

Chapter 20

Ikkyū Sōjun



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The Zen monk IKKYŪ Sōjun 一休宗純 (1394–1481) is one of the most controversial, and one of the least discussed, Japanese thinkers of the Muromachi period 室町時代 (1337–1573). Although his writings have been translated by a select number of Japanologists in the latter part of the last century,¹ the underlying philosophy of his thought remains largely unexplored outside of Japan.

Ikkyū remains one of the most celebrated Zen monks of medieval Japan. However, little is known about the actual history of this figure. The records inform us that he was the illegitimate son of the Emperor GO Komatsu 後小松 (1377–1433) and that his mother was exiled from the court while pregnant. For the first several years, she raised him in impoverished conditions until he was entrusted to the local temple at age six. His serious education in Zen is traced to the hermit-monk Kenō 謙翁 (d.1414) of Myōshinji 妙心寺, and Kasō 華叟 (1352–1428), the abbot of Daitokuji 大徳寺. It was Kasō who eventually confirmed Ikkyū's enlightenment, bestowing him his seal of enlightenment (J. *inka* 印可), though Ikkyū was reluctant to accept it. In fact, he is recorded to have thrown it in the “fire to burn” (J. *inka* 引火).

For 30 years following the death of Kasō, Ikkyū assumed the role of a wandering monk, moving mainly between Kyōto and Ōsaka, living outside of the monasteries, befriending all classes of society without discriminating among them. In his final years, Ikkyū was made abbot of Daitokuji, which he had helped restore following the Ōnin war, though he spent most of his time at the Shūōnan 酬恩庵 hermitage (now called the Shūōnan Ikkyūji 酬恩庵一休寺) his disciples had built for him at

¹I cannot overemphasize the tremendous resource I have found in the works of Sonja Arntzen, who has also been kind enough to offer me advice and guidance in my own efforts to draw upon the wealth of material left by this underexplored Zen figure.

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the monastery of Myōshōji 妙正寺, following his restoration of this commemorative institution. He died there at the age of 87.

Considered one of Zen's "crazy-monks," Ikkyū's ongoing legacy and popularity is owed, to a large extent, to the wealth of hagiographic literature written about him during the Tokugawa period 徳川時代 (1602–1868). In this literature, Ikkyū is represented in such a way as to highlight his superior wit, and the character and tone of his own writings is transfigured and censored. This same transfiguration is later adopted by popular culture in the twentieth century, with the development of cartoons, television shows, and advertising, all of which depict Ikkyū as a young child – as the clever "rascal" Ikkyū-san 一休さん. The unfortunate outcome of this transfiguration is the loss of Ikkyū's poetry and his unique expression of Buddhist philosophical ideas. Today, there are few Japanese – and even fewer people outside of Japan – who have read Ikkyū's poetry.

In what follows, I present a selection of key philosophical elements from Ikkyū's writings in order to draw attention to the valuable insights to be found in his poetry.

1 Ikkyū's Skillful Bending: Language as Skillful Means

Ikkyū's poetry, expressing emptiness and no-thing, is best understood as an adaptation of the practice of direct pointing as skillful means (*J. hōben* 方便).² In the writings of Ikkyū, poetry is used as an appropriate form for conveying paradoxical and self-disruptive contexts of instruction. Ikkyū reminds us that language, in poetic form, facilitates the breakdown of the relation between names and forms and the oppositional structures generated through contextualized rhetorical situations. His use of language is best interpreted as a particularly Buddhist method of bringing about appropriate understanding. Along these lines, DESHONG Zong notes:

It is natural to think, given the role that names play here [cases of the ancient Chan masters], that this must be a method that is designed to teach the student the appropriate way to handle the issue of reference within the context of Buddhist practice. The larger concern, of course, is the appropriate understanding of the Mahayana notion of emptiness. (Zong 2005: 596)

In the case of the writings of Ikkyū, as with most of the Zen masters, the goal of such practice is not edification for the sake of appropriate understanding in given contexts but the realization that such contexts are "empty," that is, vacuous,

²The Japanese compound term *hōben* 方便 is made up of two kanji: *hō* 方 and *ben* 便. "*Hō*" is commonly translated as "method," "means," or, in certain specific Buddhist contexts, as "dharma." "*Ben*" is commonly translated as "expediency," "use," "function," or "skillful." There are subtle differences to be inferred from the various translations of *hōben*. Depending on the translator, it is variably translated as "skill in means," "skillful means," "expediency in means," "expedient means," "dharma function," "dharma use," etc. For a more exhaustive philological treatment of *hōben* I refer the reader to Michael Prye's *Skillful Means: A Concept in Mahayana Buddhism* (Prye 2003).

non-essential and purely relational to begin with, ultimately enabling spontaneous response in any and all contexts. This point is addressed by Dale Wright as follows: “The skilful means that is involved in the soteriological use of paradox is the capacity to use language fluidly and dynamically so that one ‘settles down’ in neither pole of the opposition, neither affirmation nor negation, but remains open to their common ground which lies between them” (Wright 1982: 335). Ikkyū’s poetry is a performance of this oscillation between affirmative and negative proclamations.

Ikkyū’s use of language, and the language he uses, is informed in the case of each poem by its topic and its “audience.” For example, when he writes what Sonja Arntzen has called his “poems of criticism concerning Zen,” Ikkyū assumes the reader to have a proper Buddhist education in scriptures, *kōan* 公案, and classical literature. The paradoxical function of such poems works only in virtue of an adequate recognition of the reversal of referents with regard to their conventional interpretations. However, when he writes prose pieces, such as “Skeletons,” Ikkyū uses a language that is far more accessible to laymen and disrupts their world-views just as much as his poems would disrupt the views of the educated reader. In both poetry and prose, Ikkyū uses conventional language in unconventional ways. However, this unconventional use of meaningful rhetoric is arguably facilitated all the more in his poetry, where he often deliberately breaks with convention, discussing major figures of his sect and particular forms of behaviour in ways that fail to adhere to the writings of his predecessors. According to Carl Raschke: “The situational transposal of ordinary linguistic meaning is found in poetry, which depends only on a skilful bending of word-uses ... in order to rupture the familiar rules of understanding” (Raschke 1974: 101). This idea of skillful bending fits nicely with Ikkyū’s unique practice as skillful means.

Ikkyū’s poems bend traditional meanings through the contextual placement of characters, concepts, and terms. They assert paradoxes for the sake of pointing towards *no-thing*, that is, to the formlessness of things and their non-substantial, relational nature. Such paradoxes are the result of word usages that are “bent,” in the sense that they only provide the occasion for realization in virtue of their queerness in relation to their context. Ikkyū’s poetry often offends in light of this contextual misplacement, shocking readers so that they must reconsider the context itself (and contextualization as such). Thus, Ikkyū’s paradoxes typically are neither solely “in the text” nor solely “in the mind” of the reader: rather, they are expressions of the tensions, or the conflicts, between the two. According to Wright:

Not only are statements about ultimate truth paradoxical, but the way in which this truth makes its appearance is also paradoxical. The paradox lies not simply in the thinking subject, but in the way ultimate truth becomes manifest to the subject. The unconditional truth of suchness becomes known only through the conditioned form, a paradoxical manifestation. (Wright 1982: 328)

Read in this light, Ikkyū’s writings paradoxically manifest unconditioned ultimate truth, as demonstrations of the practice of emptiness, as a showing of no-thing. Paradoxically, they both depend on the conventions of language and writing, and, due to the subject matter and style Ikkyū chooses, they at the same time work against

such conventions. Ikkyū's writings are therefore paradoxical assertions of paradoxes aimed to undermine conventional forms in a showing of ultimate truth.

2 Writing as Critical Engagement: Conventions and Persons

Many of Ikkyū's poems are criticisms of the Zen institutions and histories of which he was a part. Such criticisms meet the criteria for "critical engagement" put forth by Wright:

The accomplished monk is a repository of the community's purposes, values, practices, and beliefs, and only secondarily, upon that basis, an individual agent who takes the tradition up into critical scrutiny. The capacity for critical distance, however, is based upon and derived from a prior mastery of the monastic language game. (Wright 1992: 124)

Ikkyū's mastery of the various forms of instruction and practice allows for his critical engagement with the monasteries of his time. His poems are soteriologically effective insofar as he is able to attack conventions by bending the contextual frameworks within which such criticisms are expressed. Discussing names in his prose piece "Skeletons," Ikkyū notes that

there is nothing born into this world that will not eventually become "empty." Oneself and the original face of heaven and earth and all the world are equally empty. All things emerge from "emptiness." Being formless it is called "buddha." The "mind" of buddha, the "buddhahood," the buddha in our minds, buddhas, patriarchs, and gods are different names of this emptiness, and should you not realize this you have fallen into the hell of ignorance and false imagination. (Heisig et al. 2011: 172)

Failure to account for the fluidity of signification only furthers the illusory reification of the non-essential. This ultimately perpetuates attachment and further entrenches individuals into *samsara*. However, by taking note of the empty nature of names and forms, spontaneous action/expression/compassion becomes manifest in such a way as to remain non-essential. Such manifestations remain interdependent generations through the relations of no-thing. Conventional linguistic ascriptions maintain their usefulness only to the extent that they are able to engage the world subversively in non-conventional ways. This is how the poetry of Ikkyū differs from standard classical forms. In his poem, "The Ridiculousness of Poetry," Ikkyū makes this point clear:

嘲文章

人具畜生牛馬愚
詩文元地獄工夫
我慢邪魔情識苦
可嘆波旬親得途

The Ridiculousness of Poetry (no. 367)³

³Numbering for poems, which are from the so-called "Crazy Cloud Anthology" (J. *Kyōun-shū* 狂雲集), corresponds with that from *Ikkyū to sono zen shisō* 一休とその禅思想 [*Ikkyū and his Zen*]

Domesticated men are as stupid as cows and horses.
 Poetry begins as an earthly⁴ craft.
 I am ridiculous, wickedly ridiculous, sympathetically writing about suffering.
 One should not lament such transitory intimacies in finding the way.

Ikkyū's self-reproach is not without its irony. Ikkyū's "intimacy" must be construed as non-intimacy, given that his use of metaphor and poetry remain foundationless in light of his appropriation and use of the Buddhist doctrines of emptiness and no-thing. In this sense, his self-reproach fails to produce merit in its application. His metaphors fail to point to anything essential and are therefore only further displacements of displaced content. Such a reading is supported by Ikkyū's statement that "poetry begins as an earthly craft." When used properly, poetry is able to disrupt the conventional associations of contextual readings. When metaphors fail, in the sense that they are used in a paradoxical fashion, they ultimately refer to something completely other than the expected conventional referent, if anything at all. Metaphors are thus able to dissolve the conventions with which they are engaged. In other words, the conventional readings of unconventional metaphors unsettle readers enough for them to re-evaluate the process in which these readings ensued. In this re-evaluation, not only the specific context but all contexts are thrown into relief. Readers are forced to suspend, however briefly, the tyranny of the essential and real. As Henry Rosemont Jr. writes: "in the mondo and koan the Zen master is not performing illocutionary but perlocutionary speech acts; he has a specific intent, a specific response that he is desirous of eliciting from his students, and the content of his utterances has little relevance to that response" (Rosemont 1970: 117). At the same time, the context *does* have relevance to the desired response. In fact, the content is completely determined by the context.

Specific contexts, whether they are defined by the use of a title, a specific character, or any other theme, allow Ikkyū to develop poems that, from almost any perspective, seem entirely disjointed throughout. Faure writes:

[Ikkyū's] poems attack the conventional distinction between the sacred and the profane by resorting to the scatological. These lines leave the reader with the philosophical, the scatological, and the erotic, the most contradictory of images and ideas juxtaposed and intermingled, impossible to separate. (Faure 1998: 114)

Despite such collages of varying and contributing perspectives, however, contents remain defined by contexts. They are "all mere names applied by us from our own limited perspectives." Such perspectives are indicative of experiences within conventional reality.

The conventional world depends on an intricate matrix of interdependent concepts that serve to perpetuate the illusory reality of things as they appear. The con-

Thought] published in the *Chūsei zenke no shisō* 中世禅家の思想 [*The Thought of Medieval Zen Figures*], volume 16 of *Nihon shisō taikai* 日本思想大系 [*Compendium of Japanese Thought*] (Ichikawa et al. 1972: 262–299). All translations, unless otherwise stated, are my own.

⁴I translate "地獄" (literally earth/ground prison) as "earthly," but it is important to note that the term is meant to convey the idea of human existence in the realm of *samsāra*, in a sense trapped in the earthly conventions of life.

ventional world depends on discriminations, which are solidified by conventions that validate their use. The most fundamental of such discriminatory distinctions is that of self and other. Ikkyū writes:

祖意教意別與同
商量今古未曾窮
松源老々婆心切
人我無明屬己躬

(no. 187)⁵

Does the meaning of the Patriarchs and the Doctrine divert or agree?
Dealings in estimations remain ever perplexed.
Old Shogen, as sharp and kind as an elderly grandmother, tells us
Our ignorance stems from ourselves.

Ikkyū notes that the discrimination of conventional truth and ultimate truth, of his own understanding of Zen and the ultimate meaning as understood by his predecessors, begins with the delusion of self. The drawing of the boundary of self implicitly posits an *other*, both of which come to appear in the realm of conventional truth. Conventional truth, in this sense, consists in false appearances arising from the illusory distinction between self and other. Conventional truth is thus the mode of awareness that prevails in conventional reality. Conventional reality has meanings that facilitate their self-perpetuation through their integration in conventional social communicative practices.

This world of convention not only reifies conventions into objects but also encourages the fictional positing of subjects in relation to them. The experience of others carries with it the experience of a self that stands before, or against, such others. In contradistinction to such conventional experiences, and with the goal of spontaneous engagements in mind, Ikkyū shows great fondness for fishermen, on the grounds that their engagements demonstrate free and easy relations with the surroundings in which they find themselves.

漁父
學道參禪失本心
漁歌一曲值千金
湘江暮雨楚雲月
無限風流夜々吟

Fisherman (no. 216)⁶

Studying the Way (*dō* 道), practicing Zen, one loses the Original Mind.
The pleasure from a fishing song is worth a thousand pieces of gold.
Making a living on the Sagami river, among the clouds of Chu and the moon,
Unlimited *fūryū*, singing, night after night.

According to Ikkyū, the relational person engaged in the study and practice of Zen, engaged in the conventional worlds of discrimination, becomes attached to his/her progress and development, thereby preventing the dissolution of second-order

⁵ See footnote 3.

⁶ See footnote 3.

displacements as a means of showing no-thing, the “Original Mind” (J. *honshin* 本心) The fisherman, however, is engaged with the world in such a way as to be purely spontaneous in his actions. He has few attachments and is thereby free to engage the world outside of most conventions and relational contexts. While *fūryū* 風流 remains a difficult term to translate, Arntzen argues that, in this poem, it “refers to the natural grandeur of the fisherman’s environment as well as the sublimity of such a vocation” (Arntzen 1986: 131). The illusory self is discriminated as meaningful through action, through its engagements in conventional worlds. Existence, therefore, remains relational, inter-dependent and conventional. Ikkyū’s poem points out how the fisherman’s relational existence is of such a nature as to allow free and spontaneous engagements in the “natural grandeur” of his environment. It attests to Thomas Kasulis’ claim that “the Zen ideal is to act spontaneously in the situation without first objectifying it in order to define one’s role” (Kasulis 1981: 136).

In the world of convention, the reification of relations is acted out and given meaning through engagements. To this extent, one becomes a self, a person, through the meaningful engagements that distinguish relations. Conventionally, a person is nothing outside of their relations. Ultimately, a person is no-thing. According to Kasulis: “If we could list all the relational determinations (employee, customer, son, and so on), we would not have a list of roles that Mr. A plays – we would have what Mr. A is as a person” (Kasulis 1981: 130).⁷ To the extent that persons are occasioned as relational positions, and exist only within and through such conventional discriminations, the sum total of relations of engagements determines the conventional existence of the person. Many of Ikkyū’s poems display how relations of conventional worlds affect who (in the sense of how) he is as he is. He writes:

自山中歸市中

狂雲誰識屬狂風
朝在山中暮市中
我若當機行棒喝
德山臨濟面通紅

From the Mountains, Arriving in the City (no. 93)⁸

Crazy Cloud, who knows to what crazy wind he belongs?

Morning, in the mountains, I spend my time in the city.

If I, upon the appropriate occasion, journeyed to take up the stick or shout “Katsu,”

Tokuzan and Rinzai would blush.

Ikkyū divided his time between the wilderness and the monasteries in the city. His engagements with others, therefore, produced starkly different persons, depend-

⁷ We are here reminded of Ludwig Wittgenstein. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 2.0123, he writes: “Wenn ich den Gegenstand kenne, so kenne ich auch sämtliche Möglichkeiten seines Vorkommens in Sachverhalten. / (Jede solche Möglichkeit muss in der Natur des Gegenstandes liegen.) / Es kann nicht nachträglich eine neue Möglichkeit gefunden werden” [“If I know an object I also know all its possible occurrences in states of affairs. / (Every one of these possibilities must be part of the nature of the object.) / A new possibility cannot be discovered later” (Pears and McGuinness 2001: 6)].

⁸ See footnote 3.

ing on their relational contexts. The poem marks Ikkyū's non-attachment to any specific objectified self. This point is confirmed by Ikkyū's self-praise concerning his ability to act spontaneously and, therefore, appropriately, even in the event that he should be relationally situated as Tokuzan (C. Deshan) 徳山 (782–865) or Rinzai (C. Linji) 臨濟 (d. 866). He is not determined by his relational situation but is able to engage worlds of convention freely as empty illusions.

According to Ikkyū, persons exist only in conventional worlds and can be essentialized only through one's relational engagements in distinct situations. However, there are different conventional worlds at play in any given instance, and meaningful engagements are able to take place, despite seeming inappropriate or conflicting. This is how skillful means is able to adopt distinct modes of communication in all conventional relations. Ikkyū uses this foundationless quality of all conventional worlds in order to prompt disruptions of the supposed relational contexts in which persons find themselves.

乱世正工夫

丈夫須具正見
諸妄想隨境現
馬問良馬麼無
人答此刀利劍

A Man of Righteous Skill in a Disturbed World (no. 292)⁹

The great one must possess the right view.

Various delusions and ideas comply with distinct actualities.

About a horse, one asks: "Is it a good horse or not?"

Another answers, "This blade is better."

While seemingly nonsensical, this reply is entirely appropriate for its meaningful intended use. As Arntzen points out, "this poem states that in times of disorder one must constantly be on one's guard as nothing will be what it seems" (Arntzen 1986: 140). In short, "nothing is as it seems," at least, not entirely. There is a multiplicity of persons engaged in different communications in the same situation. If we interpret the question as "Is your horse worth stealing?" then it becomes clear that the response is appropriate. The fluid re-contextualization of the relation in which persons are found disrupts the initial situation and dissolves the persons who took part in it: it thereby becomes a different relation between different persons. In this sense, persons behave in accordance with their position, and their position is established in accordance with the relation between persons. Speaking to this point, Kasulis writes: "for Mr. A to function as a person, he must see himself as functioning in certain preestablished relationships" (Kasulis 1981: 130).

⁹ See footnote 3.

3 Disruption of the Body: Embodiment and Relationality

The body as a constitutive element of the conventional self presents innumerable unique constraints and limitations on the relationships that come to be determined as pre-established. The body, therefore, limits the functions assumable by persons, at least insofar as persons conceive of their engagements and relations in terms of their physical situation. Part of the practice that undermines the essentialization of meaningful relations in conventional contexts is, therefore, marked by a return to the body. In *zazen* 坐禪, one is to remain aware of one's bodily presence and to focus on such physical activities as breathing and sitting. Ikkyū uses similar imagery in his prose piece "Skeletons." As a skillful means approach, he uses simple analogies to dissolve the dichotomies of conventional reality. He writes:

Who is not a skeleton? It is just because human beings are covered with skins of varying colors that sexual passion between men and women comes to exist. When the breathing stops and the skin of the body is broken there is no more form, no higher and lower. You must realize that what we now have and touch as we stand here is the skin covering our skeleton. Think deeply about this fact. High and low, young and old – there is no difference whatever between them. (Heisig et al. 2011: 174)

Aside from the conventional distinctions of the world, there is no-thing. Ultimately, things are non-dual. In order to show this to his readers, Ikkyū points out how "underneath it all" we are non-different. He continues: "when your breath stops and the skin of your body breaks, you will also become like me. How long do you think you will live in this fleeting world?" (Heisig et al. 2011: 174). We can think back to Ikkyū's account of the time he removed his robe and placed it before the meal his host had laid out for him. He believed that the meal was prepared for the robe and not for him because he had not been offered a meal when he had visited the same home earlier as a beggar. Beneath the relational appearances, the conventional discriminations, and the second-order displacements, things are non-different. Essentially, things are non-essential. It is as a reminder of this fact that Ikkyū shows the non-distinct nature of bodies and persons. Ikkyū writes:

地獄

三界無安
猶如火宅
箇主人公
瑞巖応喏

Earthly Prison (no. 441)¹⁰

The triple sphere offers no peace:
It is as though a house on fire.
"Master?"
Zuigan replies: "Yes."

¹⁰ See footnote 3.

The conventional world, identified here as the “house on fire” of the “triple sphere,” occasions existence through relations of self. The allusion to Zuigan 瑞巖 (ca. 900) is taken from case no.12 of the *Mumonkan* 無門関. The case is recorded as follows: “[Zuigan] is supposed to have talked to himself as follows: ‘Hello, Master.’ / ‘Yes.’ / ‘Better sober up.’ / ‘Yes.’ / ‘Don’t be fooled by others.’ / ‘Yes, yes’” (Heisig et al. 2011: 174). In worlds of convention, the discrimination of persons takes place and persons are engaged. The specific fashion of such engagements, however, remains to be properly qualified.

The most infamous of Ikkyū’s poems are sexual in nature, exploring and transforming the sacred into the profane through the scatological.¹¹ However, it is rarely conceded that these poems provide more than shock value. Being sexual, they are also engagements of and with bodies, and must therefore be explored in light of Ikkyū’s return to the body as a shared pedagogical place. Again, all human beings have bodies. These poems highlight, perhaps even more so than his others, the existential conflict arising out of desires in the face of well-balanced understanding and practice. They also highlight the non-dualist’s appreciation of the breakdown of difference in light of interdependence. To this extent, insofar as my body is like that of those with whom I stand in relation, I can understand my body as extending to theirs and theirs to mine. Bodily experiences of such a nature are able to allow for my body to be *as though* that of another. They constitute what Graham Parkes terms somatic practices, insofar as they “improve our relations with others ... by reducing egocentrism and increasing humility,” thereby helping to “close the gap between beliefs and behaviour, and between ideas and action” (Parkes 2012: 69). Such a reading adds depth to poems like “Making My Hand Mori’s Hand,” a poem that seems at first to be nothing more than a raunchy recounting of masturbation. Ikkyū writes:

喚我手作森手

我手何似森手
自信公風流主
癩病治玉莖萌
且喜我會裏衆

Making My Hand Mori’s Hand (no. 536)¹²

My hand, how it becomes Mori’s hand.
In truth the lady has a masterful style;
Ill, her cure makes the jeweled stem sprout.
The multitude rejoices amidst our meeting.

The illusory nature of conventional worlds is brought into sharper relief through an appreciation of the relations in which the self is found. Ikkyū describes his solitary experience *as though* it were in relation to Mori 森, his blind lover. This relation of the *as though*, here and elsewhere, is every bit as real as in other conventional

¹¹ Bernard Faure, for instance, discusses this aspect of Ikkyū’s poems on sex and sexuality (Faure 1998).

¹² See footnote 3.

relations. The perpetuation of conventional worlds takes place in virtue of the fact that we proceed *as though* they were ultimately real. To this extent, the reality of the illusory persists only so long as it is found to be *as though* real: *as though* I exist, *as though* the tree is the same as the acorn, *as though* my lover is present before me. It is along these lines that many of Ikkyū's poems dealing with sex can be read. However, they also carry a moral – or rather an amoral – dimension as well.

Having found conventional discriminations to be empty of any essential reality, and therefore instances of relations of no-thing, Zen ethics finds itself unsustainable. For this reason, ethics, like everything else, is discussed along the dividing line of the conventional and the ultimate. However, even within the conventional, and in light of the bodhisattva ideals of compassion and the requisite amorality that accompanies it, Ikkyū writes poems that criticize prohibitions against sex and other traditional vices. Again, to this end, he often turns to the body, in the sense of the sensual, as his place in common. He writes:

題娼坊

美人雲雨愛河深
樓子老禪樓上吟
我有抱持嘔吻興
竟無火聚捨身心

On the Lewdness of Priests (no. 144)¹³

A beauty's cloud-rain, love's a deep river.
In the pagoda, a child and an old man meditate silently, singing.
Embraced, I find pleasure in the sucking of the proboscis.¹⁴
In the end, neither body nor mind is thrown into the fire.

Here again, Ikkyū makes reference to false dichotomies and their impact on correct understanding. Attachment to dualisms, such as pain and pleasure and right and wrong, remains just that, attachment. Against such tendencies, Ikkyū treats sex no differently from *zazen* or cooking: relational contexts equally able to instigate and facilitate correct understanding. In order to better appreciate this type of reading, it is important to first understand Ikkyū's conventional amorality.

¹³ See footnote 3.

¹⁴ Note that Sonja Arntzen translates the characters “嘔吻” as kissing. However, such a reading loses the obvious allusion to fellatio that occurs through the reading of “嘔” (here read as シヤ, from the Chinese sha) as “to suck” (treated, here, as synonymous with its homonymous 飲) and of “吻” as proboscis (still carrying the oral imagery of Arntzen's “kissing”). At the same time, “嘔” can also be read as チ (from the Chinese ti), and can be considered identical with “嚏,” meaning “to sneeze,” adding an allusion to the culmination of the act of fellatio. Though the English rendering provided here may sound clumsier than Arntzen's translation, it has the advantage of allowing these various meanings to come out.

4 An Ethics of No-Self and No-Thing: Ikkyū's Conventional Amoralism

The Buddhist insistence on the no-self doctrine and the illusory nature of conventional worlds makes it difficult to imagine how any moral system could become established. Moreover, it becomes difficult to imagine how such a dichotomous structure could be philosophically supported and maintained within the non-dualist framework of Zen Buddhism. Perhaps it is for this reason that studies concerning Zen Buddhist ethics remained, until recently, uncharted territory.¹⁵ However, recent scholarship on Zen Buddhism has made an active attempt to develop an understanding of what such an ethics would look like. John C. Maraldo, for instance, finds that “Zen Buddhism has always been full of ideals, like the bodhisattva ideal, and imperatives, like precepts” (Maraldo 2009: 195). These ideals and imperatives, however, as empty displacements of no-thing, must be understood as operating only on the level of conventional reality. They are discriminations of behaviours and ways of being, generated out of, and evaluated according to, dichotomous relations pertaining to conventionally real individuals. Such individuals are recognized, on the level of ultimate reality, as non-individuals. To this extent, any Zen Buddhist ethics is unable to ascend to ultimate truth. As Mark T. Unno writes: “If there is no self, defining moral agency becomes problematic” (Unno 1999: 516). Maraldo’s observation is nevertheless an accurate one. Zen does embrace both ideals and imperatives, which can be understood as the conventionally real doctrinal aspirations and codes of conduct that are established in Zen communities. It is these codes of conduct that serve as the basis for what comes to be argued to be Zen ethics. This is a legitimate interpretation. The codes of conduct for Zen monasteries, understood as the “house rules,” are often interpreted as a variation of those found in Confucianism. They are based on tradition, place emphasis on relations between members of the “home,” and are believed to constitute a specific form of authority.

Without such a conventional framework, Ikkyū’s antinomianism, his “crazy” style, and the rationale behind the censorship of his writings would fail to make sense. He is outrageous only insofar as he goes beyond the traditional behavioural framework of the communities in which he finds himself. After all, as Gereon Kopf remarks: “[Ikkyū] is remembered best as the Japanese representative of the ‘crazy monks’ who made a name for themselves by breaking the precepts, more specifically by eating meat, drinking sake, and frequenting brothels” (Kopf 2010: 42). The behaviour of Zen’s “crazy monks” aims to undermine the rigidity of conventional structures of discrimination. It is commonly (conventionally) agreed that this is for the sake of liberating sentient beings. However, given the collapse of the distinction between conventional and ultimate reality, the persons of the bodhisattvas can also be understood as practicing transgressions for the sake of realization. It is not that

¹⁵ Mark T. Unno, for example, notes that “Important as Zen has been in defining the image of Buddhism and Asian religion in the West, the study of Zen Buddhist ethics has been conspicuous by its absence” (Unno 1999: 510).

conventional persons can be liberated from conventional reality but, instead, that conventional persons can be shown that conventional reality is empty and no-thing. This showing is the practice of the bodhisattva. It includes showing that moral discriminations are also empty.

It is along these lines that I interpret Ikkyū's amorality, as a demonstration of the empty discriminations of moral valuations. In his prose introduction to four poems on the nature of karma, he writes:

Good and evil have never been confused. In this world, those who do good are all friends of Shun and those who do evil are all friends of Chieh [Jie]. The pheasant is always attacked by the hawk, the rat is always bitten by the cat, this is innate in them and predetermined. The way in which all living beings take refuge in Buddha's virtue is also like this. (Arntzen 1974: 56)

Ikkyū highlights the distinction between conventional moral reality and the ultimate truth of amorality. The social moral conventions of conventional worlds give a strong binding force to moral valuations ("Good and evil have never been confused"). These conventions are based on previous patterns of behaviour and the moral ascriptions bestowed on them. His use of Shun 舜 (ca. 2200 BCE) and Jie 桀 (1728–1675 BCE) conveys the same tautological support that is often called upon by ethicists: those who are good are good because they are good (friends of Shun), and those who are bad are bad because they are bad (friends of Jie). The moral discrimination of good and bad is situationally evaluated in accordance with previous conventions of moral discrimination, and nothing more. However, the "natural" state of things, exemplified by the hawk and the cat, is not subject to these conventions. Their discriminations are not moralistic. Ikkyū points out that, ultimately, these two kinds of discrimination are non-different, to the extent that they are both empty conventional discriminations generated out of no-thing through the force of karma. Both humans and animals find their specific conventions innate to their conventional worlds, which are predetermined.

The tension between the two levels of moral reality must be appreciated if one is to understand Ikkyū's amorality. On the conventional level, moral discriminations exist, and they follow the conventions relationally established for their allowance. "Those who are good are friends of Shun." In other words, there is a way in which conventional moral discriminations adhere to the meta-ethical principles of consistency and universalizability. As R. C. Solomon writes:

Both the principles of consistency and universalizability ... may be summarized as follows: If some evaluation (or evaluative term) applies in a particular case, then, for any other case exactly similar to that one, or similar in all relevant respects, that evaluation applies. (Solomon 1970: 100)

The flexibility granted by the inclusion of "relevant respects" allows for the conventional perpetuation of moral ascriptions to like occurrences. On the ultimate level, moral discriminations are empty, allowing the practices of the bodhisattva to transgress conventional moral discriminations for the sake of showing their emptiness. However, the eccentric behaviour of the "crazy monks" is ultimately not transgressive insofar as the moral conventions transgressed are non-essential. According to

the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*: “They [the bodhisattvas] become prostitutes to liberate those with sexual desires” (quoted in Kopf 2010: 47). Understood in this light, Ikkyū’s transgressions are non-transgressions. They are only demonstrations of the impossibility of moral transgression.

5 Concluding Remarks

Ikkyū’s writings are indicative of a novel approach to the practice of skillful means (*hōben* 方便) in Zen Buddhism. Unlike his predecessors, who are depicted from a third-person perspective in their recorded sayings and practices, Ikkyū’s writings introduce a personal, first-person account of a manifold of tensions that arise in Zen practice. For instance, while Ōbaku 黄檗 (d. 850) strikes his students with a staff, and Rinzai strikes his students with a roar, Ikkyū can be understood as striking his students with the breakdown of dichotomies through poetry and prose. While all three Masters act in a way that could be interpreted as evil and unnecessary (though, in so interpreting, their actions would be qualified in dichotomous propositions), in the works of Ikkyū we find an existential account of conventional reality thrown into relief in light of the bodhisattva ideal. Ikkyū’s writings thereby point directly to no-thing.

Specifically, Ikkyū’s writings offer a focused account of different philosophical themes that are often only touched upon in other Zen writings. In this paper, I have touched briefly on several of these themes, including an existential account of the self, the pedagogical value of using the body as a reference point for interdependent generation and non-dualism, the amorality of the enlightened perspective, and the situational re-adaptation of Buddhist teachings through skillful bending for the sake of contextual re-evaluations and/or breakdowns. This can no more than point to the much larger project of excavating a more comprehensive account of Ikkyū’s philosophical significance, a project that is well worthy of more attention.

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