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The *kōan* in Japanese Society at the Beginning of the Early Modern Period: *Kana hōgo* and *kanna-zen*

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Introduction

The teaching of the Japanese Rinzai school is, in its principles, relatively simple: the practitioner focuses on a *kōan* 公案, grasps its real meaning—that is, the one beyond the trivial meaning of the words—and then receives another *kōan* on which he focuses in turn, this process being repeated until there is attainment of complete awakening. The fundamental difference between the Japanese Rinzai school and the other Chan or Sŏn branches, in China and Korea, is that in Japan a series of *kōan* is seen as necessary to reach awakening, while in China and Korea going through one *gong'an* is considered the equivalent of awakening itself. Leaving aside this difference—despite its importance—such use of *kōan* by the Japanese Rinzai school is based on a practice originating in the Song dynasty, that of *kanhua-chan* 看話禅 (Jp. *kanna-zen*). From its introduction to Japan at the beginning of the 13th century and up to the present era, this *kanna-zen*—though in fact only one mode of *kōan* Zen and not (as often imagined) its totality—has been the Rinzai school's very core, as indeed it is for the vast majority of all Chan or Sŏn practice in the world today.[1]

During the Edo period, from its very beginning, the teaching of Zen was spread to Japanese society at large, notably through texts written in vernacular Japanese that explained the principles of the Zen school easily and comprehensibly. Yet herein lies what can be seen as a paradox: how is it that such a school, whose stated teachings preach above all the need to go beyond words' mere meaning, can produce texts like *kana hōgo* 仮名法語, specifically designed to be easily understood? Certainly one of the most common answers to this question would be that there are different levels to the presentation the school makes of itself: a profounder one, leading to awakening, suitable for monks or lay practitioners, and a more superficial one—the one seen in *kana hōgo*—that explains only the teaching's main principles. In a sense, this answer would be correct, but

[1] From this point of view, the modern Japanese Sōtō school, which rejects *kanna-zen*, constitutes an exception.

it only sidesteps the problem. With the practice of *kanna-zen* being at the very core of Rinzai school teaching, even in a superficial explanation of the school's main principles, the subject seems a difficult one to avoid. In this paper, we will consider several issues raised by this question and examine how this problem appears in *kana hōgo* at the beginning of the Edo period.

1. The Origins and Diversity of *kana hōgo*

From its introduction at the end of the 13th century, up until the end of the medieval period, around the end of the 16th century, contacts between the Japanese Zen school and Japan's laypeople were rare and took place almost exclusively among the higher classes of society. Moreover, during this period, rather than the school's teaching of a new form of Buddhism, more often what was valued was the newest knowledge in literature, philosophy, science, etc., that its monks brought back from the continent. Beyond such renewed erudition in classical Chinese literature, particularly in poetry, some monks were used as diplomats, accountants, administrators, and so on. In other words, during the medieval period, to be useful—and therefore patronized—it was almost sufficient for the monks, and for the school as a whole, to be able to compose Chinese poetry and explain recent literary texts or new intellectual currents. It would be a mild exaggeration, yet not so far from the truth, to say that, from the point of view of lay society, it was on the basis of its cultural contributions, rather than its religious ones, that the Zen school was integrated into the larger cultural and religious landscape.

However, this does not mean that the teachings of the Zen school were completely unknown to laypeople, and several examples show how monks explained the school's doctrine in a comprehensible way. One of the most famous texts produced for this purpose is undoubtedly the *Record of Dialogues in a Dream* (*Muchū mondōshū* 夢中問答集), which records the questions of Ashikaga Tadayoshi 足利直義 (1306–1352) and the answers of Musō Soseki 夢窓疎石 (1275–1351).[2] Musō explains the teaching of Zen as well as Buddhism in general from a Zen monk's perspective. In addition to being what can be considered one of the masterpieces of Japanese Zen literature, the *Muchū mondōshū* has two particularities that should be highlighted. The first is that the text is in Japanese, which was far from the norm at the time, particularly in the Sinocentric milieu of Five Mountains culture. The second is that it was published, and this during the lifetime of its author. This second point is very uncommon, with only one other known example, but the pattern of a Zen monk explaining the teaching of his school for a layperson, and doing this through a text in vernacular Japanese (often in the form

[2] For an English translation of this text, see Thomas Yuho Kirchner, *Dialogues in a Dream: The Life and Zen Teaching of Musō Soseki* (Kyoto: Tenryū-ji Institute for Philosophy and Religion, 2010).

of a letter), while not frequent, can be seen several times over the course of the medieval period. Needless to say, the recipients of such teachings were all, at least without any known exceptions, from the higher classes of society.

For the most part, the texts thus produced are very close to what is called, in the Chinese Chan school, "instructions on the Law" (*fayu* 法語): that is to say a text, generally short, in which a master summarizes his teachings or a part thereof. For example, among the records of the sayings of the famous Song-period Chan master Yuanwu Keqin 円悟克勤 (1063–1135), there exists a large section, divided in three parts, devoted to all the *fayu* written by the master on various occasions. One of these, found in *Records of Yuanwu's Sayings* (*Yuanwu foguo chanshi yulu* 円悟仏果禅師語録) with the title "To the librarian [Shao]long" (示隆知蔵), is addressed to his disciple and successor Huqiu Shaolong 虎丘紹隆 (1077–1136).[3] In Japan, this *fayu* is one of the most renowned extant calligraphic texts produced by the Chan or Zen school, which are often used in the tea ceremony, and known as *bokuseki* 墨跡. The *fayu* addressed to Huqiu Shaolong with calligraphy by Yuanwu is now in Japan, and has a long history. It is said to have been discovered floating in a paulownia-wood canister and is for that reason called "flowing Yuanwu" (*nagare Engo* 流れ円悟). Because such "instructions on the Law" were made to be given to a disciple, either lay or monastic, it is not surprising that they constitute a large part of extant calligraphic works by Chan monks.

If the *Muchū mondōshū* can be considered separately, the texts produced by Japanese Zen monks for laypeople are very close, in their purpose as well as in their form, to the "instructions on the Law" of their Chinese counterparts, and were thus quite naturally also called *fayu*, which became *hōgo* in Japanese pronunciation. As we will see, most of these *hōgo* were published after the medieval period, making it imprudent to speak about what they were like in their original versions, but there exists an exception that allows us to affirm that the genre was already present earlier. The *Gettan kana hōgo* 月菴仮名法語 was a compilation of "instructions on the Law" by Gettan Sōkō 月菴宗光 (1326–1389; also pronouced Getsuan), addressed to twenty-four people, men and women, secular and religious. Such a structure is not in itself so rare; what makes this text special is the fact that it was published—in 1402 (Ōei 応永 9). The title itself used already a formulation that will be repeated frequently—"*kana hōgo*"—and thus the expression can be dated to at least this time. The fact that these "instructions on the Law" are in *kana*, or to put it more simply, in Japanese, is obviously a Japanese specificity, but in its principle one can call it faithful to its Chinese models. Chinese *fayu* were designed to explain things as clearly as possible, and to that end they used a language understandable to their recipients. When a Japanese monk wanted to explain the Law to a Japanese speaker, he did it—as was only natural—in Japanese.

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[3] *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大蔵経, eds. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 et al. (Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1932), vol. 47, p. 776c.

Other instructions texts addressed to religious disciples might be written in classical Chinese, but the Japanese language was a very understandable choice for laypeople.

Kana hōgo constitute thus a corpus of texts whose production began around the 14th century, and continued until the end of the Edo period. Many of them explain Zen teachings, but not all of them, and before examining the question of the *kanna-zen* found in *kana hōgo*, a presentation and delineation of the corpus we are considering is necessary.

Different Types of *kana hōgo*

In modern Japanese, the term *kana hōgo* can refer to a wide spectrum of Buddhist texts, from various schools, written in vernacular Japanese, and the Zen school produced only a part of this corpus. Moreover, the definition of what can be called a Buddhist text is far from being clear, and an examination of the characteristics of all the various texts today considered to be *kana hōgo* would easily be enough for a whole article on its own. Depending on what is meant by *kana* (a text fully written in Japanese from the beginning? a Japanese reading—*yomi-kudashi* 読み下し—of a text written in classical Chinese? etc.), and of course depending on what is meant by *hōgo* (the Japanese reading of *fayu*? any text concerning Buddhist teaching? a sermon addressed specifically to laypeople? etc.), the number of texts potentially considered *kana hōgo* will be quite different. The oldest *kana hōgo* is said to be the *Ichimai kishōmon* 一枚起請文 by Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212) during the Kamakura period, but many other texts considered *kana hōgo* were also produced during the same period.[4] One collection of Japanese classical literature, the *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* edited by Iwanami, includes a volume titled "Collection of *kana hōgo*."[5] Herein are compiled texts from various schools such as Tendai, Jōdo, Shingon, Kegon, etc., with the Rinzai school being only one among others.

Furthermore, the term *kana hōgo* sometimes designated texts that used literary style—mostly narrative and poetry—to present Buddhist teachings. These are, to give only examples related to Zen teachings, texts such as the *Boroboro no sōshi* ぼろぼろの草子,[6] the *Nezumi no sōshi* 鼠のさうし, the *Ikkyū gaikotsu* 一休骸骨,[7]

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[4] See Sanae Kensei 早苗憲生, "Hōsa bunko-bon *Shōichi kana hōgo* no kenkyū (1): honmon hen" 蓬左文庫本『聖一仮名法語』の研究（一）本文篇, *Zenbunka kenkyūjo kiyō* 禅文化研究所紀要 6 (1974), pp. 265–294.

[5] *Kana hōgo-shū* 仮名法語集, vol. 83 of *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 日本古典文学大系 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1964).

[6] See Koida Tomoko 恋田知子, "*Boroboro no sōshi* kō" 『ぼろぼろの草子』考, *Chūsei bungaku* 中世文学 49 (2004), pp. 99–109.

[7] Despite the mention of a specific Zen monk, Ikkyū Sōjun 一休宗純, this text is a literary *kana hōgo*. All specialists agree that it is not a text by Ikkyū. See Koida Tomoko, "Gaikotsu no monogatarizōshi: *Genchū sōda-ga* saikō" 骸骨の物語草子: 『幻中草打画』再考, in *Zen kara mita Nihon chūsei no bunka to shakai* 禅からみた日本中世の文化と社会, ed. Amano Fumio 天野文雄 (Tokyo: Perikansha, 2016), pp. 98–114.

etc.[8] Thus, the term *kana hōgo* can refer to many different kinds of texts, and for this reason, rather than trying to propose here a precise definition, we will limit ourselves to indicating the scope of our inquiry, as well as the reasons for this limitation.

In the first, and perhaps most important specification, we will deal only with *kana hōgo* from the two Zen schools, and of these two, mainly from the Rinzai school. Among this group, moreover, we will not consider literary *kana hōgo*, concentrating our inquiry instead solely on texts presenting the teachings of specific—and explicitly named—Zen monks, a group of texts that for the sake of convenience we will call accordingly "Zen-monk *kana hōgo*."

These "Zen-monk *kana hōgo*" can be divided into three large groups, according to the eras of the monks whose teachings they are said to represent. As we will see below, the mention by name of a monk does not necessarily mean that the given text is reliably attributable to him (i.e. directly written by him or a transcription from his oral teachings, sermons, or dialogues), and there are several cases of texts being, without a doubt, impossible to associate with the monk whose teachings they supposedly present. This question set aside, the corpus of *kana hōgo* can be divided into: (1) those texts produced (i.e. written and established as texts that circulated in print or manuscript) during the medieval period; (2) those texts attributable to medieval-period monks but compiled later (by, for example, editing letters that had not circulated as texts previously); and (3) those texts actually produced during the Edo period. Below we will consider concrete examples in each category. We will limit ourselves to texts that were published, leaving out of our scope those texts that circulated only as manuscripts.

(a) Medieval-period *kana hōgo*

Kana hōgo are often associated with the Edo period, and it is in fact mainly during this period that most of them were produced and published, though a few are older. The most famous is certainly the *Muchū mondōshū*, by Musō Soseki, published during the lifetime of the monk in 1342. The question of whether or not this text can be called a *kana hōgo* is worth discussion, but as it is a transcription of a dialogue between a Zen monk explaining to a layperson (Ashikaga Tadayoshi, as we saw above) the principles of Buddhism and Zen in vernacular Japanese, we will consider it to be such. Another example is the *Gettan kana hōgo* that recorded the teaching of Gettan Sōkō, and which was published as a so-called *gozan-ban* 五山版 ("Five-Mountains Edition") in 1402.

(b) Medieval-period *kana hōgo* Published Post-Medievally

Looking at the beginning of the Edo period, the most numerous type of

[8] See Koida Tomoko, "Kana hōgo no kyōju to bungei" 仮名法語の享受と文芸, in *Chūsei no zuihitsu: seiritsu, tenkai to buntai* 中世の随筆: 成立・展開と文体, ed. Araki Hiroshi 荒木浩, vol. 10 of *Chūsei bungaku to rinsetsu shogaku* 中世文学と隣接諸学 (Tokyo: Chikurinsha, 2004), pp. 435–455.

Zen-monk *kana hōgo* are, by far, those texts compiling materials from the medieval period (often from letters). Their dating and the details of their production are difficult to determine,[9] and above all, the reliability of their attributions needs to be carefully examined. Several *kana hōgo* are, indeed, clearly not documents of the teaching of the monk they pretend to be from. For example, all the *kana hōgo* attributed to Ikkyū, without a single exception, starting with the *Ikkyū kana hōgo* 一休仮名法語, are acknowledged by specialists to be pseudepigraphical. This does not mean that they should be rejected—on the contrary, they remain important texts, as much for their contents as for the significant influence they had. Nonetheless, they should be considered in a context apart from Ikkyū himself, from his thought, or even from his era.[10]

(c) *Kana hōgo* by Edo-period Monks

Lastly, there are the *kana hōgo* produced during the Edo period, in the same era as the given monk himself, or soon after his passing. In these cases, naturally, the content is more likely to reflect the teaching of the monk accurately, though also to echo various contemporary preoccupations. The clearest example of this is certainly the *Ha-kirishitan* 破吉利支丹 by Suzuki Shōsan 鈴木正三 (1579–1655), an attack against Christians from the standpoint of Zen. This is, of course, a very particular example, but looking closely at other *kana hōgo*, one can see that their teachings, and the ways they are presented, are also largely reflective of their age, and in this way different on several points from what can be seen in medieval-period *kana hōgo*.

2. The Place of *Kanna-zen* in Zen-monk *kana hōgo*

As can be seen, the chronological origins of a given *kana hōgo* are not easy to grasp, and a text attributed to a medieval-period monk may in fact have been written during the Edo period. Even if its material is ultimately authentic, the possibility that such a text has been somehow modified, or recompiled in a way that changes substantially the purpose of the composition's original context, cannot be excluded. For these reasons, especially when studying the beginning of the Edo period, the *kana hōgo* corpus must be treated with caution, and the different contexts of production need to be examined with care in order to

[9] For example, the *Daiō kokushi hōgo* 大応国師法語 was first published during the Edo period, but a manuscript of the text discovered in the Reiun-in 霊雲院 of Tōfuku-ji Temple 東福寺 is thought to have been produced at the end of the medieval period. See Sanae Kensei, "Zenshū kana hōgo-shū no kenkyū (shiryō hen): Reiun-in-bon *Daiō kokushi hōgo* kaidai, honkoku" 禅宗仮名法語集の研究（資料編）: 霊雲院本『大応国師法語』解題・翻刻, *Zenbunka kenkyūjo kiyō* 禅文化研究所紀要 13 (1980), pp. 173–200.

[10] For a study of the several *kana hōgo* attributed to Ikkyū, see Iizuka Hironobu 飯塚大展, "Ikkyū ni giserareru kana hōgo ni tsuite" (1) 一休に擬せられる仮名法語について（一）, *Komazawa daigaku bukkyō bungaku kenkyū* 駒澤大学仏教文学研究 1 (1998), pp. 185–212.

understand the characteristics of each individual text. Yet, for the common reader of the early modern period, all of these texts were seen as authentic teachings by Zen monks, and it was mainly through them that the image of Zen teaching would spread throughout Japanese society. In other words, even if the individual examination of each *kana hōgo* text constitutes a necessary task, consideration strictly of the teachings they contain, regardless of other characteristics—authenticity, period of production, etc.—remains, from a certain perspective, a valid approach. Very roughly speaking, such an approach allows us to take the viewpoint of a reader at the time, and thereby to gain a glimpse of how the teaching of Zen was perceived during the Edo period.

The expression *kanna-zen* 看話禅 (Ch. *kanhua-chan*) describes a method that consists of concentrating on (lit. "looking at", *kan* 看) an offered *watō* 話頭 (Ch. *huatou*)—the latter term being synonymous with *kōan* (Ch. *gong'an*).[11] This approach was finalized by Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163) in the Song period and became the basis of almost all forms of Chan in China, Korea, Vietnam, and Japan. While this is somewhat simplifying things, one can say that, from the end of the 12th century, *kanhua-chan* was no less than the very core of Chan teaching everywhere the school had spread. For this reason, looking at the way *kanna-zen* is explained in Japanese *kana hōgo* is far from being the examination of a minor point of detail: rather it is a way to see how accessible the fundamental basis of Zen teaching was, during this very period when the Zen school, like most Buddhist schools in Japan, began being expounded to social classes previously almost ignored. In a word, we are looking at the core teaching of Zen in the core Buddhist medium of the time.

A Few Examples

Among other important evolutions that radically changed the face of Japanese society, the spectacular progress of printing technology at the beginning of the 17th century played a fundamental role in the tendency, within the world of Japanese Buddhism, to spread the teachings of one's school to a much wider audience. Many books introduced—in various ways and at various levels—the doctrines of the several sects, ranging from sūtra commentaries to beginners' texts, and including, naturally, Zen-monk *kana hōgo*. A complete examination of the place of *kanna-zen* in all *kana hōgo* would exceed the scope of this article, but we will look at a few representative texts.

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[11] In the English-speaking academic world, *huatou* is generally understood to mean something like "head of speech," being most often translated by expressions such as "key phrase," "critical phrase," or "key word." To resolve the question would need a more thorough examination, but here we follow the position of most Japanese specialists, considering the term to be fully synonymous with *gong'an*. The character 頭 should be understood not as "head of" but rather as a particle expressing "the whole," as in the word *mantou* 饅頭, which is of course not the head of a bun, but rather the bun in its totality.

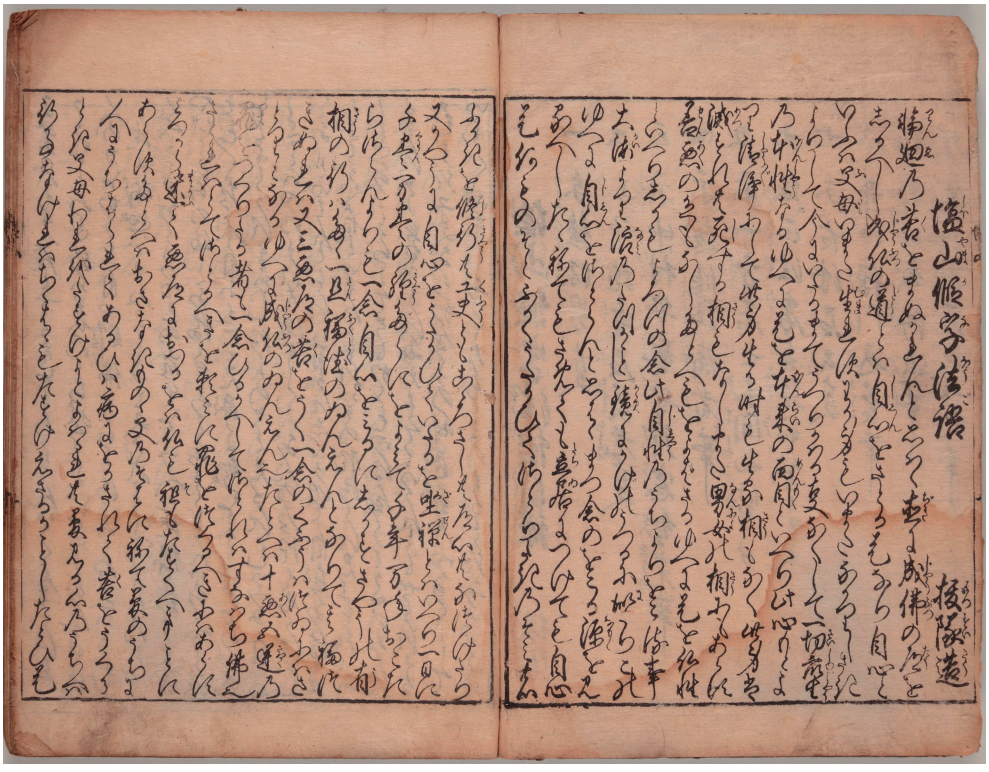

Figure 1. Opening of the *Bassui kana hōgo* 抜隊仮名法語 (National Institute of Japanese Literature). https://doi.org/10.20730/200013619

(a) The *Bassui hōgo*

The *Bassui hōgo* 抜隊法語 (**Figure 1**) begins with the following:

> If you want to escape the suffering of the cycle of birth and death, you must know directly the way to Buddhahood. The way to Buddhahood consists in realizing the [nature of] your own mind. The [nature of] your own mind is unchanged, from the time before your own parents were born, from the time before your body itself even existed, and down to the present day. Because it is thus the fundamental nature of all beings, it is what is called the "original face."
>
> 輪廻の苦を免れんと思はゝ、直に成仏の道を知るべし。成仏の道とは、自心をさとる是なり。自心と云ふは、父母もいまた生まれず、わが身もいまだなかりしさきよりして、今に至るまで移り変ることなくして、一切衆生の本性なる故に、是を本来の面目と云へり。[12]

[12] *Zenmon hōgoshū* 禅門法語集, eds. Yamada Kōdō 山田孝道 et al. (Tokyo: Perikansha, 1996), vol. 1, p. 43.

In other words, for the one who wants to escape from the cycle of rebirth, which is the very purpose of Buddhism, the attainment of the Zen awakening is necessary. To attain this awakening, one has to realize the true nature of one's own mind. That is to say, to understand that this mind is already, and was always, awakened. The reference to the time "before your own parents were born" is a clear reference to the famous *kōan*, "your original face before the birth of your parents" (父母未生以前の本来面目), yet more than just an allusion, the passage is also a clear explanation of it.

Later in the text, one can read:

> If this is the way you wish to be [i.e. awakened], you have to consider this: "A monk asked Zhaozhou, 'What is the meaning of the Patriarch coming from the West?' [Zhaozhou] answered: 'the cypress tree in the front garden.'"
>
> 若しかくの如くならんとき、是を挙て見るべし、僧趙州に問う。如何是祖師西来意。答曰庭前柏樹子。[13]

The one who wishes to be delivered from the cycle of eternal rebirth must focus on a *kōan* until arriving at awakening. Thus, from the reader's point of view, the path to deliverance runs through the practice of the *kōan*, or *kanna-zen*. The *Bassui kana hōgo* was printed in 1643, which makes it one of the earlier Zen-monk *kana hōgo* printed in the Edo period. According to the *Catalog of Zen Texts* (*Zenseki mokuroku* 禅籍目録) edited by Komazawa University,[14] it was published also in 1649, 1727, and at yet another point during the course of the Edo period (year unknown). The number of copies still surviving today allows us to deduce that the text had a good circulation and therefore a large number of readers.

(b) The *Daitō-kokushi kana hōgo*

In 1645, two years after the first publication of the *Bassui hōgo*, the *Daitō-kokushi kana hōgo* 大灯国師仮名法語 (**Figure 2**) was published. Here Daitō kokushi ("National Master Daitō") refers to Shūhō Myōchō 宗峰妙超 (1292–1337), the founder of Daitoku-ji 大徳寺 Temple, but the *Daitō kokushi kana hōgo* also contains a *kana hōgo* of Tettō Gikō 徹翁義亨 (1295–1369). In this text, one can find a letter titled: "Addressed to the Empress of the retired emperor Hagiwara" (*Hagiwara hōō no kisaki ni shimesu* 萩原法皇の后に示す). Hagiwara refers here to the Emperor Hanazono 花園 (1297–1348; r. 1308–1318), who was himself close to Daitō. The letter starts as follows:

> All the brethren engaged in practicing the way of Zen, while they still have a beginner's mind, should practice only the sitting meditation. For this sitting meditation, having first assumed the full lotus position, or the half-lotus position, open your eyes only halfway, and look to the original face, to the time before

[13] Ibid., p. 47.

[14] Now accessible online: https://zenseki.komazawa-u.ac.jp/

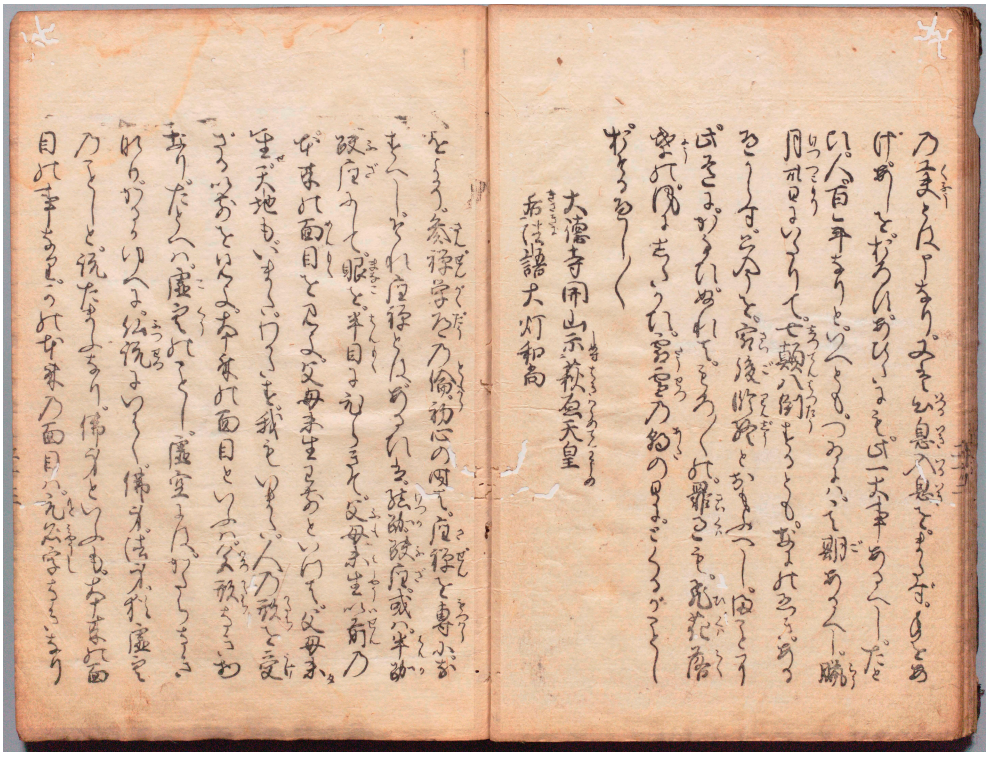

Figure 2. *Daitō kokushi kana hōgo*. Inner title: *Daitokuji no kaizan Daitō kokushi no hōgo* 大徳寺開山大灯国師法語. (Nagoya University, Okaya Bunko). https://doi.org/10.20730/100260708

> your own parents were born. By "the time before your own parents were born" is meant: look to the time before even earth and sky were separated, before even the "I" had received any human form.
>
> 凡そ参禅学道の倫(ともがら)、初心の時は、坐禅を専にすべし。夫れ坐禅とは、或は結跏趺坐、或は半跏趺坐にして、眼を半目に開きて、父母未生以前の本来の面目を看よ。父母未生以前と云ふは、父母未だ生せず、天地も未だ分かれず、我も未だ人の形を受けざる以前を見よ。[15]

Here too, in a text aimed at a lay practitioner, the practice of *kanna-zen* is presented as the way to awakening, even for a beginner. Later in the text one can read:

> This "original face" had at the beginning no appellation. Since long ago it has been called "the original face," or "the master," or "the Buddha nature," or again "the true Buddha." It is just as when someone is born, he has no name, but afterwards acquires various names over time. Likewise the subjects of a thousand and seven hundred *kōan* may be a thousand and seven hundred in number, but they all of them serve to make the same "original face" be seen.

[15] *Zenmon hōgoshū*, vol. 2, p. 512.

> 彼の本来の面目は、元名字なきなり。本来の面目とも、或は主人公とも、或は仏性とも、或は真仏とも、こなたより名けたり。譬えは人生まれたる時、名は無けれども、以後色々の名を付るが如し。一千七百則の公案とて、話頭の数千七百あれども、皆彼の本来の面目を見せしめん為なり。[16]

To see his true self, the self that was always awakened—that is, to reach the Buddhist awakening—one must use the *kōan*, or to come at it from the opposite point of view, all *kōan* have the same goal: allowing the practitioner to see this "original face." If Daitō develops this point at some length it is because, for him, this is the one and only approach, which even a layperson has to follow—as clearly stated in the text.

> Bodhidharma has explained that if you cannot see your nature (*kenshō*), even the recitation of the Buddha's name [for rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitābha] and the reading of sūtras, or indeed your keeping to the precepts—all these acts are in vain. If you cannot see your nature, you must find a friend of virtue [a master], and come to understand the basic principles of [the cycle of] life and death. If you cannot see your nature, even should you read to their end the sūtras of all twelve parts [of the Buddhist canon], you would not be able to escape the cycle of birth and death, and would still endure suffering in the Three Worlds.
>
> 若し見性せずんば、念仏誦経して戒体を持つとも閑事なりと達磨大師説き給うなり。見性せざる人は、善知識に逢ひ奉りて、生死の根本を明むべし。見性せずんば、縦ひ、十二部経を読み得りと雖も、又生死輪廻を免れずして、三界に苦を受くべし。[17]

As we can see, for the *Daitō kokushi kana hōgo*, as was the case for the *Bassui hōgo*, the practice of *kanna-zen* is the one and only path to salvation offered to the practitioner. Any other Buddhist approaches, such as would have been considered easier and for that reason more appropriate for the laypeople, are rejected without any ambiguity.

(c) The *Ikkyū kana hōgo*

The *Bassui hōgo* and Daitō's letter to the empress are two examples of *kana hōgo* that invite—at the very beginning of the text—the practitioner to focus on *kōan*, and by this, they allow us to see clearly the preeminent place of *kanna-zen* in their presentations of Zen teaching. The *Ikkyū kana hōgo*, another widely-read text in the *kana hōgo* corpus,[18] does not start directly with an exhortation to practice on a *kōan*, but instead with an explanation about the necessary motivations for entering upon the way of the Buddha, and about the fundamental structure of the mind, *kokoro* 心.

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[16] Ibid., p. 513.

[17] Ibid., p. 515.

[18] It was published no fewer than nine times in the premodern period, the first of these being in a year unknown during the first half of the 17th century. See *Zenseki mokuroku* 禅籍目録, p. 8 (note 14 above).

> First of all, what I mean by "disposition of the mind" is to be without any negligence of the Law from dawn to dusk. If you but understand that, from antiquity to the present day, all this floating world is like unto a dream, then your mind will no longer stop to linger over anything.
>
> 先ず御こゝろもちと申すは、朝夕仏法に御油断なき事にて候。古へ今にいたり、浮世のあり様、夢のごとくにさへ思召され候へは、なに事も御こゝろのとまる事御座候まじく候。[19]

Waking up from a dream is a common metaphor within Buddhism as a whole, and descriptions of awakening as understanding the vacuity of this world are an explanation that is far from being specific to Zen teachings. Indeed, mentions of sūtras, such as the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Heart Sūtra*, are made in the *Ikkyū kana hōgo* to explain the need for reaching awakening, and the text's first part can be seen as an introduction to Buddhism, rather than to Zen specifically. But when it comes to practice, it is practice on *kōan*, the *kanna-zen*, that is prescribed:

> In your practice, their words are vain who say you can dispense with [the practice of] doubt regarding the old cases and stories [i.e. the *kōan*]. As a consolation for idle hours, I have taken some of [the *kōan*] that monks of the past have collected and roughly rewritten them for you here in *kana* [i.e. Japanese].
>
> 御工夫にも、古則話頭、御不審はなれ候よし仰せられ候、無に候。むかしの御僧たちあつめ給ふなぞへを、あらあらかなにて御なぐさみにしるしまゐらせ候。[20]

Following this a series of *kōan* are explained, the first of them being that of "your original face before the birth of your parents."

As mentioned above, this text is, almost undoubtedly, not from Ikkyū's hand, and an analysis of its doctrinal basis remains yet to be done, but what must be noticed here is the fact that the solution offered to the practitioner is, again, the *kanna-zen*.

We can see, in the three examples above, that in texts presented as being, and—in all likelihood—also in fact received by readers as being, introductions to the teachings of the Zen school, the main (not to say the only) practice presented as valid was that of concentrating on *kōan*, i.e. that of *kanna-zen*. The examples above were chosen because of the clarity with which they expressed this superiority of *kanna-zen*. But such a superiority, or more precisely such an exclusivity, can be found in almost all the Zen-monk *kana hōgo* produced during the first half of the Edo period.

To a modern reader, and perhaps even more so to a Western one, the significance of such evidence may seem trivial, unworthy of any particular attention: what wonder is there, after all, in Zen texts explicating Zen teaching? What else should they preach? But what appears an obvious point is not, in fact, as straightforward as it might seem.

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[19] *Zenmon hōgoshū*, vol. 1, p. 213.

[20] Ibid., p. 219.

3. The Alternatives

Thus, to briefly summarize the situation, when the Zen school started to spread widely throughout Japanese society, around the beginning of the 17th century, most of the texts available to the average reader would have made the claim that the school's teachings, and therefore the path to salvation, were based on a practice using *kōan*, namely *kanna-zen*. To appreciate the uniqueness of this situation, we need to make some comparisons. In premodern times the Chan school spread to Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Here, however, we will not examine the case of Vietnam for lack of competence, nor take up the case of Korea, where Buddhism was, at this time, in far too weak of a position to provide a relevant point of comparison.

(a) In China

Admittedly, in China too, *kanhua-chan* was the doctrinal basis for the practice of the Chan school, which it still is today. This does not mean, however, that it was the only recognized path to salvation. Indeed, after the end of the Song period, the global tendency in Chinese Buddhism was instead to unify the several schools, or at least those schools then still active. The Chan school, notably, came gradually to integrate even the recitation of the name of the Buddha Amitābha into its practices. This inclusion was not universally accepted, and its history remains somewhat confused,[21] yet one can say that, in the end, reciting the name of the Buddha Amitābha to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land became an acceptable alternative to the practice of *kanhua-chan* alone.

The global idea behind this attitude is that all the teachings of the Buddha lead ultimately to the same awakening,[22] and that if some believers were able to obtain awakening through difficult practices like the use of *gong'an*, for those who lacked such capacity an easier practice, even one based on the sūtras—far from an obvious option given Chan teachings—came to be seen at first as tolerable, then as acceptable, and in the end as normal. Therefore, even if the practice of *kanhua-chan* persisted, it was not thought of as granting access to salvation exclusively.

Beyond all this, the status of Chan teachings and their influence within Chinese society decreased substantially after the rise of the neo-Confucianism of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200). Consequently—such institutional setbacks having only further weakened Chan's already less doctrinally demanding character—a contemporary Chinese layperson who undertook to question a Chan monk about the teachings of his school might well be answered any number of ways,

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[21] See Noguchi Zenkei 野口善敬, *Gendai zenshū-shi kenkyū* 元代禅宗史研究 (Kyoto: Zenbunka Kenkyūjo, 2005).

[22] The conceptions of the monk Yongming Yanshou 永明延寿 (904–975) played a fundamental role in this process. See Yanagi Mikiyasu 柳幹康, *Eimei Enju to Sugyōroku* 永明延寿と『宗鏡録』 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 2015).

kanhua-chan being only one of them. The insistence upon practices focused exclusively around *kōan* as the teaching of the Zen school is thus a Japanese peculiarity. Or, to put it more precisely, this presentation to a lay public of *kanna-zen* as the main—and often only—path to obtaining awakening was an approach uniquely characteristic not only of the Japanese school of Zen, but also of that school's ways of interacting with lay society.

(b) Sōtō and Esotericism

The doctrinal contents of *kana hōgo* allow us to see also an important evolution within Japanese Zen itself. It is certainly true that at the time Chan teachings were being introduced to Japan, the practice of *kanna-zen* was common in China, and therefore naturally became the basis of Zen in Japan. However, this does not mean that all the teachings of the Japanese school of Zen were limited to it. To understand why the almost hegemonic place of *kanna-zen* in the *kana hōgo* corpus is a phenomenon worthy of notice, let us briefly review those practices within the various Zen teachings of Japan that were not *kanna-zen*, and how these were represented within *kana hōgo*.

First, there is the case of the Sōtō sect, and more particularly that of Dōgen. As is well-known, soon after the passing of its founder, the Sōtō school turned away from Dōgen in its teachings, such that throughout the first half of the premodern period, up to the "movement for restoring the school's ancient lineage" (*shūtō fukko undō* 宗統復古運動), while Dōgen was respected, in terms of doctrine he was almost ignored. To say that the teachings of the Sōtō and Rinzai sects were the same during the medieval period would be going much too far, but *kanna-zen*'s place at the core of medieval Sōtō teaching is something hard to dispute. We should note, however, that there is a *kana hōgo* attributed to Dōgen, the *Eihei kana hōgo* 永平仮名法語.[23] Its content, being clearly Rinzai-oriented, shows without ambiguity that the text does not come from Dōgen.[24] At the same time, broadly speaking, we can say that for the average reader in the first half of the Edo period, the teachings of Dōgen were almost unknown. Equally unknown were the doctrinal principles of the Sōtō school as we know it today, which holds rather (to simplify things) that sitting meditation is in itself an awakening, and that thus there is no need to obtain, through the practice of *kanna-zen*, awakening as the Rinzai branch understands it.

Recent studies[25] have shown that during the Kamakura period, what is called the Shōichi 聖一 branch was so important that it would not be an exaggeration

[23] *Zenmon hōgoshū*, vol. 2, pp. 377–408.

[24] See Sakurai Hideo 桜井秀雄, "Kyōke ni okeru sezokuka no mondai: Eihei kaizan no na wo kanshita gisho wo megutte" 教化における世俗化の問題: 永平開山の名を冠した偽書をめぐって, *Kyōke kenkyū* 教化研究 14 (1971), pp. 13–18.

[25] See Sueki Fumihiko 末木文美士, "*Chūsei zenseki sōkan* to chūsei zenkenkyū no shomondai" 『中世禅籍叢刊』と中世禅研究の諸問題, in *Chūsei zen e no shinshikaku* 中世禅への新視角, eds. Abe Yasurō 阿部泰郎 et al. (Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 2019), pp. 7–30.

to call it then the mainstream of Japanese Zen. This branch's founder, Enni 円爾 (1202–1280), went to China and received the transmission of the Law from the famous monk Wuzhun Shifan 無準師範 (1178–1249), but his teachings also incorporated a large amount of esoteric Buddhism. The relationship between esoteric Buddhism and Zen is a problem far beyond the frame of the Shōichi branch alone, and it would be impossible to understand early Japanese Zen without taking it in account. However, in the later age during which the Zen school was to spread throughout Japanese society, from the doctrinal point of view, any such esoteric aspect had long been almost completely absent.

From the standpoint adopted in this paper, that of an average reader in the first half of the Edo period, neither the Zen of Dōgen that claimed the inefficacy of *kanna-zen*, nor the hybrid practice of an esoteric-oriented Zen, would have appeared in any *kana hōgo*. There is, however, in the history of Japanese Zen a third alternative, one that could in fact be found in early-modern *kana hōgo*.

(c) Musō Soseki

If the esoteric-oriented Shōichi branch was influential at the beginning of Japanese Zen history, one can say that the subsequent period was marked by what is often called the Five Mountains branch, or *Gozan-ha* 五山派. This appellation itself raises several problems, the fact that it was not, doctrinally speaking, a homogeneous group being only one among many. For our average reader of the Edo-period, the most representative monk was without a doubt Musō Soseki. We have already mentioned here his most famous text, the *Muchū mondōshū*, published several times during the Edo period,[26] within which it is explained how he combined Zen practice, or in other words *kanna-zen*, with the other teachings of Buddhism. The thought of Musō is complex, and we will not try to summarize it here[27]; the point that interests us in this article is his acceptance of other approaches for the attainment of awakening. This appears of course in the *Muchū mondōshū*, but also in *kana hōgo* attributed to him. Among these is the *Nijūsan mondō* 二十三問答,[28] a *kana hōgo* composed of twenty-three dialogues, each of which consists in fact of a single question and its answer. The questions are about issues such as "The necessity of raising the mind towards the Way" (*dōshin okosu beki koto* 道心おこすべき事, dialogue #1), "The origin of good and evil" (*yoshiashi no minamoto no koto* よしあしの源の事, in #4), "The desire for the Pure Land" (*jōdo wo negau koto* 浄土をねかふ事, in #12), but also others like "The absence of mind itself is being a Buddha" (*kokoro no naki wo hotoke ni suru koto* 心のなきを仏にする事, in #21). The text is one whose authenticity should

[26] More than eight times in all, according to the *Zenseki mokuroku*.

[27] We have not yet had the opportunity to read it, but let us note here the recently published work of Molly Valor, *Not Seeing Snow: Musō Soseki and Medieval Japanese Zen*, Brill's Japanese Studies Library, vol. 64 (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

[28] *Zenmon hōgoshū*, vol. 1, pp. 15–40.

be questioned, yet nonetheless, it can be observed here that neither the questions nor the answers presume *kanna-zen* to be the only valid approach. Indeed, the final dialogue bears the superscription "These are not anyone's personal sayings, but are all of them found in the sūtras" (*watakushi no kotoba ni arazu mina kyōmon naru koto* 私のことばにあらす皆経文なる事, in #23). The text of its question is as follows:

> Question: "These various things I hear you say, are they all the teachings of the Buddha? Or have you added in anything personal? Becoming a Buddha requires difficult and painful asceticism, as well as the accumulation of merit—that is how one becomes a Buddha. All this talk about us being Buddhas already, easily and without any raising of the mind, or about there being no Buddha outside the mind—it seems very suspicious. Are these things really in the sūtras?
>
> 問ふて曰く、かやうにさまざま承るは、仏のをしへのまゝにて候や。又私のことをばそへられ候や。仏になるは難行苦行し、功徳をつみかさねてこそ仏とはなるべきに、やすく何の心もおこさず、わが身仏に候、心の外に仏なしなとゝばかりは、不審に覚え候、確かに経文にて候や。[29]

The question seems quite natural, and despite its apparent simplicity it reflects one of the main critiques made of the Zen school by other Buddhist sects: how can Zen pretend to be a path to Buddhist awakening if it does not rely on the teachings of the Buddha? The answer, for the Musō of the *Nijūsan mondō*, is quite clear:

> All that I have said is, entirely and without doubt, the text of the sūtras and the treatises. If you suspect it all of being only one man's personal sayings, I ought to write out the sūtras and treatises for you in the original! I wrote them in *kana* [i.e. Japanese] to soften them, to make them as easy to understand as possible for your ears.
>
> かやうに申すは、悉く慥なり、経論の文どもにて候。私の言かと御疑ひ候はゝ、本の如くに経論の文をかきて参らすべし。いかにも耳ちかく心得やはらぎて仮名にかきなしたるにて候。[30]

The position expressed here is notably different from the one seen in the preceding *kana hōgo* we quoted above. Here, the practice of *kanna-zen* is not explicitly recommended. True, it can be deduced, for example from explanations about the necessity of not seeking the Buddha outside, which is a way of saying that the practitioner himself is already awakened. In addition, to realize that one's own mind is equal to that of the Buddha requires, for the Zen school, the practice of the *kōan*. Yet these are deductions, and not easily made by someone unfamiliar with the teachings of the school, or with how far apart these injunctions are from those of the preceding examples. Moreover, other kinds of Buddhist

[29] Ibid., p. 38.
[30] Ibid., p. 40.

practice are not rejected, with even the recitation of the Buddha's name being considered a perfectly acceptable alternative. Thus, the *Nijūsan mondō*, like other *kana hōgo* attributed to Musō, present an important counterpoint to the other tendency so often encountered. The text prevents us from claiming too categorically that all Zen-monk *kana hōgo* were conveying fundamentally the same message. The *kanna-zen* was, surely enough, widely considered to be the core of Zen teachings, but there remain some nuances, and important ones, that need to be added.

Conclusion

It goes without saying that this article is only an introduction to some of the questions raised by a first reading of what we have called the Zen-monk *kana hōgo*. The importance of *kanna-zen* in the way Zen teachings were spread to lay society has, we hope, been sufficiently demonstrated by the few examples given above. But of course this is not enough for a full understanding of all the different issues such questions involve. As we have noted, a more complete examination of the characteristics of various types of *kana hōgo* remains to be done. Among other tasks, a classification from the point of view of the doctrinal contents of each seems to be an essential step. For now, however, let us simply say a few words about two of the questions implied by the above considerations.

The first question is that of the origin of this situation. If, as we have said, the insistence on *kanna-zen* in books read by common laypeople was something unique to Japan, where did this come from? The answer, we believe, is to be sought in the doctrinal history of the Rinzai branch, and in the way that Japanese Zen came to evolve, particularly at the end of the Muromachi period. In a nutshell, the emergence of the Daitō branch—which claimed that Zen teachings could not tolerate other practices, and that the Zen approach (in concrete terms, *kanna-zen*) must be the only one pursued[31]—ended up modifying progressively yet radically the landscape of the Rinzai branch. Because, moreover, the temples of Daitoku-ji and Myōshin-ji acquired a great influence during the Edo period, the very period that saw this spread of *kana hōgo*, a very large part—though not all—of the Zen monks in Japan were affiliated with the Daitō branch. Someone asking a monk or reading a *kana hōgo* would encounter with a high probability the answer that the only way to practice was that of *kanna-zen*.

The second question raised is that concerning the implications of such a situation. This question is a very difficult one, and we will not try to answer it here, but the fact that for a large part of society the teachings of Zen were considered through the lens of *kanna-zen* had, certainly, many consequences. Though it

[31] See Didier Davin, "Datsu Kamakura Zen?: Junsuizen to Daitō-ha nitsuite no ichi kōsatsu" 脱鎌倉禅？: 純粋禅と大燈派についての一考察, in *Chūsei zen e no shinshikaku*, eds. Abe Yasurō et al. (Rinsen Shoten, 2019), pp. 459-478.

would be naïve to think that thanks to *kana hōgo*, all Japanese people knew about the fundamental principles of the Zen school, it is nonetheless undeniable that, in some milieus, Zen conceptions were in fact received. Understanding all the ways in which they influenced literary theories, aesthetic discourses, etc., remains a task for the future. For a long time, the relationship between "Zen" and "Japanese culture" has been a monolithic and polemical topic, often centering around Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙. The idea that this relationship was an invention of the 20th century, in the context of nationalism, has become now a common one. However, looking more closely at these Edo-period texts should lead us to adopt a different point of view. The wide diffusion that *kanna-zen* achieved through *kana hōgo* implies different types of receptions—likely including also some misunderstandings and unexpected connections—that deserve, we believe, to be examined more carefully.