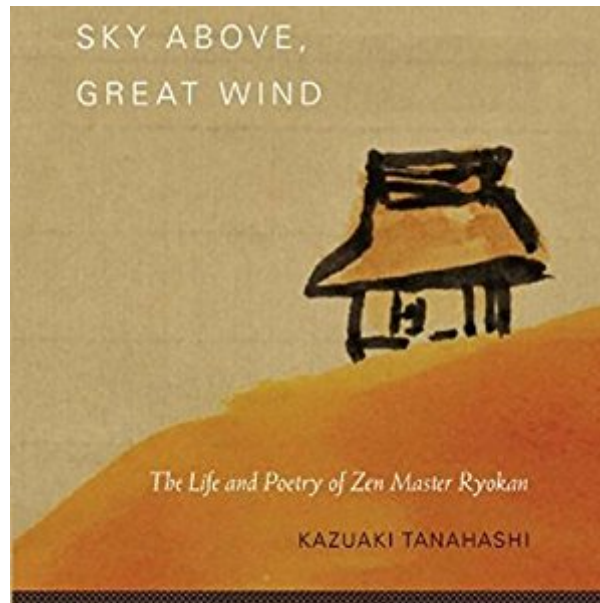




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# **Sky Above, Great Wind: The Life And Poetry Of Zen Master Ryokan**



## Synopsis

Ryokan (1758-1831) is, along with Dogen and Hakuin, one of the three giants of Zen in Japan. But unlike his two renowned colleagues, Ryokan was a societal dropout, living mostly as a hermit and a beggar. He was never head of a monastery or temple. He liked playing with children. He had no dharma heir. Even so, people recognized the depth of his realization, and he was sought out by people of all walks of life for the teaching to be experienced in just being around him. His poetry and art were wildly popular even in his lifetime. He is now regarded as one of the greatest poets of the Edo Period, along with Basho, Buson, and Issa. He was also a master artist-calligrapher with a very distinctive style, due mostly to his unique and irrepressible spirit, but also because he was so poor he didn't usually have materials: His distinctive thin line was due to the fact that he often used twigs rather than the brushes he couldn't afford. He was said to practice his brushwork with his fingers in the air when he didn't have any paper. There are hilarious stories about how people tried to trick him into doing art for them, and about how he frustrated their attempts. As an old man, he fell in love with a young Zen nun who also became his student. His affection for her colors the mature poems of his late period. This collection contains more than 140 of Ryokan's poems, with selections of his art, and of the very funny anecdotes about him.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Kaz Tanahashi, the author and translator of this new book on Ryokan, was my calligraphy instructor and his inclusion of examples and discussion of Ryokan's calligraphy makes the book especially

worthwhile. I already own two of John Steven's translations of Ryokan and was curious to examine this far more extensive book. Before even reading the poems, I studied the calligraphy. The brush stroke reveals the artist, the poet. The lightness, the thinness, the flowing together hint about the style of poetry. It is so different than Korean thick, strong, confident calligraphy and the refined, scholarly, and carefully stylized Chinese lines. Ryokan dances freely on tip toes. Leaving the Zen monastery after completing training and living alone near temples in small huts, he became independent from rules and norms, yet lived his practice in poverty, relishing the simplicity of the moment of each natural event. His poetry reflects this approach to life. He famously was known to entertain children, as he himself was much a child with 'beginner's mind.' A lonely hermit who loved company, he late in life developed a teacher-student romantic relationship with the much younger nun Teishin, and we are glad for that comfort as he died. After the poems, Tanahaski presents a series of anecdotes and then a thorough analysis of Ryokan's various poetic forms--haiku, waka, and kanshi. This fine book gives the reader a deeper impression of the poet and Zen practitioner. It inspires and motivates. Ryokan reminds us to awake from our dream.

I started reading the Kindle sample and just couldn't put it down. Without hesitation, I purchased the full version, and I wasn't disappointed -- not in the least. The account of Ryokan's life is amusing, touching, and extremely well-written -- and I don't often say that. Really, it's rare that I find a book these days that's genuinely well-written, yet I truly felt that this one was. There is so much beauty and humor, such a wonderful capture of the subtleties of Ryokan's personality and his life. I found that there were enough details to paint a great backdrop for his life, yet not so many to get bogged down in dates and locations. Likewise, there is enough of his poetry in the account of his life to give a great grounding for it (truly, the poems are so much better when understanding their context), yet not so many that it holds the story back. After the account of his life, there are a wealth of his poems and anecdotes from his life. While I find that, in the case of translated works, I often prefer to have the originals to see for myself how things originally flowed -- as is the case with "One Hundred Leaves: a new annotated translation of the Hyakunin Isshu" by Frank Watson which shows the the original Japanese, pronunciation, a literal translation, and a poetic translation of each poem. In the case of "Sky Above, Great Wind," I really didn't feel like this volume was lacking in that area. Everything felt as if it were presented enough, given the aims of this work (as I perceive them). No, this isn't an academic book, it's not something technical, citing obscure sources, journals, or having large footnotes with quotations from original texts. It's also not a new-agey fluff piece that drowns in its own vague aspirations. Instead, it's a well-rounded, non-technical, but informative, and enjoyable

book. I can't remember being this pleased with a book in a long time and wouldn't hesitate to recommend it. Yet, if you're in doubt, as is at the time I write this, there is a preview of the book, so feel free to start reading before you buy it, give it a chance -- you may enjoy it as much as I did. :)

This fine translation by Kazuaki Tanahashi includes a succinct biography along with a wide and varied selection of his poetry. The poems are accompanied by Tanahashi's accessible analysis and anecdotes about Ryokan's life. One of the best books to bring the works of this ancient master to the modern world. Highly Recommended.

Some of my favorite Zen poetry (haiku and other forms), by a remarkable, beautiful human being. The book feels like a stream of fresh, pure water, cleaning some of the dirt and grime of everyday life. A true treat, to be enjoyed slowly, one page at a time.

Being a meditator and a member of a Zen group I was interested to read some of the history of this often quoted man. The book seemed little short but for me it captured the feel of the time he was alive and told of his wisdom and failings in equal measure. Reading those poems of his loneliness and love was profoundly moving. I just wish there was more of it.

I loved imagining Ryokan's life, and got a few out loud laughs too! What a neat book translating another language, and culture, and calligraphy into something I could understand and appreciate.

My favorite book of Ryokan's work. In addition to Tanahashi's delightful translations, there is an excellent introduction to Ryokan's life and poetry. A short chapter of anecdotes and a chapter on Ryokan's poetic forms helps the reader to really enjoy the man and the different types of poetry that he wrote.

Sky Above, Great Wind: The Life and Poetry of Zen Master Ryokan introduction and translation by Kazuaki Tanahashi is a real blessing. To have Kazuaki talk about the calligraphy, one Zen artist on another, is most helpful. And his translations have the easy flare of what I've always sensed about Ryokan. He has selected some of the best poems and provides a guide for reading them, never stooping to explain them. The book includes some of the best anecdotes on this renegade Zen monk as well as notes on his form. Anyone interested in Zen writing should add this to their collection. "Who says my poems are poems?" asks Ryokan, and Kazuaki answers him 200 years

later.  
The Kanshi Poems of Taigu Ryokan (Laughing Buddha Series) (English, Chinese and Japanese Edition)

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