Zen-Life

Zen-Life:
Ikkyū and Beyond

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Foreword

To leave after you've gone
A track in letters
Is the stuff of dreams.
Awaken, I know that
No one will be there to read them.[1]

In Professor Haga Kōshirō's groundbreaking *Studies in Higashiyama Culture*, a nine-hundred-page work on the high middle ages of Japan,[2] there is one single illustration — a portrait of Ikkyū.[3] And this little fact reveals just how important Ikkyū was to his times, an era in which poetry and theater, calligraphy and painting, the art of gardening and the art of tea flourished as never before. The 15th century is famed for so many stars

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[1] This *tanka* is the last one from the proso-poetic treatise *Gaikotsu* (骸骨 *The Skeletons*) — see more later. (It is also included in collections of "The Songs of the Way" (*dōka* 道歌) traditionally attributed to Ikkyū. The Japanese text reads *Kakioku mo / yuku-no uchi naru / shirushi kana / samete wa nara-ni / Tou hito mo nashi*. *(Ikkyū Dōka* 1997, 40)

[2] Haga Kōshirō was only 37 years old, and not yet a professor, when this encyclopaedic work was published — an almost unbelievable feat. But it is interesting to note that several prominent Ikkyū specialists also made their first appearance in print well before turning forty: in 1967, Nakamoto Tamaki (b.1937), for example, oversaw the publication of the Shinju-an *Kyōunshū* and a concordance of it with other manuscripts, and in the same year published an article on Ikkyū and the world of *renga*; Ikkyū's dharma heir, Yamada Sōbin (b. 1920) helped prepare the Okumura manuscripts for publication in 1966. On the other hand, the reverend elder Nagata Kōi (1900–1997) published his *Ikkyū sonzai-no erotishizumu* (*Eroticism of Ikkyū*) at the venerable age of seventy-six.

[3] This same portrait graced the cover of a solid German edition, a book on Zen art by Helmut Brinker and Hiroshi Kanazawa entitled, in English translation, "Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings." (See Brinker und Kanazawa 1993). Even more recently, Donald Keene, the old man of Japanese studies in the US, has published an elegant little book entitled *Yoshimasa and the Silver Pavilion: the Creation of the Soul of Japan* (See Keene 2003). In Keene's book there are two portraits: one, naturally, of the shogun himself, Yoshimasa; the other, of Ikkyū — which illustrates perhaps better than anything else that Ikkyū had as much a part in this creation as did the shogun. The question of who had greater influence on aesthetics will be discussed in later chapters.

of the first order in the whole constellation of the arts — verbal, visual, temporal/spatial — that other centuries pale in comparison. And from each form of art, from each significant figure, there stretches a thread that leads us to Ikkyū — like dozens of paths leading to a single mountaintop. Ikkyū was that mountaintop, that point at which all of medieval Japanese spirituality converges. *Kanshi* 漢詩 and *renga* 連歌 poetry, *suibokuga* 水墨画 painting, *Nō* 能theater, the tea ceremony *chanoyu* 茶の湯, and even vegetarian cuisine and the preparation of incense all reflect the power of his influence; long after Ikkyū's death, these arts continued to develop along the lines that he laid out.

Wholeness and fullness of being are the two traits that best define Ikkyū. And however paradoxical it might seem at first glance, this very fullness of being was what kept Ikkyū from becoming a supreme master of a single art. The professionalization of human endeavor, even aesthetic endeavor, inevitably leads to a fragmented, or rather, a one-sided personal existence. The hypertrophy of one area of self-expression ends in that area becoming a surrogate for a real life lived in the flow of time. Ikkyū considered the creative arts both useful and important, but hardly the highest rung on the scale of human values. For him, the loftiest form of art was the **art of living**, and all other forms were merely "noble tricks" (or "expedient means" — *hōben* 方便) that helped those still halfway along the path attain the true fullness of knowledge.

It is tempting to call Ikkyū *l'uomo universale*, a Renaissance man of the order of his Florentine peers. To some degree, first of all by their impact on the surroundings and the name he left for for posterity, Ikkyū resembles Leonardo da Vinci, his younger contemporary. Both of them are much more than the sum of their parts, i.e., the relatively few works and unfinished projects that remain after them. Ikkyū did not leave a rich legacy in each and every one of the fine arts; he chose a different path, and his significance lies in that, simply put, he was the incarnation of the syntheticism of Japanese culture. He lived and had his being in a constant state of creativity, in that unordinary state of mind that gave rise to all of the Japanese art of his day. I shall focus, therefore, on his life itself, and on the many and diverse connections between Ikkyū and Japanese culture. All the poems, calligraphic scrolls and paintings presented and interpreted in the text are meant to elucidate his philosophy and aesthetics, to explain his occasional eccentricities, or to show "his manner of understanding of things," using Vissarion Belinsky's expression. Ikkyū is the perfect example of an artist whose life, as a text, is more interesting and meaningful than any other text he has left us.

My working approach has been to write "a biography with digressions." Ikkyū's work was so intertwined with his life, and his life with his era, that separating the first from the second or the second from the third is both unfair and impossible. So I have chosen to organize this book around the various stops on Ikkyū's way (or, better, alongside some routes of his journey), and to present a cultural and historical context that explains, complements, interprets, and connects the events of his life with the culture of Japan. It transfigures the facts of Ikkyū's life into the facts of Japanese culture.

In some parts of the text I have eschewed a strictly linear narrative; I have sometimes jumped ahead and sometimes jumped back. I would like to think that this will create a true context (Lat. *contextus* — the interlacing) of Ikkyū's life and times, an era when Zen defined Japanese culture. Hence the name of the book, *Zen-Life*, with Ikkyū relegated to a subtitle. A good deal of space is devoted to the artists and poets, the monks and the courtesans around him, who are not merely a kind of staffage meant to round out the narrative of Ikkyū's life; to the contrary, through Ikkyū one can often see more fully and deeply into the style and the behavior of many of medieval Japan's leading cultural figures. It would be more proper to say that this is a book on Japanese culture, and that Ikkyū is its magical prism, one not only bewitching as a whole, but also for its many facets, and for the light it sheds on the depths of the Japanese collective soul in which it was formed.

Japan has always been fascinated by Ikkyū. He was famous enough in his own times, and after his death stories about him abounded and spread. By the Edo, or Tokugawa era (1615–1868) he had become Ikkyū-san, the folk hero, the legend. In modern Japan he is the subject of dozens of articles,

0-1. Little Ikkyū and the Bonze in the Bathtub. Illustration from the book Hani Setsuko. *The Bonze and the Little Novice.* (Transl. by B. Lavrentiev. Ill. by Nikolai Kochergin.) Moscow: Detgiz, 1956.

monographs, animated cartoons, comic books, and novels. But much about his life remains a mystery; there are gaps, there are contradictions, all of which require further study.

The West has only lately become acquainted with Ikkyū. The brilliant legacy his students left in the gardens, museums and teahouses of Japan have eclipsed the work of the master himself. Granted, he was given mention in English-language studies of Japanese culture as early as the Meiji era (1868–1912), for the most part in casual anecdotes that were more telling about the wit and mores of old Edo than of Ikkyū proper. It is interesting to think back to the very first book in Russian that had any connection with Ikkyū, a translation of several *Ikkyū-banashi* (一休咄, *Ikkyū stories*) intended for children, published in the USSR as *The Bonze and the Little Novice*. In it, Ikkyū is never mentioned by name.[4]

The first mention of Ikkyū's name, as far as I could find, was the line in Franz von Siebold's monumental work on Japan (1834), where translating some old Japanese chronicle, he put under 1481: "Der Monch Ikkiu stirbt."

[4] Here I must insert an interesting (or perhaps prophetic) story aside. This little book was one of my childhood favorites from the time I could hardly read myself. I was terribly taken with the antics of the little novice who had absolutely no fear of the pompous bonze, and who always managed to find his way out of a fix. Twenty years later, as a university student reading the first few crumbs of Ikkyū lore available in Moscow libraries, I realized that something seemed familiar. Later, at my parents' house, I managed to find my old book, cover torn off (most probably by me), and since all the publication information disappeared with the cover, for the next twenty years I didn't know (and neglected to find out) where, when, or by whom it was published. The signature on the illustrations (NK-56) had led me to Nikolai M. Kochergin, a then popular illustrator of children's books, and for the time being that seemed enough. But later, as I was working on this edition, I dived once again into card catalogues, and was well rewarded for the effort: among the holdings of the Lenin State Library I found that very same book listed: Setsuko Hani. *Bonza i malen'kii poslushnik* (*The bonze and the little novice*). (Translated by Boris Lavrentiev, Illustrated by N. Kochergin, Moscow: Detgiz, 1956. 32 pages). Thus, unwittingly I happened to have been an Ikkyūist for forty years plus. Once upon a time in 1996, at Ikkyū's memorial temple Shinju-an at Daitoku-ji, as I was stoking the fire under the master's washtub, I remembered my favorite picture from that book — a beaming, well-steamed bonze in the tub, and a sly-faced little novice nearby — and rejoiced in the thought that for all my nearly bonze-like academic status I might still be fit to be a little novice. After the master, the senior monk Sōshō-san bathed; then it was my turn, and as I climbed in, it occurred to me that if the master was the Ikkyū dharma heir, then some of that Ikkyū's dharma might wash off on me as well — a sort of mocking bodily communion. That little picture, by the way, is on my university website.

(Siebold 1834, v. 3, 75) (And it was the single entry under that year.) The first Western-language publication of Ikkyū was a selection of his *dōka* verse, translated by Reginald Blyth (See Blyth 1952–1954; 1956). This came out in 1952. Fifteen years later, Donald Keene wrote a brilliant introductory article (Keene 1971); then, in 1973, the first separate publication devoted to Ikkyū appeared — an annotated translation of fifty-five of Ikkyū's Chinese poems, his *kanshi* (a bold tour-de-force by a young Canadian scholar, Sonja Arntzen) (Arntzen 1973). Later she published a well-commented selection of 155 poems from *Kyōunshū* 狂雲集 (Arntzen 1987). Simultaneously, in the US, James Sanford defended the first doctoral dissertation about Ikkyū, which was eventually published in 1981 (Sanford 1981). Meanwhile, a work co-authored by Jon Carter Covell and Rev. Yamada Sōbin, the abbot of Ikkyū's memorial temple in Daitoku-ji, was published the previous year (Covell 1980). If we do not count passing references to Ikkyū in works of a more general nature, this exhausts the list of scholarly literature on Ikkyū published in Western European languages.

Surprisingly, very few serious Western scholars have had either the courage or the desire to examine the works and days of Ikkyū. As one American Japanologist put it in the early 1980s, "The clutter of the popular press has had stifling effect on Buddhist studies by alienating many who have had their fill of cryptic kōans and chic cults." (Morell 1983, 104). The situation did not improve since that time; maybe it has even deteriorated.

With this scarcity of Ikkyū books, we would do well to note one recent book; while not specifically about Ikkyū, devoted to his times. It is very close to this one both in spirit and in composition. This small book by the doyen of Japanese studies in America, the indefatigable Donald Keene, describes the life and character of Yoshimasa, the eighth shogun of the Ashikaga dynasty (Keene 2003). The greater part of the book is taken up by a survey of the cultural and artistic life of the Higashiyama period, which derives its name from the district in Kyoto where Yoshimasa's residence was located. As I read the book, I realized that its composition in many ways coincided with that of my "Ikkyū:" Keene focuses on the role played by Yoshimasa, a man of refined tastes, some literary talent, and great wealth, in the construction of a new cultural style. Each chapter is devoted to a discussion of one facet of the arts that Yoshimasa took under his wing: poetry, painting, gardening, the tea ceremony, Nō theater. My own portrait of Ikkyū is drawn against a background of the very same set of arts. Keene is less interested in writing a detailed biography of Yoshimasa than in describing the sort of culture that Yoshimasa fostered and advanced. His chief subject, he says, is "the soul of Japan." In my Ikkyū, based on the writings of Ikkyū and others in his circle,

I have attempted to sketch out a "model of the medieval Japanese mind." The similarity in both methods and conclusions is gratifying.

No one had greater influence on the creation of classical Japanese culture than did Yoshimasa and Ikkyū. Quantitatively, it is hard to say which had more. But qualitatively, there is a considerable difference. Yoshimasa, a demanding but sometimes capricious patron, shaped the face of his era by commissioning works of art and paying well for them. Ikkyū was, to a certain extent, a practitioner of virtually all the classical arts of Japan; he was both a master and a mentor who inspired scores of followers. His is the weightier and deeper influence. He defined the aesthetic language of his time, whether it had to do with poetry, rock gardens, ink paintings, tea ceremonies or the preparation of incense. It is interesting that, until Keene's book appeared in 2003, no Western work on Japanese art or literature had even included the name "Higashiyama" in its title. But somehow it happened that in reading Haga Kōshirō's fundamental work on Higashiyama culture (or rather, skimming it, since those nearly nine hundred pages of dense, pre-war Japanese were a challenge for my student comprehension at the time), I came up with a theme for my university thesis, which I called "On several aspects of Japanese painting of the Higashiyama period." With the zeal of a Young Pioneer, I set out to prove that Japanese artists were not slavish imitators of Chinese style, their artistic practice did not run counter to the practice of Zen, and Ikkyū was not "a bad Buddhist." Strangely enough, at the time, this was something that had to be proved. Even more strangely, it took another twenty years and the word of the doyen, Donald Keene, for the Higashiyama culture to be named for what it was — the soul of Japan.

At the same time, this work, with all its implicit sympathy with Ikkyū (the mythologized person and his cultural image), is very far from being an apology for our hero. The conclusion that he was not a "bad Buddhist" did not arise because of sentimental feelings but is based on broader materials and their more thorough analysis than was available a quarter of a century ago. However, quite often this analysis would bring me to what can be called a sheer deconstruction. A plethora of stereotypes — related directly to Ikkyū, or dealing with Zen in general (let's call them a romantically propaedeutic wave à la Suzuki) — appeared to be untenable under detailed and multifaceted scrutiny. And the holy image of Ikkyū turned into a more controversial one. He had plenty of what cannot be squeezed into a frame of a "pure enlightened denunciator of a false and faulty Zen." Sometimes Ikkyū's texts and conduct provoke some discomfort — for instance his violent intolerance and proclivity for slander — whereas those who were the objects of his attacks evoke empathy. I tend to believe that the Ikkyū of

this book is portrayed as a multidimensional and ambivalent representative of such a variegated phenomenon as Zen and the medieval Japanese culture.

One brief but important methodological note: I have brought in a number of *dōka* poems and ink paintings that are assumed to be Ikkyū's, but have not been wholly authenticated. (What in fact has been?) That these are the work of Ikkyū's own hand and mind is not clear. For example, virtually all contemporary scholars agree that he did not in fact write two *Nō* plays earlier attributed to him (*Eguchi* 江口 and *Yamamba* 山姥). I agree that he most probably did not, but I have included them in the discussion because they were no doubt written under his influence, and reflect much of him, and his image. That is to say, for me, the interest in the **cultural image** of Ikkyū justifies the mention of texts traditionally attributed to him, flute melodies, and even instructions on the Way of Fragrance (*kōdō* 香道) that may not be his at all. In discussing his life, his eccentricities, I have occasionally drawn on late medieval stories and anecdotes, most of which are apocryphal. (The source, with an indication of the level of veracity, is always mentioned.)

I am not a textologist or a literary historian (although once upon a time I earned a doctorate in philology), and I am hardly interested in creating concordances, establishing exact dates, or discarding everything that cannot be proven authentic in order to establish an official canon. (I am well aware that, however convincing now, this "canon" would not outlive a generation or two of scholars.) Medieval Japan's notion of "individual authorship" was markedly different from that of the post-Enlightenment European one (and especially the contemporary Western one where every word or scribble now bears a copyright, and lawsuits abound). The notion of collective creative process in Japan will be discussed later, but here I would like to declare that what interests me about Ikkyū is that, first, he was a remarkable and remarkably appealing man, and second (but hardly second), he was a creator, a hero, and a character who was the very embodiment of medieval Japanese culture.

Let us, as a mental experiment, imagine that only half of what is associated with Ikkyū, the "real" Ikkyū who lived at such and such a time, was ever "actually" written by him, painted by him, or performed by him. In a dusty corner of the archives of some abandoned monastery, suddenly we find a manuscript known now as "his," but here signed by a certain Nikyū, and next to that, one signed by Sankyū, or by Mukyū.[5] We have no idea who these three are. What do we do next? Announce the sensational discovery of these mysterious figures on the pages of a little-read scholarly

[5] The word *ikkyū* 一休 means "a single pause, a break." Counting both up and down, *nikyū, sankyū, and mukyū* are "two, three, or even 'no break'."

journal? There is little point in that. But the figure of Ikkyū, as we know it, will be stripped bare. There is a point in discussing why so many texts are attributed to Ikkyū and why so many stories are now "Ikkyū stories."[6] This attribution is a collective modeling and organizing work of a Japanese cultural consciousness that both makes general patterns and molds them into specific figures and images — in this case, a cultural hero. And this is precisely what interests me: non-reflective self-actualization of culture, a sense of identity focused on and concentrated in one figure — Ikkyū. So for clarity's sake, perhaps the best name I can give to the field in which I work is "the archaeology of the creative mind" (and not necessarily the individual mind).

In describing the historical backdrop to his life we have consulted studies on the culture of the 15th century and the role played in it by Zen's Five Mountains (i.e., the G*ozan* 五山, or network of major capital monasteries) by Haga Kōshirō (Haga 1945; 1956), Imaeda Aishin (Imaeda 1970), and Martin Collcutt (Collcutt 1981). Basic information about *gozan bungaku* literature is drawn from books by Uemura Ganko (Uemura 1909) and Tamamura Takeji (Tamamura 1958). The work by Covell and Yamada (Covell 1980), as well as those by Sanford and Arntzen (Sanford 1981; Arntzen 1987) have been both an inspiration and a useful comparison.

And suddenly it has been twenty years since the first *Ikkyū*: five years of study and reflection followed by forty-nine days of total immersion, first in Moscow and then in Apšuciems on the Baltic shore. Now, here in New York, and on the shores of Lake Ontario, as well as later in London, I have returned to the text, reviewing old translations and braving the new ones, changing, adding — three more years of work. The time and space between then and now has been full of journeys (not always welcome ones) through both geographical and mental space. I have perhaps come to somewhat better understand Ikkyū the wanderer.[7]

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[6] My approach is perfectly coincides with John McRae who, in his *Seeing Through Zen*, established the first "McRae's Rule of Zen Studies": "It's not true, and therefore it's more important. The contents of Zen texts should not be evaluated using a simple-minded criterion of journalistic accuracy, that is, 'Did it really happen?'" (McRae 2003, XIX)

[7] For example, in one *dōka* he said:

kuni izuku	what country are you from
sato wa ika-ni to	what is your native land
hito towaba	if this is what they ask you
honrai mui-no	answer thus: I am a man

There are extensive additions and changes to the original text. Some parts include more detail and description, in part thanks to new experience (for example, time spent in Shinju-an, Ikkyū's memorial temple in Kyoto, in 1996 and visits in later years, talking with its abbot and its monk), and in part to the appearance of new literature on Ikkyū and his times. A number of new subchapters have been added. As a result, the text is some one hundred and fifty pages longer.

In conclusion I would like to thank all those who helped in the writing of the book, and those who commented on the finished product, who spurred me on to further study: the late Prof. Evgenia V. Zavadskaia, my first teacher at the Moscow university; the reverend abbot Yamada Sōbin, for allowing me to stay in Shinju-an, Ikkyū's memorial temple; the reverend Yamada Sōshō, for teaching me how to sit, and for advising me during that difficult summer; Prof. Herbert Plutschow of UCLA, who read the first version of this book in Russian and encouraged me to have it translated (I did — or rather rewrote it and twice enlarged). Special thanks go to those senior colleagues who generously sent me their books twenty years ago while I was at the beginning of my Ikkyū studies and still lived within the system which did not presume the buying of books from abroad: Dr. James Sanford, Dr. Sonja Arntzen, and Dr. Jon Carter Covell. Most grateful mention should be made of all the libraries where I both read and wrote: the Lenin State Library; the library of Sophia University in Tokyo; the Bobst Library (New York University); and the British Library. The final summer of updating and reworking was spent with the incomparable collections of the library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, which I was able to access through the affiliation with the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures. The Head of its London office, Dr. John Carpenter, was especially helpful. I am very grateful to Prof. Timon Screech (SOAS) who read the manuscript and offered their advice. Some observations and minor corrections from no less than four anonymous readers were helpful as well. Also I wish to express my gratitude to Sōbin-oshō one more time for his generous permission to freely photograph in Shinju-an and to use the pictures in the current book, as well

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mono to kotae yo from the primeval *wuwei*

(From *Ikkyū oshō hōgo*, no. 48: *Ikkyū dōka* 1997, 18)

Honrai 本来 (literally, that which arrives from the root) is the constant within ever changing life. *Mui* 無為 is the Japanese for the famous Chinese *wuwei* — "no action", but also "no change", in other words an ability to save something of oneself within all the vicissitudes of life.

as to use images from the book *Ikkyū Sōjun shinsekishū* (1980) that he edited. I am sad that the production of this book was so long that Sōbin-oshō did not live to see it. I am grateful too to all museums that allowed me to reproduce artworks from their collections. Special thanks go to Ksenia Tsvetkova for her assistance in compiling the indices. Finally, I thank a book designer Marina Zimoglyad for helping me with typesetting and design of pages.

Technical matters: Japanese names are cited with the family name first, followed by the given name. Chinese names cited are given in *pinyin* transliteration, followed, in parentheses, by the Japanese version. In translation from Ikkyū and other Japanese sources I use Japanese forms of Chinese names (Linji 臨濟 or Deshan 德山 in my own narrative but Rinzai or Tokusan in Ikkyū's poems.) All Japanese and Chinese names and terms are given with characters in the indices. In addition, important terms and those words, which would be better understood in their original writing are supplied with characters at the first appearance.

Initially, my sources for both study and translation were Nakamoto Tamaki's 1976 version of *Kyōunshū*, and *Ikkyū Sōjun* S*hinsekishū* (一休宗純真蹟集, *The Collected Authentic Works of Ikkyū*) (1980, ed. Yamada Sōbin), cross-checked, however, with other publications. At the time, I had no access to the first modern collated collection of his manuscripts (published in 1964 by the Yamato Bunka Museum in Nara) which, until the 1970s, was considered the canonical edition.[8] That status has since been transferred to the set of the complete works of Ikkyū begun in 1976 by the publishing house Shunjusha: *Kyōunshū* was published in two volumes (the first was edited by Hirano Sōjō; the second, edited by Kageki Hideo, appeared in 1997); this was followed by volume number four (prose) in 2000, and volume number three in 2003 (sic!) In the last stage of work, I made heavy use of Hirano and Kageki's edition (both volumes published in 1997). In most cases I give reference to this edition in the following format: KUS 235: KyōUnShū, poem #235. When I quote commentaries by the editors of this edition, I refer to them as Hirano 1997 or Kageki 1997. Also I consulted with the edition of a facsimile of the *Kyōunshū* manuscript published by the owner of the original, Okumura Jūbei, in 1966, in a limited edition of 500 numbered copies not for general sale. (I worked with #220, at NYU's Bobst Library.) The original was transcribed during Ikkyū's lifetime by a disciple named Soshin Shōetsu; it contains 881 poems. A limited

[8] The Yamato Bunkakan edition includes manuscripts taken from the Okumura Collection, Shinjuan, Hoshō Bunkō, Fujita Bijutsukan, and Yamato Bunkakan. (See *Ikkyū tokushū*. Ed. Itō Toshiko. Nara: Yamato bunkakan, 1964 [issue 41].)

number of poems not in the above-mentioned editions I translated from the Yamato bunka 1964 edition (found at the SOAS library). In some cases, poems not included in *Kyōunshū* I have translated directly from pictorial scrolls. For *Tōkai Ikkyū-oshō Nempu* (東海一休和尚年譜, *The Chronicle of Life of the Reverend Ikkyū of Tōkai [Region])* I used the text in Nakamoto 1976 (referred to as "*The Chronicle*" or "*Nempu*" with an indication of a year — "*Nempu*, 1410"), as well as the Imaizumi edition (1998) of "The Life of the Reverend Ikkyū" to check and correct quotations from that text.

Chapter One
The birth of Ikkyū
Political life in Japan at that time

Ikkyū's origins

Bokusai, Ikkyū's pupil and biographer,[1] describes his master's birth as follows:

> The first year of Ōei in the rule of Emperor Go-Komatsu, the senior wood year of the Dog (1394).
> Our teacher, Ikkyū, was of noble origin. His mother was the daughter of a nobleman of high rank in the Southern Court who belonged to the Fujiwara clan. She became the faithful consort of Emperor Go-Komatsu, and the Emperor, in his turn, showed her great favor. But the empress hated her, and said, "This person has sympathies for the Southerners. She hides a knife up in each of her sleeves, and it waits its chance at His Majesty." And so the noble lady was banished from the court and sent to live in the house of simple folk, where she gave birth to our Teacher. Even as a babe in babe's clothing, our master was marked by the signs of the dragon and the phoenix. But no one in all the world yet knew of this. His birth took place at the rising of the sun on the first day of the New Year (1 February 1394).
>
> (*Shinsekishū* 1980, 158; *Nempu* 1394, Nakamoto 1976, 381)

The Chronicle, written by Ikkyū's closest disciple over the course of the decade following his master's death, bears many standard hagiographic features, and employs many conventions of the genre. Therefore Bokusai's claim that Ikkyū was a prince of the blood, Go-Komatsu's firstborn, might at first be considered merely a pious exaggeration. Buddhist hagiographies often describe their subjects as being of kingly birth, the better to compare

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[1] Bokusai (also called Motsurin Shōtō, d. 1491) was an artist, one of Ikkyū's most devoted students; he first began following the master in 1452. He left a few little-known landscapes in the abstract *haboku* 破墨 manner, but is primarily known for his portrait of Ikkyū, which now belongs to the Tokyo National Museum. He was also the first abbot of two Ikkyū temples: Shuon-an in Takigi and Shinju-an in Daitoku-ji.

them with the holy prince Gautama of the Shakya clan (the man who became the Buddha). Christian myth shares the same typology: Jesus Christ, born into the family of a simple carpenter, was a descendant of the royal house of David.

But such legends and tales are not the sole source of information on Ikkyū's birth. The secret of his descent was no secret at all to his contemporaries and immediate descendants. And so, exactly 100 years after his birth, in the year 1494, a courtier named Sugawara no Kazunaga (1460–1529) made a diary entry in which he notes that, according to the secret tradition, Ikkyū was the morganatic son (*rakuin* 落胤) of Emperor Go-Komatsu and therefore a prince, although the people of the world did not know that.[2] Kazunaga's information we can count as reliable, since he had studied Zen under Ikkyū's son Jōtei, himself a Zen monk. Moreover, Kazunaga's father and grandfather, as well as other members of the Sugawara family, were very close to Ikkyū and undoubtedly might have preserved the real story of the teacher's birth.

There is also indirect but nonetheless persuasive evidence in the brushstrokes of Emperor Go-Komatsu himself. In the waning days of the first year of Ōei, he composed a 100-stanza *wakan renku* 和漢聯句 — a form or poetry that alternates Chinese and Japanese verse. While the poem never mentions names or gives specific details, its sense of longing, heartfelt sorrow and love lost must, in our opinion, surely be a sublimated expression of some of the most dramatic events of Go-Komatsu's life. The most telling lines begin on the face page of the second leaf in the standard four-leaf *kaishi* 懐紙 format that was traditionally used for such 100-stanza poems. Placing these lines here, at a central point in the text, underscores their importance in the whole:

Virtue discarded
    has a dignity not of this world.
Behind her curtain, the beauty
    is busy with her toilet,
She sits alone before
    a red candle.
Pithy is a dream of the orphan
    in autumn-time.

[2] *Higashibōjō Kazunaga kyōki* 東坊城和長卿記, 1 day, 8th month, 1494. See Nishimura 2006, 42.

1-1. Portrait of the Emperor Go-Komatsu. Unknown artist. Silk, colors. 110.0 x 51.5. Unryū-in temple, Kyoto.

Mournful thoughts
Night after night,
The moon too has turned sorrowful,
And the dew, merciless to all vows,
Slips down off the blades of grass.

The hart finds no wife
In the flatlands.
His voice grows quiet.
Loneliness.
Darkness gathers at the foot of the hills.

There is no mention of this poem by Go-Komatsu in the current scholarship, perhaps in part because to this day *wakan renku* is a genre hardly studied, little known, and little published; Go-Komatsu's poem was first introduced in a highly specialized work entitled *Renku and Renga* 聯句と連歌, by Nose Asaji (Nose 1951, 168–175), and here, unlike in some other cases, we cannot look to an authoritative Ikkyū Japanese scholar for a reference. However, in seeing in this text the longing of the young emperor for this lost wife and son, we might not be stretching its meaning too far.

Of course, Go-Komatsu's imagery is certainly conventional, even canonical; he uses forms that had evolved over at least a hundred generations,

to the hundredth emperor. These images — the call of the hart, who has lost his mate, or the parting of the dew and the flower — could have come to the poet (who wrote within a strictly dictated formal-imaginative paradigm) regardless of his personal trials and travails. It would be simplistic, and simply wrong, to read every mention of crying cicadas as a lamentation on an unhappy romance. A sorrowful, elegiac tone is characteristic of the love theme in Japanese lyric tradition. But in this case, given the totality of other factors as well, we can be somewhat assured that we are hearing the echoes of Go-Komatsu's real feelings for the concubine he had lost and the son he had never seen.

In the first place, this *renku* was composed during the twelfth month of the first year of Ōei (1394), perhaps on the first anniversary of Ikkyū's mother's banishment from the imperial court. And we know from a multitude of sources that *renku* and *renga* were written for a variety of ceremonial occasions and significant days; they had their own singular place in Shinto-Buddhist rituals and served as a sort of prayer — a *hōraku renga* 法樂連歌, a *renga* to propitiate a spirit.

The second factor has to do with the religious-devotional character of the *renku*, and that His Imperial Majesty "deigned to write it alone" (*gyōdokugin*). The chief and most distinct characteristic of the *renga* and *renku* is that they were collective efforts, with two, three, five or even more poets composing stanzas "round the circle." Inasmuch as a *renga* by a single poet was a violation of the defining poetic method, individual *renga* were few and far between. Working alone, Go-Komatsu was not bound by his fellow poets' themes or imagery. So in this case we can be relatively sure that traditional motifs like the discarded beauty, the orphan, and the solitary hart are dictated not by the genre but rather by Go-Komatsu's own emotions.

And in the third place, even a quick survey of the words used in the above quote shows us that in terms of key concepts — "virtue discarded," "he/she who is departed," or "fallen out of the system" (*rinka* 林下), "beauty," "lonely/alone," "red candle" (a wedding candle), "the dew and the grass" (a symbol of lovers parted), "the hart who has lost his mate," et cetera — quantity turns to quality, and sets the leitmotif for all the stanzas in the poem.

Japanese lyric poetry allows for a rather wide variation of images and topics within a set cultural context; Go-Komatsu's constant return to and reiteration of those described above, while to some degree a matter of reflection, is undoubtedly sincere. Apparently, the forced separation was a shock not only to Ikkyū's mother, but to Ikkyū's seventeen-year-old father as well. Granted, the young emperor still had "willing consorts at the service

/ of Flattery or Dreams,"[3] but as is obvious from these verses, these ladies, however willing, could not erase the memory of his beloved first concubine.

Ikkyū himself never doubted that he was Go-Komatsu's son. In a number of his poems in *Kyōunshū* there is direct testimony to his sense of kinship with the emperor. Thus, in a poem about chrysanthemums in front of Go-Komatsu's memorial shrine (in Unryū-in temple of Sennyū-ji monastery in Higashiyama area of Kyoto), Ikkyū wrote: "on the Emperor's brocade sleeves there are clouds in azure sky." (KUS, 289). He possibly mentioned this pattern and placed together the characters "cloud" and "sky/heaven" to hint that he, A Cloud, is connected to the Emperor ([the Son of] Heaven). A set of poems about Go-Komatsu (KUS, 771–775) was written after the death of the latter.

Ikkyū did not see his father until he himself was thirty-three. In 1427, Go-Komatsu, who was by then fifty years old, summoned Ikkyū to the imperial palace. By that time he had already abdicated the throne to his second (and first legitimate) son, the sickly and mentally challenged Shōkō (1401–1428), the son of the Empress Motoko, and a half-brother to Ikkyū. According to Bokusai's *Chronicle*, after handing over to Shōkō all the requisite imperial powers and regalia, Go-Komatsu established a formal relationship with his firstborn, to whom he showed love and deep respect. He invited Ikkyū to court, where he with great pleasure talked of the Way or discussed Zen with his son. (For instance, Go-Komatsu asked Ikkyū who, amongst the Zen masters of the past, was more advanced, and Ikkyū gave him his judgment.) When Shōkō was on his deathbed, and there was no direct heir to the throne, Go-Komatsu approached Ikkyū, the man who possibly, in his mind, should be proclaimed emperor. By this time Ikkyū was already a long-time student of Zen; he had experienced enlightenment, and the title of descendant to the gods was nothing that particularly tempted him. He proposed that the emperorship be given to the distant nephew of Go-Komatsu, Hikohito (1419–1471); and in fact little Hikohito became, under the name of Go-Hanazono, Japan's 102nd emperor, occupying the throne from 1428 to 1464. We emphasize that he "occupied the throne" rather than "ruled," because at the time the emperor exercised very little real power, being instead a sort of figurehead who presided at ceremonies and led a highly ritualized life, where in matters both of religion and etiquette there were formal obligations and formal restrictions — all of which spoke to the emperor's political impotence. The fact that Ikkyū did not become

[3] From Innokenty Annensky's poem in *Кипарисовый ларец* [*The Cypress Chest*] (1910).

emperor is of tremendous — and happy — significance for Japanese culture. Precisely *because* he was unconstrained by ritual, court intrigue, or forced idleness, he became the leading Zen master of his day, a culture hero of sorts, who exerted a defining influence on all forms of visual, plastic and literary arts. So in the light of history, the machinations that forced his mother into exile from the imperial court even before the boy's birth had a remarkably favorable outcome.[4]

Two-Court Japan

Ikkyū had been born into an unprecedented set of circumstances. Rarely, if ever, had an offspring of a Japanese emperor been declared illegitimate. One of the reasons for this exception, perhaps, was that Go-Komatsu was barely seventeen when he fathered the child, and none of the various factions within the court took him very seriously. But the chief reason lay elsewhere.

Ikkyū's mother descended from a noble family of the Southern Court, the rightful and elder line of the imperial family that until 1392 had its seat in Yoshino, south of Nara, and which had over the course of several decades warred with the Northern, or Kyoto Court — the line from which Go-Komatsu descended.[5] The division between the Southern Court and the Northern had existed formally since the 1330s, but the groundwork for this discord between the two factions of the imperial family had been laid at least fifty years earlier.

In 1272, Emperor Go-Saga (1220–72, r. 1242–46), in the hope of establishing peace and unity within an imperial house often racked with strife over succession, made a disastrous decision, one that would eventually lead to one brutal internecine war succeeding another. He issued a proclamation declaring that henceforth all future emperors must be chosen either from

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[4] Ikkyū was not the only Zen monk who was begotten by a Japanese Emperor. Thus, the first teacher of Daitō-kokushi (whose spiritual heir in the fifth generation Ikkyū considered himself), was the son of Emperor Go-Saga, Kōhō Kennichi (1241–1316), also known as Bukkoku-kokushi, the abbot of Manjū-ji monastery in Kamakura.

[5] For a very long time, the victors from the North considered their line the only legitimate one, but in 1911 the imperial house finally reconsidered, and declared the Southern emperors the rightful, and their Northern contemporaries usurpers. Shortly thereafter Ikkyū was officially recognized as a member of the imperial family, and his gravestone at Shuon-an was inscribed with the chrysanthemum crest and the title *ō* 王 (a royal).

the line of his second-born son Go-Fukakusa, or from that of his seventh-born, Kameyama, the current emperor. Go-Saga may have been striving for a compromise, a mutually acceptable means of imperial succession, but his solution in fact was an official recognition of the existence of two competing factions. Such a decision could not help but please the shoguns, who, having by 1185 stripped the imperial throne of any real power, and having by 1192 legalized their status, were by now the de facto rulers of the country. One child emperor after another had abdicated the throne and taken monastic vows, leaving the shogunate free to manipulate the court; thus the shoguns could pay lip service to the latest descendant of the sun goddess Amaterasu, but act according to their own will.

This struggle that constantly replaced one boy emperor with another continued until 1318, when the energetic but no longer young Go-Daigo (1288–1339) took the throne. He was thirty years old, a latecomer. His long wait may have given birth to his tireless pursuit of power and his reluctance to abdicate. Very soon he was behaving not as a proper, ritual emperor should; he was taking action, attempting to shift political power in Japan from the *bakufu* back to the imperial court. His intention was to extend his rule as long and as far as he could, ceding nothing to either the *bakufu* or to rival descendants of Go-Saga. Upon his death, Go-Daigo's own children would ascend to the throne.

Yet Go-Daigo was enough of a diplomat to prevent the shogunate from forcing its own policy upon the court. The general staff in Kamakura sat back, waiting for Go-Daigo to trip over himself, or give the *bakufu* an excuse to accuse him of fomenting anarchy or sedition. Such had been the fate of one of Go-Daigo's predecessors, Emperor Go-Toba, who spoke out in favor of the restoration of the authority of the throne, and who in 1221 was arrested and sent into exile.

It was not until 1331 (when a genuine anti-shogunate conspiracy came to light) that troops were dispatched from Kamakura. They made quick work of the emperor's small force, and took Go-Daigo prisoner. Strong-willed as ever, he refused to abdicate the throne or take monastic vows. In the end, he was forcibly exiled to the faraway island of Oki in the Sea of Japan. A more compliant candidate, Kōgon, a representative of yet another line of the imperial house, was placed on the throne.

Meanwhile, Go-Daigo, unreconciled to his fall from power, managed to escape from Oki, and made his way back to the central provinces. In his fifteen-year rule he had gathered about him a group of influential supporters interested in removing the lowborn Hōjō regents (*shikken* 執権) who ruled in the name of the Kamakura shogunate. Go-Daigo's supporters now came

out in open opposition to military rule by the Kamakura, and had already begun to raise arms against the clan. As time went on, it became clear that the two sides were closely matched. But what might have turned into a long-drawn-out civil war came to an abrupt end when the head of the powerful Ashikaga clan stepped into the fray. Ashikaga Takauji was a clansman of Minamoto; he was also a brave and far-sighted warrior. He had been sent to put down the rebellion fomented by Go-Daigo, but at a critical moment in the campaign switched sides, and supported the imperial party. This presaged not only a victory for Go-Daigo himself, who would retake the throne in July of 1333, but also the final collapse of the Kamakura regime, which had long been weakened by internal strife. The unexpected forging of a coalition between Go-Daigo and Ashikaga Takauji was the *coup-de-grâce*.

But it soon became obvious that Takauji, a calculating and clever politician who in 1333 was all of twenty-eight years old, was hardly ready to remain a humble vassal of the ruling emperor. A descendant of a noble house from the same eastern provinces that had given birth to the Minamoto and Hōjō samurai clans who had crushed the old Heian aristocracy rule some one hundred years before (1185), Ashikaga Takauji had no intention whatsoever of abandoning the shogunate system of rule. With the house of Hōjō in decline (Minamoto's family had lost much of its political influence with the death of Yoritomo, a charismatic leader), Takauji apparently fancied himself the next shogun.

Yet he was sadly mistaken in supposing that Go-Daigo would be so grateful for the aid that he would assume the same humble posture and general indifference to state affairs that previous emperors had. Supported by a small group of loyal followers, Go-Daigo assembled an army; he planned neither to retreat nor to share power. He proclaimed that henceforth the land would be ruled as it had been in ancient times, by the descendants of Amaterasu; the symbol of his rule would be the character signifying both "construction" and "military valor" (*kemmu* 建武). Go-Daigo's brief but vain attempt at reviving the power of the monarchy came to be known as the Kemmu Restoration.[6]

But while cultural tradition has always dictated there be an emperor on the throne of Japan, the emperor has rarely in fact ruled the state. The emperor was a symbol of national unity; the real power lay with families and clans, who plied their influence either by marriages of convenience or by direct

[6] One of Go-Daigo's portraits shows him with a sword, which was a unique case in the depiction of Japanese emperors. It was painted by Monkan, a priest linked with Tachikawa sect. It is stored in Daitoku-ji.