THE PRESENTATION OF SPIRIT: A CASE STUDY OF THE ZEN PAINTING "RUSHLEAF BODHIDHARMA"

Yiqin Sun
Sun Yat-Sen University

Introduction

The term Zen, which derives from the Sanskrit *dhYāna* (Pali: *jhana*), meaning meditation, refers to the mainstream monastic form of Mahayana Buddhism in China (Chan), Japan, Korea (Sŏn), and Vietnam (Thien).[1] Recent scholarship on Zen tends to focus on ritual practices, philosophical investigations, and aesthetic elements, including the fine and literary arts. A major factor in the spread of Zen from Japan to China in the thirteenth century was an emphasis on the arts.[2] Therefore, an analysis of Zen art offers an opportunity to examine the integration of religion and spirituality, art theory and practice, and aesthetic reception.

One of the most essential Zen teachings is that spiritual awakening can be achieved under the master's guidance. In other words, Zen practitioners need to be trained in the process of spiritual cultivation to achieve awakening. In considering Zen and the arts, paintings have the capacity to illustrate Zen teachings, engage the viewers, and prompt their visual aesthetic experience. This is one reason that the philosopher Van Meter Ames emphasizes painting as the most beneficial artistic form for spreading Zen Buddhism and guiding practitioners towards enlightenment.[3] At the same time, painters have the opportunity to present the meaning of Zen Buddhism, which lies beyond language, through visual elements.

Zen paintings depict different themes common in Zen Buddhism, such as birds, flowers, nature, vegetables, and the like. Beyond these themes, the topic of Bodhidharma (菩提达摩, known as Daruma in Japan) is considered one of the best-known subjects in the field of Zen paintings. In

---

[1] William. M. Bodiford, "Zen," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, September 10, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Zen.

[2] Steven Heine, preface to *From Chinese Chan to Japanese Zen: A Remarkable Century of Transmission and Transformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), xiii.

[3] Van Meter Ames, "Zen and American Philosophy," *Philosophy East and West* 5/4 (1956), 305 (accessed April 2, 2022, https://doi:10.2307/1396882).

this essay, I examine pictorial depictions of the "Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi River on a Reed" (also referred to as "Rushleaf Bodhidharma" (*Royō Daruma*, 蘆葦達摩).[4] This study focuses on how Zen paintings engage viewers through their representation of Bodhidharma's spirit. By presenting a brief analysis of the appreciation of Zen paintings, I examine pieces dealing with "Rushleaf Bodhidharma" that provide important elements contributing to the promotion of viewers' aesthetic experience.

Appreciation of Zen Painting

To better understand how Zen paintings engage viewers, we can start by asking, what is Zen art? The East Asian art historian Brinker Helmut suggests that it is difficult to provide a persuasive interpretation of Zen art. In addition, certain Zen artwork does not require any elucidation since it does not convey an essential meaning.[5] The Asian art historian Sherman E. Lee also states that the field of Zen painting is beyond logic or description. As he said, the imagery related to Zen art is meaningful since it generally functions as an expression of Zen Buddhist ideology.[6]

Meanwhile, the field of Zen art is so limitless that examples of it tend to lose their significance and become meaningless.[7] Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that Zen paintings are boundless and indescribable. Any attempt to define the concept of "Zen painting" in concrete terms is fruitless.

Although providing a precise and convincing description is not possible, one of the most fundamental characteristics of Zen painting is the expression of religious meaning. If Zen Buddhist ideology is not involved in the creation, appreciation, or criticism of the painting, it cannot be described as a work of Zen art. Besides the most fundamental function,

---

[4] Charles Lachman, "Why Did The Patriarch Cross The River? The Rushleaf Bodhidharma Reconsidered," *Asia Major, Third Series* 6/2 (1993), 237 (accessed January 19, 2022, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41645494).

[5] Helmut Brinker and Hiroshi Kanazawa, "ZEN Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings," in Andreas Leisinger, trans., *Artibus Asiae. Supplementum* 40 (1996), 56 (accessed November 6, 2021, http://doi:10.2307/1522704).

[6] Sherman E Lee, "Zen in Art: Art in Zen," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 59/9 (1972), 239 (accessed November 6, 2021, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25152451).

[7] Ibid.

which is expressing religious meaning, Zen paintings can also serve to introduce an honorable person, depict dharma transmission, offer advice, practice repentance, represent the bond of friendship, and emphasize the importance of moral belief.[8] Zen paintings also depict the everyday experience of humans and ordinary objects, especially those from nature. As a result, such works, which generally portray animals, fruits, flowers, or landscapes, provide viewers with an easily accessible reference to Zen religious ideology.

Since the expression of religious meaning is an essential and typical characteristic of Zen painting, we will first consider how Zen painting serves as an influential and persuasive aesthetic expression. As mentioned above, Zen's creative, expressive works and meditative practices were transmitted from Chinese to Japanese culture in the thirteenth century. Therefore, to understand how Zen paintings convey Zen meaning to viewers, a close examination of the classical Chinese art theory of creation and appreciation will be useful. Because of globalization, this heritage of artworks has also been observed by modern Westerners.[9]

In his book *Classified Record of Painters of Former Times* (*Guhua Pinlu*, 古畫品錄), the Chinese painter and art historian Xie He (active in the sixth century, 謝赫), inspired by artists from the Liu Song (420–479) and Southern Qi (479–502) dynasties, put forward the "Six Principles" (*liufa*, 六法) of Chinese painting. The appreciator or critic needs to follow these essential standards for the processes of practice, appreciation, or criticism. Although the interpretation and translation have changed over time, the basic meaning of the "Six Principles" can be considered as follows:

> 1. *Qiyun shengdong* (氣韻生動): "Spirit Harmony-Life's Motion" (Arthur Waley); "animation through spirit consonance" (Alexander Soper)
> 2. *Gufa yongbi* (骨法用筆): "bone-means use brush" (Waley); "structural method in the use of the brush" (Soper) [implies "knack" for using the brush]
> 3. *Yingwu xiangxing* (應物象形): "fidelity to the object in portraying forms" (Soper)

[8] Brinker and Kanazawa, "ZEN Masters of Meditation," 115.
[9] Heine, *From Chinese Chan to Japanese Zen*, 11–12.

> 4. *Suilei fucai* (隨類賦彩): "conformity to kind in applying colors" (Soper)
> 5. *Jinying weizhi* (經營位置): "proper planning in placing [of elements]" (Soper)
> 6. *Chuanyi muxie* (傳移模寫): "that by copying, the ancient models should be perpetuated" (Shio Sakanishi).[10]

It is not difficult to realize that the principle *Qiyun shengdong*, which is mentioned in the first category, plays an important role in the "Six Principles." The philosophical concept *qi* (氣) refers to the universal spirit, or cosmic energy, that animates everything in the universe. As for the role of the painter, *Qiyun shengdong* requires the artist to depict the inner life and cosmic spirit of the subject represented. In other words, they must show the invisible universal energy through the visual elements of line and color.

The art historian Michael Sullivan states that a painting can become an expression of "spirit consonance" if the artist develops awareness of the universal energy, accommodates it, and immerses himself in this spirit.[11] In this case, the second, third, fourth, and fifth principles can be understood as different methods for representing the first one visually and vividly. This way, the painting is able to convey the spirit and energy of the depicted subject. By following these principles, the painting can engage the appreciator. As for the appreciator, he or she needs to feel the cosmic energy and capture the painting's spiritual resonance. In addition, the subject of the painting must be regarded as a living existence in the universe so that the appreciator can participate in a spiritual exchange with creation and creator. The painting has a better chance to fully engross its appreciator.

Zen paintings have been instrumental in the creation and appreciation involved in artistic theory as well as in the expression of religious meaning. Therefore, the artist and viewers are also expected to have gained knowledge of Zen, not just the theory of East Asian art. After

---

[10] These renderings of the Six Principles are from Arthur Waley, *An Introduction to the Study of Chinese Painting* (London: Ams Pr Inc, 1923), 72; Alexander Soper, "The First Two Laws of Hsieh Ho," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 8 (1949): 412–423; and Shio Sakanishi, *The Spirit of the Brush* (London: John Murray, 1939), 51. Please see Michael Sullivan, "Three Kingdoms and the Six Dynasties," in *The Arts of China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 95–96.

[11] Sullivan, "Three Kingdoms and the Six Dynasties," 95.

that, both may have a spiritual exchange in the ideal way. As mentioned earlier, the visual representation of natural objects and humans' daily experiences can supply viewers with a more understandable reference to the religious ideology.

Regarding the viewers' aesthetic experience, there is still a question that we may want to consider. In the age of globalization, an increasing number of people from the West are interested in Zen art. Hence, it is reasonable to ask how Western viewers, especially the ones completely outside the context of Zen Buddhism, participate in the spiritual exchange. The philosopher Van Meter Ames states that rejecting the appeal of Zen painting is nearly impossible since it has worldwide appeal.[12]

Art historian Jennie Klein thinks viewers should be aware of Zen Buddhism and further analyze a work's religious meaning.[13] According to Melissa Miles and Robin Gerster, it is more reasonable to appreciate the works of Zen art within the context of Zen Buddhist aesthetics.[14] In brief, understanding the religious and aesthetic context is necessary to appreciate Zen paintings fully. From the perspective of art history, interpreting the religious context helps make sense of why ancient holy images frequently are of great interest to so many viewers.

The Event of "Bodhidharma (*Daruma*) Crossing the Yangzi River"

The earliest surviving record about Bodhidharma is preserved in *Luoyang qielanji* (洛陽伽藍記), written by Yang Xianzhi (楊衒之) during the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534). It said that Bodhidharma was a Persian who came from the West. When he saw the glorious Yongning temple in Luoyang, he stopped, held his hands together, and chanted. He saw how the golden roof reflected the sunlight and heard the sound of bells in the wind.

---

[12] Van Meter Ames, "Current Western Interest in Zen," *Philosophy East and West* 10/1.2 (1960), 29 (accessed March 19, 2022, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1397122).

[13] Jennie Klein, "Being Mindful: West Coast Reflections on Buddhism and Art," *PAJ:A Journal of Performance and Art* 27/1 (2005), 83–84 (accessed March 19, 2022, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3246387).

[14] Melissa Miles and Robin Gerster, *Pacific Exposures: Photography and the Australia–Japan Relationship* (Canberra, Australia: ANU Press, 2018), 226 (accessed March 20, 2022, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv9hj8jz.11).

People who lived far away from the temple could still hear the sound.[15] Another reference to Bodhidharma can be found in *Xu Gaoseng Zhuan* (續高僧傳), which was written by the monk Daoxuan (道宣, 596–667) in the Tang dynasty (618–907).[16] A brief introduction of Bodhidharma and his journey through China are mentioned in this work. The art historian Charles Lachman has traced the evolution of Bodhidharma's biography in his article "Why Did The Patriarch Cross The River?" Based on his study of some major historical records, he thinks that the "official" story of Bodhidharma had not necessarily been "fixed" until the late eighth century. Several popular episodes of the Daoxuan biography, such as "facing the wall" at the Shaolin Temple in Henan Province, were gradually added to the texts composed during the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries. However, according to Lachman's research, Bodhidharma's crossing of the Yangzi River was not added to the texts until the early twelfth century.[17]

The best-known historical account of this event is a koan from the *Blue Cliff Record* (*Biyanlu*, 碧岩錄), which is a collection of Chan koan. It was compiled by Chan master Yuanwu Keqin (圓悟克勤, 1063–1135) from the Northern Song dynasty. The *Blue Cliff Record* has many versions or blocked-printed editions. However, all these describe the same event: Emperor Wu (464–549) of the Liang dynasty (502–557) has a meeting with the Indian Buddhist monk Bodhidharma, who travels to China to transmit Chan Buddhism. However, the emperor could not fully understand Bodhidharma's contradictory response. After an unpleasant conversation, the patriarch leaves the emperor's country, crosses the river, and arrives in the land of Wei. However, so far, none of the versions have mentioned that Bodhidharma crosses the river on one reed.[18] Since the koan is generally related to Chan/Zen teaching, it is reasonable to regard paintings of the theme "Rushleaf Bodhidharma" as the illustrated narrative of said

---

[15] Yang Xianzhi 杨衒之, *Luoyang Qielan Ji Jiaozhu* 洛阳伽蓝记 校注 [A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Luo-Yang], ed. Fan Xiangyong, 范祥雍, vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 1999), 50.

[16] Dao Xuan 道宣, *Xu Gaoseng Zhuan* 续高僧传 [Supplement to the Biographies of Eminent Monks Domain], Puti Damo Zhuan 菩提达摩传 [*The Biography of Bodhidharma*], ed. Guo Shaolin 郭邵林, vol. 13 (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2014), 565–566.

[17] Lachman, "Why Did The Patriarch Cross The River?" 242–245.

[18] Ibid., 269–271.

teaching.[19] Moreover, since paintings are the visual expression of the essential and engaging quality known as "spirit consonance," the painter must consider how to adequately represent Bodhidharma's emotion, spirit, and life through art.

Chan Paintings of "Rushleaf Bodhidharma"

The painting *Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi River on a Reed* (Figure 1) was produced before 1317. This piece is probably an early treatment of the theme "Rushleaf Bodhidharma." In the painting, Bodhidharma is represented as a tall and robust figure. He wears a hooded robe and stands on the reed. The long sleeves indicate that he probably stands in the wind while crossing the river. His earring, beard, and face inform viewers that he is a monk from India. The concentration in his eyes and the gritted teeth reveal his spiritual constancy. This painting is signed by Li Yaofu (李堯夫) and inscribed by Yishan Yining (Issan Ichinei, 一山一寧, 1247–1317). Yishan Yining was a famous Chinese Chan monk and missionary. He went to Japan in 1299 and never returned to China.[20] His inscription said:

> Traversing the [Yangzi] River and its Han tributary he came,
> Who professed ignorance to the Emperor.
> Upon his failure he left without hesitation,
> Pressing on, his feet treading the water.
> Written by Monk Yishan Yining with respect.
>
> 逾河越漢來，對御道不識.
> 事負即抽身，腳下浮逼逼.
> 一山比丘一寧拜手.[21]

[19] Ibid., 240–242.

[20] See *Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi River on a Reed*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (accessed April 14, 2022, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/40515).

[21] Ibid. The translation is cited from Department records in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The Chinese believe that the connection between the sage and the people is a common rule of nature. Through the power of attraction, people's hearts and minds can be affected by the sage.[22] Therefore, it is reasonable to consider that the subject of this piece, Bodhidharma, who is regarded as a wise and holy man in Zen/Chan Buddhism, draws the attention of viewers without difficulties. The visual representation of his ancient holiness can also influence viewers through this relationship. However, painting a picture of Bodhidharma does not only concern nature or religion. It is also a matter of aesthetics.

According to the philosopher Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, in order to create a true image of Bodhidharma, the painter must first decide the characteristics of Bodhidharma on his own. Then, the painter can decide which anesthetic technique can be employed to best represent Bodhidharma.[23] In other words, the painter needs to have religious awareness of Bodhidharma's features to create a true image of him.

As shown in Figure 1, Bodhidharma's qualities had first been described in literary works. Therefore, this painting can be considered both a visual depiction of Bodhidharma's characteristics and a stylized version of the event. Bodhidharma's identity, emotion, and spirit are represented mainly through the face and facial expressions, and the content of the "Rushleaf Bodhidharma" tale is transformed into an abbreviated ink illustration.

As for the employment of artistic techniques in Li Yaofu's painting, the monochrome ink allows the painter to illustrate with artistic spontaneity the life of Bodhidharma in a simple way. Furthermore, Li Yaofu did not employ the style of Song painter Li Gonglin (李公麟, 1049–

---

[22] Hellmut Wilhelm, ed., "Book I: The Text" in Richard Wilhelm and Cary F. Baynes, trans., *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 123.

[23] Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, "On Chan Art," January 3, 2008 (accessed June 7, 2021, http:www.fas.x0.com/writings/hisamatsu/onchanart.htm). This article is translated by Richard DeMartino in collaboration with Fujiyoshi Jikai and Abe Masao (in the Japanese name order) and made public in T*he Eastern Buddhist* 1/2 (1966): 21–33; and *Hisamatsu Shin'ichi Chosakushuu*, vol. 5 (Kyoto: Hozokan, 1996), 93–101. Revised by Tokiwa Gishin, the present version supplies the original translation with further notes for corrections and brief explanations, uses "Chan" for "Zen" except in "Rinzai-zen."

1106), who is well-known for the thick, austere, and controlled lines in his portrayal of Bodhidharma. Such an approach, which is generally used in the figure paintings of the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties, is replaced by a more flexible and dynamic style in this painting. The modulation of the thick flowing line and the unconstrained rendering of the ink-wash technique can be mostly observed in the treatment of the drapery and the reed. The exquisite and careful depiction of the face and bare feet reflects Bodhidharma's identity as a foreign Chan monk while suggesting his determination and persistence.

Another example is the fourteenth-century painting *Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi on a Reed* (Figure 2). On top of it, viewers can see an inscription written by the monk Liaoan Qingyu (了庵清欲, 1288–1363), famous for the use of ink in paintings. During the Yuan dynasty (1279–1367), he was the head monk of Baoning and Kaiyuan Temple in China. The inscription reads:

> Wind rises from the reed flowers, the waves are high,
> It's a long way to go beyond the cliff of the Shaoshi mountain,
> Above the worlds of kalpas a flower is opening into five petals,
> So that your barefoot heels are just fine for the whipping rattans.
>
> 蘆花風起浪頭高，少室岩前去路遙.
> 劫外一花開五葉，腳跟正好喫藤條.[24]

In this poem, "a flower is opening into five petals" refers to the development of Chan Buddhism in China. Bodhidharma transmitted Chan to China, thus, he is treated as the first patriarch. Huineng (慧能) received the Dharma transmission during the seventh century. He became the sixth and last Chan Patriarch. In brief, the poem indicates Bodhidharma's persistence in spreading Chan. This idea is also expressed through the painting (Figure 2).

---

[24] See *Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi on a Reed*, Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art (accessed April 14, 2022, https://web-collection-prod.clevelandart.org/art/1964.44).

Figure 1. Li Yaofu*'s Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi River on a Reed* (before 1317)[25]

Figure 2. *Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi on a Reed* (1300s)[26]

[25] Li Yaofu 李堯夫 (Chinese, ca. 1300), *Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi River on a Reed* 達摩渡江圖軸, before 1317, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 155.6 × 35.6 cm, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (accessed April 14, 2022, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/40515).

[26] *Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi on a Reed* 蘆葉達磨圖, 1300s, Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), hanging scroll, ink on paper, 91.1 x 36.5 cm,

Figures 1 and 2 were painted in almost the same period. In fact, these two Chan paintings can be interpreted through the theme of "Rushleaf Bodhidharma." It is not difficult to realize that both painters attempt to represent the true image of Bodhidharma in a similar way, such as with the "foreign" appearance, the concealed hands, the style of dress, the composition, and the brushstrokes. The main difference is the facial expression. Different artists have different ideas about how the first patriarch felt after the disappointing conversation with the emperor.

For the artist who painted *Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi on a Reed* (Figure 2), Bodhidharma was imagined as dejected after this encounter but still insistent on transmitting Chan. Despite this disparity, the structural similarities between these two Chan paintings suggest that Chinese painters had established a pictorial model for representing the Rushleaf motif and embodying its spirit of decisiveness around the fourteenth century. Such a paradigm was appreciated, learned, and developed by Japanese artists in the following centuries.

Zen Paintings of "Rushleaf Bodhidharma"

During the Northern Song (960–1279) and Yuan dynasties (1271–1368) of China, ink paintings remained popular. This phenomenon can be explained by the art theory of the Northern Song dynasty. In the well-known literary work *Yizhou Minghualu*, which means "Famous Painters from Sichuan" (益州名畫錄), the scholar Huang Xiufu (黃休復) states that the best painters will not focus on colorful and delicate representations. Instead, they depict the *qi* of the subject and their inner self through the simplest visual elements—line and ink.[27]

This idea exerted a profound influence on the Chinese painters of that time, especially the literati painters. Moreover, during the Northern Song, Chan was highly favored by well-educated scholars who did not work for the royal court and by the elite class of scholar-officials. Many of them, such as Ouyang Xiu (歐陽修, 1007–1072), Su Shi (蘇軾, also known as Su Dongpo 蘇東坡, 1037–1101), and Huang Tingjian (黃庭堅, 1045–1105),

---

Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art (accessed April 15, 2022, https://web-collection-prod.clevelandart.org/art/1964.44).

[27] Huang Xiufu 黄休复, "Yizhou Minghualu" 益州名画录 [Famous Painters from Sichuan] in Anlan 于安澜, ed., *Huashi Cong Shu* 画史丛书 [Serious of Chinese Art Theory Books], vol 3 (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 1962), 3.

developed close relations with Chan monks. Therefore, it is not surprising that the spirit of Chan was expressed through the literati paintings of the time.[28] Meanwhile, the art created by Chan monks was also probably influenced by the tradition of literati art. This helps us understand why we can find the abbreviated ink painting style in the distinct versions shown in Figures 1 and 2. Both paintings were created during or soon after the Northern Song dynasty.

Most Japanese Zen depictions of "Rushleaf Bodhidharma" were produced during the Kamakura period (Kamakura jidai, 鎌倉時代, 1185–1333). These pieces generally follow the tradition of Chinese literati paintings, especially the abbreviated ink painting style. When more Chan monks started to immigrate from China to Japan during the Kamakura period, the tradition of literati paintings was also transmitted to Japan. At the same time, the samurai, the emerging military force in Japanese society, began to replace the dominant Tendai religion (Tendai-shū, 天台宗) with Zen Buddhism in the Kyōto court (京都御所).

As a result, the artistic production of Zen was supported by the military leadership of the Kamakura shogunate and became more popular in Japan. Painting, gardening, the tea ceremony, and other aesthetic forms favored in Chinese literati circles became part of Zen culture during this period. Over the next several centuries, Zen painters practiced the Chinese ink painting style.

This tradition can be observed in Zen paintings like the fifteenth-century version of *Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi River on a Reed* in Figure 3. Created during the Muromachi period (Muromachi jidai, 室町時代, 1336–1573), this version appears very similar to the Chan painting of the same name created before 1317 (Figure 1). The stylistic similarity between these two paintings can be observed from the treatment of the drapery, the spontaneous use of the brushstroke, the changing thickness of the line, and the employment of monochrome ink. Such freely expressive style, Brinker Helmut believes, "grants [the viewer] access to the fleeting, but simultaneously timeless act of creation."[29]

---

[28] Liu Guirong 刘桂荣, *Songdai Chanzong Meixue yu Chanhua Yishu Yanjiu* 宋代禅宗 [The Studies of Chan Aesthetic and Chan Arts in Song Dynasty] (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2019), 22–23.

[29] Brinker and Kanazawa, "ZEN Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings," 126.

Figure 3. ***Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi on a Reed*** **(15th century)**[30] ***(left)***

Figure 4. Kano Genshun's ***Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi River on a Reed*** **(before 1641)**[31] ***(right)***

[30] *Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi on a Reed*, Muromachi period, fifteenth century, hanging scroll (mounted on panel), 46.7 x 26 cm, Washington, D.C., Freer Gallery of Art (accessed April 17, 2022, https://asia.si.edu/object/F1907.141/).

[31] Kano Genshun 狩野元俊 (Japanese, 1588–1672), *Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi River on a Reed* 芦葉達磨図, before 1641, hanging scroll, ink on

In addition, the details in Chan paintings that illustrate the Rushleaf Bodhidharma event, such as the portrayal of him standing with bare feet on a reed, the sleeves, the cowl, the covered hands, the earring, and the beard, are also present in this Zen painting (Figure 3). The main difference among these works is how the painters imagine Bodhidharma's emotions. For instance, Bodhidharma's facial expression in the fifteenth-century version seems depressed and less energetic. However, the concentration in his eyes still points to his persistence in the transmission of Chan Buddhism.

Another Zen painting, created before 1641, was also titled *Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi River on a Reed* (Figure 4). The painter, Kano Genshun (狩野元俊, 1588–1672), also called Hayato, was an artist of the Kano school in the early Edo period (Edo jidai, 江戸時代, 1603–1868) and the first head of the minor Yamashita Kano studio.[32] Zen monk Gyokushitsu Sōhaku (玉室宗珀, 1572–1641) wrote a poem on the top of the painting. It said:

> Lightly sailing on a single reed,
> He is majestic and commanding.
> Far from Liang territory,
> Ah, what does he recall?
> Humbly inscribed by the remote descendant and monk,
> Suiminshi
>
> 軽乗一葦
> 威風凛然
> 遠離梁土
> 回顧那辺
> 咄
> 遠孫比丘睡眠子拝賛.[33]

---

paper, 162.6 x 44.5 cm, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (accessed April 17, 2022, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/73645).

[32] See *Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi River on a Reed*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (accessed April 17, 2022, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/73645).

[33] The translation adapted from Miyeko Murase. See Kano Genshun, *Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangzi River on a Reed*, New York,

From the perspective of iconographic representation, the features that Chinese painters used to present the Rushleaf Bodhidharma event were also used by Kano Genshun to illustrate it (see Figure 4). In particular, this artist depicts Bodhidharma's robe with flowing brush strokes in a simple and spontaneous manner, which suggests the style of Chinese ink painting. But compared to Chinese painters' re-interpretation of Bodhidharma, Kano Genshun's version shows the figure in a more demythologized, unconstrained, and expressive way. His Bodhidharma, uncovered by the hood, seems calm and casual. The result of the meeting with Emperor Liang exerts less of a negative influence on him. He is set to continue the transmission of Chan in China.

Figure 5. ***Onna no Daruma***[34]

Metropolitan Museum of Art (accessed April 17, 2022, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/73645).

[34] Keiri (Japanese, active first half of the nineteenth century), *Onna no Daruma*, Edo period (1615–1868), woodblock print (*surimono*), ink and color on paper, 21.6 x 18.6 cm, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (accessed April 17, 2022, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/54325).

Figure 6. ***Bodhidharma***[35] ***(left)***

Figure 7. ***Portrait of Daruma***[36] ***(right)***

[35] Unkoku Tōgan 雲谷等顔 (Japanese, 1547–1618), *Bodhidharma* 達磨図, late sixteenth to early seventeenth century, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 89.6 x 33.4 cm, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (accessed May 11, 2022, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/671040).

[36] Fūgai Ekun 風外慧薫 (Japanese, 1568–1654), *Portrait of Daruma* 達磨図, early seventeenth century, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 77.5 x 30.8 cm, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (accessed May 11, 2022, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/78147).

From the stylistic point of view, it is not difficult to see that both the Muromachi painter and Kano Genshun experimented with different means of conveying the spiritual value of Bodhidharma and the theme of the patriarch crossing the river. On the one hand, they follow the earlier examples and the monochrome ink painting style introduced in China. Such visual representations of "Rushleaf Bodhidharma" had been followed by Zen artists for centuries. Painters also used these techniques and motifs in other artworks besides Zen paintings. During the Edo period (1615–1868), artists started to associate this traditional paradigm of Bodhidharma with the imagery of courtesans. In the woodblock print titled *Onna no Daruma* (Figure 5), a young and beautiful woman dressed in a red robe stands on the reeds, floating on the water's surface. It is not difficult to recognize the similarity of the composition.

On the other hand, the painters are free to illustrate Bodhidharma's emotions within the context of his biography. This method is also employed to depict other motifs of Bodhidharma. For instance, in his work *Bodhidharma* (Figure 6), Unkoku Togan (雲谷等顔, 1547–1618) focuses on showing the patriarch as a conscious and decisive figure. In *Portrait of Daruma* (Figure 7), Fūgai Ekun (風外慧薰, 1568–1654) emphasizes Bodhidharma's concentration and struggle during meditation. The pictorial theme "Rushleaf Bodhidharma" has its origin in China.[37] Its derivative has been developed in Japan since the Muromachi period. The spirit of Bodhidharma and the significance of crossing the river are embodied aesthetically in Zen paintings, capturing viewers' attention through this theme.

In summary, Zen paintings with the theme "Rushleaf Bodhidharma" liberate one from words and concepts that attempt to describe Bodhidharma's teaching and legacy. These visual representations have the capacity to guide the viewers to feel the spirit and energy of the patriarch in a more visible, direct, and flexible fashion. As the painter attempts to fully engage viewers with his depictions, the result is an enriching aesthetic experience that allows viewers to communicate with Bodhidharma through the art piece and the painter. During this process of contemplation, viewers must concentrate on the portrayed Bodhidharma to appreciate the religious meaning expressed in his vitality, personal qualities, and spirit within the context of Zen Buddhism. Viewers can then participate

[37] Lachman, "Why Did The Patriarch Cross The River?" 246.

in a spiritual exchange with the painter and the patriarch.[38] Through this approach, then, the paintings can convey the spirit of Bodhidharma to their viewers and move them in deliberate and meaningful ways.

[38] Susan Bush, "The Views of Northern Sung Literati," in *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037–1101) to Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555–1636)* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 50–51 (accessed May 26, 2022, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2854hr.8).