



Chiyono in the moment of awakening

Maruyama Ōkyo

Not on display

Title/Description: Chiyono in the moment of awakening

Artist/Maker: Maruyama Ōkyo (Artist)

Born: 1772

Object Type: Scroll painting

Materials: Fibre, Ink, Paper, Silk, Watercolour

Measurements: h. 1872 x w. 400 mm

Inscription: Chūsen

Accession Number: 857

Historic Period: Edo period (AD 1600-1868)

Production Place: Asia, East Asia, Japan

Artist Maruyama Ōkyo (1733-1795) has used a soft grey brushed outline and washes of pale colour to create this gentle portrait of the young woman, Chiyono. Chiyono is the secular name for the fully ordained Buddhist nun and Zen matriarch, Mugai Nyodai (Mugai Nyodai; 1223-1298).

Mugai Nyodai was a disciple of the Chinese Rinzai Zen monk, Wuxue Zuyuan (1226-1286; J. Bukkō Kokushi, also known as Mugaku Sogen Mugaku Sogen). In 1278 Mugai Nyodai built the temple Keiai-ji in Itsutsuji Ōmiya, Kyoto on donated land and became its founding Abbess. Mugai Nyodo is included in the official dharma lineage of the Bukkō school of Rinzai Zen. [1]

According to popular legend, Chiyono joined a religious order as a servant because she hoped to find enlightenment. At the convent she closely observed and imitated the Buddhist nuns at prayer. With frustration, Chiyono realised that the more effort she invested in attaining her spiritual goal, the further away it seemed. [2]

Chiyono left a poem that describes the moment of her spiritual awakening or enlightenment (J. *satori*). While carrying water back to the monastery in an old bucket, Chiyono observed the reflection of the moon on the water's surface. Suddenly, the bottom of the bucket broke, spilling the water all over the ground.

In this way and that I tried to save the old pail

Since the bamboo strip was weakening and about to break

Until at last the bottom fell out.

No more water in the pail!

No more moon in the water! [3]

The bright moon, un-obscured by clouds, is a symbol of spiritual enlightenment in Zen Buddhist iconography. In the poem, Chiyono realises that she has been merely observing the moon's reflection (copying the outward forms of piety and devotion), as opposed to looking directly at the moon (discovering her inner Buddha nature and letting go of outward forms).

Ōkyo has captured the moment of Chiyono's sudden enlightenment and paints her staring down at the spilt water. Ōkyo momentarily tricks the viewer into believing they can see the moon reflected in the water, but this is an illusion. The semi-circular shape in the puddle is the bottom of the broken water bucket; however, its form draws the viewer's attention to the absence of the moon and our foolish desire to see its reflection.

An inscription brushed in black ink in the bottom left corner of the painting reads: Snake Year, mid-autumn, Hei'an Ōkyo' (*Mizunoto-mi chūshū Heian Ōkyo* 水注月夜平安 大休), which equates with 1773 in the Gregorian calendar. The two red square seals are: *Ōkyo no in* 大休印 and *Chūsen* 中仙.

Ōkyo, founder of the Maruyama school, trained in a wide variety of painting styles, which included Kanō painting, Chinese landscape painting, Chinese bird and flower painting in the Nagasaki-school style, and Rinpa. He was also influenced by the naturalism in European paintings and prints.

[1] Richard Bryan McDaniel, *Zen Masters of Japan. The Second Step East* (Rutland, Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 2013), pp. 77-79; Patricia Fister 'Commemorating Life and Death: The Memorial Culture Surrounding the Rinzai Zen Nun Mugai Nyodai' in Karen M. Gerhart, ed., *Women, Rites, and Ritual Objects in Premodern Japan*, Brill's Japanese Studies Library, Volume: 63, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018), pp. 269-303.

Gereon Kopf, ed., *The Dao Companion to Japanese Buddhist Philosophy* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2019), p. 117.

[2] Stephen Addiss, Stanley Lombardo and Judith Roitman, eds, *Zen Sourcebook Traditional Documents from China, Korea, and Japan* (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2008), pp. 175-79.

[3] Paul Reys and Nyogen Senzaki, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1998), no. 29.

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

This painting depicts the episode of a lady, popularly known as Chiyono. In one theory, she was a daughter of a major warrior in Kamakura in the 13th century, Adachi Yasumori, and the wife of the elite warrior Hōjō Akitoki. Legend has it that she renounced the world after the downfall of both her father and husband. Her chores at the convent, it is said, included drawing water from the well.

In the picture, Chiyono still wears secular attire with a brocade sash. As she is reputed to have been a beautiful woman, the figure has the typical characteristics of a representation of a beauty in the Edo period – abundant long black hair tied at the back, elegant facial features, slender body frame and the pose of turning back with her hip twisted. In the painting is a date and signature, which reads 'Mid-autumn of 1773, Ōkyo in Heian [Kyoto] has playfully depicted'.

The woman turns back when a bucket of water has slipped out of her arms and hits the ground, spilling the water. This was the moment for her to have an awakening; the beautiful reflection of the moon in the bucket of water is lost. The broken bucket bottom lies uselessly in the foreground, in the pool of water.

Interestingly, however, a few paintings exist that adopt exactly the same composition, design, signature and seals. Other examples have the same design but a different signature or date. It is clear that this was a popular subject and design. Further research is needed to assess the relations among the many examples. The original model may have been created indeed by Maruyama Ōkyo.

The highly accomplished master Ōkyo is said to have revolutionised painting in Kyoto. His works

were sought after, and he had several pupils. A close examination of the current painting reveals that, although overall it looks tastefully composed, the lines forming the contour appear hesitant, not flowing spontaneously; rather they look as if they are faithfully copying a model, a common practice for pupils.

Akiko Yano, June 2022

Further Reading

Stephen Addiss, Stanley Lombardo and Judith Roitman, eds, *Zen Sourcebook Traditional Documents from China, Korea, and Japan* (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2008)

Karen M. Gerhart, ed., *Women, Rites, and Ritual Objects in Premodern Japan*, Brill's Japanese Studies Library, Volume: 63, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2018)

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Paul Reys and Nyogen Senzaki, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1998)

Kanai Shiun, *Tōyō gadai sōran* (Comprehensive Guide to East Asian Subject Matter for Paintings), reproduction edition, Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1997.

Sasaki Jōhei and Sasaki Masako eds., *Koga sōran* (Photographic Archive of Japanese Paintings), Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 2000.
