

**Zen** art is known for its elegant simplicity, embodied in the many paintings and calligraphies in this exhibit that consist of black ink on white paper or silk. With a few brushstrokes, Zen monks create expressions of enlightenment, from a simple circle, to an image of Zen's Indian founder, Bodhidharma. These works from the Kagetsu An Collection show a wide range of Zen art from Japan's Edo period (1600-1868) to the twentieth century. Among these pieces are painting and calligraphy by such prominent Zen figures as Hakuin Ekaku (1685-1768), Sengai Gibon (1750-1837), and Nakahara Nantenbo (1839-1925), who were all great artists and great Zen masters.



**ABOVE:** The monk Renshobo was so devoted that he always faced west, the direction of the western paradise in Chinese Pure Land Buddhism, even if, as here, he was traveling east.

*Inscription by:*  
Daikei Sotetsu (1677-1756). Abbot of Daitoku-ji Temple

*Painting by:*  
Mochizuki Gyokusen (1692-1755). Hanging scroll, ink on paper. Height: 61 inches.

**LEFT:** A few brushstrokes, painted with the right mind, evoke a lotus pond. The lotus is a widespread symbol of spiritual purity in Buddhism, and the unopened bud represents the potential of all beings to realize enlightenment.

Gocho Kankai (1749-1835). Hanging scroll, ink on paper. Height: 47.5 inches.



## ZEN BUDDHISM and the ARTS of JAPAN

**CURATED BY AND ON LOAN FROM**  
John Fong

**ASSOCIATE CURATOR**  
Megan Bryson, UT Department of Religious Studies

**COLLABORATOR**  
Suzanne Wright, Chair of Asian Studies, UT School of Art

**TEA CEREMONY SET LOANED BY**  
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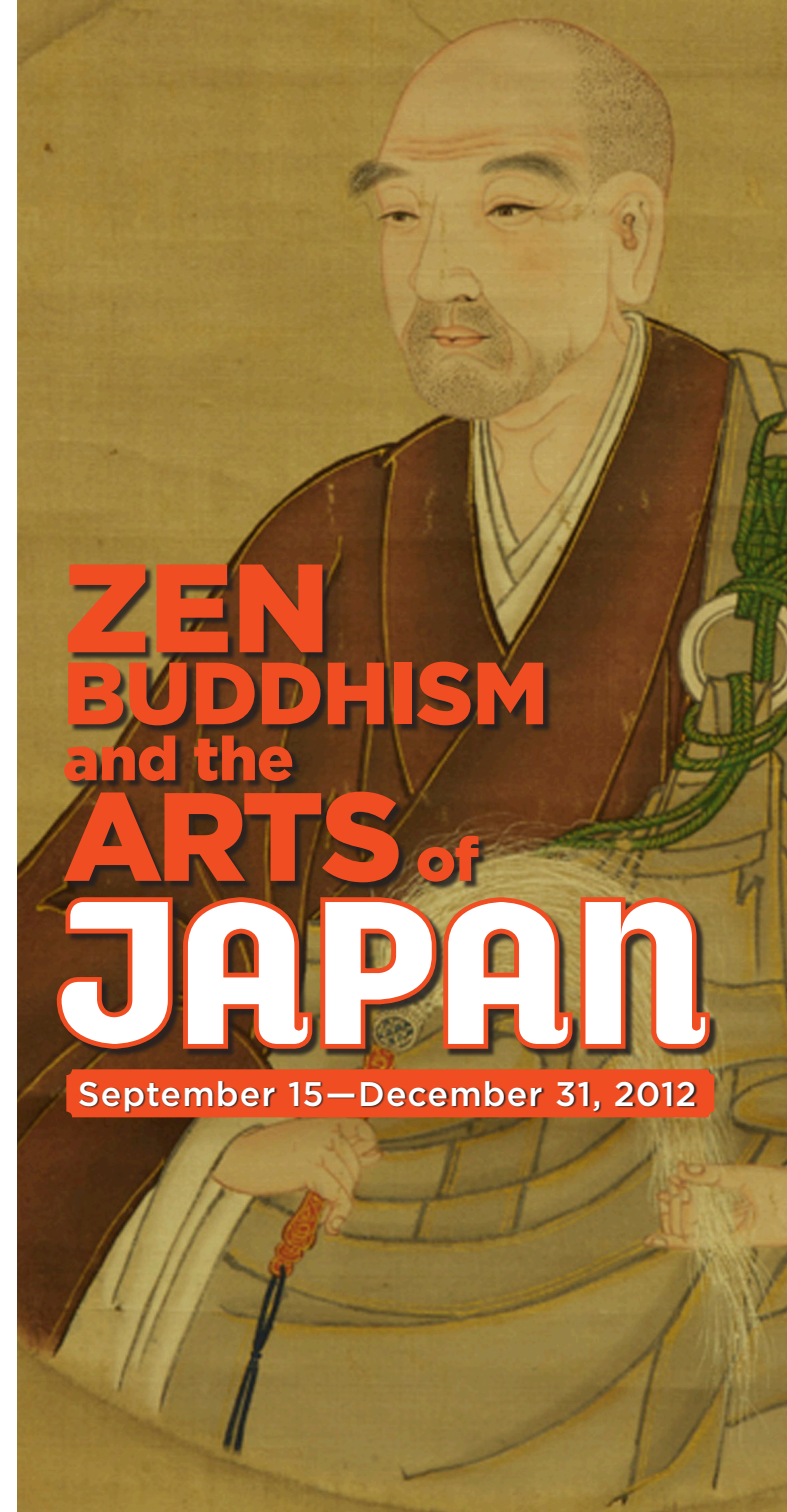


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**ON THE COVER:** The painting of an unidentified Obaku monk represents the genre of *chinsō* (true likeness). Portraits hung in the monastery's halls commemorated abbots and emphasized the importance of teachers and their spiritual lineage.

Anonymous (eighteenth to nineteenth century). Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk. Height: 62.5 inches.



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used to strike students to prompt their awakening.

Teachers are important in Zen, not only for helping guide students to awakening, but also for verifying students' awakening. When students reach enlightenment, they receive a certificate that places them within a spiritual lineage that extends to the famous Chinese Zen patriarchs, to Bodhidharma, and all the way back to the Buddha. The enlightenment these students reach is the same as the Buddha's enlightenment. It is therefore not surprising to see several examples of Zen painting and calligraphy either depict the Zen masters of the past or quote their sayings.

The tea ceremony is another artistic form associated with Zen Buddhism. This exhibit includes objects used in the tea ceremony, from bowls, to iron kettles, to braziers. The

**LEFT:** Mt. Fuji rises over Sagawa Bay as a few ships sail on the water below. This nature scene, rendered in a few brushstrokes, shows the simplicity and minimalism of Zen ink painting.

Nakahara Nantenbo (1839-1925). Hanging scroll, ink on paper. Height: 79.5 inches.

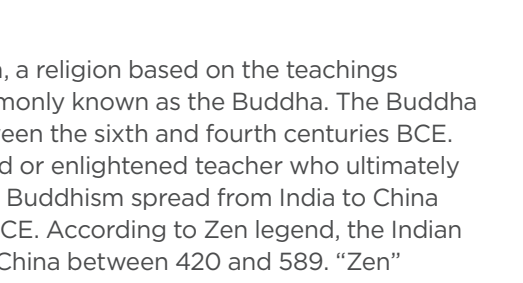
**RIGHT:** "Teal" proclaims the large symbol. "Everybody attentively drinks Zhao-Zhou's tea." Zen monks developed the tea ceremony, "Way of Tea," an important Zen ritual.

Gaoquan Xingdun (Jpn. Kosen Shoton; 1633-1695.) Hanging scroll, ink on paper. Height: 53.25 inches.

Zen is one of many schools of Buddhism, a religion based on the teachings attributed to Siddhartha Gautama, commonly known as the Buddha. The Buddha lived and taught in India sometime between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE. Buddhists recognize him as an awakened or enlightened teacher who ultimately attained nirvana and shared his insights. Buddhism spread from India to China via the Silk Road by the second century CE. According to Zen legend, the Indian prince Bodhidharma introduced Zen to China between 420 and 589. "Zen" is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese character "Chan," which is the Chinese rendering of the Sanskrit word *dhyana* that refers to a mind absorbed in meditation. Seated meditation, or *zazen*, is a core practice of Zen.

Japanese Buddhists embraced Zen in the twelfth century and it became one of the dominant forms of Buddhism there. In Japan, Zen is split into three lineages of Soto, Rinzai, and Obaku. The Rinzai and Obaku forms of Zen retained close ties to China. Monks of these lineages mastered the classical Chinese arts of painting and calligraphy in addition to philosophy and literature. Most of the pieces in this exhibit come from Rinzai and Obaku monks. Though their paintings and calligraphy might look effortless or unstudied, they are the result of years of training. As with most endeavors, it takes a lot of effort to appear effortless!

Zen art expresses the enlightened mind that, according to Zen doctrine, exists within everyone. The only difference between buddhas and other people is that buddhas have awakened to their innate enlightenment, while other people have not. Zen masters have the job of leading their students to realize they are already buddhas, but this is not something people realize by hearing an explanation. Instead, Zen masters use various non-verbal techniques and wield language creatively (sometimes confusingly) to trigger students' awakening. Nakahara Nantenbo took the name Nantenbo, meaning "Nandina tree staff," from the staff he



**ABOVE:** Bodhidharma (Jpn. Daruma), the Indian monk who introduced Zen to China, was a favorite subject of Zen artists. The calligraphy alludes to his legendary escape from the emperor's guards by crossing the Yangzi River on a rush leaf before he sat in meditation facing a wall for nine years.

Gocho Kankai (1749-1835). Hanging scroll, ink on paper. Height: 72 inches.

**LEFT:** A *chawan*, or tea bowl, made in China during the Song dynasty (960-1279). The Jian ware (stoneware) shows the simplicity and subdued colors preferred for the tea ceremony. The *temmoku* bowls, with "hare's fur" glaze, were produced mainly for export to Japan for the tea ceremony.

ritualization of every step of the tea ceremony (*chanoyu* in Japanese) mirrors the highly ritualized nature of Zen monastic life. Each step requires total concentration and mindfulness, making it a meditative experience.

Meditation is the cornerstone of Zen monastic practice. Painting and calligraphy can be forms of meditation, and can serve as objects of meditation after completion. A phrase such as "ordinary mind is the Way," a lotus pond, or the peak of Mt. Fuji could be the catalyst that leads the viewer to realize his or her innate enlightenment. The search for enlightenment need not extend beyond one's own mind.

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**RIGHT:** "People who fear this staff will go to paradise," states the calligraphy next to the Nandina staff used by the well-known artist and Rinzai Zen abbot, Nakahara Nantenbo. Rinzai masters would strike students with a staff to bring them to enlightenment.

Nakahara Nantenbo (1839-1925). Hanging scroll, ink on silk. Height: 76 inches.

