



# Portrait of the Zen acolyte Jittoku

Denzan

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## Not on display

**Title/Description:** Portrait of the Zen acolyte Jittoku

**Artist/Maker:** Denzan (Artist)

**Object Type:** Scroll painting

**Materials:** Fibre, Ink, Paper, Silk

**Measurements:** h. 689 x w. 298 mm

**Accession Number:** 855

**Historic Period:** Muromachi period (AD 1333-1568)

**Production Place:** Asia, East Asia, Japan

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Brushed in black ink, this work on paper depicts Jittoku (Ch. Shide), the close companion of Kanzan (Ch. Hanshan). The hermits Kanzan and Jittoku are drawn from Chinese myth and legend and are frequently depicted in Zen (Ch. Chan) paintings, dressed in rags and wearing mischievous expressions. Following pictorial convention, Jittoku is shown equipped with a broom and Kanzan usually holds a scroll; these attributes were used to signify the 'compatibility of menial work and intellectual endeavour'. [1]

According to the Chinese legend, Kanzan and Jittoku lived in the precincts of Guoqing Temple at Mount Tiantai in Taizhou, Zhejiang province. Jittoku worked in the temple's kitchen and collected scraps of food for his poetic friend to eat. [2] The two are often shown laughing over a profound joke that only they possess the insight to enjoy.

Using dark abbreviated brush strokes, the artist has captured Jittoku's loose-fitting robes, voluminous sleeves and high-wooden clogs. Fine, near invisible, lines in pale ink suggest Jittoku's facial features. To produce this effect, the artist has used a technique known as 'apparition painting' (Ch. *wanglianhua*; J. *mōryōga*), which derives from the Chinese Southern Song (1127-1279) ink painting tradition. [3]

The artist, cautiously identified as Denzan [ ] by his seal, was possibly a Japanese monk-artist affiliated with a Zen Buddhist monastery. [4] Zen monks practiced calligraphy and painting as forms of meditation and as a means of attaining enlightenment. [5] It is likely that the scroll painting in the Sainsbury Centre Collection once had a companion image of Kanzan [6], and resembled the format of the Kanzan and Jittoku pair of scrolls in the Tokyo National Museum. [7]

From the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Chan Buddhism developed in China from the teachings of the semi-legendary monk, Bodhidharma. Chan encourages the practice of meditation as a path to sudden enlightenment. [8] At the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Japanese Tendai Buddhist priest, Myōan Eisai (1141-1215) returned from China with knowledge of the Linji sect of Chan (J. *Rinzai Zen*). [9]

As Zen Buddhism established itself in Japan, Kanzan came to be associated with the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī (J. *Monju Bosatsu*) and Jittoku with the bodhisattva Samantabhadra (J. *Fugen Bosatsu*). Consequently, the Zen acolytes, Kanzan and Jittoku symbolise the ‘wisdom of Buddha’ and the ‘teaching, meditation and practice of Buddha’, respectively. [10]

During the Muromachi period (1336-1573), Japanese artists and practitioners of Zen Buddhism took inspiration from Chinese Chan Buddhist imagery. The feudal military government of the Ashikaga shoguns promoted aspects of Chinese culture ‘as aesthetic alternatives to the Imperial taste.’ [11] Intent on legitimizing their rule, the Shogunate patronized Zen monasteries hoping to eclipse the legacy of their aristocratic rivals, the Fujiwara clan. [12] As a result of this patronage, many examples of Chan calligraphy and painting entered Japan and provided models for Zen monk-artists and literati.

Vanessa Tothill, August 2020

[1] Lawrence Smith and Yutaka Mino in Stephen Hooper, ed., *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection: Catalogue*, vol. 3 (New Haven, Connecticut; Norwich: Yale University Press in association with University of East Anglia, 1997) p. 165; illus p. 164

[2] Kanzan is remembered today as the Tang-dynasty (618-907) eccentric poet whose name translates into English as ‘Cold Mountain’. Goedhuis, Michael, *One Thousand Years of Art in Japan* (London: Colnaghi Oriental in association with Shirley Day Ltd., 1981), p. 46-7

[3] Joan Stanley-Baker, *Japanese Art* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1984, repr 1995), p. 116.

[4] Hooper, p. 165.

[5] Hooper, p. 165.

[6] Hooper, p. 165.

[7] Tokyo Metropolitan Museum, Kanzan and Jittoku by Kaō Ninga, 14<sup>th</sup> century

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zen\\_Eccentrics\\_Hanshan\\_and\\_Shide\\_by\\_Kao\\_Ninga,\\_14th\\_century.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zen_Eccentrics_Hanshan_and_Shide_by_Kao_Ninga,_14th_century.jpg) [accessed 12 August 2020]

[8] Penelope Mason, *History of Japanese Art*, 2nd edn (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), pp. 211-12.

[9] Stanley-Baker, p. 112; Kasahara Kazuo, ed., *A History of Japanese Religion*, trans. Paul McCarthy and Gaynor Sekimori (Tokyo: Kōsei Publishing Company, 2001), p. 227; William M. Bodiford, *SōtōZen in Medieval Japan (Kuroda Studies in East Asian Buddhism)*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), pp. 22-36.

[10] Mori Ōgai 'Translation: Kanzan and Jittoku', trans D. A. Dilworth and J. T. Rimer, *Monumenta Nipponica* 26:1-2 (1971), pp. 159-167 (p. 162).

[11] Joan Stanley-Baker, *Japanese Art* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1984, repr 1995), p. 117.

[12] Stanley-Baker, p. 116.

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## Further Reading

Addiss, Stephen, Zenga and Nanga: Paintings by Japanese Monks and Scholars. Selections from the Kurt and Millie Gitter Collection (New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, 1976)

Bodiford, William M., *Sōtō Zen in Medieval Japan* (Kuroda Studies in East Asian Buddhism), (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008)

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