



The Ox Herder

A Zen Parable Illustrated

Stephanie Wada

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In the Buddhist parable of the oxherder, a herdsman's search for his missing ox is likened to an individual's journey toward enlightenment. Buddhist masters composed this parable, whose origins reach as far back as the literature of ancient India, to guide students of Buddhism in their spiritual journeys. *The Oxherder: A Zen Parable Illustrated* presents the earliest known Japanese handscroll illustrating the parable – the only one with paintings in colour. Unlike many early Japanese handscrolls and books, it is intact, from its preface explaining the basic tenets of Buddhism to its signed inscription dated 1278. Extremely popular among Zen Buddhists in mediaeval Japan, *The Ten Oxherder Songs*, as the parable is best known, divides the herder's journey into ten stages, each illustrated by circularly framed images accompanied by a four-line poem. The paintings, rendered in the graceful traditional manner of Japanese narrative illustration, show the progress of the oxherder (a seeker of truth) toward enlightenment (the ox). Appearing with the ten pictures are the preface and the ten songs that accompany the images, both in the original and in translation, and the final inscription.

Stephanie Wada is Associate Curator at the Mary and Jackson Burke Foundation, one of the most extensive private collections of Japanese art outside of Japan. She has taught courses in Asian art at Temple University, Parsons School of Design, Columbia University, and The City College of New York.