

(Arts of Asia, September – October, 1986)

*"My play with brush and ink
is not calligraphy nor painting;
yet unknowing people mistakenly think:
this is calligraphy, this is painting."*

Sengai Gibon (1750-1837)

THE APPRECIATION OF ZEN ART

John Stevens

THE EARLIEST reference to Zen brushwork occurs in the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, a text which relates the life and teaching of the illustrious Chinese master Huineng (638-713). Buddhist scenes, composed in accordance to canonical dictates, were to be painted on the walls of the monastery in which Huineng was laboring as a lay monk. At midnight the chief priest sneaked into the hall and brushed a Buddhist verse on the white wall. After viewing the calligraphy the next morning, the abbot dismissed the commissioned artist with these words: "I've decided not to have the walls painted after all. As the *Diamond Sutra* states 'All images everywhere are unreal and false.'" Evidently fearing that his disciples would adhere too closely to the realistic pictures, the abbot thought a stark verse in black ink set against a white wall better suited to awaken the mind.

Thereafter, art was used by Chinese and Japanese Buddhists to reveal the essence, rather than merely the form of things, through the use of bold lines, abbreviated brushwork, and dynamic imagery—a unique genre now known as Zen art.

Although the seeds of Zen painting and calligraphy were sown in China, this art form attained full flower in Japan. Masterpieces of Chinese Ch'an (Zen) art by such monks as Ch'an-yueh, Liang K'ai, Yu Chien, Mu Ch'i, Chi-weng, Yin-t'o-lo and I-shan I-ning were enthusiastically imported

to Japan during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and a number of native artists, for example Kao Sonen and Mokuan Reiun, studied on the mainland. Building on that base, Japanese monks such as Josetsu, Shubun, and somewhat later Sesshu Toyo and Ikkyu Sojun produced splendid examples of classical Zen art; eventually Zenga became one of the most important Japanese art forms, appreciated the world over for its originality and distinctive flavor.

Early Zen in Japan was a religion for cultured aristocrats and powerful lords but by the fifteenth century Zen priests and nuns became actively concerned with the welfare of common folk. The democratization of Zen had a marked effect on painting and calligraphy, and the scope of Zen art was dramatically expanded.

Hakuin and Sengai, the two greatest Zen artists, employed painting and calligraphy as visual sermons (*eseppo*) to teach the hundreds of people, high and low, that gathered around them. Both of the masters drew inspiration from other schools of Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Taoism, folk religion, and scenes from everyday life; their calligraphy too embraced much more than quotes from the Sutras and Patriarchs—nursery rhymes, popular ballads, satirical verse, even bawdy songs from the red-light districts could convey Buddhist truths. Zen art thus became all-inclusive: anything could be the subject of a visual sermon.

Following the example of Hakuin and Sengai it became *de rigueur* for Zen masters to do much of their teaching through the medium of brush and ink; a tradition that continues to the present day. In many ways, Japanese Zen art parallels the Tibetan Buddhist concept of *termas* (hidden treasures).

According to Tibetan legends, the guru Padmasambhava hid thousands of texts all over the country to be discovered later when the time was ripe for their propagation. Whether or not this is literally true, during the persecution of Buddhism in Tibet during the ninth century, a large number of religious texts and articles were in fact hidden in caves, under rocks, inside walls, and other secret places to prevent their destruction, and over the centuries such treasures were gradually recovered. Similarly in Japan during this century, devotees of Zen art have uncovered thousands of magnificent pieces locked away in temple store-rooms, sitting forgotten on shelves in private homes, kept in drawers by indifferent art dealers, or left

uncatalogued in museums. The illustrations in this article are largely comprised of such discoveries. Significantly, these pieces, some unseen for centuries but still bearing a message as fresh and forceful as when first delivered, are reappearing just as it is possible to display them throughout the world by means of modern print technology.

While the primary purpose of Zen painting and calligraphy is to instruct and inspire, it does have a special set of aesthetic principles; indeed, the best Zen art is true, beneficial, and beautiful a combination of deep insight and superior technique. The freshness, directness, and liveliness of Zen painting and calligraphy imbue it with a charm that few devotees of Japanese art can resist.



Figure 1

The aesthetics of Zen art are difficult to categorize. Zen artists follow the method of no-method and, in that sense, Zen painting and calligraphy is anti-art: not created for purely aesthetic effect and beyond the normal categories of beautiful or ugly. As an unadorned "painting of the mind" true Zen art is created in the here and now encounter of the brush, ink, and paper and if it has drips or splashes on it so much the better! Zen painting and calligraphy can also be thought of as folk art.

One of the finest examples of Zen calligraphy ever brushed (Figure 1) is a set of scrolls written by Ryokan (1758-1831) for an illiterate farmer: *i-ro-ha, ichi-ni-san* (a-b-c, one-two-three).

Certain commentators have characterized Zen art as being asymmetrical, simple, monochromatic, and austere; this, however, ignores the fact that there exist perfectly round Zen circles, full-color painted "operas with huge casts", and delightful cartoons with more than a touch of eroticism. Actually, the most important element of Zen art is the degree of *bokki* present in the work. Bokki, "the ki projected into the ink", activates the brushstrokes ("lines of the heart"). By contemplating the clarity, vigor, intensity, extension, suppleness, scale, and sensitivity of the brushstrokes, the artist's presence of mind and level of enlightenment is made palpable. By way of illustration, consider the following examples.

Daruma, the legendary Grand Patriarch of Zen Buddhism, symbolizes penetrating insight, self-reliance, and immediate awakening. The First Patriarch is the favorite subject of

Zen artists, a spiritual self-portrait as we can see in the five illustrations presented here (Figures A, 2, 3, 4, 5); although the subject is the same, the respective treatments are completely different, reflecting the unique Zen style of each individual artist. This particular style of Daruma is known as *hanshō'n-daruma* (half-body Daruma); as an embodiment of the universe Daruma's entire form is too big to capture on paper, and part of him remains hidden from the view of unenlightened worldlings.



Figure A

Temple life and religious ceremony was not for free-spirited Fugai Ekun (1568-1655); he spent most of his days on the road or living in caves where he obtained provisions in exchange for his paintings. Despite his vagabond life, or perhaps because of it, Fugai was a remarkably polished artist. Firmly constructed and finely textured, the brushstrokes of Fugai's Daruma (Figure A) are extremely clear and luminous.

There is a powerful undercurrent of stability, unostentatious refinement, and vitality. The vibrant bokki brings this Daruma to life and one can sense the calm intensity of the Patriarch as he gazes steadily past the viewer, taking in all the wonders that ordinary people, preoccupied with their own affairs, overlook. An interesting feature of Fugai's work is his frequent placement of his seal and signature behind his Darumas and Hoteis, suggesting perhaps that the artist, too, is peering over the shoulder of his creation at the viewer.

It is impossible to convey the overwhelming presence of this monster Daruma (Figure 2) by Hakuin Ekaku (1685-1768). The painting itself is over seven feet in height and nearly five feet in width; mounted on an enormous scroll it covers an entire wall. The sixty-seven year old master marshaled all of his resources to produce this tremendous display of physical strength and spiritual power. The thick brushstrokes are bold, substantial and charged with energy. Note that the Patriarch's eyes are fixed on the viewer; as Hakuin wrote on some of his other Darumas, "I've always got my eyes on you!"



Figure 2

The viewer is literally forced to look within and "wake up". Such was Hakuin-style Zen-demanding, forceful, expansive, and concrete. The inscription reads: "Son of an Indian prince, Dharma-heir of Priest Hannyatara, he is a rough looking fellow, full of wild determination."

At first glance, Sengai Gibon's (1750-1837) happy-go-lucky Daruma (Figure 3) appears to be the exact opposite of Hakuin's intent Patriarch. The kindly old fellow smiles to himself, content to let things come and go as they please. Critics have complained of Sengai's lightheartedness and cartoon-like brushwork, but on closer examination Sengai's Daruma is found to be more mature, older and wiser than the versions of other artists. The soft, lustrous brushstrokes are full of warmth, contentment, and well-being. The accompanying inscription, "Entrust yourself to Daruma. What is life? A drop of dew. When you meet this rascal, give it back without regret", indicates that one must be unattached to all things, even Buddhism. Like all of his best pieces, this painting originates in the realm of pure and uninhibited joy.



Figure 3

Above all, the one factor that distinguishes Zenga from all other forms of religious art is its burnout, indeed irreverence. This Daruma (Figure 4) by Gako (Tengen Chiben 1737-1805), a student of the Hakuin school, resembles that of the master but the inscription contains a *risque* pun: "He peers into aeons with his clear eyed gaze. YES!! Dark willows, bright flowers... Dark willows, bright flowers" was originally a Zen metaphor for Buddha-nature but then it became a euphemism for pleasure quarters. The slang nickname for courtesan was "daruma" because they were like the legless Daruma toy dolls that always sprang up, ready for more, each time they were placed on their backs. In short, Gako tells the viewer that Daruma may as well be encountered in a brothel as in a monastery, and that one should not seek him exclusively in religious edifices.



Figure 4

In keeping with that theme, Gako's Daruma appears rather cagey; wide-eyed and alert, this Daruma is impossible to deceive. However, he seems more tolerant and understanding of human frailties than Hakuin's fierce Patriarchs. Regarding the bokki, the large stroke forming Daruma's robe is brushed decisively without a trace of stagnation and the eyes are bright and fresh.



Figure 5

Nanzan Koryo (1756-1839) was Sengai's "Dharmabrother", related to the same master; similar to Sengai, Nanzan enjoyed mingling with common folk, drinking sake, and brushing Zen art. His mighty Daruma (Figure 5), glaring sharply to the side in order to repel any approaching challenges to his serenity, is more artistically composed than that of Sengai and is much larger in scale bigger than life-size. This masculine, muscular Daruma fills the paper, assuming an assertive, no-nonsense stance and it is hard to believe that such a vigorous Daruma sprang to life from the brush of an eighty-three year old monk. As *aficionados* of Zen art know well, this type of lively brushwork is a bracing stimulant that refreshes and energizes the viewer.

Next to paintings of Daruma, Zen circles (*enso*) are the favorite subjects of Zen artists. In addition to suggesting infinity, Zen circles also represent the moonmind of enlightenment, the wheel of life, emptiness, a mirror, ultra-abbreviated Darumas, and even rice cakes; frequently the accompanying inscription on an enso asks, "What is this?", leaving the answer up to the viewer.

In this enso (Figure 6) Torei Enji (1721-1792) has drawn the universe. The brushstroke forming the circle is perfectly controlled, firm, steady, and somewhat reserved, much like Torei himself. The bokki is calm and clear. Inside the circle, Torei calligraphed Buddha's dramatic declaration at birth: "In heaven and on earth I alone am the Honored One."



Figure 6

The four characters "heaven-above-heaven-below" form a vertical axis to the side; "only-I" is slightly off center and "honored-one" is placed a bit down to the left. The inscription is thus a schematic representation of human life: set between the poles of heaven and earth, unique but not solitary. (Notice also the skilful placement of the first "heaven" character solidly above "above" and then the smooth shift to a cursive "heaven" character that flows down to "down".) Other interpretations of this enso include "All of us share the same nature as Buddha and can aspire to a similar enlightenment" and "The universe is not outside oneself but within!"



Figure 7

On occasion, Zen artists combine Daruma and enso into one image as we see in this piece (Figure 7) by Seiin Onjiku (1767 -1830). Normally with such an inscription: "Who said, 'My heart is like the autumn moon?'" The enso would be placed at the top of the paper; here, however, Seiin has set the moon-mind at the bottom to represent Daruma "wall-gazing" (*mempeki*), illumined by the moonbeams of enlightenment. Further, the inscription reminds us that, despite vast differences in time and place, the minds of the Patriarch, the Chinese poet Han-shan (to whom the verse refers), the Japanese monk who created the painting, and that of the modern viewer are essentially the same. Totally unaffected, Seiin's brushwork is soft and warm and the bokki radiates gentle light.

Next we have a marvelous visual sermon by Hakuin (Figure 8). The treasure boat of popular folklore is piloted by Fukuroruju, the God of Longevity (whose face resembles that of the artist). The boat itself is cleverly formed by the character *kotobuki* (long life) and contains the four symbols of good fortune: (1) lucky raincoat; (2) straw hat (representing the gift of invisibility from thieves and tax collectors); (3) magic mallet (the Far East version of Aladdin's Lamp); and (4)



Figure 8

treasure bag.

The inscription, which dances above the boat, states, "Those who are loyal to their lord and devoted to their elders will be represented with this raincoat, hat, mallet, and bag." The best way to steer through the rapids of life is to board this ship as soon as it is launched one who is sincere in his or her dealings with fellow human beings will naturally be blessed with wealth and good fortune. The composition of the painting is light, bright, and buoyant (notice how high the boat rides on the waves) while the message is deep and universal.



Figure 9

This Zen painting by Taikan Monju (1766-1842) of a puppet show (Figure 9)—a theme first popularized by Hakuin—epitomises the essence of e-seppo. A puppeteer is performing a morality play on the filial piety of a poor Chinese peasant named Kakukyo.

The inscription relates the tale: "There was not enough food to feed both Kakukyo's aged mother and infant son. Thinking to himself, 'I can always make more children, but I only have one mother,' Kakukyo and his wife tearfully decided to bury their child. When Kakukyo began digging a grave, he found a pot of gold hidden in that spot. They were now rich and lived happily ever after." The story concludes with this moral: "All should be thankful that Buddha taught us the great value of parents in this world of sorrow." Many of the faces in the crowd of onlookers are not painted in, suggesting perhaps that the viewer should substitute himself or herself for one of the figures.

A Zen artist is a master puppeteer too, out in the street using scenes from everyday life to delight and edify the curious passer-by. Sometimes the moral is immediately clear, understandable by all in both an amusing and instructive manner as in Hakuin's and Taikan's paintings. Other times the Zen artist is more subtle, illuminating only one corner and leaving the viewer to fill in the rest.

There is nothing subtle about this demon rod (Figure 10) by Shunso Shoji (1751-1839). Demons wielded such dreadful weapons to beat evil doers as they fell into hell and this painting is a forceful reminder of the truth: "As you sow, so shall you reap." The accompanying inscription sums up Buddhist ethics: "Avoid all evil, practice all good." Rather than depicting the horrors of hell in gruesome detail, the Zen artist Shunso presents the case in the simplest possible terms, employing thick brushstrokes to give the rod a three-dimensional quality and extending the final character "practice" in the inscription to emphasize the necessity of acting on one's good intentions.



Figure 10



Figure 11

Buddha nature has a physical as well as a spiritual side to it and therefore Zen artists depict people (and Buddhas) relieving themselves, passing gas, and making love. In this delightful Zenga (Figure 11) by Ono Yuren (died 1775), the artist (portrayed as a pop-eyed frog) excitedly watches a young lovely step into a bath; she evidently notices the intrusion of the Peeping Tom and looks back with some disdain.

The frog reflects to himself, "Although I'm captivated now, eventually the emotion will subside and my mind will return to its source." Passions can be dangerous but they also add spice to life; properly controlled and transformed they can help one attain great awakening. In keeping with the humorous yet profound theme of the painting, the brushstrokes are light, bright, and ultimately revealing.

Now a drier subject (Figure 12) by Reigen Eto (1721-1785). The bleached skulls of warriors and pilgrims who died on the road were a common sight in old Japan, and Zen artists loved the subject. Reigen's skull painting is a *memento mori*: "Turn to dust, ditto, ditto." In spite of the alarming message, repeated three times to drive it home, the painting is not frightening. The scene catches the rightness of change, and the foolishness of being obsessed with the pursuit of fame and wealth; all individual forms naturally dissolve some day and one should not be afraid of or attempt to avoid death. Reigen's interesting brushwork is



usually quite faint: suggestive rather than assertive. It also hints at hidden mysteries. What is the strange shape in the painting's foreground? Could it be a Tantric *vajra*, with the skull forming the fourth orb?

Figure 12



Figure 13

Although more research is required prior to unequivocal attribution of this landscape painting (Figure 13) to the renowned swordsman-samurai artist Miyamoto Musashi (1584-1645), the scene, still on the surface, bristles with an inner intensity associated with that master.

The cliff jutting out at the left and the tree on top extend up and out forcefully, unfolding much like a perfectly controlled sword cut and the *ma-ai* (the combative distance) between the cliff and the facing islands is perfectly balanced. Unlike a *nanga* landscape painting in which a viewer is drawn into the work, Zen landscapes project out from the paper, enveloping or even, as in Musashi's work, *penetrating* the viewer.



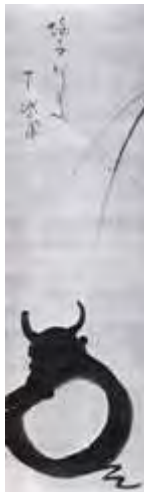
Figure 14

Contrast Musashi's intense, razor sharp brushwork with the soft lines of Nanzan's charming little sketch (Figure 14). Almost child-like in its simplicity, this is pure, unadulterated Zen art, created spontaneously without artifice or strain. The inscription describes the joys of contemplating nature: "The sound of a bubbling stream at night, the mountain colors at sunset."

Bamboo is the ultimate Zen plant: flexible yet strong and empty on the inside! This painting (Figure 15) by Dokuan with an inscription by Daijun (both circa 1800) is typical of Daitokuji Zen art. With its long tradition of imperial patronage and as head temple of the tea cult, cultured Daitokuji priests turned out mostly classical Zen art as we see here. Dokuan was obviously a professionally trained painter and Daijun, 407th abbot of Daitokuji, added a verse in impeccable script: "Each leaf [rustles] creating fresh breezes." Common sense indicates that the wind rustles the leaves but from the Zen standpoint, it is the leaves that rustle the wind—one cannot occur without the other. Bamboo remains cool in the hottest weather, "no-mindedly" accepting the extremes of heat and cold, as it extends steadily upward.



Figure 15



Kogan Gengei (1748-1821) here portrays the favorite Zen animal (Figure 16). A bull fears nothing, and when he sits, he really sits; when he moves, he really moves—the ideal behavior of a Zen adept. A bull additionally stands for the mind; uncontrollably wild at first but capable of being tamed, harnessed, and eventually set free to roam contentedly wherever it pleases. Kogan's solidly brushed bull-enso is set off against delicate willow branches, a harmonization of brute force and gentle non-resistance.

Figure 16

When Mount Fuji is painted by professional artists, the peak is dressed in gorgeous colors; a Zen Mount Fuji, on the other hand, is austere and created with a few strokes. In this Zenga (Figure 17) by Yamaoka Tesshu (1836-1888), the greatest Zen artist of the Meiji period (1868-1912), a handful of brushstrokes create a lush landscape. The old couple gaze fondly on the lovely scene as the grandfather says to his faithful wife, "You will live to be one hundred and I'll live to ninety-nine; the peak of Mount Fuji and the pines of Miho [are they not beautiful?]" The splendid lines and remarkable bokki bring the scene to life; a viewer can actually sense the peace and love present in the work.

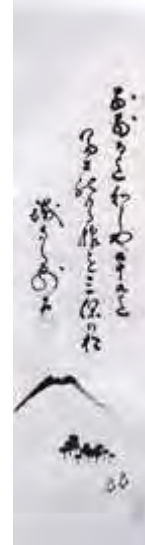
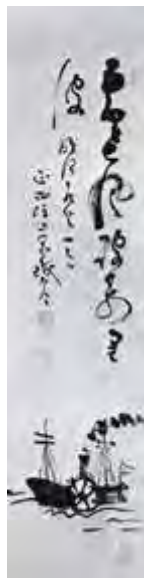


Figure 17



As mentioned above, anything can be the subject of Zen art. Tesshu's modern steamship (Figure 18) "Rides the great winds, shattering the waves of ten thousand leagues." The clock cannot be turned back and one should not resist change. Developments in technology, too, must be utilized to expand one's horizons. The free spirited calligraphy flows up and down the paper; notice the extraordinary bokki in the lines forming the waves and the ascending smoke.

Figure 18

The trademark of Tesshu's colorful friend Nantembo (Toju Zenchu 1835-1925), the last of the old-time Zen artists, was an uncompromising Zen staff (Figure 19). "If you come forward speaking nonsense, you'll get a good taste of my staff; if you try to fool me by remaining silent, you'll get a whack!" was Nantembo's motto. This dynamic staff, painted in his fifties, explodes on the paper, hanging over the heads of the indolent. The incredible single stroke of the staff is, simultaneously, abstract and concrete, the key to the creation of fine Zen art.



Figure 19



Figure 20

Turning now to the realm of Zen calligraphy—though actually there is no clear distinction drawn between painting and calligraphy—we have a lively *ichi* (Figure 20) brushed by Ungo Kiyo (1582-1659). Does it represent the koan, "All things return to the One. Where does the One return to?" Or to the "One Truth"? Maybe it refers to the "One Vehicle" of Mahayana Buddhism. Or perhaps the "Oneness" of human beings and Buddha.

This single brushstroke resembles a decisive cut of a sword; it begins with a burst of pure spirit and then tails off into infinity. Even after the brush is lifted from the paper there must remain a steady stream of concentration; in both the martial arts and calligraphy, this state is called *zanshin* (lingering mind). The bokki is steady and direct, indeed uncomplicated—Ungo always made his brushwork easy for anyone to read.

Condition is an important factor in collecting Zen art, but collectors should not limit their selections to mint pieces which are, at any rate, difficult to find since so much Zen art was given to children, peasants, and monks and nuns who could not afford to have them properly mounted and stored.



Figure 21

This "flower" (Figure 21) brushed no doubt for some child by the homeless monk Goryo Dojin (1768-1819) was written on the cheapest paper with borrowed brush and ink but it is, to my mind, infinitely superior to anything I have seen by contemporary calligraphers who only work with the finest materials.

Even though the paper is disintegrating and torn at the bottom, remounting would dull the bokki and adversely affect the piece's unadorned charm. In certain, cases, Zen art should be accepted "as is" without tampering or trying to restore it.

Here is a very rare piece (Figure 22) by a woman Zen master, Ryonen (1646-1711). Ryonen was so lovely that no abbot would accept her as a pupil lest she tempt the other monks; she therefore disfigured her face with a red-hot iron. The brushwork exhibited in this piece is confident and cool; Ryonen was obviously a determined woman.

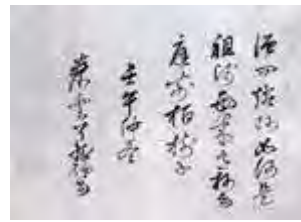


Figure 22

Technically superior, the spacing of both the lines and the characters is excellent; the balance, too, is outstanding and the bokki vivid. The work reproduces a famous koan: "What is the meaning of the First Patriarch's coming to the West?" The master replied, 'The oak tree in the garden.'" That is, enlightenment is not confined to the distant past; it is right in front of your face, if you only look. Also, Daruma's "coming" was not an isolated event hundreds of years ago; he is always "coming to the West" in the here and now of Zen training.

"One-word Barriers" (*ichijikan*) are unique to Zen art. A large character is brushed to catch the viewer's attention; typically an accompanying inscription is added to reinforce the image. Obaku Zen artists specialized in *ichijikan*, usually in a horizontal format as we see in this piece (Figure 23) by Tetsugyu Doki (1628-1700).



Figure 23

It was composed for a certain Mr Mizumura so Tetsugyu set off the character *mizu* (water) to the side and then in the inscription expresses delight at his host's generosity and the man's efforts to be a good citizen and hard worker. Such lively, well-balanced brushwork is typical of Obaku artists. (Incidentally, Zen artists often tried to include the character for water in their pieces to serve farmers and merchants as a kind of good luck charm; to bring rain to the crops and prevent fire in the household, for instance.)

This massive ichijikan (Figure 24) by Gan'o (died 1830) is literally a "Barrier" with this inscription: "The pathless path." Leave off the agitated ruminations of the mind, press yourself to the limit (another meaning of *kan*), and attack the barrier head on. Since Zen is a pathless path, it can be approached from any direction; all that counts is effort. The artist's tiny signature suggests an individual facing immense obstacles; nonetheless, the powerful bokki inspires the viewer to take the challenge. An interesting feature is the seal in the upper corner reading *bhrum* in Siddham script. *Bhrum* is the seed-syllable for all the esoteric Buddhist deities and Gan'o's placement of that mystic sign on his ichijikan indicates the unity of Zen and Tantric approaches.



Figure 24



Figure 25

Closely related to ichijikan are *ichigyō-mono* (one-line Zen phrases). Jiun Sonja's (1718-1804) *ichigyō-mono* (Figure 25) is direct and to the point: "One who is content is always wealthy". Jiun replaced animal hair brushes with ones made of bamboo or reed and his calligraphy appears at first to be rough and undistinguished. Upon further examination, however, the bokki is found to reflect the high-minded purity of the artist and the distinctive artlessness of perfectly natural brushstrokes. The calligraphy still appears as fresh as the day it was put on paper, seemingly self-formed by some elemental force. The first and last characters extend out positively, creating a subtle tension that links the middle characters.

The calligraphy in Nantembo's one-liner (Figure 26) is a bit gruff, similar to the old fellow himself; even the elongated signature seems to form a staff ever ready to strike! This ichigyō-mono is more puzzling than that of Jiun: "A fierce tiger roars, the moon rises above the mountains." The animal cry of the tiger arises from the raging world of the senses while the inanimate moon silently shines high above us the key is to settle oneself between the extremes of matter and spirit, lust and apathy, light and dark, positive and negative.



Figure 26



Figure 27

It is a common misconception that Zen calligraphy is wildly illegible; in fact, as noted above with Ungo, many Zen calligraphers deliberately make their work easy to read. This one-liner (Figure 27) by Banryu (1848-1935) clearly states a well-known Confucian maxim: "A peach tree does not speak yet a path appears beneath it" (that is, a virtuous person never boasts about himself but nonetheless attracts admirers). Banryu succeeded Nantembo as the abbot of Zuiganji in Matsushima. When he arrived at the temple to assume his new position, he was so shabbily dressed that the gatekeeper mistook him for a beggar and sent him to the kitchen for food. He was a late bloomer and did not start painting until his eighties. This piece, brushed in the last year of Banryu's life, is amazingly sure and steady for an eighty-eight year old man. Warm and bright, the artist's contentment and peace of mind shines through the work.

It is well understood in the Orient that contemplation of art fosters awakening no less than sitting in meditation, studying a sacred text, or listening to a sermon. Zen masters applied their insight to painting and calligraphy to inspire, instruct, and delight all those who choose to look.

