Chapter II

IKKYŪ AND HIS TIMES

Ikkyū was born in 1394, two years after the final settlement of the dispute between the Northern and Southern courts, and he died in 1481, shortly after the end of the Ōnin War (1467-1477). He lived during one of Japan’s most turbulent periods that saw disorder in the Eastern provinces, the assassination of the shogun Yoshinori, the various agrarian and other uprisings, the natural disasters of the years 1459-1462, and finally the Ōnin War which reduced nearly all of Kyoto to ashes. The Japanese have traditionally regarded the Muromachi period, during the latter half of which Ikkyū lived, as a lamentable time in their history. The Ashikaga shoguns were never able to establish as strong a regime as the Kamakura bakufu that preceded them. The first half of their era was dogged by disputes about succession to the imperial throne; the second half was plagued by succession disputes within the great warrior clans. The succession disputes within the clans led to the Ōnin War which put an end to the effective power of the Ashikaga.

The Ashikaga bakufu was from the beginning in a weak financial position. Its landholdings were irregular and scattered and the income from them was never sufficient to meet government expenses. To compensate for this deficit, the bakufu began from the time of shogun Yoshimitsu (1358-1408) to rely heavily on taxes derived from the flourishing commercial enterprises of sake brewing and pawnbroking. The taxes collected from these sources were substantial, but they could never provide the solid security that extensive consolidated landholdings would have. Furthermore, the
shōguns began to levy taxes on these commercial concerns in an arbitrary and predatory way. Yoshimasa 義政 (1435-1490) increased the rate of paying "emergency taxes" on breweries and pawn-brokers from several times a year to several times a month. These actions tended to wreak havoc in the commercial community and thus seriously impeded the very business upon which the government depended. Paul Varley in his book on the Ōnin War suggests that one reason why the Ashikaga clan was able to maintain power so long in spite of military and financial weakness was the charismatic power it derived from bringing itself into intimate association with the imperial household, a policy initiated by the politically astute Yoshimitsu.

In contrast to the Kamakura shōguns who remained aloof from the imperial court and avoided its effete influence, the Ashikaga shōguns, especially Yoshimitsu and Yoshimasa, were eager to accept high court appointments and enthusiastically cultivated the arts of the court. They became typical of a kind of aesthetic warrior, well versed in and actively patronizing poetry and the arts. Indeed, Yoshimasa, aesthete and dilettante par excellence, relinquished the warrior role entirely. Hand in hand with these refined tendencies went a taste for extravagance. Both Yoshimitsu and Yoshimasa were renowned for their immoderate building projects. Two of their creations, the Kinkakuji 金閣寺 (Golden Pavilion) and the Ginkakuji 銀閣寺 (Silver Pavilion) built by Yoshimitsu and Yoshimasa respectively, are famous to this day. Their wastefulness strained the already weak financial base of the regime and set an example for ostentatious behavior among their retainers. The retainers, in order to raise the cash to live up to the fashion of the day, mercilessly exploited the peasants in their domains. Thus the age was characterized by gross extravagance on the part of the ruling classes and abject misery among the lower classes.
A contemporary diary of the time, the Hekizan Nichiroku vividly recounts an example of the contrast between rich and poor.

When the sun went down I set out for home, and as I passed through Rokujo I saw an old woman cradling a child in her arms. After calling the child's name over and over, she finally ceased and began to wail. I looked closely and saw that the child was already dead. The woman fell over onto the ground in lamentation and passers-by inquired of her origins.

"I am a homeless wanderer from Kawachi," she replied. "The drought there has lasted three years and the young rice plants no longer sprout. Officials perpetrate excesses and taxes are collected, but not a penny is lent out. If I had not left I would have met my death. Therefore I had no choice but to go to another province to seek food from others and to beg. As it is, I have not been able to provide for this child and now it has come to this."

She began to wail again with great sobs. I took out the spare alms money I had and gave it to her, saying, "Take this money and hire someone to bury the child. I will return now and conduct a service to provide him with a Buddhist name and to pray for his salvation in the next world." The mother was very pleased with my words.

While still in a mood of sorrow over this experience, I came across a group of lords out viewing flowers. They numbered more than a thousand on horse and a myriad others in carriages. One could not cope with a force of that size. They looked down haughtily on pedestrians and railed at the soldiers in front of their horses. They were in a frolicsome mood, stealing flowers, and some had drawn their swords and were singing drinking songs. Others, who had vomited and were unable to walk further, were lying on the road. There were many such incidents occurring. Those who were witness to these happenings shuddered, while others coming upon the scene withdrew in surprise. They feared the powerful.
This entry was made in the year 1460, the same year when 80,000 people died in Kyoto. The years from 1459 to 1462 were plagued by droughts in early spring, deluges bringing pestilence in their wakes in late springs and summers, and typhoons with more flooding in autumns. Almost no measures were taken during this time by the shōgun Yoshimasa to alleviate the distress of the peasants beyond asking the temples to pray for better weather and conduct services for the souls of the dead. Most large temples turned a blind eye to the suffering as well. Meanwhile, Yoshimasa continued his lavish refurbishing of the shōgunal palace Hana no gosho 花の御所, and began building a new palace for his mother.

The peasants, however, were not always willing to submit quietly to such mistreatment. When strain became unbearable, many peasants banded together in uprisings, their most frequent demand being for tokusei 徳政 (Act of Grace), which meant the cancellation of debts. In this demand, they were often joined by samurai of the lower ranks and many townspeople who also suffered at the hands of the usurers. Yoshimasa often appeased these uprisings with the declaration of tokusei, at first because he was interested in having his own debts with the usurers cancelled and later because a complicated system of percentage tokusei had been worked out that actually increased the bakufu's income. These wholesale cancellations resulted in financial chaos among the brokers who, in order to make up for their losses, responded with still higher interest rates and stiffer loan standards. Consequently, tokusei had the unfortunate effect of making the poor still poorer.

Ikkyū wrote a perceptive poem about tokusei:

Robbers never strike poor houses.
One man's wealth is not wealth for the whole country.
I believe calamity has its origin in good fortune.
You lose your soul over 100,000 pieces of copper.
Ikkyū addressed the wealthy brokers who must have felt robbed everytime the mob demanded tokusei and got it. Ikkyū reminded them that the cause of their misfortune was none other than their own opulence; they had too much while others had too little. He warned them about losing their souls out of greed. No doubt few brokers had receptive ears for such admonitions.

Judging from this description of the Muromachi period, the reader might well concur with the traditional opinion that it was a regrettable period. Yet, when one looks to its art and literature, the Muromachi period was anything but regrettable. So many of the artistic masterpieces for which Japan is justly famous—the ink paintings of Sesshū, the stone and sand gardens of Ryoanji, and Daisenin, superb edifices such as those in the Tofuku temple compound—were created during this time. The No and the Kyōgen were outstanding new developments in theater. Innovative linked verse and the Chinese poetry of the Gozan school were important literary contributions of the time. Traditional historians did not ignore these cultural achievements, indeed they seized upon them as the only redeeming feature of the age. However, as the modern Japanese historian Nagahara Keiji has aptly pointed out, these two facets of the period, political degeneracy and brilliant cultural achievements, cannot be regarded as separate entities. They must be recognized as interwoven parts of one unit.

The traditionally pejorative view of the period is based on the Confucian ideal of political order which sees a wise and virtuous ruler at the top inspiring all below to obedient devotion and benevolently directing constructive activity. Ideally, this pattern is to be duplicated in every family throughout the land with the father as ruler. One of the main reasons why the Muromachi period was regarded as a time of utter lawlessness and degeneracy is because it was a time of gekokujō, "those below overthrowing those above," the worst a country could come to. Nagahara opposes the traditional view. He suggests that initiative
for change coming from the people is a good thing; that the Muromachi period was in fact a great "people's age" and hence a period of cultural brilliance. While this may be a slightly exaggerated viewpoint, there is no doubt that disorder and weakness on the part of a military dictatorship, which the bakufu unquestionably was, does make for more individual freedom, since robust military dictatorships tend to be very repressive. And individual freedom appears to be related to advances in the arts.

At any rate, progress was not restricted to the arts. Commercial development, centered in the cities of Kyoto and Sakai, and the beginning of a transition to a money economy must be regarded as positive elements of the time. They resulted in greater variety and wider distribution of goods and provided more opportunities for upward mobility among the lower classes. This economic development had its roots in the overall increase of agricultural production during the period. The peasants, hard pressed by the necessity to meet ever-increasing taxes responded with amazing ingenuity. Double and triple cropping, reservoirs and irrigation systems, fertilizing with nightsoil and ashes, were some of their innovations.

Even the peasant uprisings can be regarded as a positive development. They represented a confidence in the power of independent united action against corrupt authority. Many of them, like the Yamashiro 山城 uprising, were well organized and their results went beyond the cancellation of debts. Some communities achieved a surprising degree of autonomy; the village of Suganoura 蒲の浦, for example, controlled its own affairs for over a century.

As I mentioned earlier, Ikkyū was a monk of the Rinzai sect. Most of his poems deal with Rinzai Zen as a religion or philosophy, but quite a few poems describe the decadence of the Rinzai sect as a religious institution. We shall, therefore, offer a brief sketch of the Rinzai school's religious decline during the Muromachi period.
Rinzai Zen was introduced to Japan during the Kamakura period and rose quickly to great prominence. The Muromachi period was the zenith of the Rinzai sect's wealth, political power and social influence in Japan. It was also the nadir of its ethical purity and philosophical discipline. The old axiom that power and wealth inevitably corrupt seems to be proven true again in this instance.

The great wealth of the Rinzai sect came from several sources. Like all the other well-established sects of Buddhism, it had extensive landholdings which the bakufu had granted. Another source was donations from its followers. Still another, and for the Western reader a somewhat surprising, source of income was interests the sect held in sake brewing and pawnbroking concerns. The precedent, however, for temple involvement in pawnbrokerages had been set in China. The original ideal had been a pawnbrokerage acting as a kind of credit union by using the surplus from offerings of the faithful for helping the needy. Unfortunately, the original motivation was quickly forgotten in China as well as Japan, and profits were sent after more profits and eventually back into the coffers of the temple where they were used for the aggrandizement of the institution. Still another source of income for the Rinzai sect was a share of the lucrative profits from trade with Ming China, a venture in which Rinzai prelates became involved through their contacts with "base" temples in China. We may assume that more monks went to China at this time to engage in shrewd business deals than to keep alive the lines of transmission of Zen.

Wealth and political influence went hand in hand. It appears that the Rinzai sect was intimately involved in the financial affairs of the bakufu. Nagahara remarks, for example, that in 1447 many Zen monks were members of a select group directing bakufu revenue policy. The political power of some individual Zen monks was astounding. Shinzui, a monk of the Shokokuji相国寺, stood out as a monk with overwhelming political influence. He was the personal confidant of the shōgun Yoshimasa and meddled in nearly every affair of the day. The Chronicle of
Önin singles him out as a prime recipient of bribes in the government. As can be imagined, when temple offices meant so much in terms of wealth and power, it was not long before those offices themselves became objects for barter. It appears that by the end of the Muromachi period, temple offices were sold openly. Unscrupulous monks, capitalizing on the increasing interest in Zen at all levels of society, indulged in lucrative practices such as selling "seals of enlightenment" and "secret answers to kōan."

Without a doubt, the worst aspect of the degeneration of the Rinzai sect was this commercialization which transformed Zen into a saleable commodity, the motivation being simple greed and lust for power. Out of greed, the Rinzai temples exploited the peasants on their domains as unmercifully as anyone else and then, as backers in the shadow of usurers, squeezed still more profit from the people. Thus, they must also be held partly responsible for the peasant and tokusei uprisings.

All this was disastrous to the moral fiber of the sect whose ethics, like those of all other Buddhist sects, were based on voluntary poverty and compassion toward all sentient beings. The overt symptoms of this moral degeneration were extravagant debauches within the monasteries, the secret keeping of concubines, and open pederasty. It was under such deplorable conditions that Ikkyū Sōjun lived.

There are three main sources for Ikkyū's biography. The first and, of course, the most reliable is his own writing, particularly his two collections of Chinese poetry, the Kyōunshū and the Jikaishū. The poems in these collections contain information about Ikkyū's life, and many of the poems are accompanied by diary-like descriptions of the circumstances surrounding their composition.

The second source is two biographies written not long after Ikkyū's death, the Ikkyū oshō gyōjitsu (Deeds of Ikkyū) and the
Ikkyū oshō nempu (A Year-to-Year Record of Ikkyū). The former appears to be an abbreviated version of the latter; their information about the same events is virtually identical. They comprise the traditional biography of Ikkyū, that is, the biographical information about him which has been "handed down." Both are written in a cumbersome formal style of kambun which makes for laborious reading. It is impossible to estimate their accuracy although the closeness of their time of composition to Ikkyū himself inclines one to a positive opinion of their accuracy. Also, when it is a case of an event described both by Ikkyū and the Nempu, there are no glaring discrepancies. Errors of omission are a key to the bias of the traditional biography. For example, no mention is made in the Nempu or the Gyōjitsu of Ikkyū going to sake shops and brothels or of his affair with the blind woman Shin, two topics that often appear in his poems. We may assume that the main concern of the compilers of the traditional biography was to transmit for posterity the story of a famous and revered monk and so they emphasized episodes of Ikkyū's life that were conventionally acceptable.

The third source of biographical information is the many "tales of Ikkyū" (Ikkyū banashi, Ikkyū monogatari) that were so energetically created by Tokugawa writers. These popular stories, range from the highly literary and informative to the banal. The writers of these tales generally portray Ikkyū as a sharp-witted and free-spirited rascal, always ready to make fun of empty ceremony and haughty charlatans. Favorite themes for these stories are Ikkyū as a witty child getting the best of all the adults around him, Ikkyū in the brothels, Ikkyū traveling footloose and fancy-free. Most of these tales tell us little about Ikkyū and rather more about the Tokugawa authors themselves, but they should not be entirely ignored. They express the iconoclastic spirit of Ikkyū as it was passed on to succeeding generations. Also, I know of several instances where a tale has been woven around a poem from the Kyōunshō, indicating a high degree of
familiarity with primary material on the part of some of these authors. While the best of these tales may be pure fabrication from the point of view of historical fact, they nevertheless manage to convey the essence of some aspects of Ikkyū's personality. The task, however, of separating the wheat from the chaff in these tales of Ikkyū is not an easy one. I have decided, therefore, for simplicity's sake, to draw only on material from the first two sources, that is, Ikkyū's own writings and the traditional biography.

The traditional biography relates that Ikkyū was born on the first day of the first month of the first year of Ōei (1394). He is said to have been the secret child of the emperor Go Komatsu. Ikkyū's mother, a member of the Fujiwara clan, was favored by the emperor. The jealous empress, however, slandered her by accusing her of sympathizing with the southern court and had her banished to a lower class dwelling in Kyoto where Ikkyū was born. At the age of six, Ikkyū was sent to the Ankokuji temple in Kyoto. When he was thirteen, he began to study the composition of Chinese poems, writing one poem every day. He became so good at it that at the age of fifteen he composed a poem that was widely known and recited. When Ikkyū was sixteen, he was supposedly in the company of some young monks who were avidly arguing the merits of their various family backgrounds. Ikkyū covered his ears and left the hall. He wrote two poems about the episode to show to his master. One of the poems said:

While explaining the Dharma and discussing Zen, they raise up their family names; A shameful word, I listen aghast. In discussion, if you don't know what's really up and down, Arguing about who's better than who just increases ignorance.
We can see from this episode that Ikkyū had from his youth a very low opinion of monks who were fond of status. Another characteristic of Ikkyū's revealed here is a disposition to frank criticism of anything he thought was wrong. At the age of seventeen, he took his first real master, Kenō, with whom he lived and studied for four years until the latter's death. Kenō had no "seal of transmission" or proof of his enlightenment, and so did not give one to Ikkyū, although he is reputed to have said that he had no more to teach him. It is interesting that Kenō had no "seal of transmission" at a time when "seals of transmission" were easily bought and sold. This virtually proves that Kenō was an unorthodox master. The Nempū remarks that Kenō was renowned for his extreme modesty, whence the meaning of his name, "Modest Old Man." When Kenō died, there was not even money for a proper funeral. This was in sharp contrast to the ostentatious prosperity of most Zen monks.

Ikkyū was very grieved by the loss of such a fine master. He went to pray at the Ishiyama temple but, finding no consolation, resolved to drown himself in Lake Biwa. As he was making his way to the lake, however, a servant from his mother's household caught up with him to tell him that his mother was very ill, so he returned to the capital to visit her.

Diverted from committing suicide, Ikkyū set out for the hermitage of the master Kasō Sōdon (d. 1428), who was renowned for his severity. Here again, we find Ikkyū choosing an unusual teacher. Kasō was a master of a line of teaching within the Rinzai sect that came down from the Chinese master Sung-yuan Ch'ung-yo (Matsugen Sōgaku, d. 1209) through Hsü-t'ang Chih-yü (Kidō Chigu, 1184-1269) to the Japanese master Daitō Myōchō (1281-1337), founder of the Daitokuji temple. This school encouraged rigorous discipline and maintained its vigor while other schools languished. It is the
same school to which the famous Tokugawa Zen master Hakuin (1686-1769) claimed himself heir and revivifier hundreds of years later. And since most modern Zen masters trace their lineage to Hakuin, it is really the only remaining school of Rinzai Zen. The Daitokuji itself has a special place in the Rinzai sect for it was the only temple to resist absorption, for some time at least, into the gozanjussatsu temple system (a system of ranking temples that had been borrowed from Sung China) which particularly during the Muromachi period served to bring the interests of temple and state still closer together. Kasō was heir to the teachings of the Daitokuji masters, but he did not reside at Daitokuji. He preferred a smaller temple in Katada, a tough, prosperous mercantile town on the shores of Lake Biwa. There he led his disciples in the ways of strict discipline and pure poverty at variance with the current trends.

The story of Ikkyū's acceptance by Kasō demonstrates the harsh nature of his new master. Ikkyū arrived at Katada and waited outside Kasō's gate for five days while Kasō ignored his presence. Finally, one day, while on his way to a ceremony in the village, he looked at Ikkyū and said to his attendants, "Is that monk still here? Throw some water on his head and chase him away." This was carried out, but when Kasō returned, Ikkyū was still there. So Kasō relented and agreed to take him as a disciple. 30

Kasō's rigorous discipline kept Ikkyū busy day and night. Ikkyū was so poor that he had to go down to the capital from time to time to get spare work making incense sachets in order to get money for food and warm clothes. 31

When he was twenty-five, Ikkyū, upon hearing someone singing a song from the Heike monogatari, sudden grasped a famous koan. At this point, Kasō gave Ikkyū his name who until then had been known as Shūken. 32

At the age of twenty-seven and after ten years of
conscientiously seeking enlightenment, Ikkyū was meditating one night in May in a boat on the lake when he heard a crow call out and was immediately enlightened. He hurried to Kasō to have him witness his enlightenment, but Kasō said, "This is just the enlightenment of an arhat, you are not a real master yet." Ikkyū said, "Then I am happy to be an arhat, I just detest masters." "Now you are a real master," said Kasō. Ikkyū allegedly wrote this poem to commemorate the event:

For ten years, a mind beclouded with egotism,  
Raging and angry, the time is now!  
The crow laughs, I leave the dust and end up an arhat.  
Brilliant sun, in the shadow a jeweled face sings.  

After his enlightenment Ikkyū stayed close to Katada to attend to Kasō's illness. Kasō was afflicted in his later years by paralysis of the lower limbs and had to be carried from place to place. In 1423, Ikkyū accompanied Kasō to an anniversary ceremony at Daitokuji. Everyone at Daitokuji was dressed to suit the pomp and splendor of the occasion except Ikkyū who was wearing his usual black habit and worn-out straw sandals. Kasō turned to him and said, "Why aren't you more dignified?" Ikkyū replied, "I am the only one who makes the crowd colorful." Also around this time, someone came to ask Kasō, "Who will maintain the dharma a hundred years after you?" Kasō said, "Although you say he's crazy, it will beIkkyū." Ikkyū often referred to himself as crazy, in fact, he gave himself the nickname Kyōn "Crazy Cloud," whence the Kyōunshū. This, however, is the only recorded instance of other people calling him crazy. Kasō died when Ikkyū was thirty-five. After the funeral ceremony, Kasō's disciples scattered; Ikkyū returned to Kyoto.

Thus released from filial duties to his master, Ikkyū began a round of traveling that lasted most of his life. This is not to say he was moving every day for he had semi-permanent dwellings at
several places in the Kansai region, but he never settled in one place for any length of time. The traditional record does not give a detailed account of where he went and how long he stayed but mentions only some events. At the age of forty-two, for example, Ikkyū is reported to have been walking the streets of Sakai, the present-day Osaka, with a wooden sword strapped to his side. People stopped and asked him, "Swords are for killing people. What's a sword like that for?" Ikkyū replied, "When this sword is in the sheath, it resembles a real sword, but when I draw it, it is only a piece of wood, no good for killing anything. Nowadays, monks are just like that. They look knowledgeable, but when you draw them out in conversation, you find that they know nothing. They have no knowledge to help a person die, let alone to help him live."  

It must have been during this period, his early and late middle age, that Ikkyū habituated the sake shops and brothels mentioned so often in the Kyōunshū. He did not, however, spend all his time in the city. He had an isolated hermitage in the mountains at Jōō to which he often retreated. One of Ikkyū's poems begins, "In the morning the mountains, in the evening the city," expressing his peripatetic relationship with town and country. He also had a hermitage in the Muromachi section of Kyoto called Katsuroan 螃蠅庵 (Blind Donkey Hermitage). Sometimes he also lived within the precincts of Daitokuji.

He disliked, however, long periods at the Daitokuji because of the presence of a monk named Yōsō Sōi 耀叟宗顯 (1376-1459), another disciple of Kasō's, who was twenty years Ikkyū's senior. Yōsō inherited the headship of Daitokuji because he was Kasō's senior heir. Despite the close relationship they had as fellow disciples of the same master, the two men seemed to have nothing but animosity for each other. For Ikkyū, Yōsō epitomized the false and deceitful monk who sold the dharma for fame and fortune. Ikkyū called Yōsō and his successor Shunbo Sōki 春浦宗熙.
poisonous snakes, robbers and fakes. A long passage in the _Jikaishu_ vividly describes Yōsō dying of leprosy. As far as we know Yōsō did not die of leprosy; this is merely a death Ikkyū wished on him. Reading only Ikkyū's side of the story, we do not know how justified his opinion of Yōsō was. Perhaps Yōsō was simply a worldly monk who thought it natural to have great ambitions for his temple and who regarded Ikkyū as an eccentric puritan.

An incident recorded in the _Nempu_ typifies the enmity between them. The occasion was their master Kasō's thirteenth death anniversary in 1441. Upon the request of temple elders, Ikkyū had taken up residence at Nyoian 随 安 in Daitokuji a week earlier. Yōsō, being head of the temple, had arranged the ceremony and had especially invited certain wealthy merchants from Sakai with the hope of receiving a large donation for the temple. Ikkyū was disgusted by their noisy and obnoxious behavior. Two days later Ikkyū stuck this poem up on the temple wall:

Everyday things put in the cottage,
A wooden ladle and bamboo basket hanging on
the east wall.
I do not even need utensils like that.
I have spent many years traveling all over the
world with straw raincoat and hat.

He left another poem addressed to Yōsō declaring officially that he was leaving the temple.

After dwelling ten days in the temple, my mind
is spinning.
Under my feet the red thread of passion is
very long.
If you come tomorrow and ask for me,
I will be in a fish or sake shop or else a
brothel.

With that Ikkyū gathered up his raincoat and hat and left. It is interesting that the second of these poems is not given in the _Nempu_ although the first one is. It may have been omitted because of its mentioning sake shops and brothels.
Ikkyū's sorrowful indignation about the degeneracy of the Rinzai Zen sect is expressed in an episode concerning the final destruction of his own "seal of enlightenment." Ikkyū, it will be remembered, was enlightened in his twenty-seventh year. At that time Kasō wrote him a seal or document witnessing that fact. The document read "If Rinzai's Zen should fall to the ground, you will go forth into the world and raise it up again. You are my only child. Remember it, think of it." It is recorded that he tried to give it to Ikkyū not long after his enlightenment, but Ikkyū "threw it on the ground, wiped his sleeves [a gesture indicating he would have nothing further to do with it] and left." Kasō then entrusted it to a woman of the Tachibana family, telling her, "His confidence is immeasurable. Wait until he is somewhat humbled and the time is ripe, then give it to him." She, in turn, passed it on to a minister of the imperial court for safekeeping. When Ikkyū was forty-four, he stayed with this minister for a short time. One day he is said to have been feeling low. He described what was troubling him, saying, "Nowadays, the Buddha's Dharma is muddy and confused, there is no one endowed with a clear eye. No one distinguishes between the dragons and the snakes [i.e., superior and inferior people]. True and false are mixed up. When disciples get hold of a piece of paper, they all say, 'Oh, I am the heir to so-and-so's Dharma.' They are all tangled up like rope. Should not someone caution against the errors of these false disciples?" He then ordered the minister to bring him his "piece of paper." He tore it to pieces and burned it.

Ikkyū's relationship with the imperial court was always very close. The emperors Go Komatsu and Hanazono often invited Ikkyū to discuss Zen. In 1448, when Ikkyū was fifty-four, an affair at Daitoku-ji made him resolve to fast to death. This event is described in Chapter IV. Suffice it to say here that it involved slanderous accusations and temple intrigue. Ikkyū fled in a fit
of despair to Mount Jōō and planned to fast to death. An imperial edict was issued to dissuade him from this endeavor. The edict said, "If the revered monk does this, Buddha’s way, the king’s way will perish. How can the master cast us aside like this! How can the master forget his country like this!" This edict clearly shows the high esteem in which the emperor held Ikkyū and the close personal connection between Ikkyū and the court.

In his later years, Ikkyū witnessed the natural disasters and mass starvation of the Chōroku years (1457-1460). Although he himself passed unscathed through these difficult times, several poems he wrote about the famine that indicated how deeply he was moved by it. When the Ōnin war broke out, Ikkyū, now seventy, was at Katsuroan in Kyoto. He left the city to take refuge at the Shūonan of Takigi, a small temple that he had been frequenting for a few years. Not long after his departure from Kyoto, Katsuroan was burned in the military action. Takigi remained quiet for two years but eventually soldiers swept into that area as well. Ikkyū was forced to flee again and he continued to move around for the next few years.

In 1471, when Ikkyū was seventy-seven, we notice the first dated reference to the blind woman Shin. It is not clear whether he had met her before. Except for Ikkyū's poems and one portrait of her and Ikkyū together, almost nothing is known about Shin, but it is fairly certain that she was some kind of attendant to the Shūonan temple. In 1471, the country was still in the midst of disorder; so the years they had together must have been spent running from the war. Information in two of Ikkyū's poems seems to indicate that Shin died before Ikkyū. The reader may turn to the translations of the poems Ikkyū wrote about his love for Shin for a description of their relationship. There is something quite touching and at the same time droll about a man of Ikkyū's age and a Zen monk at that, falling in love.
At the age of eighty-two, Ikkyū was called upon to assume the headship of Daitokuji. The poem he wrote on the day he assumed his post eloquently describes his feelings about receiving this honor:

Daitō's school destroyed his remaining light,
Difficult to explain singing in the heart, one night's eternity.
For fifty years a fellow of straw rain hat and coat
Shameful today, a purple-robed monk.

Having been a renegade for most of his life, Ikkyū must have felt odd taking up such a dignified and lofty position in an institution he had criticized for so many years. But Daitokuji was in great difficulty, its buildings burned to the ground during the war; thus Ikkyū gained not only an eminent position but also an opportunity to be of great help. In the next few years he is supposed to have exhausted himself with helping in the reconstruction, ironically enough by gathering donations.

Even after he was made head, Ikkyū never lived for long periods at Daitokuji. His beloved Shūonan at Takigi was his home during his last years. He finally died there in 1482 at the age of eighty-eight. This is one of his best known departing poems:

South of Mount Sumeru,
Who meets my Zen?
Even if Hsu-t'ang comes,
He's not worth half a penny.

Hsu-t'ang was one of the patriarchs of the line of Rinzai teaching that Ikkyū subscribed to. Ikkyū often signed himself as Hsu-t'ang's seventh generation. He also wrote many poems praising Hsu-t'ang. Zen masters about to die characteristically assumed a stance of utter confidence like a warrior going off to war. Ikkyū's poem is typical of this kind of bravado. A copy of this poem, written in Ikkyū's own bold calligraphy, remains at the Shinjūan in Daitokuji.