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Abstract
This piece offers an extended visual analysis of the Zen master Dōgen’s (1200–1253) *Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen*, arguing that Dōgen’s calligraphy is a carefully orchestrated performance. That is, it does precisely what it asks its readers to do: it sits calmly, evenly, and at poised attention in a real-world field of objects (trees, grasses, and so forth). The manuscript’s brushstrokes and entire aesthetic layout enact seated meditation. Most analyses of Dōgen’s text have focused on its use and adaptation of Chinese source material, its place in founding the school of Sōtō Zen in Japan, and the ramifications of its doctrinal assertions on our understanding of Japanese religious history. Drawing attention instead to the material, aesthetic, art historical, and performative qualities of the text represents a completely new approach, one that foregrounds how the visual and material qualities of this Buddhist artifact are closely intertwined with its efficacy as a religious object. In pursuing this line of analysis, this article participates in the broader ritual turn in Buddhist studies while seeking to make a particular intervention into art historical qualifications of Zen art.

IN THIS ARTICLE, I will try to make two interventions into our current understandings of Zen calligraphy (calligraphy written by Zen monks). The first has to do with definition and scope. I want to redefine the qualities of Zen calligraphy beyond the spontaneous and splashy forms of composition typically associated with this writing style, to now include deliberate, erect, stable, and legible characters that are well-paired with the paper’s underlying imagery. The *Fukanzazengi* falls into a completely different genre of Zen writing from the sorts of expressive and creative manifestations, much-favored in museum exhibitions, in which dynamic interpretation is paramount. Instead, the *Fukanzazengi* is a pedagogical and didactic guide in which legibility is crucial, the function being to teach adherents, clearly and methodically, how to do seated meditation. In support of this assertion, I offer an extended visual analysis of the performativity of the manuscript’s calm and measured calligraphy (fig. 1). Dōgen’s treatise was part of an explosively popular new genre of meditation texts, which were in high demand both in Song China (960–1279) and in Kamakura Japan (1185–1333). On the whole, I agree with Stephen Addiss’s strict definition of *zenga* (Zen art) as “the brushwork of leading Zen monks or occasionally of other monks and laymen who have studied Zen deeply enough to be imbued with its spirit.” But I want to expand our notions of what that “spirit” might be and how it might manifest itself, materially, as calligraphy.

The second intervention that I will assert has to do with the materiality of the text—the very particular things that this manuscript version of *Fukanzazengi*
Reading the artifact closely with an eye toward its material performativity will inevitably, for some readers, raise the question of authorial intention. In its barest form, the objection to a materialist mode of reading comes down to the question of authority. Where do authority and authenticity lie—with the author or with the object?

To clarify my position, allow me to sketch some potential replies to this query, which has been the subject of rich debate over the last half century. At the risk of oversimplification, the debates pertaining to authority have moved through four theoretical stages. The oldest principle, informed by Romanticism and the belief that the artist, in the moment of creation, experienced a moment of insight or genius, places authenticity squarely within authorial intention. In this reckoning, it is the job of the scholar (whether editor, interpreter, translator, curator, or art historian) to get as close as possible to this original insight—to clear off any later accretions, to clarify obscure points, and to introduce the artist, through her or his works, as a person of genius.

The New Critics offered a radically different approach, articulated primarily in terms of literature but later extended to other art forms. In this second theoretical stage, the artist is forgotten, and the artwork is primary. In literary terms, the text exists only as words on a page: it hangs together as a discrete unit and provides all the clues (however hidden) for its own correct interpretation. Some have called this a “hermetic” approach, in that the artwork is viewed as sealed, self-sufficient, and related only to signs.

Post-structuralist and deconstructive theory offers a third stage, in which not only the artist’s authority is eschewed, but so is the idea that there could be any single correct interpretation of a work of art. In this view, the artwork takes on a life of its own as soon as it enters into circulation, and we are free to make of it what we will, even to read it against the grain for whatever playful possibilities might be extracted. It is the job of the scholar to refresh and remake the artwork with her or his reading. Here, the locus of authenticity shifts to the receiver (viewer or reader) of the artwork.

Most recently, a sociological approach has emerged. This fourth stage attempts to harness the energy and interpretive freedom of the deconstructionist mode...
while recognizing that there are some limits to what was historically possible and giving some weight to social context and plausibility. Here, it is the job of the scholar to imagine a range of possible meanings in an artwork, and then to suggest which of these would have been more probable at various junctures (the time of creation, for instance, or at an important moment when the artwork was used in a specific way). As Peter Shillingsburg has put it, “The richness and complexity of a text … is more fully experienced by contrasting the text as a product of a partially known (that is, constructed) past with the text as free-floating in the present, or as it seems to have been experienced at significant moments in intermediate times.” McKenzie calls this a “secular” approach, insofar as it is open, social, and admmissive of historical context.

In the pages that follow, I adopt a thoroughly sociological approach. I prefer to place more weight on the material end of the scale and less on the authorial. Consequently, over the course of this essay, I will ground questions of authenticity and authority primarily in the manuscript at hand. But, it is not an either-or choice: we need not choose between the materiality of the manuscript to the total exclusion of its purported creator and wider social context. While admitting that it is impossible to know exactly what the creator (in this case, presumably Dōgen) intended, we can at least sketch the contours of what would have been possible, plausible, or expected in Dōgen’s time and at various intermediate points thereafter, such as when the Japanese government declared the manuscript a national treasure.

In this article, I offer an extended visual analysis of the manuscript *Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen*. I argue that the calligraphy and its interplay with the paper on which it is written can be read as a carefully orchestrated enactment of mind. Following my analysis, I situate Dōgen’s handwritten treatise in three sociological contexts—two historical and one contemporary—to bring to light the performative dimensions of his calligraphic work. First, I consider the very broad cultural understanding that one’s handwriting was a direct reflection of one’s level of spiritual attainment and emotional state of mind. In the classical East Asian cultural sphere, a calligraphic artifact was considered a tangible point of contact with the composer’s mind and body. Second, I provide a brief account of classical and medieval Japanese Buddhist cultures of religious writing, which conceptualize the human body and written text as lying along a shared material continuum. And finally, I examine the modern culture of art historical analysis and museum display, which have overwhelmingly framed Zen Buddhist writing primarily in terms of spontaneity and boldness. These three approaches allow me to highlight the performative aspects of calligraphy as understood in Dōgen’s day and age, while suggesting reasons why that performative valance has been illegible to the modern art world, which has otherwise been quite open to, even celebratory of, Zen calligraphy.
Moving from Moment of Creation to Moments of Interpretation: Introducing the Manuscript

The Tenpuku-bon7 manuscript of Fukanzazengi (普勧坐禅儀, hereafter Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen, 1233) is one of the few extant examples of Dōgen’s calligraphy (figs. 1, 2, 4, 6a, 6b). This is somewhat odd, for Dōgen (1200–1253), founder of the Sōtō school of Japanese Zen Buddhism, was an incredibly active producer of literary, philosophical, and religious works. One recent scholarly tally credits the monk with perhaps half a dozen ritual manuals, a collection of doctrinal essays, several volumes of collected sayings and commentaries, more than six hundred sermons, and numerous poems in both Chinese and Japanese.8

Nevertheless, extant examples of his calligraphy are rare for a variety of reasons. A huge amount of his time was taken up with temple administration and, in most cases, he seems to have entrusted his chief disciple and successor Koun Ejō (1198–1280) with creating written copies of his teachings. Furthermore, Eiheiji, Dōgen’s headquarters, has “always been poor, geographically isolated, and without extensive land holdings or wealthy patrons,”9 meaning that Dōgen did not receive commissions or demands for his calligraphy in the way that many of the more urban-centered monks of the Rinzai and Obaku lineages did.10 Eiheiji was hard-pressed financially for several centuries and would not have had the preservation infrastructure necessary, or perhaps the institutional predilection, for maintaining samples of Dōgen’s writing—at least, not until a series of able administrators, beginning in the 1600s, institutionalized regular memorial services in Dōgen’s honor, thus securing a funding stream for major architectural renovations.11

In an authorial model of analysis, the manuscript of Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen is thus a rare and precious glimpse into the calligraphic practice of this highly influential Zen patriarch. In the centuries after Dōgen first composed it, the essay itself assumed a foundational importance for the Sōtō school of Zen Buddhism as the founder’s first systematic presentation of his lineage’s most central emancipatory technique: seated meditation. For all of these reasons (authorial, material, and historical), the scroll, maintained now at the Eiheiji temple storehouse, was designated a Japanese National Treasure (kokuhō) first on March 11, 1941, and then reconfirmed on March 17, 1952, following the postwar revisions of the national treasures laws, as part of a highly politicized project.12

In terms of its semantic content, the essay is generally analyzed as consisting of three parts. The opening portion, a broad statement concerning the Zen approach to Buddhism, relates how the discipline of seated meditation was practiced by the Historical Buddha and was introduced to East Asia by Bodhidharma (fl. sixth century), the legendary Indian monk identified as the First Patriarch of Zen. The second section details methods for performing seated meditation. This portion, which
performing mind, writing meditation relies heavily on Chinese source texts, repeats a standard tripartite movement, beginning with directions for bodily comportment and then considering breath regulation and management, before briefly touching on this physical regimen’s effects on the mind. Finally, the closing section speaks succinctly but ecstatically of the benefits of seated meditation, which is said to bring bodily relaxation, an invigorated spirit, calmness, peace, and joy.

Dōgen and Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen: A Brief Historical Sketch

Dōgen was born just after the New Year in 1200 in the imperial capital at Heian, now the modern city of Kyoto. After consulting with his mother’s brother, the monk Ryōken, Dōgen climbed Mount Hiei, headquarters of the Tendai Buddhist establishment in Japan and a major monastic training center, where he became a low-ranking monk at the tender age of thirteen. An intellectually gifted young man, he read widely and was not afraid to ask pointed questions of his teachers. Unable to find satisfying answers on Mount Hiei, he began a period of wandering; in 1223, he undertook the dangerous sea journey to Song China. Dōgen eventually attached himself to Rujing (如浄, Japanese: Nyojō), thirteenth patriarch of the Caodong (曹洞, Japanese: Sōtō) lineage of Zen Buddhism. In the seventh month of 1225, Rujing confirmed Dōgen’s enlightenment experience. Dōgen continued to study under his master for almost two more years, eventually receiving dharma transmission in 1227.

Shortly after Rujing’s death, in the fall of that year, Dōgen returned to Japan. In 1233, Dōgen attempted unsuccessfully to found a monastic training center at Kōshōji—the first independent (non-Tendai-affiliated) Zen monastery in Japan. He preached “a message of the universality of enlightenment for all those who

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practice ‘just sitting’ (shikan taza), including women and laypersons.”¹⁴ In 1243, Dōgen relocated yet again, this time to a remote, mountainous area several days’ journey from any of the major political centers of Japan. He would go on to establish a comprehensive monastic training center in the Sōtō tradition at Eiheiji, a function that the temple maintains today. Monastics follow closely the various dictates first laid out by Dōgen, beginning with his crucial essay Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen, which has assumed a central place in Sōtō liturgy and is recited daily following evening meditation.

The Tenpuku-bon manuscript includes a headnote identifying Dōgen as the author and an endnote dating the composition to the fifteenth day of the seventh month of 1233, which would have been the last day (gege) of the traditional three-month summer meditation retreat (ango). Scholars therefore have suggested that the manual “was connected with this retreat and reflects [Dōgen’s] meditation teachings during the preceding months” and that it may have been presented “to one of the more important persons participating in, or supporting, the 1233 summer retreat.”¹⁵

While the contents of the essay circulated in other, revised formats (both oral and written), little of the transmission history of Dōgen’s 1233 manuscript is known. The manuscript disappeared from the public eye for several centuries; most likely, it was being passed down within a particular family or lineage as part of a private collection. The calligraphy resurfaced in 1922 when it was exhibited at Tokyo Imperial University. At some point in the intervening years, likely during the mid- to late Edo period (1600–1868), the scroll had been mounted on thick, durable paper. A colophon written on the mounting identified the manuscript as being the “authentic brushwork” (shinpitsu) of Dōgen and further stated that the scroll had been donated (presumably to the Eiheiji treasure house) by calligraphy expert Kohitsu Ryōhan (1790–1853). The box and mounting paper are quite elaborate, with gold and silver foil, fancy decorated paper, and the like, suggesting that, by the Edo period, Dōgen’s writing was being treated not only as a fine example of calligraphy but as a relic of the founder. Indeed, Kohitsu Ryōhan’s note on the box lid labels the item an “authentic trace” (shinseki) of the Zen master Dōgen (道元禅師御真蹟).¹⁶

Dōgen wrote the Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen in Sino-Japanese (kanbun).¹⁷ The treatise is quite compact: seven sheets of paper glued together to form a single roll of some 881 characters in length (equating to just under four pages of double-spaced English prose), an economy of expression achieved through terse description and telegraphic allusions to other texts. Dōgen employed the easy-to-read kaisho (regular) script that was common in the Song period and composed on a lightly decorated paper thought to be of Song manufacture. The paper is yel-
lowish in color, indicating that it had been treated with a bark-based insecticide.\textsuperscript{18} Throughout the Song, state-sponsored sutras, written with a standard fourteen characters per line, were generally produced on high-quality paper treated with an insecticide that turned the paper yellowish. Dōgen’s use of this type of paper is one material register of the essay’s intended function as sacred text. Background motifs in the paper are pastoral in nature, including a pine tree, some grasses, orchids, peonies, chrysanthemum, and grazing horses.

**Visual Analysis: Calligraphy Enacting Content**

Dōgen’s essay opens with a snare, a puzzling series of questions that engage the sort of mental gymnastics and linguistic sparring commonly seen in Zen literary culture.\textsuperscript{19} I provide a typographic transcription, following the line breaks in Dōgen’s manuscript, for the benefit of those who may wish to correlate the translation to the calligraphy. The passage quoted here comes just after the treatise’s title (普勧坐禅儀) and the attribution of authorship to Dōgen (入宋傳法沙門道元撰, “composed by a \textit{srāmanera} [monk] who transmitted the Dharma by traveling to Song [China]”). The essay begins:

```
原夫道本圓通争假修證
宗乗自在何費功夫況乎
全體逈出塵垓孰信拂拭之
手段
```

Fundamentally speaking, the basis of the way is perfectly pervasive; how could it be contingent on practice and verification? The vehicle of the ancestors is naturally unrestricted; why should we expend sustained effort? Surely the whole being is far beyond defilement; who could believe in a method to polish it?\textsuperscript{20}

In short, the essay questions why meditation is necessary if the enlightened mind is always already present. A curious way to begin a meditation manual, but Dōgen’s point seems to be that, though there is but a “hair’s breadth” between the availability of an enlightened mind and the realization of that availability, only continued practice beyond enlightenment prevents this tiny gap from becoming a great chasm, “like that between heaven and earth.”\textsuperscript{21} In the lines that follow these opening sentiments, the calligraphy reinforces and enhances the semantic content, executing a chirographic performance of the logical conundrum it introduced.

The calligraphy in these next lines moves smoothly over the background motif of the pine. A traditional symbol of longevity and steadfastness (because of its
evergreen needles), the pine also evokes a common pun in Japanese, in which *matsu* can mean both “pine tree” (松) and “to pine for, wait for, or long for” (待つ). There is a sort of playfulness here, a productive and performative tension among the material image of the pine in the paper, the potential dual valance of the word *matsu*, and the doctrinal import of Dōgen’s assertion that seated meditation is itself a “dropping away of body and mind [in which] your original face will appear,” something that is, he insists, “never apart from this very place” (大都不離當處). In fact, the characters for “this very place” (當處, fig. 1) are carefully brushed directly on top of the pine tree’s knotty root, suggesting in this layering the intricate intertwining of desire for that which is already present, available, and manifest.

Continuing this purposeful interplay, the character for “hair’s breadth” (毫釐) not only might invoke the sense of “a minute amount” but also alludes to the small tuft of hair (白毫) that marks the Buddha’s so-called “third eye.” The downward sweeping motion of this little wisp of hair transports us from the solid, reassuring darkness of the evergreen to the wide-open white space immediately below and to the left of it. This area highlights the devastating chasm that gapes before us “like the gap between heaven and earth” (差天地), the calligraphy for which is suspended in this negative space.

The composition goes on to make even fuller use of the craggy pine, the main trunk of which articulates organically, like a spinal column, the flexed S-curve that is capable of supporting a relaxed but upright posture. Moving from the trunk to the small, scraggily offshoots on its left and the adjacent white space, we see the phrase “Once the slightest like or dislike arises, all is confused and the mind is lost.” The words translated as “like” and “dislike” (違順纔起) carry secondary connotations of order and error; they also refer to Buddhist teachings about how the desire to be near to what one likes and distant from what one dislikes is the root of suffering. The habit of picking apart the threads of “like” and “dislike” (達順纔起) carry secondary connotations of order and error; they also refer to Buddhist teachings about how the desire to be near to what one likes and distant from what one dislikes is the root of suffering. The habit of picking apart the threads of “like” and “dislike” is, Dōgen suggests, a mind-entangling predilection, something he indicates visually by brushing those words directly on top of the scrubby leaves and tangled brush of the pine’s secondary or false trunk. Pursuing these tangles brings naught but confusion and, sadly, “the mind is lost” (失心): again, the calligraphy hangs in that open, chasm-like white space that yawns between heaven and earth.

This is a masterful opening, not only in semantic and doctrinal terms but equally at the material and performative levels. We see the manuscript playing, intensively and pointedly, with the material interface of paper and ink, thereby emphasizing the interpenetration of semantic content (how to meditate) and physical container (the paper). If Dōgen’s point is that the enlightened mind is here and now, the wonderful calligraphic dance brings attention to the sensory nature of that here and now: the root of the issue is that we pine for what we already have. Through the
calligraphy, the composition pulls the pine from background (motif in the paper) to foreground (the crux of Dōgen’s teachings) and insists on the material situatedness of the meditative experience. This complex interplay with the pine root can be understood to rehearse, at a material and compositional level, the import of Dōgen’s teachings on seated meditation. It establishes the interpretive framework for the essay.

Following this knotty philosophical beginning, a major portion of the treatise seems remarkably straightforward, quotidian, and matter-of-fact: a basic how-to manual. But the deep evocation of the opening lines should alert us to other instances in which the ink and paper do as Dōgen’s words and phrases instruct. Dōgen tells practitioners to find a quiet room, eat and drink moderately, and sit on the floor on a comfortable cushion. In fact, the lengthiest section of the essay comprises a detailed description of posture:

When you sit, spread a thick mat and use a cushion on top of it. Then sit in either the full cross-legged or half cross-legged position. For the full position, first place your right foot on your left thigh; then place your left foot on your right thigh. For the half position, simply rest your left foot on your right thigh. Loosen your robe and belt, and arrange them properly [or “neatly” 整]. Next, place your right hand on your left foot, and your left hand on your right palm. Press the tips of your thumbs together. Then straighten your body and sit erect [or “upright” 正身端坐]. Do not lean to the left or right, forward or backward. Your ears should be in line with your shoulders, and your nose in line with your navel. Press your tongue against the front of your palate and close your lips and teeth. The eyes should always remain open. Once you have settled your posture, you should regulate your breathing.23 Whenever a thought occurs, be aware of it; as soon as you are aware of it, it will vanish. 24

Dōgen’s concerns here are with the embodied qualities of balance, alignment, and steadiness. An intensive, proprioceptive awareness of the body’s placement in its environment is, Dōgen insists, the only place to begin.

The brushwork for the entire composition does precisely what this portion of Dōgen’s treatise asks of its addressees. Consider the use of space, the placement of ink on paper. Dōgen did not rule or grid out his paper ahead of time, so the number of characters per line is not rigidly fixed but ranges from ten to fourteen (compare to fig. 3). There is some top-to-bottom compression toward the middle of the treatise, in contrast to the several lines at the beginning and end whose characters enjoy a bit more room. But there is no cramping. Likewise, the vertical columns hedge
somewhat to the right toward the bottom of the paper, as is the tendency with right-handed writers. Again, though, the shift is minimal, and the overall impression is of balance and calm.

A materially attuned reading of the manuscript suggests that the calligraphy does what Dōgen claims the practice of seated meditation does. Consider, for example, the chirographic performance of these lines:

If you grasp the point of this, the four elements of the body will [simply] become light and at ease, the spirit will be fresh and sharp, thoughts will be correct and clear; the flavor of the dharma will sustain the spirit, and you will be calm, pure, and joyful. Your daily life will be your true natural state.

若得此意
自然四大軽安精神爽利正念分
明法味資神寂然清楽日用天真
也

In other words, Dōgen claims that if one “grasps the point” of seated meditation—if one does it according to the method he has described—then its benefits will manifest naturally. The individual characters, written in the kaisho script, are easy to discern: they are “fresh and sharp,” “correct and clear.” Visually, there is a sense of relaxed heaviness or groundedness to these lines. The top margin is generous in contrast to the lower margin, where the lines of written characters stop just short of the paper’s edge. The writing does not float or waver on the page. Rather, the columns of writing are firm without being rigid and have a strong seat. They are upright without being tense. They are, I would argue, a “daily life” example of the “true state” that Dōgen is both describing and enacting.

Dōgen employed this compositional aesthetic throughout the treatise, with some minimal, relaxed variation. The spacing between columns is greater at the beginning and end of the essay, growing slightly more compressed toward the middle. The visual appearance again is not so much of crowding (as if the calligrapher were concerned he might run out of paper, for instance) as it is of a sort of settling...
performing mind, writing meditation

in: a bit more openness and space at the beginning and end balanced by a bit more concentration and economy in the body. The calligraphy thus engages in a very subtle expansion-contraction-expansion rhythm, reminiscent of the torso’s movement during calm, steady breathing. Indeed, the typical rhythm for composition in the kaisho script is referred to, somewhat onomatopoetically, as ton-sū-ton, or stop-move-stop: “One writes in rhythmic alterations of hold-release-hold-release.”

This rhythm is quite different from that associated with the semi-cursive “running hand” (gyōsho) or even more suggestive “grass hand” (sōsho) styles, both of which depend more on rapidity and fluidity of movement. By contrast, Dōgen’s calligraphy assumes a relaxed, upright posture such that the body of the essay, like the body of its addressees, feels “light and at ease” (fig. 4).

Finally, the ink gradation is remarkably consistent: thick and dark throughout. There are no sections showing a surfeit of ink, nor are there sections where the brush has clearly begun to dry. We see none of the “flying white” (hihaku) technique that is so common to the more dynamic style of Zen calligraphy favored in contemporary art dialogue (compare with fig. 5). In the case of the Fukanzazengi manuscript, the only places where the calligraphy is thin or the ink comparatively light is when the brush has moved over an underlying design in the paper, as, for instance, in the lines that read (fig. 6):

Verily form and substance are like the dew on the grass, and the fortunes of life like the lightning flash: in an instant they are emptied, in a moment they are lost.

加以形質如草露運命似電光倏忽
The characters for “form,” “substance,” and “grass,” while clear and easy to read, evidence some spots where the underlying grass motif has shown through the ink, making it appear somewhat lighter in color (fig. 6a). Not coincidentally, the lines reference a core Buddhist image of impermanence (the insistence that things are no more lasting than the dew on the grass) while loosely alluding to the Vimalakirti Sutra’s well-known catalogue of metaphors for the human body, comparing it to a cluster of foam, a bubble, a flame, the leaf of a plantain, a phantom, a shadow, an echo, a drifting cloud, and lightning.28 In this portion of his treatise, which comes very near the end, Dōgen stressed the importance of the human body as a tool—a precious, soon-to-perish tool—that is ideally suited for seated meditation. Even in this hortatory moment, however, the brushwork stays consistent: the ink dark, the lines smooth, and the characters clear. This regularity suggests that the calligrapher took pains to maintain the same amount of ink on his brush as he composed and that he re-wet and reformed his brush regularly, probably after every character. Again, the impression is one of slow, methodical, calm work.

In this visual analysis, I have sought to show some of the ways in which the calligrapher (presumably Dōgen) artfully used his materials to perform or enact the essay’s semantic message. Thus far, I have been writing in the context of a larger cultural world, a “period eye,” so to speak, in which my assertions make sense.29 What evidence do I have to offer that this asserted link between calligraphy and the performance of ethical or spiritual attainment would have been active in Dōgen’s time and is not groundless fabrication? And what are the norms and expectations of the aesthetic logic that I have been assuming? In the following sections, I will turn away from a fine-grained visual analysis of this particular manuscript to sketch in the broad brushstrokes of the calligraphic culture in which Dōgen lived and worked. Then, I will contrast this “period eye” with a consideration of the things that the “eye” of the contemporary art world looks for in Zen calligraphy (and does not see in the Fukanzazengi manuscript).

**Classical Notions of Calligraphy as Evidence of Attainment**

The notion that a calligraphic artifact was a tangible point of contact with the composer’s mind and that one’s handwriting was—and was intended to be—a direct...
performance of one’s character or level attainment is ubiquitous in the classical East Asian cultural sphere. Confucian writings have long asserted that “the human body is at the intersection of the moral and the aesthetic, as the ability to intelligently form habits enables one to become both a good person and a good artist.” Accordingly, calligraphy has been used throughout East Asia for well over a millennium as a pedagogical tool to perfect individual character (in the Confucian sense of one’s mental and moral qualities); that is, to display one’s mastery of “ritual decorum” (礼, Chinese: li), and, by extension, to evince the signs of one’s “humanity” (仁, Chinese: ren). Aristocrats and Buddhist clerics were at the forefront of importing these ideas to the Japanese archipelago and adapting them to the needs of local culture. Confucian manuals concerning letter writing, an important component of which was calligraphy, flooded into Japan from the Nara period (710–784) on and were read eagerly, passed down within families, and stored in temple treasure houses for use by clerics over the centuries.

Letter-writing manuals, which originally pertained to Sinographic courtly correspondence with dynasties in China, represented the first flush of Japanese interest in calligraphy. By the thirteenth century (during which Dōgen was born), calligraphic style manuals (shoron 書論) abounded, both in aristocratic lineages and in esoteric and Zen Buddhist settings. In addition to extensive commentary on the role of calligraphic practice in spiritual cultivation, these manuals typically attend to material matters (such as the positioning of characters on the page, importance of paper choice, shape of the character, sense of flow between characters and lines, spacing, balance, height and width of characters, angle of the brush, and amount of ink on the brush) as well as physical, embodied ones (the correct posture for the calligrapher, importance of mental concentration, ideal length of time to spend in...
daily practice, how to hold the brush, and so on). The manuals commonly assert an equivalence between the calligraphic performance and the composer’s heart or mind (kokoro). As one manual puts it, “The shape of the character is, in a manner of speaking, a person’s appearance, and the vigor of the brush is the expression of the workings of his heart.”33

These ideas quickly matriculated into vernacular culture. Any number of passages from narrative literature (monogatari), such as the famous Tale of Genji (circa 1000 CE), attest to the importance of one’s handwriting in communicating one’s aesthetic sensibilities. Such texts assume that aesthetic choices pertaining to paper, ornament, ink thickness, brush, and script style should be understood as expressing fine gradations of the composer’s mental and emotional state. Indeed, many scholars have pointed out that “Heian aristocrats’ lives revolved around communicating their status aesthetically, as expressed in the composition and writing style of poems.”34 Similarly, within Zen more particularly, calligraphy—whether exchanged between master and student, bought from a mountain hermit by an urban art collector, or displayed in the meditation hall or tea alcove—has often been viewed as a material instantiation of the calligrapher’s enlightened mind.

Dōgen, the son of a high-ranking aristocratic man, was raised by his mother (also an aristocrat, though of a lower rank) and learned to read and write in the Heian capital, where he would have been exposed to and expected to internalize and master such ideas. During his lifetime, there were heated debates concerning whether or not “distortion” of characters was ideal or unacceptable, whether regular or cursive style scripts should be learned first and when each should be employed, whether the brush should be held at an incline, and so on.35 In choosing to compose Fukanzazengi in kaisho script on heavy yellow paper with a fully loaded brush, in regular (though not rigid) vertical columns, Dōgen was making meaningful choices, as his contemporaries would have understood. On the whole, the choices visually identify the calligraphy as Zen Buddhist (Zen priests at the time were at the vanguard of important Song styles). But more important than this, the choices the calligrapher made in terms of spacing, ink gradation, placement of characters on the page, and interplay between semantic content and background motif would have been closely examined and analyzed by his peers.36

These notions concerning the performative nature of calligraphy, so ubiquitous during Dōgen’s time, belong to a wider constellation of ideas concerning the relationship between the human body and material text. In the following section, I provide a brief account of some ways in which contemporary scholarship has begun to parse through the embodied and performative nature of classical and medieval Japanese Buddhist religious writing.
Body and Text as a Material Continuum in Buddhist Culture

In recent years, there have been many scholarly studies attesting to the profoundly material nature of Asian Buddhism, representing a sort of sea change. While it has built upon the foundations of previous philological studies, this research has drawn greater attention to the performative and ritual dimensions of Buddhist culture. Bernard Faure’s work on icons and Robert H. Sharf’s on relics were early moves in this anthropological turn, which has continued to be a fruitful field of discussion, such as in Brian D. Ruppert’s study of Buddhist relics and political power in medieval Japan.37

These material explorations of icons, relics, and statuaries also have opened up new avenues for thinking through the ritual uses of Buddhist text. Anne M. Blackburn, for example, has worked closely on ritual aspects of manuscript culture in Sri Lankan monasteries, and Christoph Emmrich has conducted an extensive ethnohistorical study of sutra repair practices in Newari Buddhism. Paul Copp’s study of incantations, amulets, and stone pillars inscribed with sutra text points to the deeply embodied nature of Buddhist ritual and the tight connections between sacred text and devotional flesh. Indeed, Natalie Gummer, in her survey of the ritual uses of Buddhist books, has noted that Buddhist practice tends to fuse the categories of relic, icon, speech, and text: “A relic, whether of the Buddha’s body or his speech, is not an inert object, but the potent presence of the Buddha himself.”38

Elsewhere, I have argued that, in East Asian Mahayana Buddhism generally and in the Buddhist textual culture of medieval Japan more particularly, we can find almost innumerable artistic genres, manuscript artifacts, ritual objects, and liturgical practices to support the idea that Buddhist texts possess a life force. As a corollary, the human body is (or at least can become) a sacred Buddhist text. Compendiums of Japanese miracle tales from the ninth through the thirteenth century speak of fragments of sutras taking on human form, often becoming a young boy who saves an endangered believer from death or dismemberment. Buddhist poems talk about human corpses disintegrating to reveal bits of scripture carved into the bone.

A look at ritual liturgies reveals that sutra copies were widely regarded as bodily relics of the Historical Buddha. Sutra manuscripts were created in which each character was inscribed either inside a reliquary or atop a lotus petal throne—that is, with the calligraphy sitting in the place of the Historical Buddha’s body (fig. 7). And sculptures show holy men chanting incantations, each word of which appears, streaming from the tongue, as a fully embodied miniature Buddha.39 Again, as Willa Jane Tanabe’s now classic work shows, sutra copying practices in and around Dōgen’s time could involve the use of human hair (as a component of the paper or
part of the brush), blood (as ink), and bone (as stylus). Sutras and other sacred texts might be copied onto the backs of letters or poems as a way of ensuring the spiritual solace of a deceased loved one.

In other words, the Buddhist culture that Dōgen inherited and the cultural norms by which he and his contemporaries operated assumed many things that bear heavily on the visual analysis I offered above. There was the assumption that form cannot be separated from—and indeed, is partially constitutive of—content (i.e., ink and paper choices matter just as much as grammar and word choices do). There was the notion that a person’s calligraphy correlates to and is a material enactment of her or his spiritual or ethical attainment. And there was the belief that the human body and the written text exist along a material continuum. All of these things tell us that, to understand Dōgen’s essay, we have to pay attention to more than just its words and phrases.

For centuries, Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen has been taken as one of the foundational teachings of Dōgen, who is in turn the founder of one of the most powerful Zen lineages in Japan. It is hard to think of another piece of writing that would be more fittingly called “Zen calligraphy.” And yet, museum catalogs of Zen calligraphy seldom include any discussion of this sort of regular, clear, balanced composition. Why?

**Apprehensions of Zen Calligraphy in the Modern Art World**

In many ways, East Asian calligraphy became “Zen”—and, conversely, Zen became accessible widely to museumgoers as a visual product—through its calligraphy, primarily in the 1950s and 1960s. In Japan, much of this conceptual framing took place in the pages of the avant-garde art journal *Bokubi* (The
Beauty of Ink). As Eugenia Bogdanova-Kummer has noted, it was in this journal that calligrapher Morita Shiryo (1912–1998), philosopher Hisamatsu Shin’ichi (1889–1980), and artist Hasegawa Saburo (1906–1957), among others, explicitly positioned premodern Zen calligraphy as spiritualized, sudden, transcendent, prototypically Japanese, and of immediate interest to contemporary avant-garde artists. The aesthetic evaluation of Zen calligraphy as proto-modernist went on to intrigue and markedly influence US artists in the postwar years, particularly those associated with American Abstract Expressionism. These artists found Zen Buddhist aesthetics compatible with “a large range of contemporary intellectual currents valorizing spontaneous expression as the preferred medium of authentic communication.”

Significantly, this general conception of Zen calligraphy continues to dominate Western aesthetic appreciation (and curatorial framing) of Buddhist-inspired East Asian calligraphy (fig. 8). To cite one recent exhibit, *Brush Writing and the Arts of Japan* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, August 2013–January 2014) described the calligraphy of medieval (12th–16th century) Zen monks as “characterized by boldly brushed characters that break the rules of conventional handwriting conspicuously. What they lose in legibility they gain in sheer visual potency that transcends the meaning of the phrases inscribed.” The calligraphy of premodern Zen monks is often curated, annotated, and displayed in terms that strongly resonate with the vigorous abstraction and masculinist distortion that are hallmarks of the experimental postwar art of Abstract Expressionism and related contemporary avant-garde slipstreams.

Despite wide variation in historical contexts and in political and cultural agendas, these three discourses (postwar Japanese aesthetic philosophy, postwar Zen-inspired Abstract Expressionism, and contemporary curatorial language) share certain features. First, each is interested in the performative and embodied aspects of calligraphic practice. While the idea that calligraphy is a visual indicator of embodied spiritual attainment stretches back centuries, the postwar discursive framings of calligraphy mentioned above did something new: they each reclaimed premodern art for contemporary aesthetic ends. Avant-garde artists and critics in 1950s and 1960s Japan, particularly those associated with the group Bokujinkai (Men of Ink), seized on the notion of calligraphic embodiment. They identified the international cache of “the modernity of Zen culture” (and particularly the aesthetics of Zen calligraphy) as a powerful opportunity to reinsert Japan and Japanese artists into the cutting edge of global art development. There was a concern that Japan had fallen behind the pace of the international arts world; by drawing attention to the (proto)modernity of Zen arts, Japanese critics thought Japan might be able to leapfrog its way (back) to the vanguard.
For American Abstract Expressionists, engaging with Zen calligraphy as embodied practice provided a way to overcome a Western concern with mass in favor of attentiveness to line. In the words of Mark Tobey, who studied for a time at a Zen monastery in Kyoto, “In China and Japan I was freed from form by the influence of the calligraphic.” Contemporary exhibition culture often continues this reasoning. Recently, for example, press releases for the very popular traveling exhibition *The Sound of One Hand: Paintings and Calligraphy by Zen Master Hakuin* praised Hakuin’s work for its “vitality, humor, power, and depth,” and characterized it as comprising a strikingly modernist “new visual language.”

In yoking premodern art to contemporary aesthetic frameworks, however, all three discourses at times dislocate medieval Zen calligraphy from its historical and soteriological moorings, rendering “Zen” a timeless qualifier. In this usage, the single word “Zen” actually indicates a loose network of sometimes contradictory adjectives: minimal, intuitive (but also at times impenetrable), bold, organic, spontaneous, dynamic, creatively distorted, dramatic, and stretched.

To be clear, my point is not to say that contemporary discourse is wrong, but to say that it is limited and that we can enrich it. Zen-inspired calligraphy in the dynamic, dramatic, distorted tradition is, after all, plentiful, and it has helped ignite wonderful and productive innovations by contemporary artists. But the sudden and the splashy are only part of the wide spectrum of premodern Zen calligraphy. The *Fukanzaazengi* manuscript is a particularly useful tool with which to reevaluate the dominant aesthetic judgment of the long postwar period, because its example throws into sharp relief the continuing legacies of avant-garde aesthetics.

**The Affordances of Paper and Ink**

Art historians typically draw great attention to the material affordances of artistic tools and media in the East Asian calligraphic and painting traditions, which rely upon the application of water-soluble ink to a lightly absorbent surface (generally handmade paper or silk) by means of an animal-hair brush. As Stephen Addiss points out, “There was no way to correct or repaint an unsatisfactory area; unlike oil paint or canvas, a line or color … could not be effaced or changed.”

These material considerations commonly are understood to engender two somewhat contradictory compositional dicta. First, because no stroke can be undone, composition must be preceded by contemplation, a comprehensive envisioning of the final product. Second, the execution itself must be rapid and spontaneous, free from hesitation.

This conceptualization of East Asian painting generally and Zen calligraphy particularly certainly resonates with the language of postwar Japanese avant-garde calligraphy and American Abstract Expressionism. Obviously, there is a cer-
tain amount of overlap or creative synergy possible there, particularly when one emphasizes the rapidity of execution and downplays the contemplative act of mental composition. But the material affordances of brush, ink, and paper can also tip the other way, becoming an invitation to slow down, to be deliberate, and to move calmly. This would be particularly important if one sought to compose (as the calligrapher of Fukanzazengi seems to have done) in such a way that each character sits calmly, with a regularity of size, balance, orientation, ink gradation, rhythm, and weight. This regular pattern of calligraphic sitting, like the routines of monastic life that Dōgen advocated, places emphasis on the mundaneness of everyday Zen practice and its lengthy periods of seated contemplation, rather than zeroing in on the breakthrough moments of individual realization or the sudden overcoming of a great doubt.

The calligraphy in Fukanzazengi anticipates the creation of a monastic architectural structure (Eiheiji) that affords its intimates the opportunity to “just sit.” At Eiheiji, Dōgen successfully materialized the Zen practices he first conceptualized on paper: to this day, monastics under his direction literally wash their faces, eat their breakfast, read their scriptures, and sit on their meditation cushions in accordance with the dictates of Dōgen’s essay and his later elaborations on its basic teachings.

Conclusion

The calligraphic performance in Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen represents one particular instantiation of this much larger textual culture, while drawing attention to Dōgen’s deep interest in “just sitting” (shikan taza). A major hallmark of Dōgen’s teaching was his insistence that seated meditation was in and of itself enlightened understanding, an experience that he termed “the dropping away of body-mind” (shinjin datsuraku). In other words, seated meditation is, in Dōgen’s understanding, not a future-oriented practice, something one engages in in order to one day have an experience of insight (kenshō) or enlightenment (satori). It is not a sort of striving or grasping, but rather a balanced stillness, a natural manifestation of something that is present already and needs only to be cultivated. Notably, the words Dōgen uses to describe this state of attentive “just sitting” work equally well to describe the calligraphic performance discernible in Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen. Dōgen writes of the body as being composed, relaxed, and upright, moving slowly and quietly, calmly and deliberately, rather than with suddenness or abruptness.

Most of these descriptors stand in stark contrast to the adjectival qualifiers associated with Zen in contemporary exhibition settings, which tend to favor the language of spontaneity. The common factor, however, lies in a vigorous embodiment. Incarnation in a human body is, for Dōgen, a crucial factor, which he terms
the “pivotal opportunity” (jinshin no kiyō).\textsuperscript{51} A gentle rocking right and left on the sit bones, a soft upward articulation of the spine, the balanced deportment of the limbs: these are the same gestures—the same bodily acts—that his calligraphy rehearses and enacts. The insistence of the primacy and vigor of the human body as the performative matrix of enlightening text and enlightened practice is, therefore, a common constituent of Zen calligraphy, whether of the “just sitting” type exemplified by Dōgen or the more sudden, splashy type favored in most contemporary exhibition spaces.

David E. Shaner has contended that Dōgen’s later works move beyond the descriptive work of the Fukanzazengi “in favor of describing the experience of zazen itself.”\textsuperscript{52} If we limit ourselves to the semantic content of the essays, perhaps this is an accurate statement. But, as this essay has attempted to illustrate, semantic content (the words of the essay) does not come without a material container (the physical form in which we encounter the words). Paying attention to the calligraphic performance of 1233 reveals that the Fukanzazengi is both a description of how to perform zazen and a performance of zazen rendered in a visual medium.

\begin{quote}
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\end{quote}
1 I would like to thank Steve Heine and Jane Copeland Habegger for early conversations on these topics. Likewise, I am thankful to the two anonymous reviewers for their many helpful comments and suggestions for revision.


6 *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, 37.

7 The manuscript is known as the *Tenpukubon* as it was written in the first year of the Tenpuku era (1233–34).

8 Heine, “Table of Dōgen’s Literary Productivity,” *Did Dōgen Go to China?*, 2–3.


11 See Bodiford, “Remembering Dōgen.”

12 For an account of this canonization, see Yokoi, “Fukanzanzen goshinitsubon nitsuite.” Occasionally, other examples of calligraphy attributed to Dōgen will surface, but none of these has maintained the same level of appraisal and authentication. See, for instance, Yoshida
13 In recent years there has been a great deal

14 Steven Heine, Dōgen’s Manuals of Zen Meditation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 33. According to most traditional, sectarian accounts, Dōgen composed the brief treatise in 1227, immediately upon his return from the Southern Song, as a succinct set of instructions for practicing seated meditation (zanzen), a technique he mastered under his teacher Ruizeng. He supposedly made a clean copy of the essay six years later, in 1233. Contemporary scholarship, however, suggests that there was no 1227 version and that the extant 1233 manuscript is, in fact, Dōgen’s earliest written description of seated meditation. In this reckoning, he composed the text while he was already in residence and directing students in meditation at Kōshōji.

16 As cited in Yokoi Kakudō, “Fukanzazengi goshinshitsunonitsuite” [普勧坐全儀御真筆本について] (Concerning the Fukanzazengi in Dōgen’s writing), Shīgaku Kenkyū 11 (March 1969), 78–90. The multivalent word seki generally indicates some sort of material trace. In the case of Zen calligraphy, the material trace is taken to be that of the calligrapher’s enlightened mind. For more on the treatment of calligraphy as a relic in Japanese Buddhism, see Willa Jane Schopen, Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997). The profession of art appraisal first came into being in Japan in the early decades of the seventeenth century. It was quickly dominated by the Kohitsu family, who were particularly renowned for their evaluations of calligraphy. Indeed, the clan’s professional name literally means “ancient brush” (kohitsu). Kohitsu Ryōhan was a leading voice of the family’s tenth generation, and his endorsement of the manuscript signals not only its authenticity, but also its aesthetic value as an example of the calligraphic arts. That he was involved in the movement of the manuscript from some private collection to the Eiheiji treasure house is in keeping with the general practices of the connoisseurship, authentication, appraisal, and art dealerships of ancient calligraphy as it was practiced in Japan during the 1800s. For more on the Kohitsu family, see Komatsu Shigemi, Kohitsu (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1972). For information on Kohitsu Ryōhan in particular, see Satō Atsushi, “Bakumatsu no shoga kantei ni okeru ken’ i no arika; ‘Kohitsu Ryōhan/ Anzai Un’en kantei ikken shimatsu’ o chūshin ni” [幕末期の書画鑑定における権威のあり方：古筆了伴・安西雲鶴鑑定一件始末を中心に] (Concerning authority and the appraisal of artwork in the late Edo period: Focusing on the unfolding of the dispute between Kohitsu Ryōhan and Anzai Un’en), Kindai gasetsu 18 (2009), 114–16. Very little is available on the family in English, though some information can be gleaned from Satoko Tamamushi, “Tawaraya Sōtatsu and the ‘Yamato-e Revival,’” Critical Perspectives on Classicism in Japanese Painting, 1600–1700, ed. Elizabeth Lilleyhoj (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 53–78.

17 For a modern typeset version of the 1233 kanbun treatise, which employs some modern simplifications for archaic characters, see Suzuki Kakuzen, Sakurai Hideo, Sakai Tokugen, and Ishii Shūdō, eds. Dōgen zenshi zenshū 5 (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1989), 10–12.

18 For more on Song dynasty book history and sutra production practices, see Tsuen-Hsun Tsien, Written on Bamboo Shapes the Mind How the Body.

19 Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Fukanzazengi are taken from Bielefeldt, Dōgen’s Manuals of Zen Meditation, 175–87. Bielefeldt’s study includes a very useful appendix in which he provides side-by-side translations of five manuals of Zen meditation: the twelfth-century Chinese monk Zhanglu Zongzé’s Chanyuan qinggū (the oldest book of regulations ordering Chan/Zen monastic life, a section of which is devoted to describing meditation), Dōgen’s 1233 Tenpuuki manuscript version of the Fukanzazengi (the text I am examining here, which draws heavily, in its descriptions of posture, on the Chanyuan qinggū), Dōgen’s later revision of the Fukanzazengi (generally referred to as either the Rufubon, “popular version,” or the Karokubon, after the era in which it was composed, 1242–46), and two other texts in which Dōgen describes the practice of seated meditation.

20 Bielefeldt, Dōgen’s Manuals of Zen Meditation, 175.

21 Bielefeldt, Dōgen’s Manuals of Zen Meditation, 175.

22 For a detailed account of the complex interactions between semantic content, material format, author, and reader, see Peter L. Shillingsburg, “Text as Matter, Concept, and Action.” Studies in Bibliography 44 (1991), 31–82.

23 In the later, popular expansion of this section of the treatise, Dōgen added a sentence instructing the practitioner to “take a breath and exhale fully, rock your body right and left, and settle into steady, immovable sitting.” The added sentence draws further attention to Dōgen’s multivalent sense of the term “pivot.” The spine and sit bones provide the physical pole around which seated meditation coheres, while the practitioner’s possession of a human body, in a more idealized sense, represents a “pivotal” opportunity to engage in Buddhist practice—the most pivotal element of which is, in Dōgen’s view, the seated meditation he is describing. For an English translation of the revised treatise, see Bielefeldt, Dōgen’s Manuals of Zen Meditation, 175–87. For an alternate translation, see “Univerally Recommended Instructions for Zazen,” Sōtōshū nikka gongō seiten (Sōtō School scriptures for daily services and practice), electronic resource, accessed January 16, 2015, http://web.stanford.edu/group/scb/sztp3/translations/gongyo_seiten/translations/part_3/fukan_zazengi.html.

24 Bielefeldt, Dōgen’s Manuals of Zen Meditation, 178–81. I have included an alternate translation for two short phrases in brackets.

25 Bielefeldt, Dōgen’s Manuals of Zen Meditation, 182. I have added the word “simply” (set off in brackets) to Bielefeldt’s translation to account for two characters (自然, “naturally, smoothly, as a matter of course”) that he seems to have omitted.

26 This descriptive note comes from an interview with Fukushima Keidō, abbot of the Zen temple Tōfukuji. Wirth, ed. Zen no Sho, 85, no. 6.

27 The technical term “flying white” (hakuhi) refers to a particular technique in which—because of the brush’s speed, the pressure on the brush, or the depletion of ink—the bristles of the brush separate, creating streaks of negative (white) space. It is commonly taken as evidence of rapid, spontaneous, and dynamic brushwork. The relevant passage of the Vimalakirti Sutra may be found in T 14.475.539b15–21. Taishō shinshū daiizōkyō, ed. Takakusu Junjirō, Watanabe Kaigyouku, and Ono Gemmyō, 100 vols., (Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–34).

originated in the eighth-century calligraphy collection Shuduan (書斷), refers to the fourth-century calligrapher Wang Xizhi 王羲之, whose strokes were said to be so powerful that the ink from his brush penetrated the wood on which he was writing.


36 To give one further example, the Heike Nōkyō is a heavily decorated, hand-copied sutra set that the powerful warrior and politician Taira no Kiyomori (1118–1181) dedicated to the Itsukushima Shrine in the ninth month of 1164. In many instances, the composers artfully intertwine their calligraphy with underlying motifs and ornaments on the paper, thus creating extended rebus, subtle double meanings, partial vernacular translations, and literary allusions. Dōgen’s calligraphy in Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen does not go to this extent, but I offer this example to indicate the general visual-verbal culture in which he was operating. For a fuller visual analysis of the Heike Nōkyō, see pages 223–27 of Charlotte Eubanks, “Illustrating the Mind: ‘Faulty Memory’ Setsuwa and the Decorative Sutras of Early Medieval Japan,” Japanese Journal of Religious Studies 36, no. 2 (fall 2009), 209–30.


39 For a discussion of these examples, see Charlotte Eubanks, Miracles of Book and Body: Buddhist Textual Culture in Medieval Japan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). See also “Reading by Heart: Translated Buddhism and the Pictorial Heart Sutras of Early Modern Japan,” International Journal of the Sociology of Language 220 (2013), 7–25; and “Unearthing Practice: Sutra Interment and Fantasies of Resuscitation in Medieval and Contemporary Japan” (forthcoming).


44 This is the general thrust of several articles featured in Bokubi. For example, Hasegawa Saburō opens the fifth installment of his survey of
modern art with a statement “in anticipation of the day when the calligraphic arts will achieve their rightful place in the contemporary international [art] world” (29) and points out the importance of premodern Zen art and architecture in this regard. Hasegawa Saburō, “Gendai geijutsu (5),” Bokubi 15 (1952), 29–33. Similarly, Morita Shiryū begins a roundtable discussion of the Kyoto Museum of Modern Art’s 1965 exhibit The Arts of Zen with the question, “Why are we six years behind Europe in exhibiting Zen arts [in a modernist context]?” (4) Morita Shiryū, Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, Kitayama Masamichi, and Nakamura Nihei. “Zen no Bijutsu ten ni furite: ‘Shakkyō to geijutsu’ o kataru: Atarashii runessansu no tame ni” [「禅の美術」展にふりて:「宗教と芸術」をかたる:新しいレネッサンスのために] (On the ‘Arts of Zen’ exhibit: Discussing ‘religion and art:’ Toward a new renaissance), Bokubi 146 (1965), 4–17. Tellingly, the transcript of the roundtable is preceded by a one-page essay by one of its participants, Hisamatsu Shin’ichi, titled “Zen bunka no kindaisei” [禅文化の近代性] (The modernity of Zen culture), Bokubi 146 (1965), 2–3.

As quoted in Winther-Tamaki, Art in the Encounter of Nations, 47.

“Paintings and Calligraphy by Zen Master Hakuin at the New Orleans Museum of Art,” electronic resource, accessed January 23, 2015, http://artdaily.com/news/45166/Paintings-and-Calligraphy-by-Zen-Master-Hakuin-at-the-New-Orleans-Museum-of-Art#.VMJqam-NOSdk/. The exhibition The Sound of One Hand: Paintings and Calligraphy by Zen Master Hakuin, organized by the New Orleans Museum of Art (NOMA) and on display there February 11–April 17, 2011, also traveled to the Japan Society Gallery (October 1, 2010–January 9, 2011) and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA, May 22–August 17, 2011). The tendency to associate Zen arts with modernist art movements seems to be more pronounced when the exhibit focuses solely on the work of Zen masters and much more muted when the exhibit covers a broader range of objects. Even here, however, exhibition notes at times draw comparisons between, for instance, the calligraphy of a premodern Zen master (such as Sesson Yubai, 1290–1346) and the Action Paintings of Franz Kline and Jackson Pollock. See, for example, the collectors’ notes for the exhibit Faith and Form: Selected Calligraphy and Painting from the Japanese Religious Traditions, which was on display at the Freer|Sackler (March 20–July 18, 2004).

As quoted in Winther-Tamaki, Art in the Encounter of Nations, 47.


46 The last four terms on this list come from Stephen Addiss, The Art of Zen (New York: Abrams, 1989). Quoted in Faith and Form. These adjectives describe the early Zen calligraphy of Seigan Soi (1588–1661), whose work was featured in the Faith and Form exhibition held at the Freer|Sackler (March 20–July 18, 2004).


48 In fact, in many of his writings, Dōgen frames the everyday and the spontaneous as two sides of the same coin. For instance, the title of a letter (Genjō kōan 現成公案) composed in Japanese for an unknown lay believer from southern Japan and dated to the same year as Fukanzazengi can be rendered either “Spontaneous Realization of the Kōan” or “The Kōan Realized in Everyday Life.” For a discussion, see Heine, Did Dōgen Go To China?, 135.


50 Suzuki et al, eds. Dōgen zenshi zenshi 5, 12.