

**The Person in Buddhism:
Religious and Artistic Aspects**

Heinrich DUMOULIN

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Buddha-symbols and Buddha-images point both to the person they represent and to the ineffable meaning they embody. However, the clarification of the problematic involved in this double pointing remains in its initial stages. This article shall attempt, however gropingly, to treat some aspects of the problem of the person from both the religious and the artistic perspectives. Philosophical questions on the person are herein bracketed, for in the West, as in the East, the concept of the person is beset with considerable difficulties. We also bracket the specifically Buddhist question of *anattā* (i.e., the meaning of the non-ego in early Buddhism), which has already been discussed at length by Buddhist scholars of varied provenances without any definitive result. For our purposes, it may be helpful to note that the outstanding scholar, Professor Nakamura Hajime, himself a Buddhist, expressly states that, besides the negation of the empirical individual self and of all ego-substance, early Buddhism already had a doctrine of a true self, the subject of moral actions (Nakamura 1976, p.11).

In connection with this assertion, Nakamura elucidates from the Buddhist texts of the Pāli canon the distinction between the empirical and ever-changing ego, which must be subjugated, and the true self, in which the Buddha's disciples are enjoined to seek refuge. He concludes his consideration with the remark: "On this point the Buddha's assertion is very similar to that of the Upanishads and of

Translated by Jan Van Bragt. See Contributors, p.289

Vedānta philosophy. But the self (*ātman*) of the latter was rather metaphysical, whereas the self for the Buddha was genuinely practical. Out of this thought, Mahāyāna Buddhism developed the concept of the 'Great Self' (Nakamura 1976, p.12).

In Nakamura's final conclusion, he speaks about a cosmic dimension to the self, which, in mainline Mahāyāna thinking, functions in synergy with the negation of the empirical self. Both of these important dimensions of Far Eastern thought are clearly articulated in Buddhism. The West discovered this twofold predilection of Asia for these cosmic and negative aspects of the self at precisely the same time it was turning away from an overemphasis on scientific research into source material toward a search for the spirit of India and East Asia. The Western hope was that an assimilation of Far Eastern values would lead to an enrichment of occidental culture itself. In the initial stages of this East-West encounter, dichotomies held sway and Asian scholars kept repeating that the East was intuitive and the West rational, or that the East was cosmic and the West personal. Such judgments were sometimes made simply to delineate the issues, and sometimes to render value judgments. Rapt in an enthusiasm for everything Asiatic, such pronouncements became a plea for the irrational. But, when used as a counterfoil to one's own Western view, they nurtured feelings of superiority in the clear awareness that the entire world was in debt to the enormous technical progress of this century, which in turn is an outflow from the superiority of the rational and critical sciences of nature in the West, themselves based on Western personalist thinking.

Today, only the extremely naive still hold forth on the cosmic, a-personal East over against the man-centered, personalist West. It does remain true, as noted above, that the East does have an affinity for cosmic and negative expressions. But, just as one would not deny Western man all cosmic feeling for nature, all universal worldviews, or the negative way of approaching reality, so it cannot be

maintained that the person and the personal are utterly alien to oriental thinking, especially to Buddhism.

Buddhism has always been sceptical of philosophical concepts of person. There have been many reasons for this. As the first of these, we may mention the fact that the historical Buddha, Sākyamuni, did not answer the meta-physical questions posed to him by the Indian Brahman scholars, but rather made clear, by his silence, his refusal, or perhaps his disinterest in engaging in philosophical questioning. This fact alone was sufficient to make many a Western scholar accuse him of ignorance or of an agnostic attitude. It is, however, much more reasonable to surmise that the reason for his silence was, as stated in the early Buddhist texts, that the Enlightened Sage was interested only in showing the path of deliverance to all living beings, ensnared as they are in the net of suffering. Later Hīnayāna philosophy heatedly discussed the concept of person, but these discussions had very little influence on the mainstream of the Buddhist religion. It must also be granted that, quite often, the speculations of Western philosophers on the nature of person are too abstruse for Easterners. It is only in our day that Buddhist thinkers, especially in Japan, have begun to reflect on the true aims of European discussions on the person and the personal. Professor Nishitani Keiji, the recognized leader of the Buddhist-inspired Nishida or Kyoto school, in an essay entitled "The Personal and Impersonal in Religion" wrote that "there is no doubt that the idea of man as a personal being is the highest idea of man yet to have appeared." He continued, "the same may be said in regard to God as personal being" (Nishitani 1970, p.80). The course of our reflections may perhaps clarify the reasons why Nishitani does not decide in favor of this idea, for ultimate human experience can be expressed as either personal or impersonal, either mode of expression being imperfect in the face of that ultimate.

PERSONALISTIC ATTITUDES IN THE WORSHIP OF
BUDDHA-SYMBOLS

We have by now explored our theme sufficiently to be no longer surprised to find that in Buddhist praxis personalistic dimensions are included and that in Buddhist art they are represented, or that these personalistic dimensions are then reassumed into the impersonal, particularly by Zen Buddhists.

There exists a remarkable correspondence between the religious praxis of pious Buddhists and the works of Buddhist art, which thus reveals itself as great religious art by its nearness to the living practice of religion.

We owe our first reliable information on Buddhism to archeology and art, namely, to the third century B.C. stele inscriptions of the Indian King, Aśoka (274-236), and to the monumental works of art of the second and first centuries B.C. in Bhārhut and Sānchī. Sānchī, which has been left by its discoverers in its natural environment, may well be the most impressive artistic site of early Buddhism. The treasures of Bhārhut fill several halls of the Calcutta museum. In this most ancient of Buddhist art, the Buddha is presented in symbolic form. There is no doubt that the symbols on the gate arches, pillars and steles—namely, the tree, the tree and throne, the wheel, the pillars, the promenade (*caṅkrama*), and the stūpa—have each a special relationship to the main events in the life of the Buddha, and that they served to remind people of these events. It is clear that these symbols render the Buddha himself present, especially the stūpa, "the Buddhist symbol par excellence," and the footprints.¹ This is why the symbols evoke in the believers responses that find expression in cultic or personal veneration.

Attitudes of veneration with personal dimensions, whether directed at a personal representation of an object

1 On the explanation of the individual symbols in their relationship with the life of Buddha, see Seckel 1976, p.13-21; and Seckel 1967, pp. 50-63.

or at a symbolic representation of the numinous, can often be seen in the mainstream Buddhist tradition. Their meaning is impressively expressed in the worshipers of Bhārhut and Sāncī, and in an even more pronounced manner in the Amaravāti sculptures of the faithful venerating the footprints of Buddha in deep prostration. Symbols which evoke such attitudes toward persons do not originate in a completely impersonal field, but rather testify to a sense of a supra-personal reality. As a person, man responds to the supra-human, transcendent reality, which meets him in the symbol and elicits his total veneration.

CONCRETIZATION IN THE BUDDHA-IMAGE

In subsequent periods of Buddhist history, personal elements appear even more distinctly. Buddhist believers evidently felt impelled—possibly by outside influences about which Professor Seckel provides us with valuable information from the history of Indian religions and arts (Seckel 1976, p.25sq.)—to look for (I do not say a more understandable way, for I believe that the early Buddhists had a clear understanding of their symbols, but for) a more concretely apprehendable way of presenting their religious "object." They found this in the Buddha-image.

The first Buddha images originated respectively in the schools of Mathurā and Gandhāra. Historians of Indian art maintain this sequence, but dates of particular images remain uncertain. The remarkable fact that Buddha images appeared almost simultaneously at two different places indicates that both internal and external conditions were all ripe. The Buddha image quickly spread over the whole of Asia and there is not a single Asian country where researchers and tourists do not encounter Buddha images. Styles have developed in accord with country and historical period, but, with few exceptions, all represent the same type of image and visualize the great wisdom (*mahā-prajñā*) and the great compassion (*mahā-karuṇā*) of the Accomplished One. On this point religious praxis and artistic representation dovetail.

Let us now return to our problematic and ask: is a higher form of personalistic religious life attained with the creation of the Buddha image? I do not think we can answer this question with a simple yes, for the issue is many-faceted. I content myself with referring to two aspects of the matter, which are intimately connected and in the final analysis signify the same thing. In the first place, the Buddha image in general does not represent the historical person, Śākyamuni, but Buddha-hood. In Theravāda this is specified by the clear marks of supra-human greatness, while, in Mahāyāna, the image, in perfect accord with the religious visions of Mahāyāna Buddhists, is an embodiment of final truth and universal salvation. In such fashion, the artists have correctly understood and faithfully fulfilled the wishes of the believers.

In the second place, the Buddha image is in the final analysis a symbol. It is easier to apprehend and more concrete than the an-iconic symbol, but it still points, in virtue of its typifying character, at an impenetrable reality recognizable in its transparency (*chiffre*). Professor Seckel is correct when he finds the most perfect realization of the Buddha type in the "Buddha sitting cross-legged with hands joined in the meditation *mudrā*." The Buddha in the meditation posture gains "in a high degree the character and functioning of a symbol, personal now in its form" (Seckel 1976, p.20). The expression, "personal in its form," sounds like a paradox, but leads to a deeper understanding of the relationships which obtain between symbol and person, religious practice and ultimate reality.

Person and symbol, even an-iconic symbol, are not opposites. They stand to one another in a dialectical relationship, without contradicting one another. In fact, we find that in all the great religions, personalistic attitudes and relationships are paralleled over long stretches of time by symbolic expressions. Preferred modes of expression depend then upon the level of consciousness of the believers, whether they will feel moved by their faith and piety to see the person in the symbol and to offer that

person their worship, or whether, deeply aware of the symbolic character even of the person, especially the person represented in the likeness of an image, they will venerate in silence the ineffable, without reference to any object at all.

The insufficiency of the presentation haunts both the image and the symbol, no matter what kind of symbol it might be. This insufficiency is clear from the beginning in the case of a symbol. As Zen Buddhists like to say, it is like a finger pointing at the moon. For the worshiper of the symbol, its reality remains as distant from the worshiper as the moon itself is from the monkey who, in the famous Zen painting, grasps for its reflection in the water. Despite the great skill in portrait art long developed from his mastery over images, Western man too has always known that all images fall short before the mystery of the person. No image can plumb the depths of the human person. How much less could it make visible the personal character of God. Thus the biblical ban against images maintains its meaning. Modern men have extended this prohibition to the sphere of interpersonal human relationships. Man must not make an image of his fellowman. The lover must not make an image of his beloved, lest the relationship be distorted. As best, an image can be a "bodily crutch."² It can never adequately express the spiritual reality.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BUDDHA IMAGE FOR RELIGIOUS PRAXIS

In Asia the Buddha image has certainly served many believers as a support in their devotional practices toward the Buddha, the supreme being and ultimate reality. In Theravāda as well as Mahāyāna, personalistic attitudes, which in these devotions may be as universal as the Buddha images themselves, which have found a home in all Asian countries

2 One finds this expression in Tibetan Buddhism, see Seckel 1976, p.40, where he gives "eine körperliche Stütze."

touched by Buddhism. Through the representations of Buddha the faithful could be stimulated to come to an experience of the transcendent, particularly when the gigantic size of the statue impresses the eye of the believer with the supra-human dimensions of the Exalted One, as in Bamiyān in Afghanistan or in Nara and Kamakura in Japan. The same applies to the assembly of a great number of Buddha images in one place, a phenomenon related to the miracle of Śrāvastī,³ which is related in the Pāli canon and often represented in early Buddhist art, for the attempt here is to arouse an awareness of the supra-sensible miraculous powers of the Exalted One. In the case of the fifty-six powerful Buddha heads which look down from the towers of the massive ruins of the Bayon temple in Angkor Thom in Cambodia upon the pilgrims and make them feel the presence of the Buddha as Lokēśvara, the Lord of the World, the assembly of such a great number embodies an impression of abundant personality. It is indeed the intention of this unique artistic creation to render visible and elicit the experience of the Lordship and Omnipresence of the Lord Buddha.

A completely different impression is made by the equally typified representation of Amitābha (Japanese: *Amida*), the Buddha of immeasurable light and mercy. In comparison with other forms of Buddha worship, the personal dimension which the image of their Buddha evokes in the Amida believers has a very special resonance. Here confidence and loving abandonment prevail. Art has expressed this special characteristic of Buddhist piety most impressively in the *raigō*-images. Here Amida, accompanied in the halo of his Buddha splendor by heavenly retainers, gracefully comes to meet his believer from whose dying lips the *nembutsu*, i.e., the trusting invocation of the name of Amida Buddha, rises, in order to take him home to the Pure

3 Compare the sculptures in the Lahore museum and in the Calcutta museum. See the prints in *India* 1956, nr.29 and nr.30. Compare also the description of the miracle in Silva-Vigier 1955, p.40.

Land. This Buddha image, also, is of supra-human dimension, but, by his immeasurable mercy, the ineffably exalted Buddha inspires in his disciple confidence and joy in the process of being born and carried to the Western Paradise. In these *raigō*-images it is most frequently a monk who awaits the coming of Amida and Japanese prefer to think here of the pious Hōnen, the founder of the Pure Land School (*Jōdo-shū*), whom the unforgettable Japanese historian of religion, Anesaki Masaharu (who also was renowned in the history of art) loved to compare to Francis, the poverello of Assisi.

It is to this Amida piety that we owe the attractive type of men, the *Myōkōnin*, those "wondrously good men," who live on in the memory of their compatriots in many anecdotes about their simple trusting faith, often tested and refined by suffering, and their helpfulness to their neighbor in distress, an eagerness to help which not infrequently exceeds all reasonable bounds. Their tradition did not entirely die out. These Amida disciples combine meditation with a pronounced piety toward persons. During his life time Daisetz Suzuki, the pioneer of Zen in the West, showed them a special sympathy.⁴

PERSONAL ELEMENTS IN THE SYMBOLIC HAND-GESTURES OF THE BUDDHA IMAGE

The Buddha image itself can be interpreted as a symbol which points in the direction of the personal without falling into anthropomorphism. This impression is further strengthened by the symbols which, in Buddhist art, are connected with the Buddha image. This is particularly true of the *mudrā* (Japanese: *in*), i.e., the hand gestures or finger positions of the Buddha figures. For this reason, among the many symbols that define the Buddha image, the *mudrā* merit our close attention. The history of art recognizes in these symbolic gestures two universes of

⁴ Suzuki 1958, which reproduces five conferences given by him in New York in 1958.

meaning. On the one hand, as "seals" (the first meaning of the Sanskrit word) the *mudrā* prove the authenticity and efficacy of the image, a power which radiates from the image especially when these gestures are repeated many thousands of times by initiated officiants in a ritual cult. This meaning of *mudrā* - "as a seal is predominant in Esoteric thought" (Saunders 1960, p.7).

But the general iconographic significance of the *mudrā* is more far-reaching, for the *mudrā* is a symbolic sign for doctrinal content or events, as well as for the totality of some Buddha figure under some particular aspect. In the context of the Buddha image, symbolic hand positions—which in their origin go back to natural gestures and, in the most common forms, to generally used, natural gestures (Saunders 1960, p.10)—take on sacred meaning and religious weight. When one is able to read these signs, they become a "writing system,"⁵ indicating the essence more deeply than any letters ever could do.

Fundamental is the personal expressiveness of the hand, often convincingly demonstrated by artists, thinkers, psychologists and educators. The hand, second only to the facial features in expressive ability, is the most individually stamped member of the human body. Very naturally, when thoughts or emotions have to be expressed in a suitable way, the hand comes to the assistance of the word. Therefore it is safe to assume that the pious Buddhist, when he bows in worship before the Buddha image, senses the Exalted One speaking to him by his hand gestures and finger positions.

In Buddhism the *mudrā* originated as an iconographic symbol together with the Buddha images (Saunders 1960, p.10sq). Many *mudrā* express events of the life of Buddha and, by the mere fact of their relationship to the historical Buddha, already contain a personal element, although not always pronounced. But the personal accent is especially

5 That is how Otto R. Franke—quoted by Saunders 1960, p.5—called them in an early publication (1892).

stressed when the Buddha indicates by his gestures that he teaches his worshipers, protects them, or fulfills their wishes.

Since the origination of the Buddha image in Mathurā and Gandhāra, the *mudrā* corresponding to the above gestures, namely, the gestures of wish-fulfillment (Sanskrit: *vara-mudrā*, Japanese: *segan-in*), protection (*abhaya-mudrā*; *semui-in*), preaching (*vitarka-mudrā*; *seppō-in* or *an'i-in*), turning the wheel of doctrine (*dharmacakra-mudrā*; *tembōrin-in*), are all found widely diffused throughout the Buddhist world. These *mudrā* are expressly directed to man and therefore the personal element comes to the fore clearly in them. Often combined with each other, they constitute in their numerous combinations and variants, a great part, if not the greater part, of Buddhist *mudrā*. Evidently the first two mentioned *mudrā* are intimately connected, for a immediate giving or bestowing by the Buddha is signified by the gestures of fulfilling wishes and granting protection. Thus the Buddha grants the hearing of prayers and wishes, fearlessness, safety, and deliverance from anxiety. He is also the giver of doctrine, beginning with the sermon at Benares, whereby he is said to have put into motion the wheel of doctrine. Thus it is not surprising that, during the first phase of the Buddha image in Gandhāra, the basic meanings of the principal *mudrā* were not fixed in sharp distinction one from the other. An image of the teaching Buddha of the Gandhāra school shows the gesture of protection (*abhaya-mudrā*).⁶ Even in their forms, *mudrā* are not seldom connected to one another, as, for example, a combination derived from the *vitarka-mudrā*, wherein the gesture of preaching (also quieting down) is linked to a gesture of collecting (Saunders 1960, p.69sq). This *mudrā* (*an'i-shōshū-in*), which is probably not of Indian

6 See Saunders 1960, Table II. The gestures of wish-fulfillment (*varada-mudrā*) and protection (*abhaya-mudrā*) are often combined, Saunders 1960, p.52 and p.57. On the use of the gesture of protection as an expression of teaching, see Saunders 1960, p.61 and p.219, note 45.

origin (Saunders 1960, p.222, n.39), is remarkable for the fulness of its human expression. It is found in raigō-images, and thus also called raigō-in (Saunders 1960, p.75). Amida Buddha, who comes to meet his believer, greets him and bestows his gifts upon him with this eloquent hand gesture. The first two mentioned mudrā of gracious bestowing are particularly proper to the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Japanese: *Kannon*), who is also called the Bodhisattva of Wish Fulfillment and Protection (Saunders 1960, p.62sq and p.219, n.57). The teaching mudrā pertain in the first place of course to Sākyamuni, particularly the mudrā of setting in motion the wheel of the doctrine.

In the context of our question I have singled out the mudrā of giving and of teaching, for in these gestures of communication with the worshiper or contemplator, the personal element shows itself in an unmistakably clear fashion. Other hand gestures, no less typical of Buddhism, such as the mudrā of meditation (*dhyāna-mudrā*; *jō-in*), of the fist of knowledge (*vajra-mudrā*; *chiken-in*),⁷ of touching the earth in witness (*bhūmi-sparśa-mudrā*; *sokuchi-in*), are strongly expressive, but are not characterized by the same degree of orientation toward the other. If, on the whole, the Buddha image can be regarded as a point of contact for the personal in Buddhism, the mudrā, which are inseparable from the Buddha image—especially the communicative hand gestures—are eminently suited to aid in strengthening personalistic attitudes. Buddhist iconography has not only created exquisite artistic forms, but has, at the same time, also provided valuable religious impulses. In virtue of their "speaking function," the mudrā can be fittingly ranged with the sūtras, for through them the

7 Saunders adduces several Sanskrit equivalents (but with a question mark) of the Japanese term, "chiken-in." I myself was unable to find a Sanskrit term for this important mudrā, not even in Japanese lexicons of esoteric Buddhism which otherwise indicate the Sanskrit equivalents. Thus the term *vajra-mudrā* is uncertain.

Buddha speaks to the listening worshiper. Buddhists have always attached great importance to the hearing of this Buddha speech.

PORTRAIT ART IN ZEN BUDDHISM

When speaking of approaches to the personal in art and religious praxis, our attention has been drawn first to these approaches that directly relate to the Buddha. However, there are in Buddhism other expressions of the personal dimension, expressions which remain within the human sphere of interpersonal relations. Equally embodied through artistic creation, they also afford us important insights into the Buddhist understanding of the person. Here, portrait art in Zen Buddhism has priority of place.

Zen Buddhist portrait painting originated and developed in China as a continuation of a very ancient tradition. The oldest preserved Chinese portrait goes back to the pre-Christian era (Brinker 1973, pp.181-182). Before and during the T'ang period (618-906), a good portrait was expected to show a likeness to the original and to bring out his characteristic individuality (Brinker 1973, pp.6-7). Portraits of the founders and other prominent monks exist also in other Buddhist schools. Still, Zen Buddhist portraiture is pre-eminent in the field of East Asian portrait art.⁸ Its first golden age occurs in China during the Southern Sung dynasty (1126-1279) and the Yüan dynasty (1280-1368). In Japan its golden age begins in the Kamakura era (1185-1333) and reaches its apogee during the Muromachi period (1336-1573). Particularly at times of high creativity the Zen painters endeavored in their portraits to represent and bring to life the highly revered patriarchs and masters with their personal idiosyncrasies. In his very instructive and penetrating study of Zen Buddhist portraiture in China and Japan, after a very extensive analysis of Zen painting, Helmut Brinker declares that "in the broad field of Zen the

8 Keene 1971, p.229, remarks: "The most significant portraits, however, are associated with Zen Buddhism."

historical personality and the person in general stepped into the center of thought and conduct" (Brinker 1973, p.18).

In Zen Buddhism the portrait as an art form draws its life force from several roots. First of all, there is the distinct consciousness of tradition whereby the spirit of this Mahāyāna school of meditation is transmitted from generation to generation. An uninterrupted chain of transmission links the contemporary Zen masters to Śākyamuni, the founder of Buddhism who is believed directly to have handed down this spirit to his disciple, Kāśyapa, thus constituting him the first in a row of twenty-eight Indian Zen patriarchs. The last representative of the Indian lineage, Bodhidharma, according to tradition, brought Zen from India into China and set the stage for the Chinese line of Zen patriarchs. The first six of these Chinese patriarchs have frequently been portrayed by Zen painters in the "generation-paintings" (*ressozō*) (Brinker 1973, p.65 sq and p.101 sq). This cycle became a favorite theme of Zen portraiture. The sequence of the generations, however, is often extended beyond Lin-chi (died 866—the greatest Chinese Zen master after Hui-neng) into the Sung period and all the way to the contemporary abbots and famous Zen masters of the Chinese and Japanese Zen monasteries. In these portraits the traditional lineage is the focus of interest, and the individual recedes for the simple reason that these are almost purely ideal pictures, which can orient themselves only by the more or less attested and often legendary character traits of their subjects.

The transmission of the spirit plays yet another large role in the motivation of portrait painting in regard to the immediate master-disciple relationship. It had become customary quite early, upon a disciple's attainment of enlightenment, for the master to present his disciple with a picture of himself, preferably adorned with an autographic inscription. This portrait was intended to keep alive the memory of the strict guidance of the master and of the great moment of enlightenment, thus spurring on the

disciple to ever deeper insights on the road of spiritual discipline. The portrait also came to be considered as a certificate of the authenticity of the disciple's enlightenment experience. Evidently it was because there was a danger of deviating from the unconventional spiritual way of Zen that such eminent Japanese Zen masters as Dōgen and Ikkyū uttered serious objections against the abuse of these certificates⁹ of enlightenment.¹⁰ I prefer to see these portraits—whatever the inscriptions announce—as witnesses to the cordial relationship which exist in Zen Buddhism between master and disciple. Seckel indicated clearly what these portraits were all about when he wrote: "The portraiture of arhats, patriarchs, and priests was promoted with great vigor by adherents of the Ch'an school, which attached great importance to deeply religious personages, to the contact between master and pupils, and to the handing on of traditions 'from spirit to spirit.' In this case the chain of tradition plays an enhanced role and is based entirely on personal relationships" (Seckel 1964, p.254). The art historian stresses the personal element with an inescapable insistence.

Finally, Zen Buddhist portraits, especially those of the patriarchs and founding abbots, are used in the temple-monasteries as artistic pictures before which cultic acts are performed. Herein, they resemble the paintings of early Buddhist saints, the arhat (Chinese: *lo-han*; Japanese: *rakan*), to which they are also related in their artistic style (See Brinker 1973, p.61; Brasch 1961, pp.14-15). They often occupy a place of honor in a niche of a main temple-hall, and sometimes they even have their own separate building among the numerous buildings scattered over the temple grounds, which serve partly a cultic and partly a practical purpose. When thus enshrined in a mystic twilight,

9 Brash 1961, pp.16-17, opines that this usage replaced the old custom of handing on robe and alms bowl as insignia of the patriarchal dignity.

10 See Saunders 1960, pp.16, 20, 174. Yet, Ikkyū himself probably gave away some portraits as certificates.

these artistic pictures are not readily accessible to the art lover. This may have something to do with the fact that Zen Buddhist portrait art became known late, actually only in the last decades, although those termed "priest portraits" (*chinsō*)—mostly full-length pictures of founders, abbots, and masters in priestly attire—enjoyed great popularity as art pictures in the Japanese Zen monasteries.¹¹

In many of its best works, Zen Buddhist portrait painting allows the viewer an encounter with real persons. Of course, according to the kind of portrait, the individuality of the represented subjects comes to the fore more or less strongly and in different ways. To mark the grades and particularities of individuality is the task of the art historian. Yet one does not have to be an expert to be impressed by the characteristic living fullness of expression of these Zen portraits. Since they fall under the category of posthumous and hence ideal portraits, Brinker is astounded by "the lively and surprisingly differentiated, not to say individualized, faces of the patriarchs" (Brinker 1973, p.61). He even discovers in a series of paintings "humanized facial features" and even one "lovable, youthfully fresh, and appealing face with an expression of understanding mildness and wisdom" (Brinker 1973, p.104). Even in a transfiguration picture, the facial features of Zen master Daichi Kōjin (1290-1366), figuring here as Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha (*Jizō*), are "entirely individual and not formed after the idealized schema of the Jizō figure" (Brinker 1973, p.87).

The specific portrait typology in Zen painting did not impede the elaboration of individual, characteristic features, for Zen painters were concerned with the "truly proper essence" of their subjects.¹² This is especially true of the individual portraits of Zen masters painted by their

11 According to Brash 1961, p.16, the priest image was "in Zen . . . the most important cultic image."

12 Brinker 1973, p.73, shows the difference between posthumous portraits and portraits painted during the lifetime of the master.

talented disciples. From the wealth of individual portraits painted during the lifetime of the master portrayed, I shall select the portraits of three personalities who were prominent in the history of Zen Buddhism. Two original portraits of the famous Chinese Zen master, Hsü-t'ang Chih-yü (1185-1269)—painted by unknown Chinese artists who must have been personally acquainted with the master and adorned with an inscription by the master himself—were given by the master to Japanese disciples, who brought them to Japan, where they are now to be found in the famous Zen monasteries of Myōshinji and Daitokuji in Kyoto. According to Brinker, the Myōshinji portrait, dated 1258, communicates "in an outstanding way an impression of the looks of this serious, good-natured and tolerant Ch'an master" (Brinker 1973, p. 117; see illustrations 46 and 47). The Daitokuji portrait, picturing the master as an octogenarian, might scarcely be less praiseworthy. It appears to be better preserved and shows the facial features in sharper outline.

Soseki, better known by the honorary title bestowed on him by the Emperor Go-Daigo, nI.Musō Kokushi (1273-1351), is the dominating figure in Japanese Zen Buddhism during the first half of the fourteenth century. He is unequalled in the combination, so typical of Zen, of religious spiritualization, extensive culture, and artistic talent. Many portraits of him attest to the high veneration in which he was held and the warm affection with which he was regarded by his contemporaries.¹³ In all of these portraits the spiritualized, ascetical features bespeak the inward-directed, deep insight of the enlightened monk. His blameless, aristocratically distinguished posture makes his widespread influence as educator and popular leader understandable. The fact that this "national master" (that is the meaning of

13 Brinker 1973, pp.160-177, consecrates the last chapter of his book to four Zen masters, two Chinese and two Japanese, who are represented by especially important and numerous portraits. One of them is Musō Kokushi. The other Japanese master is Ikkyū Sōjun. For the personality and work of Musō Kokushi, see Benl 1955.

the Japanese title, "Kokushi") was himself a creative artist of the first rank, spurred his portraitists on to the utmost of their effort and the highest possible faithfulness to the model. "The gaunt, wrinkled face of the bald-headed old master" (Brinker 1973, p.167) in the portrait of sixty-five year old Soseki in the Tenryūji is alive through the clear, kindly, quiet glance of the eyes. The most famous painting, a half-length portrait of Musō Kokushi, was painted by his disciple, Mutō Shūi, a prominent artist who, "in a magnificent way knew how to bring out the open spiritual attitude of his master in the serious face of the man" (Brinker 1973, p.168). The name of Musō Kokushi is linked with a number of famous Japanese Zen monasteries and the traces of his artistic activity can be found in places all over the country.

The most popular of all Japanese Zen masters, Ikkyū Sōjun (1394-1481), has inspired the greatest number of Zen Buddhist portraits.¹⁴ With his eccentric character it is not surprising that his portraits express a high degree of individuality. The preserved portraits, about twenty in number, show the master in various guises. He is shown in his younger years with a fully shaved head as the strict monastic rule prescribes. However, even in the early paintings, he squats indolently with legs half crossed, and a long wooden sword, added as his distinguishing quality, symbolizes, according to his own explanation, the hypocrisy of contemporary Zen, which lacks the quality of the real sword. Later generations have been most impressed by a portrait sketch ascribed to his trusted disciple Bokusai (1412-1492). In this half-length portrait, the master with head turned to the left watches the viewer from the corner of his eyes," the look is penetrating rather than dignified" (Keene 1971, p.231), the hair stands up, and under the big nose with the extraordinary large nostrils a hairy beard and

14 The many portraits of Ikkyū offer also "the broadest spectrum of various iconographic types and possibilities of artistic expression." See Brinker 1973, p.170 and Keene 1971.

mustache protrude. There have been other long-haired Zen masters, and Ikkyū continues on this point the line of the founder of his school, Lin-chi.

Many of Ikkyū's portraits are alike in style. One portrait, whose ascription to Bokusai is not completely certain and which is kept in the Shūon'an, is particularly noteworthy. In this portrait the characteristic features of the master are exquisitely drawn and betray something of his spirited and pointed humor. It has probably served as a model for several other similar portraits and itself originated about the time Ikkyū was called to be head of the important Zen monastery of Daitokuji. A portrait of the same period shows the master, who was the enemy of all convention and whose style of life heaped scorn on the pomp and corruption of so many of his contemporaries, in ornamental priest attire. Considerations on the history of Japanese Zen Buddhism are called for here,¹⁵ but, in accord with our theme, we simply point out again the individual, personal character of Zen Buddhist painting. In regard to Ikkyū, whose above mentioned portrait sketch he is evaluating, Brinker even speaks of a moment of "communication," and writes: "With a penetrating, critically probing, yes altogether challenging glare, the man in the portrait looks at the viewer from the corner of his eyes. For Zen portraits this is a highly unusual trait, which nonetheless intensifies to a high degree of liveliness the direct communication between the viewed and the viewer" (Brinker 1973, p.175).

Zen Buddhist painting experienced a revival about the middle of the Edo period (1600-1868).¹⁶ But it must be immediately said that the forte of its two most prominent artists, Hakuin (1685-1768) and Sengai (1750-1837) does not lie in portrait art. Sengai's Chinese ink paintings (*sumi-e*) draw realistic and humorous episodes, caricatures of people

¹⁵ See the pages on Ikkyū in Dumoulin 1963, p.184 sq.

¹⁶ On this revival see Brash 1961, especially pp.71-81. See his explanations of the illustrations.

in comic situations, uncommon things in nature. He has illustrated in a tasteful way many Zen verses, utterances of the masters, and kōan. Hakuin is reckoned among the most prominent figures of the history of Japanese religion.¹⁷ It is less known, however, that he was a great artist, a master of Chinese ink painting and calligraphy. Still, a number of valuable portraits from his brush have come to us. It is true that in this autumn season of Zen Buddhist portraiture, the richness and perfection of the Muromachi period, which was inspired by the Chinese art of Sung, is no longer attained. Nevertheless, the self-portraits by Hakuin remain astounding. The enormous, penetrating eyes, with which the dignified master, warning stick in hand, looks out into the distance or straight ahead of him, impress themselves unforgettably on the viewer. Hardly ever has the spiritual force which flows from meditation and kōan exercise been represented in a more striking way. Self-portraits are current in Zen Buddhist art. If it be true that "every self portrait proceeds from and points back to a self-aware individual," then the self-portraits in Zen attest that "man has become fully conscious of his own person and personality" (Brinker 1973, p.79).

THE EXPRESSION OF THE PERSON IN WORD AND WRITING

Shaped as he is by the logos, the Westerner cherishes the conviction that nothing reveals the person in its essence like the word and language. In this perspective, it would be worth while to consider the linguistic achievements within Buddhism—beginning with the sūtras and śāstras, moving to the written testimonies of later generations, and finishing with the forceful utterances of the Zen masters. In Zen Buddhism, the kōan—which, as Martin Buber, the eloquent

17 See Miura and Sasaki 1965. On Hakuin, see especially pp.22-30, 41 sq., 46-47, 53, 63 sq. See also Yampolski 1971 and the chapter on Hakuin in Dumoulin 1963.

advocate of religious personalism, rightly remarks, are intimately connected with the master disciple relationship—occupy an important place (Buber 1963, p.886, p.888 sq, and p.995). On the surface this is hard to reconcile with the fact that in Zen all words are finally convicted of nullity and the highest wisdom lies in silence.

In East Asian Buddhism, the word is important in regard to the personal also because in the Chinese characters word and image are linked in a unique way. Rooted in the East Asian tradition, the Buddhist sees in the written character a word penetrating the deepest essence of things. When a Zen master wants to share the most precious treasure of his wisdom and to give his disciple a special token of his friendship, he will squat for a moment in the meditation posture and then—in the highest concentration, often in a few swift strokes of compressed force—write a character and hand the written paper to his friend. It is even true, as Sackel describes it, "that the Zen characters—normal Chinese characters freely selected and reshaped in an original way—in their vital and often dynamic application of the brush stroke, do not only give direct expression to the personality of the writer, but equally show the degree of his insight and spiritual power" (Seckel 1976, p.62). For that reason, calligraphy (*shodō*, the way of writing), a craft pushed to its highest degree of perfection in East Asian Buddhism, must be reckoned among the artistic aspects of the problem of the person in Buddhism. For, in writing and word interpersonal communication occurs and therein the personal one to one relationship of humans is based in language.

THE ACCESS TO THE PERSON THROUGH ART

By its very nature art needs interpretation. That is, the understanding of artistic expression will forever be varied according to the different spiritual and cultural make-up of people. Consequently, the access to the person, offered by art, remains uncertain and subject to doubt. This uncertainty relates to the subjective intention of the artist

as well as to the objective work of art, and is a natural accompaniment of the symbolic character of art. Works of art, particularly Buddhist works of art, are signs that do not copy reality but signify it.

In portrait art, which essentially stays in the human sphere, the personal character is imperiled only, or at least mainly, by the shortcomings and lack of talent of the artist, as when the artist merely copies his model and lets his art degenerate into schematic, stereotyped handiwork. Artistic quality guarantees the individuality and personality of the represented subject. We were able to convince ourselves of this in the consideration of Zen Buddhist portrait painting. Doubt can here arise only when Zen is misinterpreted and mistakenly presented as a false road of introversion, a misinterpretation that has often been extended to the whole of Buddhism. It must be noted here that the arhat images inspired by primitive Buddhism do not show any less individuality than the Zen Buddhist images. In this way, an access is opened in portrait art to a personal trait in Buddhism. To be sure, we should not hide the fact that Zen Buddhist painting reaches its highest peaks not in portraits but in landscape painting. The conclusion can be drawn that the cosmic sense of nature enjoys priority. Still, the road to the human personality, far from being cut off, is clearly open and has been trodden.

Accordingly, Japanese Buddhists stress that, in religious praxis, Buddhism represents a humane ethics which highly values human rights and nurtures sympathetic compassion (Nakamura 1976, pp. 25-30). The word person has long since become a part of the Japanese language as *jūnkaku*, and is much used in sermons and instructions. The objection is often directed against Buddhist humanism that in its presentation of the cycle of reincarnations, which include animals, starving spirits, hells, etc., the special position of man in the universe is not taken into account and does not carry much weight. In the wake of general modernization and demythologization, the Buddhists, at least those of the younger generation, either completely

drop or thoroughly reinterpret the doctrine of reincarnation. Scholarly Buddhists today consider this presentation as folk religion and affirm, in their ethics, the privileged position of man among all living beings.

Far more difficult remains the question concerning the personal or impersonal character of ultimate reality. Although, in its mainstream, it recognizes a transcendent, absolute reality, Buddhism is not inclined to ascribe a personal character to it. In the Buddhist way of thinking, the personal attitudes in Buddhist religious praxis are not sufficient to justify the recognition of a personal Supreme Being. On this point, the dialogue between Buddhists and Christians is not very promising (Dumoulin 1974, pp.145-193). Even after removal of the anthropomorphic character of the idea of a personal God and the limitations of the philosophical concept of person, Buddhists are left with a deep conviction that the ineffable ultimate—be it called *nirvāṇa*, Buddha nature, emptiness, or nothingness—can never be compatible with the content which, in his images and feelings, is linked with the word, person. This is true for all forms of Buddhism, Amida Buddhism not excluded.

For human beings, ultimate reality always remains an ineffable mystery. Whether, in its deepest ground, being is personal or impersonal, is something that humans will never be able to plumb by his rational powers. Here, man faces a decision which he will make according to his own tradition and upbringing, more still according to his faith and experience. The Christian sees the mystery revealed in the personal love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, the Buddha in the silence of the Buddha. Still, Buddhists and Christians agree that the ultimate mystery is ineffable, and also in that it should be manifest to human beings.

The inscription on a Chinese stone figure of the Buddha, dated in the year 746, reads:

The highest truth is without image.

If there were no image at all, however, there would be no way for truth to be manifested.

The highest principle is without words.

Heinrich DUMOULIN

But, if there were no words at all, how could principle possibly be revealed? (Seckel 1976, p. 36).

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