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Tawaraya Sōtatsu and the watery poetics of Japanese ink painting

YUKIO LIPPIT

There exists a term, *tarashikomi* (literally “dripped in”), that refers to one of the most recognizable techniques of Japanese painting of the early modern period. This technique involves the initial application of a layer of pigment, usually monochrome ink, on heavily sized paper or silk, followed by the measured introduction of a second layer of either ink or colorant while the first layer is still moist, causing the newly introduced pigment to bleed outward and form an amorphous mark. The visual appeal of this method lies in the variegated and organic surface effects that result from the fusion of the two different layers of paint. A remarkable example can be found in *Cherry Tree and Thrush* (fig. 1), a hanging scroll by the Japanese painter Sakai Hōitsu (1761–1828) in the Hosomi Art Museum in Kyoto. In this work the surface of the tree trunk is complicated by the timely introduction of malachite green into a preapplied layer of lightly graded ink, exploiting the qualities inherent in the water solubility of ink painting to produce localized painterly accidents. The interaction between pigments is, at least to some degree, beyond the control of the painter, and the emulsive patterns that ensue add immeasurably to the visual interest of Hōitsu’s work.¹

Tarashikomi is associated with the Rinpa lineage of painters, a loosely affiliated group of artists—including the aforementioned Hōitsu—that claimed inspiration from the painter and master designer Ogata Kōrin (1658–1716).² Celebrated for their abbreviated approach to design and composition and their sophisticated variations on classical themes, Rinpa painters employed *tarashikomi* as one of their signature

methods. Although the centrality of this technique in the Rinpa repertoire has generated a substantial amount of commentary, rarely has it been subjected to sustained analysis.³ The Japanese term and its English translations—“dripping” or “pooling” are the most commonly employed—provide descriptive approximations for the visual effects with which *tarashikomi* is associated. As the Hōitsu example shows, however, “ink staining” or “stain painting” does more justice to the qualities evident here. In fact, although it is not clear when the term *tarashikomi* emerged, its use does not appear to predate the modern era. It is therefore possible that *tarashikomi* overunifies a group of affiliated techniques from the Edo period (1615–1868) with small but important differences among them.

Although the visual profile of *tarashikomi* is characterized foremost by the semifluid intermingling of painting pigments, its successful execution also relies upon a careful a priori treatment of the painting ground. This process involves the even application of alum-based sizing (*dōsa*), which transforms the painting’s support into an impermeable surface. By neutralizing the absorptive capacities of paper or silk in this way, sizing also causes whatever form results from the initial application of ink to delineate a natural boundary untransgressable by any pigments that follow. Under these conditions Rinpa painters were able to achieve certain extraordinary effects, such as the intermingling of colors along the thin stem of a plant, no more than half a centimeter in width. A successful *tarashikomi* effect also relies upon a measured rapidity of application, necessary because a second infusion of paint needs to be introduced before the initial layer dries. In this respect it shares several similarities with splashed ink painting, most famously exemplified by the monk painter Sesshū’s *Splashed Ink Landscape* (1495) in the Tokyo National Museum (fig. 2).⁴ In this work,

1. The yellow color in the trunk is not an independent pigment but rather the result of “malachite burn” (*rokushō-yake*) in which a chemical reaction between the malachite and the silk ground produces a yellowish penumbra around the green pigment.

2. In contrast to other professional painting houses of the Edo period, such as the Kano and Tosa schools, the Rinpa school consisted primarily of painters who studied and drew inspiration from Kōrin. During the early twentieth century, attention began to be paid to the fan shop proprietor Tawaraya Sōtatsu (active ca. 1600–1640) as a crucial influence on Kōrin, and he was elevated in art historical discourse to the “founder” of the Rinpa lineage. For recent scholarship on the construction of the Rinpa school in the modern era, see Tamamushi Satoko, *Ikitsuzukeru Kōrin* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2004), and *Rinpa—kokusai shinpojiumu hōkokusho*, ed. Tokyo kokuritsu kindai bijutsukan (Tokyo: Brücke, 2006).

3. Tokugawa Yoshiyasu, *Sōtatsu no suibokuga* (Tokyo: Zayū hankōkai, 1948); Yamane Yūzō, “Sōtatsu to suibokuga,” in *Sōtatsu kenkyū ni*, vol. 2 of *Yamane Yūzō chosakushū* (Tokyo: Chūōkōron bijutsu shuppan, 1996), pp. 163–212; and Nakabe Yoshitaka, “Tarashikomi no hen’yō,” in *Sōtatsu to Rinpa no genryū*, ed. Kanō Hiroyuki, vol. 4 of *Rinpa bijutsukan* series (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1993), pp. 122–132.

4. I have addressed the splashed ink mode in East Asia in an unpublished manuscript, “Of Modes and Manners in Medieval Japanese Ink Painting: Sesshū’s *Splashed Ink Landscape* of 1495.”



Figure 1. Sakai Hōitsu (1761–1828), *Cherry Tree and Thrush*, early nineteenth century. Hanging scroll, ink and colors on silk, 130.7 x 50.2 cm. Hosomi Art Museum, Kyoto.

successive layers of ink wash are applied one on top of another, each while the previous layer is still moist, in order of lightest to darkest gradation of ink. The resulting panoply of bleeding and blending effects intimates a landscape primarily through fused motifs and the architectonics of composition. Both splashed ink and *tarashikomi* are planar as opposed to linear in orientation and somehow suggestive of the temporality of the process itself. In both cases, the dynamic of liquidity effaces the legibility of “brushwork” or the sensitive brush dynamics so coded with tropes of authorship in East Asian ink painting traditions (although the erasure of brush traces itself would become highly indexical). Splashed ink differs from its spilled ink counterpart in its involvement of more than two layers of pigment and its reliance solely upon monochrome ink. In general, *tarashikomi* requires a more measured application of pigment, resulting in less splash and more stain.

The aesthetic appeal of *tarashikomi* complements well its multivalency. In the hands of practitioners such as Hōitsu, localized ink staining could be simultaneously abstract and representational. In *Cherry Tree and Thrush*, for example, the pools of malachite that have been dripped into the ink substrate of the cherry tree create an iridescent and abstract pattern entirely independent of the representational prerogatives of the subject matter. At the same time, these infusions of color invoke moss dots and suggest the organic texture of the trunk surface. This duality is exploited most impressively in the pooling techniques of Ogata Kōrin. In Kōrin’s *Eight-Planked Bridge* screens in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, for example, *tarashikomi* is highly effective in introducing a contrastive, aqueous tonality to the brilliant mineral pigments used to depict the surrounding setting, while also conveying a sense of the decayed wood of the bridge (fig. 3). The screens evoke the celebrated ninth chapter of the courtly classic *Tales of Ise*, in which the exiled protagonist, traveling eastward from Kyoto with his entourage, composes an acrostic poem on a marshy site traversed by an eight-planked bridge and surrounded by blooming irises. In this context, the rotting bridge planks are intended to evoke the rusticity of the setting.⁵

5. Kōrin’s lacquerware designs confirm his preoccupation with this effect; in his famous lacquer writing box depicting the same subject in the Tokyo National Museum, the lead inlays used to represent the bridge planks are slightly corroded to convey the same quality of dilapidation and exilic desolation.

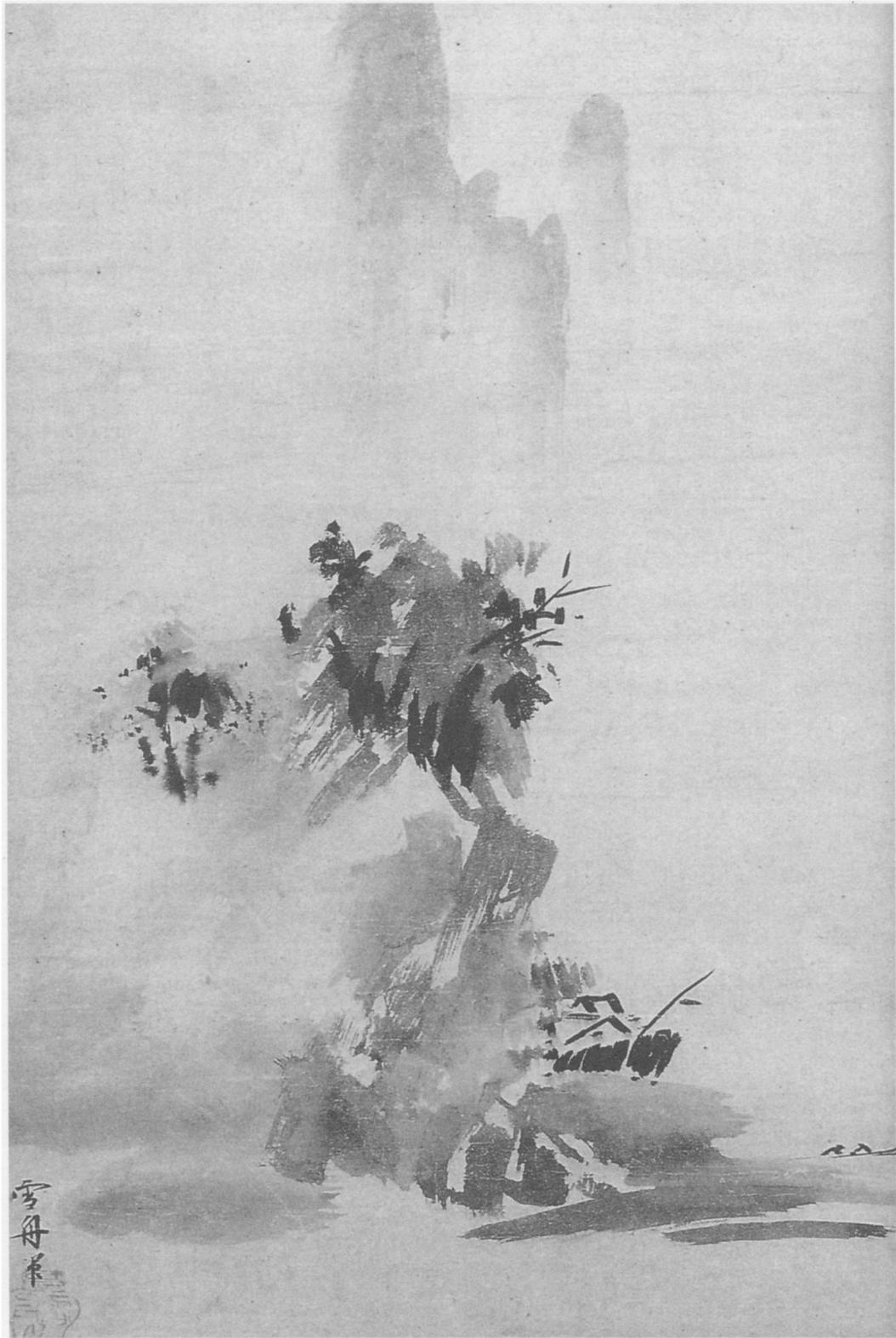


Figure 2. Sesshū Tōyō (1420–1506), *Splashed Ink Landscape*, detail 1495. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 147.9 x 32.7 cm. Tokyo National Museum.



Figure 3. Ogata Kōrin (1658–1716), *Eight-Planked Bridge*, detail, early eighteenth century. Pair of six-panel folding screens, ink, colors, and gold foil on paper, 179 x 371.5 cm each. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Its uniquely prismatic abstraction and pictorial poetics have made *tarashikomi* one of the most celebrated and at the same time inscrutable innovations of Edo-period painting. As the most identifiable technique of Rinpa painting from Hōitsu's era onward, it played a decisive role in conditioning the latter-day reception of Rinpa as decorative in orientation. The dripping and blotching techniques of Rinpa painters were understood according to notions of ornamental art into which Japanese art—along with many other traditions of non-European art—was being assimilated during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The orientalist understanding of Rinpa and Japanese art as a whole within the framework of parlor ornamentation clearly calls for some form of discursive disarticulation.⁶ In this

6. While valorizing what Louis Gonse referred to as the *génie des Japonais dans le décor* (the title of an 1888 essay), Euro-American commentators of this period were firmly situated within the structure

regard, *tarashikomi* offers an intriguing case study of a striking optical effect whose genesis and semantic potential has never been fully considered.

of a beaux arts hierarchy in which the decorative arts could function as little more than parlor ornamentation. Even while seemingly inverting this structure, the resulting discourse conceptualized Japanese art objects within the framework of neutral environmental adornment. Ironically, this view left its most enduring mark on art historical practice in Japan itself, as Tamamushi Satoko has demonstrated (see note 2). Numerous recent inquiries into premodern Japanese concepts and practices of artful adornment have often taken an anthropological approach in attempting to restore context to the visual and design qualities of Japanese art objects. The art historian Tsuji Nobuo has taken the lead in rallying scholars around this line of interrogation, specifically the idea of *kazari*. See, for example, *'Kazari' no Nihon bunka*, ed. Tsuji (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1998) and *Kazari: Decoration and Display in Japan, 15th–19th Centuries*, ed. Nicole Coolidge Rousmaniere (New York: Japan Society Gallery, 2002). Tsuji's approach is not unproblematic, however, especially in its essentialist positing of a "culture of *kazari*" as somehow reflective of an indigenous Japanese aesthetic.

As a modest step in this direction, the present essay examines the origins of the technique in the early seventeenth century, in the work of the painter Tawaraya Sōtatsu (act. 1600–1640). The head of the Tawaraya fan shop and painting atelier in Kyoto, Sōtatsu was little known until the early twentieth century, when his reputation spread among artists and collectors as one of the most innovative artisans of Japan's early modern era. By now he is a canonical figure in Japanese art history, despite the fact that almost nothing is known about his life. A large corpus of attributed works and fragmentary records relate that Sōtatsu was a painter and paper designer with a large constituency among the aristocracy and mercantile elite. One of his main contributions to the history of Japanese art was the transposition of habits of representation unique to courtly papermaking traditions to the medium and formats of painting. Because Kōrin, a distant relative of Sōtatsu, based much of his own artistry on that of his predecessor, Sōtatsu would later be hailed as the founder of the Rinpa school.

The conditions under which his paintings conveyed meaning differed from those of his so-called Rinpa followers, however, a difference that also applies to his use of *tarashikomi*. Of direct relevance in this regard is a remarkable group of monochrome ink paintings from Sōtatsu's hand representing *tarashikomi* in its initial phases.⁷ The most famous among these is *Lotus and Waterfowl* in the Kyoto National Museum. As its title suggests, the painting depicts two waterfowl swimming amidst lotus flowers in varying degrees of bloom and decay (fig. 4). Subtle spongiform effects, resulting from the intermingling of sequential layers of ink wash, can be discerned on the lotus leaves and in the area around the flowers, where ink has been applied in planar fashion. The mottling that results infinitely nuances the surface and enables the scroll's compositional ambiguity, as evident toward the top of the scroll where the lotus leaf blends into the inked-in area above. Through its simple compositional structure and minimal use of materials, *Lotus and Waterfowl* showcases its author's keen awareness of the liquescent potential of ink.

Lotus and Waterfowl demonstrates one important way in which Sōtatsu's use of *tarashikomi* should be distinguished from that of his followers. Most latter-day Rinpa painters selectively applied the technique to local areas of a painting, whereas Sōtatsu tended to make it



Figure 4. Tawaraya Sōtatsu (act. ca. 1600–1640), *Lotus and Waterfowl*, early seventeenth century. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 119 x 48.3 cm. Kyoto National Museum.

the generative pictorial method out of which other effects in a painting were achieved. In works such as *Lotus and Waterfowl*, *tarashikomi* might be understood less as a technique than as a mode of picture making. Hence the presence of numerous monochrome works in Sōtatsu's oeuvre that explore the full tonal spectrum of ink painting. A noteworthy aspect of this corpus is that its works bear little technical resemblance to the large

7. This group is discussed en masse in Yamane Yūzō, *Sōtatsu* (Tokyo: Chūōkōron bijutsu shuppan, 1962), and *Sōtatsu ha ichi*, ed. Yamane Yūzō, vol. 1 in *Rinpa kaiga zenshū* series (Tokyo: Nihon keizai shinbun, 1977).

body of ink paintings of similar subject matter produced in medieval Japan. Such works, created primarily by Zen Buddhist monk painters from the thirteenth through sixteenth century, followed well-established traditions of brushwork and composition.⁸ Instead, Sōtatsu consistently pictorialized subjects through sequential layerings of ink, building up variegated tonal fields traversed by myriad wash effects.

Until now, the question of *how* he arrived at this unique form of picture-making has taken precedence over the question of *why* he did so. There is at least one work, however, that provides traction for an explanation of the latter. It is a pair of hanging scrolls depicting two bulls in the collection Chōmyōji, a monastery in Kyoto (fig. 5). As will be argued, *Bulls* can be understood as a *locus classicus* of *tarashikomi* technique, due to the way its extraordinary inkwork facilitates insights into the subject matter. Because of its inscriptions and what can be gleaned about its production context, this pair of scrolls provides a unique opportunity to explore the painterly agendas to which *tarashikomi* was initially put. Stated another way, *Bulls* offers an important window onto the contexts for the motivated technical experimentation that ultimately resulted in Sōtatsu's now famous staining technique.

The bulls of Chōmyōji are executed entirely in monochrome ink on paper, unaccompanied by settings or motifs of any kind. This isolation calls attention to their bovine silhouettes, set against lightly inked-in backgrounds. While the left scroll depicts its bull standing and facing rightward, the right scroll depicts its bull squatting and facing toward the viewer's left. Upon closer inspection, however, the poses of both animals appear more ambiguous. They lay somewhere between motion and stillness, their bodies taut with tension as if struggling against the invisible ether. As pursued below, the indeterminacy of these dispositions has much to do with the original narrative contexts of their pictorial models. The signatures and seals in the lower outside corners of the scrolls indicate both Sōtatsu's authorship and his honorific title "Bridge of the Dharma" (*hokkyō*), conferred by the court sometime after 1620. Both works bear inscriptions at the top by the well-known courtier Karasumaru Mitsuhiro (1579–1638): The one on the right a classic *waka* poem in thirty-one syllables, the one on the left a quatrain of seven-character lines

8. I have analyzed these conventions according to the concept of modal painting in Yukio Lippit, "The Birth of Japanese Painting History: Kano Artists, Authors, and Authenticators in the Seventeenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2003), ch. 2.

written in Chinese. The poems, addressed below, provide significant insights into the representational mandate of their accompanying paintings.

Recent scholarly scrutiny has further specified the dating and original format of the Chōmyōji *Bulls*. Based upon a careful analysis of the progression of Mitsuhiro's ciphers, a date circa 1631 has been proposed for their creation.⁹ Speculation concerning the date and other aspects of the pair is complicated by the fact that in both cases a paper seam separates the inscription and the painting below. There is a general consensus that the calligraphic style of the inscription on the left scroll, which depicts the standing bull, differs in significant respects from that on the right scroll.¹⁰ Furthermore, there has been a tendency among some Sōtatsu specialists to view the standing bull as the product of a different hand from its kneeling counterpart. This attribution arises from certain perceived infelicities in the former, such as the repetitiveness of three of the four legs, or the resemblance of the bull's tail to a fifth leg, with something closer to a hoof than a tuft of hair at the end of its shank.¹¹ Such differences, however, are not sufficient to warrant its dismissal from Sōtatsu's milieu. The quality and wear of the paper are remarkably similar in both scrolls. Furthermore, no known animal paintings by any of Sōtatsu's followers—including studio works or later scrolls pressed with his seal—come close to achieving the sophistication of ink application witnessed here. The present analysis thus assumes that both works were painted by Sōtatsu, and that Mitsuhiro's calligraphy on the standing bull scroll represents a copy not too far removed from Mitsuhiro's own time.

The original format of *Bulls* also merits consideration. While the two scrolls form a complementary pair, they may originally have been conceived of as individual paintings to be collected and eventually mounted onto "pasted painting screens" (*oshi-e-bari byōbu*). Such

9. See Kasashima Tadayuki, "Tawaraya Sōtatsu kenkyū e no arata na shihyō—Karasumaru Mitsuhiro no kaō wo megutte—," *Kajima bijutsu zaidan kenkyū nenpō* 15 (1998):49–60.

10. Tanaka Eiji, "Oshi-e to oshi-e-bari byōbu," *Nihon bijutsu kōgei* 679 (1995):66–75. The paper seam is mentioned on page 70. For whatever reason, this observation concerning the paper seam was omitted from Tanaka's article when it was republished in *Kan'ei bunka no nettowaaku—'Kakumeiki' no sekai*, ed. Iwama Kaoru and Oka Keiko (Kyoto: Shibunkaku shuppan, 1998), pp. 215–224.

11. Mizuo Hiroshi, "Tawaraya Sōtatsu hitsu Ushi zu," *Kokka* 833 (August 1961):362–369; Sandy Kita, "The Bulls of Chomyoji: A Joint Work by Sōtatsu and Mitsuhiro," *Monumenta Nipponica* 47.4 (Winter 1992):495–519. The present article is greatly indebted to Kita's study, which represents the first substantial analysis of Sōtatsu's *Bulls* in any language.

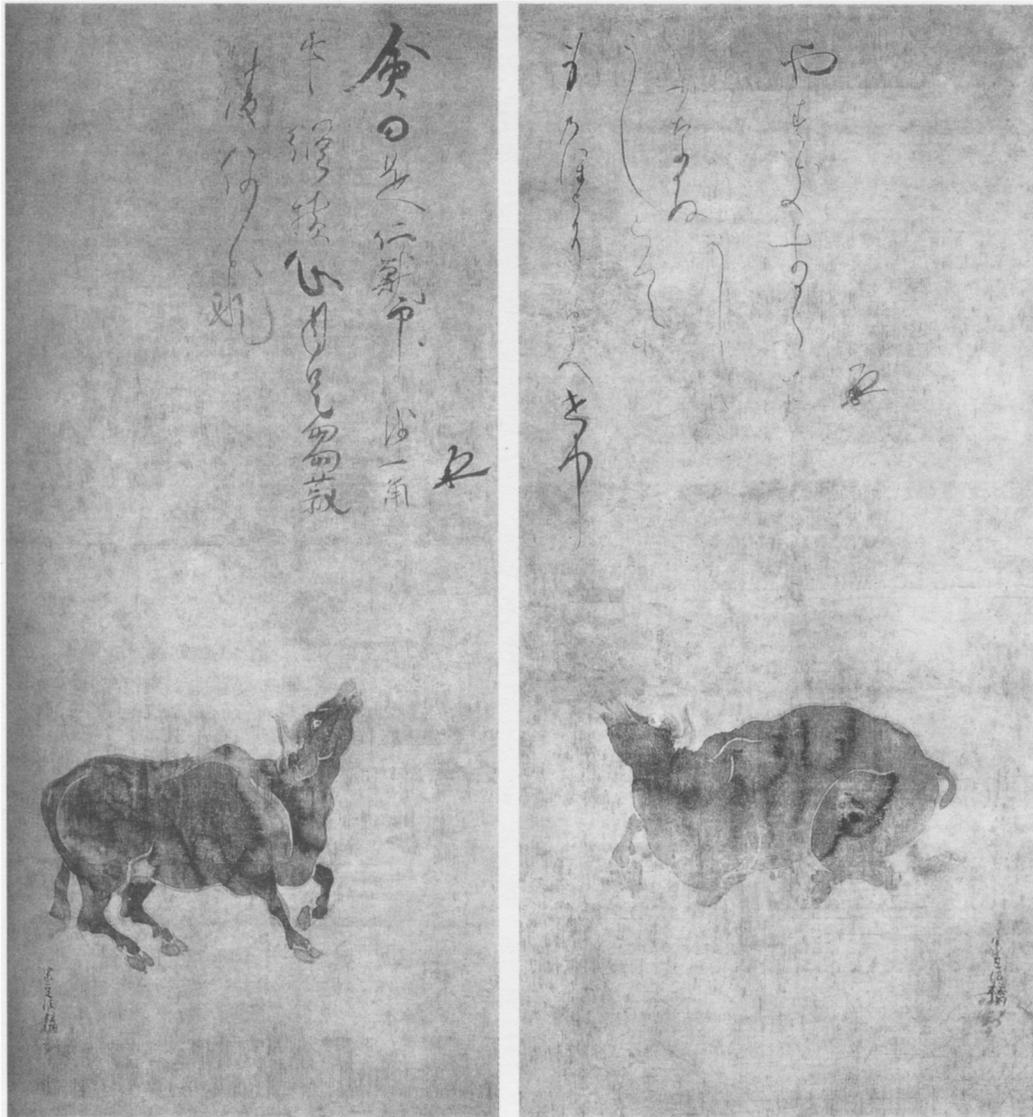


Figure 5. Tawaraya Sôtatsu (act. ca. 1600–1640), inscribed by Karasumaru Mitsuhiro (1579–1638), *Bulls*, circa 1631. Pair of hanging scrolls, ink on paper, 94.8 x 43.6 cm each. Chōmyōji temple, Kyoto.

screens, which became highly popular from around 1610 onward for several decades, typically bore neutral gold-foil or generically decorated backgrounds; paintings would be pasted onto individual panels, usually in groups of six or twelve. These groupings could be based upon a common theme such as Zen eccentrics, landscapes, or birds and flowers, or combine such themes miscellaneously. They were inscribed by prominent monks or courtiers of the day; indeed, an important part of the appeal of this composite format

seems to have been that it allowed for the compilation of prominent “ink traces” while mixing and matching various painting subjects.¹²

12. See Namiki Seishi, “Oshi-e-bari byōbu shiron,” *Kinko sōsho* 10 (1983):467–488. Namiki explores the origins of this genre in medieval Zen monastic culture. By the early 1600s, painters of the Kaihō, Soga, Tawaraya, Iwasa, and Kanō studios were producing works for pasted painting screens.

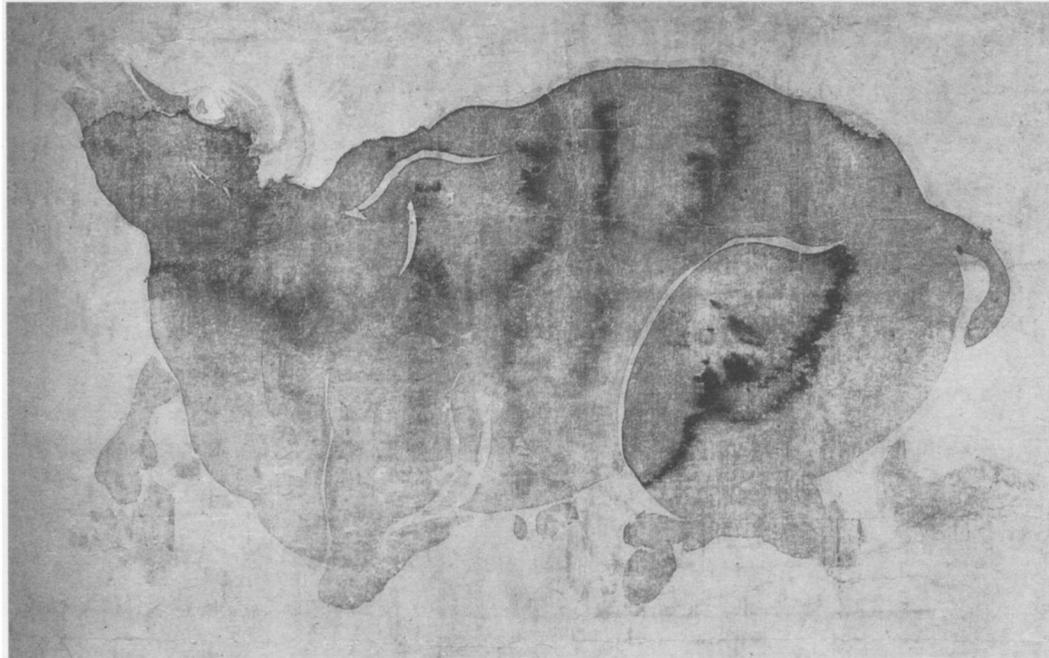


Figure 6. *Bulls* (see figure 5), detail from right scroll.

Sōtatsu is known to have produced works for pasted-painting screens, although these screens have subsequently been dispersed and individual paintings remounted as hanging scrolls.¹³ Such paintings typically measure some 100–120 cm in height. Based upon the dimensions of the Chōmyōji *Bulls* (96 cm high by 45 cm wide), Tanaka Eiji has speculated that they originally were made for pasted-painting screens, and only subsequently remounted as hanging scrolls. According to Tanaka, it was during the remounting that the areas between the inscriptions and paintings were trimmed, resulting in the paper seams evident today. By the early eighteenth century, when the scrolls were donated to Chōmyōji during the abbacy of Shinnō-in Nittō (d. 1730), they were mounted as a pair.¹⁴ Although it is unclear which format *Bulls* was conceived for originally, it is possible that this work was intended to be mounted as *both* hanging scrolls or folding screens in its various incarnations. Many paintings from this period were continually remounted from one format to another, and it ultimately may be anachronistic to consider such small-scale works as suitable for only one format. Records of the period also indicate that such works were

often commissioned by intermediaries, and that rarely was the painter or the inscriber the driving force behind the production of a painting in this format.¹⁵

Compared to later examples, the *tarashikomi* of the bulls is unusually sophisticated (fig. 6). The body of the kneeling bull of the right scroll is depicted with the lightest possible gradation of ink, the bottom half in particular so faint that the animal appears to vanish into the paper. The scale and quality of the splotches formed by the *tarashikomi* suggest that only small amounts of inky liquid were introduced at once, while the ground layer was still relatively moist. Furthermore, as opposed to later *tarashikomi* practice, the first and second layers of ink appear to have been of roughly the same degree of dilution (fig. 7). The standing bull of the left scroll, on the other hand, is somewhat darker and more variegated in its tone-scape. The scalloped edges of the ink ridges here suggest the highly deliberate manner in which the painter's brush introduced the second load of pigment into the first layer, slowly pressing the fleshy part of the brush into the body of the animal as if recording a fingerprint. The resulting tie-dye-like effect also suggests

13. See Tanaka (note 10), pp. 68–69.

14. *Ibid.*

15. See examples in Tanaka (*ibid.*) drawn from *Kakumeiki*, the diary of the Shōkokuji monk Hōrin Shōshō (1593–1668), and elsewhere.

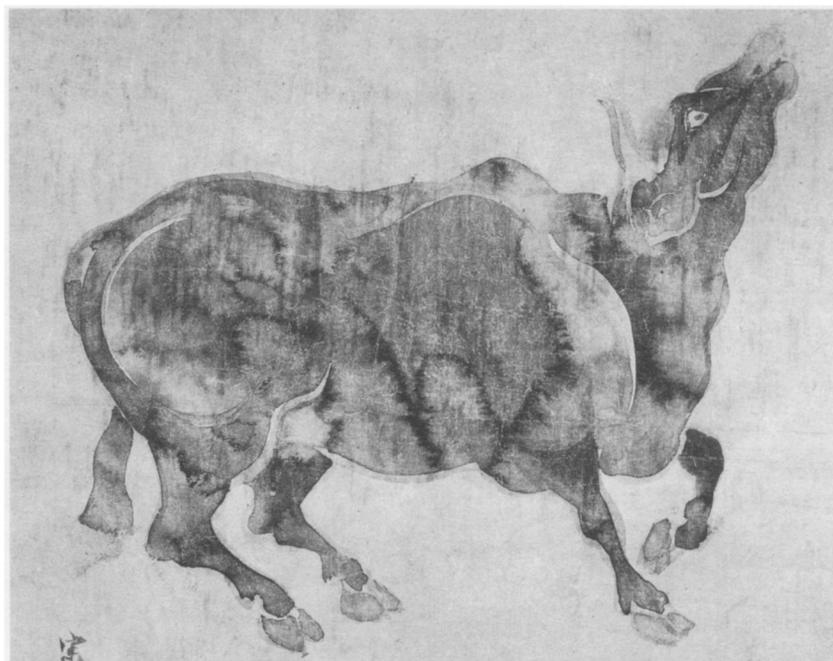


Figure 7. *Bulls* (see figure 5), detail from left scroll.

that the initial layer was nearly dry when the brushprint was taken. In both scrolls these aqueous residues are enhanced by extremely pale contour lines that harken back to a technique of classical Japanese figure painting, in which the outlines of the underdrawing of a painted figure were left uncovered while the remainder of the figure was colored over.¹⁶ The resulting outlines appear to be etched into the surface of the animals, somehow both articulating and subverting their sense of mass at the same time. The *tarashikomi* patterns complement this ambiguity by suggesting in the vaguest manner possible the musculature of the bulls' bodies. By contrast, medieval ink painters conveyed the corporeality of bulls through the meticulous representation of fur, rendering each hair legible while darkening or shifting direction to indicate the swells and recessions of the volume underneath. Although the watery surfaces of Sōtatsu's animals are equally dynamic in their suggestion of volume, they also promote the contradictory outcome of dematerializing their subjects.

16. The technique is known as *horinuri*, literally "carved and painted," because the lines appear to have been excavated by carving through colorant. It can best be witnessed in works such as the thirteenth-century *Satake Version Thirty-Six Immortal Poets*, now dispersed among numerous collections in the United States and Japan.

The cross-purposes to which facture is put in the Chōmyōji bulls ultimately highlight their insubstantiality as representations. Here *tarashikomi* serves to posit a subject of pictorial representation only to set in motion its own liquidation.

Over the past half century there has been considerable speculation concerning the types of precedents to such a striking technique, which has settled into two main hypotheses. The first, proposed by the dean of Sōtatsu studies, Yamane Yūzō (1919–2001), asserted that Sōtatsu was attempting to transpose into pictorial terms certain effects that he had achieved in his gold-and-silver underdesigns for the calligrapher Hon'ami Kōetsu (1558–1637).¹⁷ A fair number of these designs employ wooden stencils or molds to repeat forms across the lateral surfaces of handscrolls. In these instances, the molds were dipped in gold or silver ink and then pressed onto the paper; the lift off of the paper resulted in mottling and puddling effects that, in Yamane's view, were not unlike those associated with

17. The fullest elaboration of this idea can be found in Yamane, "Sōtatsu to suibokuga" (see note 3). Yamane writes that *tarashikomi* technique "naturally arose from the way Sōtatsu viewed or grasped the world" (p. 170).

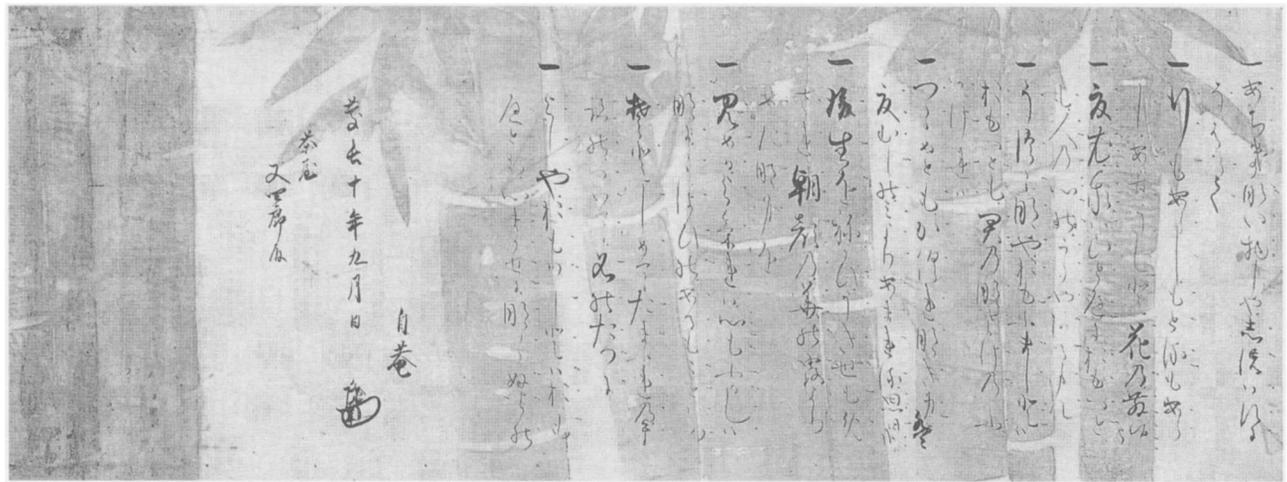


Figure 8. Inscribed by Takasabu Ryūtsu, underdesigns by Tawaraya Sōtatsu (active ca. 1600–1640), *Songs by Ryūtsu*, 1605. Fragment from handscroll, ink with gold and silver woodblock printed designs on paper, 33.5 x 90.1 cm. Kyoto mingaikan.

tarashikomi (fig. 8). Because he understood Sōtatsu's collaborations with Kōetsu to have taken place during the first two decades of the seventeenth century, Yamane imagined a career trajectory wherein the master artisan in his later years reproduced and developed by brush those effects he had achieved earlier in his career by stencil. *Tarashikomi* is thus conceived as the transposition of xylographic effects into the idiom of ink painting.

A second hypothesis, offered early on by the Chinese painting historian Yonezawa Yoshiho (1906–1993) and subsequently elaborated upon by others, located Sōtatsu's inspiration for his signature technique in the monochrome works of Chinese monk painters of the Song (960–1272) and Yuan (1272–1368) periods.¹⁸ These works were brought back by Japanese Zen pilgrim monks during the medieval period and formed the basis of the Japanese ink painting tradition. Examples raised in support of this line of causality include the Chinese monk painter Muqi's famous *White-Robed Guanyin* triptych at Daitokuji. In the central scroll depicting Guanyin in his island-mountain abode, graded washes are superimposed to build up a highly atmospheric setting, evoking both the earthen texture and moist air of the grotto in which the bodhisattva sits. Another, and perhaps more convincing, precedent is found in the

18. Yonezawa Yoshiho, "Kakizatsuga josetsu—kinsei suibokuga no shintenkai—," in *Hachidai sanjin, Yōshū hakkai*, vol. 11 of *Suiboku bijutsu taikai* series (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1978), pp. 39–74.

Muqi-attributed *Hibiscus*, also preserved in Daitokuji (fig. 9). *Hibiscus* is understood to represent the Song-period technique of dropped-ink (Chinese, *luomo*) in which, similarly to *tarashikomi*, different gradations of ink were blended together to produce a metamorphic visual effect, in this case of hibiscus flowers in the rain.¹⁹ The major difference with the technique found in Sōtatsu's *Bulls* is the former's use of unsized paper, resulting in far less control in the behavior of subsequent ink layers. In the Chinese practice of dropped ink, the ground actively influences the outcome of *laissez-faire* pigmentation through its absorption of the ink. Nevertheless, the premium it places on the tonal vicissitudes of intermingled water-based pigments puts *luomo* in intriguing proximity to *tarashikomi*. Because works by Muqi and other Chinese monks associated with Zen communities were collected avidly in Japan, Sōtatsu, it is reasoned, would have had ample opportunity to study the techniques on display here.

A third proposal concerning the origins of *tarashikomi*, uniquely made by the art historian

19. For a classic introduction to *luomo* technique, see Tanaka Toyozō, "NanTō no rakubokuka," *Mita bungaku* 16.10 (1941), reprinted in *Chūgoku bijutsu no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Nigensha, 1964), pp. 181–189. Maggie Bickford provides an extended discussion of dropped ink and its most famous practitioner, the eleventh-century Chinese painter Xu Xi, in *Ink Plum: The Making of a Chinese Scholar-Painting Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 97–100.



Figure 9. Attributed to Muqi (active late thirteenth century), *Hibiscus*, late thirteenth century. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 34.5 x 36.7 cm. Daitokuji monastery, Kyoto.

Minamoto Toyomune (1895–2001), deserves mention as well. Minamoto asserted that the various effects of opacity and transparency witnessed in Sōtatsu’s oeuvre can be understood as an extension of traditional *yamato-e* painting practice, as seen for example in the landscape representations of medieval narrative handscrolls.²⁰ As close analysis of his oeuvre reveals, Sōtatsu was clearly studying early handscrolls carefully and acquiring motifs and habits of representation from them.²¹ Minamoto’s observations anticipated the

tendency in more recent commentary to view Sōtatsu not as a classicist reviving early courtly traditions, but rather as an artisan whose practice can be understood most insightfully on a continuum with medieval norms of craft design and pictorial representation.²²

Although there is no clear-cut consensus among specialists, all of the above-mentioned theories have merit and contribute to an understanding of the innovations in Sōtatsu’s painting. None of them, however, identifies a definitive precursor in visual terms for *tarashikomi* or provides a convincing explanation for its emergence. In East Asian painting, perhaps the most proximate handling of ink is found in the works of the sixteenth-century Chinese painter Xu Wei (1521–1593) (fig. 10), especially his late flowers-and-plants scrolls. These works demonstrate what one contemporary referred to as a “muddy” use of ink that manipulated

20. As an example Minamoto cites various parts of the handscroll *Illustrated Life of Ippen* (*Yugyō engi emaki*; 1323) in the Shinkōji collection. See his “Tawaraya Sōtatsu,” in Minamoto Toyomune, ed., *Tawaraya Sōtatsu*, vol. 14 of *Nihon bijutsu kaiga zenshū* (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1977), pp. 97–118.

21. Concerning Sōtatsu’s patterns of motif borrowing, see Yamane Yūzō, “Sōtatsu hitsu Sekiya Miotsukushi zu byōbu ni tsuite,” *Rinpa kaiga zenshū Sōtatsu ha ichi* (Tokyo: Nihon keizai shinbunsha, 1977), reprinted in *Sōtatsu kenkyū ni*, vol. 2 of *Yamane Yūzō chosakushū* (Tokyo: Chūōkōron bijutsu shuppan, 1996), pp. 78–95, and Okudaira Shunroku, “Sōtatsu no in’yōhō—suibokuga wo chūshin ni—,” in Kanō Hiroyuki, ed., *Sōtatsu to Rinpa no genryū*, vol. 1 of *Rinpa bijutsukan* series (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1993), pp. 110–121.

22. See Satoko Tamamushi, “Tawaraya Sōtatsu and the ‘Yamato-e Revival,’” in *Critical Perspectives on Classicism in Japanese Painting, 1600–1700*, ed. Elizabeth Lillehoj (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004).



Figure 10. Xu Wei (1521–1593), *Miscellaneous Flowers and Plants*, detail, late sixteenth century. Handscroll, ink on paper, 28.2 x 665.2 cm. Tokyo National Museum.

gradation through sequential, wet-on-wet application.²³ Xu Wei's paintings were often executed on heavily-sized paper that enabled the initial layer of ink to settle into a crisp, "boneless" silhouette despite lacking a contour line. Because there is little historical evidence to suggest an awareness of Xu Wei's inkwork or anything similar in Sōtatsu's milieu, however, the question of models and inspirations remains an open one.

It may be that the establishment of trajectories of influence has received far too much attention in relation to sustained consideration of the environment that enabled the emergence of *tarashikomi*. By the early seventeenth century, accidentalism was an established part of elite craft production in Kyoto, especially as it was mediated by the tea ceremony (*chanoyu*). Among ceramics in particular there developed numerous ways of foregrounding accidental kiln effects in wares deemed suitable for the practice of tea. The qualities by which such ceramics were characterized—for example, uneven or collapsed bodies, kiln grit, and naturally occurring glazes—had always been a component of medieval utilitarian wares but were developed and rendered

23. See Kathleen Ryor, "Bright Pearls Hanging in the Marketplace: Self-Expression and Commodification in the Painting of Xu Wei" (Ph.D. diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1998).

further conspicuous by tea masters such as Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591) and Furuta Oribe (1544–1615). Such features enabled discourses that privileged rusticity and imperfection, in keeping with the general ideology of the tea ceremony as developed by Sakai's merchant tea masters. Accidentalism also facilitated the individuation of tea bowls and other objects by inviting the projection of associations onto their idiosyncracies, thereby enhancing their value and the aestheticist profiles of their owners. Hence the emergence of naming practices in the tea culture of this time, culminating in the craze for *meibutsu* or "named objects."²⁴

Given the contemporary ethos in craft production, it is not surprising that similar effects would be explored in the realms of paper decoration and painting. As the master artisan of the Tawaraya shop, with ties to several of the leading cultural figures of his time, Sōtatsu undoubtedly was aware of such trends and motivated to explore the possibility of resonant effects in pictorial representation. Toward this end, it is not difficult to imagine a wide variety of inspirations for the pursuit of sequential ink layering, drawn primarily from the various traditions of classical painting available for study to the

24. See the catalogue *Meibutsu chaki* (Tokyo and Nagoya: Nezu and Tokugawa Art Museums, 1988).

well connected. A plausible cultural context can thus be mapped out for the pursuit and privileging of collateral visual effects in Sōtatsu's paper decoration and painting. The lines of causal interrogation first raised by Yamane, Yonezawa, and Minamoto have muddied the issue by shifting emphasis away from the relationship between *tarashikomi* and synchronic contexts of meaning. In the absence of obvious prototypes, it is all the more important to work through specific case studies of Sōtatsu's use of this technique in order to further explore what the local contingencies of signification were for its emergence. Chōmyōji's *Bulls* provides a unique opportunity to do just this because of its sophisticated inkwork and because of what can be determined about its interpretive community.

The meanings of pictorial representations of oxen in East Asia was thoroughly overdetermined. In China there was a long-standing tradition of associating the ox—usually understood as either the yellow ox or the domesticated water buffalo—with the pastoral ideal. In this capacity, the ox embodied the eremitism and freedom from officialdom that were privileged in Confucian ideology; large herds of grazing oxen could also be understood as a metaphor for good governance. Scholar-officials from the Song period onward were known to give paintings of oxen to fellow officials who were assuming a new post.²⁵ Both the bull and the oxherd thus were accorded a privileged place in the iconography of gentlemanly culture. Paralleling this phenomenon was a tradition in Buddhist discourse that employed the bull as a privileged figure for the exegesis of religious doctrine. This could take myriad forms—perhaps the most common was to borrow the unrestrained nature of the ox as a figure for the potentially destructive wanderings of the human mind that had to be harnessed in order to achieve awakening. On the other hand, these wanderings could be seen as a metaphor for the search for the Buddha nature within oneself.

The same animal could also serve as a symbol for enslavement to the mundane world, especially in its domesticated capacity. Finally, tending to the ox was likened to the monk's cultivation of his Buddha nature and path toward enlightenment. In the last instance, the practicing monk was recast as an oxherd, a figure who would become central to allegories of awakening, such

as the Ten Oxherding Stages, developed in verse and then pictorialized in twelfth-century China. The figure of the ox could also invoke the Daoist ideal of naturalness and self-governance, although it is unclear to what extent this represents a borrowing from Buddhist commentarial literature. During the Song period the multiple capacities in which oxen could signify tended to settle into an opposition between a state of emancipation and whatever its antithesis might be, whether bondage to government service or attachment to the mundane world.

This polyvalency of the ox in East Asian painting enhanced its mobility among many different communities during the Song period. Instead of being yoked to one meaning, the bull served as a roaming metaphor that could appeal to the prerogatives of multiple constituencies simultaneously. Depending upon one's philosophical allegiances, the proverbial beast of burden could embody or catalyze the aspirations of monks, officials, adepts, and all types in between. In many cases, however, oxen became sites for the mixing and matching of different rhetorical regimes. The following poem by the scholar official Lou Yue (1137–1213), inscribed on an ox painting by the Daoist monk Fan Tzumin, demonstrates the multiple ways in which the draft animal could embody essentially the same concept within a single verse:

Someone asked me why I love this ox
The Immortal Fan's true brush enhances elegance.
Although being pulled with a rope is no comparison to
being free;
It is surely better than being trapped with a golden halter.²⁶

As Scarlett Jang has demonstrated, Lou Yue here makes allusion through the image of the golden halter to a classical parable concerning scholar-officials and the reclusive ideal.²⁷ At the same time, the image of the ox being pulled by a rope recalls within Chan symbolism the idea of the wayward mind reigned in by Buddhist practice. "Being free" in this context can connote reclusion, enlightenment, or Daoist realization, the latter of special resonance in Lou Yue's poem given the status of the painter whose work it addresses. In this way, the verse is anything but isotropic in its rhetorical sensitivities. Chan Buddhists understood particularly

26. Translated in *ibid.*, p. 65.

27. The parable involves the hermit Dao Hongqing of the sixth century. When asked by the Liang Emperor Wu Di (reigned 502–549) to serve in his court, Dao responded by painting two oxen, one with a golden halter, the other without. See *ibid.*, p. 55.

25. See Scarlett Ju-yu Jang, "Ox-Herding Painting in the Sung Dynasty," *Artibus Asiae* LII 1/2 (1992):54–92.

well the multidirectionality of such figures, which were pictorialized over and over for the scholar-official class as a way of expressing a commonality of endeavor and of recruiting sympathy and patronage.

Such is the context within which to understand the semantic charge of the large volume of oxen imagery that circulated throughout East Asia up through Sōtatsu's time in the form of painting, verse, and prose commentary. Although themes such as the Ten Oxherding Stages are closely associated with Zen Buddhist allegory, their communicative agendas were typically multilateral. In the Japanese context such themes were reproduced for the aristocratic and warrior elite instead of the scholar-official class. Indeed, one way of understanding the historical role of Zen Buddhism in Japan is as a rhetorical and institutional field that distilled classical continental culture anew for local constituencies throughout much of the premodern period. This is the context within which a courtier such as Karasumaru Mitsuhiro, the inscriber of the bulls of Chōmyōji, and members of his circle would have experienced and been attracted to the iconography of the ox.

The inscriptions by Mitsuhiro on *Bulls* clearly indicate his awareness of the Zen claim on the bull metaphor, borne out by the fact that both poems revolve around the concepts of freedom and self-sufficiency. The thirty-one syllable *waka* verse, inscribed over the kneeling or squatting bull, reads as follows:

Think of your station,
The world is full of sorrows.
Like a bull untethered,
Be, then, at ease.²⁸

(*mi no hodo ni omoe,
yo no naka ushi totemo
tsunaganu ushi no
yasuki sugata ni*)

As Sandy Kita has pointed out, the first line, "[t]hink of your station," makes an allusion to the courtly narrative *The Tale of Genji*.²⁹ In the novel a certain Lady Akashi falls in love with the protagonist Prince Genji while he is in exile in the province of Suma, only to be heartbroken when he is then called back to the capital. "Think of your station" (*mi no hodo ni omoe*) refers to the fact that Akashi was of a rank that would not have been deemed suitable to Genji in the capital. In this regard her situation corresponds to that of the bull,

which is trapped for the duration of this incarnation, born into a condition of servitude. Thus "the world is full of sorrows" (*yo no naka ushi totemo*). Kita notes that the term sorrow (*ushi*) here can also mean bull, functioning as a pivot word that fulcrums meaning toward the final lines of the verse: "Like a bull untethered, be, then, at ease" (*tsunaganu ushi no yasuki sugata ni*). The bull in this instance clearly is a zoomorphic expression of tetheredness or lack thereof. Its floating, unattached form here indicates a state of grace that comes with an understanding and acceptance of the mundane.

The Chinese poem inscribed above the standing bull reads as follows:

All say the bull is a benevolent creature,
This single-horned beast, drawn in sand,
Is from side to side, top to bottom, sufficient unto itself.
Why, then, should it seek for grass or sprouts?³⁰

(*Sen iwaku kore jinjū to
insha no ikkakugyū
jūō shin onozukara tari
sūshuku mata nani o ka motomen*)

Although composed according to very different conventions, this quatrain of five-character lines revolves around the same concept as the *waka* in the partner scroll. Kita observes that the last line alludes to the sixth stage of the Ten Oxherding Stages, which states that when the herdboy reaches enlightenment, "the ox lacks nothing . . . and does not cast a glance at the grass." While its recourse to the Zen archive is clear, the poetic interest of Mitsuhiro's verse lies in the way it reimagines Zen metaphors according to the norms of classical Chinese textuality. Thus the bull has undergone a lycanthropic transformation into a "single-horned beast," a reference to the *qilin* of Chinese mythology, and is described as a "benevolent creature," invoking one of the foundational virtues of Confucian thought. The juxtaposition of two such contrastive items of poetic syntax and imagery generates the aesthetic interest in this pairing. In turn, this matching of continental and archipelagic regimes of versification bears a centuries-long pedigree in Japanese courtly practice.³¹ The charge generated by the pairing, however, is positioned within the overarching framework of the Zen Buddhist habit of using the ox metaphor to distill representations and expressions of Buddha nature. Thus the term single-

30. Translation by Kita in *ibid.*, p. 498, with slight adjustments.

31. See David Pollack, *The Fracture of Meaning: Japan's Synthesis of China from the Eighth Through the Eighteenth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

28. Translated by Kita (see note 11).

29. *Ibid.*, p. 511.

horned (*ikkaku*) is also a reference to the Buddha,³² while the phrase “sufficient unto itself” suggests the idea that the Buddha nature can be found within oneself, without recourse to external aids.

The masterfully counterpoised pair of verses on Sōtatsu’s *Bulls* can be understood as a product of the culture of aristocratic Zen in early seventeenth-century Kyoto. Although not always recognized as such, the courtly community of this period was closely involved in the study and practice of Zen Buddhism under the leading monks of the Kyoto monastic world. Mitsuhiro himself was a devotee of the charismatic and short-lived monk Isshi Bunju (1608?–1646). Having switched sectarian affiliation from Nichiren to Zen under the influence of Hosokawa Yūsai (1534–1610), from whom he was also bequeathed the secrets of the courtly poetic tradition (*kokin denju*), Mitsuhiro initially studied under the Daitokuji monk Takuan Sōhō (1573–1645). After Takuan’s banishment from the capital by the Tokugawa shogunate in the Purple Robe Affair of 1629, Mitsuhiro received religious instruction for the last eight years of his life from Isshi.³³ He was by no means alone in his admiration for the Zen master. Fellow courtier Konoe Nobutada (1565–1614) invited Isshi to court as soon as the monk had established himself in Nishioka, a region south of Kyoto. Retired Emperor GoMizuno’o and Empress Tōfukumon’in counted themselves among his numerous adherents; surviving letters from GoMizuno’o to Nobutada discuss their study under Isshi of various Zen kōan, riddles of language and logic that were meant as heuristic devices in religious training.³⁴ Cultural historians have noted that during the 1620s and 30s, political disaffection led the GoMizuno’o circle to focus with particular intensity on cultural pursuits based upon the revival of classical norms of cultural production; the turn to Zen Buddhism among individual aristocrats at this time might be understood as one manifestation of this phenomenon.³⁵

Within the imperial circle, however, Mitsuhiro may have been particularly fervent in his spiritual commitments. He first met Isshi in the spring of 1630 and immediately thereafter built a retreat named Hōkō-an for the Zen master in Tanba province.³⁶ According to a eulogy inscribed by Isshi on a memorial portrait of Mitsuhiro in Hō’unzen-in monastery in Kyoto, upon meeting the master, Mitsuhiro was given the famous “A Dog Has No Buddha-Nature” kōan, with which he struggled for six or seven years before achieving a breakthrough.³⁷ The courtier’s insight into this celebrated Zen case study, discussed below, is recorded in several “enlightenment verses” (*tōki no ge*) that still survive.³⁸ Of direct relevance to his poems on the Chōmyōji *Bulls* are his calligraphic inscriptions of verse by the medieval monk poet Shōtetsu (1381–1459) based on the Ten Oxherding Stages, on a handscroll in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.³⁹ These inscriptions are accompanied by simple ink sketches of each stage within a roundel, most likely based upon woodblock-printed illustrations. A separate hanging scroll, also in a Japanese private collection, inscribes only a third of Shōtetsu’s verses and is also accompanied by a roundel-framed sketch.⁴⁰ While these works are far removed in formal terms from Sōtatsu’s *Bulls*, they further document the religious dispositions that characterized the environment from which the Chōmyōji pair emerged.⁴¹

This context offers new interpretive possibilities for the formal qualities of Sōtatsu’s oxen. In this regard, their *tarashikomi* staining cannot be understood in isolation from the poses they assume. Numerous commentators have observed that these poses ultimately are derived from Sōtatsu’s study of Japanese narrative painting scrolls, more specifically *The Miraculous*

36. Later this retreat would become the foundation of Hōjō-ji monastery, which still stands today.

37. The portrait was made for rituals marking Mitsuhiro’s third death anniversary, and is illustrated in the Itabashi Ward Museum catalogue (see note 33), pl. 59.

38. See *ibid.*, pls. 61 and 62. Both are believed to date to around 1637 or 1638 and are preserved in Hō’unzen-in (Kyoto) and Hōjō-ji (Kameoka) monasteries, respectively.

39. *Ibid.*, pl. 2.

40. *Ibid.*, pl. 11.

41. Another scroll of a bull painted by Sōtatsu and inscribed by Mitsuhiro is reproduced in *ibid.*, pl. 69. Its features are strikingly similar to the Chōmyōji pair, especially in the way the *tarashikomi* is applied, while the poem is similar in tone and imagery to Mitsuhiro’s *waka* poem on the kneeling bull scroll. Overall, however, the quality of the painting as well as Sōtatsu’s signature and seal strongly suggest that this is a much later work.

32. Kita (see note 11), p. 508.

33. The following account of Mitsuhiro’s relationship to Zen is indebted to Komatsu Shigemi, *Karasumaru Mitsuhiro* (Tokyo: Shogakkan, 1982) and Yasumasa Toshinobu, “Karasumaru Mitsuhiro to Tawaraya Sōtatsu,” in *Karasumaru Mitsuhiro to Tawaraya Sōtatsu* (Tokyo: Itabashi Ward Museum, 1982), unpaginated exhibition catalogue.

34. See Kumakura Isao, *GoMizuno’o-in* (Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 1982), pp. 206–211.

35. This is one of the main themes of Kumakura (*ibid.*), as well as of the writings of Tsuji Zennosuke and Hayashiya Tatsusaburō.

*Origins of the Kitano Tenjin Shrine.*⁴² Such borrowing is not surprising, given that numerous figural and animal motifs from Sōtatsu's other known works are also indebted to the rich repository of similar imagery found in the handscroll tradition.⁴³ Close to the time *Bulls* was painted, for example, Mitsuhiro is known to have borrowed the narrative painting *Tales of Saigyō*, painted by Kaita Uneme in the early sixteenth century, from the Imperial Palace at the request of the warrior Honda Tomimasa, and to have had Sōtatsu copy the painting while Mitsuhiro transcribed the text.⁴⁴ In such a manner, Sōtatsu is imagined to have had access to numerous classical handscrolls through elite connections. Rather than a direct reference to any specific work, however, the gestures assumed by the bulls are more plausibly understood as a reflection of the large repository of exemplary images built up over the course of time in the Tawaraya atelier, formed through the close study of early Japanese courtly painting. These may have included both narrative handscrolls and the tradition of "excellent oxen" paintings (*sungyū zu*), which often consisted of portraits of prized cattle owned by the aristocracy.⁴⁵ Given this accumulation of stock motifs, the significance of any specific morphological echo can be overestimated. Of greater significance is the fact that the Chōmyōji bulls of both the left and right scrolls appear to have been derived from representations of tethered oxen. This derivation is obvious from the poses of the beasts, which in both cases appear to be shifting their body weight backwards and rearing their heads, perhaps against the imaginary pull of an oxherd; the ox of the right scroll appears to be squatting to increase its leverage against the tug of the harness. A comparison with a similarly struggling ox from Sōtatsu's *The Tale of Genji* screens in the Seikadō Museum (fig. 11), to take but one example, confirms that the original models for both Chōmyōji bulls derived from contexts in which the animals were yoked.

42. Mizuo, "Tawaraya Sōtatsu hitsu Ushi zu" (see note 11).

43. Okudaira (see note 21).

44. The borrowing took place in the ninth month of 1630, and is recorded in the colophon to the Sōtatsu copy, formerly in the Mōri family collection and now in the Manno Museum in Osaka.

45. On "excellent cattle" paintings in relation to Sōtatsu's *Bulls* see Kita (note 11), pp. 505–506. Jinbo Tōru provides an overview of the genre in "Sungyū zu dankan," in *Emakimono sōran*, ed. Jinbo et al. (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1995), pp. 504–505. For an intriguing discussion, see Nakai Kaoru, "Sungyū ekotoba, Kokugyū jūzu, Hakugyūroku kō no kaidai," *Nihon jūi shigaku zasshi* 31 (1994.3): 50–57.



Figure 11. Tawaraya Sōtatsu (active ca. 1600–1640), *The Tale of Genji*, detail, 1631. Pair of six-panel folding screens, ink, colors, and gold on paper, 152.3 x 355.6 cm each. Seikadō Library Museum.

The disconnect inevitably experienced upon an initial viewing of these oxen results in part from the fact that they are unaccompanied by any motifs—a rope harness, an oxherd, any setting at all—that would suggest the original contexts in which their poses were conceived. Thus unfamiliarized, the bodily dispositions of the oxen are thoroughly ambiguous. Floating and writhing against—or without—a background, they can be understood as fettered and unfettered at the same time. Their pale contour lines only serve to set them off further from the inked-in void around them, itself an indistinct space. The oxen are represented with a quiet intensity of activity, each beast flexing its muscles and straining its joints, somewhere between captivity and unbridled freedom. Their indeterminate status is only oxymoronic if these states are understood as binary opposites and not as two registers of the same condition, of supramundane freedom discovered within mundane servitude. In this regard, the uninterpretable body language of the bulls corresponds remarkably well to the ontological ambiguity of the poems inscribed above them. They are attached to (or born into) their "station" but "untethered," "at ease" in a "world full of sorrows." Each is both a bull and a "single-horned beast," "benevolent" and "sufficient unto itself."

Within this resonant descriptive field, the role of the *tarashikomi* can be articulated with greater precision. The sophisticated monochrome staining techniques found on the bodies of the animals visually complement the discursive context within which the pair is framed

and gesturally situated. They do so by creating another register of indeterminacy in the representation whereby *tarashikomi* implies both volume and a certain watery insubstantiality. In so doing the technique effectively dematerializes the bulls, setting in motion their ink liquefaction. The incompleteness of this dissolution turns them into visual conundrums. Although familiarity with *tarashikomi* dripping methods allows for an understanding of the bulls' inky profiles as resulting from a second layer of ink infusing a still-moist previous layer, at a purely visual register it is unclear whether the resulting spongiform marks represent a slow outward emulsion or a gradual centripetal coagulation. Furthermore, because the hydraulics of *tarashikomi* effectively erase brush traces that would otherwise index a painter's contribution, the oxen appear that much more convincingly to be unauthored, that is to say, spontaneously formed through a coalescence of ink—or an oxidation of energy, if you will. In this regard they are “self-sufficient” beasts that bear well the burden of the rich metaphoric prism through which oxen were viewed in Zen Buddhist commentary.

The Chōmyōji *Bulls* scrolls represent the most striking example of *tarashikomi* to have survived, as well as one of its earliest examples. *Bulls* looks the way it does because Sōtatsu likely was given a mandate to develop, out of the various accidental daubing and smearing effects already nascent in his repertoire, an ink painting technique that complemented patterns of Zen Buddhist metaphoric expression embraced in Mitsuhiro's circle circa 1630. This line of speculation is supported by the fact that several other animal paintings attributed to Sōtatsu—in this case dogs—that employ *tarashikomi* were understood as complementing similar discursive habits. The group of some ten dog paintings attributed to Sōtatsu, for example, include two examples bearing inscriptions that make reference to the Zen kōan “A Dog Has No Buddha-Nature.”⁴⁶ This corpus needs to be treated with caution, as none of the scrolls therein can be convincingly attributed to the master artisan himself. Nevertheless, the most accomplished in this group can be ascribed to the hand of a Tawaraya assistant or later follower, and understood as being based in some manner on Sōtatsu's menu of subjects. A hanging scroll in a private collection depicting two puppies playfully interacting, for example, employs *tarashikomi* in a

manner remarkably similar to *Bulls* (fig. 12). Although it bears a later inscription by the Obaku monk Tangai Musen (1693–1763), the painting itself can be dated to the early- to mid-seventeenth century and is closely reflective of Sōtatsu's own treatment of the subject. The significance of this work lies in its suggestion that pictorial representations of dogs, which traditionally served in East Asia as auspicious images for the delivery of abundant offspring, were understood among the interpretive community serviced by Sōtatsu in the context of the celebrated kōan.⁴⁷

“A Dog Has No Buddha-Nature” is the first example in the famous thirteenth-century Chinese kōan collection *The Gateless Gate* (Chinese, *Wumenguan*; Japanese, *Mumonkan*), compiled by the monk Wumen Huikai (1183–1260). No kōan is more abbreviated and more deceptively complex:

A monk asked Zhaozhou Zongshen: “Does a dog also have the Buddha-nature?” Zhaozhou answered: “*Wu!*”
[Japanese, *Mu*]

“A Dog Has No Buddha-Nature” is a prime representative of the kōan genre as it had evolved by the thirteenth century; initially these “case studies” were drawn from encounter dialogues attributed to early religious masters. As time went on, they were increasingly abbreviated, enhancing their bizarre and inscrutable nature, while accruing an increasingly extensive commentarial literature. Although there was much debate during the Song period as to what role these dialogic fragments played in Sino-Japanese Zen practice, they are traditionally understood as providing precedents of enlightened behavior and speech whose illogicality needed to be worked through in order to transcend dualistic thought.⁴⁸

Kōan became a prominent part of the Zen literary curriculum in medieval Japan and, as we have seen, “A Dog Has No Buddha-Nature” was the example by

47. This point is also suggested in Kōno (ibid.). The other Sōtatsu-attributed dog painting with an inscription bears a verse by none other than Isshi Bunju. Again, although the painting cannot be attributed to Sōtatsu unproblematically, it is nevertheless suggestive of Isshi's understanding of this painting subject; see the catalogue of Itabashi Ward Museum (note 33), pl. 73.

48. See the collected essays in *The Kōan: Texts and Context in Zen Buddhism*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For “A Dog Has No Buddha-Nature” in particular, see Ishii Shūdō, “Kung-an Ch'an and the Tsung-men t'ung-yao chi,” pp. 110–136 and Morten Schlutter, “‘Before the Empty Eon’ versus ‘A Dog Has No Buddha-Nature’: Kung-an Use in the Ts'ao-tung Tradition and Ta'hui's Kung-an Introspection Ch'an,” pp. 168–199 in that book.

46. The dog paintings are collated in *Sōtatsu-ha ichi* (see note 7). See also the discussion by Kōno Motoaki, “Rinpa no shudai—Sōtatsu no ba'ai,” in *Nihon bi no seika-Rinpa*, ed. Asahi shinbunsha (Tokyo: Asahi shinbunsha, 1994), pp. 7–18.

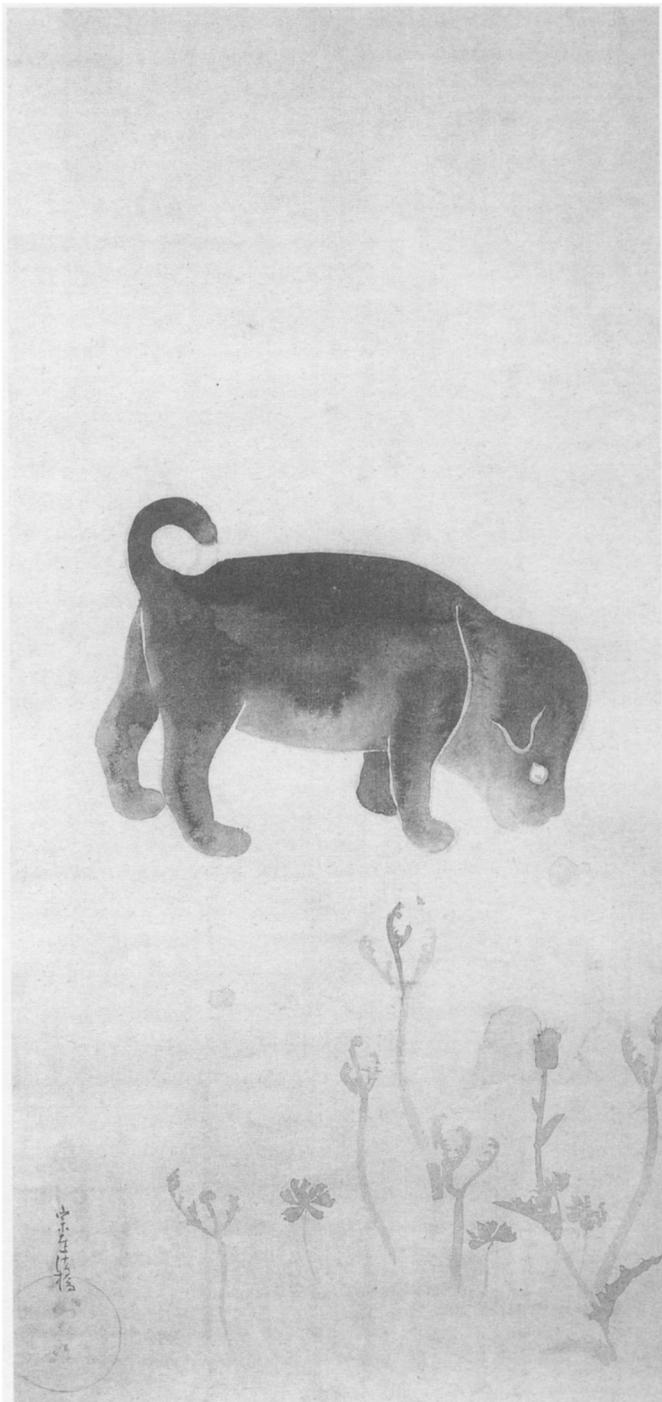


Figure 12. Attributed to Tawaraya Sōtatsu (active ca. 1600–1640), *Dog*, early- to mid-seventeenth century. Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 90.3 x 45.0 cm. Private collection, Japan.

which Mitsuhiro achieved awakening. Although no exegesis of the kōan in question will be attempted, Zhaozhou's response "Wu!" [Japanese, "Mu!"], vaguely translatable as "nothing," negates the either/or structure of the question itself and sets in motion a difficult vector of inquiry into the doctrinal tenets of Zen Buddhism. More germane to the present discussion is the idea that *tarashikomi*, through its unique watery poetics, can be imagined to provide an equivalent to the self-negating character of Zhaozhou's response. The painter who innovated this striking technique may have had little or no understanding of the religious and philosophical subtleties of the inscriptions that accompanied his works.⁴⁹ Yet in its dissimulation of line, mass, and volume, its deconstitution of gesture, and its total absence of "texture" itself, *tarashikomi* represents the ultimate artisanal response to the question of Buddha nature. Its presence in the Chōmyōji *Bulls* allows the pair of scrolls to repose in visual terms the query to Zhaozhou, only this time with regard to oxen instead of dogs. The tonal fusion in Sōtatsu's animals becomes a visual metaphor for the search for the ineffable.

Sustained consideration of *tarashikomi* serves as a reminder that the pictorial qualities of monochrome ink painting are predicated upon its water solubility. The ability of ink to blend with water in a limitless spectrum of ratios allows for both maximum transparency of brush dynamics and an infinite range of tonal gradations. An awareness of the combinatory potential of water and ink was lexically encoded in the East Asian term for this mode of pictorial representation, "water-ink" painting (Chinese, *shuimohua*; Japanese, *suibokuga*). It was the discovery of the hydroaesthetic possibilities of this admixture that led, during the Tang period (618–907), to the invention of "ink painting" in China, transforming brush painting in ink from an essentially linear mode of representation whose pictorialism was mutually

49. Sōtatsu's own religious views are too poorly documented to explore meaningfully. He is known to have been a member of the Nichiren sect, and Chōmyōji was his family's mortuary temple, a fact that may have played a role in the donation of *Bulls* to the temple in the early eighteenth century. The first character of the name "Sōtatsu," however, is commonly associated with monks who are affiliated with the dharma lineage of the renowned Zen master Musō Soseki (1275–1351). A recent study has, unconvincingly, attempted to interpret Sōtatsu's *Wind and Thunder Gods* screens in Kenninji monastery as "enlightenment paintings" (*tōki no e*). See Murase Hiroharu, "Tawaraya Sōtatsu to Ogata Kōrin no shisōteki chūtai—'Fūji raijin zu' to 'Kōhakubai zu' wo megutte—," *Bigaku* 54.3 (Winter 2003):15–28.

transferable among a handful of other media (stone or clay sculpture, textiles, lacquer) to a planolinear one unique to painting, based upon a rich repertoire of brush-and-wash effects. Although “brushwork” has received the majority of attention in the literature on ink painting throughout the centuries, it is in techniques of wash that this medium most dramatically distinguished itself historically from most other forms of painterly representation. Wash is what allowed for the staging of remarkable effects that have been likened, not unproblematically, to monochromatic mimesis.

In the history of East Asian ink painting, however, *tarashikomi* can be situated more specifically within a subterranean genealogy of modes that foregrounded wash as a master metaphor for the process of creation itself. The splashed ink method (Chinese, *pomo*, Japanese, *hatsuboku*) of the Tang period (618–907) is a prominent example; in this mode of painting, ink wash rapidly fused together in different gradations provided the raw material out of which landscapes were imagined, relying upon a participatory aesthetics in which a given representation ultimately was completed by the viewer. The method of Wang Mo, the painter most closely associated with the invention of splashed ink, was described in a ninth-century compilation as starting from spontaneous ink marks on the painting surface. The way in which Wang derived forms from them was “exactly like the cunning of a deity.”⁵⁰ Significantly, the ink in such unpremeditated marks was described as “thin in some places, rich in others,” indicating that wash featured prominently in splashed ink as the raw material out of which landscapes would then be imagined. In later centuries arbitrary wash effects would be developed as catalysts for creative pictorial composition, and the resulting visual qualities would themselves become likened to primordial morphogenesis.⁵¹ This was especially the case in the aesthetic discourse of the eleventh-century scholar-official and poet Su Shi (1037–1101), who likened one

preferred mode of ink wash painting to “the perception of unforced process akin to natural creation—witnessing the thing become itself.”⁵² Song-period literati commented upon the associations of ink liquidity with cosmic processes in numerous painting inscriptions. While the visual properties of diluted ink conjured such associations in its shape-shifting heteromorphism, counterintuitively, the paintings which featured them could still be read as direct reflections of the character of the painter. Thus the seemingly protean “cloudy mountain” landscapes of the literatus Mi Youren (1074–1151) were understood as reflections of the painter’s upright character. As Peter Sturman writes, in such paintings Mi Youren takes up the “well-known challenge posed a generation earlier by Su Shi for ‘superior men of outstanding talent’ to paint subjects of ‘inconstant form but constant principle,’ such as clouds and mist, which are ever-changing but always in accordance with their basic nature or principle.”⁵³ While this discourse concerning the evanescent, fugitive qualities of wash-based painting would survive only piecemeal in later eras, it represents an important precedent for the context in which Sōtatsu’s *tarashikomi* was experienced and appreciated by its initial audiences.

In all likelihood Mitsuhiro did not commission the paintings from Sōtatsu, but simply inscribed them on behalf of an as-of-yet unrecovered third party. Nevertheless, he was undoubtedly one of the presences in the painter’s milieu most responsible for engendering Sōtatsu’s experimentations in ink. At the very least, Mitsuhiro was sensitive to what *tarashikomi* could evoke, as witnessed by his description of the standing bull as “drawn on sand” (*insha*). This phrase was employed in Chinese aesthetic discourse as, for example, in the following passage on calligraphy in Zhao Xiku’s twelfth-century *Compilation of Pure Earnings in the Realm of the Immortals* (Chinese, *Dongtian qinglu ji*):⁵⁴

To speak of a painting “without brush traces” does not mean that its ink is pale, vague, and without definition. It is precisely the same as [the work of] a good calligrapher who

50. *From Celebrated Painters of the Tang Dynasty (Tangchao minghua lu)*; see Shimada Shūjirō, “Concerning the I-p’ in Style of Painting,” trans. James Cahill, parts 1–3, *Oriental Art* 7.2 (1961):66–72; 8.3 (1962):130–137; 10.1 (1964):19–26. Originally published as “Ippin gafū ni tsuite,” *Bijutsu kenkyū* 161 (1950):264–290.

51. On the afterlife of the splashed ink method and the role of “imagination” in Song painting, see Ogawa Hiromitsu, “TōSō sansuigashi ni okeru imajineeshon—hatsuboku kara ‘Sōshun zu’ ‘Shōshō gayū zukan’ made—,” Three Parts, *Kokka* 1034 (June 1980):5–17; *Kokka* 1035 (July 1980):35–45; and *Kokka* 1036 (August 1980):25–36.

52. Bickford (see note 19), p. 96.

53. Peter Sturman, *Mi Fu: Style and the Art of Calligraphy in Northern Song China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 10. Su Shi’s quote is taken from a longer passage translated and discussed in Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037–1101) to Tung Ch’i-ch’ang (1555–1636)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 42–43.

54. This source is pointed out in Kita (see note 11), pp. 515–516.

conceals his brush tip, like *drawing in the sand* with an awl
Or making a seal impression in paste.⁵⁵

In this passage Zhao goes on to describe, in keeping with orthodox literati ideas, the equivalence of calligraphy and painting. Yet Mitsuhiro applies this idea to a very different type of art form, likening the dissembling quality of *tarashikomi* itself to the indistinction of lines drawn in sand. Such imagery is particularly apt when imagined in the setting of a seashore with waves washing over evanescent, sand-writ images. It is then activated as a vivid simile for *tarashikomi*, in which layers of ink wash over other layers of ink, like a cyclical and ceaseless mutation of the very conditions of pictorial representation.

55. Translated in Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 206. The italics have been added by me.