



The Ascetic as Savior,
Shakyamuni Undergoing Austerities
by Kano Kazunobu

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During a recent visit to the Spencer Museum of Art's Asian art gallery I came upon a hanging scroll portraying a haunting image of an emaciated, half-naked man—a previously unpublished work by the Japanese artist Kano Kazunobu (1815–1863) (Fig. 1). The bald spot at the crown of the figure's head and the luminous orb that surrounds his upper torso alert the viewer that this is a depiction of the historical Buddha as a youth (*Shakyamuni* in Sanskrit; hereinafter referred to as Shaka, the Japanese pronunciation of this name), practicing asceticism in his quest to understand and transcend worldly suffering before attaining enlightenment. The painting captures Shaka's utter dejection at his inability to achieve his goal. He sits slumped upon a grass mat, atop a rocky ledge, with hands and head resting on an upraised knee, and a mournful expression on his face. His scraggly beard, elongated toenails and fingernails, bony shoulder and ribs—all features carefully delineated by the artist—show the results of Shaka's self-deprivation, which stems from his complete preoccupation with spiritual concerns.

fig. 1 Kano Kazunobu (1815–1863) / *Shakyamuni Undergoing Austerities*, 1856–1862 / hanging scroll; ink on silk / 98.5 x 34.5 cm / Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Gift of Elsie Anna Wilson Trust, 1994.0113

I was pleased to see the painting, which entered the collection as a gift from the estate of a Kansas collector in 1994, because I did not know that the Museum possessed any of Kazunobu's works, most of which reside in Japanese collections that are housed in shrines and temples, and which have, until the last twenty years, remained unstudied.

In the traditional canon of Japanese art, formulated in the late 19th century, Kazunobu was categorized as a minor member of the academic Kano school and had been disregarded because he worked mainly for religious institutions. His art was thought to have little to do with the vitality of the more avidly studied painting of the late Edo period by artists working in newer and more fashionable traditions.

The first monograph on Kazunobu appeared in 1983. It introduced images and documents relating to a remarkable set of one hundred paintings of the five hundred legendary disciples of the Buddha (*Arhat* in Sanskrit, *Rakan* or, less commonly, *Arakan* in Japanese; hereinafter referred to as Rakan), which he painted for Zōjōji, the Tokugawa family temple in Edo (Tokyo) (Figs. 2, 3). Zōjōji served as the eastern Japan headquarters of the Jōdō (Pure Land) sect of Buddhism.¹ Ten scrolls from this set were exhibited for the first time at the Shizuoka Prefectural Art Museum in 1989.² Since then, with ever-increasing frequency, exhibitions and art magazines have featured selected scrolls from this set as well those from a related set owned by the Tokyo National Museum. The Zōjōji set was also the subject of a recent television documentary.³ Interest in Kazunobu will undoubtedly culminate in 2011, when Zōjōji will display its complete set of Rakan paintings for the first time since 1945, in a special exhibition at the Edo-Tokyo Museum in Tokyo, from March 15 to May 29, as part of the 800th anniversary of the death of Jōdō sect founder Hōnen (1133–1212).

I have been an admirer of Kazunobu since the 1980s, when I began researching later Japanese Buddhist art, and I have twice published his Zōjōji paintings in broader studies of this subject.⁴ This article is an opportunity to explore Kazunobu's life and art in greater detail, in the process addressing how the Spencer Museum's painting fits into his oeuvre and introducing several other paintings by him that reside in prominent Western museum collections, including several acquired in the late 19th century, before he drifted into obscurity. Finally, I will suggest reasons for the current resurgence of interest in Kazunobu in Japan.



fig. 2 Kano Kazunobu / *Five Rakan Saving Sinners from Hell*, 1862–1863 / Scroll 23 from a set of one hundred, of Five Hundred Rakan / hanging scroll; ink, colors, and gold on silk / 172.3 x 85.3 cm / Zōjōji, Tokyo



fig. 3 Detail of Figure 2

Kazunobu's Training and Entry into the Kano School

In Japanese art historical taxonomy, Kano Kazunobu is identified as an artist of the Kano school, Japan's largest and most successful professional painting academy, established in Kyoto in the 16th century. Kano workshops initially produced art for residences and for the formal audience chambers of high-ranking samurai warriors, the imperial court, and religious institutions patronized by these elites. Their paintings featured archetypal and symbolic Chinese and Japanese subjects including trees, often together with birds and flowers; mythical and real animals, especially dragons and tigers, which the Japanese warriors considered emblematic of power; Chinese sages and palace life in ancient China; Chinese-style ink landscapes; and figural compositions of secular and religious personages, among whom are Buddhist deities such as the Spencer Museum's scroll by Kazunobu of *Shakyamuni Undergoing Austerities*. The standardization of a broad repertoire of reproducible painting techniques derived from diverse continental and native artistic traditions allowed Kano-school painters to sustain their practice over multiple generations. In the Spencer Museum's painting, the dark, angular outlines of the craggy rock upon which the Buddha sits and the jagged folds of his garment reflect Kazunobu's Kano-school training.

In the 17th century, some Kano-school members relocated to Edo to become official painters for the Tokugawa shoguns who headed the military bureaucracy that ruled Japan during the Edo period (1615–1868). Concurrently, other Kano artists opened branch academies elsewhere, initially to serve regional samurai warlords (*daimyo*). All of these Kano studios became a training ground for innumerable painters charged with perpetuating the Kano lineage. But sometimes artists left the academy and struck out on their own to escape the conservative environment that many Kano workshops had become. The most creative period for Kano painters is generally considered the late 16th through the late 17th centuries. Prior to new investigations undertaken over the last twenty years, Japanese scholars had largely dismissed Kano-school painters after this time as derivative.⁵

Kazunobu may be the most important late-Edo Kano artist to have been brought to light by this recent research.⁶ He was born into the family of an antique dealer in Edo, who recognized Kazunobu's natural gift for painting and had him begin art training at a very young age. Kazunobu first studied with Tsutsumi Tōrin III (active early 19th century), a painter and print designer who specialized



fig. 4 Kano Kazunobu / *Benkei Fighting Ushi Wakamaru on the Gōjō Bridge in Kyoto*, 1847 / votive tablet (*ema*); ink and colors on paper / 310 x 234 cm / Sensōji, Tokyo

in Chinese subjects rendered in a style derived from native Japanese painting traditions of the Tosa and Shijō schools. Artists of the former excelled in brightly colored, delicate paintings of stories from Japan's ancient era, whereas those of the latter school made their names by creating lightly colored, lyrical compositions of birds and flowers, landscapes, and figural compositions based on sketches from life.

While still quite young, Kazunobu switched teachers and entered a more prestigious atelier, the studio of Kano Sosen Akinobu (1765–1826), the sixth-generation head of one of the major Kano family branches, Asakusa Saruyamachi, which served the shogunate. Study here offered him opportunities to examine fine old paintings and provided access to important potential institutional and private clients. Although Sosen Akinobu died when Kazunobu was only twelve, he apparently remained associated with Sosen Akinobu's studio for the duration of his life. Sosen Akinobu created paintings of greater diversity than was the expected norm for Kano artists. His known works include elegant Ukiyoe-style paintings of beautiful women and Girls' Day Festival dolls.⁷ Kazunobu's wide-ranging artistic interests probably stemmed in part from his teacher's attitude, but they also must have been derived from his relentless dedication to the study of art, evident in sketchbooks that reveal the diversity of his sources.⁸

Sometime during his apprenticeship in the Kano studio, Kazunobu became the adopted son of Itsumi Toneri and married his daughter, Yasu (died 1897). Such an arrangement was common in premodern Japan when a family had no male heir (this practice continues today, though less frequently). However, in Kazunobu's case, his allegiance to the Kano line proved stronger than his loyalty to his adopted family, whose surname he did not use professionally. Probably in his late 20s, he and his bride left her parents' home and moved to Edo's bustling Asakusa entertainment district.⁹ There, Kazunobu became friends with the celebrated lacquer painter Shibata Zeshin (1807–1891), one of many other successful artists who also resided in the area. Kazunobu seems to have begun to use the Kano surname professionally at this time. His earliest known work, which earned him great popular acclaim, is a large votive tablet (*ema*) dated 1847, which he painted for an unidentified client who dedicated it to Sensōji (Fig. 4), one of Edo's most important temples (popularly known as the Asakusa Kannon temple) located in the center of Asakusa. He signed it "*Kenyūsai Gen Kazunobu kin ga*" (respectfully painted by Kenyūsai Gen Kazunobu). "Kenyūsai" is a pseudonym he used as an artist and "Gen" stands for the Kano family name.¹⁰ "Kazunobu" is his professional art name, conferred by his Kano master. It includes the character "nobi," commonly used in the given names of Kano family members.

This votive tablet depicts a legendary episode from the Genpei civil war (1180–1185), fought by two rival clans seeking military domination of the imperial court. In this famous scene, the 12th century warrior-monk Benkei, enormous and demonic in appearance, futilely fights Ushi Wakamaru (Minamoto Yoshitsune), a young samurai warrior trained in martial arts by goblins. The dramatic intertwined poses of the figures and animated brushwork indicate that by the time he executed this work, Kazunobu was already an accomplished painter. Dated 1853, his only known pair of large-scale screens portrays a related subject—various battles from the Genpei War—with ink paintings of a dragon and tiger on the reverse.¹¹

In 1856, Kazunobu received a prestigious commission from Naritasan Shinshōji, a large and popular temple near Edo, for icon paintings and preparatory drawings for a sculptor to use as a guide in carving a series of wooden door panels with images of the Five Hundred Rakan. Kazunobu's stature in the art world increased as a result of this project, in recognition of which he received the honorary ecclesiastical title, “*Hokkyō*” (Bridge of the Law) on the 21st day of the

third month of 1856. This title was the lowest of three levels of rankings that the imperial court presented to talented artists.¹² We know that he was working on this project before receiving this title because he signed only some of the paintings in this manner.¹³

Many of Kazunobu's surviving paintings, including the Spencer Museum's *Shakyamuni Undergoing Austerities*, include the title “*Hokkyō*” in the signature.¹⁴ This helps to pinpoint their production to a date after the 21st day of the third month of 1856 and before the 10th day of the seventh month of 1862, when he was awarded the second highest court title, “*Hōgen*” (Eye of the Law). He proudly included his new title, *Hōgen*, in the signatures of all (known) paintings that he created subsequently. Although Kazunobu is most famous for his Buddhist figures, known works with the title *Hokkyō* included in his signature include two in the British Museum: a pair of scrolls of horses; and a large painting, intended to be mounted on a screen, of Chinese children playing amidst blossoming plum trees (Fig. 5).¹⁵ This latter theme was a stock subject in the repertoire of artists, including Kazunobu's teachers, who painted Chinese themes.



fig. 5 Kano Kazunobu / *Chinese Children at Play*, 1856–1862 / unmounted screen; ink and colors on paper / 116 x 211 cm / © Trustees of the British Museum, 1881,1210,0.1517



fig. 6 Kano Kazunobu / *Skeleton Dance* / Inscription possibly by Kubota Suigan (dates unknown) / hanging scroll; ink and light color on silk / 97.9 x 32.2 cm / Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William Sturgis Bigelow Collection, 11.6511

Yet Kazunobu has given it a new twist in his rendition of the action, cleverly integrating Western spatial effects, seen particularly in his use of foreshortening to define the shape of the baby's head. Other creative artists of his time also incorporated Western art techniques, perhaps none more successfully than the popular Ukiyoe printmaker Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797–1861).¹⁶

One page from a sketchbook by Kazunobu, depicting a standing skeleton, reveals the artist's close study of the Western science of anatomy. Such study informed his finished paintings, including *Shakyamuni Undergoing Austerities* (Fig. 1), and this chilling depiction of a skeleton brandishing a folding fan (Fig. 6), which is a Buddhist commentary on the transitory nature of life. The theme of animated skeletons as a metaphor for life's brevity was a popular one in Edo Japan.¹⁷

Kazunobu's last commission, the Zōjōji Five Hundred Rakan scrolls, which he worked on for the ten years preceding his death, testifies to the artist's boundless creativity and innate talent. The scroll from the set illustrated here (Figs. 2, 3) is representative of the group in its meticulous attention to detail. It shows the artist at the height of his talent, masterfully synthesizing various painting styles. His inclusion of raking light, shading, and precise anatomical definition stemmed from recently introduced Western influences; his brush techniques and color application originated in Kano teaching methods; and he derived basic composition and figural forms from old Chinese and Japanese prototypes. Kazunobu similarly juxtaposed these traditions in the Spencer Museum's painting (Fig. 1). There, the dark, angular outlines characteristic of the Kano school are offset by the soft shading visible in the contours of the flesh and in the clouds, the latter reflecting the artist's interest in Western art.

Related to the Zōjōji scrolls, and possibly a trial work for them, is another complete set of hanging scrolls of the *Five Hundred Rakan* donated to the Tokyo National Museum in 1909 by two imperial families who had owned it since Kazunobu's time. These scrolls number fifty in all and are only about a quarter of the size of the Zōjōji set, although, as with that series, the artist's signature includes the title of "Hōgen," which dates their completion to 1862 or 1863.¹⁸

Documentation Related to Kazunobu's *Five Hundred Rakan* Scrolls at Zōjōji

Because Kazunobu's Zōjōji Rakan paintings constituted his magnum opus, virtually all posthumous records about the artist were compiled to help viewers understand these works and learn about the life of their maker.¹⁹ Two of these records, written in 1863 and 1864 by Samon Daiun (1817–1876), a priest at Zōjōji, discuss the artist's early life and artistic training, explain the history of Rakan painting in China and Japan up to Kazunobu's time, and describe how Kazunobu traveled around Japan to see famous examples of both sculpted and painted Rakan in preparation for this project.²⁰ Another important document was written in 1869 by Ryōteki, the head priest the Zōjōji subtemple of Yamauchi Genkō'in.²¹ He composed it when Kazunobu's widow, Yasu, became a nun there.²² Ryōteki relates that in the spring of 1854 his predecessor, Ryōhō, had asked Kazunobu to paint a set of one-hundred paintings of the Five Hundred

Rakan for Genkō'in. Because each of these paintings is impressed with a seal reading "Hōgen," the rank Kazunobu attained in mid-1862, it is clear that he did not put the finishing touches on them until the eighteen months between 1862, when he was awarded that title, and his death on the 22nd day of the ninth month of 1863, although he must have begun the project soon after receiving the commission.²³

A later document, dated 1901, describes how Kazunobu's wife, along with his disciple Kazuyoshi, assisted with the coloring of the first forty paintings. For paintings forty-one through ninety-six, Kazuyoshi and another disciple, Tomonobu, helped Kazunobu apply the colors.²⁴ Although Kazunobu died at this point in the project, apparently these disciples were able to complete the last four scrolls of the set, for which Kazunobu had already laid out basic outlines. The text further notes that in 1864, the paintings were unveiled at Zōjōji in a ceremony in the main audience hall on the 13th day of the first month. Every year after that, the paintings were brought out for display during a ceremony honoring Rakan that took place at the time of the spring and autumn equinoxes. But in 1873 the ceremony had to be suspended when the temple's main hall was lost to fire. The observance was resumed in 1878, when Genkō'in erected a new Rakan Hall, paid for by Kazunobu's widow, Myōan (Yasu), who personally unrolled the scrolls for the display. After Kazunobu's widow died in 1897, Kazunobu's disciple Kazuyoshi took charge of the unrolling. The ceremony featuring the scrolls continued to be held in the hall until air raids in 1945 destroyed the building, although the paintings survived, having been stored in a secure location during World War II. Since then, with no proper location in which to display them, Zōjōji has not displayed the set in its entirety, which is one reason that the exhibition scheduled for 2011 is eagerly anticipated.

Imagery of Rakan and Ascetic Shaka in Edo-Period Japan

The appearance of *Shaka as an Ascetic* (*Kugyō Shaka* in Japanese), the subject of the Spencer Museum's painting, closely resembles portrayals of Rakan. The emulation of Shaka's monastic life by these devoted disciples linked their lives with his; in fact, Shaka is sometimes regarded as the first Rakan. Consequently, the artists of China, who first portrayed these themes, devised similar iconography to represent both Shaka and the Rakan as monks with Indian features.²⁵ Although Kazunobu sometimes painted secular subjects, he received his most important commissions from Buddhist institutions and devotees. Most frequently he painted Rakan, who enjoyed widespread popularity during the late Edo period.

Rakan are devout monks who gained enlightenment through rigorous discipline after hearing the teachings of the Buddha Shaka in India. They are represented in assemblages of sixteen, eighteen, and five hundred. In Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, Rakan function differently from transcendent gods such as Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Rakan live on earth, sustaining the Buddhist Law by following the code of values taught by Shaka. But their perfected state also allows them to perform miracles to save believers.²⁶



fig. 7 Chin Genkō (Ch: Chen Xuanxing, 1647–1703), painter / inscription by Muan Xingtao (Jp: Mokuan Shōtō, 1611–1684), dated 1683 / *The Sixth Rakan* / hanging scroll, from set of eighteen; ink and colors on silk / 126.8 x 50.4 cm / Manjuin, Manpukuji, Uji



fig. 8 (left) Minamoto Masakatsu Kogawa, *Shaka, the Historical Buddha*, dated 1630 / gilt and lacquered bronze / Width: 29 cm, Depth: 24.5 mm, Height: 37.8 cm / © Trustees of the British Museum, 1891,0905.20

fig. 9 (right) Anonymous / *Shaka as an Ascetic*, eighteenth century / joined woodblock construction, inlaid crystal eyes, gesso and polychromy / Height: 30.5 cm / Collection of Drs. Edmund and Julie Lewis

During the 18th century, Rakan popularity increased exponentially in Japan through identification with émigré monks from China who founded a new Zen lineage called Ōbaku in the middle of the 17th century. The Japanese admired the Ōbaku monks' depth of knowledge and respected their personal resolve to flee their homeland for a life of exile in Japan as a form of righteous, quiet protest in support of the deposed, native-Chinese Ming emperor, whose throne the Manchus (who established the Qing dynasty in 1644) had commandeered. They equated the perseverance of the Ōbaku monks, in their honoring of the lost Ming dynasty, with the Rakans' role in the Buddhist pantheon—noble upholders of the Buddhist Law even during degenerate times. Rakan imagery was prevalent in Ōbaku temples and reflected the religious atmosphere of Buddhism in late Ming China (the first half of the 17th century), which was dominated by the patronage of lay followers who identified with Rakan as fellow humans. Parallel developments in Edo society, which witnessed the growth of its commoner population, paved the way for an increased appreciation of Rakan in Japan. As Ōbaku monks expanded their efforts to convert followers, the popular fascination with Rakan became fused with an idealization of the Ōbaku monks, who frequently displayed painted and sculpted imagery of Rakan, many by Chinese artists, in their temples' main worship halls.

A Japanese-born Ōbaku monk/sculptor named Shōun Genkei (1648–1710) incorporated the nervous energy and verisimilitude that characterizes these Chinese images into the set of Five Hundred Rakan statues that he carved. These were said to have been modeled after actual people.²⁷ Their lifelike appearance awed viewers and reinforced Chinese accounts that Rakan dwelt anonymously among the living. Because Genkei installed them in a new Ōbaku temple (Gohyaku Rakanji; the temple of the Five Hundred Rakan) that he established in 1695 in Edo, the nation's most populous urban center, the throngs of visitors that his temple attracted helped to boost popular interest in devotion to Rakan.

Widely circulated woodblock books, such as the 1755 *Rakan ōgen den* (Legends on the miracles performed by Rakan) that presented Rakan biographies and described famous representations of them in Japan, also helped to spread interest in Rakan later in the century. As a result, demand for new images of Rakan increased.²⁸ The new paintings, though inspired by earlier Chinese and Japanese prototypes, often incorporated elements of Western artistic traditions, some aspects of which were filtered through the lens of the Chinese art styles that the Ōbaku monks transmitted to Japan. The work of Chin Genkō (Ch: Chen Xuanxing, 1647–1703), a Chinese-born artist who became an Ōbaku monk after he arrived in Nagasaki, characterizes the Ōbaku painting style. His Rakan (Fig. 7) reflects dominant trends in late Ming-era Chinese Buddhist painting, which united increased stylization through self-conscious, mannered brushwork with the greater realism of an augmented physical presence evinced by naturalistic shading and highly individualized facial features. This style had a great impact on Japanese Buddhist painting, including that of Kazunobu.²⁹ The diffuse shading in the Spencer Museum's painting (Fig. 1), betrays Kazunobu's ultimate indebtedness to Ōbaku sources.

Compared to images of Rakan, those of Shaka as an ascetic are relatively rare because they appear more often in the form of sculpture.³⁰ One Japanese bronze sculpture of Shaka in this persona, dated 1630 (Fig. 8), generally resembles the figural type that Kazunobu portrays in the Spencer's painting. Yet, although Shaka's suffering is accentuated in the sculpture, his calm expression still evokes the sense of the Buddha as a divinity. The sculpture's inscription, recording its dedication on the fifteenth day of the second month—the date when monks performed rituals celebrating the historical Buddha's death—suggests when such images might have been displayed.³¹ Another Edo period sculpture of Shaka as an ascetic, datable by style to the early 18th century, (Fig. 9) derives from a different aesthetic tradition, but it too possesses a serene facial expression more common to representations of the transcendent Buddha.

In contrast, Kazunobu's painting of *Shakyamuni Undergoing Austerities* emphasizes instead the Buddha's suffering as a human being, and in so doing creates a new interpretation of this moment in Shaka's life. Not coincidentally, it was created at a time when the public clamored for art that delivered shock value, evident more obviously in the portrayal of the newly deceased in Kazunobu's Zōjōji Rakan scrolls (Fig. 3), who find themselves reborn in a Buddhist hell. These gaunt figures, who shiver in fear and pain in a pool of icy water as a ghoulish figure stabs them with a pitchfork, closely resemble Shaka's anguished form in the Spencer Museum's painting. As already mentioned in connection with that work, the emphasis on the skeletal quality of the body of these sinners also closely relates to Kazunobu's anatomical studies, as seen in his *Skeleton Dance* (Fig. 6).

Ascetic Shaka images possess an iconographical similarity to depictions of another, more frequently represented, form of the historic Buddha that shows him descending from the mountains at the end of his ascetic wanderings, poised to undertake the meditation that led to his enlightenment (in Japanese, this iconographical form is known as *Shussan Shaka*). This version (Fig. 10) by Wada Gozan (1800–1870), a professional painter who became a monk at the age of forty one, exhibits characteristics of late Edo-period painting in its juxtaposition of diverse artistic traditions, including the recently introduced Ōbaku/Ming Buddhist painting style, evident in the naturalistic coloration of the flesh and the mannered brushstrokes that define the drapery. However, the overall figural form, with its exaggerated, elongated eyebrows, betrays an indebtedness to one particular Chinese model of Rakan that originated with the Chan (Jp. Zen) artist Guan Xiu (832–912), distinguished by figures portrayed as wild-

eyed, eccentric, gnarled old men. Chinese and Japanese Buddhist artists frequently copied this style, and some of these versions, like this 13th century Chinese example from a set of sixteen (Fig. 11), had entered old Japanese temple collections and were quite famous in Kazunobu's time. In fact, he was known to have studied this Chinese set, and its influence on his art is apparent in this scroll of a Rakan (Fig. 12), also from a set of sixteen.³² The stylistic features in Kazunobu's set of Sixteen Rakan have led Japanese scholars to conclude that it is an important, rare precursor to the Zōjōji Rakan set. The Spencer Museum's *Shakyamuni Undergoing Austerities* also includes telltale characteristics that point to Guan Xiu as Kazunobu's source, in particular the lumpy form of the right shoulder and the dark outline delineating the figure's bone structure. The sinners in the Zōjōji Rakan scroll (Fig. 3) reveal a similar indebtedness. During Kazunobu's lifetime the 13th-century set had grown so famous that it served as a model for a popular woodblock-illustrated guide to Rakan, published in 1863, that included the first mention of Kazunobu's just-finished Rakan painting project for Zōjōji.³⁴

Kano Kazunobu's Legacy

Kano Kazunobu's paintings found their way into the collections of several of the earliest Western visitors to Japan. They helped assemble three important collections of Japanese art in Western museums: the British Museum in London; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and the Musée Guimet in Paris. The British Museum's paintings include, in addition to the paintings of Chinese children (Fig. 5) and horses discussed previously, a scroll of the ancient Chinese general Zhao Yun on horseback. The museum also possesses a pair of scrolls of sixteen Rakan done in Kazunobu's style but lacking seals or a signature. These are presumably the work of a disciple. The museum acquired all these from William Anderson (1842–1900), a Scottish surgeon who lived in Japan between 1873 and 1880, who became an important early authority on Japanese pictorial arts, which he collected in large quantities.³⁵

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, owns two paintings by Kano Kazunobu, acquired from prominent Bostonian collectors Ernest Francisco Fenollosa (1853–1908) and William Sturgis Bigelow (1850–1926). Both had converted to Buddhism, and though the Boston museum's paintings are not formal Buddhist icons, their subjects express Buddhist sentiments, which may explain the collectors' attraction to the artist.³⁶ Bigelow had purchased *Skeleton Dance* (Fig. 6) prior to 1911, probably when he was in Japan between 1882 and 1888. The second Boston painting, *Shoki on Horseback*, portrays the mythical Chinese demon-queller and arbiter of Buddhist hells.³⁷ Fenollosa purchased it in Japan prior to 1886, when he sold it to fellow Bostonian Charles Goddard Weld (1857–1911), who bequeathed it to the museum. Fenollosa and Bigelow are famous for having assembled for the museum the largest collection of Japanese Buddhist art outside Japan. Although the museum's Buddhist paintings of earlier date have been well studied and frequently published, those by Kazunobu have not.

The Musée Guimet possesses four preparatory drawings of groups of Rakan, probably for the Naritasan Shinshōji project. How they came into the collection is unclear. The pioneering Japanese Yōga (Western style) oil painter Kuroda Seiki (1866–1924) noted in his diary that he saw them sometime between 1884 and 1889 in Paris. He apparently took an interest in Kazunobu because, in 1902, he recorded that he had viewed the Zōjōji set on display in its Rakan Hall in Tokyo.³⁸



fig. 10 Wada Gozan (1800–1870), *Shussan Shaka* / hanging scroll; ink and colors on silk / 100 x 30 cm / Yabumoto collection, Japan



fig. 11 Anonymous, Chinese, 13th century (yuan Dynasty), traditional attribution to Guan Xiu (832–912) / *The Third Rakan* (Skt. Kankavastsa), from a set of sixteen / hanging scroll; ink and light colors on silk / 105.7 x 49.2 cm / Kanagawa Kenritsu Kanazawa Bunkō, Yokohama / Photo after: Kanagawa Kenritsu Kanazawa Bunko, ed., *Arakan* (Yokohama: Kanazawa Bunko), 2006, 11

As noted at the outset of this article, scholars in Japan have, until recently, ignored Kazunobu. They must have done so for the same reasons that later Buddhist art and later Kano-school paintings have been overlooked in studies by Western scholars and curators. Kazunobu's paintings were simply too conservative in their emphasis on traditional religious themes. Scholars historically have been most interested in later Edo-period pictorial art, which captured the bustling daily life and pastimes of urban commoners (i.e., Ukiyoe prints and paintings that influenced Western artists involved with the Japonisme movement), but their studies have also encompassed art that was either gorgeously decorative (e.g., the Rinpa school) or was inspired by Chinese literati painting traditions (e.g., the Nanga or Bunjinga schools). That Kazunobu incorporated Western influences into his art in an astonishingly creative manner was overshadowed by the religious nature of his subject matter and the fact that he painted icons for religious institutions rather than for famous or wealthy private clients. Later, after World War II, with his Zōjōji paintings hidden from view, Kazunobu began to fade into obscurity.

On a popular level, a resurgence of interest in Kazunobu's paintings of Rakan today ties into the continuing devotion to Rakan in Japan, evident in the many stone statues of these figures that are still being erected in temples throughout the country. Thus their presence helps to refute the widespread perception that contemporary Japan is a consumer-driven, post-industrial, secular society in which religion has little impact. These images also reflect the Japanese public's longstanding fascination with the rise of Buddhism in India and the importance of the faith's early teachers—especially Shaka and his disciples, prominent among them the Rakan—who inspired the transmission of Buddhism to Japan along the ancient Silk Road. This attraction to such images on the part of the public up to the present results from the high regard Buddhist followers have always had for both Shaka and the Rakan as symbols of fortitude and integrity, values that resonate as much with those affiliated with Buddhism's formal sectarian organizations as with those who honor Buddhist ideas at a strictly personal level—an increasingly common phenomenon. The close relationship between Rakan and Shaka also helps to clarify why Kazunobu, who specialized in portrayals of Rakan, might also have had an interest in depicting Shaka.

Kazunobu's current resurrection also coincides with a general fascination among scholars and the public with late Edo-period art. It seems eccentric and bold, capturing the spirit of this tumultuous and momentous turning point in history—a period in which Western visual expression first enticed Japanese artists, the failure of the ruling military bureaucracy loomed, and contacts with the West undermined Japan's seclusionist policies. In this context, Kazunobu's art has strong affinities with that of other late Edo-period painters such as Itō Jakuchū (1733–1800), Utagawa Kuniyoshi, and Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), all of whom have been the subjects of recent blockbuster exhibitions in Japan and the USA. Although their oeuvres encompassed a broader range of popular, often secular, subjects than Kazunobu's, these painters incorporated Western influences into their highly original artistic visions and possessed fierce dedication to their art, as did Kazunobu. The Spencer Museum's rare, poignant painting by Kazunobu of *Shakyamuni Undergoing Austerities* demonstrates his talent as an artist and reveals why he deserves to be recognized as the peer of better-known painters of his time.



fig. 12 Kano Kanzunobu / *Rakan with Attendant* (originally from a set of sixteen), 1854–1863 / hanging scroll; ink and gold on paper / 117.2 x 52.2 cm / The Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture, Hanford, California

Notes

- 1 Kawai Masatomo, *Kano Kazunobu Gohyaku Rakan zu* (Paintings of the Five Hundred Rakan by Kano Kazunobu) (Tokyo: Minato-ku Kyoiku Inkai), 1983. Professor Kawai's study was commissioned by Tokyo's Minato Ward (the subdistrict of the city in which Zōjōji is located), which in 1979 designated this set as an Important Cultural Property of the Ward.
- 2 Shizuoka Kenritsu Bijutsukan, ed., *Kanoha no kyoshōtachi: kaikan sanshūnen kinen ten* (Exhibition of great masters of the Kano school held on the third anniversary of the museum) (Shizuoka: Shizuoka Kenritsu Bijutsukan), 1989, plate 67.
- 3 Shiga Kenritsu Biwako Bunkakan, ed., *Tokubetsuten, Rakan: Sono bijutsu to shinrei* (Special exhibit on the art and worship of Rakan) (Otsu: Shiga Kenritsu Biwako Bunkakan), 1994, plate 44 (six scrolls from the Zōjōji set). In 2003, five paintings from a previously unpublished set of fifty scrolls of the Five Hundred Rakan, owned by the Tokyo National Museum, were included in Itabashi Kuritsu Bijutsukan, ed., *Edo bunka shirizu 19: Ayakashi to tsuya ~ Bakumatsu no shōnen ~ ten zurōku* (Edo culture series exhibition catalogue 19: Strange and shiny, the sentiment of the late Edo period) (Tokyo: Itabashi Kuritsu Bijutsukan), 2003, plates 9–13. In 2004, a special edition of the popular art magazine, *Taiyō* (the sun) focusing on Kano school painting, featured a multipage spread of close-up pictures of selections of the Zōjōji Rakan set with explanations by Itabashi Ward Art Museum Director Yasumura Toshinobu, see Yamashita Yūji, ed., *Kano ha kettei ban* (The decisive book on the Kano school), *Bessatsu Taiyō* 131 (October 2004): 153–160. In 2006, the Tokyo National Museum exhibited its complete set (together with two scrolls from the Zōjōji set), see Tokyo Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan, ed., *Bakumatsu no ayashiki butsuga—Kano Kazunobu no gohyaku rakan zu* (Outlandish Buddhist paintings of the late Edo period—The Five Hundred Rakan of Kano Kazunobu) (Tokyo: Tokyo Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan), 2006. In 2008, Professor Yamashita Yūji, discussed the Zōjōji paintings on a popular Tokyo art scene website, *Tokyo Art Navigation* <http://tokyoartnavi.jp/essence/index013.php> (accessed December 5, 2009), in which he mentioned the then upcoming 1.5-hour Hi-Vision documentary produced by NHK television, *Hihō kōkai kyōi no butsuga*, “Gohyaku Rakanzu (Wonderful Secret Treasures of Buddhist Painting Revealed to the Public: Paintings of Five Hundred Rakan [by Kano Kazunobu]), broadcast in primetime on October 12 that year.
- 4 See Patricia J. Graham “A Heterodox Painting of Shussan Shaka in Late Tokugawa Japan, Part II,” *Artibus Asiae* 52, no. 1/2 (1992): Fig. 7 and Patricia J. Graham, *Faith and Power in Japanese Buddhist Art, 1600–2005* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press), 2007, colorplate 7.
- 5 Yasumura Toshinobu and Yamashita Yūji have been tireless champions of late Kano-school creativity. See note 3 for a partial listing of these publications. See also Brenda Jordan and Victoria Weston, ed., *Copying the Master and Stealing his Secrets: Talent and Training in Japanese Painting* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press), 2003, esp. 55–57.
- 6 Several primary documents, reproduced in Kawai, 1983, offer reliable information about Kazunobu's life and art. The biographical sketch presented here is drawn from these, some of which I discuss subsequently in this essay.
- 7 Illustrated in Yamashita, 2004: 128–129 and Sasaki, 2006, plates 42–43.
- 8 A selection of pages from these is included in Kawai, 1983.

About the Author

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- 9 Biographical accounts omit a date and the reason for this relocation.
- 10 I am grateful to Fujimoto Yūji, curator at Sensōji, who provided this information and supplied a photograph of the *ema* for this essay.
- 11 Sasaki Eriko, ed., *Itabashi Kuritsu Bijutsukan shōzō: Kanoha zen zuroku* (Complete catalogue of Kano school paintings in the collection of the Itabashi Art Museum) (Tokyo: Itabashi Kuritsu Bijutsukan), 2006, 142 and plate 44.
- 12 These titles gave artists legitimacy and thus entrée to wealthy potential clients of elite status. The system grew out of the custom of ranking Buddhist priests according to the extent to which they had attained of spiritual knowledge.
- 13 Sasaki, 2006, 142.
- 14 The complete signature on the Spencer Museum's scroll reads: "*Hokkyō Kazunobu hitsu*" (by the brush of Kazunobu, Bridge of the Law). It also is impressed with two seals: the top one reads "*Kenyūsai*," the lower, "*Kazunobu*."
- 15 Both of these works also feature the same two seals as the Spencer Museum's painting.
- 16 See Timothy Clark, *Kuniyoshi* (London: Royal Academy Publications), 2009.
- 17 For Kazunobu's sketch see Kawai, 1983, 76. For an unnerving painting of a meditating skeleton hovering over waves, by Maruyama Ōkyo (1733–1795), see Osaka Shiritsu Bijutsukan et al., ed. *Tokubetsuten Maruyama Ōkyo: "shaseiga" sōzōe no chōsen* (Special exhibition on Maruyama Ōkyo: "shaseiga [painting from life]" challenging a new frontier). (Osaka: Mainichi Shinbunsha), 2003, plate 71.
- 18 Tokyo Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan, 2006, includes photos of all 50 scrolls.
- 19 These are all discussed in detail and reproduced in Kawai, 1983.
- 20 These texts are: *Shinzu gohyaku dai Arakan ki* (Record of the new pictures of the great Rakan) and *Shinzu gohyaku Rakan kakejiku kifu ekō ki* (Record of the memorial service for the donation of the hanging scrolls of the new pictures of the Five Hundred Rakan). See, Kawai, 1983, 144–158.
- 21 This document is the *Genkō'in kakochō* (History of Genkō'in), see Kawai, 1983, 174–177.
- 22 When she became a nun she took a Buddhist name, Myōan.
- 23 Many of these preparatory drawings survive in Japanese temple collections; see Kawai, 1983, for illustrations.
- 24 This document, section twelve of *Minu yo no tomo* ([Biographies of people of] the past) by Kaneko Banu, records the text from Kazunobu's tombstone. See Kawai 1983, 180–184, who notes that its contents formed the basis for all modern Japanese artists' dictionary entries on Kazunobu.

- 25 See Jan Fontein and Money L. Hickman, *Zen Painting et Calligraphy* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts), 1970, XXIV; Helmut Brinker, "Shussan Shaka in Sung and Yuan Painting," *Ars Orientalis* 9 (1973): 31; and Howard Rogers, "The Reluctant Messiah: Sakyamuni Emerging from the Mountains," *Sophia International Review* 5 (1983): 16–27.
- 26 On Rakan imagery in China and Japan, see Marinus Willem De Visser, *The Arhats in China and Japan* (Berlin: Oesterheld and Co.), 1923; Richard K. Kent, "Depictions of the Guardians of the Law: Lohan Painting in China," in *Latter Days of the Law: Images of Chinese Buddhism 850–1850*, ed. Marsha Weidner (Lawrence, Kan.: Spencer Museum of Art), 1994, 183–213; and Shiga Kenritsu Biwako Bunkakan, 1994.
- 27 See Graham, 2007, 57–60, for a discussion of these statues.
- 28 On Rakan veneration and imagery of them in the Edo period, see *ibid.*, 101–109, 171–172.
- 29 For a detailed analysis of this development, see Graham, "A Heterodox Painting of Shussan Shaka in Late Tokugawa Japan Part I," *Artibus Asiae* 51, no. 3/4 (1991): 275–292 and Part II, 52, no. 1/2 (1992): 131–145.
- 30 See Chinese sculptures in Pratapaditya Pal, *Light of Asia: Buddha Shakyamuni in Art* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art), 1984, plate 43. For a 15th-century Japanese painting, see Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan, ed., *Budda Shakason* (The Buddha Shaka) (Nara: Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan), 1984, plate 77. For an early 19th-century copybook sketch of a Japanese painting by Shūgetsu (1440–1529), see Takai Sōgen, ed., *Butsuga: Maruyama-ha shitae shū* (Buddhist painting: Collected preparatory drawings of the Maruyama school) (Kyoto: Mitsumura Suiko Shoin), 1997, vol. 1, 92. For an Ōbaku painting by the preeminent Ōbaku Buddhist painter Itsunen (Ch. Yiran, 1601–1668), see Kobe Shiritsu Hakubutsukan, ed., *Ingen Zenshi to Ōbakushū no kaiga ten* (Exhibition of paintings of the Zen master Ingen and the Ōbaku sect) (Kobe: Kobe Shiritsu Hakubutsukan), 1991, plate 52.

- 31 Lawrence Smith et al., *Japanese Art: Masterpieces in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum), 1990, 38.
- 32 This set had been split up prior to 1923. The Clark Center owns one other painting from it and a Japanese auction catalogue of 1923 includes four others. I am indebted to Andreas Marks of the Clark Center for sharing with me research on this set by Fujimoto Yūji.
- 33 Sasaki, 2006, 142.
- 34 This book was *Rakanzu sanshū* (Collected stories about Rakan pictures) by Ukai Tetsujō (1814–1891), the seventy-fifth head priest of the Chion'in temple, headquarters of the Jodō sect to which Zōjōji belonged. For one page, see Kanagawa Kenritsu Rekishi Hakubutsukan, ed., *Sōgen butsuga* (Sung and Yuan period Buddhist paintings) (Yokohama: Kanagawa Kenritsu Rekishi Hakubutsukan), 2007, plate 37. See also Kawai, 1983, 159–161.
- 35 He lists all but the painting of Zhao Yun in his definitive catalogue, *Descriptive and Historical Account of a Collection of Japanese and Chinese Paintings in the British Museum* (London: Longman's & Co.), 1886, 88, 305, 318. In the course of my research for this article, I located the museum's works through its online database, but they had not yet been photographed. I thank staff member Rosina Buckland, who photographed these paintings immediately in response to my request, and subsequently posted the photos online.
- 36 See Christine Guth, "The Cult of Kannon among Nineteenth Century American Japanophiles," *Orientalism* 26/11 (December 1995): 28–34 and Elizabeth de Sabato Swinton, "Bigelow, Boston, and Buddhism," *Orientalism* 35/1 (January/February 2004): 57–61.
- 37 It contains the same seals as those found on the Spencer Museum's painting.
- 38 See Tokyo Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 2006, 60–62 and 64 n. 12.