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*Dramatic Publishing*

# ZEN JUNIOR HIGH



C O M E D Y   B Y   K I R K   L Y N N

# ZEN JUNIOR HIGH

**Comedy. By Kirk Lynn.**

*Cast: 6m., 4w. (gender flexibility possible) plus extras. Expandable to as many as 25 actors. Zen Junior High is the story of a school that teaches the precepts of Zen Buddhism to young people. A new class of students is leaving home and beginning the journey to the school. Zen Junior High is far away, "across the country, across the mountains and rivers." The trouble is: none of the students knows exactly which mountains or what river marks the path to the school, and speaking to strangers is strictly forbidden. To begin the journey every student must take a vow "not to talk to strangers and not to talk to friends; the only ones to talk to are fellow students of Zen." This strange vow of silence causes a lot of trouble but challenges each student to make a spiritual leap to overcome the difficulty. Bankei and Tsai Chih recognize each other as fellow students not because of anything the other says, but because of their shared silence. The two become friends in the manner of Laurel and Hardy, exasperating each other as much as helping. Rengetsu and Chiyo-ni are sisters. Both of them long to study Zen, but Rengetsu must return home after she sees her younger sister safely to the school. Their lack of communication is as much a product of jealousy and sibling rivalry as the vow of silence. Shih Chieh, on the other hand, has been an only child her whole life. Her eagerness to make friends with a fellow student of Zen makes her gullible to a suspicious character she meets on the train who claims to have the same name and the same destination as Shih Chieh. Is this the mysterious laundry bandit for whom the chief of police is searching? As the students get closer and closer, Master Bo-Dee attempts to prepare the school with the help of his bumbling manservant, Bobo. The students' paths begin to intersect, and the vow of silence is challenged by wild obstacles and overcome with wilder antics, including charades and slapstick. Based on Zen stories and koans, *Zen Junior High* is a classic road story in which the journey is the destination. Simple staging. Approximate running time: 1 hour.*



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# **ZEN JUNIOR HIGH**

By

KIRK LYNN



**Dramatic Publishing**

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*Zen Junior High* received its premiere production at the  
HERE Arts Center in New York City, December 2-5, 2004.

The Drama League Director's Project New Directors/  
New Works Program presents *Zen Junior High*.

Director. . . . . BROOKE BROD  
Set by. . . . . JO WINIARSKI  
Lights by. . . . . BEN KATO  
Costumes by. . . . . MATTHEW HEMESATH  
Props by. . . . . THERESA GONZALEZ  
Music by. . . . . DAVID SOLER  
Stage Manager. . . . . SHERIN BENNET

And the cast was:

ARTHUR ACUNA\*, PUN BANDHU\*, ALEXIS CAMINS\*,  
BINA CHAUHAN\*, SIHO ELLSMORE,  
ANDREW GUILARTE, MAMI KIMURA,  
JACKSON LOO\*, HANSON TSE, EUNICE WONG\*

\*appearing courtesy of Actor's Equity

# ZEN JUNIOR HIGH

A Full-length Play

For 6m., 4w., (gender flexibility possible) plus extras.

Expandable to as many as 25 actors.

## CHARACTERS

BANKEI . . . . a student of Zen, he's big with small clothes

BOBO . . . . . Master Bo-Dee's assistant

MASTER BO-DEE . . . . . principal at Zen Junior High

NYOGEN . . . a criminal, pretending to be a student of Zen

MO-SHAN . . mother of Chiyo-ni and Rengetsu, tough exterior—tender heart

CHIYO-NI . . . a student of Zen, she's bright in dull clothes

SHIH CHIEH . . . a student of Zen, she's insightful—wears glasses

TSAI CHIH . . a student of Zen, he's small with big clothes

RENGETSU . . she wants to be a student of Zen, she shines with longing

*[All of the students are named for different masters of Zen.]*



Also the Chief of Police, and possibly Train Passengers and Students depending on the desired cast size.

## **SETTING**

Three clotheslines run across the stage at different depths.

Painted sheets are hung from them.

Stage left is a sheet with a tree painted on it. Rengetsu stands by the tree, hanging smaller laundry on the line.

Center stage is a sheet with the train station painted on it. Shih Chieh stands there with a huge pile of luggage and books. She keeps checking her watch.

Stage right is a sheet with a school, Zen Junior High, painted on it. There Master Bo-Dee is elegantly preparing five cups of tea.

In the center of the stage floor is a large, round, blue pile of clothing. It's a pond, and it is very deep.

# ZEN JUNIOR HIGH

## Scene 1 Follow a Leader

*(TSAI CHIH enters and walks across the lip of the stage. Over his shoulder he carries a small sack on the end of a pole. TSAI CHIH is whistling. BANKEI enters opposite on a collision course with TSAI CHIH. BANKEI also carries a small sack on the end of a pole. BANKEI seems lost and wobbly, as though he might fall off the earth. BANKEI and TSAI CHIH bump into one another at the center. Then they bow a greeting to one another. There is a strange air of formality. After the bow there is a bit of silence. Then TSAI CHIH reaches into his bag and produces a sign with a flourish, which reads, "I don't talk to strangers." BANKEI applauds and then reaches into his bag and produces a sign with a flourish which reads, "Me neither." TSAI CHIH applauds and then flips his sign over, it reads, "Why not?" BANKEI starts rummaging through his bag. TSAI CHIH merely flips his sign over again, it reads, "Are you afraid?" BANKEI continues rummaging. TSAI CHIH flips his sign over again, it reads, "Are you an outlaw?" BANKEI continues rummaging. TSAI CHIH flips his sign over again, it reads, "Are you afraid of outlaws?" BANKEI continues rummaging. TSAI CHIH flips his sign over again, it reads, "Has talking been outlawed?"*

*BANKEI continues rummaging. TSAI CHIH flips his sign over again, it reads, "I can only speak to other students of Zen." At the same moment BANKEI finally finds what he's been looking for, another sign which reads, "I can only speak to other students of Zen." They both bow again.)*

TSAI CHIH.

How do you do?

BANKEI.

How do you do too?

I'm fine.

TSAI CHIH.

I'm fine too.

Where are you going?

BANKEI.

I'm going to Zen Junior High.

You?

TSAI CHIH.

I'm going where you're going.

Maybe I could follow you?

BANKEI.

'Fraid not.

TSAI CHIH.

But we're both going the same way?

BANKEI.

We may be,  
but I don't know which way it is.

TSAI CHIH.

Then how were you going to get there?

BANKEI.

I was looking for other students  
so I could follow them to the school.

TSAI CHIH.

Well I'm another student.  
You can follow me.

BANKEI.

Do you know the way?

TSAI CHIH.

'Fraid not.

BANKEI.

Then how are we going to get there!

TSAI CHIH.

We'll look for someone who does know the way  
and follow their direction.

*(TSAI CHIH exits and BANKEI follows. RENGETSU,  
who has been hanging out laundry, exits.)*

**Scene 2**  
**Too Foolish Even**

*(From stage left, the CHIEF OF POLICE and BOBO enter.)*

CHIEF OF POLICE.

You know,  
I wasn't always the Chief of Police—  
When I was a child, I used to go to Zen Junior High.

BOBO.

You're going there now.  
It's just past the pond.

CHIEF OF POLICE.

I mean—  
I used to be a student at Zen Junior High.

BOBO.

Oh!  
Master Bo-Dee is always pleased  
when old students return for a visit.

CHIEF OF POLICE.

I'm afraid I'm not here to visit.  
I'm here on official business.  
Tell him, "The Chief of Police wants a word with him."

BOBO.

I'll tell him word for word.

*(MASTER BO-DEE continues making his tea—)*

BOBO.

Master Bo-Dee! Master Bo-Dee!

MASTER BO-DEE.

Bobo.

*(BOBO bows before MASTER BO-DEE in veneration  
but then quickly becomes casual.)*

BOBO.

Eh-hem

“The Chief of Police wants a word with you.”

MASTER BO-DEE.

No.

BOBO.

What?

MASTER BO-DEE.

He wants a word—the word is “no”—I’m busy.

BOBO.

But he’s an old friend?!

MASTER BO-DEE.

Impossible—I’ve never met the Chief of Police.

BOBO.

He just wants a word.

MASTER BO-DEE.

And I said one—go give it to him.

*(BOBO returns to the CHIEF OF POLICE.)*

BOBO.

No.

CHIEF OF POLICE.

What?

BOBO.

The master said, “No.”

CHIEF OF POLICE.

Why?

BOBO.

Because he doesn’t *know* the Chief of Police.

CHIEF OF POLICE.

Ha-ha.

BOBO.

What’s funny?

CHIEF OF POLICE.

Tell him Huang-Po has come to visit!

*(MASTER BO-DEE drops everything in that instant and comes rushing to the CHIEF OF POLICE.)*

MASTER BO-DEE.

Huang Po!—so good to see you again.  
Bobo, why didn't you show Huang-Po in?  
He used to be a student of mine you know.

BOBO.

But he said to say "the Chief of Police."

MASTER BO-DEE.

Do you obey him or your master?

BOBO.

I obeyed you, Master Bo-Dee.  
I told him no—like you said.

MASTER BO-DEE.

Then I was a fool when I said no to a friend  
and he was a fool when he said his job not his name  
and you were a fool for repeating such fools.

CHIEF OF POLICE.

So many fools  
what can we do?

MASTER BO-DEE.

Let's promise to keep our mouths shut!

CHIEF OF POLICE.

Fine. I'll promise that.



BOBO.

By promising—  
you broke the promise!

CHIEF OF POLICE.

By pointing out my mistake  
you made your own!

MASTER BO-DEE.

I say we're too foolish even for silence—  
we'll have to talk until we understand each other.

CHIEF OF POLICE.

That suits my message just fine  
because I came to warn you:  
there's a thief on the loose.

BOBO.

Petty?

CHIEF OF POLICE.

Pretty much.

MASTER BO-DEE.

Is this petty thief dangerous?

CHIEF OF POLICE.

He's not so much dangerous  
as he is dishonorable.

MASTER BO-DEE.

Who's honor did he dis?

CHIEF OF POLICE.

His boss, a maker of banjos in Bao-ji  
hired him for his pluck  
but caught the guy napping his first day on the job  
and instead of staying and taking his licks  
this guy took it on the lamb.

BOBO.

That's not so baaaaa-d.  
I do worse by six-thirty in the morning.

CHIEF OF POLICE.

You'd be surprised how this sort of thing can snowball.  
Out on the road it gets cold  
so the guy steals a stole,  
next thing you know he's robbing a robe,  
sooner or later he'll get tired,  
then I expect he'll swipe a sheet.

BOBO.

So you think he might be undercover?

CHIEF OF POLICE.

Well I'd like you to be on the lookout.

MASTER BO-DEE.

What should we look out for?

*(As the CHIEF OF POLICE describes—NYOGEN comes on wearing blue pants and a red top and steals clothing from MO-SHAN's clothesline.)*

CHIEF OF POLICE.

We have a few descriptions—

one says he's wearing blue pants and a red top

*(NYOGEN puts on red pants and a blue top.)*

but another says he's wearing red pants and a blue top.

*(NYOGEN takes the blue top back off.)*

He's also been seen all in red.

BOBO.

How do you know these are all descriptions of the same  
guy?

CHIEF OF POLICE.

Because they all have one thing in common—  
each is a description of a thief.

MASTER BO-DEE.

I'm sure Bobo and I will be fine.

But I worry about the students on their way here.

CHIEF OF POLICE.

Well, I'll be traveling the roads  
and I'll warn everyone I see.

MASTER BO-DEE.

Huang-Po—I'm proud of you.

CHIEF OF POLICE.

I'm proud to hear you say it.

*(They hug and go their separate ways. BOBO stays with  
MASTER BO-DEE, who goes back to making tea. The*

*CHIEF OF POLICE continues on his way. And NYOGEN slinks off in the background.)*

### **Scene 3**

#### **Mo-Shan's Way**

*(MO-SHAN enters and tugs hard on the clothesline. The line appears to be stuck for a moment or two when suddenly, WHOMP, from stage left comes an entire house, painted on a sheet hanging on the clothesline.)*

MO-SHAN.

Ren!

*(Enter RENGETSU, MO-SHAN's older daughter, who seems a bit angry and impatient. There is a formality between them.)*

RENGETSU.

Yes, Mother?!

MO-SHAN.

Rengetsu—

RENGETSU.

That's my name don't wear it out.

MO-SHAN.

Don't wear out my patience.