The Ten Ox-Herding Pictures

Poems by 12th century Chinese master, Kakuan.
Incessantly you brush aside thick grasses in pursuit;
The waters are wide, the mountains far, and the path leads on without end.
Sapped of strength, exhausted in spirits, knowing no longer where to search,
You only hear the sound of the evening cicadas chirping in the maple trees.
FINDING THE TRACKS

At the waters edge, under the trees - hoofmarks are numerous.
Balmy grasses grow abundantly - can you see them or not?
Even if you go deeper and deeper into the mountains,
How could his nostrils, well compassing the heavens, hide him at all?
CATCHING SIGHT OF THE OX

The bush warbler sings on the branch.
The sun is warm, the breeze gentle, and the willows on the riverbank are green.
There is no place you can escape from him.
That majestic head and horns could never be painted in a picture.
SEIZING THE OX

You have exhausted all your faculties to take hold of him.

Because his spirit is strong and his strength abundant, it is difficult to rid him of his habits.

Sometimes he goes to the top of the high plain.

Other times he resides in clouds and smoke.
TAMING THE OX

Whipping does not depart from the body at any moment.
Lest he follow his own whim, entering the dust and dirt.
If you devotedly tame him, he will be pure and gentle.
Without bridle and chains, he will follow you of his own accord.
RIDING THE OX HOME

You mount the ox and want to make your way slowly home.

A barbarian plays the flute in the red glow of sunset.

Each measure, each tune is filled with ineffable tones.

Among true intimates, what need is there for words?
OX FORGOTTEN, PERSON REMAINING

You have mounted the ox and already reached your home in the mountains.
The ox is gone and the person has nothing more to do.
Though the morning sun has already risen three bamboo lengths, he dreams on.
The whip and the halter, no longer of use, are hung up in the stall.
PERSON AND OX
BOTH FORGOTTEN

Whip, tether, person and ox - all are empty.
The blue sky spreads out far and wide, it cannot be communicated.
On a red-hot oven, how can there be any place for snow?
Having come this far, you understand the intention of the patriarchs.
RETURNING TO THE SOURCE

Having come back to the origin and returned to the source, you see that you have expended efforts in vain.

What could be superior to becoming blind and deaf in this very moment?

Inside the hermitage, you do not see what is in front of the hermitage.

The water flows of itself and the flowers are naturally red.
Shoeless and bare-chested he enters the marketplace;
He is daubed with earth and ashes, and a smile fills his face.
Making no use of the secrets of gods and wizards,
He causes withered trees to bloom.