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THE TOOLS OF ONE-HANDED ZEN: HAKUIN EKAKU'S TECHNOLOGICAL  
AND ARTISTIC CHARISMA

By

Brandon James Harwood  
B.A., University of Louisville 2005  
M.A., University of Louisville 2008

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Humanities

Department of Humanities  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2015

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A Dissertation Approved on

April 16th, 2015

by the following Dissertation Committee:

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Annette Allen, Dissertation Director

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John Gibson

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Albert Harris

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Patrick Pranke

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Ying Kit Chan

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to  
all people in the past, present, and future  
who are interested in learning about the world around them  
and reaching out to others the world over who are both comparable to themselves  
and still profoundly different.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Despite the image of a scholar working on her or his research alone, buried under the books of a corner room high in the ivory tower, I find that most of my work really happens in conversation with other people. So, I have many more people that have helped shape my work than I can even name, but I will try to start to do so here: I would like to thank my family (Tarren, Phillip, Mom, Mamaw, and Aunt Jennie) for supporting me and making me feel valued. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Ph.D. program who made working hard not about being competitive with each other but instead about striving to understand truth and beauty. I would also like to thank my advisors throughout my career so far (Annette Allen, Albert Harris, Patrick Pranke, John Gibson, Ying Kit Chan, Elaine Wise, Osbourne Wiggins, Natalie Polzer, and Mary Ann Stenger) for being paradigms of the sort of professional and the sort of person I would like to become. I would like to thank Michael Horton and Matthew Livers for loving me and being loved by me while I was a neurotic Ph.D. student, which surely could not have been easy. I would like to thank Ira Byelick, Leigh Viner, and Todd Keonig for their friendship and for their conversations with me, which continue to help me learn more about the world and its glorious works of profundity. Lastly, I would like to thank Tiffany Hutabarat who has been a superb teammate both in the digital world and in the material world, and who has discovered with me that team comp is the key to success in all things.

ABSTRACT  
THE TOOLS OF ONE-HANDED ZEN: HAKUIN EKAKU'S TECHNOLOGICAL  
AND ARTISTIC CHARISMA

Brandon J. Harwood

April 16, 2015

When people think of a Zen kōan, they probably think of Hakuin's "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" This is appropriate as Hakuin's ministry has become such an important part of Rinzai Zen that all current masters trace their lineage to him. In this paper, I hope to illuminate one of the reasons that Hakuin became so influential in his time and in the history of Japanese Zen. I argue that Hakuin was a charismatic teacher that used the technological innovations of woodblock printing and the wealth of some of his students to duplicate and disseminate his paintings and writings for free to a wide audience of lay people and monks, effectively solidifying his teaching as doctrinal. Despite the caricature of the Zen master as aloof, antisocial, and perhaps humorless, I hope to show Hakuin as charming, funny, engaged, and perhaps tech-savvy in his cultural context.



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## PREFACE

### PLATING POISONOUS FOX SLOBBER

Although many people, even within the academy, might not know the name of Zen Master Hakuin, most people in U.S. society, at least, have heard of the nonsensical Zen kōan “What is the sound of one hand clapping.” Many might be familiar with it from *The Simpsons*, where Bart Simpson tries to find a way to answer the puzzle by smacking his fingers against the palm to create a dull whack sound. From a Zen perspective, Bart has missed the point of the exercise in an instructive way, demonstrating the tendency of our “monkey mind,” as Zen terms it, to force the question into dichotomy—I can make *some* sound—instead of recognizing that the question itself prevents any answer when considered on its own terms—a clap requires two hands. It might be that a similar slip of the dichotomous mind is at work when someone considers the work of mystics like Hakuin himself and tries to define them as introspective without any desire or interaction with the world of their time. Hakuin was and is a well-respected Zen mystic; that is, he had achieved great insight into the Zen understanding of reality, which requires dedication to practices designed to develop such insight. Hakuin’s influence was so great that all of the Rinzai Zen masters practicing today trace their lineage back to Hakuin (Kasulis 112). More than that, Rinzai Buddhism was on the decline in the 18th century, and might have even shrunk into obscurity, but because of a charismatic, artistic,

technologically aware mystic like Hakuin, it became a very important religious order. In the 20th century, when Japanese scholars of the Kyōto School, D. T. Suzuki and Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, and Masao Abe, begin to try to explain Japanese culture to the rest of the world, it is a Rinzai Buddhist training that informs those globalizing thinkers. So, Hakuin, far from being only interested in a psychological, introspective contemplation, was a person deeply interested in the people of his time, and through his charisma, and ability to impress people with his art, provided an important force of Japanese (and global) history.

In Hakuin's *Sokkō-roku Kaien-fusetsu*<sup>1</sup> (translated as *Talks given introductory to Zen Lectures on the Record of Sokkō*) he regularly uses the metaphor of poisonous fox slobber both in reference to false teachers of Zen in his time, but also the proper teaching of Zen represented by the great patriarchs. He equally calls his own teaching fox slobber, and though he treats it as dubious as other teachers do, it is clear from his criticism of the

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<sup>1</sup> Because of the vast number of writings I cite from Hakuin, I will be applying the following abbreviation system; the translator and translation publication dates are in parentheses:

ZW: "Zazen Wasen: The Song of Zazen by Hakuin" in Zenkei Shibayama's *A Flower Does not Talk—Zen Essays* (Kudo 1970)

MH: *The Zen Master Hakuin: Selected Writings* (Yampolsky 1971)

YK: "Yasenkana: An Autobiographical Narrative by Zen Master Hakuin" in *The Tiger's Cave: Translations of Japanese Zen Texts* (Leggett 1977)

ET: *The Essential Teaching of Zen Master Hakuin: A translation of the Sokkō-roku Kaien-fusetsu* (Waddell 1994)

BC: *The Secrets of the Blue Cliff Records* (Cleary 2000)

FW: *Hakuin on Kensho: The Four Ways of Knowing* (Low 2006—a compilation of translations)

PM: *Hakuin's Precious Mirror Cave: A Zen Miscellany* (Waddell 2009)

WI: *Wild Ivy: The Spiritual Autobiography of Hakuin* (Waddell 2010)

CD: *Beating the Cloth Drum: The Letters of Zen Master Hakuin* (Waddell 2012)

other teachers that he must believe that he has some greater claim to the true teachings than they. It is at least the case that since Hakuin's students and the Rinzai tradition see him as one of their greatest teachers that they must consider his fox slobber akin to the great patriarchs like Sokkō, Bodhidharma, and Hui Neng, meaning that it is both humble and profound. The rhetorical reason for Hakuin's vivid metaphor is that the dharma is something that is simultaneously a lie and true that students are desperate to "lick up," to continue his metaphor. When the slobber is a lie, it induces certainty that leads one farther away from the truth, and when it is the truth, it induces a sickness of doubt that can lead a person to the heights of Zen experience, kenshō and eventually satori or nirvana—stages of realization that frees one from the shackles of illusory existence.

This project, however, does not seek to explain Hakuin's theology or discuss its place in the history of Buddhism or Zen Buddhism, specifically. To keep with Hakuin's metaphor, I only seek to describe the method that Hakuin used to communicate with the people of his time, to describe how Hakuin plated and served up his fox slobber. I hope to engage in a scholarly reimagining of Hakuin's world, taking into account the writings of Hakuin himself, his students, and also scholars of Edo Period Japan. To do this, I adopt a mixture of a sociological and humanistic approaches to religious figures. In the first chapter of this project I define the terms mysticism using a framework of social role and I explicate Weber's concept of charisma to describe a specific kind of mystic that Hakuin was. Taking into account the critique of charisma as being too mystical, I seek to offer a way to explain Hakuin's charisma in terms of his use of the technology of the time and also his expressive art. Chapter 2 will describe the developments of Hakuin's time and

show how he utilized the development of a highway infrastructure, increased literacy, and the development of a popular printing market to facilitate his increasing fame and reach as a Zen teacher. In Chapter 3, I engage with philosophers of art to make an argument that Hakuin's art can use expressive qualities to be instructive to his students. Finally in chapter 4, I examine the letters, essays, and autobiographies of Hakuin to show his relationship with both the paradox of art as worldly and useful for teaching dharma, as well as to show Hakuin's documented attempts for using technology to spread his art and dharma teachings.

This work acts as a case study with the goal of explicating a position contrary to the view that mystics are recluses and world renouncers, unconcerned with the tainted or illusory world of objects and people. Instead, mystics might be intimately engaged with their culture, and in the case of some charismatic mystics like Hakuin, that some mystics were important shapers of cultures around the globe and through history. In my dissertation, I focus solely on Hakuin as a charismatic and social mystic, whose mystically-motivated art influenced Japanese aesthetics, and whose teachings addressed the social and spiritual concerns of laity, monks, and the Tokugawa power structure.

Each of the chapters will engage in a kind of philosophical archeology, starting with a memorable anecdote from Hakuin's life and teaching that presents a problem for how we understand him, e.g., the possibility that art can express character or the possibility that the technological infrastructure could be of spiritual use. Then, I show that the presented puzzle or theme is not an isolated incident, but instead appears in many of Hakuin's writings. Finally, I will connect Hakuin's ideas to thinkers from around the world that

have grappled with similar questions. I will end each chapter proposing a philosophical stance that would make sense of Hakuin's position. By unpacking Hakuin's thought, teaching, life, and mystical practice, I provide support to my claim that Hakuin is a charismatic mystic who engages with worldly technology to reach the populous with his expressive art and writings.

CHAPTER 1  
GATHERING TO HEAR THE GOD OF FOXES: THE POWER OF HAKUIN'S  
CHARISMA

In one of Hakuin's tales, a mixture of fiction and history, a young boy is possessed by the Fox god Inari. The god speaks through the boy defending the methods of Hakuin from critics of his method of using stories and painted certificates. When the fox god speaks, of course the entire village and those nearby come to hear him. I write this because not only would this event be unusual, Yūkichi is a young boy after all, but also those present are supposed to feel the facticity of the god's presence. This event does not require a supernatural power, however, and in historically verifiable life, Hakuin experienced an even greater gathering at his temple in Hara in 1740. The rural town and poor temple had life breathed back into it by many lay and monastic followers who came to learn from Hakuin. By the time of his lecture, there were at least 400 students gathering to listen to him, many of whom had taken up residence in the town and prepared the town and monastery for the occasion. Despite the diminishing impact of Zen teachers in the Edo period, Hakuin remains one of the most dynamic figures of Zen history generally. To have been able to attract so many students in this time of declining dharma is unique, and in need of exploration. In this chapter, I will define what it is that



makes a mystic, and further why we should see some mystics, like Hakuin, as charismatic—capable of attracting a vast number of followers through their efforts.

When even some scholars of religion discuss mystics, they expect that because of the solitary practice of mysticism that mystics are only the women or men that seclude themselves in monasteries or on mountain tops in order to perfect their mystical experience. By coming to the subject with such an expectation, one misses the complexity of so many mystics—mystics that are neither recluses nor even solely interested in an inner experience. Hakuin is one of those worldly mystics. He engages with his monks and the throngs of laity that come to study with him, with the power structures and technological infrastructures of the time, and with the practices of Japanese art.

My dissertation provides a reading of Zen Master Hakuin Ekaku's artistic and expository works that demonstrates that Hakuin should be understood as a mystic who is not only charismatic and worldly, but also I hope to provide an interpretation of his life and dharma ministry that emphasizes that his charisma and success is in part his use of technology to disseminate his ideas and art. This provides an alternate view opposing a common assumption about mystics always being world-renouncing. World-renouncing means that a person secludes herself or himself from society to develop mystical practice and insight. In the case of some charismatic mystics, like Hakuin, instead of renouncing the world, they interact with laypeople and monks through creative practice, teaching, social commentary, and holistic health prescriptions developed from and related to their mystical practice. In the case of Hakuin, I show through his philosophical writing, his

biographical writing, his letters, lectures, paintings, and public actions that he considered his mystical practice as encouraging and informing his painting, his ministry, and his social involvement with the laity as well as the monks and power structure of his time. Hakuin's mysticism led him to engage with his society, utilize technology, inform his culture, and teach his students to do the same.

In addition to his mystical accomplishments, I hope to show that Hakuin was also an artist, a teacher of ethics, a social commentator, and a worldly thinker, which includes the use of technology. Each of these roles is not separate from Hakuin's mystical practice, but instead each role informs the others. Hakuin's role is exemplary of charismatic mystics of other time periods and traditions—many of whom are also socially-concerned citizens, teachers, artists, and engaged with the developments of technology. I hope to show that Hakuin's mystical practice overlaps with his creative and social practice, so one understands Hakuin's creative practice as a tool for teaching mystical practice. Teaching mystical practice is not merely instruction about how to meditate or what is the nature of the self, but also includes ethical principles about how to be a good, compassionate individual, how to address and select what concerns should be dealt with in the name of social justice, and how to know the purpose of human society and each individual within it.

My focus on Hakuin is due to the enormous amount of writings and art works produced by him and preserved after his death. Thanks to Norman Waddell and a few others, there are currently several collections of Hakuin's letters, three autobiographies, and a biography written by his favorite disciple, all of which have been translated into

English, most of them recently. Focusing on Hakuin will allow me to devote a portion of my work to a close analysis of a single mystic in his socio-cultural context. My analysis will demonstrate how the cultural influence of mystics can illuminate and make sense of the practices of mystics and successful religious leaders and its relevance to the developments of culture and people's lives.

### An Introduction to the Subject of Mysticism

In the entry for the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Lindsay Jones, remarks that a satisfying definition for mysticism must meet two positive and two negative criteria. First, it must not reify mysticism into a “uniform system outside the historical tradition of religion.” Second, it must not favor any one tradition's mysticism as a basis for understanding the others. Third, it must understand the global phenomenon of mysticism. Finally, it must account for the four “dimensions of mysticism: the experiential, the theoretical, the practical and the social” (6354). With this entry, Jones is using a definition that includes the mystical experience, the framework of that experience, the personal effects of the experience, and the social role of the experiencer. This project will only seek to explore in depth one aspect of this definition of mysticism, the social role.

A starting property of mysticism to incorporate into a definition might be the practice of a person who has had a direct intuition of the ultimate. But, even this property deserves some unpacking: a direct intuition is meant in the philosophical sense of Kant and Husserl to be an apprehension of something whether through the physical or mental senses. Whereas the word “ultimate” is taken from Tillich to mean an equivalent to God, the direction of religion to ultimate and deepest meaning (Tillich, *What is Religion*). This

is helpful to make a definition that would even work for religions that do not have a single divine entity (many primal religions, like the Ancient Greek religion), or a divine entity at all (Theravada Buddhism, for instance). A problem with this definition, however, is that it is too broad. A good definition must function as a net that catches just the size or type of fish meant to be caught. If the space in the netting is too broad, then it does not accommodate some instances of the defined—some objects that count as the defined do not fit the definition. This definition of mysticism has the opposite problem. The netting is too tight, which means that some objects that do not fit with others fit the definition—the net is catching more objects than just fish. In the case of the definition as mentioned above, “direct intuition of the ultimate,” includes several types of experiences that are not typically understood to be mysticism. For instance, someone who is strictly a priest, shaman, medium, ecstatic, prophet, fortuneteller, magician, or healer might satisfy this definition, but might still seem to the educated thinker to be missing a mystical component.

A caveat before I turn to the definition I will be using for this project as well as a brief defense of it in the face of classic definitions from William James, Evelyn Underhill and Jordan Paper. First, my discussion of the mystic’s role and other religio-social roles [do I want to call these cultural roles, since someone might say that they aren’t different social roles because they fulfill the religious leader social role], should only be read as an attempt to clearly articulate the sort of roles that religious leaders play for her or his respective communities, not an attempt to create a hierarchy of these roles. In many traditions, mystics are sometimes given a great deal more prestige than the other roles.

For instance, in the Hindu tradition, mystics like Tagore or Mirabai are seen as higher or closer to the ultimate than fortunetellers, healers, or perhaps even priests (brahmans). This might be because they are akin to spiritual geniuses in their tradition while the others are more typical. In addition to this complication, mystics through history have also had skills or played roles in these other types as well; for instance, Meister Eckhart, a Christian medieval mystic, was both a priest and mystic; Hildegard of Bingen, another Christian medieval mystic, was also a healer. This taxonomy is an attempt to describe the social role alone, allowing that sometimes the multiple definitions will fit a single religious figure—the purpose is to emphasize the role that they play and how each role has a different logical relationship with the ultimate force described by the tradition.

I am defining a mystic as a practitioner of mysticism, meaning a person who practices behaviors and techniques that they intentionally perform, resulting in a belief and perception that they are experiencing the Ultimate (King 333). The term Ultimate is taken from the scholarship of Paul Tillich and is that concept which the person holds to be most true and most valuable. This concept could be sunyata, Dao, Allah, God, Brahman, YHWH, Onikar, etc. These mystical activities could be physical, like bodily activities that prepare the body for this experience (hatha yoga, for instance). Mystical activities could be intellectual—studying texts to prepare the understanding (studying sutras). Or they could be social—caring for the poor or those in need of compassion to prepare the sentiments for experiencing the Ultimate (working in a soup kitchen). They may be imaginative exercises, like seeing the glory of God(s), the Buddha(s), or objects associated with them (merkabah contemplation). Or they may be more plainly attentional,

like thinking about the breath or not thinking (zazen). If a person engages such practices with purpose, and subsequently if the person believes she or he is preparing for an experience of the ultimate, then the person probably fits into the role of a mystic. Ursula King points out that “In each case [the mystical experience] is understood as an experience beyond ordinary human experience and reason, but not antagonistic to them” (333), meaning that the mystical experience is something different than everyday sensation and thought, but that it does not supersede the everyday. This is one aspect that differentiates mystical experiencing from magical experiencing because a magical experience takes the place of ordinary, everyday reasoning or sensation. For instance, magical thinking would posit that a shadow on my wall is not really a shadow, but instead a demon that has come to make me ill unless I can ward it off with special words, actions, or symbols. Mystical practice and reasoning, on the other hand, enhance our understanding of the everyday, shared world, giving deeper understanding of it and value to it, not an alternate viewpoint from it. To continue the example of some illness being caused by demons, mystical thinking, especially Hakuin’s, would say that the illness is the result of internal struggles between my desire to gain mystical knowledge and that very desire for mystical knowledge being an obstacle to mystical knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Mystical practices often become associated with ethical practice—what one should or should not do.<sup>3</sup> The connection between mystical practice and ethical practice could be as limited as

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<sup>2</sup> This is Hakuin’s description of Zen sickness or meditation sickness, from which he suffered.

<sup>3</sup> Magical practices also are associated with ethics, but that is beyond the scope of my work here.

what sort of clothes one wears when one practices, or as absolute as what one wears all the time. The ethical prescriptions could affect diet, speech, thoughts, actions, relationships, et cetera. So, a Sufi's salat (call to prayer) both counts as a kind of mystical practice (it prepares the mystic for an experience of the Ultimate) and an ethical practice (the mystic *should* perform the prayer, in this case, as a duty to Allah or out of love for Allah).

It should be noted that where it is most common to see mystical practice within an organized religion, it is possible to have such practice as defined without the full system of a religion. For instance, mystical practice is seen in secular perennial philosophy, New Age movements of the latter 20th century, and perhaps even versions of Buddhism that lack some of the classic standards or expectations of the term religion, like a metaphysically foundational divine being. A reader might want to apply my definition to some philosophies as well, like the Chinese philosophy of Mozi, which urges ascetic living and the development of universal, equanimous love. Perhaps the practices of Socrates, as told by Plato, fit the given definition of mysticism since Socrates questioned common notions of the Athenian citizens trying to understand the ultimate truth (the Forms) that undergirds the world they commonly knew. This interpretation is even more plausible when examining the Neo-Platonists, who emphasized a transcendent indivisible One, as opposed to many, which appears similar to the Abrahamic conception of an ultimate monotheistic God, albeit one that is not personal, and a practice of contemplation in order to come to fully know this One. The separation of religious from secular is a debate that this project will not engage. As long as persons and their practices

satisfy the definition I have developed so far, then I will consider them as a part of my greater study, whether they are part of an organized religion or not. Since the culture upon which I focus this work is Japanese, the openness to the definition of religion is important as the individual people of Japan do not often ascribe to one solitary religious belief or another, but instead practice multiple systems at once (Kuroda 3). A Japanese person, for instance, might stop at Shintō and Buddhist places of worship on the way to work or school in the morning. She or he would see no contradiction in doing this, nor having their wedding officiated in a Christian church (which has been popular practice since the late 20th century).

Division between Shintoism and Buddhism, the two largest and oldest traditions in Japan, has happened recently in Japanese history starting in the Edo period, during the 18th century CE, which is contemporary with Hakuin's life (Kuroda 20). The influence these two traditions have had on one another is great, as well as the influence of Chinese Ruism<sup>4</sup> and Daoism. A mystic like Hakuin walked a proverbial tightrope between devotion to Rinzai Zen specifically and pluralist acceptance and incorporation of other religious traditions. Regarding his monks and lay students, Hakuin saw strict adherence to a single tradition necessary to the development of mystical insight. But, one can see in

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<sup>4</sup> Ruism is the term I will use to refer to the tradition that is usually called Confucianism. The term is closer to the Chinese word for the same tradition, *rujia* or *rujiao*, which could translate to the way of the scholar. I make this change both to make my transliteration system consistent (I write Daoism and not Taoism or the non-existent term Laociusism), and also because Confucius is a relic from latinization and so the nominalization using it, seems inconsistent. In this work, I will use the current standard of the pin yin transliteration, writing Zhaungzi is a contributor to Daoism, Kongzi is a contributor to Ruism, Han Feizi is a contributor to Legalism. Since my concern is with a Japanese mystic, this is a tangential concern, but one that I still feel needs some consistency.



Hakuin's paintings, writings, and sermons an almost ecumenical inclusion of teachings, stories, and beings (gods, demons, etc.) from Japan's other religious systems, Buddhist and otherwise. As a scholar, I am interested in both creating definitions that help a reader understand the comparative structure of religion, while at the same time accurately describing the specific beliefs, arguments, and practices of individual mystics and their traditions that represent a robust variety of religious practice and belief. My dissertation will attempt a case study with these concerns, narrowing my focus to show how a cultural reading can be done authentically on a particular mystic and his socio-cultural context, his charisma, and his mystical-knowledge-transmitting art.

One way that a mystic often fulfills his role is as a paragon. Being a paragon, however, doesn't require a mystic to be worldly or even charismatic. For instance, a mountain hermit could equally be a mystic as someone socially-engaged like Hakuin because both could act as a paragon of a certain kind of spiritual attainment—closeness to the ultimate. In this project, I am interested entirely in the category of mystics that are paragons by their social engagement. Those mystics, and especially Hakuin, often turn to be teachers of their particular world-view, whereas a mountain hermit does not. Their roles as teachers can manifest in their products as creative artists and as utilizers of developments in technology, like wood-block printing.

In religious studies, or at least the study of mysticism, there are several camps concerning the nature of mystical experience—the perennialists who assert that mystical experience is the same or similar despite cultural, religious, or personal contexts (Forman) and the constructivists who assert that mystical experience is mediated by

socio-cultural context (Katz). This current project has a foot in each camp. The framework of looking at a person's role within a culture is akin to structuralism, emerging from the assumption that mystics are human beings and typically participate in something called a religious tradition. Religious traditions have qualities that are comparable to other religious traditions because they share similar structural attributes, e.g. prayer, meditation, belief in purity/impurity, et cetera appear in many religions. So, like the perennialists, one might say that mystics share qualities across time, space, and culture. This current approach can also incorporate the concerns of the contextualist, examining the unique and contextually specific manifestations of the larger structures of mysticism. This would suggest that this project is contextualist, but with some limitations about the effect a single culture can have. For instance, this project does not assert that a mystic of one culture is radically different from the mystic of another culture; in fact I hope to take Hakuin's own comparison to Hui Neng, a mystic of a very different time and place, as valid because the role that the two men played in their respective cultural structure was similar. In this work, I emphasize that mystics have a similar role in the structure of society and religion—a mystic is a practitioner of activities that encourages an experience of what is considered the ultimate; they are teachers of that activity to other people; and if my theory proves true, they are often interested in revealing their experience through creative practice that they disseminate as widely as possible.

In his recent article on the debate between contextualists (particularly Katz) and perennialists, Torben Hammersholt asserts that the division between the two need not be so stark. Hammersholt argues that a clearer reading of Katz would show that he is

suggesting an epistemological agnosticism instead of a strict constructivism. Hammersholt reads Katz as saying “a doctrine based on a mystical experience might very well be true, but even if this was the case, it would be impossible to philosophically establish” (473), meaning that there might be some mind-independent element at work, but it is not methodologically possible to affirm that or to make cross-cultural claims such as a Christian mystic and a Hindu mystic have the same experience. The importance of this debate for the current project is that Hakuin has to rely upon the concepts of the time that pick up both positions. On one hand, Hakuin will assert that there is something that is true, dharma, and that it is not socially constructed. Simultaneously, words are particularly troublesome with which to express the dharma. This is one of the reasons that Rinzai Zen, and so Hakuin, emphasizes kōans to push the linguistic and rationalizing limits of a student’s mind.

In addition to the tension between contextualist and perennialist, there is also a debate concerning the worldly nature of the mystic; that is, whether the mystic participates in the concerns of the world or is seeking transcendence from the world or at least renounces participation in the world. A classic interpretation of mystics, their practices, and their lives is that mystics separate themselves off from the activity of the world around them, not participating in family life, political concerns, or sometimes even ethical concerns about social justice. The notion of world renouncer stems from the belief that those seeking spiritual insight isolate themselves from everyday life, much like the monks in Catholic Christianity or the sannyasins in Hindu traditions. When discussing Thai Buddhist kings, Tambiah says that the King receives a monk’s ordinations briefly but that

“a king temporarily bends himself to the renouncer’s regimen, only to resume the ruler’s ‘necessary’ killing vocation” (86). From this, one can see evidence of belief that some religious orders, which can be called mystical, expect that the world is renounced for the purpose of attaining insight through mystical practice. The other camp of thinkers, which has mostly emerged since the 90s, sees the mystic not necessarily as a recluse (although there are some that are recluses), nor as universally discouraging worldly concerns in order to develop personal connection to the ultimate (although there are some of these as well). The work of Grace Jantzen on Medieval Christian mystics in particular started a small trend in scholarship that examines the social concerns of the mystics in their time, and how they responded to those concerns (Jantzen). For instance, there has been research to show that Teresa, a Spanish Catholic of the 16th century, harbored Jewish and Christian people to protect them from the Spanish inquisition and threats through discrimination and poverty (Slade). There has also been research that argues that Buddhists in the Mahayana traditions practice and teach mysticism in order to transform society as a whole, including the individuals within it (Rothberg). On this second issue (the one concerning the worldly nature of the mystic), my project is clearly sitting within the camp that some mystics, what I’m calling charismatic mystics, are not recluses, but instead are often engaged with culture. Hakuin is a charismatic mystic whose creative practice was a teaching tool for his mystical practice and for his ethical concerns; to engage his society, he used move-able type printing and the infrastructure of a national highway (the Tōkaidō) to place himself in the midst of the people of the time, to which they responded with devotion and increased interest in Rinzai Zen Buddhism. Through

his art, his sermon tours, and his letters, in which he petitioned his richer devotees to pay for reproduction and dissemination, Hakuin interacts with the culture of his time at large as a kind of celebrity. He saw his task was to overthrow the malaise infecting Buddhism at the time and also to create a reliable system to guide practitioners through the study of the dharma, to prevent charlatans from distorting the truth of Zen dharma.

The way we analyze and understand mystics is a decision on the part of historians and other scholars, which mean that it is inherently a product of social construction (Jantzen 332). Various assumptions have been held by thinkers that ignore the socio-cultural influences, challenges and supports of various mystics. For instance, Jordan Paper, defines the mystical experience as afunctional (Paper 145), ignoring the important role that the experiences of such mystics as Hakuin played in his interaction with his community—and also for the entire tradition. Hakuin’s writings, poetry and visual art perform a function for the communities, albeit one that is aesthetically communicative instead of utilitarian. The works of Hakuin led other people along the path of religious activity and revitalized the tradition, enabling it to be a key figure in the communication of Japanese culture to the rest of globalizing cultures in the 20th century.

William James’s approach, although very influential in the study of mysticism has also been called into question both because of its lack of neutrality (Jantzen 343), which it claims to possess, and its ignoring of the socio-cultural factors of the mystics it hopes to analyze. Each of the four qualities (ineffability, noetic quality, transience, and passivity) are a present in the case of Hakuin, but not fully. It might be the case that the mystical experience is difficult to explain, but in the case of Hakuin does one call it

ineffable when he spends most of his life expressing the dharma teaching, which includes his experience of awakening . From a Cartesian point of view, the mystical experience might be noetic, which means of a mental nature, but according to the writing of Hakuin, it is also fully embodied—not merely a mental event, but one that is experienced by body, mind, et cetera. And whereas the height of the mystical experience might be transient, the effects of it are life altering, both because of the disease experience Hakuin had, but also because it meant he spent the rest of his life as a Zen master, teaching others to have a similar experience. Finally, the mystic is passive in one sense, if one means that the experience happens when the person does not expect it, but Hakuin was a fully participating member of his religious order, and because that order is Zen Buddhism, he practiced the ways of the order, namely meditation and kōan study, in order to have a mystical experience. So, although the enlightenment experience in Zen Buddhism happens when one least expects it, Hakuin actively sought after it and prepared himself for it—so, characterizing his mysticism as passive is not accurate. James’s psychological approach is invaluable, but it misses other aspects of the mystical experience, namely the soci-cultural context and lived experience of mystics like Hakuin.

Even a practitioner of a type of mysticism like Evelyn Underhill missed the lived, socio-cultural aspects of the mystics lives. Not only does Underhill neglect to address the gender inequalities in the mystics she examines, she diminishes the loving, selfless characteristics of some mystics by focusing entirely on union with the ultimate. Hakuin, for instance, was deeply interested in the experience of awakening, or realizing the no-self, and he was also interested in the community around him enough to write, paint, and

preach. Also, Hakuin's love and selflessness extended to the otherwise ignored members of their society not as a method to attain their goal, but as a product of it—Hakuin taught not only the monks in his monastery, but to anyone who was interested, regardless of money, station, or gender. Underhill's prioritization of selflessness is undermined by her insistence that, or her lack of clarity about, the mystic's intentions. If the compassion for the community and the society is derived from the ultimate, that means a very different intention than compassion for the community and the society. Hakuin's actions and writings suggest they were motivated by the latter urge—he cared for those around him for themselves not for another aim. His teaching is a product of his wanting his students to do well, and learn the dharma.

So, for the purposes of this dissertation, we will take the definition of mysticism to be the practice of encouraging a kind of experience that is mediated through socio-cultural structures such as religious traditions, historical zeitgeists, and personal innovations. This practice can be solitary, although probably not radically separated from the socio-cultural structures, and it need not be solely disengaged from the world.<sup>5</sup> Further, in cases like Hakuin, the mystic might also have a special quality that attracts others to him and gives him the opportunity to shape people's lives the development of cultural tradition. For this project, I will call this quality charisma, which can be applied to many kinds of religious figures, including mystics.

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<sup>5</sup> Nor does every religious figure fit into the category of religion, which will be explored in the next section.

Charismatic mystics: Paragons of virtue, Engaged with the World, and Creatively  
Innovative

In my work, I describe Hakuin as a charismatic mystic, meaning that he was and is valued by Zen Buddhists as an accomplished practitioner of Zen mystical practice and that his personality causes him to be a social leader of some of his contemporaries as well as future practitioners. The word charisma is taken from sociologist Max Weber to mean “a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, super-human, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities” (48). The charismatic person garners much attention, and can even attract followers or disciples, which she or he governs with what Weber calls charismatic authority. A charismatic person could just as easily garner negative attention, being infamous, or even threatening to other groups or power structures. So, a charismatic mystic is someone who has something attractive that sets her or him apart, concerning mystical practice or insights, which often leads to not only being a leader of a religious community, but often to be engaged with the concerns of the community and society at large.

This definition, as I have conceived it, includes such figures as Teresa of Ávila, Grigori Rasputin, Rabindranath Tagore, Hildegard of Bingen, Meister Eckhart, Dov Baer of Lubavitch, Baal Shem Tov, Mirabai, Shankara, Hakuin, Sri Aurobindo, Dōgen, Kukai, Musō Soseki, Thérèse of Lisieux, John of the Cross, Jalāl ad-Dīn Rumi, Ibn ‘Arabī, Hui Neng, Padmasambhava. I am not including founders of religions like Siddhartha Gautama, or prophets like Moses or Muhammad, or savior figures like Krishna, Rama, or



Jesus, as their respective religious traditions often treat those figures differently than they treat the mystics listed above. My reading of these mystics' writings and analysis of their creative works has influenced my ideas about mystical practice generally. Throughout this work, their influence will likely be present, and I hope to make claims that are true about the structural properties of mystical practice at large. In this work, however I will demonstrate the effectiveness of such an approach by performing a kind of close reading of Hakuin's life and works, emphasizing how he is a charismatic, creative, and technologically savvy mystic. I argue that Hakuin is a culturally relevant figure and is socially-engaged, particularly through his art and teaching.

In his examination of religion, Max Weber asserts that the force of religious figures and the political changes they create lies in the power of charisma, the quality of a human being endowed with gifts that makes them exceptional from others. A person's charisma is taken as being bestowed by some higher, divine or supernatural power, but it seems consistent that the person possessing charisma is also psychologically convinced that his duty is to follow the calling dictated by charisma and the higher power. The followers, apostles, acolytes, or monks that recognize the charisma of the central figure respond by complete and personal devotion to the charismatic figures (Weber 49). The typical result of the charismatic figure's discourses or actions is "a radical alteration of the central system of attitudes and directions of action with a completely new orientation of all attitudes toward the different problems and structures of the 'world'" (Weber 53). In other words, the charismatic person often changes the philosophical, religious, and political ideas of the time, through their presence, teachings, and the actions of their devoted

followers. This change could be a readjustment from the traditional way or a radical reformation, or a return to an older tradition. In the case of Hakuin, he described that the dharma had been diminishing because of other teachers spreading false notions about Buddhism, so he imagined that he was returning the dharma back to a purer time, particularly the time of Chinese patriarch Hui-neng, who was also a charismatic, tradition-changing leader.

Upon the death of the charismatic leader, the community undergoes a crisis. With the charismatic person, the community might be able to exist without structure or political concern because the power of charisma is enough to keep the community together and give it meaning. But, when the charismatic person is gone, several things must happen according to Weber: 1) A new leader must be found based on criteria of the original charismatic; 2) A new leader is chosen by an accepted oracle or divinatory system; 3) A new leader is found by the designation of the original charismatic person; 4) A new leader is chosen by the administrative staff (typically, those closest to the charismatic person) and finally with the recognition of the community; 5) The charismatic power is seen as transferred by biological hereditary; 6) the transfer of charismatic power is conducted by ritual from the original leader to a new leader (Weber 55-57). What Weber is asserting here is that the original organically occurring charismatic force must find a new body to inhabit to keep the tradition thriving. Weber here is pointing out that charisma, at least by the communities that have it as a part of their function, runs on the assumption that it is a spiritual or psychological quality that can be passed down, on, or just found again. In my analysis, I hope to provide another way to think of charisma—instead of being a spiritual

force, charisma might be facilitated by a religious leader's ability to be creatively expressive and technologically astute. Hakuin's success might not only be explained by a charismatic personality, but also because he was very adept at incorporating new methods in his teaching, such as using wood-block printing and the solidification of infra-structures like the Tōkaidō. Using these developments, however, would be pointless without some important content to use with them—so I suggest that Hakuin's artistic creativity in his visual paintings and his creative imagery in his sermons are expressive and evocative in ways that appealed to the popular imagination of the people of Edo Period Japan.

Historian Joshua Derman, while discussing the history of the modern use of charisma, points out that not only is the term charisma made known and popular in social science because of Weber, but it also does not make it into popular English usage until the 1960s (87). Since then, the term has been used to mean a kind of magical aura that some people possess and use to lead people (Derman 64, 86). According to Derman, this is the legacy of Weber because he “became a classic of modern social thought not because his work dealt with timeless issues, or because he correctly predicted the future, but because the world changed so as to make his concepts particularly timely . . .” (86). Anthropologist Stephan Feuchtwang would likely agree with Derman that Weber's theory is useful. Feuchtwang notes that although it is a concept used to make sense of religio-political leadership in the modern period, it could be used to understand religious leadership of early periods and even leaders in East Asia, albeit with some needed redefining (91). Particularly, Feuchtwang notes that what should be added is a characteristic noted by

historian Ji Zhe when discussing Master Li of Modern Chan Society of Taiwan—that a person with charisma must have emotional vigor and bring pleasure to the follower (94-95). In addition to this emotional vigor, Feuchtwang also points out that when examining charisma in China (and probably much of East Asia) the idea that charisma is the grace of a divine being or granted from another source, rings untrue to traditions such as Ruism, Daoism, and Buddhism where such characteristic are not granted but nurtured (Feuchtwang, 100-101). The term charisma, then, is a fitting one for Hakuin’s dharma ministry. As the opening of the preface illustrates, Hakuin was capable of attracting a large body of followers in his lifetime

#### An Introduction to the Subject of Mystics’ Creativity

Since my work is not just examining the mystical practice of charismatic mystics like Hakuin, but also their creative practice, I propose a starting definition for creativity. Rothenberg and Hausman, in their survey of creativity propose two qualities that are accepted by most theorists of creativity: novelty and value. About novelty, they say “the appearance of intelligible attributes or experiences that are different from preceding attributes or experiences” (Rothenberg and Hausman 7), meaning that the product of creative practice is not a copy of previous work, but instead has a unique set of qualities. Rothenberg and Hausman allow for value to mean either intrinsic meaning, valuable for its own sake, or pragmatic usefulness, meaning that it is valuable for what it could do (7). In the case of the fine arts, intrinsic value is central to determining value, and in the case of industrial or technological creative practice, pragmatic usefulness determines value more readily. For instance, if one is an appreciator of fine art, a work of Picasso’s would

have value not based on what it could do, but instead it has value because it is a work of Picasso's. On the other hand, if you were trying to create a server network for an entire university, its usefulness and stability would be more important than if the server was shaped like Rodin's *Thinker*.

Creative practice, for the purpose of my work, is limited to activities that create or arrange objects (physical or linguistic) in a unique way, but are based upon the aesthetic rules of the culture, and are received by an audience as being valued mostly for their aesthetic, as opposed to practical, qualities. A person who works on painting, music, dance, gardening, pottery, theater, poetry, literary writing, or calligraphy should each fit this definition. My definition can be extended to include the fact that the audiences receiving creative works are valuing the work *mostly* for aesthetic qualities. I argue that a mystic's creative practice could have some practical applications as well, namely teaching mystical practice. However, the aesthetic qualities of the mystical artwork, for lack of a better phrase, are essential to its success as a teaching tool. For instance, whereas a great aesthetic work of pottery could be just as practically useful, for drinking tea, for instance, as a poor aesthetic work of pottery, I argue that a mystic artwork requires its aesthetic qualities to be practically successful as a teaching tool. In addition to that, I argue that for a piece of a mystic's creative practice to be successful, it must also reach the intended audience (or one might say students). To do that, sometimes developments in technology can be utilized, as Hakuin did in order to disseminate his ideas to as many people as he could, solidifying his success as a charismatic mystic.

I would like to recognize an important distinction between the creative practice of Hakuin when he paints, or writes a song and the creation of something unique. This should stand in juxtaposition to the practice of utilizing technology, which I argue Hakuin did with the purpose of disseminating his art and ideas. Art can have a purpose, but is rarely understood to be a tool. In fact, some definitions of art might say that art typically is not useful in any direct way (except maybe in a symbolic way as an expression of someone's wealth or status). For instance, a fine tea cup has the function or use to hold tea; it could also be artistic, meaning that it possesses unique and valued aesthetic qualities. These two qualities, utility value and aesthetic value are distinguishable, and if we had many tea cups, we could determine that some have one value, but not the other, suggesting that utility need not depend on aesthetics and vice versa. Hakuin's ingenuity lies in his use of technology in the dissemination of his creative works: the first part of that ingenuity is utilitarian, while the second one is aesthetic. My argument continues to say that the art was useful in the teaching of dharma. However, one might think that this must mean that the art too has utilitarian value. This would be a misunderstanding of the difference between utility and aesthetics. Expressing ideas and emotions in art does not suggest using a piece of art the way someone uses a cellphone to transmit one's voice to another's ear. Instead, the more accurate understanding would be to say that he was using art like an alternate language, one that perhaps can express Zen dharma in a different (and perhaps better) way.

#### An Introduction to the Life of Hakuin

Hakuin Ekaku (1685-1768 CE) despite being interested in spiritual questions and becoming a monk at an early age, Hakuin was not a good fit for a solitary practice. Being rebellious and an itinerant, Hakuin spent time not at one monastery, but traveling between many. Hakuin, in his biography *Wild Ivy*, says that from an early age he was extremely anxious and feared the pits of hell as preached to him by a Nichiren Priest to whom Hakuin's mother was devoted (*WI* 8). Hakuin tried to flee his fears by entering the monastery, but upon reading a story about a monk "brutally murdered by bandits and how the monk's cries were supposedly heard for miles" (Kasulis 106), he was overcome by more anxiety. It is not surprising that he had several *roshi* (teachers) that struggled with what they thought was a difficult, stubborn, and anxious student. One roshi even argued with Hakuin, claiming that Hakuin had not had the *satori*, or enlightenment experience, despite Hakuin's certainty that he had (Hakuin *WI* 28).

Hakuin's journey had many confrontations with roadblocks. One of these was a struggle with a physical and/or psychological disorder that Hakuin calls Zen sickness. He wrote that his first major episode happened in the wake of a major decision to leave a roshi after Hakuin had undergone what he believed at the time was a *satori* experience. Hakuin writes, "I began moping around in a dark, melancholy state. I was always nervous and afraid, weak and timid in mind and body. The skin under my arms was constantly wet with perspiration. I found it impossible to concentrate on what I was doing. I sought out dark places where I could go to be alone and just sat there motionless like a dead man" (*WI* 41). Though having achieved a difficult goal, according to Zen Buddhism, Hakuin began to have an intense disease experience. Hakuin believed that it was a likely

result from studying paradoxical puzzles, called *kōans*, and meditating on emptiness, called *zazen* (Kasulis 111). Throughout the rest of his career as a Zen priest and teacher, Hakuin warned other students about Zen sickness, taking his own experience as a cue to be aware of the psychological needs of his students.

The Edo Period saw a lot of changes in Japan, both stabilizing and destabilizing. One of the most radical changes was the Tokugawa families seizing power, creating a line of autocratic shoguns who ruled Japan throughout Hakuin's lifetime. The Tokugawa tried to control and codify all aspects of Japanese life, including registering all temples as a specific sect and resisting any reclassification, and requiring all people to register with a Buddhist temple in the area for purposes of civic records. It is during this political turmoil that Hakuin rises as an innovator of the Rinzai tradition, revitalizing the methods and understanding of satori and kensho, and reorganizing the kōan system. He did this through his writing, which despite being influenced by abstract and difficult Zen philosophy, was written and expressed in compelling and understandable forms, like folk songs, new parables, and paintings (Maraldo 69). Even Hakuin's own philosophy was simple; he offered that the way to know the world was through simple moments of enlightenment—an event that does not need a lifetime to cultivate, but could happen while listening to a poem or seeing dew on a blade of grass (*FW* 32). This means that the possibility of achievement in Zen Buddhism was opened up to everyone including peasants who had other roles to play that prevented them from studying in a monastery full time. Despite this popularization, Hakuin was acerbic in his critiques of other Buddhist teachers, particularly other Zen teachers and the preachers of the Pure Land



school. He also, emphasized that although the first experiences of enlightenment could come without a lifetime of cultivation, those lessons must be deepened throughout one's life to fully understand and appreciate.

As Hakuin spiritually progressed, his Zen sickness did as well. He writes, "There was a constant buzzing in my ears, as if I were walking beside a raging mountain torrent. I became abnormally weak and timid, shrinking and fearful in whatever I did. . . . Strange visions appeared to me during waking and sleeping hours alike" (*WI* 76). During this time, Hakuin sought out many renowned healers at the suggestion of his fellow monks, but none of their cures relieved his disease experience. It was not until Hakuin met an old Zen hermit named Master Hakuyū that he would find some guidance. In true Zen fashion, Hakuyū began by saying that curing Zen sickness only made it worse, and the only option was to sit "with the intention of withering away together with the mountain plants and trees" (*WI* 42). Hakuin knew then that this master was the one for him. While studying *zazen* and *kōans* with master Hakuyū, he learned that he could not relieve himself of Zen sickness, but in that acceptance he found relief. This trial in Hakuin's life is important in part because it is through his personal experience with what he called zen sickness that led certain rich members of the community to Hakuin, looking for a way to relieve their own illnesses. Although there is no report that Hakuin demonstrated healing powers, he gave advice about how to live a balanced life and how to meditate and pray in such a way to relieve mental causes of suffering.

Hakuin's habit of drawing blessing from his disease experiences extended to his legacy as a reformer as well. By organizing the *kōans* into a practical system for *roshis*,

teachers in the Rinzai tradition, Hakuin hoped to further guide people through inevitable Zen sicknesses even after Hakuin passed away (Kasulis 111). By composing poetry and paintings, he also sought to express the feeling of emptiness that led to and came from his Zen sickness. In his painting of the Chinese Zen patriarch, Bodhidharma, he painted intense eyes that looked directly up to a brief, poetic command written in a scrawling hand by Hakuin—“See your own nature and become perfect nothing” (Hisamatsu 218). Hakuin taught not only monks of the dwindling Rinzai Buddhism, but he also wrote letters showing “great compassion for the layman’s spiritual problems” which he addressed directly (Kasulis 111). Perhaps it is because of Hakuin’s great efforts that Zen Buddhism revived itself in a period that was otherwise a little hostile to the development of religious sects.

Albert Low, a western Zen master, writes a commentary concerning Hakuin’s *Four Ways of Knowing* in which Hakuin emphasizes the importance of further work after experiencing awakening. Low writes that “Very often, people who come to spontaneous awakening outside a tradition, because they do not undertake this work after awakening, become distorted and weird at best. Very often they become prophets and gurus and spread their own subjective ideas. They can be very dangerous people because a certain charisma comes with the awakened state, arising out of complete faith, and yet this charisma can be misguided and mixed with all kinds of strange ideas and practices” (*FW* 48). Although acting as a commentary for an English speaking readership, Low’s comments are complimentary of Hakuin’s, especially regarding people who stray too far from what both men would call the true dharma. Hakuin was deeply concerned with the

effect that false teachers have upon their students. Hakuin, having been mistaken about his own reaching of enlightenment early on in his career (he had several awakening experiences that were not authentic awakenings), thought that the certainty of a student in their own success can cause great trouble for them. In addition, if a person with great charisma or social influence who is certain of enlightenment, but does not have the support of a dharma tradition, then he could lead many more people astray than a recluse with the same belief. Hakuin, however, did not lean too far in the opposite extreme of strict adherence to the dharma tradition. Hakuin seems to have believed that people who have awakened like himself and his most promising students have to maintain a balance of being true to the tradition while at the same time using their influence to impress the dharma upon more people. In fact, Hakuin asserts that one of the tasks of the monk is to create an interpretation of his own to pass on, which Hakuin did in many ways, not least of which his writing of the kōan “What is the sound of one hand clapping”.

In this chapter, I briefly outlined some important keywords that are necessary in order to make the argument that proceeds through chapters 2, 3, and 4. The first is that Hakuin should be called a mystic because he practiced a religious tradition that encouraged a kind of experience that he thought was indicative of ultimate reality. The second is that Hakuin should be called charismatic because he had an emotional vivacity that attracted people to him and he used that vivacity to connect and educate people. The third is that Hakuin was knowledgeable about the developments of technology and changes of infrastructure in his time so that he used to the advantage for his dharma ministry. The fourth is that Hakuin utilized those technologically developments to disseminate his art as

a mode of expressing the truth of Zen Buddhism, a truth that was thought to be distorted by words alone.

## CHAPTER 2

### “IS THAT SO?”: THE MASS CULTURE OF THE EDO PERIOD AND HAKUIN’S ADAPTIVE RESPONSE

Although most likely apocryphal, one of the most famous stories about Hakuin highlights him as a figure with extraordinary equanimity, an admirable quality for which all Zen monks are supposed to strive. The story goes that a Japanese girl, who had recently become pregnant, accused Hakuin of being the father. The enraged parents went to Hakuin to chastise him; Hakuin only replied “is that so?”. When the child was born, Hakuin, even having lost his reputation as a respected teacher, took care of the child lovingly and with no resentment for a year. After that time, the girl confessed that the real father of the child was a worker in the fish market. The parents went back to Hakuin, asking for his forgiveness, telling him their mistake, and retrieving the young child, to which Hakuin merely said “is that so?” (Reps 22). As well as being complimentary to Buddhist virtue, Hakuin’s equanimity that is mythologized in this story is comparable to the sort prescribed by the Greek Stoics like Epictetus as well as the kind of graceful fluidity encouraged by Daoists like Zhuangzi. In fact, the Hakuin actions in the story verge on emotional disengagement rather than compassionate non-attachment, which might allow it to more easily fit into the paradigm of Stoicism or Daoism better.

However, this story is most likely a compelling folk tale, instead of a biographical story of Hakuin's life. If this story is more historical than folkloric, then this episode might be one of the only times that Hakuin showed such equanimity.

Judging by his writings, autobiographies, and the writings of his contemporaries about Hakuin, Hakuin was a passionate and driven man, deeply connected and responsive to the culture and people of Japan of his time. He includes stories of honorable, peaceful, and equanimous mountain hermits in his sermon examples and stories, but Hakuin lived a more social and passion-filled life. Moreover, Hakuin lived in a cultural context that emphasized a modernizing economy, the growth of urbanization, the emergence of affordable, intranational travel, an increased influence of the arts of popular and mass culture, and the spread of literacy and education to most social classes. Although Hakuin becomes well-respected as a Zen Buddhist paradigm, he does not accomplish this in the way a Medieval Japanese monk would (by becoming the abbot of a politically important and often rich temple with an aristocratic base), nor in the way an enigmatic mountain hermit would (like the figure described in the apocryphal story), but instead by engaging with the mass culture and populous of the Edo period and being relentless in his pursuit of purifying the Rinzai Zen Sect. Hakuin's effectiveness as a minister is due in large part to his passionate charisma and inclusiveness of what interests his students at large. So the story about the man and the historical person match up in the sense that the story shows someone who is adaptable to the the circumstances presented to him and the historical Hakuin was someone that adapted to his world in such a way to communicate his dharma message.

The approach in this chapter is similar to Grace Jantzen's approach. She uses a socio-cultural approach to religion, and challenges the assumptions of other theorists of mysticism. She focuses on examples from female, medieval, Christian mystics, but the framework of her theory and approach can be used for an approach to mystics of a different gender, in a different tradition, and in a different period of history, in this case the Japanese Zen Buddhist tradition of the 18th century. She says that the modern focus in the study of mysticism has been deeply affected by the European Enlightenment period's preoccupation with the mind and humanity as the sole subject and foundation of knowledge (Jantzen 7). Like Foucault, Jantzen is interested in the dialogs of power that surround and have impact on mystics. In particular, she points out that "structures of power and knowledge have operated unequally upon women and men" (Jantzen 15). By this, she means not only political power, but also the affirmation capabilities of a religious organization to give a power of office (or pulpit) and to verify a religious administrator's approach to religious teachings. In the Zen tradition, we see that Jantzen's critique of gender discrepancy is valid—it is rare in the Edo Period (the same is true today) to have a Zen master, let alone a popular and charismatic one, be a woman. Although Hakuin mentions the wisdom of many women seekers (human and divine)<sup>6</sup>, there is still a large discrepancy between the amount of structural support female Zen Buddhists get in the Edo period.

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<sup>6</sup> The close-reading chapter of this dissertation will go into more detail about some of the women Hakuin considered as wise and dharma mavens.

Jantzen's position is that any understanding of mystics and religious thinkers, like Hakuin, Dōgen, et cetera, must include some analysis of the social and political structures in which they find themselves.<sup>7</sup> Jantzen asserts that "what counts as mysticism will reflect (and also help to constitute) the institutions of power in which it occurs" (Jantzen 14). So, Hakuin's success as a mystic or a charismatic leader as understood either by academia, the Zen tradition, or the Japanese cultural tradition will reflect his ability at the time to negotiate those institutions of power. These institutions of power, in a New Historicist/Foucault-ian approach, do not just include official, political institutions, but also the tradition of the arts, the beliefs and desires of the people, and the abstract workings of the economy. So, a survey of the institutions of power in the Edo Period should not only include the Tokugawa Shogunate, but also the changes to economic structure, the increasing urban development, and the body of popular culture supported by wood block printing, each of which Hakuin utilized in his dharma ministries and, I argue, are responsible for Hakuin receiving the fame and prestige he did.

### The Cultural Developments in Edo Period Japan

Almost a hundred years before the birth of Hakuin, there was a major shift of governmental powers on the islands of Japan. For over a hundred years, Japan was torn apart by civil wars in the Sengoku Period (1467-1603 CE). During this time, the society was ravaged by conflict, power changes and disunity. In the late 16th century, first Oda Nobunaga, then Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and finally Tokugawa Ieyasu conquered the last

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<sup>7</sup> This study doesn't go far enough, in fact. An interesting study using Jantzen's approach could also be the inheritance of the dharma in Hakuin's line and the way that it also had gender discrepancies.



remaining rival warlords and settled the conflict by creating a central government ruled by a military leader, called a Shogun. The Emperor of Japan still lived throughout this government, but his role became ceremonial and religious as opposed to political. For the next several centuries, the Tokugawa family ruled from the position of shogun, organizing the rest of the nation into a hierarchy of posts that reported to the seat of the Tokugawa government in Edo. The Emperor's line remained in position in Kyōto awaiting the growth of power and control that will return to it in the mid-19th century. In the meantime, Japan experienced wealth, peace, and growth, that had been uncharacteristic for several centuries. Despite the strict set of laws of the Tokugawa clan, the implementation of those laws provided room for prosperity and flourishing both economically and culturally.

That being said, the Edo Period had been incorrectly viewed by scholars until more recently. Their misconceptions are in part about the political, industrial, and economic development of Japan during this period, but there is also a persistent belief that religious thought was declining, or at least not as significant as previous developments in thought, in the Muromachi Period, for instance. The misconception that Buddhism declined will be considered later in this chapter. Regarding the political aspects of Japan in the Edo period, scholars have viewed it as backwards or as a Japanese dark ages, a term that scholars of medieval Europe also find inaccurate and disparaging about their subject matter. This misconception probably emerged in part because of the Tokugawa Shogunate's closing off of the borders of Japan (sakoku), preventing them from engaging in the quickly globalizing world outside. The globalization during this time period was

driven by imperial European powers, and was something that it was prudent for the Tokugawa Shogunate to avoid, considering their goals for self-sufficiency and stability. The Shogunate's decision to enact sakoku was in response to the Portuguese Jesuits' successful evangelical campaign among the general population of Japan, but also because of their increasing political influence among the daimyos whom the Shogunate feared would rise up against them because that very thing happened continuously for a few hundred years before the Tokugawa took power.

Robert M Bellah, in particular, has influenced the recent generation of thinkers concerned with the societal structures in Edo period Japan. His book *Tokugawa Religion* (1957) takes a Weberian approach to the period, suggesting that it was dynamic and economically progressive in the way that Cullen and other recent theorists have done, but as Bellah points out in his introduction to the paperback version (1985) "scholarship has advanced so rapidly in the last thirty years that it would require rewriting the whole book to take account of it" (xi). Bellah provided a new way to look at the period, but his insistence that Japan had a functional correlate to the U.S.'s protestant ethic (a key aspect of Weber's theory of economics) would strike most current scholars of asian societies as reductionistic and probably a little orientalist. My approach is also inspired by Weber, particularly his concept of charisma, a concept deeply indebted to Christian understanding of that term; however, I do not follow Bellah's approach, because whereas he provided an excellent start to honestly looking at the Edo period as culturally significant, which even some 20th century Japanese historians were not doing, Bellah's staunch grounding in Weber's theory introduced bias into his work—Weber's analysis

and ideas were derived from an entirely different culture, which in many ways is not comparable to the culture in Edo period Japan. My approach, on the other hand, uses Weber's charisma as a launching off point of human phenomenon of attraction and leadership ability, not as a framework for understanding the basis of a distinctly non-protestant culture. Using Weber's concept of charisma provides a thoughtful approach to a phenomenon that happens in many religions—the force that draws people to a particular religious thinker—which allows for an analyses of Hakuin's life, culture, and thought with a flexible approach more capable of honestly describing his dharma ministry.

Recent scholars of the Edo period object to the characterization of the Edo period as the Japanese dark ages. These scholars even insist that the decision to enact sakoku could have saved Japan a few centuries of unprofitable agreements from European countries, which weakened many of the other great Asian powers.<sup>8</sup> Between the sakoku and the U.S. admiral Matthew Perry's prying open the borders in 1854, there was an assumption that Japan was stuck in a medieval state. This belief leads historians (as well as the European and U.S. people of the late 19th century) to be impressed by what was seen as rapid development and economic growth beginning in 1868 and continuing into the

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<sup>8</sup> Once the sakoku was discontinued, however, Japan did fall prey to U.S. bullying, being forced into agreements that severely damaged not only the power structures' reputation with its own citizens, but also its ability to govern effectively. Subsequently, Japan, being supported by the U.S. and European powers, forced other Asian countries into unequal treaties. This encouraged Japan to adopt a more imperial mentality towards its Asian neighbors, which grew to its fullest expression during world war II. These periods in the late 19th century through the middle of the 20th century, however, is outside the scope of this dissertation as it is well after the life of Hakuin.

1990s. L. M. Cullen points out this shock “and the obsession by western writings for explaining why and how Japan could rival the west is not only patronizing but, as far as its economic content is concerned, directed to a non-problem” (Cullen 10), namely that Japan already had a rational and flexible approach to its economy without the need of European models, and it was not the backwards dark ages that orientalist (past and present) in Europe and the U.S. expected. According to Cullen, the Edo period of Japan, even with the sakoku separating it from the globalizing and modernizing world outside, was a period that introduced the successful implementation of several political and economic policies that made Japan prosperous and better equipped to handle modernization in the 19th century: the Shogunate unified all of the important families and land they controlled, moved to a money economy that was flexible with the market, developed modes of infrastructure such as a shipping industry that was the largest in the world at the time, and built a functional highway that allowed for business and tourism to increase across different regions (Han) within the Japanese border (Cullen 71-72, 83-84, and 90). Further, and similarly to the globalizing, colonial powers of Europe, Japan developed dynamic, dense urban centers in Kyōto, Ōsaka, and Edo. By the latter part of the 18th century, Edo was the largest urban center in the world, even larger than Paris or London. So Hakuin, far from being comparable to a mystic of a medieval period like Francis of Assisi or Dōgen, was living in a steadily modernizing world, and had to negotiate with the issues of a modernizing world; in particular, Hakuin had to reach and guide a large populous with his dharma teaching, and make religion something that was a viable practice for a non-feudal and increasingly modern and urban society.

One of the motivating factors for modernization and urbanization in Edo period is due in thanks to the policing made possible by the Tokugawa Shogunate along the Tōkaidō, which stretched from Ōsaka to Kyōto to Edo passing through Hara at the foot of Mount Fuji. This caused more activity along the whole road, revitalizing the economies of the merchants and the city's they visited. We have evidence from Tōrei's *Chronological Biography* and from Hakuin's own letters that Hakuin visited Edo often, if not also Kyōto, using the Tōkaido. Norman Waddell, the most prolific translator of Hakuin into English, writes as way of introduction for a letter Hakuin wrote to a teacher in Hakuin's lay community of Edo that "[t]he evidence of Hakuin's acquaintance with the city, its inhabitants, and its vibrant cultural life is found scattered throughout his writings, suggesting that he found the bustling new metropolis well suited to his own irrepressible personality" (*PM* 109). Hakuin's decision to remain in the area around Mt. Fuji instead of becoming a priest in Edo or Kyōto most likely had some other motivator than fear of or aversion to the urban life. It might have been devotion to the area that he left at such an early age to become an itinerant monk, or perhaps the location, being at the foot of one of the most sublime sights of Japan that probably appealed to Hakuin's aesthetic sensibilities.

Another possibility is the positioning on the Tōkaidō—Hara is on the way between Kyōto and Edo, and the Tōkaidō could boast more people than the populations of Edo or Kyōto combined, all of them having to at least pass through Hara. Hara, in Suruga province during the Edo Period,<sup>9</sup> according to Norman Waddell, "was one of the busiest

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<sup>9</sup> Suruga province corresponds with Shizuoka prefecture in present day Japan.

and also one (sic) the most beautiful in [Tōkaidō's] entire three-hundred mile length. A fascinating assortment of people and sights, together with the latest news from around the country, passed in a constant stream through the post station, creating an unusually stimulating environment that would inform young Hakuin's mind from an early age" (*PM xi*). This notion suggests is that Hakuin, despite not being in Kyōto, the classic spiritual center of Buddhism in Japan, nor in Edo, the new political center of Edo Period Japan, grew up in and developed as a thinker and spiritual leader in a kind of environment comparable to the stimulation of both Kyōto and Edo. Hakuin was surrounded by many different people, cultural expressions, ideas, and dialects all of his life. When Hakuin is writing his great works at the age of fifty and older, being influenced by this dynamic environment is evident. Hakuin emulates the patter of street merchants to deliver his Zen message in songs like *Old Granny's Tea-Grinding Songs* (discussed in chapter 3), *A Wake Up Call for Sleepyheads*, and *Popular Rhymes for the Great Way*. Waddell writes that "the vital popular culture of Edo Japan becomes a vehicle for delivering his religious message to a new and largely untapped audience" (*PM xxi*). This was crucial to the survival of the Rinzai sect, which was classically practiced by the samurai, whose numbers were diminishing since the beginning of the 17th century as they moved into the developing bureaucratic middle class. Hakuin's ability to express the teachings of Rinzai using methods that were accessible to the population, placed Rinzai squarely back into the position of an incredibly influential Buddhist sect for the development of Japanese culture, notably on the 20th century writings of Japanese scholars educated the west like

D. T. Suzuki, Kitaro Nishida, and Masao Abe, Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, each of whom were trained in Rinzai Zen Buddhism.

Hakuin's role in the Rinzai tradition differs from the great Buddhist teachers of the Heian and Muromachi periods in at least one way—the great teachers of the past typically made a name for themselves in the capital, namely Kyōto. Hakuin, on the other hand, stubbornly refused to seek out a position in one of the larger or more famous temples. Instead, he chose to be abbot of his father's temple Shōin-ji in Hara, and even when he expanded his administration into a second and then a third temple, he chose nearby and rural Mishima to found Ryūtaku-ji, and Hina, across Suruga Bay for Muryō-ji. Religious historians Barabara Ambros and Duncan Williams, when discussing the growing scholarship about the Edo period, say “[t]his focus on religiosity as it appears in a local context emerges from the growing consensus in the field that Japanese religion as ‘lived religion’ was practiced in local settings, with regions, villages, towns, and cities as socially significant units to understand religion” (210). From the writings that emerged from this trend in Religious studies scholarship of the Edo period, we see that there is a shift of importance from the major figures and temples in Kyōto or Edo, to the activities happening at the local level. Because of the decrees of the bakufu, temples became repositories of census information of the people in their area, and so Religious Studies scholars can examine the plethora of documents at local shrines and temples, which mark the number and types of services, their attendance, and how many people came to a particular temple. All of this information shows us numerically the popularity of a temple, but also codifies the number of practitioners that visit the temples. Hakuin's

decision to remain in the countryside, at least during a period like this, might have not detracted from his popularity or prestige as a great Zen master in part because each of the local shrines and temples were becoming organized to function as important centers of civil and popular life. And, the success of a small temple would not necessarily be something that slips into the mists of history, but instead something that we could appreciate for the power structure of the time and by historians today through the temple records.

Michel Mohr, a historian of Edo Period Zen Buddhism, notes that there is a development of a sectarian consciousness in the Edo Period, which for him means awareness by people of the time of the differences between various sects within Zen school of Buddhism, namely the Rinzai, Sōtō, and Ōbaku sects.<sup>10</sup> This sectarian consciousness emerges in part from developments of Zen thought in Ming and Qing dynasties Buddhism by some figures like Ingen Ryūki (345), one of the innovators of the Ōbaku sect, a syncretic Shingon and Zen approach to the subject of awakening. In addition to this, Mohr says “New religious policies adopted by the Bakufu encouraged individuals to define more precisely their own positions and affiliations, but a simultaneous sense of crisis seems to have fostered a feeling of togetherness among Zen Buddhists, who may have placed concerns about the survival of meaningful Buddhist

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10 For the entirety of this dissertation, I will adopt the following schema to discuss the various levels of Buddhist institution:

Religion: e.g. Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity

Branch: e.g. Mahayana Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism, Vajrayana Buddhism

School: e.g. Zen Mahayana, Shingon Mahayana, Tendai Mahayana

Sect: e.g. Rinzai Zen, Sōtō Zen, Ōbaku Zen



practice above considerations of sect” (365). Mohr considered this essay a preliminary study of major Zen figures in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, each of whom had to deal with what they considered challenges in the proper transmission of dharma; in particular, the Zen figures of this time were concerned with the abuse of the transmission system by unskillful masters and with the syncretism of the Ōbaku sect, which drew heavily upon Shingon practices. Hakuin shared these concerns of the Zen masters that Mohr surveys. He found the Ōbaku syncretism problematic because of the tension between the other-power centered Shingon, which emphasized salvation by being reborn in a paradise through the intervention of the infinitely good Amida Buddha and the self-powered centered Zen school, which emphasized developing one’s own awakening in this life through meditation practice. Mohr asserts that although the distinctions between the schools was made more pronounced in the Edo period, the notable masters of each sect, such as Hakuin for Rinzai and Menzan for Sōtō, were interested in making sure the practice of Buddhism was fruitful for the Japanese people, and they were interested in restoring the dharma back to its glory during the time of the 6th patriarch, Huineng (363), an idea which is considered innovative and not regressive, according to Mohr, by both Rinzai and Sōtō traditions (355).

#### Hakuin and the Power Structure of Edo Period Japan

In an appended letter, in which Hakuin responds to a visitor’s criticism to his thoughts about Shingon, Hakuin reveals that he sees Zen as the true dharma heir to Siddhartha Guatama, as opposed to all of the other branches of Buddhism. But more than that, we can see that Hakuin imagined a very Confucian vision of a ruler. Hakuin writes that

Dharma is master of the world and “there is a master in the world, high and low remain in their proper ranks, and all things are at peace” (ZMH 153). Hakuin is creating a metaphor about Buddhism being a king of the world, which corresponds to neo-confucian views about the proper leader, who keeps the order of the society by maintaining the people’s proper relationship with one another. This is a point of synergy between Hakuin and the Tokugawa bakufu, which was deeply Confucian.

However, Hakuin was not completely in agreement with the political power of the Tokugawa Shogunate. In a series of letters to Senior Priest Zenjo about the forthcoming publication of Hakuin’s *Poisoned Blossoms in a Thicket of Thorns*, Hakuin reacts negatively to the preface written by Yanada Zeigan, the leading Confucian scholar of the time and friend of Hakuin. Hakuin writes,

“I don't care if Zeigan does think the essay on *Study of Our Shinto Shrines* should be cut from *Poison Blossoms*; I had good reasons for writing that piece, which he is completely unaware of so I want you to leave it in. If his complaints continue, we will just have to delete his preface. It is probably better to leave it out anyway. It won't be much help. Let's just forget about the preface” (CD 124).

The essay with which Zeigan found issue attacked the neo-confucian Razan for harboring anti-buddhist views that could have influenced the early Tokugawa shogunate. Waddell points out that Zeigan’s caution could have also been influenced by the fact that Hakuin could have already been in violation of Tokugawan policies several years earlier.

Translator Norman Waddell writes “In Hakuin’s work *Snake Strawberries*, he had broken the taboo of mentioning the first Tokugawa shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, and as a result the text had been placed on the government's list of banned books” (CD 123, italics added).

This shows both that Hakuin lived in a time where his views were not only possibly

threatening to the power structure, but it also placed him in opposition with other major schools of religious thought, e.g. Neo-confucianism and Shintoism (which was one of the concerns in Razan's original thought—that Buddhism was damaging the indigenous Shinto practice, a source of *li*, ritual knowledge/action, which is the back bone of Confucianism). That being said, Hakuin drew extensively on Shintoism and Neo-Confucianism, incorporating them in his lectures, letters, and paintings, explicating the other traditions as well as using them as models to further explain the principles of Zen. The Tokugawa shogunate limited some thinkers during its reign. Hakuin seems sometimes to have been cautious about his ideas, and at other times he flew defiantly and righteously into the face of those with power.

Still, Hakuin does critique political people more powerful than he in a few instances. In a more benign way, he critiqued the extravagance of the two imperial princesses who were training at a Rinzai convent. In *Horse Thistle*<sup>11</sup>, Hakuin published the letter he wrote to the young women, in which he urges them to lead a simple life, much like the one he prescribes for his monks and himself (Waddell, xxii). In another letter called the *Hebiichigo* (which translates as Snake-Strawberry and is the same text Waddell mentions in the quote above), Hakuin warns the reader that cruelty follows extravagance, writing that “When an evil ruler gains control of a country he will without fail demand luxury. When he demands luxury he will most likely assemble women for his court. When he gathers together these women his finances will not suffice. When his finances do not suffice he will exhaust every means in seeking to supplement them” and so on (*ZMH*

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11 As far as I can tell, *Horse Thistle*, has not been translated into English.

194).<sup>12</sup> Because Japan was ruled by the shogunate during this period, and has been for over a hundred and fifty years, Hakuin is probably not speaking directly to them about being rulers. Although the *Hebiichigo* is written for a close retainer of Ikeda, Iyo no Kami, of Okayama Castle in Bizen who would have some effect on politics, Hakuin's message is presumably for a much broader audience than the retainer or the abbesses judging by his decision to publish the letters. His analogy of the evil ruler is meant to caution lay people about the problems of extravagance in a time when the economy is becoming more and more materialistic.

In *Hebiichigo*, Hakuin also levels a more specific critique of the samurai class. Hakuin opens his critique with a chastisement that "since ancient times the idiotic generals . . ." have been the source of society's woes, but he does not specify a specific family or groups of families of the samurai class. The scenario he describes, however, was a common representation of the Heian period in particular. Hakuin blames the samurai for spending more than they make, wearing silk garments, not caring for their people, being womanizers, and possessing a general obsession with materialism. The result is that "[d]ay by day the physical body declines, eventually a serious disease difficult to cure sets in, and life itself is difficult to sustain. The clear character inherent in all is obscured and destroyed by base personal lusts and desires until the point is reached where the mind-as-master cannot be determined even for a moment" (*ZMH* 188). According to Hakuin, immoral, materialistic behavior is not just troublesome on moral or political levels. He also urges his students to think about the effects it could have on

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12 \*sic\* I would put commas in most of these sentences, but there isn't any in the text.

someone's health, which for Hakuin makes it harder to pursue awakening. In the most unhelpful case, materialism and immorality could directly obscure one's progress in understanding the dharma, which is the most important goal for a Zen Buddhist. Again, just like the example of an evil ruler, this lesson is meant more broadly and is also as relevant for the laity. Unlike the evil ruler example, this critique of the samurai would resonate both with the critique that anti-imperialists make against Heian period debauchery, but it might also resonate with the common people's opinion of rich samurai, a prejudice that is slow to change despite the majority of the samurai class slowly losing wealth, power, and prestige during this period.

One of the factors working to bring the populous up to the same level as the declining samurai was that education became something not just for the wealthier classes, but instead was more widely pursued. This is in thanks to *terakoya* 寺子屋, literally "temple child building," which were often run cheaply by "a priest who taught as an act of benevolence or a samurai who taught for a sense of self-worth" (Henshall 59). The sort of wide spread instruction that we see from Hakuin emulates this model of teaching a wide range of subjects, including literacy, which rose as high as 30% in the Edo period, but also including the arts and religion. Hakuin discussed medicine, spiritual practice, art, ethics, and politics with equal authority, instead of speaking as a specialist of one aspect of human life. This might be because his audience was a wider public, whom he believed had those same interests, so he educated them and then relied upon their education to explicate his overarching goal of teaching Zen Dharma.

Hakuin's inclusion of women in his ministry shows a shift in the expectation of the times, one that corresponds with more women becoming literate through the temple child schools (Cullen 122). In chapter three, I will explore a story of Hakuin taking on a young woman whose literacy is so developed that she is bold enough to critique Hakuin's calligraphy, to which he reacts with admiration and seeks to train her and cherish her as a valuable, profound student. A part of this might be Hakuin's own openness to co-ed spread of Zen dharma, a feature of Buddhism that is surprisingly rare despite its seeming interest in equality, or it might be a general shift in the expectation of women and men, with women now stepping into the role of achieving greater degrees of education.

#### Hakuin and the Popular Culture of the Edo Period

Although Hakuin has some sort of tension with the political powers of the time, it is interesting to note that he does not become a political reformer, but instead a religious reformer. Hakuin uses his charisma to attract many followers, but instead of focusing their ire on the shogunate, he instead has them embrace the neo-confucian *li*, native Shintō *kokoro*, and most importantly the Rinzai Zen buddhist dharma and think critically about the incorrect teachings that have come the few generations before Hakuin.

Hakuin's charisma does not work upon the sangha, but the entire population of Japan.

One reason to believe that Hakuin was interested in reaching the widest population possible is his creation and distribution of written sermons in the kana syllabary, which could be read by a wider range of people because it is phonetic, unlike works written using the ideogrammatic Chinese character system, *kanji*, which required a great deal of study to learn and often required knowledge of the Chinese language, a skill that many

people in the Edo period (including the samurai class) did not have, and could not easily obtain. Hakuin wrote *Hebiichigo* in the kana syllabary, in part because “unusual sermons in the kana syllabary seemed to be very rare these days” (ZMH 182), suggesting that he was filling a need, with a sermon that teaches something new in its return to the ideas of the golden age of Zen with Hui Neng, a line of thought which Hakuin holds to be unexplored during his time, except by the most excellent of teachers. The title *Hebiichigo* literally means “Snake Strawberry,” a common and pervasive weed. Hakuin writes that he names this essay a common weed to be clear that it was common thought by a common person, not a great work by a great sage (ZMH 182). Hakuin titles many of his essays with the names of weeds and common plants, likely for the same reason—to give a sense of humility, however ironic, of the author.<sup>13</sup> Later in *Hebiichigo*, Hakuin praises a work of Tokugawa Ieyasu for being written in kana for “[n]ow it can be read by any samurai or dharma master, no matter how inept at Chinese characters or lacking in talent he may be” (ZMH 206). Although he is praising another work, the effect is that he is also suggesting the importance of having many of his own works in kana because that choice of writing gave the widest possible audience access to his thoughts and ideas. Hakuin goes on to say that even people who are illiterate (he lists farmers, artisans, merchants, specifically) should treasure the Shogun’s text, placing it in their personal shrines. It would also be the case that the texts, since they are written in the common Japanese

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13 Teresa of Ávila, a 16th century Spanish Catholic mystic, writes with a similar irony-laden humility. Although Teresa’s circumstances are different from Hakuin’s (Teresa, for instance, other than being a woman in the Catholic church, was also under threat from the Spanish inquisition, who suspected her to be a heretic) it would be interesting to explore the rhetorical function of ironic humility in the two mystics’ respective writings.

language could be read aloud by a more educated member of the community, of which the community had more and more of as the 18th century went on, as discussed above. Reading these kana texts out loud would have made them comprehensible to all Japanese. Whereas the educated members of the community, even if they knew how to read the Chinese script out loud, would have to translate it into the common tongue, a much more difficult and less common skill. Hakuin did write, as is typically the case with abbots of important temples, some of his work in Chinese as well, but it is significant that a large majority of his extensive corpus is written in kana and thus in the spoken language of the time. His reasoning in *Hebiichigo* suggests that he made this choice consciously, and his popularity with the general population of Edo period Japan suggests that his strategy was successful.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the sakoku of Japan during the Edo Period creates a misconception that Japan stayed in a semi-medieval state. This opinion could be held, but is probably incorrect, not only for Japan's economic and social developments, but it could also be held, and could equally be wrong, for its cultural developments. Historian Louis G. Perez writes that "even though Japan was almost isolated from the rest of the world . . . , it did not lag behind Europe and the Americas in terms of cultural and artistic development" (70-71). His basis for this is the immense flourishing of not only painting (Hokusai and ukiyo-e), poetry (Bashō and haiku), plays (Chikamatsu and bunraku/kabuki), but also philosophical, aesthetic, and religious thought with Hakuin and Motoori. Perez notes that this culture is mass produced probably in the fifty printing houses in Edo, so that many people of Japan, not just that aristocrats and their courts,



consume the culture being produced in this period. Hakuin, not only a religious teacher, tapped into the interest in art and publications to get his ideas into the hands of a wide, and it turns out, accepting public.

One of the main technological tools at Hakuin's disposal was wood block printing, which had become popular in part to both Toyotomi stealing a printing press and several of the early Tokugawa shoguns seeing it as an important industry.<sup>14</sup> Kenneth Kirkwood, a scholar who argues that the Edo period is a renaissance for Japanese culture, writes that with the growth of a printing industry both texts and paintings became widely disseminated to both the rich and the poor (Kirkwood 96). He notes:

“Subjects of popular devotion predominated . . . But to these were quickly added subjects of allegory, of classical learning, of witchcraft and superstition and of daily life; scenes of the parlor and the cloister, of the shop, the field, the market and the camp; and lastly portraits of famous men, with scenes of court life and princely pageant and ceremony. Thus the new art became a mirror of almost all the life and thoughts of the age.” (Kirkwood 97)

Kirkwood would not be surprised, then, at the mirroring of Hakuin's ideas in the publications of the time. Just as all forms of creative thoughts and critical thinking were preserving and disseminated through the increasingly affordable printing industry, Hakuin's ministry too could use these methods to express his ideas to the population at large.

One of the purposes of this project will be to show that Hakuin's ministry, by utilizing technologically innovations such as woodblock printing, takes both his paintings, but also his writings to the level of mass art. Noël Carroll, when defining mass art says that “it is

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<sup>14</sup> For a more thorough history of the growth of book publishers and sellers in Edo, see Nishiyama's *Edo Culture: Daily Life and Diversions in Urban Japan, 1600-1868* (1997).

the point of mass art to engage mass audiences, and that mandates an inclination toward structures that will be readily accessible virtually on contact and with little effort on the part of audiences with widely differing backgrounds” (190). Throughout this project, I will argue that Hakuin’s ministry relied upon this characteristic of Hakuin’s materials, disseminated on a mass scale, and tried to make Zen teaching manageable and enticing.

The larger portion of the population of Edo Period outside of the samurai, but especially the merchants, who were growing richer, did not prefer the same kind of arts as the old aristocracy like Nō theater. Instead, they were interested in “the color and ostentation of *kabuki*. . . . shorter and often humorous verses such as *haiku* . . . . [and] colorful woodblock prints” (Henshall 60-61). Hakuin’s poetry, songs, and paintings, fit into the popular culture of the time as opposed to being in the tradition of Dōgen, Muso, or Zeami. He tries to be brief and humorous when getting his point across. Or, he adopts a style of folk narrative when discussing Zen Dharma. For instance, in his story called “The Tale of Yūkichi of Takayama,” a boy is possessed by the deity Inari, who speaks through the boy, warning the listeners to be distrustful of Zen masters who distort the truth for their own ego or material gain. It is a straightforward folk story composed by Hakuin, and some scholars of Japanese culture might consider Hakuin’s approach to be a dilution of Japanese (or Zen specifically) artistic style, and they are probably right that it does not have the same subtlety or nuance as Zeami and Dōgen. But, the culture of Japan during the Edo Period was quickly shifting from being motivated by the elite, who prefer (and have the time to appreciate) complexity and subtlety in art and thought, to be motivated by a growing urban and working class, who like their religious truth in a

vibrant and compelling form. Hakuin seems more interested in reaching a wider audience and improving the understanding of proper Zen, than than following or developing the artistic traditions of Japan. In fact, if Hakuin had been more conventional in his approach to the arts,<sup>15</sup> his lessons might not have been as popular or spread as successfully as it had done. Say the least, Hakuin is a product of the cultural mindset at the time.

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<sup>15</sup> Chapter 4 will discuss Hakuin's own struggle with becoming a monk and becoming an artist.

## CHAPTER 3

### “THE REALM WHERE VERBAL EXPRESSION CAN’T REACH”: THEORIES OF ART AS EXPRESSION, INSTRUCTION, AND TRANSFORMATION

“In art, expression itself is truth.” Kitarō Nishida, *Art and Morality* 99

Zen Master Hakuin is probably best known popularly for his creation of the koan “What is the sound of one hand clapping?”. But among appreciators of Japanese art, and Zen art in particular, he is also well-known for his striking and often humorous paintings of bodhisattvas, monks, lay people, shinto deities, and animals. In a letter to a senior monk in 1752, Hakuin writes on behalf of the art of two young daughters of a lay student. Both girls had heard of an artist giving a painting as a gift to two important imperial abbesses.<sup>16</sup> The eldest girl, “preparing herself through a regimen of abstinence and religious practice” (Hakuin, *CD* 79), created embroidery depicting the Life-Prolonging Kannon, a figure that Hakuin himself painted often. According to Hakuin, the image “reveals [the daughter’s] great goodness and purity of heart” (*CD* 79). Hakuin wrote the letter to beseech the senior monk to take both embroidery pieces to the abbesses because he believed that they have value as works expressing the religious character of their

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<sup>16</sup> The imperial abbesses are the daughters of the Emperor.

creators. Hakuin's wording in this letter suggests that he believes that the result of religious practice can have an effect on the product of an artist, making it possible that the artist's religious achievement can be revealed in the artwork. Hakuin's writing this to a senior monk suggests that the issue was not only important, but also legitimate in Hakuin's eyes that these pieces of art should be given to the abbesses.

In this chapter, I will explicate some philosophies of art from both the Western and Eastern traditions that explore the possibility of art as expression. I will ground these philosophical notions into the teachings of Hakuin, checking to see if the proceeding theories help elucidate and support Hakuin's ideas. To make sense of Hakuin's thought about art, I note, art must be expressive of the artists character, instructive between the artist and audience, and transformative for the audience.

Stephen Addiss and Audrey Seo, scholars of Zen art, in their book about Hakuin's art, close a chapter by speculating, that Hakuin "turned to art" to "go beyond words" in the tradition of Zen teaching (92). They quote Hakuin's commentary on *The Blue Cliff Records*, a collection of kōans, where Hakuin is explaining kōan 77 "A Piece of Cake." In this kōan, an unnamed monk asks the great Zen Master Ummon "What is talk beyond Buddhas and Zen masters?" to which Ummon merely says "A piece of cake." What is meant here is not the expression in English "it is a piece of cake," meaning that something is easy, but instead this is a statement saying that an actual piece of cake equals talk beyond Buddhas. Answering this serious religious question in this way seems nonsensical. It would be as if a student asked a professor, "can a lay person reach nirvana?" and the professor responded by saying "a piece of chalk" or better yet, merely

held up a piece of chalk; the answer is vaguely relevant to the context in which the question is asked (the classroom), but is hardly a direct response to a legitimate question.

Hakuin unpacks the meaning of the student's question, saying that "talk beyond Buddhas and Zen masters" means "The realm where verbal explanation cannot reach" and when unpacking the line "A piece of cake" he writes "I can do nothing but praise . How fluent!" (BC 264). Hakuin is not unusual in the Zen tradition to urge his students to move beyond words to try to understand Zen. G. Victor Sogen Hori, a scholar who is here writing about his experience as a Zen monk, says that even though there are what he calls crib sets of answers to Zen kōans, rote memorization is not what is being requested by Zen masters, but instead "true insight into the kōan" is required to properly satisfy the master's questions (29-30). The precise words aren't as important as demonstrating that insight. The master will often ask a series of questions to followup the student's answer to the kōan to discern whether the student truly has seen what the kōan is meant to show, as opposed to merely learning an answer or even the method of answering without insight, like answering with nonsense because you have seen the master respond with nonsense.<sup>17</sup> I am picking up on Seo and Addiss's insinuation to make the argument here that Hakuin saw art as one way to develop and communicate insight and other Zen virtues, like tranquility, sublimity, and profundity. Literalness in words, and perhaps even in art appreciation, is not helpful when engaging in the mystical practice of the Zen tradition; otherwise Ummon's answer about cake is nonsensical. But the Zen tradition does take

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17 The kōan "Gutei Raises a Finger" is about just such a scenario where a student mistakes the master's raising his index finger as the truth. And doesn't realize his mistake until after the master cuts off his finger.

Ummon to be answering his student clearly, although the student may not at first understand the answer because he lacks the proper insight. Hakuin is furthering this idea, that sometimes the presentation of something that does not directly answer a question, is a better answer probably because it teaches the student not to rely so much on their everyday linguistic understanding of the world, but instead to go beyond the question. Hakuin's art is one way that a person can go beyond the questions about Zen practice and look directly at an expression of the formless self of the artist.

In a conversation with Paul Tillich, a Christian theologian and Religious studies scholar, Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, a 20th century Kyoto school philosopher, explains that an artist can express the "Formless Self"<sup>18</sup> in art and that "when a painting expresses the Formless Self, the observer can deepen himself to his own Formless Self; that is, through his act of seeing he can [intend] himself to that very depth" (Tillich and Hisamatsu 91)<sup>19</sup>. This means that an artist, at least a Zen trained artist, expresses in her or his art work the true nature of her or his self, which has no form. Zen philosophy asserts that the self is not eternal or individual in the sense that the self has an identity that on an essential level makes it what it is. Instead, the self is a bundle of memories, volitions, feelings, et cetera, which exist in continuity, but are constantly in a state of flux. The self is without essential qualities because any part of the bundle could fall away or new parts could be added. On a practical or social level, we can identify the self as having a kind of identity, being Brandon Harwood, or you the reader having a name and a history. But, parts of what

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18 The term Formless Self is always capitalized in the transcript of this conversation, so I capitalize it here.

19 The original text has the German word *intendieren*, which I have translated for clarity.

make me up can change: I could have a new memory, sense something different in the world, change my hair color, or in a more extreme case, my personality could change radically, like what happened to the once amicable Phineas Gage when a portion of his brain was damaged, making him irritable and tempestuous. Even if parts of me change, most of my friends and loved ones can still identify me from other people on a street. But from a Buddhist perspective, identifying a person could be similar to identifying a hemp rope, which has had a few of its strands replaced, and whose strands rarely exist across the entire length of the rope. The rope is practically identified as the same rope because of a general trend of continuity, not literal and essential continuation of the exact substance I identify. In other words, in some sense, I am the same person to which my mother gave birth, but in another, more true-sense, according to Buddhism, I am not the same as that person, although I am in a casual line of continuation from that person in a way that I am not with the person I call my sister.

Applying Hisamatsu's claim to a piece of enso, a simple circle painted by monks like Hakuin, Hisamatsu would say that the circle expresses the Formless Self and that Hakuin developed awareness of the Formless Self through his Zen meditation practice. Further, Hisamatsu would say that a viewer of Hakuin's enso, if she or he has seriously practiced Zen Buddhism and attained a certain level of mystical insight,<sup>20</sup> can become more aware of her or his own true nature. This is true even though it is Hakuin's Formless Self being represented in the enso. Neither the respective selves of Hakuin nor the viewer has

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20 Like the ones that Hakuin taught, and which are covered in the chapter entitled "Doing Zen One Handed: Hakuin Ekaku's Art and Ministry as Zen Mystical Practice"



essential or formal qualities, so the Formless Self of Hakuin, when viewed correctly by the audience member undergoing mystical practice, is going to be an expression of that person's formless self too, or at least will be a good analogy to one's own formless self.

According to the progenitor of the Kyoto School and teacher of Hisamatsu, Kitarō Nishida, any piece of art is expressing (*hyōgen*) the “Good” and “True”—those qualities that are ultimately true about the world, from a Buddhist perspective, and that are central to the interests of all people, no matter the historical or cultural context. Wirth summarizes Nishida, saying "Aesthetic sensibility is the expression of the Good in the site (*basho*)<sup>21</sup> of the true" (Wirth 293), meaning that a piece of art can reveal through its depiction of those things that are real (allowing for abstract depictions as well) and experienced in the moment, can be a representation of the Good. Wirth points out that “this is not to say that artistic activity, expressive communication, is the same thing as *hyōgen*, but rather artistic creativity originates in *hyōgen*” (italics removed 292). So Nishida would not say that art is an expression as we see Collingwood say later in this chapter, but instead that creative performance must begin with expression. In the case of some of Hakuin's work, for instance, we could understand that he paints his portrait or his calligraphy with a sense of expressing, or making something “ontologically” “rise to the surface” as the Japanese term *hyōgen* literally means. In the example of the two daughters of Hakuin's lay student, they practiced meditation to prepare themselves for expressing something they wanted to become clear through their embroidery, namely the

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21 The Japanese word 場所, means place, spot, room, or location and is used in everyday discourse.

pure heart and compassion of the Life-Giving Kannon. They began with the expression, but if the work was successful, according to Nishida and Wirth, the beauty of the embroidery is the expression of the Good-ness inherent in compassion itself and that embroidery is the place (basho) where the true is also apparent. When *The Lotus Sutra*, an important Mahayana Buddhist scripture, says that merit is awarded to artists, it might be because of the belief that painting the Buddha or bodhisattvas allows for the goodness or truth of these figures to be communicated in their image. For Hakuin, that communication is successful if the artist, like himself or the two girls, has prepared himself or herself to express the goodness of the Buddha or Bodhisattva.

In his work *Art and Morality*, Nishida wrote “[j]ust as historical cognition can be thought to be knowledge that is a unique event and at the same time includes infinite eternal truth within itself, we can think that eternal truth is contained infinitely within a work of art” (192). What he might mean by this is that thought is simultaneously a particular event but has the possibility of grasping knowledge and truth from an endless set of possibilities, whether it is the near past, distant past, or even possible futures. For instance, a moment in history, like the death of the Japanese Emperor contains both facts and truths about the specific event (who is this emperor, what causes his death, what effects does it have), but it also contains within it a depth of eternal truths (what is death like, what causes it, what are its effects). Art, then, can contain within itself a particular subject matter and also be the place where one can perceive truths about the world. Nishida might imagine unpacking some piece of art like a play by Shakespeare, *Othello* for instance, by saying that the play doesn’t just tell us truths about a fictional world

(Iago is angry with Othello), or even a creative portrayal of actual truths (there was a conflict between Venice and Turkey in 1570), but also truths that are eternal and universal (jealousy is destructive even in the face of virtuous devotion), applicable to everyone in the audience who has the ability to perceive them, regardless of whether they are interested in Iago as a character or the conflict between the Venetians and the Turks.

One question that one might ask is whether the artist has a role to play in the “putting” of that truth into the art work. Hakuin’s philosophy seems to suggest that the artist’s state is important and that the artist’s character is expressed in the artwork, not that a viewer could see eternal truth in any piece of art, but that the art should have been created by a person who can successfully express a character which has been honed through religious, and more particularly for Hakuin, mystical practice. What is meant by character is taken from Greek philosophy of Aristotle and the Greek word *χαρακτηρ*, which means qualities that differentiated one person from another. Aristotle takes this notion also to mean something that can be excellent or defective in abilities and morality. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes that “Virtue, then is a state that decides, consisting in a mean, the mean relative to us, which is defined by reference to reason, that is to say, to the reason by reference to which the prudent person would define it. It is a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency” (Book II Chapter 6 §15 1107a-3 pg 25). This means that a virtue is a quality of personality that is neither overly deficient nor overly excessive, as defined by a judge of such character, one with prudence. Some classic Aristotelian virtues are courage (a balance of fear and impulse) and wit (a balance of vulgarity and boorishness).

In the case of Zen philosophy, character, particularly religious character, would be determined by the virtues (sila) of individuals and perhaps the degree of wisdom (prajna) that they have gleaned from their practice. Mahayana Buddhism, in particular, posits six perfections: generosity, morality, patience, diligence, meditation, and wisdom. In addition to this there are measureless states, like loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. Hisamatsu also ascribes certain states similar to the description of the above to artworks, like simplicity, tranquility, asymmetry (an expression of wisdom). In the case of Hakuin or some of his students, their meditation hones their character, encouraging virtues like compassion and developing understanding of dharma, which is ultimate truth for Buddhism. Someone's character from an Aristotelian and Buddhist perspective is the culmination of actions. For Buddhism in particular, this could develop over many lifetimes and also includes thoughts, feelings, and intentions. Virtue is necessarily the result of a person's actions, and then a person's character guides a person's future actions. The Four Noble Truths given by Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha, seem guided by a theory about virtue—suffering is caused by the perpetual thirsting after transient objects, but we can train through the eight-fold path to overcome this thirst by blowing out the illusion of the separate self. That emphasis on training and developing one's character to no longer cling to the self, is motivated by the idea that one's actions can change the nature of one's self and so change the motivational forces upon one's future actions.

When discussing the problem of artistic forgeries, Denis Dutton argues that an artwork is representative of an artist's performance. It is more intuitively clear to say that

a dancer or an actor's artistic work is a performance because we witness the performance simultaneously as we witness the art—i.e. the performance is the object of contemplation (called a ballet or play) for an audience. It is less immediately clear that a painting by Hakuin on a scroll before us is the result of a human performance, but Dutton says that “[a]s performances, works of art represent the ways in which artists solve problems, overcome obstacles, make do with available materials” (102). So, just as a dancer must develop a performance through practice, and create a performance that uses this amount of movement or that gesture, a painter too must make decisions and perform the results of their practice, contemplation, and training on the painted scroll to create, incidentally, a longer lasting work, at least when compared to a single dance performance. For Dutton, the fact that an artwork represents a particular artist is the nature of the problem of forgery: the issue is not whether the forged work has or does not have the formal qualities that make it an artwork, but whether the art work represents the performance of the artist we believe it is. Dutton's insight is helpful for supporting Hakuin's belief about art. An artwork, although it can be isolated for contemplation of its form, as Dutton says (102), is an artifact of actions and decisions that a person performed, so it is a by-product of human action. A Chinese Buddhist story from the Ch'an tradition<sup>22</sup> that should have been well-known to Hakuin is of a famous artist who is called to the Emperor's court. The Emperor asks the painter for a painting of bamboo and says that he will pay the artist

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22 The word Zen and Ch'an both mean meditation. The two traditions are considered a single tradition, however, there are enough differences between the two, that I will use Ch'an when speaking about Zen Buddhism in China and Zen when referring to the Zen tradition in Japan.

handsomely. The artist accepts the payment up front and leaves the city, never being heard from for five years. After five years, the emperor's guards find the artist, and he is brought back to the Emperor, who is furious that the artist, now seeming to be a thief, has not produced the commissioned painting. The artist says that he is prepared to create the painting and asks for his supplies to be brought to him. He lays out his scroll and mixes ink, picks up his brush with a flair, and strikes the scroll with a flurry of strokes as if his brush were a sword. After a few brief seconds the artist presents the emperor with the scroll, portraying the most vivid painting of bamboo the Emperor has ever seen. The Emperor commends the artists, but asks "if you could create such a masterpiece in only a few seconds, why did you make me wait five years?" The artist, in true Zen fashion, responds "it took five years of becoming bamboo to paint my self." Dutton's concept of art is exemplified in this story as the artist's work is not separated from the performance that made it, and an artist's performance, his poise, problem solving and use of materials is essential to the creation of the final product, which only afterward, perhaps from a formalist perspective, can someone treat it as an object of contemplation. Any sort of abstracting of the piece from the artist's performance is just that, an abstraction from the actual performance by the artist that creates the art piece.

But this alone won't solve the problem of how it is that a person's essence can be perceived in art because Dutton's point only means that we can see evidence that someone made the work, the direction of the brushstroke, its density, and maybe even the speed at which it was drawn across the page. Even if Dutton is correct, it does not necessarily mean that we could tell what the artist was like, let alone what his character is

like. We might be able to say that because of similarity in a set of work performance, there is an identifiable style to a particular artist's performances. For instance, one might say that the dynamic faces on Hakuin's painted subjects or the single stroke of the brush from right to left to create the buddha's mantel on his portraits of awakened men and women are features that make many of Hakuin's paintings identifiable as his. But, the concern about style does not come into this discussion in part because there is only a little disagreement about which works are Hakuin's and which are not.<sup>23</sup> So, even if we agree that the artist is necessary for the creation of a piece of art, we will need a theory of expression to describe how it is possible that something of the artist is communicated in the work.

Two painters of the early 20th century, Ben Shahn and Wassily Kandinsky, both presented a description of the artistic process that asserts that the artist's particular context and nature is expressed in the creation of an artwork. Shahn says that painting "is rather the wholeness of thinking and feeling within an individual; it is partly his time and place; it is partly his childhood or even his adult fears and pleasures, and it is very greatly his thinking what he wants to think" (34). He means that the painting itself somehow contains some qualities that make up who the artist is, which can include parts that don't get expressed otherwise like "the insurgent in a Goya" or "the suppliant in a Masaccio" (34). So when a painter paints, according to Shahn, it is natural that the historical context, his thoughts and feelings, his life history, and his ideals influence the

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23 Kameyama Takurō's *Hakuin zenji no ga o yomu* addresses some concerns about artworks that are typically taken to be Hakuin's but are in fact fakes emulating Hakuin's style.

painting. But more than that, Shahn's stance is that the painting is the whole of the person in another form.

Thomas Kasulis, when describing Shintō philosophy, discusses how in Japan there is a indigenous belief that all objects have a holographic quality, meaning that the entire world is reflected in every object (20-21).<sup>24</sup> So, a tree, a kami<sup>25</sup>, the sacred rope wrapped around the tree, and the lay person who is bowing in reverence before the tree are all reflections of one another. Kasulis writes “the poet alone does not write a poem about the mountain mist. More precisely, the mountain mist, the Japanese words, and the poet write the poem together” (26). What Kasulis means here is that from a Japanese perspective, the natural world, the artist, and the medium which the artist uses work together to create the final product. If any one piece of this relationship were different, then the poem would be different. Shahn's assertion is of a similar sort—the artist's work is an expression not only of the artist's intellectual and emotional state, but also the surrounding world and the medium within which the artist works. If Shahn is correct, then we can discern much more than the artist's decisions from a work of art; we can see reflected in the work of art the wholeness of the artist and his or her context. Taken a step further, one might say that after the poem is written, it too becomes a part of the relationship, changing the mountain mist (one's perception of it now includes its appearance in the poem), the Japanese words (this is especially true in philology where the recognized use of certain words in a poem might change its meaning in common

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24 This has similarities with the Buddhist description of Indra's web from the Avatamsaka (Flower Ornament) Sutra.

25 A spirit, soul, god, or even demon or ghost.



usage), and the poet (who is now someone who wrote a poem about mountain mist in Japanese).

Kandinsky has a similar stance as Shahn's in that the painter is overcome with an inner (and he says spiritual) necessity, a drive of personality to create a work of expression that is a product of style from the person's time and culture, and to become a champion of art (51-52). By champion of art, Kandinsky means that the artist is not only driven to create for oneself or one's culture alone, but also for the development and furthering of the entire body of art since the first work of art. Kandinsky's description of the artist not only fits nicely with Shahn's, but also seems to resonate with Hakuin's belief. When Hakuin describes the meditation practices of the young embroiderers getting ready to make the images of Kannon, or when Hakuin shows almost feverish interest in getting his own paintings printed and disseminated,<sup>26</sup> he implies that there is some connection to the drive to create a good work and the interest in spiritual development.

For R. G. Collingwood, any creative act is an expression, and creative works are the products or manifestation of that expression. He makes a stark distinction between craft, which is made according to some design and plan, whether in a literal sense or metaphorical sense, for some particular aim. For instance, a chair is typically made according to a design that is known to make chairs stable and also sturdy because it is made with a purpose—for people to sit in them, or at least look like the object in which people typically sit, in the case of chairs that are merely decorative.

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<sup>26</sup> This will be discussed more in the next chapter.

Craft does not just apply to works that have a practical purpose but instead can also be applied to works that are supposed to do something like teach or create certain emotions. Collingwood wrote that “art proper, as the expression of emotion, differs sharply and obviously from any craft whose aim it is to arouse emotion” (113). As the expression of emotion, art allows the artist to fully become conscious of an emotion in all of its individual peculiarity. Further, Collingwood says that it is a mistake to think that creativity is the creation of a representation of emotion, like an artist that paints an entire landscape red to represent his anger or aggression. This is too simplistic, according to Collingwood, and is more like craft, because it seeks to describe an emotion and maybe even to evoke it, which can only be a general kind of an emotion not the specific, individualized one in a genuine work of art. Lastly, the creative expression is not a kind of catharsis that gets the expressed emotion “out of the system” the way crying could alleviate mourning. Instead, Collingwood says that creative practice and the creative work are the expression of an emotion unknown to the artist, and that the creative expression uncovers that emotion, making it clearer to the artist in its peculiarities and its individualization, and allows the artist the ability to express that emotion for the artist to hear her or his expression (118).

Hakuin’s philosophy does not correspond well with Collingwood’s for a couple of reasons. One: Hakuin and his students are not described as coming to understand their enlightenment in the process of painting. Hakuin’s writings suggest that mystical practice is the preparation for the creative work, not that the embroidery or painting functions as purifying practices for the hearts or spirits of his practitioners. Two: Hakuin seems to

think that the creative practice of his followers and his own creative practice has a purpose—to communicate Zen principles and the character of the painter, as well as to assist the recipient with problems in life or Zen practice. According to Collingwood’s theory, Hakuin and his students’ work can only be a kind of craft which Collingwood calls magical. Magical craft, for Collingwood, is a work that is intended to evoke certain kinds of feelings for the practical benefit of that emotion. For instance, a national anthem could be understood as a kind of magical craft that is intended to evoke national pride and create solidarity among the people of the nation for which it is written. If I were going to stick with Collingwood’s theory, I would have to say that Hakuin is not creating works of art, but instead is creating magical craft with the intention of evoking devotion or encouraging discipline in his students. This would be an interesting position, and should be thought through in another paper. One reason to dismiss Collingwood for now is that I am following in the footsteps of Hisamatsu, Nishida, and the Japanese tradition generally, who understand the work of Zen artists as art, not as craft. In fact, Hisamatsu includes certain mediums, like pottery and flower arranging, which might be considered craft by Collingwood’s theory and perhaps even many more philosophers of art in Europe and the United States. Collingwood’s dismissal of some creative work does not fit well within Hakuin’s ideas nor with Japanese philosophy of art (although we will see later in this chapter that Motoori might also dismiss art like that of Hakuin’s because of what he calls its ugliness and vulgarity). That being said, Hakuin fits with Collingwood in his personal approach to art, which was what he calls grass-style because it is untrained and painted as pure expression, without thought about the final product or adherence to a school’s style

or rules; this is also a part of the problems Motoori has with his work. So rather than explain away the conflicts they have, I will set aside Collingwood, except to hold onto his assertion that an artist gains something from the creative process other than the creative work itself. It is not an argumentative necessity that artists learning about themselves in the process of creation need be connected to the idea that an artwork must be disconnected from purpose, plan, or use. While engaging in creative practice, artists incorporate aspects of themselves that is evidenced by the created work. For Hakuin, the part of oneself that can be expressed is a part that is influenced by the mystical practices of Zen Buddhism, that is, one's spiritual character which is developed through mystical practice and expressed in the creative work.

As we will see later in this chapter, saying that Hakuin's art is expressive of qualities that are ineffable is problematic. This problem exists whether one is saying that the art is ineffable because the qualities are derived from mystical practice or experiences, which are often ineffable according to many theorists in the tradition of William James, or whether one is saying that the art is expressive of emotional states, which are ineffable in the sense that each person's emotional state is uniquely theirs. It is problematic as philosopher John Spackman points out either because there are two things one could mean by ineffable—semantic or communicative (304). Communicative ineffability means that a concept cannot be conveyed through words (e.g. "I can't even describe what happened."), and semantic means that the words do not capture the truth of it (e.g. "Seeing what he had done felt like getting punched in the stomach." This is many cases is only an approximation or a simile, whereas the actual experience is not fully explained in

these words). Spackman holds that people “possess demonstrative concepts that can capture the expressive qualities they experience and hence for saying that expressive qualities are semantically and, in a restricted sense, communicatively effable” (310). This is true for Spackman despite inconsistency between people’s understanding or between exposure to a work’s strongly or weakly fine-grained distinction of emotions (e.g. differentiating between grief and despair as opposed to just marking a piece as expressing sadness) (308). Further, comparisons of someone’s description of an expressive quality might not correspond completely from work to work, perhaps because “the expressive qualities of different works have at least the potential to depend quite closely on the different formal features of those works” (Spackman 312). In other words, I might say that both Hakuin’s *White-Robed Kannon* and *Otafuku Makes Dango* express serenity or tranquility, but it is in the face of adversity in Kannon and in the face of banality in Otafuku because of the formal and iconographic elements at play regarding how one typically depicts each figure (Kannon as a protective diety, Otafuku as a simple woman). It is also possible, according to Spackman’s reading of Kandinsky, that even if the person does not have the knowledge about certain emotions, they could still be impacted by the expression of “novel emotions, emotions not previously known to the audience” (312). Since emotions are such that they can be difficult to put into words, learning about novel emotions might be best served through expressive arts. For instance, Hakuin, teaching about equanimity to a young student, might best be able to show this unique state by demonstrating in his portrait of Kannon, sitting on a cliff, with a very slender support. The face of Kannon expresses poise, equanimity, and being at peace, despite her

precarious position, the waves crashing below, threatening to topple over her fragile perch. But, Kannon also looks at a lovely and bare ikebana that should be in someone's tokonoma. Hakuin, as opposed to describing the emotion that the student strives for, expresses it in his subject matter.

Philosophical pragmatist John Dewey's theory of art is often compared to Collingwood as being an alternate expressive theory of art.<sup>27</sup> But, Dewey's explanation about the expressive quality of art is different enough from an merely an alternative to Collingwood's theory that it might avoid some of the features that prevented Collingwood from supporting Hakuin's position about the nature of his and his students' art. Dewey says that art is not just an expression but, "an experience." For Dewey, experience is the sensory, emotional, and thoughtful activity of life. One has experiences when one walks down the street, thinks of a loved one, eats a gluten-free bagel, brushes one's teeth, and so on. "An experience" is an event where the material of experiences is consummated or brought to completion, e.g. the finishing of a book, game, or conversation. Some events or objects in life, according to Dewey, become an experience by seeming to incorporate all phenomenon into that event or object. For instance, he says that a fight with a friend could be an experience of the entire relationship (in this instance, most likely as bad, or at least conflicted). Another example is a dinner in Paris, which could seem like the culmination or fulfillment of all culinary experiences up to that

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<sup>27</sup> Dewey's training and support of pragmatism perhaps put him in another philosophical camp from Collingwood entirely. Dewey's work on art as experience met with much criticism from his fellow pragmatists because it was an abandonment of pragmatism for continental Hegelianism.

point (Dewey 37). Creative work is this sort of event or object, according to Dewey. A good work of art has within it all parts in a harmonized whole; it culminates into experience and fulfills it in itself. For instance, Dewey might say that Bernini's Ecstasy of St Teresa (18th c CE; Italy) is an experience culminating experiences of joy, religiosity, sexual pleasure, or some other relevant experiences.

When applying Dewey's theory, it is useful to discuss not only the creative activity of the artist, but also the form of the artifact, and the reception and cultural context of the audience. It does a more satisfactory job of explaining Hakuin's position because it doesn't limit the distinction of art only to those objects that don't have a plan or practical purpose. Further, Dewey's position suggests that both the work of art and the reception of it by the audience has some greater value other than enjoyment, which Hakuin seems to believe as well. But, it is unclear at first what kind of experience Hakuin's art or his students' art might be. A possible subject to explore the experience of Hakuin's work is his work on the enigmatic and jolly figure of Budai. Hakuin uses what is called the grass brush style, the most fluid and popular of the classical styles, to draw with brush on silk the figure of a large man, whose smiling face peers out from the folds of a bag he holds in front of him. The figure is captured in some sort of playful mood, like he is playing peek-a-boo with the viewer. The largest Japanese character on the bag, 寿 (ことぶき kotobuki) means longevity. Dewey would probably say that this work, in so far as it is art, is an experience; it is complete in itself and it culminates the feeling of joy, playfulness, and long life. This is Budai, a Japanization of his Chinese name; he is also called Hotei in Japan. He is also called the laughing Buddha, a manifestation of Maitreya Buddha, who

is the Buddha of the future. Maitreya is an anticipated figure in both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism because he comes to renew the effectiveness of teaching the dharma (religious truth) that has begun to fade since Siddhartha Gautama's original teaching. Even for someone who doesn't know the background of Budai, Hakuin's work is probably striking and can succeed in evoking an experience, particularly one of playfulness and maybe even a connection with Hotei as a someone to feel close to. With further understanding, according to Dewey, an experience could culminate in more experiences, but the initial encounter with the product of creativity can still be an experience. Dewey also uses another term to describe the phenomena of an experience—integral expression, which seems to have the connotation that the art work is transmitting some kind of information in the object itself. As one comes to know Hakuin's work of Budai, one's culmination develops into an understanding that Budai is both a serious expression of Buddhist practice and also a playful satirizing of Buddhist practice. Further, since from a Mahayana Buddhist perspective, Buddhism teaches dharma, which is truth itself, then Budai is satirizing or being playful about all of life. Yet, the paradox between serious study and playful disregard, which is evident in Hakuin's letters and the story of his life as well as other great Zen teachers, like Hui Neng, is rarely resolved to mean that the seriousness of study is not pointless, but instead that the playful or mischievous activity of some Zen masters is intimately connected with the goal of teaching mystical insight, which sometimes requires, from a Zen perspective, abandoning the dogmatic following of traditional practice and even traditional belief. Budai is like the finger



pointing at the moon, saying “this is awakening” meaning the moon not the finger that points towards it.

Dewey writes about Leibniz’s theory of metaphysics, that all of the universe is organic and is “constituted ad infinitum of other organisms” (Dewey 212). Dewey goes on to say that this might not be true about the world, but that it is true about art, “that every part of a work of art is potentially at least so constituted” (212). Dewey is explaining that in a work of art, there is a unity, where each piece of the work is connected to the rest of the work in the whole. The work is complete and creates a kind of world unto itself. Leibniz’s theory is similar to the description of the universe in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. This theory is called Indra’s web or net, and it holds that all of the world is an expanse of filaments, when filaments connect, there are reflective nodes, like drops of dew on the web. Inside the reflection on each node is all the other nodes and filaments, so that every instance of the world is a reflection of every other instance of the world.

A predecessor to Collingwood’s and Dewey’s expressive theories can help to demonstrate some of the philosophical consequences of Hakuin’s position. Leo Tolstoy, in his writing about the work of art, presents what is sometimes called the contagion theory of art. Tolstoy asserts that a work of art is successful when a certain emotion is transmitted through that work. For instance, a storyteller sitting with an audience around a campfire describes his encounter with a wolf. Tolstoy says that this storyteller could be called an artist if the audience member experiences the same fear that the storyteller experienced (122). The storyteller uses descriptive details like the smell in the air, the

whistle of the wind through the pines, and perhaps even the sinking feeling in his stomach as he spots the wolf to embellish the story. These embellishment are evocative and can draw the listener into the story with the purpose of getting the listener to feel the same thing that the storyteller felt in that encounter with the wolf—which is perhaps a mixture of fear and sublimity. Tolstoy’s position was stronger than Hakuin’s was since Tolstoy wrote that the art is successful only when the exact emotion that the artist is trying for is expressed. Hakuin, on the other hand, would probably assert that a student could perceive a variety of emotions in an artwork. Further, it is unclear whether that emotion must be shared or merely glimpsed, for Hakuin to believe that there was a connection between the artist, artwork, and audience member. So, in the case of the girls’ embroidery, their mystical practice and their purity of heart comes through according to Hakuin, but the Imperial Abbesses might also see the sincerity or hardworking nature of the girls, which Hakuin would probably believe is successfully grasping the pieces. What would need to be the case for Tolstoy’s theory to fill in the argumentative gap for Hakuin is that each of these qualities would also have to be emotional. In Tolstoy’s storyteller example, fear is clearly an emotion (arguably one of the most basic emotions), but purity of heart or achievement in meditation are less clearly emotions. Instead, what would have to be the case is that virtues of someone’s character would have to be “contagious” in the way that Tolstoy thinks emotions are, or at least perceptual.

It is unclear what Tolstoy meant by an emotion. During his time, emotion was often conflated with feeling, where a feeling is the bodily sensation associated with certain states. Some examples of feelings are hair standing up from fear, or the sense that you

will be sick if your beloved is gone for too long, et cetera. Current debates concerning emotion vary from theorists that say that emotions are merely a response to brief neurological events that are finished in about 100 milliseconds to theorists that say that emotions are intimately related to judgements about one's engagement in the world. Robert Solomon is in this second camp, and I believe that his theory fits nicely with not only Tolstoy's but also Hakuin's. Solomon makes the claim that emotions are more than just neurological moments or propositional judgments, but are instead engaged with objects in the world. For instance, love or hatred of a certain kind of food is desire for or repulsion by that food (80). It is possible that I could have a propositional attitude about the food; for instance, I could think that spinach is good for me and therefore I want to eat it, and I can have a pleasant bodily reaction while eating Palak Paneer which informs my judgement to value it, but the emotion is the judgment: I love spinach. This does not mean that an emotion is really just thoughts, according to Solomon. He points out that judgements happen with thoughts, but that they could have happened without thought, for instance hundreds of kinesthetic judgements that keep me from tripping over furniture or generally falling off balance (82). Judgements are also capable of creating emotions without a stimulus (83)—I can work myself into a rage over something that happened years ago, or I can calm myself in the face of tremendous adversity. For Solomon, what is the defining feature of emotion is the judgement, which is typically engaged with the world, particularly with objects within the world. For instance, if I am experiencing fear, it is fear **of** an object that I judge to be harmful to me somehow—a dog is approaching me quickly. If I change my judgement and judge that the object is not harmful, my

emotion changes—what if the dog is wagging its tail and I judge that it must be friendly, I would no longer fear it, but instead welcome an interaction with the dog. One way that this could fit into Tolstoy’s understanding of emotion is that the audience listening to the storyteller’s story of the frightening wolf are not experiencing fear because they are not judging that the storyteller’s story is harmful, but instead the wolf in the story is harmful and they have entered the world of the story that the storyteller has shaped. In this world, they have a fictive emotion, albeit one that might make them look over their respective shoulders when they head home.

Commenting on Tolstoy, Dewey summarizes Tolstoy’s theory of art as “that which unites” (208), meaning connects the artist with the perceiver through the medium of the art, a medium that Dewey says acts as a mediator (207). This is Dewey connecting Tolstoy to his own theory of art, but showing that the artist, at least according to their views, is ultimately connecting, putting forth an expression or arranging an experience for the viewer in order to unite with them. In the case of Hakuin, this connection is to his students for the purpose of teaching them the dharma and also to develop their spiritual virtues like loving-kindness or discipline.

One might come to Zen Buddhism with the expectation that it views emotions with suspicion or that the practice of Zen seeks to reduce or eliminate the emotions for the sake of wisdom and equanimity. But as Graham Parkes explicates in his comparative work concerning Hakuin’s and Nietzsche’s writings about emotions, one sees that Hakuin’s Zen Buddhism, in part due to its being influenced by Daoism, has an important place for the emotions. Parkes notes that in the *Zhuangzi*, Zhuangzi tells a story of his

mourning the loss of his wife, but when Huizi finds him, he is “pounding on a tub and singing” (115). When questioned about his impropriety, Zhuangzi says “When she first died, do you think I didn't grieve like anyone else?” Then Parkes says “The implication is that he was—so deeply, indeed, that it was now issuing from him in song and rhythms of the body” (Parkes 216). Although I believe Parkes assertion might be true for Hakuin’s Zen tradition, and perhaps for the Daoist position, but another possible interpretation is that Zhuangzi is saying that he used to mourn but has learned better. Zhuangzi goes on to say that after grieving like anyone else, he thought back to the beginning of time and the point before his wife had a body or spirit and then thought that a change happened to give her body and spirit and then after another change, she is dead, “just like the progression of the four seasons, spring, summer, fall, winter” (Zhuangzi 115). Zhuangzi ends not with saying that his music making is connected to his wife, but instead to say that following after her body sobbing “would show that I don’t understand anything about fate” (115). This concludes on the rational note that Parkes is arguing against, where the lesson is not that music or expression or even the emotions are an important part of the process, but instead that they are a miscalculation about the truth of the existence. A similar incident is mentioned several times in Roman Stoic Epictetus’ *Encheridion* where he mentions that one should treat even the death of a spouse or child as if one has “given it back” (Section 11, pg. 290). The general lesson from Epictetus about mourning can be taken from Section 3, 11, 15, 16, and 26. Taken together they say that mourning is the result not of the death, but the incorrect judgement that the person (he also compares this to breaking or losing jugs, cups and other objects) is not one’s own. A similar interpretation could be

made about Zhuangzi, where his music-making nor his first experiencing of grief was beneficial for his eventual understanding.

Although his interpretation concerning *Zhuangzi* might not be definitive, Parkes goes on to show that Wang Bi, an ancient commentator about Daoist texts, says that whereas a sage's spirit is superior to ordinary people, the sage's emotions are the same as ordinary person's and responds to life's situations accordingly. Parkes writes "For the Daoists, to be ruled or ensnared by the emotions is to fail to realize one's true humanity—and yet to become devoid of emotion altogether is not to be fully human either" (216), meaning that there must be a balance between emotions and being caught by emotions. Hakuin inherits this position through Hui Neng's *Platform Sutra* which states that "the very passions are themselves enlightenment (bodhi)" (148), meaning that when one practices the Dharma of prajna (wisdom) then one's very body and being become that of the Buddha—the everyday life of the person becomes informative about Dharma. In fact, Hakuin, according to Parkes uses emotion as a vital aspect of Zen practice (Parkes 228). He takes for evidence of this a passage where Hakuin uses the imagery of a warrior going to war, summoning courage and valor in the face of fear and sorrow: "behave as a valiant man would, when surrounded by a host of enemies. Mount your steed, raise your lance, and, with a good showing of your courageous spirit, make up your mind to attack, destroy, and annihilate the enemy" (ZMH 65). Hakuin's description is a metaphor, as the battlefield is the self and meditation and study the means of battle. Still, Parkes assertion has some merit as Hakuin does not shy away, nor did Hui Neng, Rinzai, or Zhuangzi, from using emotionally laden examples, stories, or metaphors to describe the sort of emotions

necessary for proper Zen practice. So, full extirpation of the passions was probably not what Hakuin prescribed for his students. Nor, did he prescribe becoming entrenched by the emotions. Instead, Hakuin probably thought that some emotions were useful on the course to awakening, perhaps because the emotions were natural responses to the world, neither detached nor attached.

Asian Studies Philosopher, Peter D Hershock, explicates a Buddhist position on emotions, especially those divisions influenced by Nagarjuna and the Mādhyamika school, writing that emotions are “relational transformations through which the direction and qualitative intensities of our inter-dependence are situationally negotiated, enhanced, and revised” (252). By this, Hershock means that at the core, the universe is empty of essential qualities (*sunyata*) and that all things are interdependent and co-originated (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and so emotions as they occur in everyday life are inter-dependent with other conscious beings, involving changes from one state to another, with its conative and evaluative nature occurring through relationship with others. For instance, Hershock might explain that in the experience of *satori*, Hakuin develops this sort of awareness based on his own state, which involves people like his mother, brother, et cetera as influences, and also the lineage of the teacher which verified Hakuin’s awakening. Hakuin’s state is not a solitary instance, but instead in relation with others inter-dependently. But especially for people who have achieved a certain level of awakening, it is not appropriate to say they have an emotion but instead “[t]hrough the practice of realizing no-self, the experience of having an emotion thus gives way, first, to being continuous with an emotional situation and, then, to realizing presence as the

situational improvisation of meaning” (Hershock, 255 emphasis removed), meaning that there isn’t an ego who possesses this or that emotion, but instead the person, as a distinguishable entity in a type of Buddhist rationality that is and is not metaphysically true, is in a relationship that involves experiencing certain kinds of emotions in relation with other sentient beings.<sup>28</sup>

Feleppa asserts that “For Hakuin, meditation should entail the full gamut of emotional responses, from profound doubt and angst to giddiness and bursts of laughter” (272) following in the path etched by Parkes and Hershock, suggesting that the importance of the Great Doubt and inquisitiveness is fueled by one’s emotion, and that cutting off one’s emotion is more in line with faulty buddhist teachings like the “bumps on the log” Soto school that encouraged dispassionate dead-sitting.

Shin’ichi Hisamatsu, the Kyoto School philosopher discussed earlier concerning the formless self, was also Rinzai Zen Buddhist monastic trained and was a renowned calligrapher in the latter part of his life. Hisamatsu’s interests merge when he wrote his seminal work *Zen and the Fine Arts*, which examined the philosophy of Zen that undergirds much of the medieval and pre-modern fine arts of Japan. He writes that many of the arts of Japan have been infused with Buddhist principles, starting with the transmission of such arts from China, where they were already influenced by Zen (called Ch’an in Chinese), and continued to be practiced and perfected by Zen monks (17-19). Hisamatsu holds that the fine arts of Japan have the seven marks of Zen arts, and so could

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28 For a summary and comparison of Hershock, Parkes, and psychological/neurological studies about emotions see Robert Feleppa’s “Zen Emotion and Social-Engagement” 2009.



be said to have a Zen influence. Hisamatsu also shows how each of the fine arts—painting, calligraphy, flower arranging, pottery, architecture, gardening, wood carving, embroidery, kimono-making, noh performance—have each had major figures who were Zen Buddhist monks (Plates 1-276). Hisamatsu’s seven marks are asymmetry, simplicity, austere sublimity, naturalness, subtle profundity, freedom from attachment, and tranquility. The reason why this form emerged, according to Hisamatsu, is that the early Zen practitioners created art to express their experience of contemplation, kensho, and satori (53).<sup>29</sup> Hisamatsu even makes the claim in his analysis of fine arts that artists, when they are outspoken about being a part of a different Buddhist tradition, are honorary Zen Buddhists. This kind of tradition-centrism may be a problem philosophically, but it has not hurt Hisamatsu’s reputation, perhaps because the idea of religious exclusivity is not as prevalent in Japan. In other words, it is not unheard of for a Japanese person to worship without perceived conflict at Buddhist, Shinto, and Christian sacred sites, so Hisamatsu saying that an artist is basically Zen Buddhist is seen not as an insult or incorrect, but instead inclusive.

Hisamatsu applies his marks to various Zen artists, including Hakuin. Concerning Hakuin’s *Bodhidharma*, Hisamatsu says that it is an excellent example of both asymmetry (30) and austere sublimity (32). By asymmetry, Hisamatsu means that the

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<sup>29</sup> Hisamatsu includes kensho, I believe, because it fits the description of kensho, but the use of that word for the earliest Zen monks of the Kamakura Period (circa 8th-9th c CE), may be anachronistic because the word does not become prevalent until Hakuin in the Edo period (17th-19th c CE). The word exists in the Chinese (jianxing) around the 7th century, but doesn’t become commonly used in writing until Hakuin. The Japanese word uses the same kanji 見性.

scroll has most of its markings on the lower left corner, with Bodhidharma looking up into mostly empty space. Whereas symmetry is associated with perfection, balance, and images of paradise, in Buddhist painting, the asymmetrical suggests imperfection. One might think that this is not a flattering or appropriate way to depict a great Zen master like Bodhidharma, who is responsible for bring Zen to China where it thrived, but instead Hisamatsu claims that there is a freedom associated with being “unconcerned with perfection” (30) and this freedom allows Zen art to represent the imperfect and even the worldly (the opposite of holy paradisaal worlds) as the going “beyond imperfection and holiness” (30). This going beyond is not only a worthwhile representation, it is a central one especially for a figure like Bodhidharma who was supposed to have responded to the Emperor of Wu that there is nothing holy about Buddhism, despite the Emperor believing in an paradisaal Buddhist land where his good deeds will be repaid. Hakuin’s *Bodhidharma* also represents austere sublimity, or what Hisamatsu also calls “lofty dryness”, in the gaze of Bodhidharma, who stares up at calligraphic script that translates as “see your own nature and become the Buddha.” Bodhidharma stares directly into the sublime nature of reality (dharma) with such intensity that he is undistracted, but that ferocity evident in his facial expression makes him a figure of strict adherence to Buddhist practice, and so austere. Hisamatsu says about this kind of beauty that

“‘becoming dried’ means the culmination of an art, a penetration to the essence by a master, which is beyond the reach of the beginner and the immature. Such is the quality of eternal life, which, far from ending, is without either birth or death; it is an inexhaustible wellspring, which is equally free from flooding, stopping and drying up.” (31)

Hisamatsu means by this that a painting like *Bodhidharma* shows the quality a master gains through age and experience; it is both dry and severe, but is fulfilling both in itself and to others for its wellspring of wisdom. Bodhidharma, Hakuin, and any other figure who has gained insight into the truth of the self and reality through rigorous practice, going beyond dichotomy, have something to express even in subtle gestures like pointing, painting, or gazing upwards. Works of art, can act as a vehicle to express the insight of awakened people or even the progress of someone on their way to understanding the wisdom and compassion at the center of Mahayana Buddhist teaching. The two little girls that Hakuin mentions in his letter, might not have the austere sublimity that Hakuin has, but they have, through mystical practice, prepared their formless self to at least express their sincere hearts through their embroidery work. If this is correct, then creative practice to a Zen mystic like Hakuin and his students, is an extension not only of their religious development, but also as a tool for them to express an ineffable realization to the audience members that looks upon their work.

Norinaga Motoori, a scholar of aesthetics and Japanese culture in the 18th century, wrote about the power of works of art to move people, and perhaps even change them. In an essay about an aesthetic concept called 物の哀れ *mono no aware* (the moving power of things), Motoori writes that it is because of a person's understanding about the nature of things (物) that he can be deeply moved (172) and that "[w]ithout feeling thoughts, songs (*uta*) do not come about" (173). He corrects a misconception at the time that *aware* (哀れ) only refers to sorrow (174), insisting with reference to many passages and poems

in Japanese literary history, that aware can refer to many articulatable emotions and even ones that cannot be stated into words, but instead exasperations like “ah!” and “oh!”. But to be stirred or moved by the moving power of things, a person must have some knowledge or understanding about the world, “deep in his heart” (184). The word heart here is 心 kokoro, which means both heart and mind simultaneously in Japanese; the two are not distinct for Motoori, nor most Japanese thinkers. Indeed, according to Motoori, the ability to be moved by objects in the world<sup>30</sup> is a special skill, that Motoori describes as having a heart (185). Further, one is not merely moved by objects in the natural world, Motoori claims that knowledge of mono no aware can change the behavior of the person. He writes “When mono no aware becomes so overwhelming, an excess of thoughts springs forth in words of its own accord. The words that come out spontaneously whenever one is overwhelmed by mono no aware inevitably prolong themselves and become ornate lines. Soon they are songs (uta)” (188). This means that being moved by things either in the real world or very commonly, according to Motoori, in poems and literature, causes a person to express themselves as well. This expression however cannot be “fully articulated in word by saying things just as they are,” but instead can be “expressed with the help of metaphors taken from the realm of things seen and heard” (190). This expression by itself is not fulfilling, however. So, “one finds

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30 Most commonly, the objects of the world that are the most capable of moving, are natural objects, like animals, plants, wind, stars, et cetera.

consolation by making others listen to his song. When others listen and they are moved, then one's heart brightens up considerably" (192).<sup>31</sup>

When discussing paintings, Motoori reveals that he is extremely formalist, saying that "it is because of the presence of specific rules in each school that paintings become appealing" (135) because just trying to imitate an object, Motoori believes creates bad painting, meaning that it, ironically, doesn't look like the object. So, he believes that the rules of a school, as opposed to mere imitation, and especially just imitating Chinese style paintings, which Motoori seems to suggest is commonly done during his time (134), can give the form to make something appealing like using clouds to give perspectives on houses or drawing contour lines that don't exist in reality but differentiation objects pleasantly in paintings. Despite my use of Motoori's theory, it should be noted that he might not have thought highly of Hakuin or at least the style of Hakuin's painting, writing "Generally, among the many paintings, the most annoying and unpleasant are Indian-ink drawings painted shabbily, Chinese pine trees, the thick lines of the folds of people's garments, and also images of Bodhidharma, Hotei, and Fukurokuju" (134). All three of these figures are featured often in Hakuin's work, and he does use thick lines to draw the folds of garments, as discussed above. Since he doesn't name Hakuin directly, and since these figures and styles are done by other artists, there is no guarantee that it is Hakuin, although Motoori did write his works after Hakuin's fame as a teacher and painter spread

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31 It should be noted that Motoori places the crux of the ability to express oneself into the rhetorical patterns of song, writing that "[t]hanks to these patterns, aware is displayed in all its depth" (194).

All of the Motoori passages have the Japanese words italicized.

through Japan and he says that he is limiting his discussing to “what [he] usually see[s] in the present age” (133). Hakuin, who is not trained in any one school, might not have the control of obeisance of rules that Motoori respects. Further, Motoori as a devoted Kokugaku scholar (Nationalist-motivated history and philology) may not have approved of the influences of any Buddhist teachers, since he spent a great deal of his energy emphasizing the Shintō religion as pure and distinctly Japanese<sup>32</sup>.

Philosopher Yuasa Yasuo,<sup>33</sup> in his exploration of the Eastern Body-Mind theory explains an anecdotal analogy derived from an unnamed Greek philosopher. Yasuo explains that there are three sorts of people that gather for the Olympia: observers, competitors and sellers. In the Greek mindset, the observers, who take the role of impartial godlike figure, are the most valued; in fact, the entire Olympia is held for them. The competitors then are secondary in value to the observers—the competitors perform or compete for the gratification of the observers. Lower still are the sellers, who take advantage of the observers attending the Olympia by pandering wares to them (Yasuo 34-35). As Yasuo notes through his work, the Greek, and arguably Western, mindset is very different from the eastern, and in particular the Japanese perspective, which holds that mere observation, like a mind without a body, is only half valuable. Instead, the goal for religious and artistic work in Japan is to combine the mind and body, the observer and competitor into a single, self-cultivating entity. Like gardening, poetry and ink painting

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32 See Norinaga’s “The Two Shrines of Ise: An Essay of Split Bamboo.”

33 For consistency’s sake, I have chosen to adopt the United States’ style of personal name followed by family name, as opposed to the Japanese order. For example, Yasuo (family) Yuasa (personal) becomes Yuasa Yasuo.

that does more than present artistic objects to be observed; instead, Japanese arts reveal a physical or metaphorical space in which the creator, but also the observer, can participate. The Japanese arts of the garden, poetry and ink painting invite the observer to enter them, contemplate them and become one with them.

Daisetz Teitarō Suzuki, 20th century communicator of Zen ideas to the west, in his work *Zen and Japanese Culture* demonstrates that a movement in Chinese Buddhism, Ch’an Buddhism, was influential in the formation of Japanese art, society, and the people’s relationship with nature (21). This movement in Japan came to adopt the name Zen Buddhism.<sup>34</sup> Suzuki says “[i]f the Greeks taught us how to reason and Christianity what to believe, it is Zen that teaches us to go beyond logic and not to tarry even when we come up against ‘the things which are not seen’” (Suzuki 360) Suzuki here emphasizes what he believes Zen and Japanese culture can add to human understanding: going beyond thinking and observation and entering into a subject.

Suzuki makes his case in such wide-ranging areas as visual arts, tea ceremonies, poetry, and swordsmanship by showing the qualities these disciplines have in common with Zen teachings. In particular, Suzuki focuses on the concept of *wabi* (poverty) present in visual art, the tea ceremony and Zen (Suzuki 22-23); he compares the similarity between moving past paradoxes like life/death and *nirvāna/samsāra* in swordsmanship

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<sup>34</sup> Both Ch’an and zen roughly translate into the practice of meditation, and are related to the sanskrit word, dyana.

and Zen (Suzuki 141); he also shows that both haiku and Zen have interest in immediate, intuitive responses (Suzuki 387).<sup>35</sup>

In the West, the dominant definitional model for art, science, religion, et cetera was that each object, where objects are any identifiable thing (even abstract notions like reason), is of a certain kind or category. Plus, objects that differ from one another exist in different categories. Some objects exist in the category of symmetrical or valuable or good, and some objects exist in the category of asymmetrical or not valuable or bad. The same is true for beauty: things are beautiful insofar as they are in or near the category “perfect” or “symmetrical,” and things are ugly insofar as they are distant from those categories. Yasuo also points out that this practice of defining categories that are diametrically opposed is the same in regards to the mind and body in the West. The West for the most part, especially after Descartes articulated it in the 18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>36</sup> holds that the object “body” is categorically different from the object “mind.” Further, mind and body, in explanations like Descartes’, are incommensurably different and so always separate (Yasuo 10). Japan, on the other hand, holds that the mind and body, although discussed as

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<sup>35</sup> Though Suzuki’s analysis is thorough, it has several biases within it. First, despite Suzuki’s emphasis on the centrality of Zen, he remained a layman all his life, and only undergoes formal Zen training from 1891-1897 (Sharf 116). Secondly, Zen is only one of several forms of Buddhism that would have had some interaction with Japanese culture, let alone the native religion, Shintoism. Further, as Robert Sharf notes, Suzuki had a pretty strong nationalistic stance about the glory of Japan, and perhaps because of this, Suzuki insisted that all authentic religious experiences have the Zen experience of *kenshō* and *satori* at their foundations (Sharf 127). Even with these biases, Suzuki’s theory can have the following implication: even if there are other influences on Japanese culture (which it is highly likely that there are), Zen’s influence is well-noted by Suzuki’s correlations.

<sup>36</sup> Although, Yasuo points out that the roots for this goes back to Greece, Rome and Christianity at least (9).



different for the purpose of conversation, are linked and most naturally one. *Shugyo* is the word for a state of a person connecting and fully living with mind and body as one (Yasuo 8). The method for achieving this are varied, with Zen Buddhism offering many of them. For instance, the main goal for zazen, or meditation, is to cultivate the self to achieve shugyo, which will also amount to a realization of the emptiness of both body and mind, which is *satori* or enlightenment.<sup>37</sup>

It is not only meditation that encourages a merging of two seemingly disparate objects, Yasuo notes as well that Japanese artistry was influenced by Zen, encouraging artists to seek self-cultivation to better express their craft. “A craftsman's skill and an actor's performance are acquired by professionally training their bodies in their respective fields, and their freedom of movement is expressed accordingly” (Yasuo 25). By cultivating themselves, artists create within themselves a sense of harmony and an intuitive understanding of the kind of art that would reveal something to viewers (Yasuo 28). This revelation and the ability to create it is what makes artists cherished in and of themselves and, unlike the Greeks, makes the participation more valuable than observation alone.

For Zen and Japanese culture, participation is key (Nagatomo 149), Suzuki emphasizes that the Japanese concept of beauty is felt when there is freedom of motion and expression and that the artist achieves this beauty when she/he can live in the subject. The painter of a flower, say, must live as a flower and express the flower as itself (Suzuki

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<sup>37</sup> In fact, from a philosophical perspective, it is because emptiness is the ground of being that all things are united. There is no essential difference separating one thing from another (Nāgārjuna 39-40).

355). The division between art, culture and religion, is far from delineated in Japan. Just as the Zen monk cultivates himself for an enlightenment experience, the garden architect, poet or artist cultivates herself or himself in order to achieve a union of body and mind that results in an expression of profundity and beauty, sometimes called *yugen* in poetry, *hana* in theatrics (Yasuo 24-25) or *aware* in garden design (Kuitert 60).

It is through Zen that the Chinese philosophy of Taoism also comes to influence Japanese culture and in particular the arts. *Wabi sabi*, the characteristic that became cherished in Japanese art, is a distillation of the simplicity and harmony of Taoist teachings (Juniper 7). The two words have distinct definitions but are commonly combined, as truly great pieces of art reveal both. Wabi roughly means “poverty” and is typically seen in a piece of ceramic that is flawed in just the right way, like it is misshapen, chipped, or cracked. Sabi roughly means “aged,” but doesn’t carry a negative overtone. Instead, sabi suggests the value of something aged, like a great tree. Andrew Juniper, director of the Wabi Sabi Design Company in England says, “Wabi sabi is an intuitive appreciation of a transient beauty . . . an understated beauty that exists in the modest, rustic, imperfect, or even decayed, an aesthetic sensibility that finds a melancholic beauty in the impermanence of all things” (Juniper 51). Wabi and sabi taken as a unit is a mark of beauty in Japanese culture that focuses on the timeliness of an object or art form. In other words, where the art of some Western cultures value perfection in the sense of without flaws or even immortality, Japanese art strives to show the impermanence of an object. This is especially true for Japanese gardens, but also true of the poetry of Bashō and Hakuin, both of whom are deeply entrenched in the Zen

tradition. To fully appreciate these works, however, the observer cannot be idle. Instead, the observer must also participate, or enter into the pieces, to combine both the mind and body in the poignant messages revealed through the work's wabi sabi.

This discussion of artistic expressions opens up the way to examine the form and possible meanings of Hakuin's art. Ekaku Hakuin (1685-1768 CE) was a Zen monk in the Tokugawa Period of Japan. Being rebellious and an itinerant, Hakuin spent time not at one monastery, but traveling between many. Hakuin, in his biography, says that from an early age he was extremely anxious and feared the pits of hell as preached to him by a Nichiren Priest to whom Hakuin's mother was devoted (Hakuin Ivy 8). Hakuin tried to flee his fears by entering the monastery, but upon reading a story about a monk "brutally murdered by bandits and how the monk's cries were supposedly heard for miles" (Kasulis 106) he was overcome by more anxiety. It is not surprising that he had several teachers that struggled with what they thought was a difficult, stubborn and anxious student. One roshi even argued with Hakuin, claiming that Hakuin had not had the satori, or enlightenment experience, despite Hakuin's certainty that he did (Hakuin Ivy 28).

During a period of religious reform, Hakuin rose as an innovator of the Rinzai tradition, revitalizing the methods and understanding of satori. He did this through his writing and art, which despite being influenced by abstract and difficult Zen philosophy, was expressed in compelling and understandable forms (Maraldo 69). Even Hakuin's own philosophy was simple; he offered that the way to know the world is through simple moments of enlightenment—an event that does not need a lifetime to cultivate, but could

happen while listening to a poem or seeing dew on a blade of grass (Hakuin Four Ways 32).

Hakuin, by organizing the kōans into a practical system for roshis, teachers, in the Rinzai tradition in order to further guide people through inevitable pitfalls in Zen practice, including what Hakuin called Zen sickness (Kasulis 111). By composing poetry and paintings, he also sought to express the feeling of emptiness and encourage the same in the observer. In his painting of the Chinese Zen patriarch, Bodhidharma, he painted intense eyes that looked directly up to a brief, poetic command written in a scrawling hand by Hakuin--“See your own nature and become perfect nothing” (Hisamatsu 218: See figure 3). This ink painting requires more than mere looking to understand it, instead one most directly grapples with Bodhidharma’s gaze and the words that he stares at so intensely. Indeed, a viewer must compete with Bodhidharma, grapple with one’s own nature to better understand one’s own nature as impermanent.

Hakuin does a similar job in his *enso*, an ink painting depicting emptiness as a circle (see figure 4). Hakuin, in this piece, after preparing himself through years of meditation, paints nothingness on white paper with black ink, the excess ink billowing almost tangibly at the beginning, only to smooth and slowly fade as the circle closes. The emptiness is nowhere to be found unless the viewer, again, participates with the piece, contemplates it, enters into it to understand the representation of emptiness in the piece, just as the emptiness or impermanence is present in forms (like a garden, fleeting poetic words, or our body) where there is more than merely a black circle on white. The beauty of Hakuin’s ink painting is not in the attractiveness of the image, but instead in the

understanding of the message, which one must participate in, with body and mind as one, to understand.

Japanese art, being influenced at least by Chinese philosophy filtered through Zen Buddhism, develops out of a different paradigm from Western arts influenced by the Greeks. Whereas the Greeks valued the observer and strove to create works of symmetry, perhaps to be more pleasing to the viewer, the Japanese valued the participator and strove to create works of subtlety and profundity that invited the observer to enter into them and participate in the meanings they revealed. This is in part because of the value of body-mind union called *shugyo* and the importance of *wabi sabi*, particularly impermanence, imperfection and timeliness. One can enter in and see these aspects in the rock or moss gardens of Ryōan-ji, the sparse but striking word scenes of Bashō, and the simple but poignant depictions of Zen figures and concepts by Hakuin. In each case, one unique characteristic to these Japanese artists approach is that they invite the observer to enter into the work, not merely present the work as an answer to the question of beauty. Similarly in Buddhism, the importance is not placed on a figure that gives all the answers, but instead on an enlightened one that guides the participant to intuit truths for themselves. The same is true for Japanese artists: they create a space through intense training of body and mind to guide us as participants in the world, as it is poignantly and subtlety revealed in the art into which we enter.

## CHAPTER 4

### “AFTER ALL, WHAT DO THEY COME TO?”: HAKUIN’S THOUGHTS ON ART AND ITS ROLE IN HIS SUCCESS WITH HIS COMMUNITY

“Japan has two things of surpassing greatness, Mount Fuji and Priest Hakuin.” Norman Waddell, *The Essential Teachings of Zen Master Hakuin* xxi

Assessing Hakuin’s creative works, Norman Waddell writes “Though he worked in a wide variety of styles, his bold compositions, filled with the thick, massive strength of his large-size characters, possess an ability unique even among Zen artists to translate visceral Zen experience to paper. Standing before them, the viewer is struck by a primordial power uncanny in its depths” (ET xxii). Hakuin’s art, although not without its detractors, has been not only popular among his followers in his lifetime but has also been heralded by art historians in the past century as being some of the most innovative art in the Edo Period. Although Hakuin’s art is not considered as refined as the Zen art of the Muromachi period, Hakuin, not trained in any formal artistic method, is self-studied in the great literary and artistic classics of Japan and China. However as Waddell writes, there is some visceral experience expressed in his bold brush strokes and in multiple portraits of the same subject, a intense ferocity is given again and again, so that we see Zen mystical practice demonstrated on the faces of his subjects.

In this chapter, I argue that Hakuin used his art to reach a wide audience, which resulted in a resurgence of Rinzai Buddhist practice in Hakuin’s lifetime. Hakuin’s art is

the expression and the flowering of his mystical practice, according to Hakuin and philosophers like Hisamatsu and Nishida; he is capable of communicating his mystical insight to other people. This chapter begins by showing that Hakuin's thoughts on the matter that art is a tool for teaching are not isolated to the anecdote used at the beginning of Chapter 2 and the inscription in the painting mentioned above, but instead recurs in several of the letters translated into English. Explication of several of those incidences will help illustrate Hakuin's use of art and its meaning in his charismatic ministry. Then, I analyze the meaning of Hakuin's letters, sermons, calligraphy, painting, and songs in order to discern both what function he believed art played and also to show how it provided an important role in his success with a community that grew tremendously under his guidance.

In Hakuin's painting of "The Three Tasters," we see Hakuin as a spiritual seeker with a tendency towards pluralism or ecumenicalism, expressing his sense that each of the Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist philosophies are related and seeking a similar goal. The picture shows three caricatures: Siddhartha Gautama in the center, Kong Zi to his left, and Lao Zi to his right, all around a cauldron. The cauldron is likely vinegar—these three men tasting vinegar tasting is a part of the classic Chinese story, of which this painting is likely an illustration. A common reading of the story is that the three men's teachings are distinct, but as I will explore in a moment, Hakuin's calligraphy above the image suggests that the teachings are relatable or maybe even synonymous. In the classic story, Kong Zi finds the vinegar sour and suggests that humankind learn rules to prevent corruption; Siddhartha Gautama finds the vinegar bitter and suggests that humankind learn to

overcome suffering through the Buddhist eight-fold path; Lao Zi, however, finds the vinegar delicious and suggests that humankind needs no change from his natural state. The thrust of the story seems to be suggesting that each of the three great teachings of China are different, and probably there is a preference for the more optimistic Daoist wisdom over what's seen as the more pessimistic Confucian and Buddhist teachings.

Perhaps as a Buddhist, one would expect Hakuin to change this reading a little, to skew it more towards Buddhism, but in fact, Hakuin changes the divisive message of the tale altogether. In the upper right hand corner of the scroll, Hakuin writes in calligraphic script “Three creeds, one creed— / One Creed, three creeds— / After all, what do they come to? / Attaining supreme virtue” (translation by Seo and Addiss 52). We can safely interpret that Hakuin means by this not that the three teachings are one, since as a Buddhist monk, he has chosen a single path, and he spends a great deal of time emphasizing the importance of singular focus upon one's practice in his highly attended lecture about Zen practice called the *Talks Given Before Zen Lectures on the Record of Sokkō*, Hakuin's pivotal theological work. Instead, Hakuin means that “the three teachings” depicted in the painting have similar goals, namely the training of one's virtuous character. This matches Hakuin's own ecumenical nature that we see from his painting and teaching many different lay people.<sup>38</sup> In the case of Hakuin, we see his art as an expression of his own questions about the ecumenical nature of the search for religious truth. He depicts the three men, in more mythic forms, whereas other images show them

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38See Seo and Addiss's chapter 2 and 5 for a survey of a variety of non-buddhist religious and philosophical topics that feature in Hakuin's art.



as three men dressed similarly, but all three men have serene faces, and Hakuin's inscription ties all of their tasks to the seeking out of "supreme virtue," which for him may be recognition of the true dharma eye, which he sought himself through mystical performance in the style of Zen Buddhism. This painting is an excellent example of a strong influence on Hakuin—how to incorporate other important or popular teachings into his ministry. This influence, I argue led to Hakuin's incorporation of other tools besides sermons to reach as wide an audience as possible and to communicate his dharma teachings in way that will assist both the monks and the laity in their understanding, practice, and general well-being.

#### Scholarship, Art, and Buddhist Thought

Hakuin does not have a formal philosophy about art, like Motoori as we saw in the previous chapter. In fact, other than his expository writing about mystical practice, Hakuin's philosophy must be interpreted from the advice he offers in his letters to and commentaries for his monastic and lay students. It seems plausible because of the extent of his prolific art portfolio that Hakuin loved art and enjoyed creating it. His students probably also loved his art as so many of his pieces have survived the past 300 or so years in the private collections, often of the families whose ancestors received the individual pieces in the first place. In the letters and commentaries he wrote, like the one that opened chapter 2, one can see that Hakuin believed that his art was not only desired by his students, but that it helped them in their practice because some of his mystical attainment can be expressed into the piece itself. So, Hakuin used art not only to get his message to as large a population as possible, he also used art to teach Zen concepts that

he believed would have been deemed authentic to the masters that brought Zen from China to Japan.

A possible influence on Hakuin's notions about art might be from the Japanese Zen tradition, which has encouraged artistic creation from a very early period, like the poetry, painting, and garden design of Dōgen, Kūkai, and Musō, respectively. The *Lotus Sutra*, a central text for many Mahayana Buddhist schools, says that "If there are persons who for the sake of the Buddha . . . employ pigments to paint Buddha images . . . such persons as these bit by bit will pile up merit and will become fully endowed with a mind of great compassion" (39). The *Lotus Sutra*, according to Mahayana tradition, is the word of Siddhartha Gautama spoken on Vulture Peak to his many followers towards the end of his life. In the above quote, Siddhartha is explaining that images and idols are not only helpful to teach about the dharma, but the painting or creation of such images earns merit for the painter. In Buddhist theology, merit accumulates with good acts, spiritual practices, and generally pure thoughts and deeds. Normally, a monk would build merit through studying the dharma, meditating, chanting the sutras, or other such activities, but *The Lotus Sutra* places making art as another possible source for merit. For a Zen master and painter, like Hakuin, who would have been intimately familiar with *The Lotus Sutra*, this means that his art is a part of his mystical practice and even his charismatic ministry to his lay parishioners.

Hakuin's own appreciation for *The Lotus Sutra* was something that he had to be prepared for. He announces in one of his sermons that he read the *The Lotus Sutra* when he was a young monk at fourteen, hearing that it is the king of all the sutras. At this first

reading, Hakuin was unimpressed saying to himself that it was “nothing but a collection of simple tales about cause and effect. . . . I'm not going to find what I'm looking for here” (ET 33). At forty, still pestered by doubts when most monks and priests his age would have shed theirs, Hakuin began reading the Lotus Sutra again. He tells his congregation

“I read as far as the third chapter, the one on parables. Then, just like that, all the lingering doubts and uncertainties vanished from my mind. They suddenly ceased to exist. The reason for the Lotus’s reputation as the “king of sutras” was now revealed to me with blinding clarity. Teardrops began cascading down my face like two strings of beads—they came like beans pouring from a ruptured sack. A loud involuntary cry burst from the depths of my being and I began sobbing uncontrollably. And as I did, I knew without any doubt that what I had realized in all those satoris I had experienced, what I had grasped in my understanding of those koans I had passed—had all been totally mistaken. I was finally able to penetrate the source of the free, enlightened activity . . . .” (ET 33)

So although Hakuin does not have a transformative experience of *The Lotus Sutra* in his youth like Huineng and some other great Zen masters, Hakuin eventually comes to see *The Lotus Sutra* as an important sutra, capable of pushing him even farther in his awakening. There are several reasons that *The Lotus Sutra* should fit so nicely with Hakuin’s thought. First, *The Lotus Sutra* opens in a similar position as Hakuin is giving his sermon; albeit Hakuin’s is on a smaller scale. Hakuin is sitting high with many hundreds of disciples who have come to Hara in order to learn the correction to the dharma. Similarly, *The Lotus Sutra* opens with Siddharatha Gautama on Vulture Peak preaching corrections to people’s understanding of the dharma as being guided by multiple vehicles. Secondly, one of Hakuin’s main contributions to the teaching of Zen is his belief in post-satori practice, which emphasizes that one is not finished after reaching

awakening, but instead that there is further deepening still to come after that satori experience. This corresponds well with most of the message of *The Lotus Sutra*, but particularly the Parable of the Phantom city, where travelers are tricked into thinking they have reached their destination when the guide conjures a phantom city. After they have rested, the guide reveals that the city was an illusion to help them to rest and re-energize so that they could make the rest of the journey. Although Hakuin does not conjure any cities, the message of the parable is that there is a goal beyond what at first seems to be the goal, which is Hakuin's position about post-enlightenment training. Lastly, Hakuin seems to be deeply interested in the education not just of the most clever, most virtuous, or the most skilled meditators, but instead of as many people as possible. *The Lotus Sutra* offers Hakuin support in this goal, positing that art, parable, and other tools can assist in the spread of the dharma through upaya, as covered above. So, it is no wonder that an older Hakuin sees in his reading of *The Lotus Sutra* an articulation of many of the insights that he was forming in his understanding of Buddhism and how it should be spread.

When discussing the impact of *The Lotus Sutra* upon culture, particularly Japanese culture, Tanabe and Tanabe wrote that “[t]he text is taken at face value: praise about the Lotus Sutra becomes the Lotus Sutra, and since the unpreached sermon leaves the text undefined in terms of a fixed doctrinal value (save, of course, the value of the paean) it can be exchanged at any number of rates. Exchange involves transformation, the turning of one thing into another, and the Lotus Sutra can thus be minted into other expressions of worth” (2-3). They hold that the Lotus Sutra, in part because it encourages artistic

expression and skillful means to exchange, transmit, and express the lessons of Mahayana Buddhism, becomes extended into any cultural object that discusses the dharma of the Lotus Sutra. So, an artist and Zen master like Hakuin, in so far as his creative activity is influenced by the teaching of the Lotus Sutra of Buddhism, generally, can use his creative activity to express Buddhist dharma, making them simultaneously works of art and also products of religious expressions, similar to Giotto's Life of Anna, Mary, and Jesus or perhaps a statue of Kali in Kolkata. I believe that there might be a tendency to dismiss works of art as religious, or religious works as overly aesthetic, but for Mahayana Buddhism, at least, one should refrain from this kind of dismissal. The theology of Mahayana Buddhism expressed in *The Lotus Sutra* emphasizes that the Buddha and other awakened beings have an ability called upaya, skillful means. Upaya is rooted in awakened beings wisdom and compassion, and manifests as their skills at giving interpretations of the dharma when the students are prepared for them. This is not only thought about in terms of the process of one person's advancement in her or his understanding of the Buddhist dharma but is also exercised over generations, meaning that new Buddhist scriptures are just as important, or perhaps more so, because they speak to the generations nearest their composition and their particularly stage in the understanding of dharma. As demonstrated in the selection from *The Lotus Sutra* above, the expressive or didactic capabilities of art works or other cultural expressions are a part of the teaching of the dharma and the earning of merit, and so they are involved both with the virtues of wisdom and compassion. In the case of art as a medium for the expression and spread of the dharma, upaya might insist that a work of art could be aestheticized and

profound simultaneously as it has the purpose of religious expression, development, or devotion because the aestheticized qualities are what grabs the attention of the audiences, draws them in, and perhaps deepens their understanding of the dharma.

Yampolsky, a translator of Hakuin from the mid-20th century, said in an introduction to Hakuin's selected writings that Hakuin's art is "not the conscious efforts of a practicing artist" but instead "the by-product of his activity as a Zen teacher and preacher" (ZMH 27). He further makes the claim that Hakuin's art is not refined like the work of the Muromachi Period (26) and indeed Hakuin had no formal training, other than his own love for the arts and his creative practice independent of any teachers<sup>39</sup>. Earlier in the same essay, Yampolsky positioned himself in a dichotomy when it comes to art and Zen teaching, writing "that when Zen flourishes as a teaching it has little to do with the arts and that when the teaching is in decline its association with the arts increases" (ZMH 9). By this, I believe, Yampolsky is making a value judgement about certain kinds of Zen teaching, which encourages a life devoted to meditation even after one's initial awakening, and with little time for anything else. Yampolsky here is only revealing a bias in his approach between these kinds of Zen teachings and those of someone like Hakuin who emphasized meditation throughout all the other activities of life, which would include, but is not limited to creative practice. Duncan Williams makes a claim that some scholars have viewed the Edo period as a decline of Buddhism, in part because the highly philosophical teachers are present in much earlier periods (6)—he focuses on the Sōtō

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<sup>39</sup> He discusses his turn to art when he became disillusioned by Buddhist practice in his autobiographies "Tale of My Childhood" (*PM* 19), *Wild Ivy* (16) and "The Chronological Biography of Zen Master Hakuin" (*PM* 158)

tradition, a Zen Buddhist tradition like Hakuin's Rinzai tradition—showing that it is a time of great popularizing and an increase in the number of followers for Sōtō, similar to the developing work that Hakuin does for his tradition. Although Yampolsky respected Hakuin's importance to the Rinzai tradition, I believe that he made a mistake about thinking of his art as a by-product of his success as a thinker and teacher. I agree that Hakuin's art is one of the main tools that he used to communicate with his students, but not merely as a tool, but instead an expression of the character and wisdom he had attained.

Norman Waddell, in his first translation of Hakuin's work, noted Hakuin's own understanding of Buddhist history, bears a striking resemblance to Yampolsky's assessment, writing that Hakuin believed "Daiō's Zen sustained its original vigor roughly until the fifteenth century. It then fell sharply as literature and scholarship began to take the place of actual religious practice" (*ET* xv). Perhaps this is one of the sources for Yampolsky's own position. However, I wonder if Hakuin and Yampolsky might be making an unnecessary dichotomy between cultural production and religious production. Hakuin, at least, seems to be practicing and encouraging both mystical practice and creative practice as a means of perfecting one's religious understanding and virtue. I think there is also some reason to believe that if we look closely at some of the periods of highly creative work in Zen (like the Muromachi periods), we will find a intermingling of the two practices, which might have been misunderstood by Yampolsky and perhaps even by Hakuin as being a reduction of religious practice to the cultural one. For instance,

Musō's poetry and garden designs could be seen as flowerings of his Zen insight not as deviations from or reductions of the complex Buddhist teachings.

Art Historian Hugo Munsterberg, in an article published in the same decade as Yampolsky's would disagree with Yampolsky's conclusion. Munsterberg holds Hakuin's art as exemplary in the Japanese artistic tradition, writing "Hakuin's representations of Daruma,<sup>40</sup> the monk who brought Zen from India to China during the sixth century, are forceful expressions of the Zen experience as is his calligraphy" (200). Hakuin's inclusion in Munsterberg's survey of Zen's influence on art may be in part because of Hakuin's importance to the religious history of Zen, but it is also because of his value as an artist, trained or otherwise, to express Zen experience through his artwork. I question whether we need to put ourselves into the same dichotomy as Yampolsky, and admittedly one that Hakuin might have had as well, of labeling historical Zen figures as either great artists or great thinkers about or teachers of Buddhism. Instead, as I will argue here and in chapter 4, at least one figure, Hakuin, was capable of both being an influential artist and an influential minister of the dharma.

#### Hakuin's Writings about Art

In this section, I engage in textual analyses of some of Hakuin's writings concerning art and creative expression. Hakuin did not have a single opinion about the subject of art, but instead had a highly contextual and evolving appreciation for the form and function of art. First, I will show Hakuin's own interactions with art from his youth until his

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40 Daruma is another name for Bodhidharma, whose portrait is the subject of a close reading in chapter 2.



ministry. Then, I will show how Hakuin used art to connect with his students, motivate them, and encourage practice outside of the monastery walls. Finally, I will unpack some of the instruction in some of Hakuin's work, showing both that it was meant for a wide audience without being a diluted form of Hakuin's innovation to Rinzai Zen thought and practice.

### Hakuin's Encounters with Art in his Youth

Hakuin's first interaction of art, as told in his autobiography *Wild Ivy*, was not as an appreciator but as a transgressor. His elder brother had a portrait of the poet Saigyō painted by Ryūi, which Hakuin's brother cherished and kept in the families tokonoma, a little alcove where precious, artistic, or devotional objects are kept for appreciation. Hakuin accidentally shot an arrow into the portrait, right through Saigyō's left eye. Hakuin was mortified at his mistake, writing "my whole body began to tremble with fear. I pressed my palms together tightly before me and appealed to Tenjin to come to my rescue" (*WI* 12). Tenjin was a Shintō god sacred to scholars and poets, whom Hakuin becomes disenchanted through this incident, like he does a few other supernatural forces when they do not show their ability to intercede on his behalf. This early story is both about Hakuin's guilt and his fear of hell, which puts him on the path of a religious seeker early in his life. But there is another take-away from this story about the centrality of art and scholarship in Hakuin's thinking, at least the thinking of an elderly Hakuin writing about his early life. The focus of his guilt rested with a painting, particularly one of a Buddhist poet, and the deity he prays to was sacred to poets as well. Calling on Tenjin seems apt considering that the painting of a poet is what he needed assistance with, but

one should also note the multiple influences about the importance of art, both visual and literary.

Later in Hakuin's life, at the age of eighteen, Hakuin had taken his monk's vows and he had been reading the Buddhist scriptures and the Confucian classics for four years. Upon reading *The Praise of the True School*, a book featuring biographies of Chinese Zen priests, Hakuin fell into a deep depression because of the story of a great Buddhist master named Yen T'ou, who was murdered by bandits. Hakuin could not understand how someone so skilled in Buddhism could die such a horrible death. He decided that being a monk did no good at all, and since it did not matter what his profession—none of it was going to stop his suffering and perhaps even his damnation—so he decided to change his life goals. Hakuin writes “I decided I would turn my attention to the study of calligraphy and the composition of Chinese poetry. I would try to earn universal praise as one of the master artists of the age” (*WI* 16). Although, young and head strong, Hakuin struggles, vacillates even, between the study of the dharma and art, but it is significant that the two poles for him are religion and art.

Hakuin's ideas about art are not solely his own. They come in part from the Japanese Buddhist tradition, influenced in part by *The Lotus Sutra*, as discussed earlier, but Hakuin's interest in art was also supported by the respect that art commanded from the people around him. When he was twenty-one and studying under a master named Nanzen Oshō, Hakuin emulated a poem his master wrote for the New Year. Hakuin showed this poem to Baō, the inheritor of master Rinzan Sōdon, who said that Hakuin would surely rise in his position at the monastery. Hakuin writes “Baō's prediction turned out to be

accurate. There were sixty men in Nanzen's assembly; by the end of the year, I had advanced to the rank of third senior monk” (*WI 19*). For such a young age, this is particularly impressive. Further, this story shows, at least from Hakuin as his own biographer, that poetry is something that is indicative of someone’s promise in their study and practice of Zen. Hakuin does not give an indication that he was linking poems with his master in a formal way, which is done in *renka* practice, like that practiced by Matsuo Bashō a few decades before. But, Hakuin is informally engaging with his master, connecting with him poetically, adopting his rhyming scheme in order to develop a deeper understanding of his thought and practice. Hakuin does not include the master’s poem, but it is possible that Hakuin adopted more than just the rhyming scheme, choosing to emulate his master in a creative way, which is probably what Baō grasped when he read Hakuin’s verse.

Later in that same year, as Hakuin writes in his “Tale of my Childhood,” Hakuin was struck directly by the power of someone’s artwork and the importance of its expressive quality. While visiting with a Daimyo’s councilor, Hakuin was invited to look at a priest's calligraphy that was in the Daimyo’s collection. Hakuin was struck particularly by Ungo Rōshi’s<sup>41</sup> work. Hakuin writes,

“Examining it once or twice, I saw that as far as the nobility of the sentiments expressed in the text was concerned, or the skill and beauty of the brushwork, there was nothing, not a single word or character in this calligraphy that set it apart from any of the twenty or so other scrolls we had seen. Yet obviously this scroll had been treasured and revered in a very special way. Why? Giving the

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41 Although in “Tale of My Childhood” Hakuin says the calligraphy is Ungo Kiyō’s, in both Wild Ivy and Torei’s Chronological biography they list a different artist priest named Daigu Sōchiku (Waddell Chapter 1 end note 46 pg 247-248).

matter some thought, I concluded that it certainly had nothing to do with either the writing style or the brushwork. The reason it was so much more highly prized than all the rest was simply because of a definite strength it possessed that had its source in the *kenshō* experience and enlightenment.” (PM 22; emphasis in original)

Hakuin suggests here that a quality expressed in the artwork that he supposes must come from *kenshō*, an awakening experience, as the aesthetic impact of the piece can not be explained by uniqueness or refinement in its formal qualities. Its formal qualities are similar to other works in the collection, and yet Hakuin notices not only that the work is special, but also that it is beloved by the owner. So, in addition to Hakuin noting that other people find something special in the work, he also finds something special, and he believes that what he finds special and what others find special is one and the same thing and that is the understanding from the *kenshō* experience and enlightenment of the painter that is perceivable in the calligraphy. It is interesting that Hakuin includes both *kensho* and enlightenment, but this corresponds to his understanding of *kenshō*, which I will discuss more fully in the fourth chapter.

Torei, in his *Chronological Biography* of his master, mentions a similar incident, although the names of the host and the calligraphers are different.<sup>42</sup> Torei describes the incident

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42 Torei says the host is a “high-ranking official of a local clan” and that the Priest who painted the scroll was Daigu Sōchiku. As mentioned in a previous footnote, there is a discrepancy where Hakuin uses Ungo in “Tale of my Childhood” and uses Daigu in Wild Ivy (Waddell, Chapter 6 16 pg 277 and Chapter 1 end note 46 pg 247-248). Wild Ivy and Torei’s Chronological biography are later, which might explain why they match, but there is no way to which was the actual calligraphy Hakuin saw in his youth. Wadell notes that both men’s calligraphy is idiosyncratic (Waddell Chapter 1 end note 46 pg 247-248).

“The brushwork was unstudied, almost offhand in manner, and showed no signs of any great or unusual skill. But the master was elated as he realized that the merit of the calligraphy, the quality that commanded such respect, had nothing 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.” (CD 161)

In this telling, Hakuin nor Torei says explicitly that the reason Hakuin loves the work is that he could sense kenshō in the piece. It does say, as does Hakuin’s own version, that there was nothing formally significant about the scroll. And Torei’s account taken together with Hakuin could suggest that it is spiritual awareness that comes through the work that led Hakuin to his interest in all the arts. The last sentence of Torei’s account notes that Hakuin decides to focus his energies on “the Way”, meaning Zen, which does imply that what Hakuin noticed was mystical or at least religious in nature. If he Hakuin wanted to aspire to “the quality that commanded such respect” it was not by studying to become a better artist, but instead to become a better Zennist.

In *Wild Ivy*, the account of this event is more detailed with two significant additions. First, when Hakuin and the other monks are confused by some of the pieces, Hakuin writes down two kanji of his own, one for mother in law and the other for old woman. The rest of the company did not understand and said to Hakuin ““Please, elder monk, . . . get off your perch in the absolute. Come down into our relative world and tell us what it says” (*WI* 20). When Hakuin explains that his characters, although nonsense by themselves, could be read as “difficult to read”, to which they burst out with laughter at Hakuin’s clever teasing of the poorly written calligraphy on the pieces. We can see from this Hakuin’s cleverness with both words and visually imagery. The monks request most

likely is teasing because whereas Hakuin is most likely the elder monk of the others in the company (he is third senior monk at this time), he has not achieved satori yet, which means that he does not have a perch in the absolute in a literal sense for the Zen tradition. Also, the phrasing above is less respectful than a formal request of instruction would be if they were looking to Hakuin for an authentic dharma lesson.

After that moment, the host brings out the Daigu/Ungo scroll discussed above, and Hakuin's writing about it in *Wild Ivy* is similar except for the aftermath. Hakuin sees the calligraphy and has the realization that the value of the calligraphy was not because of the artist's formal skill, but instead because it was "the product of truly enlightened activity" (*WI* 20). Whereas the other sources mention that Hakuin begins focusing on his religious practices instead of his art at this point, the older autobiographer Hakuin, exemplifies this moment with a dramatic act. Hakuin writes

"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 tombstones, and set fire to them. I watched until they were completely consumed by the flames." (*WI* 20-21)

One can see from this that Hakuin, has now been convinced that he must become absolutely serious about dharma study, and to do that he must give up his goal of becoming a renowned artist. One can infer from the narration of this moment in his life that the older Hakuin sees that it was through the observation of the expression of enlightenment in a piece of art, that was the catalyst to get the clever, but distractible young man to become serious about Zen practice. It will only be later in his life, after

satori, post-satori, and becoming a teacher himself, that Hakuin will find a way to merge his two loves, the love of the dharma and the love of art, by using them as part of Hakuin's skillful means to educate his students, both monks and lay people, in what he considered proper understanding of the dharma. In the next section, I will show one of the ways that Hakuin applied his artist's brush—through the creation and dissemination of pieces that would be appealing to many people and encourage them to make Buddhist thought and practice a part of their everyday lives.

Hakuin's Spread of Dharma through Art and the Encouragement of Consistent Practice

In a letter to another lay student, a samurai named Sakai Kantahaku, Hakuin writes with great urgency to request him to use his connections, and probably more than a little of his money, to have a woodblock print produced of one of Hakuin's paintings of Akiba Gongen. Akiba Gongen was a fire deity especially worshipped on nearby Mount Akiha. As Hakuin wrote in his letter to the samurai, Akiba's popularity was increasing "with all the fires we have been having recently," with people turning to Akiba for help (*CD* 112). Akiba was worshipped in Shintō, Buddhist, Shugendō traditions, with Akiba being seen in the Buddhist tradition as a temporary manifestation of the Bodhisattva Kannon (Waddell, *CD* 116). Hakuin desired that a woodblock print could be made before he performed an enshrinement ceremony for a wooden statue of Akiba at Kannon-ji.<sup>43</sup> Hakuin intended the subsequent prints to be passed out for free to all of the attendees, and

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43 One of Hakuin's students, Tōrei, mentions in the Chronological Biography, that the ritual was done, which suggests it as an important public ritual for Hakuin (PM 221).

the woodblock donated to the temple as a “treasure of the temple, to preserve and use for future printings” (*CD* 114). Hakuin’s urgency caused him to order the samurai politely, to hurry the order, although he wrote that he did not want the job to be sloppy despite the rush (*CD* 114). It is possible that this impropriety was just a mistake on Hakuin’s part, either because of excitement or a propensity to rudeness, however Hakuin shows in many occasions that he is very knowledgeable about the proper custom and his status as a popular Zen master would probably mean that he was not abrasive. Another possible reason for Hakuin’s demands to the samurai is his belief in the utmost importance of getting the paintings to the people attending the ceremony. Paintings and amulets with calligraphic painting of Akiba’s name were thought to be charms against fire, so that is one of the reasons that Hakuin thought the paintings were helpful. Not just fire, Hakuin wrote that the paintings and charms of Akiba he made for his students could “dispel the seven calamities and beget the seven kinds of good fortune” (Hakuin *CD* 117) if they are venerated while performing *gasshō*, a devotional hand position used in prayer practice in Buddhism that is performed by pressing or clapping the hands, palm together in front of the face and then bowing. We can see that the paintings were more than for “gratify[ing] temporarily the vulgar eyes of the viewer” (*CD* 117) as Hakuin wrote which is normally the belief about paintings, but instead the ritual helps the Buddhist to develop their practice more fully.

Hakuin’s great work as a skilled meditator and Zen teacher is expressed in Akiba’s countenance, and so the student can harness the power of the Bodhisattva to prevent misfortune, which would distract them from their mystical practice. The facial expression



of Akiba and particularly the eyes reminds one of the stern and disciplined expression on Bodhidharma, the first patriarch of China. Just like Hakuin's Bodhidharmas, Akiba directs his gaze upward towards the calligraphy, inviting the viewer to not only look at him, but more importantly to look at the verse composed in praise of the dharma.

Calligraphy and his art scrolls weren't just capable of stopping fires and preventing obstacles to practice, however. Hakuin also suggested in his letter to Daimyo Matsudaira Sadataka, a ruler of Iyo Province, that his paintings could enhance health. Hakuin sent some of his paintings to the daimyo and asked him to have them mounted in his tokonoma, an alcove that is often used for art in Japanese residences. Hakuin also prescribed that the words of the sutra, which are written on the paintings, should be handed to all of the daimyo's attendants, who should chant the words in clear voices. Doing this, Hakuin wrote, "will invoke [the sutra's] benefits not only for the preservation of Your Excellency's health, but for the health of your vassals and everyone throughout the land" (*CD* 179). We can see from this that Hakuin clearly thought that more than amusement was transferred through his art. That he could imbue a piece of art not only with the words of the dharma, but also with the power to grant the gift of health. A power he learned about when he struggled with a disease he calls zen sickness. Just as Hakuin could overcome the problems that he faced with meditation and chanting of Buddhist sutras, he could teach his students to do the same. The art, seems to have had an important role to play in this process, however, otherwise Hakuin would have just written the sutra in his letter, instead of making them a part of one of his calligraphic/portrait scroll paintings. I propose that the underlying argument behind these thoughts is that the

art work could express insight into the sutra in a way that is necessary for the sutra chanting to work. Perhaps the gaze of Akiba is encouragement from Akiba, or perhaps one emulates Akiba first in facial expression, developing an inward focus and determination in the process. Hakuin seemed to believe that his art was a gift that improved his students' lives, which one can see through this example of Hakuin sending his art to a powerful, albeit ailing, ruler.

Miya Tsugio, a scholar of Japanese art, while discussing the types of artwork related to the *Lotus Sutra* writes that there are two types: “1. Those used predominately as *honzon*, the central image of worship in religious services, rituals, and devotions. 2. Those intended to explain the meaning of the sutra” which Tsugio goes on to say is a broader category of artwork “called *kyō-i-e*, or ‘illustrations of the significant ideas of a sutra.’” (75; emphasis in original). Although Hakuin’s works are not always specifically concerning the Lotus Sutra, the categorical distinction is helpful here. The drawings of Akiba, might be more like *honzon* in that they were meant to be placed into a *tokonoma* and become a part, if not the direct focus of worship or religious practice; whereas, I argue that other of Hakuin’s works are meant to be instructive of the sort of mystical practices and experiences that he was trying to teach. That being said, as the close reading above implied, Hakuin’s work, even ones that he prescribed as a kind of *honzon*, have the

qualities of expression discussed by Hisamatsu<sup>44</sup> and so both act as instructive about Zen practice and virtue in addition to being devotional and magical in original function.<sup>45</sup>

### Hakuin's Motivation of Students through Certificates

One way that Hakuin used art was not just to express his insight about Zen nor just to give magical charms or devotional icons to his students, but also as a certificate that represents the achieving of a certain standard of Zen insight. When Hakuin was 60, he began painting what he called his dragon staff certificates for students who had passed the first of the koans in their study (Waddell, CD pg. 193-194). Hakuin arranged the koans in the Zen tradition to start with the easiest and up to the hardest. Hakuin's own two-part koan, "What is the sound of one hand" and "Put a stop to all sounds" was the first koan in his prescribed method, which had become the dominant method in Rinzai Zen Buddhism through today. When his students passed this koan, Hakuin painted for them a dragon staff certificate, which showed a priest's staff in the process of turning into a serpentine dragon. Many of Hakuin's students' families have kept these certificates, which are marked with the students name, date and place of attainment, so their are still quite a few to examine today.

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44 See chapter 2 "The Realm Where Verbal Expression Can't Reach": Theories of Art as Expression, Instruction, and Transformation for a fuller discussion of Hisamatsu's approach to the philosophy of art.

45 This is an important point that could be explored further in a future project—the use of popular religious devices like healing, magic, protective charms, and Hakuin's insistence that the discipline of Zen still be emphasized, so that even the laity do not rely only on magic or easy fixes as opposed to seriously developing their virtue and understanding of their dharma, and ultimately awakened to their self-nature.

In the *Sokkō-roku*, Hakuin discusses the use of certificates in his time period, but also how they can be an empty gesture. He tells of Chinese Zen teacher Yüan-chien who tells one of his students, Fa Yen, to seek out a younger master who has proven himself, Po-yün Shou-tuan. Hakuin applauds the older teacher, using him as a paradigm to berate the teachers of the Edo period, saying “When they certify a student, they hand him a piece of paper containing a line of two of some lifeless words they have written on it, telling him, ‘You are like this. I am like this too. Preserve it carefully. Never change or deviate from it’” (*ET* 90). The main critique here is that the Zen teachers of the age are concerned only with the propagation of Zen students who have received their pedigree, whereas Hakuin finds this both selfish and does not correspond with his understanding of Zen. Further, Hakuin notes that the students are not encouraged to deepen their understanding of Zen after receiving their certificates. He notes that the students celebrate their receiving of the certificate and cherish it, so the blame is essentially on the masters. Hakuin’s own adoption of the certificate process suggests that he does not think that giving the certificate for initial success is misguided, but that the teaching must be from a teacher that truly cares about the student’s understanding, one who is as magnanimous as Yüan-chien (*ET* 89).

In two letters to Katayama Shunnan, Hakuin discussed the dragon staff recipients, of which Katayama Shunnan was one, as a group of students who wanted Hakuin to record his discussion of post-satori practice (CD 188-189). Further, Hakuin was urged by Katayama not to publish a list of the recipients of the certificates because of, what Waddell believes, was discrimination of the dragon staff recipients and Hakuin’s greater

student body, by other Buddhist sects (CD Hakuin 189; Waddell 194). From this, one can see that Hakuin used art, his art in particular, as a teaching tool, this time in the form of a reward for achieving a certain level of success. The pieces of art also marked a group of students as having a certain form of honor, which one can read when Hakuin addressed Katayama and his “Dragon Staff Comrades” (CD 190) at the beginning of one of his letters, marking them off as a distinguished group, symbolized by the certificate. The certificates, however, do not seem to carry the same message as Hakuin’s Kannon or Bodhidharma, as there is not typically a poem, piece of wisdom, or humor with the dragon staff certificates. Nor do we see the vivid facial expressions one has come to expect from the pieces of Hakuin’s art that are particularly fertile with Zen messages. The dragon staff certificates instead are decorative reminders of the work that Hakuin’s students, particularly lay students have done and are cherished because of what they represent as opposed to their formal or expressive qualities.

When discussing Chinese calligraphy, Professor of Education Ming-Tak Hue, connects the practice of calligraphy to the practice of mindfulness and self-cultivation (19). The practice of Chinese calligraphy has greatly influenced the calligraphy practices of Japan at least since the Asuka period (Nakata, 9). Hue writes “Throughout the process of doing calligraphy, aestheticism and spiritualism were embedded in every moment of practice” (23). He then goes on to describe the instruction he underwent where every act of preparation and painting was imbued with mindfulness and attention to his bodily movement and the flow of energy. One of the goals for Hue is to “reveal our inner self in a piece of brushwork” (25) and that calligraphy “is a spiritual and psychological process

of self-expression, self-cultivation, and self-improvement” (20). Although, the language of qi is deeply influenced by Daoism, Zen calligraphy has similar roots in Daoism. Hue is also explicating the teaching of a modern Chinese calligraphy master, so making firm claims about an 18th century Japanese Zen calligrapher would be unwise. Still, I’d like to connect Hue’s assertion to the reading I have been doing of Hakuin’s notions on art. Since the understanding of Hue matches nicely with the interpretation of Hakuin’s writing, I believe it is safe to come to a similar kind of conclusion. Hakuin’s calligraphy could be influenced not only by his Zen mystical practice, but his art could also seek to be the expression of his understanding of self and life generally, which in his case would have to be put in terms of Zen Buddhism, which would say that he is expressing no-self. The topic of what no-self is and how it is expressed is the subject of the previous chapter of this dissertation.

#### Hakuin’s use of Art to Instruct his Students On Rinzai Zen Buddhist Principles and Practice

In an appendix to Torei’s biography of Hakuin, Torei writes about a lay student of Hakuin named Satsu. Satsu was a bright young woman, but defiant. In Torei’s telling, she thought that Hakuin’s handwriting could have been “a bit better” and “When this was reported to Hakuin, he told Satsu's father to bring her to the temple. Hakuin asked some questions. She responded easily with no hesitation. He gave her some koans. She pondered them, and a few days later penetrated their meaning” (CD 237). What we might be able to take away from a story such as this, when read with other writings is that Hakuin was able to tell that Satsu would be a worthy student of Zen purely on her

assessment of his handwriting. It is possible that Hakuin merely liked her pluck in insulting his art, but considering Hakuin's experiences of art in his youth, it is more likely the case that Torei has been influenced by his master and believes that something is communicated in calligraphy of one's self and awareness of one's self that Hue mentions is the goal of calligraphy, especially one with its roots in Chinese approach to calligraphy. There was something about Satsu's ability to penetrate not only the artistic style of his handwriting that is connected to her ability to understand Zen truth. Hakuin, in other of his writings, asks for forgiveness for his handwriting, saying that he is writing in bad light, or does not have his glasses, or some other excuse. Further, Hakuin admittedly writes in grass style, which is less formal or formally precise, so it seems that Hakuin has little delusion about the nature of his handwriting. And yet, at least in the writing of his more treasured disciple, Torei, the sharpness of Satsu is first ascribed to her ability to see through his creative working, for in Japanese writing, both the meaning of the words and their composition are of aesthetic interest.

Hakuin was not just a painter and calligrapher, he also expressed himself through other creative mediums, like stories, poems, and songs. "Old Granny's Tea-Grinding Songs" is one of his works that featured both poetry and song, with each of the verses written in a 7-7-7-5 syllable spread that was common for the popular songs in the Edo period (PM Waddell 115). He also uses a popular figure from songs, stories, and Kabuki plays from the day, the prostitute Otafuku who is seen in many works as a bringer of good fortune, but also of female foolishness or ugliness (PM Wadell 116). Hakuin uses Otafuku and Old Granny Mind Master, who in her illustration has a face very similar to

Hakuin's, to deliver his Zen teachings. Waddell writes that Otafuku's "paradoxical role as a 'homely beauty' expresses a specific Zen message, one that represents the fundamental non dualistic standpoint of Mahayana Buddhism. Ofuku—happiness and good fortune—is possible only where ordinary worldly distinctions of beauty and ugliness are transcended" (PM Waddell 116). As discussed in the previous chapter, asymmetry, signs of ugliness, or age are also signs of beauty and insight in the Zen tradition and Zenga, the artistic tradition that grows out of Zen. So, both Otafuku and Old Granny Mind Master, although not beautiful to see, deliver Zen dharma with humor. Hakuin's purpose of delivering the message in the form of a popular song probably was for the purpose of popularizing his message enough so that it might be understood by a large amount of students, especially lay students who do not have the luxury of studying diligently at a monastery full time. This can be discerned by his advertising for the usefulness of this kind of song his "Orategama Zokushu," in which he states why the Pure Land nembutsu practice is not heretical, but that Rinzai Zen, with its focus on seeing one's own nature is necessary. In this sermon, Hakuin writes that "if you are looking for something that will help you attain continuous uninterrupted true meditation and insight into your own nature, then calling the Buddha's name is fine, but you could as well recite the grain-



grinding song instead” (ZMH 133).<sup>46</sup> Although this is written before he composed his “Old Granny” song, Hakuin, here suggests that a popular, spoken piece like the nembutsu is only successful if it teaches the right kinds of practices, which for Hakuin must be the seeing into one’s own self-nature and understanding it as formless. Hakuin’s song fills a similar role as the nembutsu, socially, in that it is written in a popular and easily memorizable and easily performed form. Unlike the nembutsu, Hakuin’s song does not grant a promise of salvation by itself, instead it encourages certain kinds of practice. Waddell notes, however, that “anyone who takes the trouble to read the Songs soon finds that, like Hakuin's other songs in this genre, they are anything but easy, being made up for the most part of difficult material obviously intended for advanced Zen students” (PM Waddell 115). So, Hakuin, although putting his message in a creative medium, and a popular form of that medium, which could be circulated and performed for current and future lay students, does not dilute the teachings, as he critiques the Obaku school of Zen

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46 Yampolsky notes in footnote 23 that the grain-grinding song is a popular folk song. However, it is the same translation the he gives in the appendix for Granny’s song, which makes me wonder whether it was a grain-grinding song generally, or whether Hakuin was referring to his own song, which does have distinct Buddhist messages. The Orategama Zokushu was published in 1751 (Yampolsky ZMH 255) and Granny’s Tea-Grinding Song was completed in 1760 (Waddell PM 115), so it is possible that his writing the Zokushu inspired him to create a nembutsu of his own—a popular piece that farmers could learn and recite easily, but this one encourages practice of Hakuin’s school of mystical practice.

and Jōdo Buddhism for doing.<sup>47</sup> The difficulty of material in “Old Granny’s” songs suggests that Hakuin might have had confidence that the message of Rinzaï Zen was not intellectually opaque for the lay people of Japan at the time, or at least that it would impress them enough to seek out further instruction to help them understand. If Hakuin believed this, he had some support for this belief as his temples and the surrounding villages, which were not in urban areas, became populated with many people who were interested in further instruction. This show of popular interest must surely have been encouraging for Hakuin to continue to produce his works and to keep the dharma expressed in his work as authentic as he believed because he saw the people’s interest.

Within “Old Granny’s Tea Grinding Songs,” Hakuin explicates the importance of developing what he called mind master—shushin (主心)—a quality of a person to understand Zen dharma, which Hakuin believes must be confirmed by a Zen teacher (PM Hakuin 120). Hakuin uses the song to talk about how important it is for all people, although the song mostly describes samurai, priests, and other socially elite, whose awakening is important for allowing the lower class to also reach enlightenment. Hakuin writes

“How marvelous is the Mind Master's virtue—

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47 Yampolsky also notes in preliminary cataloging of Hakuin’s works that these songs are written in popular style but are written for “those well versed in Zen” and is “directed towards advanced students about Otafuku’s song and Granny’s song, respectively (ZMH 231). Waddell notes in an end note, however, that the Otafuku song that Yampolsky means is not written by Hakuin at all, but instead is emulating Hakuin’s style and uses a few of his verses. The author of this work is unknown (Waddell, Chapter 4 endnote 1 pg 269). The first portion of Hakuin’s “Old Granny” song has Otafuku present to introduce Old Granny Mind Master; that might have been the inspiration for another author giving Otafuku a song of her own.

Able to hear the sound of the Single hand!  
Priests blabber on about illusion and satori,  
But living the Mind Master's the essential thing;  
Cassock and surplice may make you look splendid,  
But won't really fit you if Mind Master's not there;  
Making the pilgrim circuit's commendable, too,  
But without Mind Master the walking's in vain.” (Hakuin PM 121)

Here one can see that Hakuin is critiquing Buddhist priests, and perhaps all sects of Buddhism, as still being responsible for developing their understanding even after they have become ordained. Hakuin, in this work and in most of his others, believes that even after satori, or awakening, there is still a lot of practice that must be performed in order to deepen one's understanding of dharma. One of the cultural effects of delivering this message in song is to spread an emphasis that is important to Hakuin's overall message about Buddhist dharma—the individual person, whether, monk, priest, or lay person, must be responsible for her or his own study and practice. Hakuin wanted all people of Japan to be active in their pursuit of the dharma, not relying on priests, monks, buddhas, or bodhisattvas alone for awakening or salvation, but instead to feel encouraged to bring zazen and koan practice into their everyday lives and into the time they take for their own development. By putting his Zen teaching into this popular song, Hakuin showed an interest in his teaching reaching many more people than the retinue of monks that his temples could hold, but instead he wanted all of the Japanese people, regardless of rank, to understand that the path to awakening was arduous, but well worth the effort to deepen one's understanding of the workings of the world.

In a letter to one of Hakuin's lay students, Murabayashi Koremitsu, who was suffering from a disorder that Hakuin called Zen sickness, Hakuin boasted that his

practice of naikan<sup>48</sup> meditation made it so that even in his seventies, “If people ask me for a painting, I oblige them” (CD 87). This suggests three notions: 1) that Hakuin’s painting (at least by his own descriptions) are in demand; 2) that Hakuin saw his creation of paintings provided an important service and 3) that Hakuin was thankful that his meditation practice allowed him to continue this service.<sup>49</sup>

In summary, we saw that the perspective about art for Hakuin is not singular, but instead that art is something that has different functions. Also, the way scholars understand the Buddhist art of Japan is not consistent. The scholarly discourses have some positions that suggest a position that good art and good teaching are often at odds in Japanese Buddhist culture, with Hakuin being either an dharma innovator or a brilliant artist, but not both. Other positions hold that Hakuin’s art and or his teaching are diminished by his popularization. But, this chapter supports scholars that see religious art as a flowering of Buddhist principles, particularly those emphasized in *The Lotus Sutra*, and that Hakuin’s efforts at popularization are not a degradation of Buddhist dharma, but instead essential in getting his message to a wide audience. In analyzing texts by Hakuin and his immediate students Hakuin’s thoughts about art, from his personal growth through pieces of art, to his assertions that art is expressive, to his use of art with his students to instruct through creative expression the meaning and importance of Zen

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48 The Naikan 内患 means “introspection” in Japanese.

49 Whether Hakuin’s meditation practice really allows him to paint without his spectacles, as he claims, is not certain. Translator and commentator of Hakuin’s letter, Norman Waddell, points out that he boasts in some of his letters of his great eyesight because of this special meditation, but in others he asks for forgiveness for the poor brushwork because he wasn’t using his spectacles (98). This request for forgiveness could also be politeness or humility and not a sign of his need for the spectacles.

dharma and practice. As a teaching tool, we conclude that Hakuin uses art to deliver accessible and impactful instruction, to give students certificates making their progress with a cherished piece of art, as devotional foci of one's prayers, and as charms to protect against woes that could inhibit the best practice. Hakuin's creative expression was not only an extension of his mystical practice, but also probably one of the reasons he becomes the preeminent Zen leader, and maybe religious leader generally, of his day.

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