings, except that she sometimes appears as an older woman.
- [45](#) In most of Otafuku's paintings by Hakuin, a pattern of the plum flower is drawn on her kimono. Yoshizawa associates the plum patterns with Totō tenjin—the Shinto deity (Sugawara-no Michizane 845–903), and Hakuin himself. Yoshizawa, *Hakuin—Zenga no sekai*, 68.
- [46](#) "A bit of fire" means one moxa treatment. Translation adopted from Yoshizawa, *Zen Master Hakuin*, 59. In Japanese: 痔有るを以て、たった一ト火。For another translation see Addiss, *Art of Zen*, 112.
- [47](#) See Izumi and Mizukami, *Suibokuga no kyoshō*, 102; Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 206. For more on Kukai see Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works*.
- [48](#) My translation. In Japanese: 人肥たるが故に尚からず、智あるを以って尚しとなす。

- [49](#) According to Yoshizawa, Otafuku's character has changed through history—at times she was considered to be beautiful and at times ugly. Yoshizawa claims that for Hakuin, Otafuku is beyond beauty or ugliness. Yoshizawa, *Hakuin—Zenga no sekai*, 61–82. For more on Buddhism and women see Faure, *Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity and Gender*. For more on gender in the Japanese visual field see Bryson, Graybill, Mostow, eds. *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*.
- [50](#) My translation. In Japanese see Izumi and Mizukami, *Suibokuga no kyoshō*, 100 and Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 202.
- [51](#) See Figures 2.4 and 3.1 for examples of half-figure portraits of Daruma by Hakuin. See also Yoshizawa, *Hakuin Zenga Bokuseki ten*, 74–6.
- [52](#) See chapter 3. I found one more painting which belongs to a private collection with this same inscription at Yoshizawa's work: *1050 Paintings and Calligraphies by the Zen Master Hakuin*, Figure 29. See Yoshizawa, *Hakuin Zenga bokuseki*, 24, for his interpretation.
- [53](#) See also Izumi and Mizukami, *Suibokuga no kyoshō*, 100 and Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 202; the latter adds another possible meaning to the inscription, which is "However you look"—this is Hakuin. For Yoshizawa's interpretation see *Hakuin Zenga bokuseki*, 23–4.
- [54](#) Tōkian was located in Nagata, Musashi province; it is now part of Hōrinji in Yokohama. On Sengai and Tōkian see also chapter 1. For more on the painting see Nakayama, *Sengai—sono shōgai to geijutsu*, 147; 360.
- [55](#) My translation. For two other translations into English see Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 114 and Suzuki, *Sengai*, 25. The last two lines are interpreted differently by the two other translations. *Ninjō* 人情 has several meanings, and is translated here as "the ordinary people's feelings and/or way of thinking" rather than "kindness" as in Furuta. In Chinese-style poem: 吾戲筆硯/非書非画/錯落人情/為書為画.
- [56](#) As mentioned above, there are other interpretations of the inscription; according to Furuta's understanding, Sengai himself was carried away by his feelings and admits that he created calligraphy and painting. According to Suzuki, however, it is the "common-minded people" who mistakenly regard Sengai's work as "[mere]

calligraphy and [mere] painting." The last two lines are indeed not clear; I tried in my translation to keep the ambiguity. According to my understanding, after consultation with Izumi, Sengai states generally that thinking in the common way we can, mistakenly, regard this "play" of his as simply calligraphy and simply painting.

[57](#) This translation is taken from Stevens, *Zen Masters*, 135. For more on Ryōkan see Stevens, *One Robe One Bowl*; Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History vol. 2*, 344–7; Stevens, *Zen Masters*, 103–58; Abe and Haskel, *Great Fool*.

## 5 Emancipation from Social Conventions

Having showed how the attitude towards common conceptions is in fact a manifestation of the attitude of freedom, I wish to focus on yet another manifestation of freedom, exemplified through the monk-painters' attitude towards social conventions. The paintings will be analyzed in the specific context of the social and political situation of Japan in the Edo period, together with a discussion of additional information from Hakuin and Sengai's biographies. The main topics of the discussion will be money, power, and social status. The attitude of Hakuin and Sengai towards these issues, as external matters and mere appearances that can be deceiving, will be shown to be similar to their attitude towards common perceptions. In the first part I will discuss the attitude towards social status and pride, and in the second part the specific attitude towards money.

### **The Attitude towards Social Status and Pride**

If you take the robe that a person is wearing to be the person's true identity, then though endless kalpas may pass, you will become proficient in robes only and will remain forever circling round in the threefold world, transmigrating in the realm of birth and death. Better to do nothing, 'to meet someone but not recognize him, talk with him but not know his name.'

—Linji<sup>1</sup>

In this section the focus will be Hakuin and Sengai's attitude towards social status or rank as expressed in their paintings. Matters of social status, which

are conventionally associated with feelings of pride, are conceived by the monk-painters, as will be shown, to be misleading. I shall focus mostly on the artwork of Hakuin and Sengai, supported by some biographical information.

The monk's robe, the symbol of the transmission of Buddha's teachings in Zen Buddhism, is the theme of one of Hakuin's paintings (Fig. [5.1](#)), titled *The Sixth Patriarch's Robe and Bowl* (*Rokuso ihatsu* 六祖衣鉢). It is a depiction of a robe and bowl placed on a rock with a view of a mountain behind. The painted scene is located at the bottom of the scroll and the inscription is written in its upper part. The weight of the painting is toward the right side of the scroll, creating a composition reminiscent of typical examples of traditional ink paintings from the Muromachi period (1336–1573).<sup>[2](#)</sup>



[5.1](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *The Sixth Patriarch's Robe and Bowl*, hanging scroll, color and ink on paper, 94.0 x 28.0 cm. Eisei Bunko, Tokyo

Once we read the inscription, however, what may seem at first glance simply to be a landscape painting is discovered to be something quite different. The inscription of the painting is "On the top of Mt. Daiyurei, he tried to lift it up, yet it wouldn't lift."<sup>3</sup> Hakuin's painting and its inscription

are based on a story about the Sixth Zen Patriarch, Huineng 慧能 (Jp. Enō, 638–713), one of the most important figures in Chan/Zen tradition. He was said originally to have been an illiterate wood-cutter who became awakened upon hearing a recitation of the *Diamond Sūtra* (Jp. *Kongō kyō* 金剛經). He went to study with the Chan master Hongren (Jp. Kōnin 弘忍), eventually becoming the Sixth Patriarch (Jp. Rokuso 六祖).

The original story appears in the *Platform Sutra* (*Rokusodankyō* 六祖壇經), an eighth-century collection of sermons by Huineng.<sup>4</sup> The Fifth Patriarch, Hongren (601–74), had to decide who his successor would be. Hongren was so impressed by a poem Huineng wrote about enlightenment that he chose him to become the Sixth Patriarch. Huineng received the robe and the bowl, the insignia of the patriarchate and his teaching from Hongren, and left for the south. When he reached Dayuling Mountain he realized he was being pursued by some other disciples who intended to rob him of the robe and begging bowl.<sup>5</sup> Among them was a monk named Huiming 慧明 (Jp. Emyō) who violently attacked Huineng. At that moment Huineng threw the robe and begging bowl on a rock and said: "This robe represents the faith; is it to be fought for? I allow you to take them away." Huiming tried to lift the bowl and rock but they could not be raised. "They were as heavy as a mountain; they would not budge. Hesitating and trembling, he said, 'I came for the doctrine, not for the robe. I beg you to teach your servant!'"<sup>6</sup> Huiming then realized he was wrong and achieved enlightenment.

Huiming came to realize that his chase after Huineng and the robe was in fact for matters of pride. He had acted out of his hurt pride and had forgotten the real meaning of the robe as a symbol representing the teachings of the Buddha. As in Linji's words quoted above, he had regarded "the robe that a person is wearing to be the person's true identity," without recognizing that the robe is something external and a mere symbol of faith.

Hakuin's painting, therefore, is revealed to be more than a mere landscape painting. It is based on the story of Huiming's attempt to steal the robe and bowl of the Sixth Patriarch Huineng. Nevertheless, in the painting there are no images of any of the characters in the story. Out of the whole story



Hakuin chose to paint only some representative objects: the robe, the bowl, the rock and Dayuling Mountain. Hakuin intentionally composed his painting in a way that makes his viewers think, at first glance, that it is a mere landscape painting.

Hakuin does this not only through the way he has depicted the image, but also through the content of the painting, specifically the inscription. In the inscription on the painting, translated above, Hakuin gives us only the essence of the story, a short abstract of what happened, as a hint. Those who are already familiar with the story easily manage to make the connection between the image and the text. Furthermore, Hakuin starts the inscription with the words "On the top of Mt. Daiyurei," writing this at the top center of the scroll, in a way which can easily convince a viewer who is impressed merely by the appearance of the painting, without reading the entire inscription, that this painting is simply a landscape painting of Mt. Daiyurei by Hakuin.

Hakuin's painting, therefore, is like a riddle; he intentionally drew both the image and the text in a very concise way, making the viewer believe at first glance that this is a mere landscape painting. Only after a close look at the painting does the viewer realize its true meaning without being misled by its external appearance. In line with Linji's words quoted above, both the robe and the outer appearance of the painting are conceived as mere external representations and are not as real things, as shown also in the previous chapter.<sup>7</sup> The robe can be deceiving, as we saw above, if we forget the fact that it is a mere representation of the teachings, as happened to Huiming, who chased the robe for the pride and prestige he could gain from owning it.



[5.2](#) Sengai Gibon, *The Gate Pines for the New Year*, pair of hanging scrolls, ink on paper, 78.3 x 32.4 cm each. Idemitsu Museum of Art

Sengai expands this attitude towards the robe as external and as a mere representation of faith in the following painting, which focuses on the social convention of treating the robe as representative of a high social status. The painting (Fig. [5.2](#)), which is held in the Idemitsu Museum of Art is called *Kadomatsu* 門松, which refers to the decorative pine branches placed at the entrance doors of houses at the Japanese New Year in order to welcome the gods (*kami*) of the harvest.<sup>8</sup>

It is a pair of folding screens; the right screen has a depiction of two figures that are both holding swords, one with its back to the viewer and the

other, shorter, painted from the side while standing to the right of the other figure. On the left screen there is a depiction of a pine branch, presumably a *kadomatsu*.

The inscription is written on both screens, starting from the upper part of the right screen and ending on the upper right side of the left screen:

Upper or lower

Good or bad

The rice-cake soup for the New Year.<sup>9</sup>

Most of the inscription is written on the right screen — *kami / shimo ha (wa) / Yoshimo / ashikimo* — while on the left screen, only the word *zōnimochi*, the last word of the inscription, is written. *Zōnimochi* is a special soup eaten on the Japanese New Year.<sup>10</sup>

Again, we may think at first glance that this is merely a painting for the Japanese New Year, with a depiction of all the common motifs of the New Year's celebration. However, closer observation of the painting and its inscription reveals another level of understanding. Sengai, with humor and wit, plays with words in a way that enables him to transmit other, implicit messages. The first line of the inscription *kami / shimo wa* 上 み 下 ハ is translated as "upper or lower." However, *kamishimo* 上下 is also the name of an Edo-period ceremonial dress of the samurai warrior class. *Kami* is the name of the upper part, a robe without sleeves with exaggerated shoulders, which is also called *kataginu*. *Shimo* is the lower part, a divided skirt which is also called *hakama*. Hence, Sengai is playing with the double meaning of the word *kamishimo*.<sup>11</sup>

In order to better understand Sengai's play with words, it is necessary to view it in the historical context of the Edo period class structure. According to the system of four classes during the Edo period (the samurai, who were the highest class, the peasants, the craftsmen and the merchants), the samurai class wore a certain type of clothing, like the *kamishimo*. The clothing of the samurai played an important role in distinguishing between the upper class and the lower class. According to the *Laws for the Samurai* (*Buke shohatto* 武家諸法度), a set of regulations promulgated by the

Tokugawa government for the upper class of feudal lords and samurai, warrior households were restricted in the type and quality of their clothes. "One should be able to distinguish between lord and retainer, high and low ... it is against all ancient law that nowadays vassals and soldiers are wearing gaudy clothes of damask, gauze, or embroidered silk. This must be strictly regulated."<sup>12</sup>

Reading this quotation clarifies the connection Sengai makes between the words "upper and lower" and the samurai's full dress. Clothing was a representative of class or rank in Edo-period society. Sengai, however, expresses a different attitude towards the matter. Sengai depicts a samurai and presumably his son wearing the *kamishimo*, while on the other scroll there is a depiction of the New Year symbol of the pine branch — the *kadomatsu*.

At first glance, as noted above, we may think this is simply a conventional painting depicting the celebrations of the New Year. In reality, Sengai is trying to say something about the equality of human beings and the fact that fundamentally there are no distinctions between people. With the double meaning of the inscription, Sengai's attitude is more clearly understood: upper class or lower, good or bad, dressed with *kamishimo* or not (i.e. being a samurai or not), at the New Year everybody eats the same thing — rice-cake soup or *zōnimochi*.<sup>13</sup>

Hence, Sengai with his wit implicitly transmits his own attitude towards classes and towards distinctions of any kind. Sengai rejects the common convention of judging a person by his rank or class, or by what society considers as good or bad. This attitude of Sengai's is one that was expressed earlier in Hakuin's painting and by Linji's words. Enlightenment can be achieved when one is free from common conventions and distinctions; clothing of any kind, whether a robe or a *kamishimo*, is regarded as mere outward display and therefore can be deceptive.

We can see traces of this attitude not only in Sengai's painting but also throughout his biography. Stories from Sengai's life exemplify how this attitude was imbued in his lifestyle. As we know, Sengai became the 123rd abbot of Shōfukuji, the first Zen temple to be built in Japan in 1195 by

Myōan Eisai, founder of the Japanese Rinzai sect. The temple was founded with the support of the shogun of the time, Minamoto Yoritomo (1147–1199).

As related above, for the celebration of the 600th anniversary of the death of Minamoto Yoritomo, held at Shōfukuji in 1798, Sengai, then aged forty-nine, was offered the "purple robe" in a ceremony in which he officially became qualified as a head monk by the abbot of the head temple of Myōshinji. The "purple robe" (*shi-e* 紫衣), is a robe dyed purple and bestowed by the Imperial Court upon Zen monks. In Japan, Myōan Eisai and Dōgen Kigen, the founders of the two main Zen sects, were the first persons to be given this robe. Sengai, however, refused; in fact, Sengai refused the purple robe three times in his life. The second time was when Sengai was aged fifty-three and the third time was when he was eighty-six. Sengai, it seems, was not concerned with matters of rank or pride.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, for ten years after becoming the abbot of Shōfukuji, as previously mentioned, Sengai concentrated his efforts on reconstructing the temple. He aimed at two complexes of buildings: the Sōdō or Zendō, which was the monks' residence, and the Hōjō, which was the abbot's quarters. In 1803, when Sengai refused the offer of the purple robe for the second time, he actually excused himself on the plea of illness.

According to Nakayama, the money that the clan government had given Sengai for his trip to Myōshinji to receive the purple robe was used for the purpose of reconstructing the Hōjō, the abbot's quarters. The reconstruction of the Hōjō started in 1808; however, the money was still insufficient and Sengai asked the clan government to finance the completion of the reconstruction in 1811. However, to Sengai's disappointment, it was not to be completed during his lifetime. It was completed by the 126th abbot of the temple some years after Sengai's death. Sengai was not concerned with matters of rank and pride bestowed upon him by the head temple at Myōshinji. On the contrary, his acts express an attitude which shows concern with other matters that were more important to him, such as the reconstruction of the temple for the comfort of the monks.<sup>15</sup>

In another example, taken from Sengai's world as a monk-painter, we see a similar attitude expressed. Sengai was not concerned with his reputation

as a painter. According to a famous anecdote, there was a tofu maker's shop close to Shōfukuji. The tofu maker liked Sengai's paintings so much that he used to imitate them. Sengai would view these paintings, and he would sign the better ones with his personal seal. This anecdote is also a possible explanation for the large amount of extant imitations of Sengai's paintings. These imitations appear to have started already during Sengai's lifetime — perhaps, ironically, at his own initiative.<sup>16</sup> Although Sengai was not concerned with his reputation as a painter, he was very famous for his paintings. As we saw in the previous section, people used to come to Sengai's temple asking for his paintings and calligraphy. Unable to keep up with all the requests, he had to announce that he would no longer paint.<sup>17</sup>

Sengai did not regard himself as a professional painter, nor did he regard his works as painted for the sake of conventional art. Therefore, accepting the tofu maker's imitations and even signing them with his own name did not seem to be a problem for Sengai. The purple robe and Sengai's signature were both regarded as external matters and mere appearances, just like the robe in Hakuin's painting and the samurai's outfit in Sengai's painting.

The theme of the two paintings by Hakuin and Sengai analyzed above is related to clothing as representative of social status or rank, which in society are conventionally associated with pride. Hakuin and Sengai rejected this common convention and regarded it as a mere externality and as a misleading social propriety. This free attitude is expressed not only through the paintings but also through Sengai's biography, where we learn that this free attitude was expressed practically in Sengai's life as a monk. In the next part, I shall focus on another common social convention, expressed through attitudes towards money.

## The Attitude towards Money

Respect is not given to a man for his richness; it is given to a man for his wisdom.



Money and its social implications is an issue similar to the one of clothing discussed above. Money, which is conventionally respected and valued, is regarded in the paintings, as will be shown, as another external and worldly thing. In this part, I will concentrate more specifically on Hakuin's attitude towards money as it is expressed in his artwork, calligraphy and other writings, including some information from his biography. Similar to what has been seen in previous chapters, Hakuin's attitude towards money will also be shown as part of the same general attitude of freedom. I will present here three examples from Hakuin's works.

The first painting has already been discussed in the context of the attitude towards beauty — the *Otafuku Okyū* painting ([Plate 4](#)). While previously the discussion focused on beauty here I would like to draw the attention towards the motif of money.<sup>19</sup> The painting, as we have seen, depicts Otafuku, the plump, rosy cheeked, well-fed looking woman who symbolizes prosperity, performing the traditional medical practice of giving a moxa treatment (*okyū* お灸) to a male figure. The male figure is depicted down on his hands and knees and leaning on his elbows, and is positioned with his backside towards Otafuku. He is receiving the moxa treatment from her as a cure for his hemorrhoids. On both outfits of the two figures there is a large Chinese character written twice and emphasized: *kotobuki* or *ju* 寿, which means longevity, on Otafuku's kimono and *kane* 金, which means money, on the male figure's clothing. Another important point I would like to repeat here is the inscription, which says "For someone who has hemorrhoids — just one moxa treatment ...".<sup>20</sup> This inscription is based on one of the first sentences of the *Jitsugokyō* 実語経, the list of sentences that teaches morals and values attributed to Kūkai, as mentioned above.

By basing the inscription on this sentence from the *Jitsugokyō* and by playing with the double meaning of the word *chi*, Hakuin is hinting his message and intentions to the viewer. The man who has the character of money written on his clothes is sick and needs treatment. Money therefore, is associated with misfortune and illness. Otafuku, on the contrary knows



how to cure the wealthy man's chronic illness and therefore she is the fortunate and happy one, as her name suggests. Addiss notes that the last character in the inscription of the word fire (火) is written with its last stroke pointing directly down to the eyes of the male figure, who is temporarily blinded until the cure takes effect. The fire, I should add, or the moxa treatment, has the power to purify the wealthy man's illness.<sup>21</sup>

Hakuin's attitude towards money is clear. Respect is not to be given to a man for his money, like the wealthy male figure being treated. Rather, it is given to a person for his (or her) wisdom, such as that of Otafuku. Otafuku is the one who will gain longevity and be respected. Money, like beauty or outward appearances, as shown previously, is regarded by Hakuin as a mere externality that can be misleading.

The viewer of this painting is also misled by its appearance. What seems at first glance merely to be the depiction of a scene of a man receiving a moxa treatment for his hemorrhoids is discovered to be much more than that. Only after discovering the origin of the inscription of the words from the *Jitsugokyō* does the connection between the scene and the characters written on the figures' clothes become clear. Only then do we realize that this is not simply a painting of a moxa treatment, but that there is another level that needs to be understood. The viewers, hence, understand Hakuin's message about both beauty and money, not only through the text and images in the painting, but also by experiencing this realization on their own.<sup>22</sup>

This attitude of Hakuin towards money is explicitly expressed in another work, a piece of calligraphy written by him (Fig. 5.3) with the character of the word "virtue" (*toku* 徳).

Above the character, written in dark ink and with large and emphatic strokes, we read the following inscription:

Pile up money for your sons and grandsons —  
They won't be able to hold onto it.  
Pile up books for your sons and grandsons —  
They won't be able to read any of them.  
No, the best thing to do

Is to pile merit  
Quietly, in secret,  
And pass this method to your descendant:  
It will last a long, long time.<sup>[23](#)</sup>

These lines, originally composed by the Chinese historian and Confucian scholar Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086), clearly express Hakuin's attitude towards money. Money is not something to invest in; as opposed to merit that can "last a long, long time," it is a transient matter. The inner qualities and merits of a person are more important and significant for Hakuin than external characteristics, such as money. The character for virtue, written in



[5.3](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Virtue*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 117.3 x 55.2 cm. Gitter-Yelen Collection, New Orleans



[5.4](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *A Pike-bearer Pees*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 37.8 x 53.7 cm.  
 Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Osaka Municipal Museum of Modern Art

dark and large strokes, covers most of the scroll and conveys a feeling of stability and strength.

Finally, I would like to discuss a painting by Hakuin, where he associates money with the political and social matters of his time. In this painting, called *Keyari* (*Keyarigasan* 毛槍画賛), or alternatively, *A Pike-bearer Pees* (*Keyari yakko tachi shoben zu* 毛槍奴立ち小便図),<sup>[24](#)</sup> Hakuin's attitude towards matters such as pride, money and social status is revealed once more. The painting (Fig. [5.4](#)), held in the Osaka Municipal Museum of Modern Art, is a significant work of art, first of all due to its unconventional theme.<sup>[25](#)</sup>

On the right side of the painting we see a figure of a man urinating standing up, holding a stick in his right hand. He is half naked, while on his upper garments the character *kane* 金, money, is written twice, as we saw on the male figure in the painting of Otafuku. On the right side of the figure, behind and above his back, an inscription is written. On the left side of the painting are two figures: a male and a female dressed in kimonos. The female is pointing towards the man who is urinating and the male is

pointing in the other direction; above these two figures another inscription is written.

Before we proceed with the inscriptions, let us first answer the questions: What is a *keyari*, and who is a *keyari* fellow? A *keyari* is a ceremonial spear with a scabbard that is wrapped with bird's feathers or other animal hair or skin. The *keyari* was used in the processions of the Japanese feudal lords (*daimyō* 大名). The *keyari* fellows would swing the *keyari* from hand to hand while walking at the beginning of the procession; hence the usage of the *keyari* was primarily that of an ornament.<sup>26</sup>

The inscription on the right side of the painting behind the back of the *keyari* fellow reads: "Holding a *keyari*, he stands and urinates." On the left side of the painting above the two figures the inscription continues:

And also a big penis,  
The gravel flies away  
Let's look!<sup>27</sup>

In order to understand the painting let us look at its historical context. During the Edo period, there was a well-known feudal policy called the *sankin kōtai* 参勤交代, or "alternate attendance," as it is literally translated, which began in 1615 and lasted until 1862. The *daimyō* were required to travel to Edo together with their families for a period of a year. In this way, the *daimyō* were dissociated from their provinces, minimizing the possibilities of collaboration with local activities potentially hostile to the Tokugawa government.

Stations were established along all the major routes as barriers. The Tōkaidō 東海道, the main route connecting Kyoto with Edo and the most-traveled route of all, had fifty-three stations. The stations functioned simultaneously as barriers, rest stops, transport centers, and information centers. They were under the supervision of the central government and had a station manager or head, who maintained an inn (*honjin* 本陣), a lodging reserved for official travelers.<sup>28</sup>

As part of this policy, there were processions to and from Edo (*daimyō gyōretsu* 大名行列). The processions represented the power, prestige and

wealth of the *daimyō*, who were accompanied by thousands of attendants. The *keyari* fellows, as mentioned above, stood at the beginning of the procession. According to Yoshizawa, they had an important role not only as those heading the procession but also as representatives and symbols of the *daimyō*'s power. They worked as freelancers and were not members of a particular clan; their salary was higher than average.<sup>29</sup>

According to this information it is clear that the economic and social status of a *keyari* fellow was high. However, looking at Hakuin's painting, one might feel some embarrassment. Hakuin, the famous and respected monk-painter of the Edo period, has depicted a half-naked man urinating, and what is more the man is revealed to be a *keyari* fellow of a *daimyō* procession, a respected position which required close contact with the feudal lords of the Tokugawa government.

Looking at Hakuin's biography, we can see that a daring painting of this kind is not so surprising in the context of Hakuin's background. A work by Hakuin written in 1754 was banned by the government because of the criticism it expressed towards the government, including criticism of the *sankin kōtai* system. This work, called *Hebiichigo* 辺鄙以知吾,<sup>30</sup> is in fact a letter that Hakuin wrote to Ikeda Tsugumasa (1702–1776), the feudal lord of the Okayama domain from 1714 to 1752. The work was republished only in 1862, in the last years of the Tokugawa shogunate.<sup>31</sup>

Hakuin's criticism of the *sankin kōtai* was focused mainly on the system's high expenses. The extravagant cost of the processions, including the maintenance of two separate residences by the feudal lords, the cost of transport and food supplies for the travelers, together with the fact that half of the expenditures of the entire clan were devoted to the feudal lords' needs in Edo, resulted in a financial burden imposed on the feudal lords who covered these expenses by raising special taxes and assessments from the samurai, peasants, and merchants of the clan.<sup>32</sup>

Hakuin, who grew up in the station town of Hara on the Tōkaidō route, was exposed to the system in depth, through meeting with the large number of travelers who passed through the station as participants in the



processions. He was exposed to them once again as the abbot of the Shōinji temple, also located on the Tōkaidō route.

In his book *Hebiichigo*, Hakuin criticized the government system and the extravagant lifestyle of the feudal lords:

I hear from time to time of various easy going lords who pay out sums of from three hundred to five hundred pieces of gold to buy singing and dancing girls or other so-called women of pleasure from Kyoto area ... There are reports that in some households one third of the total expenses go for the needs of the women's quarters ... In the end isn't it the people as a whole within the domains who suffer?

Hakuin continues with his criticism and directly mentions the *sankin kōtai* system and its extravagant processions:

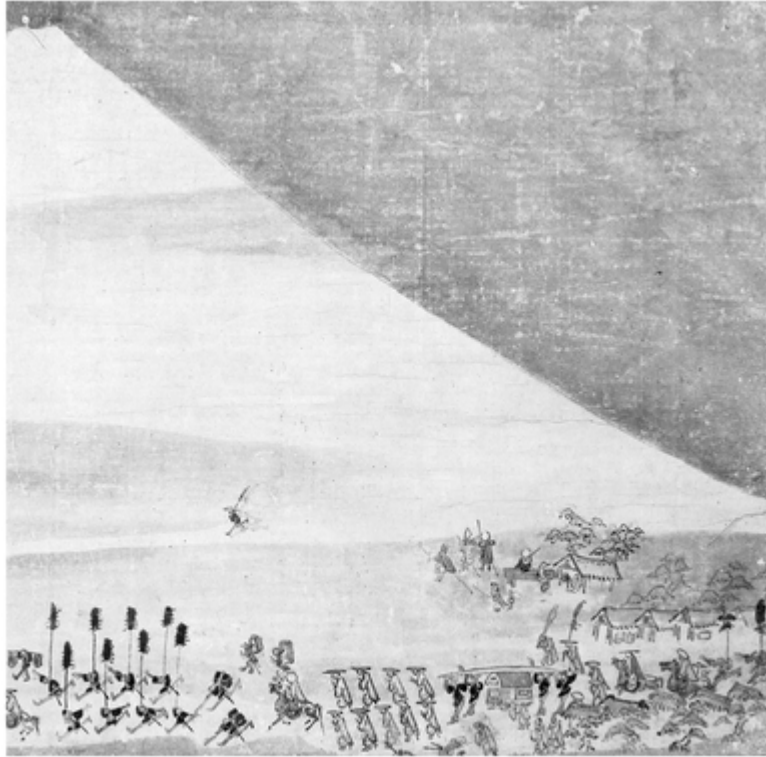
When one watches the *sankin kōtai* processions of the lords of the various provinces, a huge number of persons surround them to front and rear, bearing countless spears, spikes, weapons of war, horse trappings, flags, and curtain poles. Recently, even for trivial river crossings, depending on the status of the family, a thousand to two thousand *ryō* are used without even thinking about it.<sup>33</sup>

This criticism of the *sankin kōtai* system is expressed not only literally but also visually. In another painting by Hakuin (Figs. [5.5](#); [5.5a](#)) we can visualize these processions through the way they were viewed by Hakuin. The painting,



[5.5](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Feudal lord's procession under Mt. Fuji* (detail), hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 57.2 x 132.8 cm. Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Jishōji, Nakatsu





[5.5a](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Feudal lord's procession under Mt. Fuji* (detail), hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 57.2 x 132.8 cm. Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Jishōji, Nakatsu

which is called *The Fuji Daimyō procession* (*Fuji daimyō gyōretsu zu* 富士大名行列図), depicts a procession passing by the foot of Mount Fuji. Hakuin's literal description of the procession, quoted above, becomes more concrete in this last painting, where we can see the participants of the procession walking and carrying the spears, spikes and weapons, exactly as Hakuin described in *Hebiichigo*. The fact that Hakuin drew the people of the procession so small, almost like ants, provides us with a hint as to Hakuin's feeling towards the people who had to obey their government's system of processions.<sup>[34](#)</sup>

Let us go back to our original painting of the urinating *keyari* fellow (Fig. [5.4](#)). With the help of its inscription, we understand that the *keyari* fellow is one of the participants in such a procession and perhaps even represents the procession as a whole in Hakuin's painting. As described above, he is holding a *keyari* and urinating, while the strength of the stream of the

*keyari* fellow's urine causes gravel to fly away. The two figures on the left notice the urinating *keyari* fellow, point at him and call their other friends to come and look.

The painting, hence, is a visual means by which Hakuin chose to criticize the *sankin kōtai* system, the processions and its participants, just as he did in his written work *Hebiichigo*. It was indeed a bold act to paint a *keyari* fellow, holder of a respected position closely connected with the feudal lords of Tokugawa, half naked and urinating. Possibly only the fact that it was a painting protected it from being banned by the government, as had happened in the case of his written work.<sup>35</sup>

Hakuin is obviously criticizing the processions of his time, which represented the *daimyō*'s care for power, prestige, and wealth. Hakuin associates the manhood of the *keyari* fellow, who has such an exaggerated penis that he is able to cause gravel to fly away with the strength of his urine stream, with the power represented as a *keyari* fellow leading the procession. Hakuin is obviously ridiculing the painted character in order to criticize the demonstration of strength expressed by the processions.

On the *keyari* fellow's upper clothes Hakuin writes the character *kin* 金, which means money. Hakuin marks the *keyari* fellow with the sign of money as with a tag, as if he is classifying the figure as representative of a person who cares for money pride and power, just as was done in the previous painting of Otafuku burning moxa, where Hakuin uses the same character of money on the patient's clothes.<sup>36</sup>

It is also important to observe the way Hakuin chose to depict the figures in his painting, especially the differences between them. The *keyari* fellow seems like a complete caricature: the disproportion of his whole body his large head, his protruding belly and mostly the funny exaggerated shape of his penis all make the *keyari* fellow seem like a character from a cartoon. His body seems very stiff and inflexible, which makes him appear like a puppet controlled by someone else. He is also very large and emphasized, especially compared with the other two figures. In this way Hakuin transmits his criticism of the system of the processions, where people are operated like puppets, required to demonstrate the power of the feudal lords.

The other two figures, which are portrayed more proportionately, also seem much more flexible and realistic, although they are depicted by a small number of simple strokes. The unease we experience watching the *keyari* fellow fades away when we look at the other two figures, who appear much more conventional and usual. I suggest that these two figures, who express normality and ordinariness compared with the exaggerated awkward *keyari* fellow, represent the common people. In this way, Hakuin criticizes and opposes the social reality of his time, by presenting the common people from lower ranks as the representatives of normality while the *keyari* fellow is illustrated as an object of ridicule. The female figure points at the *keyari* fellow while her friend invites all the other people to come. In this way, we as the viewers are also invited to recognize the awkward exaggerated *keyari* fellow, who symbolizes for Hakuin the whole concept of the processions.<sup>37</sup>

Hakuin created a satirical painting, through which he criticized the government and the *sankin kōtai* system and its impact on the society of the Edo period. He criticized the chase after money and prestige and showed the decaying values of his time. The *keyari* fellow is caught naked, perhaps lacking not only clothes but also lacking virtue.

In *Hebiichigo* Hakuin advises the feudal lord of Okayama:

You my lord, in your ruling of your land and protection of your domains —be it for a hundred years, be it for fifty years — must be very circumspect and recognize that the essence of virtuous action is to forbid luxury, regulate extravagant expenditures, and, when you have a surplus, to use it for the benefit of the farmers.<sup>38</sup>

Hakuin, as we can see, expresses his social and political criticism towards the government, not only in his writings but also through his paintings. However, we must not forget the religious context in which these words were expressed, Hakuin's ideas are rooted in his religious world as a Zen monk. Money, which is conventionally respected and valued, is regarded throughout the paintings as another external and worldly thing and as a misleading social convention. Hakuin frees himself from this social convention and expresses respect for inner qualities and merits, as in the

words of the *Jitsugokyō*: "Respect is not given to a man for his richness; it is given to a man for his wisdom."

Hakuin and Sengai's attitude towards social conventions is similar to their attitude towards conceptions discussed in the previous chapter; both are rooted in the idea of the rejection of scriptures and are part of the more general attitude of freedom. Clothing of any kind and money, particularly in the society of the Edo period, are conventionally regarded as representing social status and are associated with pride and power. Hakuin and Sengai, however, regard these as worldly matters and mere appearances that can be deceptive. The inner qualities and merits of a person are more important and significant to the monk-painters than external matters and the outward appearance of things, which can be deluding and misleading. Only when one frees oneself from these conventions and awakens to the fact that they are mere appearances, can one free his mind and gain enlightenment. I will conclude my discussion on freedom in the next chapter with a discussion of humor and its relation to the attitude of freedom as expressed in the paintings of Hakuin and Sengai.

## Notes

- [1](#) Watson, *Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi*, 61. A *kalpa* is a massive unit of time in Sanskrit. The "threefold world" is "the world of desire, the world of form, and the world of formlessness. These three compose the world inhabited by unenlightened beings who transmigrate within the six paths or realms of existence" (Watson, *Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi*, 139). On Linji, see chapter 3, above.
- [2](#) Such as the paintings of the prominent painters from the Muromachi period, Shūbun and Sesshū Tōyō.
- [3](#) My translation. The Chinese and the Japanese verses can be found in the exhibition catalogue Kyoto Bunka Hakubutsukan, *Hakuin: Zen to Shouga*, 45; in classical Chinese: 大庾嶺頭/提不起, in Japanese: 大庾嶺頭に提げるも起たず.
- [4](#) The story appears also as case 23 in the *Mumonkan*. On the *Mumonkan* see chapter 3.

- [5](#) Dayuling 大庾嶺 (Jp. Daiyurei) Mountain comprises a "range of peaks on the boundary between present Kwangtung and Kiansi provinces in China. It is here that the Sixth Patriarch hid himself for a number of years after receiving the Transmission" (Miura and Sasaki, *Zen Dust*, 288).
- [6](#) Translation taken from case 23 of the *Mumonkan* (Blyth, *Zen and Zen Classics*, vol. 4, 169–74).
- [7](#) See chapter 2.
- [8](#) The English translation of the painting's title according to Furuta is: "The Gate Pines for the New Year"; see Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 101.
- [9](#) My translation. For another translation see Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 101.
- [10](#) In Japanese: 上み下ハ/よしも/あしきも/雑にもち. Each region in Japan has its own style of cooking the soup.
- [11](#) See also Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 101.
- [12](#) This quotation is part of a 1615 text from the *Dai Nihon Shiryō*, vol. 12, pt. 22, translated in De Bary, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*: vol. 2 pt. 1, 13.
- [13](#) See also Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 101.
- [14](#) For more on the purple robe, see chapter 1.
- [15](#) For the story of the reconstruction of the temple see also chapter 1, and Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 19–20; Nakayama, *Sengai — sono shōgai to geijutsu*, 44.
- [16](#) See Izumi and Mizukami, *Suibokuga no kyoshō*, 96; Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 176.
- [17](#) See chapter 3, above.
- [18](#) On *Jitsugokyō* see chapter 4.
- [19](#) See chapter 4.
- [20](#) My translation. In Japanese: 痔有るをもって、たったひと火.
- [21](#) Addiss, *Art of Zen*, 112.
- [22](#) For the full analysis of the painting see chapter 4.

- [23](#) The translation into English by Jonathan Chaves appears in the exhibition catalogue of the New Orleans Museum of Art, Rotondo-McCord, *An Enduring Vision*, 287.
- [24](#) The official name given by the museum is "Keyari" (*Keyarigasan* 毛槍画賛); Yoshizawa calls it *Keyari yakko tachi shoben zu* 毛槍奴立ち小便図; "A Pike-bearer Pees," which literally means Keyari Fellow Urinating Standing Up. See Yoshizawa, *Hakuin — Zenga no sekai*, 55–6. The name of the painting, together with other details, were reported to the author in a phone interview with the curator of the Museum in February 2008.
- [25](#) On this painting see also chapter 6.
- [26](#) Tsukahira, *Feudal Control in Tokugawa Japan*, 74.
- [27](#) My translation. The Japanese verse was adopted from Yoshizawa, *Hakuin — Zenga no sekai*, 56. In Japanese, on the right side: 毛槍をもって立ってししす. On the left side: しかも大きなしじや 小じゃりが飛ぶは あれ見よ. For another translation see Yoshizawa, *Zen Master Hakuin*, 56.
- [28](#) See Jansen, *Making of Modern Japan*, 134–5.
- [29](#) See Traganou, *Tokaido Road: Traveling and Representation*, 76–7; Yoshizawa, *Hakuin — Zenga no sekai*, 57–8; Yamamoto, *Sankin kōtai*.
- [30](#) "Literally, snake-strawberry ... small strawberry-like plant with inedible yellow fruit" (Yampolsky, *Zen Master Hakuin*, 181, n. 1). It is commonly translated as "Wild Strawberries." An English translation of this work can be found in Yampolsky, *Zen Master Hakuin*. For a Japanese version see the first volume of the collection of Hakuin's complete works: Yoshizawa, *Hakuin Zenji Hōgo Zenshū*.
- [31](#) Okayama domain was a Japanese domain of the Edo period, located in modern-day Okayama prefecture.
- [32](#) For more on the economic effects of the *sankin kōtai*, see Tsukahira, *Feudal Control in Tokugawa Japan*, 81–102.
- [33](#) Quotations are taken from Yampolsky, *Zen Master Hakuin*, 217–18. The *ryō* 両 was a gold piece used as money during the Edo period.

- [34](#) For more on the painting, see Yoshizawa, *Hakuin — Zenga no sekai*, 21–45, and Tsuji, *Nihon bijutsu zenshū*, 208. For more on Mount Fuji as a theme in Japanese art see Clark, *100 Views of Mount Fuji*.
- [35](#) According to Yoshizawa, urinating in the streets was not an unusual act in Edo-period Japan; however it is still a bold act on Hakuin's part to depict a *keyari* fellow in such a way. Yoshizawa, *Zen Master Hakuin*, 59.
- [36](#) Yoshizawa shows that the meaning of the character is an abbreviation for a word that was common in Edo-period slang, *kinkin* 金金, which meant a stylish man, i.e. one who was obviously wealthy enough to dress with style. Yoshizawa, *Hakuin — Zenga no sekai*, 58.
- [37](#) According to Yoshizawa, these two figures are in fact two children and they direct our attention to the truth, similarly to Hans Christian Andersen's famous story "The Emperor's New Clothes" (Yoshizawa, *Hakuin — Zenga no sekai*, 56; 60). Even if they are indeed children, I suggest they can still represent the common people, who reveal the truth of the naked *keyari* fellow.
- [38](#) Yampolsky, *Zen Master Hakuin*, 216.



## 6 Humor as an Expression of Freedom

Sengai's paintings and works of calligraphy are like a caricature — they are pleased with people's laughter.

— Sengai Gibon<sup>1</sup>

In this concluding chapter I wish to focus on the presentation of humor in Hakuin's and Sengai's paintings. As we saw in the previous chapters, the use of caricature and humor is quite common in their works. Various examples of paintings with presentations of humor by Hakuin and Sengai will be presented here, divided in three groups: 1) humor presented directly through traditional subject matters; 2) humor expressed in themes created by the monk-painters; and 3) humor which is an expression of the particular style of each painter. The aim of this chapter is to show that these presentations of humor are not simply artistic tools — and that they are much more significant than merely artistic styles of the monk-painters. I show that humor is very significant in the Zen Buddhist tradition and should be regarded in fact as another manifestation of freedom.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Functions of Humor**

The important role that humor plays in the art of Hakuin and Sengai is part of the attitude of freedom rooted in the thought of Zen Buddhism. The idea of the rejection of scriptures, as discussed above, is summarized in the set of four phrases attributed to Bodhidharma.<sup>3</sup> As I have argued, however, this fundamental idea in the Zen tradition extends beyond a mere rejection of scriptures. We have seen that this attitude appears in its clearest form through a type of personality or character, i.e. in the tradition of the eccentric Zen person. These Zen personalities, such as Hotei, Kensu, Kanzan,

Jittoku and Bukan, are associated with foolishness and even craziness, which are in fact appreciated and favored by the Zen textual tradition. They are viewed as rule breakers, free-spirited individuals who have been awakened and therefore are able to "laugh uproariously in the face of normal social constraint." As such, they are strongly associated with laughter, humor, playfulness and clownishness.<sup>4</sup>

Humor, therefore, is strongly connected with "rule breaking"; or, in other words, freedom from constraints and limitations is practiced through humor. Humor, in fact, plays a double role: It is an expression of freedom, and at the same time it also functions as a technique or tool. As Hyers points out, "Zen masters are often portrayed engaging in clownish or foolish behavior as a teaching device (*upaya*) or as a playful sign of spiritual freedom."<sup>5</sup>

We also saw the association of "rule breaking" with the state of awakening and enlightenment. When people free themselves from all that they have learned, they are like the free-spirited individuals who have achieved the state of enlightenment. In this state of mind they are able to laugh uproariously or in Hyers's words: "Both Zen literature and art refer to the master's or monk's 'loud, roaring laughter' — either as a means of provoking awakening or as an expression of that awakening."<sup>6</sup>

This dual function of humor can be regarded as similar to the dual function of the *kōan*, as discussed by Heine and Wright in the introduction to their book. They write, "The *kōan* was conceived as both the tool by which enlightenment is brought about and an expression of the enlightened mind itself."<sup>7</sup> Although it is clear that the *kōan* and humor are two different kinds of tools in the Zen tradition, they both function in a similar manner, as a tool for achieving enlightenment and as the expression of enlightenment itself.

Although the usage and presentation of humor in Hakuin's and Sengai's paintings is varied, as will be shown here through examples of three groups of paintings, what connects all these presentations is this special quality of humor; i.e, its dual function as both the *means* through which the viewers are freed by provoking their laughter, and, at the same time, an *expression* of this freedom in and of itself. "Laughter and humor may function both as a

technique for precipitating spiritual understanding and as an expression of new levels of insight and freedom," as Hyers describes it.<sup>8</sup>

## Humor as a Subject Matter

The first two paintings I will discuss have humor as their subject matter and main theme. These examples depict traditional themes based on famous Zen stories; they are part of the Zen ink painting tradition and were painted already by early Zen artists.



[6.1](#) Sengai Gibon, *The Three Laughters of the Tiger Ravine*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 49.2 x 59.3 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

The first painting by Sengai (Fig. [6.1](#)) is based on a story about the Chinese Buddhist master Huiyuan 慧遠 (Jp. Eon, 334–416), who lived for more than thirty years in a monastery on Mt. Lushan (Jp. Rozan). Huiyan had taken a vow never to leave his temple and never to cross the bridge over

the ravine in front of his temple, called the Tiger Ravine (Jp. Kokei 虎溪). One day, two of his friends came to visit him at his temple, the influential Chinese poet Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365–127) and the Daoist Lu Xiuqing 陸修靜 (406–77). When Huiyuan accompanied his friends as they left the temple, deeply engaged in conversation, he inadvertently broke his vow and walked with them across the Tiger Ravine bridge. Realizing that Huiyuan had broken his vow, all three burst into hearty laughter.<sup>9</sup>

Sengai's painting, *The Three Laughers of the Tiger Ravine* (*Kokei sanshō gasan* 虎溪三笑画賛), shows a scene of the three sages laughing together against the background of the Tiger Ravine bridge. In the inscription, Sengai writes:

Why are they laughing?  
With no pledge made,  
Clouds fly freely morning and evening,  
Crossing over the ravine bridge.<sup>10</sup>

The realization that he had broken his vow did not cause a serious or severe reaction on the part of the rule breaker Huiyuan; in fact the opposite happened, as he laughed heartily. This laughter is connected with his free spirit and with the moment of enlightenment. Huiyuan acted freely and naturally when he crossed the bridge, just like the clouds that fly freely, as Sengai writes in his inscription, morning and evening crossing over the ravine bridge.

With free and playful strokes, Sengai transmits this enlightened moment in his painting through its form as well as through its content. The three sages are portrayed with happy and laughing faces, composed of loose lines, with no defined outline and a relatively large space between each one, which expresses a feeling of openness and happiness. Sengai's own freedom of mind enables him to capture this moment of laughter, of the free and enlightened minds, to express it through his picture and to transmit it to his viewers.

This relation between laughter, enlightenment and free mind returns us to an earlier example of a traditional theme. This is Sengai's painting of the

"Clam Priest" Kensu, the semi-legendary eccentric Chinese monk from the ninth century. Despite the Buddhist requirement to adhere to a vegetarian diet, Kensu used to wander along lakes and river-banks eating shrimps and clams, and one day even attained enlightenment while catching a shrimp.<sup>11</sup> The eccentric Kensu, as we saw, the rule breaker and the free-spirited individual who has been awakened and therefore is able to "laugh uproariously in the face of normal social constraint," violated the Buddhist law, yet he is appreciated for his free spirit. Being a favored theme in the Zen ink painting tradition, Kensu is presented as an unconventional, funny and foolish character.

In Sengai's painting (Figs. [3.4](#); [3.4a](#)), Kensu is depicted with soft and round strokes, in a way that is very playful, simple and minimalist. The inscription in the upper part of the scroll — "Do not kill; release living creatures," as shown in detail above — is in tension with the painted scene by contradicting it: the concise, clear and serious message of the inscription on the one hand, and the expression of joyfulness and freedom of Kensu's figure on the other. Through this visual contrast, Sengai succeeds in provoking his viewers by illustrating and describing the act of the "rule breaker" as a free-minded and enlightened moment, filled with joy and playfulness.

As we can see through these two examples, humor and laughter form the subject of the paintings. Moreover, humor, laughter and joyfulness as expressions of freedom are strongly associated with the moment of enlightenment. This is, therefore, a mature laughter that arises as an outcome of spiritual experience, or as Furuta writes: "To create humor, artistic maturity is required of the performer. A somewhat similar observation can be made concerning the history of Zen: humor emerges at a point when Zen ideas had fully ripened."<sup>12</sup>

## Humor Through New Themes

Humor in the paintings of Hakuin and Sengai, however, is presented not only through traditional themes based on famous Zen stories and as the direct subject matter of the painting, but also through new themes introduced by the monk-painters. Through the following examples of paintings I will demonstrate the use of humor by Hakuin and Sengai via their personal themes, emphasizing the way in which humor is closely connected with freedom of mind.

In the case of two of Hakuin's paintings, already discussed in earlier chapters, humor and caricature are used to transmit Hakuin's political and social criticism. In the painting *Otafuku's Moxibustion*, where Otafuku is depicted giving a moxa treatment to a man suffering from hemorrhoids, both the scene itself and the way the figures are depicted are humorous ([Plate 4](#)).<sup>13</sup> The scene, which shows a man down on his hands and knees, positioned with his backside towards Otafuku, receiving a moxa treatment from her while she is holding chopsticks in her hand leaning over towards him curing his hemorrhoids, is humorous and caricature-like. Hakuin shares with us an intimate situation, which is normally not shared with the public. We are exposed to a situation we normally would rather not see, while at the same time we know it is only a painting and therefore the embarrassment we might feel blends into a smile.

The two figures are depicted like caricatures; i.e. with simple and sketchy strokes, exaggerated faces and disproportionate bodies. The male figure is portrayed almost like a scribble. We can see several outlines of the figure's body the remains of previous trials of outlines attempted by Hakuin. The painting is incomplete in some parts and even distorted, for example the hands and fingers, a fact which adds to the comic atmosphere. The faces of both figures have a funny expression and are exaggerated. In contrast to the male figure, Otafuku is painted with much more care, particularly her kimono and her hairstyle. Her kimono is even depicted with color and is decorated with a plum flower pattern. This contrast contributes to the imbalanced feeling of a caricature. Finally, the large, bold Chinese characters drawn on the figures' clothes complete the whole scene's amusing atmosphere.



However, as we have already seen, the painting should not be judged by its surface alone; it is not a mere depiction of a humorous scene. Only after reading the inscription and deciphering the meaning of the two Chinese characters written on the figures' clothes can we understand Hakuin's implied message. Hakuin is making a statement about the social value system of his time, criticizing society's respect for money while appreciating the wisdom that Otafuku embodies.

Hakuin is also teaching us to respect the inner qualities of a person and not to judge based on external appearances. Transmitting his criticism in the form of satire by holding the rich man up to ridicule through depicting him being cured of hemorrhoids, Hakuin awakens his viewers; he uses the quality of humor and caricature to break down conventions and release his viewers from them. This free attitude transcends here the specific context of the Zen Buddhist world and it is directed towards the breaking of social rules and standards of Hakuin's time, as was discussed in more detail in the previous chapter.

In another previously discussed painting, Hakuin again uses humor and caricature, this time not just as satire but as parody through which he criticizes the political system of the Edo period. As discussed above, the painting called *A Pike-bearer Pees* parodies the *keyari* fellows, who headed the *daimyō* processions as part of the *sankin kōtai* policy (Fig. 5.4).<sup>14</sup>

Here again, both the scene itself and the way the figures are painted are comical. The *keyari* fellow is seen urinating, half naked with an exaggerated penis, holding a *keyari*. Next to him are two figures: one is pointing at the *keyari* fellow and the other is pointing at his friends, calling them to look at the scene. This is an embarrassing situation in which a *keyari* fellow, who holds a respected position that demanded close contact with the feudal lords of the Tokugawa government, is depicted in such a moment. The figure pointing at the *keyari* fellow directs the viewers' attention to this odd situation. The viewer, as with the previous painting, is exposed to this embarrassment, this time feeling like a child who peeks at someone naked.

Hakuin holds the *keyari* fellow up to ridicule: his large head, his protruding belly and especially the funny and exaggerated shape of his



penis, make him seem like a character from a cartoon. With his stiff and inflexible body he seems like a controlled puppet. Compared with the other two figures next to him, he is very large and emphasized — a contrast that strengthens the comical expression. Moreover, the fact that the two figures are much more realistically portrayed, together with the fact that the female figure points at the *keyari* fellow, emphasizes the gap between them and makes the *keyari* fellow seem conspicuous and comical.

What we see here, again, is not merely a depiction of a humorous scene. Hakuin uses humor in the form of parody and satire in order to transmit his political and social criticism. As shown in detail in the previous section, Hakuin is criticizing the chase after money and prestige and is demonstrating the decaying values of his time. Using parody and humor, Hakuin breaks down the conventions and conceptions of his time and frees his viewer's mind. Humor, hence, as with the previous example, is not simply funny. It is the means through which release and liberation is evoked while at the same time it is a presentation of the attitude of freedom in itself.

Humor and caricature also appear in Sengai's artwork. Although imbued with Sengai's own particular style, they are used similarly to the two examples by Hakuin. I wish to focus on two paintings by Sengai, which express humor through the depiction of animals.<sup>15</sup> Several examples of humorous paintings of animals by Sengai have been discussed earlier. In these paintings, Sengai uses humor as a means to break down our common conceptions. In the painting called *Monkey* (Fig. 4.6), Sengai is unraveling his viewer's conception of a monkey's image.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to the two paintings by Hakuin discussed above, no special scene or action takes place in Sengai's painting. Humor is manifested through the comical way the figure is painted and by the way Sengai communicates with his viewers in the inscription. Sengai's figure is funny even without reading the inscription; this comical creature with its exaggerated large nose and round eyes is unrecognizable as a monkey. The body of the image looks more like a dog's body, while the face makes it seem more like an imaginary image. Then, when we read the title of the painting and the inscription, we discover that Sengai has drawn a monkey. The great gap between our image of a

conventional monkey and the figure depicted by Sengai creates laughter. In the inscription Sengai writes: "As good as a monkey" telling us that what he painted was as close to a monkey as he could depict. The fact that Sengai shares his "inability" to paint a conventional monkey with us, as if exposing his shortcomings, makes the whole experience very comical.

Sengai, however, is not using humor simply to make us smile or laugh — he is trying to convey a message. Sengai, as detailed above, is trying to break down our common conceptions and conventions. He does this through a rejection of the tradition of ink painting in general, and a rejection of the universal convention of a monkey's image in particular. This rejection is related to the idea of rejection of scriptures and also to the more general attitude of freedom, Sengai, hence, uses humor and caricature as a tool and means to provoke the laughter and awakening of his viewers, while at the same time, his painting is a presentation of freedom in itself.

In another painting of an animal *Tiger* (Fig. [4.7](#)), Sengai transmits similar messages through humor. Here again, as in the painting of the monkey, humor is presented through both text and image, in the way the figure is depicted and also in the way Sengai communicates with his viewers in the inscription. The "tiger" is very much a humorous caricature, with its large, round and emphasized eyes lacking in proportion to the rest of its body, its long tail, and the simplicity with which it is depicted, using only a small number of strokes. Here, as in the previous painting, what Sengai's image represents is not clear; the painted image could be either a cat or a tiger. Moreover, the title of the painting is *Tiger*, yet the inscription says "Something resembling a cat." The viewer is left confused, unable to label the depicted image.<sup>[17](#)</sup>

Once again, Sengai is trying to break down our common conceptions and conventions; he blurs the borders of the representation of a cat and a tiger. In both paintings above, Sengai uses humor and caricature in order to convey his message about common conceptions. Yet humor itself is part of the same message; it is a catharsis through which the viewer is awakened and it is in itself a manifestation of the breaking of rules and the freedom of mind.

# Particular Styles of Humor

Through the examples presented above we see how Hakuin and Sengai used humor either as the direct subject matter of the painting or via their own individual themes. In the following examples I wish to stress the differences in the way humor is presented by each of the monk-painters. As will be shown, each painter has his own distinctive style of presenting humor, while in both cases, humor functions in its similar dual way: as a presentation of freedom and as a mean to provoke the viewer's liberation of mind.

Sengai, as we have seen, tends to speak of humor directly in the inscriptions of his paintings. For example, in the inscription on the painting called *Crane and Turtle* (Fig. [4.10](#)), Sengai writes:

Worldly people's paintings and works of calligraphy are like a beautiful woman — they don't like to be laughed at by people,  
Sengai's paintings and works of calligraphy are like a caricature — they are pleased with people's laughter.<sup>[18](#)</sup>

Sengai distinguishes between his work of art and the paintings of worldly people. The main difference is that Sengai is not concerned with the external appearance of his paintings; on the contrary, when people laugh while viewing his works of art he is pleased with their laughter. Sengai reveals that his paintings function similarly to a caricature and that he is aware of this and is in fact pleased with their impact on his viewers.

In another painting, not yet discussed, called *Dragon and Tiger* 龍虎図 (Fig. [6.2](#)), the inscription expresses a similar idea; next to the painting of the dragon (the right scroll) is written:

What is this?  
It's called a dragon.  
People burst into laughter  
And I, too, have a good laugh.<sup>[19](#)</sup>

Sengai's dragon does not look like an ordinary dragon; therefore, it awakens people's laughter. Sengai himself laughs together with people at his own

paintings, a laughter that in itself shows his spiritual freedom and liberation.

As we can see, we can learn a lot about Sengai's thoughts concerning humor through reading his inscriptions. Sengai expresses his love of laughter — he appreciates its qualities and in contrast to a possible common reaction to laughter, he is not offended by it. Through these inscriptions, laughter and humor are revealed to be Sengai's philosophical standpoint, a free attitude of mind that appreciates laughing at one's self. He himself is liberated, and therefore, with his self-humor and through his works of art he liberates his viewers as well.



[6.2](#) Sengai Gibon, *Dragon and Tiger*, pair of hanging scrolls, ink on paper, 128.5 x 55.3 cm each. Idemitsu Museum of Art

Although we can also find self-humor in Hakuin's paintings, generally speaking, in terms of the presentation of humor, Hakuin is not as direct in his inscriptions as Sengai. Each of the monk-painters has his own particular way of expressing humor. Nevertheless, all are part of the attitude of freedom. In order to demonstrate the different ways Hakuin and Sengai used humor, I will discuss two different depictions of the same themes painted by Hakuin and Sengai.

The first theme is Daruma or Bodhidharma, the semi-legendary Indian prince considered to be the twenty-eighth patriarch after the historical Buddha, the first patriarch of Zen Buddhism and the one who brought Chan from India to China. As we have seen, Chinese and Japanese monks throughout the history of Zen painting often depicted stories and legends about Daruma. Among them are Hakuin and Sengai, who add a comical touch to the theme in the following examples.<sup>[20](#)</sup>

I will start with Sengai's painting called *Bodhidharma* (Fig. [6.3](#)). We do not need to read the inscription on Sengai's painting of Daruma in order to catch its humor. Our image of the respected Bodhidharma with a serious and severe expression on his face, as he is typically depicted in the tradition of Zen ink paintings, breaks down and melts when we look at Sengai's Daruma. The innocent, almost childlike expression on Daruma's face as depicted by Sengai evokes our surprise and spontaneous laughter.<sup>[21](#)</sup>



[6.3](#) Sengai Gibon, *Bodhidharma*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 90.3 x 29.8 cm. Idemitsu Museum of Art

With a small number of strokes and a simple rendering with no details, Sengai creates a comical image of Daruma: the round eyes depicted so close to each other, the hair painted partially on the eyelid and partially inside the eyeball (which could belong either to the eyebrows or the eyelashes), the nose made of one stroke and the beard depicted with long straight strokes,

all help to create this cartoon-like image. The inscription written above Daruma's head reads:

Bodhidharma —  
The anniversary of his death,  
He says: "Oh, painful, the boil  
On my buttocks."<sup>22</sup>

Sengai's inscription refers to one of the legends told about Bodhidharma, according to which Daruma spent nine years in meditation in front of a wall at the Shaolin monastery in Northern Wei province. Sengai, who probably painted this painting on the anniversary of Daruma's death, gives us some words possibly said by Daruma when referring to his experience of sitting in meditation for so many years: "Oh, painful, the boil on my buttocks." Daruma complains of the pain he feels, caused by sitting in meditation for nine years.

With the inscription, Sengai completely breaks down any feeling of sacredness, respect and seriousness towards Daruma. Sengai portrays Daruma as an ordinary human being who naturally complains of the pain anybody would have felt after sitting in meditation for even a much shorter period. Sengai thus undermines our conventions, perceptions and the tradition of Zen ink paintings by creating a contrary image of Daruma; by opposing the common image of Daruma he breaks down our conceptions and provokes our laughter.

In Hakuin's *Daruma* (Fig. [2.4](#)), a painting presented in earlier sections as well, Hakuin similarly rejects our conventions and conceptions, as well as the tradition of Zen ink paintings. However, his way of doing this is by taking the serious and severe image of Daruma to an extreme. As we can see in his painting, Daruma seems like a caricature as well. This time, however, it is for different reasons: Hakuin exaggerates the severe and serious common image of Daruma and creates a grim-faced, almost grotesque, image of him.<sup>23</sup>

Daruma's face is disproportionately painted; the wide forehead compared with the small chin and in contrast to the narrow space between the chin



and the nose creates a distorted image. The large nose, the unusual eyebrows and the big, wide-open eyes with distended pupils, all contribute to the appearance of a caricature. In the case of Hakuin's painting, our laughter is evoked together with a feeling of unease towards the image of Daruma.

In the inscription on the painting, as discussed in detail earlier in this chapter, Hakuin writes in large and emphatic characters the first two lines of the original set of four phrases traditionally attributed to Bodhidharma. They are written along the face of Daruma and very close to it in a way that is reminiscent of a cartoon, as if spoken by the depicted image. In small letters, as a second line and less emphasized, Hakuin reveals his old age and the fact that he drew this painting without his glasses, as if to excuse the comic image: "Under the *sāla*-tree, the eighty-three-year-old monk; Old Hakuin is painting without his glasses." With these last two sentences, Hakuin winks, as it were, towards his viewers and softens the expression of the frightening image of his Daruma.

As we can see, in both paintings by Hakuin and Sengai, Daruma is treated comically; however, he is presented in two very different ways. Both monk-painters use humor in order to transmit their message while each of them presents it in their own individual style. In all these cases, however, the dual quality of humor is expressed: humor which is the presentation of liberation and laughter reflected in the artwork, and humor as a provocateur of laughter, which breaks down common conceptions and conventions and liberates the viewers.

The last example, already presented above, is not as common a theme in the tradition of Zen ink painting as Daruma, yet it is one depicted by both Hakuin and Sengai. In the scene, a number of people look surprised and scared by a piece of rope which mistakenly seems to them, in the dim light, to be a snake (Figs. [4.1](#); [4.2](#)).<sup>24</sup> The scene in both paintings is depicted comically; however, both Hakuin and Sengai, as noted, do not intend to simply depict a situation in which people mistake a rope for a snake. This scene is connected to Buddhist ideas on illusion and it is presented as an allegory for the delusion of mind due to misconceptions. As we see, both Hakuin and Sengai painted the same scene based on the Buddhist tradition,

and both chose to depict this scene in a comical way, yet each one expresses this in his individual style.

The two figures in Sengai's painting (Fig. [4.1](#)) seem like two comical children. They are depicted with round and soft strokes, and this, along with the expression on their faces and their body language, including gestures expressing panic, makes them seem like caricatures of children. The figures of Hakuin's painting (Fig. [4.2](#)), however, are much less naturalistic and could perhaps fit a science fiction comic book: the figures' thin bodies, their long and straight arms and legs and their unconventional faces all create a hard and sharp, yet comical, expression.

It is important to note that there is also a difference in the way humor is expressed in the inscriptions of the paintings. While Sengai plays with the sound of words in a humorous way Hakuin on the contrary does not use humor in his inscriptions. Instead, after describing the scene in a straightforward way in the first two lines, he continues with introducing his message in a very implicit way, almost like a riddle or a *kōan*, in the last two lines of the inscription.<sup>[25](#)</sup>

Sengai's humor in this painting is therefore softer and at ease whereas Hakuin's humor tends to be sharper and less pleasant. In all cases, however, there is a de-familiarization of the figures that provokes our laughter. Sengai exaggerates his figures' natural emotions of panic and danger, whereas Hakuin makes his figures unreal by depicting them in a very unconventional and unnatural way. Both Hakuin and Sengai hold their figures up to ridicule in order to emphasize the deluded state of conventional mind, and yet each one does so in his own way.

Humor and laughter, as shown, are presented differently in the art of Hakuin and Sengai. Each monk-painter had his own creative way of expressing humor, but all these uses and expressions derive from the same idea of breaking the rules and freeing one's mind. Humor and caricature are manifestations of the attitude of freedom while at the same time they are used as a form of artistic language and tool; they are therefore both an expression of freedom in itself and the means to provoke the viewer's

laughter and freedom. I will end this chapter with Hyers's remarks in the last chapter of his book, *The Laughing Buddha*:

At every level of its manifestation, humor spells freedom in some sense and to some degree. Humor means freedom. This is one of its most distinctive characteristics and virtues ... To the extent that one is no longer in bondage to desire, or to the self, or the law, no longer torn apart by alienation and anxiety, no longer defined and determined primarily by seriousness, one can laugh with the laughter of little children and great sages. Humor is caught up, and brought to fulfillment, in the joy of awakening and emancipation.<sup>26</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> My translation. These are the last two lines of an inscription written by Sengai as part of his painting called *Crane and Turtle* (*Tsuru kame zu* 鶴亀図), mentioned above in chapter 2.
- <sup>2</sup> For more on humor and Zen, see Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 27–36; Hyers, *Laughing Buddha* and Hyers, "Humor in Daoist and Zen Art."
- <sup>3</sup> See chapter 2 and 3.
- <sup>4</sup> Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 119. On these personalities see chapter 3. See also Faure, *Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 115–24; Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 28; Hyers, *Laughing Buddha*, 37–54.
- <sup>5</sup> Hyers, "Humor in Daoist and Zen Art," 32.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Heine and Wright, *Kōan*, 3.
- <sup>8</sup> Hyers, *Laughing Buddha*, 17.
- <sup>9</sup> Huiyuan studied both Daoism and Confucianism in his youth before he began his Buddhist studies. He is considered to be a precursor of Pure Land Buddhism in China. For more on the story see Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 90; 247; Hyers, *Laughing Buddha*, 48; Suzuki, *Sengai: The Zen Master*, 103.

- [10](#) The translation is taken from Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 90. I omitted one line from the translation; this line does not appear in the original inscription and was added by the translator. The additional line was inserted between the first two lines of the inscription: ["I won't cross it" was his promise].
- [11](#) See chapter 3.
- [12](#) Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 30.
- [13](#) On this painting, see chapters 2 and 3.
- [14](#) For details see chapter 5.
- [15](#) One of the earliest examples of humorous paintings depicting animals is the well-known set of four scrolls from the middle of the twelfth century, the *Caricatures of Animals and Humans* (*Chōjū jinbutsu giga*; 鳥獣人物戯画) of Kōzanji 高山寺 in Kyoto. For further details, see Mason, *History of Japanese Art*, 141.
- [16](#) For details see chapter 4.
- [17](#) On this painting see also chapter 4.
- [18](#) On this painting see also chapter 2.
- [19](#) From Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 123. For the Japanese version, see Furuta, *Sengai*, 103. For a similar inscription in a different painting called *Tora zu* 虎図, see Nakayama, *Sengai — sono shōgai to geijutsu*, 453.
- [20](#) Here it is important to note that, generally speaking, the portraits of Daruma in the tradition of Zen ink painting before the Edo period were treated in a serious manner and in most cases have no comical connotations. The themes that traditionally are more likely to have comical connotations are Hotei, Kanzan and Jittoku, Kensu and so on.
- [21](#) A good example of an early painting of Daruma with a serious and severe expression in the tradition of Zen ink painting is the depiction by the painter Kenkō Shōkei, active mid-fifteenth to early sixteenth century; see Fontein & Hickman, *Zen Painting and Calligraphy*, 139–40 for more on the painting and on Shōkei.
- [22](#) The translation is adapted from Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 40.
- [23](#) On this painting see chapters 2 and 3.

[24](#) On this theme painted by both Hakuin and Sengai see chapter 4.

[25](#) For the translation and other details see chapter 4.

[26](#) Hyers, *Laughing Buddha*, 158.

## Conclusion: Ultimate Freedom

Before I end with some words of conclusion I wish to present the "death verses" of the monk-painters Hakuin and Sengai. Just before dying, Chan and Zen masters would leave their last words or last poems (*yuige* 遺偈). These verses are similar to the awakening verses, which together mark "the beginning and the end of the master's preaching." Death verses functioned as a testimony to the master's state of mind and degree of enlightenment.<sup>1</sup>

Hakuin passed away at the age of eighty-four. Tōrei, his disciple, writes about his master's last minutes: "The master was sleeping very peacefully lying on his right side. He made a single groan, 'UNNN!' and passed away." In the epilogue to Hakuin's biography, Torei writes the following about Hakuin's last utterance:

Ordinary people, upon hearing that the master did not compose a death verse, might get the wrong idea and think, "master Hakuin has lost a fine opportunity to make a final Zen utterance." Wrong! Wrong! That "UNNN" was just the right utterance. It penetrated straight through the Heavens above. It pierced through the Yellow Spring below. Compared with final instructions and death verses Zen monks usually leave behind them, I say that the master's was superior to them all by ten-fold.<sup>2</sup>

Sengai, who died at the age of eighty-eight, wrote his last poem that same year:

When I come, I know the place I have come from  
When I leave, I know the place I am going to  
My hands are not letting go of the cliff  
A thick cloud—I do not know the place.<sup>3</sup>

We already discussed the notion of "letting go" and its relation to enlightenment; we encounter it here once again in Sengai's last poem when he describes his moments before death. "Letting go of the cliff" would lead Sengai to his ultimate freedom. Sengai, however, describes very clearly this period before being able to finally release the cliff with both hands. These

are moments of a "renunciation of security," a loss of a permanent and stable ground which "entails a fundamental defamiliarization with oneself and the world." Wright presents the way in which the experience of freedom is described in the Chan/Zen tradition—as a frightening moment:

In the moment of full exposure, freedom is terrifying. Numerous literary figures develop this image of the "void" and the corresponding fear that it can evoke in any human being sufficiently open to experience it. The Huang Po fascicle of the *Transmission of the Lamp* likens the experience of freedom to being suspended over an infinite chasm with nothing to hold onto for security. Common to many Zen texts is the image of the moment of liberation as a letting go with both hands, a leap off a hundred-foot pole.<sup>4</sup>

The relation between "letting go" and death was presented earlier in this work through one of Hakuin's inscriptions attached to his painting *Monkey Trying to Catch the Moon* (*Enkōsokugetsuzu* 猿猴捉月図; Fig. 3.1):

The monkey seeks for the moon in the water  
Continuously till death.  
If he would let go of his hand, he will sink in the deep spring.  
The Ten Directions' light, a graceful brightness.<sup>5</sup>

The letting-go of the monkey's hands leads to his death, which is described as a positive enlightened moment. Succeeding to finally "let go" of both hands leads to ultimate freedom. Hakuin's and Sengai's last words before death thus can be regarded as the epitome of their respective minds and contain the essence of their spiritual freedom and enlightenment.<sup>6</sup> The importance and centrality of the Chan/Zen concept of freedom, as we have seen, is reflected in different aspects of the life of Hakuin and Sengai—and it is manifested also in their attitude towards death. Freedom is an entire outlook and an attitude towards life and death.

As noted in the Introduction, the original interest in Zenga after the Second World War in the United States and Europe was strongly connected with a broader interest in Zen Buddhism and an attempt to further understand its core principles. It is hard to tell whether or not this connection still exists today; i.e. whether there remains a strong correlation between public



interest in Zenga and in Zen Buddhism. Yet, judging from recent trends in research on Zen Buddhism, particularly the more critical scrutiny of the tradition against idealized images, we might assume that contemporary interest in Zenga also comes attached with a more critical point of view. While there still remains a great need to study Zenga from different perspectives, as argued in the Introduction, I would like to believe that the interest in these works of art today comes from a much more critical approach and a curiosity to be exposed to new ways of looking at these paintings.

The main purpose of this work has been to explore this particular expression in the *artwork* of Hakuin and Sengai. As such, it offers a shift from the traditional interest in the artwork as a means to promote Zen and its principles. Instead, here I have attempted to highlight the artwork and the monk-painters themselves. While it was also important to understand the nature of the concept of freedom and to identify its sources, the primary focus of this work has been the visual manifestation of this notion.

Thus, one of the most important conclusions of this book is that the expression of freedom is best understood as part of a general attitude that is deeply rooted in the thought of Zen Buddhism. Freedom in the Zen context is not *merely* an artistic style, nor should it be studied solely in terms of historical developments. Furthermore, it should not be conceived simply in terms of the religious doctrines and Zen ideas of the monk-painters, which then influenced their artistic style. Instead, as I have argued, the expression of freedom should be viewed and examined from an integrative standpoint, i.e. through the synthesis of all the factors and aspects mentioned above. It is a philosophical standpoint and a broad attitude that is reflected and expressed through the lives, activities and works of the monk-painters in a specific historical, cultural and art historical context and therefore entails a scrutiny from a multitude of perspectives.

A work of this kind can first and foremost deepen our understanding of the artwork of the monk-painters Hakuin and Sengai, and can secondarily contribute to the comprehension of the emergence of Zen paintings during the Edo period. Yet, it also brings forward a discussion of several new topics

for further inquiry: e.g. a comparison between the specific characteristics of Zen paintings during the Edo period and Zen paintings of earlier creations, and the interaction of Hakuin and Sengai with the non-religious environments that surrounded them, including the social and political environments during the Edo period. It is my hope that this book will spur further discussion of these and other topics and serve as an inspiration for new research to come.

## Notes

[1](#) For more on death verses see Faure, *Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 187–9.

[2](#) Waddell, "A Chronological Biography," no. 2, 126.

[3](#) My translation. The poem is originally written in classical Chinese; my translation is from the modern Japanese rendering of Nakayama; Nakayama, *Sengai—sono shogai to geijutsu*, 89. 来るとき来るところを知り／去るとき去る

ところを知る／手を懸厓に撒せず／雲深くしてところを知らず. For another translation into English and an interpretation of the poem see Furuta, *Sengai: Master Zen Painter*, 48.

[4](#) Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 136.

[5](#) My translation. See chapter 4 for more details.

[6](#) See Faure, *Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 189; Wright, *Philosophical Meditations*, 84; On ritualization of death in the Chan tradition see Faure, *Rhetoric of Immediacy*, 179–208 and Sharf, "The Idolization of Enlightenment," 1–31.

# Bibliography

## Works in English

- Abe, Ryūichi and Peter Haskel, trans. *Great Fool Zen Master Ryōkan: Poems, Letters, and Other Writings*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996.
- Addiss, Stephen. *Zenga and Nanga: Paintings by Japanese Monks and Scholars from the Kurt and Millie Gitter Collection*. New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 1976.
- . "The Revival of Zen Painting in Edo Period Japan." *Oriental Art* 31.1 (Spring 1985): 50–61.
- . *The Art of Zen: Painting and Calligraphy by Japanese Monks 1600–1925*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989.
- . "Reflections on Zenga." *Andon* 61 (January 1999): 14–18.
- Addiss, Stephen and Audrey Yoshiko Seo. *The Sound of One Hand: Paintings and Calligraphy by Zen Master Hakuin*. Boston: Shambhala, 2010.
- Awakawa, Yasuiehi. *Zen Painting*. Trans. John Bester. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1970.
- Barnet, Sylvan and William Burto. *Zen Ink Paintings*. New York: Kodansha International, 1982.
- Baroni, J. Helen. *Obaku Zen: the Emergence of the Third Sect of Zen in Tokugawa Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000.
- Blofeld, John, trans. *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po on the Transmission of Mind*. New York: Grove Press, 1959.
- Blyth, R. H. *Zen and Zen Classics*. 5 vols. Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1966.
- Botz-Bornstein, Thorsten. "Dreams in Buddhism and Western Aesthetics: Some Thoughts on Play, Style and Space." *Asian Philosophy* 17.1 (March 2007): 65–81.

- Brasch, Heinz. "Zenga, Zen Buddhist Paintings from 17th to 19th Centuries." *Oriental Art* 6.2 (Summer 1960): 58–63.
- Brinker, Helmut. *Zen in the Art of Painting*. London and New York: Arcana, 1987.
- Brinker, Helmut and Hiroshi Kanazawa. *Zen: Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings*. Trans. Andreas Leisinger. Zürich: Museum Rietberg Zürich, 1996.
- Bryson, Norman, Maribeth Graybill and Joshua S. Mostow, eds. *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003.
- Burlingame, Eugene Watson, trans. *Buddhist Legends*. London: Luzac & Co., 1969.
- Buruma, Ian. *Behind the Mask*. New York: New American Library, 1984.
- Chang, Chung-Yuan, trans. *Original teachings of Chan Buddhism: selected from The transmission of the lamp*. New York: Vintage Books, 1971.
- Clark, Timothy. *100 Views of Mount Fuji*. London: British Museum, 2001.
- Cleary, Thomas, trans. *The Blue Cliff Record*. Boulder and London: Shambhala, 1977.
- , trans. *Zen Essence: The Science of Freedom*. Boston and London: Shambhala, 1989.
- , trans. *Transmission of Light (Denkoroku): Zen in the Art of Enlightenment by Zen Master Keizan*. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990.
- Conze, Edward, trans. *Buddhist Scripture*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1959.
- De Bary, Theodore, ed. *Sources of Japanese Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1958.
- , ed. *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, second edition vol. 2. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Dictionary of Japanese Art Terms*. Tokyo: Tokyo Bijutsu, 1990.
- Dumoulin, Heinrich. *Zen Enlightenment: Origin and Meaning*. New York: Weatherhill, 1976.

- . *Zen Buddhism: A History*. 2 vols. Trans. James W. Heisig and Paul Knitter. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 2005.
- Elkins, James. "On the Conceptual Analysis of Gardens." *Journal of Garden History* 13.4 (1993): 189–98.
- Faure, Bernard. *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/ Zen Buddhism*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- . "Chan and Zen Studies: The State of the Field(s)." In *Chan Buddhism in Ritual Context*, edited by Bernard Faure, 1–35. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.
- . *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity and Gender*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Fischer-Schreiber, Ingrid *et al.* *Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion: Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Zen*. Boston: Shambhala, 1989.
- Fischer-Schreiber, Franz-Karl Ehrhard and Michael S. Diener. *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*. Boston: Shambhala, 1991.
- Fontein, Jan and Money L. Hickman. *Zen Painting and Calligraphy*. Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1970.
- Ford, Barbara. "Introduction." In *Japanese Ink Painting: Early Zen Masterpieces*, edited by Kanazawa Hiroshi, 13–27. New York: Kodansha International, 1979.
- Foulk, T. Griffith. "Sung Controversies Concerning the 'Separate Transmission' of Ch'an." In *Buddhism in the Sung*, edited by Peter N. Gregory and Daniel A. Getz, 220–94. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999.
- Foulk, T. Griffith and Robert Sharf. "On the Ritual Use of Ch'an Portraiture in Medieval China." In *Chan Buddhism in Ritual Context*, edited by Bernard Faure, 74–150. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.
- Frederic, Louis. *Buddhism: Flammarion Iconographic Guides*. Paris and New York: Flammarion, 1995.
- Furuta, Shōkin. *Sengar Master Zen Painter*. Trans. Reiko Tsukimura. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2000.
- Gerstle, C. Andrew, ed. *18th Century Japan: Culture and Society*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2000.

- Guth, M. E. Christine. *Japanese art of the Edo period*. London: Calmann and King, 1996.
- . "Nanga and Zenga in America, 1956 to 1976." In *An Enduring Vision: 17th to 20th Century Japanese Painting from the Gitter-Yelen Collection*, edited by Lisa Rotondo-McCord, 203–11. New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 2002.
- Hakeda, S. Yoshito. *Kūkai: Major Works*. New York: Colombia University Press, 1972.
- Hall, Whitney John. *Japan from prehistory to Modern Times*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970.
- Heine, Steven and Dale S. Wright, eds. *The koan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- . *The Zen Canon: Understanding the Classic Texts*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- . *Zen Classics: Formative Texts in the History of Zen Buddhism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Hisao, Inagaki. *Dictionary of Japanese Buddhist Terms*. Kyoto: Nagata Bunshodo, 1992.
- Hoffmann, Yoel, trans. *Every End Exposed*. Brookline: Autumn Press, 1977.
- Hori, Ichiro. *Folk Religion in Japan: Continuity and Change*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968.
- Hori Sōgen, Victor. *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Kōan Practice*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003.
- . "Zen Kōan Capping Phrase Books: Literary Study and the Insight 'Not Founded on Words or Letters.'" In *Zen Classics: Formative Texts in the History of Zen Buddhism*, edited by Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, 171–214. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Hyers, Conrad. *The Laughing Buddha: Zen and the Comic Spirit*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1989.
- . "Humor in Daoist and Zen Art." *Asian Art and Culture* 7. 3 (Fall 1994): 31–45.
- Jansen, B. Marius. *The Making of Modern Japan*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000.

- Jordan, Brenda G., and Weston Victoria, eds. *Copying the Master and Stealing His Secrets: Talent and Training in Japanese Painting*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002.
- Kanazawa, Hiroshi. *Japanese Ink Painting: Early Zen Masterpieces*. Trans. Barbara Ford. New York: Kodansha International, 1979.
- Kawai, Masatomo. "Hakuin and Zenga Painting." In *An Enduring Vision: 17th to 20th Century Japanese Painting from the Gitter-Yelen Collection*, edited by Lisa Rotondo-McCord, 119–37. New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 2002.
- Kodansha encyclopedia of Japan*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1983.
- Kraft, Kenneth, ed. *Zen: Tradition and Transition*. New York: Grove Press, 1988.
- Levin, Gregory. *Daitokuji: The Visual Cultures of a Zen Monastery*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005.
- . "Two (or More) Truths: Reconsidering Zen Art in the West." In *Awakenings: Zen Figure Painting in Medieval Japan*, edited by Gregory Levine and Yukio Lippit, 52–61. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.
- Levine, Gregory, and Yukio Lippit. *Awakenings: Zen Figure Painting in Medieval Japan*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.
- Liddle, Joanna, and Sachiko Nakajima. *Rising Suns, Rising Daughters: Gender, Class and Power in Japan*. London and New York: Zed Books, 2000.
- Lippit, Yukio. "Awakenings: The Development of the Zen Figural Pantheon." In *Awakenings: Zen Figure Painting in Medieval Japan*, edited by Gregory Levine and Yukio Lippit, 34–52. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.
- . "Of Modes and Manners in Japanese Ink Painting: Sesshū's *Splashed Ink Landscape* of 1495." *The Art Bulletin* (2012): 50–77.
- . *Painting of the Realm: The Kano House of Painters in 17th Century Japan*. Washington: University of Washington Press, 2012.
- . "Seer of Sounds: The Muqi Triptych." In *Crossing the Sea: Essays on East Asian Art in Honor of Professor Yoshiahi Shimizu*, edited by Gregory P.



- A . Levine, Andrew M. Watsky and Gennifer Weisenfeld, 243–66.  
Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.
- Mason, Penelope. *History of Japanese Art*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993,
- Miura, Isshu and Ruth Sasaki. *The Zen Kōan*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965.
- . *Zen Dust*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966.
- Mohr, Michael. "Emerging from Nonduality: Kōan Practice in the Rinzai Tradition since Hakuin." In *The kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, edited by Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, 244–79. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Nakane, Chie and Ōishi Shinzaburō, eds. *Tokugawa Japan: The Social and Economic Antecedents of Modern Japan*. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1990.
- Nishiyama, Matsunosuke. *Edo Culture: Daily Life and Diversions in Urban Japan, 1600–1868*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997.
- Parker, D, Joseph. *Zen Buddhist Landscape Arts of Early Muromachi Japan*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1999.
- Perez, G. Louis. *Daily Life in Early Modern Japan*. London: Greenwood Press, 2002.
- Pine, Red, trans. *The Collected Songs of Cold Mountain*. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2000.
- Roberts, P. Laurence. *A dictionary of Japanese Artists*. Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1976.
- Robson, James. "Formation and Fabrication in the History and Historiography of Chan Buddhism." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 71.2 (2011): 311–49.
- Rotondo-McCord, Lisa, ed. *An Enduring Vision 17th to 20th Century Japanese Painting from the Gitter-Yelen Collection*. New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 2002.
- Sasaki, Jōhei. "The Era of the Kanō school." *Modern Asian Studies* 18.4 (1984): 647–56.

- Sato, Shozo. *The Art of Sumi-e: Appreciation, Techniques and Application*. Trans. Thomas A. Heenan. New York: Kodansha International, 1984.
- Screech, Timon. *Obtaining Images: Art, Production and display in Edo Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012.
- Sharf, Robert. "The Idolization of Enlightenment: On the Mummification of Ch'an Masters in Medieval China." *History of Religions* 32.1 (1992): 1–31.
- . "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism." In *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 107–60. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- . "On the Ritual Use of Ch'an Portraiture in Medieval China." In *Chan Buddhism in Ritual Context*, edited by Bernard Faure, 74–150. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.
- Shaw, R. D. M., trans. *The embossed tea kettle, Orate gama, and other works of Hakuin Zenji*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1963.
- Shields, James Mark. *Critical Buddhism: Engaging With Modern Japanese Buddhist Thought*. Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2011.
- Stevens, John, trans. *One Robe One Bowl: The Zen Poetry of Ryōkan*. New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1977.
- . "Visual Sermons." *Bulletin of Tohoku Fukushi University* 9.1 (1984): 203–7.
- . "The Appreciation of Zen Art." *Arts of Asia* 16. 5 (1986): 68–81.
- . *Zenga: Brushstrokes of Enlightenment*. New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 1990.
- . *Zen Masters: a Maverick, a Master of Masters, and a Wandering Poet*. New York: Kodansha International, 1999.
- Sweet, Belinda. "Collecting the Art of Zen." *Daruma* 27 (Summer 2000): 14–27.
- Suzuki, Daisetz T. *Zen and Japanese Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959.
- . *Sengai: The Zen Master*. London: Faber and Faber, 1971.
- Tanahashi, Kazuaki. *Penetrating Laughter: Hakuin's Zen and Art*. New York: Overlook Press, 1984.

- Tanaka, Ichimatsu. *Japanese Ink Painting: Shubun to Sesshu*. Trans. Bruce Darling. Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1969.
- Traganou, Jilly. *The Tokaido Road: traveling and representation in Edo and Meiji Japan*. New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004.
- Tsukahira, Toshio George. *Feudal Control in Tokugawa Japan*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970.
- Ulak T. James. "Three Eccentrics." In *An Enduring Vision 17th to 20th Century Japanese Painting from the Gitter-Yelen Collection*, edited by Lisa Rotondo-McCord, 103–18. New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 2002.
- Waddell, Norman. *The Essential Teachings of Zen Master Hakuin*. Boston and London: Shambhala, 1994.
- , trans. *Wild ivy*. Boston and London: Shambhala, 1999.
- , trans. "A Chronological Biography of Zen Priest Hakuin (*Hakuin Oshō Nempu*)." *The Eastern Buddhist* 27.1 (Spring 1994a): 96–155.
- , trans. "A Chronological Biography of Zen Priest Hakuin (*Hakuin Oshō Nempu*)." *The Eastern Buddhist* 27.2 (Autumn 1994b): 81–129.
- , trans. "Hakuin's Yasenkanna." *The Eastern Buddhist* 34.2 (2002): 79–119.
- Watanabe, Chikafumi. "A study of Mahayanasamgraha III: The Relation of Practical Theories and Philosophical Theories." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Calgary, 2000.
- Watson, Burton, trans. *The Lotus Sutra*. New York: Colombia University Press, 1993.
- , trans. *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi*. Boston and London: Shambhala, 1993.
- Wright, Dale. "The Concept of Freedom in Classical Ch'an Buddhism." *Asian Philosophy*, 3.2 (1993): 113–24.
- . *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Yamada, Shoji. *Shots in the Dark: Japan, Zen, and the West*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- Yamashita, Yuji, ed. "Reconsidering 'Zenga' –In Terms of America, in Terms of Japanese Art History." In *Zenga – The Return from America*, edited by

- Yuji Yamashita, 19–28. Tokyo: Asano Laboratories, 2000.
- . *Zenga: The Return from America*. Tokyo: Asano Laboratories, 2000.
- Yampolsky, Philip B. *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch: The Text of the Tun-huang Manuscript with Translation, Introduction, and Notes*. New York: Colombia University Press, 1967.
- , trans. *Zen Master Hakuin: Selected Writings*. New York: Colombia University Press, 1971.
- Yokoi Yuho. *Japanese-English Zen Buddhist Dictionary*. Tokyo: Sankibo Buddhist Bookstore, 1991.
- Yoshizawa, Katsuhiko. *The Religious Art of Zen Master Hakuin*. Trans. Norman Waddell. Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2009.

## Works in Japanese

- Brasch, Kurt. *Hokuin to Zenga*. Tokyo: Nichi-Doku Kyōkai, 1957.
- . *Zenga*. Tokyo: Nigensha, 1962.
- Eto Yoshinori, Ishigami Satoshi, and Muranaka Tetsuo. *Sengai*. Fukuoka: Nishinihon Shinbunsha, 1998.
- Fukuoka-shi Bijutsukan Kyōkai. *Sengai ten*. Fukuoka: Fukuoka-shi Bijutsukan Kyōkai, 1986.
- . *Sengai: Ishimura Collection*. Fukuoka: Fukuoka-shi Bijutsukan, 2005.
- Furuta Shōkin. *Zen to geijutsu*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1980.
- . *Kinsei no zensha*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1981.
- . *Sengai*. Tokyo: Idemitsu Bijutsu Kan, 1985.
- Fianazono University Historical Museum. *Hakuin: Zenga to Bokuseki–Ryuunji Collection*. Kyoto: Hanazono University Historical Museum, 2004.
- Flisamatsu Shinichi. *Zen to geijutsu*. Tokyo: Risōsha, 1970.
- Inuyama City Museum. *Hakuin Zenji*. Inuyama: Inuyama City Museum, 2000.

- Izumi Takeo and Mizukami Tsutomu. *Suibokuga no kyoshō dai 7: Hakuin, Sengai*. Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1995.
- Kumamoto Prefectural Museum of Art. *Hakuin to Sengai: Hosokawa Collection no Genten*. Kumamoto: Kumamoto Prefectural Museum of Art, 1999.
- Kuramitsu Daigu. *Sengai Oshō ikō*. Tokyo: Kōgeisha, 1931.
- Kyoto Bunka Hakubutsukan. *Hakuin: Zen to Shōga*. Kyoto: Kyoto Bunka Hakubutsukan, 2004.
- Nakayama Kiichirō. *Sengai – sono shōgai to geijutsu*. Fukuoka: Fukuoka-shi Bijutsukan Kyōkai, 1992.
- . *Sengai no Maru, Sankaku, Shikaku: Muhō no Zenga o Tanoshimu Hō*. Fukuoka: Tsurushobō, 2003.
- Okamoto Kanoko. "Flakuin no Gazen ni Tsuite." In *Okamoto Kcuioko Zenshu dai 10 kan*. Tokyo: Chikuma Bunko (1993): 465–72.
- Takeuchi Naoji. *Hakuin*. Tokyo: Chikuma Shoten, 1964.
- . *Nihon bijutsu 47: Kinsei no Zemin bijutsu*. Tokyo: Shibundō, 1970.
- Tōrei Enji. *Hakuin Oshō Nenpu*, ed. Katō Shōshun. Kyoto: Shibunkaku, 1985.
- Tsuji Nobuo, ed. *Nihon bijutsu zenshū dai 23 kan: Edo no shūkyō bijutsu*. Tokyo: Gakushū Kenkyūsha, 1979.
- Yamamoto Fiiofumi. *Sankin kōtai*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1998.
- Yamanouchi Chōzō. *Hakuin: Shō to ga no kokoro*. Tokyo: Guraficu sha, 1978.
- Yamashita, Yuji and Yoshizawa Katsuhiko eds., *Hakuin – The Hidden Message of Zen Art*. Tokyo: Bunkamura Museum of Art, 2012.
- Yoshizawa Katsuhiko. *Hakuin Zenji Hōgo Zenshū*. Kyoto: Zen Bunka Kenkyūjo, 1999.
- . *Hakuin – Zenga no sekai*. Tokyo: Chuokoron-shinsha, 2005.
- . *Hakuin Zenga bokuseki ten: Matsushima Zuiganji*. Matsushima-machi: Zuiganji, 2008.
- . *Hakuin Zenga bokuseki (1050 Paintings and Calligraphies by the Zen Master Hakuin)*. Tokyo: Nigensha, 2009.
- . *Hakuin kata Daruma zō no seiritsu*. *Kokka* 1379 (2010): 23–45.

# Index

Bold page numbers indicate figures.

Bodhidharma *see* [Daruma](#)

Buddha [12](#), [30n29](#), [36](#), [44–5](#), [64–6](#), [68–70](#), [73–5](#), [79](#), [81n4](#), [81n8](#), [85](#), [90–92](#), [106](#), [112n13](#), [117](#),  
[119](#), [145](#), [149](#)

calligraphy [3](#), [5](#), [12](#), [18](#), [23](#), [27](#), [33–5](#), [51](#), [58](#), [60n10](#), [69](#), [71](#), [98](#), [101](#), [102](#), [102–4](#), [109](#), [111](#),  
[114n39](#), [115n56](#), [123–6](#), [137](#), [144](#)

caricature [41](#), [48](#), [51](#), [54–5](#), [68](#), [88](#), [100](#), [102](#), [131](#), [137](#), [141–4](#), [147](#), [149](#), [150n15](#)

cat [100](#), [143](#)

clouds [25](#), [139–40](#), [151](#)

crane [21](#), [52](#), [102–3](#), [103](#), [109](#), [144](#), [149n1](#)

*daimyō* *see* [feudal lords](#)

Daoism [14](#), [139](#), [149n9](#)

Daruma **Plate 1**, [28n1](#), [35–7](#), [38](#), [39–40](#), [41](#), [42](#), [44](#), [55](#), [57–8](#), [60n8–9](#), [64–7](#), [67](#), [68](#), [70](#), [72](#), [75](#),  
[79](#), [81n4](#), [81n7](#), [92](#), [94](#), [96](#), [106](#), [107–8,109](#), [113n24](#), [114n51](#), [137](#), [145–8](#), [150n20–21](#)

Daruma's eyes [41](#), [44](#), [60n16](#)

death [69](#), [91](#), [117](#), [146](#), [151–2](#), [153n1](#), [154n6](#)

dragon [73–5](#), [94](#), [113n27](#), [144–5](#), [145](#)

enlightenment [2](#), [12–13](#), [20–21](#), [30n34](#), [34](#), [69–70](#), [77](#), [79–80](#), [81n8](#), [85](#), [91](#), [94](#), [118–19](#), [122](#), [133](#),  
[138](#), [140](#), [151](#)

and illusion [85](#), [86](#), [90](#), [94–5](#)

and letting go [151–2](#), [92](#), [97](#), [111](#), [113n21](#)

Enō (638–713) the Sixth Zen Patriarch [117–18](#), [118](#), [119](#), [133n5](#)

feudal lords [121](#), [128–9](#), [130](#), [130–32](#), [142](#)

*daimyō gyōretsu* [128–9](#), [130](#), [130–32](#), [142](#)

fire [35](#), [50](#), [104](#), [114n46](#), [125](#)

Fudō Myōō [48](#), [50](#), [61n30](#)

Fūgai Ekun (1568–1654) [18](#), [29n18](#)

*Gateless Gate* (*Mumonkan*) [65–6](#), [81n4](#), [81n13](#), [133n4](#), [133n6](#)

Hasegawa Tōhaku (1539–1610) [52](#), [61n34](#)

*Hebiichigo* [129](#), [131–2](#)

Hongren *see* [Kōnin](#)

Hotei [29n6](#), [45](#), [46](#), [47–8](#), [61n22](#), [75](#), [75–6](#), [83n35](#), [137](#), [150n20](#)

Huangbo Xiyun or Huang Po *see* [Ōbaku Kiun](#)

Huineng *see* [Enō](#)

individualism [15–18](#), [51](#), [59](#), [63](#), [66](#), [68–9](#), [72](#), [76](#), [80](#), [138](#), [140](#), [144](#), [148](#)

Josetsu (1394–1428) [14–15](#)

Kanō school [17](#), [28n13](#), [45](#), [47–8](#), [61n21](#)

Kanō Motonobu (1476–1559) [45–6](#), [46](#), [61n24](#)

Kanzan and Jittoku [29n16](#), [47](#), [47–8](#), [49](#), [54–5](#), [55](#), [56–7](#), [61n29](#), [70](#), [70–71](#), [72–3](#), [74](#), [76](#), [82n23](#),  
[82n24](#), [82n27](#), [137](#), [150n20](#)

and Bukan [48](#), [49](#), [54](#), [61n29](#), [62n40](#), [71](#), [73–6](#), [82n21–3](#), [82n27–8](#), [137](#)

Kaō (d. 1345) [14](#), [18](#), [78](#), [83n41](#)

Kensu (Clam Priest) [76–7](#), [78](#), [78–9](#), [83n39](#), [83n42](#), [92](#), [137](#), [140](#), [150n20](#)

Kōan [19–22](#), [29n20](#), [65–6](#), [81n13](#), [94](#), [113n27](#), [138](#), [148](#)

Hakuin and kōan [19](#), [22](#), [81n6](#), [113n26](#)

Kōbō Daishi (774–835) [105](#), [114n47](#), [124](#)

Kōnin (601–74) the Fifth Patriarch [118](#)

Kūkai *see* [Kōbō Daishi](#)

laughter [54](#), [74](#), [102–4](#), [76](#), [79–80](#), [137–9](#), [140–49](#)

laws [16](#), [45](#), [73–5](#), [79](#)

*Laws for the Samurai (Buke shohatto)* [121](#)

letting go [2](#), [85](#), [90–92](#), [96–7](#), [100–111](#), [113n21](#), [151–2](#)

Linji Yixuan *see* [Rinzai Gigen](#)

meditation [21–2](#), [26](#), [28n1](#), [31n54](#), [35](#), [57](#), [106–7](#), [108](#), [108–9](#), [147](#)

mind [2](#), [34](#), [44](#), [63–5](#), [67–8](#), [79](#), [85–92](#), [94](#), [97–100](#), [106](#), [111](#), [138](#), [140–44](#), [148](#), [151](#)

mind-to-mirid transmission (*ishin denshin*) [67](#), [81n15](#)

Mokkei (c. 1210–1270) [14,18](#), [52–3](#), [89](#), [95](#), [99](#), [112n10](#)

Mokkei-zaru [52–3](#)

Mokuan Reien (d. 1345) [14](#), [18](#), [54–5](#), [62n40](#)

moon **Plate 3**, [52](#), [61n34](#), [73](#), [86](#), [89](#), [90–92](#), [94–7](#), [99](#), [111](#), [112n16](#), [152](#)

monkey **Plate 2**, **Plate 3**, [52](#), [53](#), [54–5](#), [61n34–5](#), [86](#), [89](#), [90–92](#), [93](#), [95](#), [96–8](#), [99](#), [100–111](#),  
[112n10](#), [143](#), [152](#)



and moon **Plate 2, Plate 3**, [52](#), [61n34](#), [89](#), [90–92](#), [93–5](#), [96–7](#), [99](#), [112n16](#), [152](#)  
and illusion [89](#), [90–91](#), [93](#), [94](#), [96](#), [112n16](#)  
500 monkeys [90](#), [97](#)  
Mu Qi *see* [Mokkei](#)  
*Mumonkan see Gateless Gate*  
Ōbaku Kiun, d. 850 [65](#), [69](#), [82n17](#), [85–6](#), [91–2](#), [94](#), [152](#)  
*Otafuku* **Plate 4**, [104–6](#), [114n43–5](#), [114n49](#), [124–7](#), [131](#), [141](#)  
Rinzai Gigen; d. 866 [66](#), [69](#), [117](#), [119](#), [122](#), [133n1](#)  
robe [26](#), [31n53](#), [38](#), [106](#), [117–18](#), [118](#), [119–23](#), [134n14](#)  
rule breakers [63](#), [69](#), [75–6](#), [79–80](#), [138](#), [140](#)  
Ryōkan Taigu (1758–1831) [111](#), [115n57](#)  
*sankin kōtai* (alternate attendance) [28n11](#), [128–32](#), [134n32](#), [142](#)  
Sesshū Tōyō (1420–1506) [15](#), [28n9](#), [54](#), [57–8](#), [62n44–5](#), [133n2](#)  
Shōfukuji [13](#), [24–7](#), [30n44](#), [31n55](#), [45](#), [47](#), [102](#), [122](#)  
"Japan's first Zen temple" [24](#), [122–3](#)  
Shōinji [20–23](#), [38](#), [129](#)  
Shūbun (d. c. 1450) [14–15](#), [54–5](#), [62n41](#), [133n2](#)  
shujō *see* [staff](#)  
snake [86](#), [87–8](#), [111](#), [111n7](#), [112n9](#), [148](#)  
staff [45](#), [92](#), [94](#), [113n27](#)  
tiger [48](#), [54](#), [73–5](#), [100](#), [143](#), [144–5](#)  
Tōkaidō route [20](#), [29n25](#), [128–9](#)  
Tōrei Enji (1721–1792) [18](#), [20–23](#), [30n36](#), [34](#), [151](#)  
Tripitaka [69](#), [82](#), [90](#), [112n12](#)  
Xianzi *see* [Kensu](#)



[1](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Sekiri Daruma*, 1757, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 193.0 x 107.8 cm.  
 Photographed by Tsuneo Horide. Ryōgakuji, Nagano



[2](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Monkey*, one of a pair of hanging scrolls, ink on paper, 117.3 x 57.4 cm, Eisei Bunko, Tokyo



[3](#) Sengai Gibon, *Monkey Trying to Catch the Moon*, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 97.5 x 36.3 cm, Idemitsu Museum of Art



[4](#) Hakuin Ekaku, *Otafuku Okyū*, hanging scroll, color and ink on paper, 56.7 x 64.5 cm, Eisei Bunko, Tokyo