

# Introduction to the Zen Ox Herding Pictures

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# Brief historical and cultural background of Ox Herding pictures

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- Traditional illustrations of the path of Zen teaching and practice using a symbolic and allegorical depiction of the gradual process of attaining enlightenment
- They have been used for centuries by Zen teachers to illustrate the course of spiritual development in order to encourage practitioners to engage in persistent training
- They have been put to various uses in Buddhist monastic and lay contexts for spiritual training and in secular psychological contexts (especially in the West) to give insight into the spiritual quest.

# Brief historical and cultural background of the Ox Herding pictures

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- Three versions that continue to be used commonly into the modern period

1) Kuo'an Shiyuan of the Linji sect (Chinese; aka Kakuan Shion of the Rinzai Zen sect in Japan)

Most commonly used in Japan and the West.

Each picture is surrounded by a circle.

2) Puming

Most commonly used/adapted in China and Korea.

The ox sequentially changes color.

3) A common Korean version has same sequence as in #1, but the ox changes color

By means of persistent spiritual practice, foster enlightenment (waking up)

- dissolving the illusion of separate self-existence and permanence

- stopping the mental and behavioral habits of inappropriate desire, aversion, and ignorance.



Photographs are from scroll paintings by Shubun, Shokokuji, Kyoto, Japan; and Woodcut prints by Tomikichiro Tokuriki, Japan; plus Paintings at a Korean temple (Yongam) in Yongmiri, Paju City

# The Ox Herding Pictures



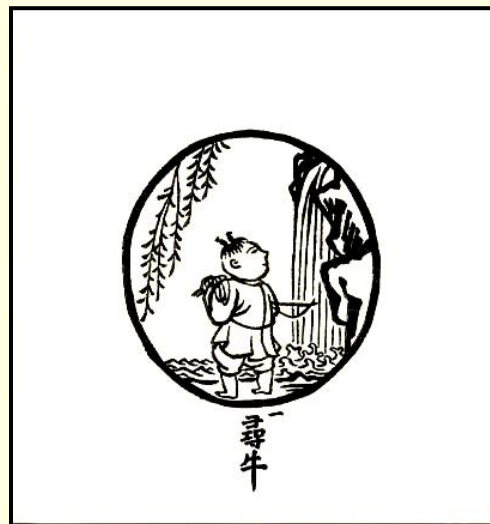
Attributed to monk Shubun, 15<sup>th</sup> century; pictures are at Shokoku-ji temple, Kyoto, Japan



# 1. Searching for the Ox

- Anxious awareness of having lost one's true Self

Tokuriki's version



In style common on murals around exterior of main hall of Korean temples, at Yongam Temple; Anonymous.

## 2. Seeing the Traces



- Finding guidance for training
- Erratic progress



# 3. Finding the Ox

- First realizing one's true nature
- Initial enlightenment (opening up, awake)







# 4. Catching the Ox

- Vexations still distract
- But never letting go of earnest practice



## 5. Herding the Ox (Resting with the Ox)



- Harmonizing with one's true nature
- Intensified practice and insight (e.g. by using paradoxical teaching cases, *koan*)



# 6. Riding the Ox Home



- Securely on way home to true self
- Effortless practice
- Clear unenmeshed awareness of world
- Samadhi (meditative concentration) and precepts well established



# 7. Ox Forgotten, Person Alone



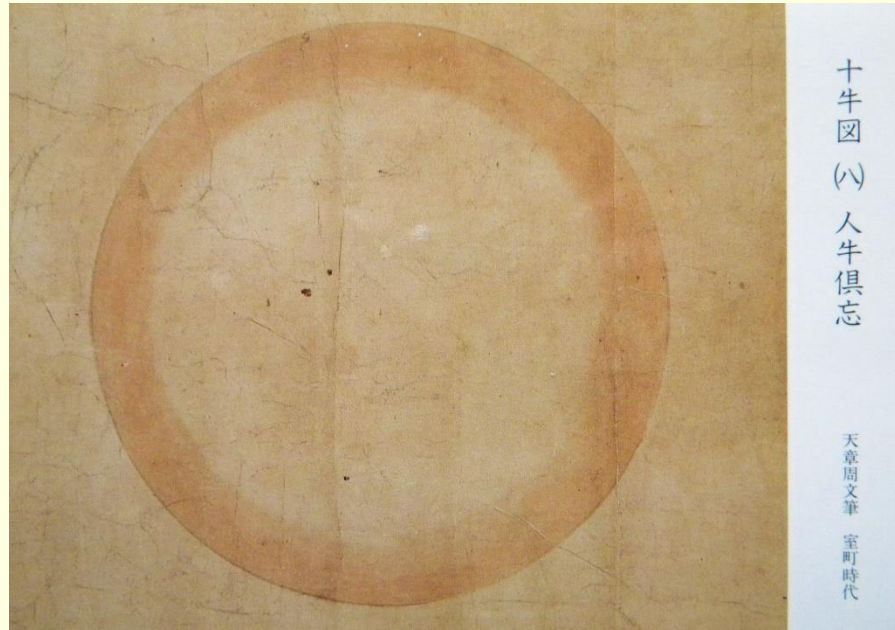
十牛圖 (七) 忘牛存人

天章周文筆 室町時代

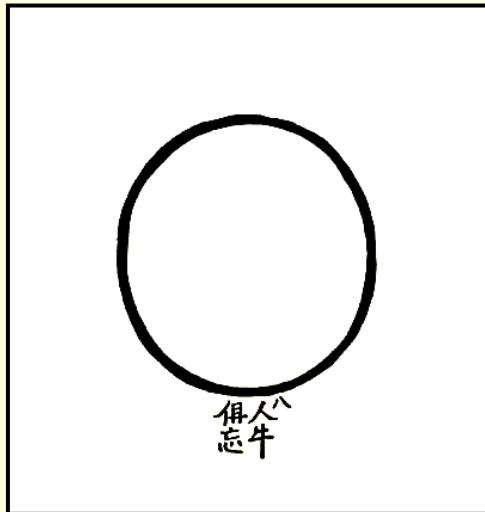
- Returned home
- Attachment and aversion no longer afflict the mind
- Nothing to do; everything as it is



# 8. No Person, No Ox



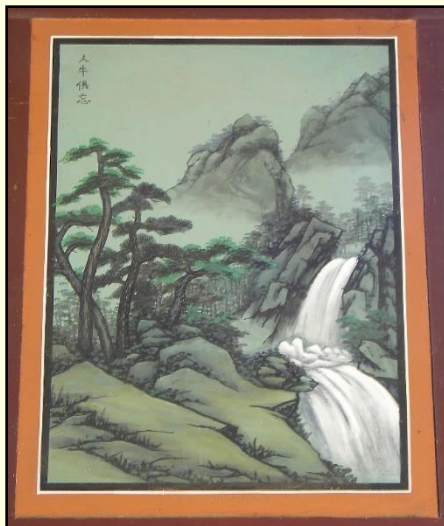
- Oneness with original Buddha-nature
- No self, no nature
- Nondual consciousness



# 9. Returning to the Source



- Manifest world is itself realm of enlightenment
- No attachment
- Everything can be a means to help others toward enlightenment
- Honors conventions but not constrained
- Everything is complete as it is



# 10. Re-entering the City (or Home) with Bliss Bestowing Hands



- The homeless monk serves others
- Bodhisattva ideal



# Sources for further Information

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- For access to various commentaries and images: <https://terebess.hu/english/oxindex.html>
- Summary by Martine Batchelor: <https://tricycle.org/magazine/ten-oxherding-pictures/>
- Wikipedia entry with pictures and verses: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten\\_Bulls](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten_Bulls)
- Canda, E. R. & Gomi, S. (2019). Zen philosophy of spiritual development: Insights about human development and spiritual diversity for social work education. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 38(1), 43-67. DOI: 10.1080/15426432.2018.1520671.
  - This is an academic journal article that explores the history and uses of the Ten Ox Herding Pictures and their implications in social work and other human service professions for understanding and promoting spiritual development. It draws on insights from Buddhist writings and dharma speeches, transpersonal psychology, spiritually sensitive social work, and Buddhist-Christian dialogue.