

The Art of Zen Buddhism

Introduction

The basic principles of Zen Buddhism¹⁴⁵ were expressed long ago in the following terse formula:

A special transmission outside the scriptures;
No dependence on words and letters;
Direct pointing to the self of man;
Seeing into one's nature and the attainment of Buddhahood.
(Tr. by *D. T. Suzuki*)

These lines define the difference between Zen and other Buddhist schools: first of all, negatively, a disdain, generally speaking, for all dogmatism and metaphysical speculation and for all teaching traditions and faith in the letter of scriptures; second, positively, a direct insight into the nature of the world and one's own self. This was to be obtained without the mediation of sacred scriptures, interpretations, rites, magic cultic acts (as in esoteric Buddhism) and without the invocation of compassionate helpmates (like Amitābha). Rather, this insight was to be obtained exclusively through one's own efforts by following the path of meditation (*dhyāna*; *ch'an[na]*; *zen[na]*) and growing personal maturity, and was to be realized in the form of a direct, concrete experience. This experience, gained either suddenly or by a gradual process of spiritual growth, leads to the final goal of enlightenment (*satori*), to the achievement of Buddhahood, i.e., to an entirely unreflected insight which stirs one's entire personality to its greatest depths, liberating, enlightening and transforming it. Man realizes that his true essence is basically nothing else but the "Buddha-nature"; that all the disparate things of the world of phenomena, even the lowest among them, are basically not different from (though by no means identical with) the one and the same Absolute or "Void."

Satori is, therefore, "pure experience,"¹⁴⁶ a most direct insight into the basically rather simple essence of things, a direct comprehension of things as they are. This essence cannot be expressed in words. It can only be hinted at, frequently in a form which scorns all logic and "reason," and is, by necessity, paradoxical. But it is precisely from these bonds of logical-discursive thought that man should free

himself by taking the liberating leap into the realm of the Totally Different which is, however, not something with the qualities of a "beyond" and basically not something "other" or special but, rather, is simple reality itself. This is what we encounter and what we are expected to view with penetrating yet open eyes which focus on the essence of things. It is repeated time and again that Zen instruction hides nothing and keeps nothing secret, that it contains no "mystic" elements. The essence of things is right before our eyes. We only have to learn how to perceive it in its elementary simplicity.

These views and practices have found their expression in innumerable statements and acts of the great Chinese and Japanese Zen masters down through the centuries, but not in well-thought-out sermons and dogmatic writings, firmly established opinions and theories, vigorous disputations and intellectual edifices reaching into transcendent realms. Rather, very simple everyday events, very ordinary things, entirely spontaneous utterances and acts in our world were believed to provide the impetus to open one's spiritual eye and make one aware of one's essential nature and the way to realize one's Buddha nature.¹⁴⁷ As a matter of fact, if one is unburdened and unbiased by preconceived notions and mental associations, everyday events are better suited than anything else to provide direct access to truth. The aim of the enlightened vision is not to view something entirely new but rather to take a new look at something familiar and always at hand.

Acolytes are prepared for this vision not by the study of Sūtras and commentaries or by dogmatic texts, nor are they prepared through systematic instruction or cult traditions. Instead, sudden impulses, frequently quite strange and apparently arbitrary, are given to them by profoundly experienced masters, intended to do nothing more than initiate their own independent process of enlightenment. Hence, the personal contact, the spark between master and disciple, gives the decisive impulse in bringing about the enlightening experience. From these contacts, we witness occasionally in Zen the evolution of something akin to a tradition. This is not a tradition of instruction in sacred scriptures, but rather (as expressed in the opening quote) that "special transmission" referred to by the Chinese term signifying an orally transmitted story, a biographical, anecdotal or legendary report, a transmission from person to person or communication in general, but also and primarily the "transmission by mind to mind," i.e., without the use of intermediary devices and frequently just in the form of a silent mutual understanding.

According to one story, which points to the very beginnings of Zen, Śākyamuni did not provide an answer to a very profound question from his disciples but merely lifted a flower in silence. Only his disciple Kāśyapa understood and indicated to the master his understanding by nothing more than a smile. This sort of "special transmission" is usually illustrated by such stories or occasionally also by apparently scurrilous or grotesque anecdotes about the meetings and conversations between old Zen patriarchs and their disciples, through which the latter, still trapped in darkness and confusion, have been led to a clear understanding, a liberating insight. These stories, sayings, enigmatic questions and surprising and frequently paradoxical answers and all-inclusive non-answers have come to serve many generations of Zen disciples. They are known as *kung-an* (*kô-an*; "Meditation Problems"); and their apparently nonsensical and contradictory nature stimulated

those searching minds, which had already been prepared for the final leap, allowing them to suddenly solve all the questions puzzling them.

Once a monk had seen through the world and its illusions (including the illusion of all religious teachings, no matter how beautiful and profound), he would be beyond all determinations and contradictions, including that of life and death. "On the edge between life and death you possess the great freedom." In the final analysis, it was again to simple, concrete reality that his attention was redirected, but with a new vision resulting from a spiritual transformation which was more intensive and only now truly valid. "A master said: Before one studies Zen, mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers. But when one has gained insight into the truth of Zen through instruction received from a master, then mountains are no longer mountains and rivers no longer rivers. But still later, once one has truly reached the realm of quietude, then mountains are again mountains and rivers again rivers."¹⁴⁸ In its tremendous elemental power, its totally personal, self-realized directness and independence of enlightenment, and in the cool, ascetic simplicity of its intellectual style, Zen is very close to the primordial forms of Buddhism that preceded the formation of the many-faceted scholastic-metaphysical system and of those traditions of doctrines and cults and mythologizations which are characteristic of Mahâyâna. However, in its philosophical view, which is based on the idea of the non-duality of samsâra and nirvâna, of the "void" and all the consequences linked to these ideas, Zen is genuinely a part of the Mahâyâna tradition.

Zen is nevertheless distinguished clearly and unmistakably from all the other schools within this comprehensive "vehicle" which offers room for the most varied views. It should not, therefore, come as a surprise that Zen art, too, is entirely different. Hence we are not only justified but even obligated to view Zen art as a phenomenon in its own right. Even though it reached its full maturity at a relatively late time, during the Sung and Kamakura/Muromachi periods, Zen art was by no means merely the lineal successor to "classic" Buddhist art. Rather, Zen art, full of vigor and new creative genius and filled with life as was Zen itself, gradually assumed a leading role, while the older art gradually lost its vigor and finally settled at the level of a merely epigonic art.

Nature and Function of Zen Works of Art

It would be possible to demonstrate the special character of Zen art merely by presenting it as the exact opposite of classic sacred Buddhist art as long as we remain conscious of the fact that both variants of Buddhist art, all the differences between their individual paths notwithstanding, arise from a common ground and pursue the same religious goal. Their opposition is purely dialectic and is ultimately cancelled, just as all contradictions and dualisms are cancelled in Buddhist thought. The path taken and the means employed by Zen art are, however, of an entirely new kind because they arise from a religious "method" different in principle and, consequently, also from an equally different view of art.

Above all, there prevails within Zen a profound skepticism about any possibility of arriving at a pictorial representation of transcendence and about any attempt to capture with human means the Ultimate in a form "approaching us from the other side" and to express it in its very own language. Zen is skeptical about all affirmative statements in general, and about the sensual power of religious art and

its beauty of form, color, and particular ornaments. It is also skeptical about all richly developed cult forms which have been intensified and beautified through art. Even symbolic signs are seen as hiding ultimate reality rather than revealing it, and as lacking directness. Zen art takes as its point of departure the "now," the given "facts" and ordinary things; it makes them transparent and shows its essential non-duality with the Absolute.

Zen art seeks to capture ultimate reality with the same passion as earlier Buddhist art. Zen, too, has as its liberating goal the attainment of "Buddhahood." Works of art proclaim this goal in their particular ways, but in Zen this happens in an intuitive vision which penetrates to the heart of a given reality, be it object, man, or landscape, and realizes essential non-difference of all these things from the Buddha-nature. Such vision leads therefore to liberation, to enlightenment. A new kind of symbol comes into being which is very close to that found in Goethe's view: The simple phenomenon as such reveals ultimate meaning, and, if viewed properly, "the particular contains also the general within itself." Thus the simple phenomenon becomes a "symbolic instance" whose artistic representation reveals in the particular object something general, without, however, "thinking of the general or without pointing to it." Yet "in the image the idea remains always infinitely effective and unattainable and would remain unexpressible even if expressed" in any available language. Finally, every individual object in our world is a symbol because "it is the thing itself without being the thing--an open secret."¹⁴⁹

The symbol in classic Buddhist art is, however, not an overt but a hidden, coded secret. It should, in Goethe's terminology, rather be called an allegory, because it presupposes a knowledge of the special meaning imposed on the sign by tradition. It is not intelligible by and in itself. By contrast, in Zen art we are not dealing with symbols "of" something which are determined in detail and are exactly formulated.¹⁵⁰ Rather, every picture, regardless of its content and form, is as such a symbol for the totality of being and for the indivisible realization of truth. However, what most profoundly distinguishes Zen art from Goethe's notion is its radical-ascetic inner tendency toward the non-image; its orientation toward an ultimate meaning which can no longer be captured and shown in any individual phenomenon or "image." The ultimate consequence of this art is the empty, white paper which is occasionally displayed in Japanese tea rooms. Here the image of the phenomenon and the image as phenomenon are ultimately abandoned.

In this instance a picture acquires an entirely different kind of reality. It becomes something very tentative, something basically lacking in essence and losing all "objective" qualities in the sense of possessing a numinous presence, cultic efficacy or magic substance. Zen should generally be understood as a rejection of all "magic" in religious life as well as in cult and art, and, likewise, as a form of demythologization. A work of art is no longer a "yantra." It is no longer a cult object representing the numinous in the form of a mythic personality or even "containing" it and exerting magic efficacy by virtue of this fact. It ceases to be a functional means, but instead serves as a stimulant for personal spiritual training and inner concentration, or it is a document of a spiritual tradition or testimony of a vision and insight that has been achieved. A certain Zen monk may, therefore, be said to have acted entirely within the Zen spirit when he smashed a Buddha statue and burnt it to warm himself.

Art also loses most of its official character; it becomes personal and intimate. The subjective side of religious art is thus strengthened. The older Buddhist art, particularly that of esoteric Buddhism, was predominantly meant to be "objective," but the rise of Amitābha art, which was essentially inspired by the experience of a believing soul, had caused a considerable increase of the "subjective" element even though to different degrees. The older schools of the Amitābha faith in China and Japan still valued prayers to all kinds of savior figures. Rites, offerings, and meditation were aided by images. The Jōdo-Shin sect which emerged in Japan from these older schools rejected all these paraphernalia and concentrated entirely on the faithful surrender out of the innermost depth of the soul to the savior Buddha alone. This school, therefore, no longer provided a fertile soil for a creative sacred art of its own but merely altered the traditional art forms to accommodate its own beliefs.

This process is completed by Zen. But at the same time Zen moves in the reverse direction. Subjective-personal attitudes and achievements become decisive and are, therefore, allowed to unfold freely because the objective-ontological process, the enlightened transformation, is believed to take place beyond all generally binding forms. But from the original spiritual power of this movement there also arise entirely new possibilities of visualization and form-creation. These, in turn, make possible the creation of a distinct and great art in its own right, primarily because the artists of this school turned passionately to the existing world and derived from it infinitely varied and original inspirations. Something objective, ontological--the Buddha-nature of all things--is also implied by Zen pictures, but it is not presented in objectively valid formulas, symbols, or hypostasized personifications of universal validity. It is only indicated with the help of simple, yet revealing hints and in entirely personal forms of expression, just as the achievement of enlightenment takes place within the monk in an entirely individual, unregimented, and even unpredictable manner.

The Zen artist is no longer bound to a certain number of given tasks and themes, except in the production of the furnishing of Zen temple interiors which largely continued the older tradition of workshops. He is no longer the highly skilled specialist for iconographically complicated images which had to be created according to strict patterns and canonical rules by craftsmen aiming for artistic perfection. Rather, he is a monk who had himself undergone Zen training and who expresses his world and existential views on the basis of his very own religious experience in an entirely personal manner and in sovereign freedom. He is no longer a professional artist, firmly bound to artistic traditions and social hierarchies and working for particular patrons. Rather, he is a dilettante or amateur in the fullest original meaning of these terms, particularly when he was a genius. A good number of these monk-artists may be called geniuses, as for example, Mu-hsi (Mu-ch'i, ca. 1210-1275) in China or Sesshū (1420-1506) in Japan.¹⁵¹ The thoroughly individual, creative person who consciously pursues his own way which he has found in his own innermost depths was, therefore, able to unfold much more freely and vigorously in Zen art than in the classic sacred art, which left much less leeway for the individual artist as an ingenious individual. Religious enlightenment, propelled by personal inspiration, sought out tangible equivalents and artistically adequate expressions which might or perhaps even should be quite new and unconventional.

In this context, Buddhist art may be said to have become, perhaps for the first time, "expression," though not, or at least not predominantly, in the sense of expressing the experiences, moods and character of a creative individual, but rather in the sense of an ontological insight shaped by an unmistakably individual personality and the experiences of this individual at his own and most original level. This personal statement may be made with the help of the most varied subject matter and is not restricted by the framework of an existing, objectively fixed, dogmatically determined and generally valid iconography.

The subject matter itself therefore became relatively less important, though by no means irrelevant. In principle, everything might become a worthy object for this art just as any particular everyday event could provide the stimulus for the ultimate enlightenment of a Zen monk. Even though there does exist a Zen iconography, it is, as we will show, basically different from that of classic Buddhist art. More importantly, none of the monk artists was obligated to adhere to its themes or to any of its rules in their creative work. If he chose to do so, this happened within the stream of that "special transmission" and not because it was held that only a certain manner of representation would guarantee ontological identity between picture and intended object and consequently the former's magical spiritual efficacy.

This relativization of objects went hand in hand with relativization of forms. Formal structure, observance of canonical principles or arrangements, supra-personal perfection and supra-empirical beauty no longer count, because all direct personal experience of the Absolute, if measured against the comprehensive, supra-personal, even "scholastic" systems, is to a certain degree alienated from or indifferent to form. In its artistic expression, this personal experience defies all explicit statements or representations, whether in words, symbols, or clearly and bindingly defined figures. It creates a new kind of language and a new form for itself. But this form is profoundly different; it employs other means and finds its highest form of expression in silence.

If a religious art culminates in silence, if it is skeptical of all fixed languages of form, if its works no longer possess any magic-cultic functions, then it has no longer anything to do with *pûjâ* (see p. 192) and, in its inner meaning as well as its external manifestations, is also removed from the *shôgon* concept. Zen contrasts the cultic splendor of *shôgon* with an ascetic sobriety and a simple, austere matter-of-factness which takes great pains to avoid blocking the Ultimate-Essential and access to it by displays of ritual elaborations and of the artistic images serving them. To offer expensive sacrifices and splendid works of art is just as unessential to the Zen monk as is any cultic act or faith in the saving powers of some other being. Even though Zen includes some cult practices and even cult pictures and implements, these objects are considered more as concessions (*hoben*) or, at best, a useful frame (setting) for a spiritual life whose true center is far beyond all such devices.

It is characteristic of Zen art that its creative potential, its most distinctive achievements are not to be found in this field. As a matter of fact, even Zen pictures used in ritual are frequently not sanctified and lofty in subject, but rather intimate-personal in character. Occasionally they even resort to gross exaggerations in order to express unmistakably the particular Zen view about sacred figures. We

should, therefore, not accuse Zen of having anti-ritual and iconoclastic tendencies. Instead it has left the ritual sphere much too far behind to assume a rigid negative stance toward it. Dogma, cult and pictures are not needed but they are also not rejected because, though irrelevant with respect to what really matters, they may be tolerated as well as ignored. Rejection of any one-sided position, much less its polemical and intolerant defense, is the only attitude truly appropriate to the spirit of Zen.

Works of art retain only three functions in the world of Zen. They serve, first, to preserve the memory of great founders and saints and to make visible the chain of the Zen tradition, of its transmission from master to disciple in the figures of the bearers of this tradition. Secondly, these pictures provide model personalities and so have a stimulating effect on their viewers. Zen pictures have been called "pictures of encouragement."¹⁵² Finally, and most importantly, these works of art, with all their variations and rather freely chosen subject matter beyond all particular purposes, may express the world view of Zen through narrative-anecdotal scenes from the life and history of the Zen sects, through depicting venerable ideal figures, through symbolic and parable-like pictures, or by projecting a profound view of nature and even of things used in everyday life.

As part of this vision and identification with the intended object, an experience of mystic unity takes place which is, however, different from that centered in the traditional cult images. What matters is not the presence of numinous persons or symbolic objects or the magical identity between the image and its subject. Instead, the picture becomes a sign that satori has taken place in its creator, that the non-duality of samsāra and nirvāna has been realized and that the barriers between object and subject--the viewing as well as the creating subject--have disappeared. Identity is realized no longer as a result of the intermediary function of the image and by means of its help, but totally independently from it. The image only indicates what has taken place in the mind of its author. It may perhaps point others in the right direction and impel them toward an insight of their own. Any picture will, therefore, have a more intensive expressive power the deeper the spiritual insight of its artist.

Architecture and Gardens

All the changes discussed so far occurred primarily in the field of painting which became more and more the leading Zen art form. A peculiarly Zen sculpture as such does not exist, since the images still needed for the traditional cult followed essentially the time-honored paths. It is perhaps worth mentioning that the figure type of the Arhat, of the Zen patriarch Bodhidharma and related figures, including also that of Zen abbots, was particularly popular and was the only figure type which was given truly significant and not merely conventional-epigonic form in sculpture. This happened to a still greater degree in painting. Cult implements could not undergo further creative development, given the peripheral role rituals played in Zen.

Next to painting, only architecture and the art of gardens were predominantly influenced by the spirit of Zen but not in every instance. To be sure, there are vast temple complexes (2*) displaying strict patterns of order which at first glance appear to contradict Zen and its skepticism as compared with all traditional cults.

But they owe their existence either to the fact that the ancient Chinese ground plan proved to be quite persistent or that these were older temples which were only later (in China since the tenth century) taken over by Zen monks. Moreover, many original Zen temples differ in several points and in a very characteristic fashion from other precinct plans, even in cases where they followed the general pattern.¹⁵³ Following the directions given by the Chinese Zen patriarch Huai-hai (died 814), the "Buddha (image) Hall" (fu-tien, butsu-den) was dropped in favor of the "Dharma Hall" (fa-t'ang, hat-tô) or at least given less prominence. The large Meditation Hall (ch'an-t'ang, zen-dô), which had become the real center of religious life of the monastery was either given the choice location at the end of the central axis north of (i.e., "above") the Dharma Hall or came to occupy a well-defined special precinct of its own. (The interior of these halls has already been described on p. 49 ff.).

It was quite in line with primeval Buddhist ideas that these two buildings, the Meditation Hall and the Dharma Hall, should be the heart of the Zen monasteries. In the former, the monks perform their difficult yet vital mental tasks and in the latter, they encounter the master and the word of the Buddha. Ritual performances are less significant than these activities but do not disappear entirely. The same is true of Buddha images and their halls. To venerate the Buddha is both the duty and desire of Zen monks. Moreover, many Zen monasteries never were and are still not merely monastic institutions for meditation and teaching but are also public religious institutions with communities of believers attached to them. Even today many families in Japan still identify themselves as belonging to the Zen sect as their traditional "denomination." These quasi-official buildings of the Zen temple follow traditional architecture in all their basic features. Only those students pursuing more specialized studies, therefore, will have to concern themselves with particular features of these buildings. The individual structural forms of these buildings (bracketing [19*] etc.) were decisively influenced by the style of the Sung period which was adopted in the Japanese buildings of the Kamakura/Muromachi periods and has been preserved until today. But in spite of the highly decorative complexity of this style, and in spite of its frequently lavish architectural design, the atmosphere in Buddhist temples that are purely Zen is much cooler, austere, and ascetic than in other sanctuaries.

Furthermore, it is characteristic for many Zen precincts that the nuclear group of buildings aligned along the central axis is frequently surrounded with numerous smaller or even minute precincts, each equipped with a chapel and living quarters for abbots, guests, monks, but also for secular personalities who may retire permanently to a Zen monastery during old age or for limited shorter periods of time as spiritual retreats. Each of these dwellings has attached to itself gardens of various sizes. The most important Zen monasteries in Japan (for example, the Daitokuji in Kyôto) provide outstanding examples of this kind of temple architecture.

These residential and meditation precincts may be traced back to the ancient Indian tradition of tightly clustered grottoes and cottages occupied by individual monks and associated with a central assembly and teaching hall. In buildings and gardens of this type, which are parts of the "mother monastery" in organizational and economic matters but otherwise lead a quiet existence of their own behind walls or hedges, the Zen spirit has expressed itself in a particularly pure form. They are

among the most important and most impressive creations of Buddhist art which we encounter today. They have provided one of the most important places for the cultivation of the Japanese tea ceremony and some still do so today. The tea room (*chashitsu*, *chaseki*), created exclusively for the tea ceremony, represents the most perfect architectural realization of Zen. Such buildings no longer have an iconology. However, even though they no longer "depict" a higher "world," they still possess a metaphysical-religious meaning, but one which can no longer be expressed in conceptual terms. In their quietude and their silence, Emptiness reveals itself directly.

The living quarters of Zen priests are no longer primitive hermitages. Rather, they not only resemble the dignified but simple and natural living quarters of the aristocracy, but also incorporate some features of the Japanese farm house. Ideally, the latter displays a certain rustic, though aesthetically refined, simplicity in material and design. Since in China Zen Buddhism was unable to become as influential as Confucianism and Taoism, the Chinese Zen residential buildings and gardens were not as uniquely refined in spiritual and aesthetic terms as they were in Japan.

In Japan, residential architecture achieved its fullest maturity in the Zen monasteries during the 15th and 16th centuries when it was sustained by the strict and austere Zen spirit, including that permeating the tea rooms. But in the final analysis it had evolved from the residences of the nobility of the Fujiwara period. Considerably simplified and modified by Zen, this residential architecture has remained the model for the later type of middle-class residence right down to the present. Essential features of the Zen spirit have survived in these residences and have continued to shape the mood of the Japanese and their lives.¹⁵⁴

Japanese houses are particularly distinguished by the straight-lined simplicity of their post-and-beam structure, with a functional design directly revealed by the emphasis given to the almost ascetically empty wall and door surfaces, by the natural simplicity and the muted colors of wood, floor mats and wall covering. The room is religiously as well as aesthetically focused on the wall niche (*tokonoma*), containing a picture scroll and flower arrangement. Originally this served as the sanctuary of the house, as the sacred space for holding ancestral and Buddha pictures. The cool and yet intimate mood of such rooms is, therefore, very conducive to quiet spiritual absorption. Finally, such rooms are also in intimate communication with nature. This communication is achieved by means of a smooth transition from inner to outer space made possible through movable sliding doors over the entire width of the house. This link with nature is not at all in conflict with the intimacy of the inner space but rather tends to intensify it. But the self-contained character of these rooms never entails seclusion. Even withdrawn and meditating individuals leading a life of solitude will always feel the presence of the totality of the world.

The experience of nature, the world, of the essence of things in their fullness as well as in their "emptiness" is accomplished most intensively through the gardens. These possess a quasi-metaphysical character and are just as much Zen works of art as are ink paintings, and just as much products and signs of insights obtained through meditation since they provide impetus and help to obtain such insights. The Zen gardens and the secular gardens of the more recent middle- and upper-class

residences in Japan inspired by the Zen spirit put their main emphasis on a firm, vigorous structure of carefully arranged rocks and stones in which the essence of the world, i.e., its unchangeable quality in the midst of all changes, is symbolized in its purest form. Second to be emphasized are sober, quiet evergreen trees and shrubs, moss and other plants. Finally, there is the water of small ponds, streams and water falls, frequently represented only by pure white sand surfaces, since only the symbolic and suggestive value of water is regarded as essential.

Bright lawns and colorful flower beds are alien to these gardens. They do include blossoming trees and shrubs which, each in their own season, enliven the sobriety of the gardens with their grace and fleeting colors. Because of these very qualities they touch the heart more deeply. The Zen garden is a symbolic landscape, akin to an ink painting, which expresses its meaning directly. Its structure is most strict, yet never schematic; its appearance suggests effortlessness and spontaneity. Zen gardens are places for meditative contemplation and not for relaxation, play or social activities. For all their simplicity, the Zen gardens exude a rich abundance of life and inner strength. They compel the viewer to immerse himself in them and to open himself to their quiet yet powerful, sometimes almost melancholic language. They lead him to the heart of things, to the essence of the world, and to the emptiness beyond all dualism.

The Zen garden which is most profoundly Zen in spirit is that of the Ryōanji monastery in Kyōto. It consists only of a few groups of stones with a little moss, scattered loosely, yet most deliberately, over a wide, empty, rectangular field of white sand, and resembles a black and white ink painting translated into the language of nature. It is an impressively grandiose work "abstracting" natural-phenomenal reality, filled with the spaceless and timeless emptiness of absolute being and yet conveying in entirely simple terms the presence of things, so that nothing more can or should be said about it than that there are stones, moss, and sand.

Related to the art of gardens are the arts of flower arrangement (*ikebana*), residential architecture, and the tea ceremony with all its associated ceramic, bamboo, metal, and lacquer utensils. These constitute a highly important field within East Asian craftsmanship, and reveal the far-flung and profound influence of the Zen spirit. But the Zen spirit has also influenced many other forms of Japanese aesthetic expression and artistic creation: the lyricism of the seventeen-syllable short poem (*haiku*), for example, or certain physical-spiritual, meditative exercises like sword fencing and archery.

The claim is well justified that the Zen spirit and Zen mood have permeated and formed Japanese culture, particularly in its aesthetic aspects, to a degree which is paralleled by few other spiritual forces. Everywhere the ideals of purity, simplicity, quietude, maturity are given the highest rank, both as attitudes whence creative endeavor and personal activities arise, and as psychological factors which have had extraordinary power in shaping the Japanese personality. A deep feeling for nature and things is revealed everywhere in artistic creations and artistically performed physical actions which have been influenced by Zen.

Most of all in the tea ceremony, there is an insight into "things," into the essence of the world and its emptiness, which is expressed in all its simplicity, directness and quietude. The Zen spirit embodies itself in perfect purity, in utensils

which seem to be merely functional-practical, perhaps even entirely unassuming or, in their coarseness, even "un-beautiful," such as a sturdy iron water kettle, or a coarse earthen tea cup (168, 169). Such things are, therefore, just as much Buddhist works of art as are the buildings and pictures of Zen monks. The values aimed at in the tea ceremony, i.e., functionality, purity, simplicity, sobriety, austerity, strictness and nobility of form, are joined with the sobriety of remoteness from the world, and with that quiet melancholy derived from the fleeting nature of things. These are at once highly aesthetic, moral and religious values. Zen's integration of various life manifestations through its power to intuit the nature of the world and existence was and is one of its most characteristic and greatest cultural achievements.¹⁵⁵

Painting: Iconography

The iconography characteristic of Zen flows with inner necessity from Zen's ideas about the role of art and the subject matter which art is supposed to depict and which is worthy of depiction.¹⁵⁶ We disregard the existence of traditional and, therefore, mostly quite conventional cult images and other picture types which Zen temples retain in their cult halls. In importance and stature, these pictures rank far below those creations in which the Zen spirit has found its highest visual expression and which are decidedly different from those in the world of traditional Buddhist painting.

To begin with, the majority of picture types is different. In contrast to the earlier dominant type of the sacred-cultic wall paintings and the larger, dignified temple scrolls, we now find intimate modest-sized pictures as the most prominent type. Small or medium-sized kakemonos are most common, as are album leaf paintings, emakimonos (predominantly landscape paintings), and the movable doors and wall screens found in monastic residential quarters. Often the externally most unassuming pictures are most important, particularly those used in the Japanese tea cult as the so-called tea pictures (*cha-gake*). Though by no means without exception, these frequently meet the Zen ideals of profound simplicity and depth.

Whenever Zen paintings depict sacred figures, these figures have an entirely different meaning and appearance from those of classic Buddhist art. As in early Buddhism, the Buddha, though understood as the embodiment of the Absolute and depicted as dwelling in ultimate remoteness, rising majestically above all human or earthly phenomena, becomes a striving human being, who achieves enlightenment through difficult struggles and is depicted in a mundane and psychologically convincing manner. To take an important example from Chinese Sung paintings which, fortunately, are preserved in great numbers in Japanese collections: Liang K'ai (early 13th century) has created one of the most moving depictions of religious man advancing from the abyss of desperation to liberating insight in his famous ink painting of "Śākyamuni Returning From the Mountains" (139,141).¹⁵⁷ The Buddha is now again primarily Śākyamuni, the earthly-historical founder of the religion, the great model and archetype of the monk who achieves salvation through his own efforts to gain enlightenment by meditation. Metaphysical-scholastic Buddhism had demoted Śākyamuni to a mere manifestation on a relatively low level (*nirmāṇa-kāya*) of the real, true, absolute Buddha (*dharma-kāya*). It is perhaps no accident that the most magnificent surviving cult image of Śākyamuni, with two Bodhisattva figures at its side and perhaps based on an original by the T'ang painter genius Wu

Tao-tse (97) is in the possession of a Zen temple. There was still room for him, the founder, the master, the model in Zen cults because he was the source of Zen's "special transmission."

The other Buddhas--Vairocana, Amitâbha, etc.--either appear not at all in the world of Zen or at best as untypical remnants of older cult traditions. Those Bodhisattvas who are still depicted decline in numbers and in status and appear in a lyrical, humanized vision. A most perfect example is in a triptych depicting the white-robed Avalokiteśvara (Kuan Yin), crane and monkey mother by the Chinese Zen monk Mu Hsi (early 13th cent.--ca. 1270; 140, 142). Here, as elsewhere in Zen art, the sacred figures are embedded into nature in an entirely new manner, so that they appear as individual entities growing organically out of nature. Nature is no longer mere background, stage prop or symbolic addition but, rather, is the essential element of the picture and an equal and on occasion even more intense basis for the interpretation of true reality than the sacred figures themselves. Most cultic-iconographic-symbolic elements have been stripped from these figures. Their being is reduced to its real core and made visible from a vantage point profoundly immersed in the totality of the world.

It does not matter if the Buddha or Bodhisattva Essence takes the form of sacred persons or creations of nature. The sacred figures are no longer hypostases of an Absolute in the old sense. Rather, they are real or imagined signs for true reality, just as are animals, plants, stones or landscapes. In Zen paintings Bodhisattvas sometimes look like ascetics and rather ragged hermits stripped of all supra-earthly splendor, i.e., of the element of *shōgon*. They come close to the Taoist *hsien* (J. *sen*) types, with their often rather grotesque supra-human and supra-mundane qualities. To regard this change as a secularization would be mistaken. We are now dealing with a logical consequence of the teaching of the non-duality of *samsāra* and *nirvāna* and of the conviction that the essence of things is also, and particularly, revealed in the unassuming and nonspectacular. Here--and this is a remarkable event--the difference or even contrast between sacred and secular pictures disappears, but this does not mean that the sacred is secularized. Rather, even the apparently most secular pictures acquire religious-metaphysical meaning.

This new view of the sacred person also meant that Zen art no longer had any room for the other categories of supra-human beings who had been part of the older Buddhist pantheon--the *Vidyārājas*, *Devas*, etc. Zen art did, however, retain an interest in yet other figures who were regarded as prototypes of the Zen disciple: Arhats (Lohan, Rakan) who may be said to have become the favorite figures of Zen art (91-93, 127-129). These embody the aspirations of totally liberated and spiritually advanced human beings to leave the here and now of the *samsāra* world and enter directly into the supra-mundane realm of *nirvāna*. The much older tradition of Arhat pictures not only continued, it may even be said to have reached its apex in Zen art.

Taoist elements are ubiquitous in Zen, particularly in its nature mysticism. In iconography, too, there frequently appears to be little difference between a Taoist *hsien* and an Arhat. While the one strives for union with the Tao, the other strives for *satori*, the ultimate insight into Emptiness. Zen art has, therefore, also included Lao-tzu, the "patriarch" of Taoism, among its venerated figures and has

depicted him--as in the famous ink painting by Mu-hsi--as an Arhat-like monk type, as an authentic Zen saint of grandiose ugliness.

Because their wisdom exceeds all normal standards, arising as it does from the six supra-sensual capacities (pāramitās) leading to perfect wisdom, Arhats also display miraculous spiritual powers. These have made them objects of veneration as outstanding examples of the monkish life and as protectors of the Buddhist teachings who had been commissioned by Śākyamuni himself. Around each of these figures arose legends or myths (129). Though Zen Buddhism was not the first to give rise to all this, Zen adopted these traditions and--as strange as this may sound at first--cultivated an intense Arhat cult, because Arhats were particularly important to it. This cult, however, no longer served the function of securing magic effects and identification with a worshipped figure but merely that of venerating spiritual predecessors and patrons. Finally, and perhaps more in the proper spirit of Zen, Arhat pictures may also have served as aids in meditation and as models for emulation.

All this explains the important role which Arhat figures play in Zen art, both in painting and in sculpture. Sculptors had to furnish images for Arhat halls, which frequently housed as many as 500 of these figures. Beginning with the older tradition of portraits of the sixteen Arhats (preserved only in copies) by Kuan-hsiu (832-912) and by Li Lung-mien (died 1106), a number of works, some quite important, can be traced through the following five to six centuries.¹⁵⁸ Particularly important in Japan is the picture of 500 Rakan by Minchō (1352-1431). The manner of their presentation, as that for Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, has nothing hieratic, cultic-magic or representative about it, but rather proceeds directly to the personal spiritual essence of the Arhats to produce profoundly penetrating images of the internally liberating, spiritually advanced *homo religiosus*, frequently exaggerated into a numinous-grotesque figure.¹⁵⁹

While the Arhats, so much venerated in Zen, were among the older or even oldest figures in Buddhism, new figures which had previously been unknown also enter Zen iconography. The most important of these was Bodhidharma (abbr. Dharma, Chin. *Tamo*, J. *Daruma*), the founder of Chinese Ch'an (=Zen),¹⁶⁰ who came to China from India, most likely around 500 A.D. Elevated to a supra-human level by later legendary accounts, he was the great first patriarch of the line of Chinese and Japanese Zen patriarchs that continues until today. He, too, is practically an Arhat and appears in pictures (143), mostly vigorous black-and-white ink paintings, as a simply dressed, undecorated monk with a powerful, almost violent look in his oversized eyes. However, this is not merely an arbitrary "expression" but is based on a legend which in its extreme character is typical of Zen. Angry over the fact that he had once fallen asleep during meditation, the patriarch cut off his eye lids and threw them to the ground. From them--and here the legend takes a milder turn--the first tea plant sprouted. (Tea originally served the monks as a stimulant during their day-and-night-long meditations, and tea drinking in general, and the tea ceremony in particular, originated in Zen monasteries.)

Bodhidharma is also depicted in some legendary scenes from his life: As he crosses the Yangtze River on a reed, as he sits for nine years in meditation before a wall until his legs atrophied,¹⁶¹ and in a scene with a monk, who wanted to become his disciple but had remained unnoticed for a long time, and who finally chopped off

his arm as a sign of his determination and presented it to the master. These stories in turn confirm the grim seriousness of the Zen spirit. Correspondingly forceful is the power of brush and ink with which the great painters--Sesshū, for example--have depicted such figures and scenes on the basis of their own Zen experience.

But Zen has also its scurrilous and humorous side. It can reveal, using a different manner, the inner superiority of the enlightened man, of those who are removed from the errors of the world, and of those who have matured enough to transcend the dignified seriousness of a would-be higher, infallible wisdom. Those historical, semi-historical or legendary figures, in particular, who embody true wisdom while appearing as odd, half-crazed or quietly joyous beggar monks, seemingly simple in spirit, have enjoyed the special attention of Zen painters. There are many pictures of Han-shan and Shih-te (J. *Kanzan* and *Jittoku*), for example. These roaming fellows, filled with an irrepressible gaiety (145), were historical personages. Han-shan lived near a Zen monastery during the seventh century as a hermit and poet, and Shih-te, a foundling, was employed in the kitchen of this monastery. They were good friends and conversed about questions of poetry and religion in a gay, playful manner unintelligible to others. Though "perfect fools in Buddha,"¹⁶² they were superior in every important aspect to any men of great book learning. They were, therefore, considered to be incarnations of Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra, the Bodhisattvas of highest wisdom. Han-shan is usually depicted holding a blank sheet of paper and a brush, because he could read the unwritten book of existence and so needed no text, and Shih-te with a kitchen broom with which he sweeps away the dust of doubt and worldly cares which are obstacles to true enlightenment. Some of the greatest artists have shown masterful skill in their handling of these two truly authentic Zen figures.

Related to these, and even more popular, is Pu-t'ai (J. *Hotei*; 144) who was also a historical Chinese mendicant monk (ca. 900), "who roamed the country free from want and with a gay spirit, and who was regarded by his contemporaries as an incarnation of the future Buddha Maitreya. In his pot-bellied smiling figure, Zen art depicts the joyfulness of the free spirit who laughs in the face of the busy seriousness of life. In Japan this jolly priest with his full shoulder bag who loves children later became one of the Seven Benevolent Genii."¹⁶³

With such images a new spiritual dimension was added to the world of Buddhist art. This only became possible because Zen asserted radical independence from all ties and rules and gained that inner freedom which became so characteristic for its world view, life style and artistic creativity. Pictures like those of Pu-t'ai or Han-shan and Shih-te no longer have the character and function of cult images, while those of Arhats or of Bodhidharma, not to mention those of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, could still remain the focus of rituals, even though in Zen they had long outgrown their cultic significance.

The same holds true for portraits (132 f.). As in classic painting, portraits were vehicles of traditional values, were links in the chain of personalities regarded as patriarchs and may also have had a cultic function in the veneration of these patriarchs as, for example, on memorial days.¹⁶⁴ But the picture of a Zen master (chinsō) primarily serves another function. Such a picture was given to a disciple by the master depicted, usually with a personal dedication written on the picture, as soon as the disciple had matured to full enlightenment. The disciple would hang the

picture in his room to win spiritual strength from the encouraging presence of his master. In such cases the portrait is, therefore, a certification of success in having achieved a state of maturity, a kind of spiritual certificate or even diploma. It was a visible expression of the master-disciple relationship and thus of that "special transmission" which is of such vital importance in Zen, because it leads by way of an existential, frequently silent encounter to a spiritual breakthrough and ultimate enlightenment.

Since some of the painters of these portraits were themselves disciples of the master depicted, these works originated from the spirit of an intimate circle of perfectly congenial minds. Perhaps for this very reason, they may be counted among the most important images of religious men to come out of the East which has given us so many other images of *homo religiosus*.

Those encounters between master and disciple, during which the decisive spark was frequently transmitted, became the subject of a genre indigenous to Zen art, the *kung-an* (*kô-an*) or *men-ta* (*mon-dô*) picture, in Japan commonly called *zenki-zu*. A *kung-an* or *men-ta* is a statement by a Zen master, usually entirely paradoxical and in the form of a "logically" meaningless question akin to that story about the Buddha nature of the small dog mentioned earlier (p. 10). The aim is to jolt the mind of the struggling disciple and help it break through the entrapment by normal discursive thought and categories. The answers, which usually are "non-answers," may also consist of surprising actions or even curses or beatings or "a kind of lion roar, a suddenly shouted 'ka' or 'katsu' (Chin. *ho*) which, like a shout from the Buddha sphere, is designed to awaken the slumbering mind."¹⁶⁵

The Zen tradition consists in large parts of collections of such statements, dialogues and "problem-anecdotes" (Gundert) which have served for centuries as problems for meditation. Such apparently paradoxical Zen insights have also found their way into poems. No wonder that these themes, because of their liveliness and the great spiritual force of the participating personalities, have also greatly stimulated the imagination of painters, particularly since Zen art does not wish to provide symbolic representations of a metaphysical world, but instead derives its actual powers directly from Zen life and Zen experience and from the atmosphere of a personal religious encounter.

The pictures referred to here depict such encounters and dialogues by integrating the persons involved, usually only the master and his disciple, into natural surroundings and by presenting the scene with dramatic effect.¹⁶⁶ A subgenre of these pictures shows everyday situations in which the monk achieves enlightenment, frequently after prolonged and apparently futile efforts which have, however, gradually prepared the ground for it. The final impetus is frequently given by an accidental jolt, which under normal circumstances would have remained without importance as, for example, in an instance when silence is broken by a pebble hurled against a hollow bamboo stem as a monk sweeps the path to his cottage. He is fully absorbed in his innocent everyday work and, therefore, entirely relaxed, open, and ready for the unexpected, almost no longer hoped for, sudden emergence of the fruit of enlightenment from his slowly and quietly maturing innermost unconscious being (painting by Kanô Motonobu: 147).

From among this group of Zen Buddhist "event pictures" (*zenki-zu*) we may single out those which depict certain symbolic actions or scenes of basic "historical" significance, such as the burning of the Buddha statue by Tan-hsia (see p. 224), Hui-neng destroying the now superfluous Sûtra scroll (146), or the meeting and conversation between Bodhidharma and Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty that must have been quite confusing to the latter.¹⁶⁷ In these pictures, which remain mostly unintelligible without commentary, the "special transmission," with all its personal directness growing out of actual life situations and religious communication, has found its realization. They are, therefore, counterparts to the narrative pictures of classical Buddhist art, which deal primarily with the official, generally known Buddha legend and related topics in their canonical versions, and had cultic character because of their use in rituals.

Many of these "historical" pictures also have a high paradigmatic value, particularly the parable pictures. There is a famous Japanese ink painting showing a man trying to catch a slippery fish with a gourd. Equally famous are the many pictures of monkeys who reach for the reflected image of the moon in the water (which is sometimes not even clearly indicated), and who overlook the real moon (which almost never appears in the pictures). Both are easily understood parables for the wrong methods with which an unenlightened man attempts to reach the truth (cf. 144).

Their positive counterpart is the popular series of the "Ten Buffalo-Herding Pictures"¹⁶⁸ which symbolize the stages of enlightenment. There are two versions, both by well-known Zen masters of the Sung period, Ch'ing-chü (Sei-kyo) and K'uo-an (Kaku-an). In the former, a dark buffalo becomes whiter from picture to picture and, finally, invisible. At the end there appears, as the symbol of the ultimate insight, an empty black circle.

In the other, better known version, the transformation occurs in the following stages:

- (1) The bewildered anxious search of the herdsman for his lost buffalo (meaning that craving and fear arise from ignorance about the true nature of the world);
- (2) He discovers its footprints (the beginning of the insight, through the study of the teaching, so that man can discover the path leading to the truth at least from a distance);
- (3) He sees the buffalo (insight into the essence of things and of his own self which are both essentially the same);
- (4) Catching the buffalo (the resisting power of the world of phenomena which has to be tamed);
- (5) Leading the buffalo by a rope (the truth, now securely grasped, can no longer be lost as the result of illusion);
- (6) Riding home on the back of the buffalo, who walks freely and securely, accompanied by the herdsman playing the flute (the sure, joyous quietude of enlightenment; everything happening spontaneously);
- (7) Having forgotten the buffalo, he is alone at home (a consciously formulated "insight" has now become superfluous; since the desired

- essential stage has been reached, the ontological transformation has been accomplished);
- (8) Both buffalo and man disappear; an empty circle remains (meaning all duality has been dissolved in the ultimate clarity; "everything is empty");
 - (9) Return to the origin; blossoms at a stream (the simple existence of things; there is no longer a need to speculate over the essence of their existence);
 - (10) Strolling through the market (in the unassuming figure of Pu-t'ai: free from desire, joyous, beyond the world, not flaunting his wisdom, the enlightened man mingles with the people, all of whom will reach Buddhahood).

It is characteristic that the empty circle does not appear here as the symbol of final wisdom. The mere realization of "emptiness" is not the true goal; there has to be a turning back to the "world," a realization that even the ordinary everyday phenomenon has Buddha nature, an insight which sees "mountains again as mountains and waters again as waters." Now, however, they are no longer capable of entangling and misleading the mind as they were at the level of *samsāra*. It is only at this stage that the highest state of liberation has been achieved, from which flows that direct, unerring action and life so vitally important to Zen.

Pure symbols, whose meaning is not embodied in concrete objects, are still frequently met in the world of Zen, but they are no longer favored to the degree they were in esoteric Buddhism, because their symbolism is different (see p. 224). In contrast to the usually complicated variety of difficult signs in esoteric Buddhism, Zen confines itself to a few signs which are almost self-evident. First and foremost among them is an empty or black circle¹⁶⁹ which, here as well as in some other cultures, is the symbol of the completeness of being and highest insight and at the same time of Emptiness. Another favorite is the numerical sign One (a horizontal line) as symbol of non-duality. Also particularly common is the character *Wu* (*Mu*): "Not" or "Naught" (34*) which does not, however, mean a simple negation that could easily be misinterpreted by Westerners in nihilistic and pessimistic terms, but rather points to the ultimately inexpressible, yet absolutely positive Reality.

In those ciphers, reduced to their most simple forms, Zen art has stepped resolutely into the realm of abstraction which, nonetheless, expresses the most concrete aspect of true reality. But is such cipher language still art? Those who have observed how profoundly experienced Zen masters have put these characters and ink circles on paper with the full vigor and force of their personalities, in their sovereign freedom and certainty, and those who remember that calligraphy is the highest and most difficult of the East Asian arts¹⁷⁰ which demands the full commitment of the individual, will have no doubts that such symbols can be perfectly valid, directly artistic expressions of religious insight.

Such examples of pure calligraphy, which reproduce Zen sayings, verses or *kō-an* in vigorous and spiritualized brush strokes, make up a large part of Zen art if for no other reason than that they are an important link in the flow of tradition. They express in a most direct manner the personality and spiritual aura of great Zen masters. They may be found--mostly in the form of the *kakemono*--primarily in the

rooms for the tea ceremony which are permeated by the purest Zen spirit, and they speak more powerfully there because of the ascetic and yet aesthetically refined simplicity of these tea rooms (15). Their expressive language--individual, free, sovereign, flowing in a lively rhythm, personal, and yet at the same time supra-personal--provides a revealing contrast to the magic-symbolic Siddham letters of esoteric Buddhism which are similarly stylized into works of art (101), but which, in their impersonal, timeless, "objective" validity and the cool perfection of their form resulting from it, constitute immobile hieratic cult formulas of mystic-magic potential.

Symbolic ciphers (circles, etc.) and calligraphic works mark one pole of Zen art where it presents itself as devoid of any concrete objects. Nature pictures--pictures of animals, plants, flowers, fruits, and landscapes--represent the other pole, because such pictures open themselves resolutely to simple, given reality, to the "mountains and waters" of that Zen phrase quoted earlier. But what is actually meant here is not nature as the empirical phenomenal world or as revelation of divine powers but as nirvāna reality which reveals itself to the opened eye in samsāra reality. Thus the artist's interest in nature is no longer naturalistic-imitative or idyllic-poetic or pantheistic, but rather metaphysical in the strict Buddhist sense.

In Zen, however, this interest arises from the most concrete subject matter, making it so clearly transparent that "Emptiness," which is simultaneously its origin and destination, is realized. The nature pictures of Zen are rooted in an incredibly close, intimate familiarity with living reality, but they elevate this reality to a kind of "abstraction" even to reducing it to ciphers (and thereby meeting the written character halfway). In a peculiar way such abstraction does not rule out an equally strong degree of substantiality and sense of ontological power, but rather guarantees their presence. In this pure vision of objects and reality, all dualism disappears, including that between fullness and emptiness and that between the plurality of the phenomena and the unity and simplicity of their metaphysical ground (148, 149). Such works represent the apex of the long and impressive development which the art of depicting nature in East Asia, accessible to us in its earlier stages only in faint echoes, had taken since the T'ang period. All the profound love of the East Asians for living reality has entered into it. Just as in the case of the world view of Zen in general, its art, too, was strongly influenced by Taoism, with whose forms of thought and expression it has a close relationship.¹⁷¹

Compared to traditional nature paintings which already served largely as vehicles for cosmosophic thought (and were not at all purely secular), Zen art appears to be even more strongly spiritualized. We will later comment on the means of expression employed in this art, but compared to classic Buddhist cult paintings, Zen art clearly advances into the "world," a world which was actually only now opened as a new domain for the religious art of East Asia. This is the reason for the disappearance of the separation between the secular and the sacred in true Zen art. Zen was capable of abolishing this distinction because it was able to show the Absolute directly in "ordinary" and simply given objects, i.e., to show nirvāna in samsāra. Cult paintings, however, actually depicted only a supra-nature of paradisaical character, and wherever nature motifs were used, these were trees, flowers, or animals stylized into fairy-tale-like forms and frequently imbued with a

well-defined symbolism. Whenever landscapes appear, they are Buddha or Bodhisattva "fields" transformed into numinous realms. The earthly world, as depicted, for example, in the raigô scenes of Amitâbha (which within classic art contain the most extensive landscapes), is meant as samsâra-like counter-world to the true, beatified world of the "pure land" and not as the bearer and revealer of true reality itself (105). Zen art, however, depicts nature in the here and now with that simple objectivity and powerful directness in which the "thing itself" expresses the Buddha nature of the world in convincing silence.

Landscapes, in particular, become vehicles for expressing this new understanding of nature and existence. Those interpretive and formative powers with which the essence of nature in its entirety was comprehended, illuminated and made to reveal the deepest insight have perhaps never been excelled or even been equalled by any other form of landscape painting. The world-wide fame of East Asian painting rests to a large part on these works (149), not only on the landscapes but also on the extremely simple pictures of animals, plants, flowers, fruits--pictures whose seemingly isolated objects reveal that totality of the world and that reason for existence which Zen art is capable of displaying in all its manifestations, no matter how unassuming they may be.

Painting: Formative Principles

Zen has also pursued quite new ways of artistic expression. These were new, however, only within the traditions of Buddhist painting and not in absolute terms. There existed in China, at least since the T'ang period, a great tradition of landscape painting created by outstanding masters and spiritually nourished primarily by Taoism. There also existed a sophisticated tradition of ink painting which had evolved a vast store of technical and artistic principles. This tradition had long been represented by the imperial academy, cultivated in China's official secular art. It would, therefore, be mistaken to simply equate Zen painting and landscape painting or Zen painting and ink painting.¹⁷² It should also be noted that Chinese Ch'an in its flourishing period during T'ang times had obviously not yet found the kind of profound and wide expression in art works as it did during the Sung period and, later on, in the Muromachi period of Japan.

It was only during the Sung period that the general development of Chinese nature painting and ink painting reached that degree of maturity and virtuosity which enabled both to become adequate media for expressing the Zen spirit. Both provided ideal vehicles for Zen and, in turn, themselves rose to the heights of their potential as the result of this encounter. They were, however, by no means confined to Zen themes and Zen circles. Secular painters, too, came under the spell of their potential for spiritual profundity and power of expression.¹⁷³ On the other hand, neither did Zen art remain confined to monochrome ink paintings.¹⁷⁴ The Arhat pictures and portraits of priests, so characteristic of Zen painting, are predominantly, but not exclusively, executed in vivid colors and in a technique which clearly follows the traditions of earlier Buddhist cult paintings. Zen's most distinctive and highest creations were, however, no doubt the ink paintings of the Sung and Muromachi periods. These were also the last periods during which the Buddhist art of East Asia flourished.

How does the Zen painter treat the object he intends to depict, how does he perceive and form both the natural objects, as they present themselves, and the objects of his imagination? (For the following, 148 and 149 provide typical examples.) The objects are not depicted "objectively," explicitly and completely according to optical reality, but are evoked by means of drastic abbreviation and reduction to their indispensable and essential elements. This is not to say that Zen painting tends towards subjectivism, sketchiness, improvisation or impressionism, even though the pictures frequently originated in sudden inspirations. Rather, we are dealing with filtered essences extracted from the infinite number of experiences of the mind, the eyes and the hands, which attempt to make statements in concentrated form about the Ultimate and True. They do so in full awareness of the preliminary and unessential nature of such efforts, and that may be the very reason for their success.

Even though the artist, in attempting to "say as much as possible with as little as possible" (Grosse), shows only "one corner"¹⁷⁵ of things, he means their totality which is always "present." We may even go so far as to claim that by following this approach he was bound to be more successful than if he had attempted thoroughly detailed depictions, because the latter would always remain mere fragments without, however, having the artist admit this openly. Such an approach would, therefore, seem unwise on the face of it. Any apparent "perfection" would only block our view of ultimate reality. A system of clear and complete forms designed to capture and define the essence of the world--in art as well as in religious life--would turn out to be not an aid but rather an obstacle and a limitation to a spontaneous understanding of the world.

Here lies one of the most important differences between classic cult painting and Zen painting. In the latter, that which is not depicted has to be seen and sensed together with that which is depicted. The painter does not suggest something definite which only happens to be left unstated. Rather, he suggests reality in its totality and shows true essence in the few, frequently unassuming objects which he presents to us. These objects, properly understood, reveal more than they are by themselves. Every one of them stands for the totality of being. The right understanding of the world (satori) "does not point to something which lies beyond itself; rather, it is knowledge of a particular single object and at the same time the knowledge of the reality which, so to speak, lies behind this object."¹⁷⁶

Such art "requires the surest touch and the clearest idea." It simultaneously presupposes a perfect understanding of the subject as well as a perfect mastery of the means for its expression, which can only be obtained by the highest concentration and meditative contemplation. These artists must, "in order to condense the essence of an object as well as the inner vision of the painter, to the highest perfection, break through by skill to freedom, by knowledge to spontaneous action."¹⁷⁷ The objects to be painted are captured in their inner essence by a manner of painting sustained by the full powers of an individual who nevertheless is trying to transcend himself. The painting arises both out of the free play of a sovereign mind and out of a strict matter-of-factness and self-discipline. It captures the innermost depth of these objects with terse, yet powerful and accurate strokes. Objects acquire an immense concreteness and density, yet also are rendered transparent and spiritualized.

Thus Barlach could speak of a strange "reality and unreality of things" in Chinese art,¹⁷⁸ a characterization which is particularly applicable to Zen art. Both aspects of the world permeate each other (see p. 143), and any objective form, no matter how definite it may appear before us, becomes a "formless form." To depict this with the effortlessness of full maturity and freedom as if it were something quite ordinary and natural, is regarded as the highest achievement in all Eastern art influenced by the Zen spirit. Such works attain that level of the miraculous which allows us to sense absolute Emptiness.¹⁷⁹ Such works can only be produced after mind and heart have been emptied, when a state of Ego-lessness (Chin. *wu-wo*; J. *mu-ga*, also *wu-hsin*, *mu-shin*) has been reached. Only a perfectly detached freedom of self, purified of all object- and goal-oriented thoughts and feelings, of all conscious reflections and intentions involving one's self permits a supra-conscious devotion to the objective task and captures the essence of the world. It makes an Other, an Id, speak with the help of an Ego. The best Zen pictures appear, therefore, not to have been painted by someone in particular at all, no matter how much they are rooted in a personal vision and existential experience. Their real meaning is not to offer "a section of nature, viewed through a particular temperament." Their Ego-lessness cancels the dualism of subject and object and allows person and object to "permeate" each other. Something like this is perhaps also intended to happen between the viewer and the picture.

The objects are stripped by this art of their firm, harsh, heavy materiality. They are "abstracted" or shortened into "ciphers" without, however, losing any of their reality and their ability to radiate an aura of life. On the contrary, the latter is intensified by use of forms which aim at the essence of things to a much higher degree than would have been possible if the artists had merely attempted to reproduce reality to the best of their ability. While Zen pictures are thus removed from the empirical world of object-bound phenomena, they are still overflowing with a most concrete sense of reality.

To us, "concreteness" and "abstraction" are mutually exclusive. They are contradictions or, at least, opposite poles in a field of tension, but they can be united in East Asian art, and by no means in Zen Buddhist art alone. They frequently appear united a priori because Zen art does not allow those antitheses to separate in the first place, but always manages to have already transcended them through the attainment of an enlightened state of mind. Zen art reflects the "Non-differentiation," the mutual penetration of *samsāra* and *nirvāna* as the two aspects of one and the same reality. This is "Reality" itself. The simple nature of things is intended to be made visible, or at least be hinted at, as simply and directly as possible. For this reason pictures of natural objects¹⁸⁰ which show "nothing but ordinary things" are, therefore, also, or even especially, suited to make valid statements about reality.

But as demonstrated above, sacred persons and spiritual encounters and awakenings are also depicted in a manner which captures their innermost essence and often presents it with great dramatic effect. All this is done with ever new forms because such pictures were never tied to routine formulas. They are always inspired by forms of expression arising from minds in an original state of enlightenment (139, 143, 145, 146). As in all Zen paintings, however, these objects are basically ciphers which point to something else, to something which is really meant merely by virtue

of the intensity and terseness with which these ciphers are depicted. The subject matter of a picture is, therefore, not a preformed vehicle with a predetermined content. Rather, it can be freely chosen and may even be given new meaning as circumstances warrant. It only provides the occasion, pretext, first and last stimulus pointing in the direction of something which belongs to another category of being, but which can only be indicated with the help of such "ciphers of transcendence" because any "other" level is itself only sensed in the concrete objects which we encounter in everyday life.

Some characteristic formal principles for expressing the world view of Zen arise from this way of depicting objects. Generally valid statements about these principles are much more difficult to formulate than those valid for cult paintings because every work presents its own, always special object in an artistic language which is always the very distinct language of a particular, very individual, creative personality. This is characteristic of Zen paintings and puts them in sharp contrast to sacred cult paintings which follow an established "theological," iconographic, and artistic canon, and allow therefore for fairly valid general descriptions.

The form of Zen pictures is essentially an "inner form" born of the phenomenon--the object to be depicted and the meaning attached to it--as well as the essence of the creative personality. It is not given a priori (dictated by a firmly established system of ideas and imposed on the objects and on the creative impulse of the artist). There are, therefore, no laws governing form and no grammar of formulas but, at best, certain habits which may, however, always be ignored. As a matter of fact, Zen painters try deliberately to make their compositions appear accidental, loosely structured, sometimes even playfully unselfconscious and effortless, so that the label "composition" seems almost inappropriate for their creation (139, 144-149).

Given this absence of rules, a higher law of forms, difficult to formulate, expresses itself. Its inner artistic logic is so compelling that not even the most minute detail may be moved without changing the whole or even placing it in jeopardy altogether. It is immaterial that this "accidental" quality is most carefully achieved, consciously or not. In any event, it is impossible to determine whether it is one or the other and, given the Zen premises, there is no a feasible alternative anyway. The seemingly accidental quality is a priori in harmony with the essence and rhythm of things in general. It is for this very reason that the "accidental" appears as something that could not be any different from the way it happens to be.

Such a style of pictorial composition, almost by necessity, has to shun the principle of symmetry and all its consequences--axiality, frontality, strict definition of picture planes. Its preference for isolated objects and the "one-corner-style" results in a predilection for asymmetry or at least a veiled symmetry with polarized tensions and a dynamic balance in place of the stable balance of the classic cult paintings. Zen pictures also exude an air of balance, quietude and certainty but do so from a more profound level, one which appears to exist beyond or below that of the phenomena depicted. There is a clear intent to point beyond that which is seen in the picture to something that is not and can no longer be depicted.

This dynamic balance is not only noticeable in pictures of human figures (144, 145, 146) but even more clearly in pictures of natural objects. These

frequently depict only a single object which thrusts with daring asymmetry into the picture plane. A tree, a branch or a sprig of blossoms, for example, is placed "accidentally" in a part of the picture which is seemingly chosen at random but is, of course, the only "right" part. Landscapes (149) also demonstrate how Zen painters, or secular painters stimulated by Zen, tend to dissolve the strict axially and parallelized compositions which had dominated older landscape paintings, particularly in China. All this is combined in many highly significant works with a strong mobility of both the objects themselves and the composition of the individual shapes, down to the smallest ink line (139, 143-146). These tendencies, incidentally, were not actually invented or even monopolized by Zen art. They were already known to artists of secular paintings and others, but Zen art adopted them because they were so well suited to its character and needs. It is from Zen art that these techniques, reinforced and imbued with new meaning, have influenced secular painting and enriched it.

From the vantage point of this principle of an ever newly gained, spontaneous "inner form," of a merely suggested profundity, of an "accidental order, of dynamic composition and equilibrium but, above all, from the basic conviction of Zen about the futility of all discursive exposition and detailed depiction, and of the superiority of the suggestive transmission of an intuitive insight, we gain a better understanding of that "sketchy" quality of many (but not all) Zen pictures (144-146, 148 ff.). While cult paintings present their objects completely and, for magic-ritual reasons, are not allowed to omit even the minutest detail, Zen painters emphasize only the most characteristic elements in which the true life and essence of an object is concentrated, and reveal it in its radiating vibrancy.

Zen art presupposes an active participation on the part of the viewer. Following the hints provided by the picture, he has to find out what the picture really means by his own efforts. The cult images expect him to surrender himself to their firm and perfect guidance and to realize the manifestation of the beatified figures step by step, to "get hold" of their presence and to establish contact with the Absolute (or its individual manifestation) represented by them. Zen rejects such a pre-fabricated, all-prescribing guidance and practical direction of the spiritual process. Zen pictures, particularly those extremely abbreviated ones in which Zen painting found its perfect form, take the viewer up to an extremity beyond which they themselves remain silent. But this act of making visible and conscious these ontologically rooted limits of the phenomenal *per se* and thus indicating that this borderline can be crossed, constitute perhaps the most significant achievement of both pictures and viewers inspired to engage in a spiritual quest. The "sketchy" quality of Zen pictures is, therefore, something entirely different from the way Westerners understand this term; it is an abbreviation concentrating on the innermost essence of things which we can only sense instinctively. It is also a self-limiting recognition of a borderline. But this recognition is inspired by the goal of crossing this threshold and doing so in a most radical sense.

Zen pictures tend, therefore, toward the "non-finite." They have their home in that realm. Nothing proves this more clearly than their relationship to space. Zen pictures prefer the "absence of confining frames."¹⁸¹ In positive terms, they aim at an openness, fullness, spaciousness, liveliness of atmosphere, a universal permeation of the existential and phenomenal realms, and a dynamic infinity of the

picture space which belong to the basic characteristics of East Asian paintings in particular and to the East Asian world view in general (139, 140, 144, 148, 149). All this can be most fully experienced in landscape paintings.

Yet this depth of space, though intensely present, is rarely clearly defined in its dimensions. We encounter an un- or supra-dimensional, a-perspective non-space, an absence of specific locale which, though including everything of the "Here," allows us to sense that state of transcended distinctions, of non-duality, an emptiness which constitutes the ground for the "Here" and "There." The picture ground is usually not a "back"-ground which can be objectively defined and located. Rather, it is "ground" *per se*. It makes no statement about what, how and where it is, and for this reason possesses such a powerful force of expression, one arising from silence and not from muteness (148).

In contrast to cult paintings, the picture ground in Zen paintings is not pushed back as if to provide a dark, neutral canvas for the sacred figures shining forth from it. Rather, it is activated, has a bright, light atmosphere which carries on a dialectical dialogue with the picture contents emerging from it and is their active, frequently even dominant partner. The phenomena emerge from this picture ground and, though defined, are not cut off but remain joined to it. The tension-filled relationship between the objects depicted and the empty picture ground also points to the relationship between the plurality of the phenomenal world and the simplicity of absolute Emptiness. But no matter how powerfully this polarity is brought out in these pictures, to the enlightened mind it has already been cancelled *a priori*.

Just as Zen religious thought does not recognize any real dualism, these pictures, too, show the realm of the objects they depict as merging imperceptibly into that of the empty ground from which they emerge. They seem at times to remerge into it like dreams and shadows, but this ground always manages to shine through their transparency. Here, too, a final limit is approached so that we may sense something that is infinite and beyond all antagonism.

In all the creative acts we have mentioned so far, Zen painters display an unerring certainty of world perception and pictorial realization of the world. Thus direct and convincing clarity and power arise from a sovereign certainty of spiritual penetration of essence which has left all doubts behind. Every element in the composition, every brush stroke, every ink tone is put exactly in the right place no matter how loose, how accidental the formal structure may appear. This certainty, which the Zen-inspired individual also displays in all other spheres of his life, has to be appreciated even more since it has been acquired through acts of freedom and independent daring, and always arises from a spontaneous, thoroughly personal impulse leading to direct, unreflected-upon action. The creators of the cult images, on the contrary, were not only allowed to follow the long proven, generally binding regulations and methods but were fully expected to do so. Their equally infallible certainty comes from a firm, metaphysically grounded bondage; that of Zen painters from an equally metaphysical freedom.

In Zen there is no hardening into set forms valid once and for all times because there is also no hardening into the security of the finality of set truths, dogmas, and interpretations which are believed proven for all times. Zen forms are, therefore, always "open" and "tentative." In every one of his creative acts the Zen

artist has to rely time and again on himself alone. He owes everything to the tremendous power of spontaneity, to that ultimate, totally liberated originality with whose help satori is attained and whose visible proof each Zen picture represents.

This directness with which the object is grasped and represented makes Zen pictures frequently appear sober, austere, unpolished and ascetic, occasionally perhaps even violent and grotesque. They do not excel by their perfect play of forms, aesthetic splendor and beautiful decorative charm. They aim for the greatest simplicity in materials, technique, choice of objects, and artistic means. This simplicity, incidentally, does not preclude a perfect, even virtuoso mastery of craftsmanship but rather presupposes it. It is full of the most minute formal nuances and succeeds in creating optical equivalents for that world view seeking to penetrate to the simple heart of things. However, this does not give rise to a disregard for form or arbitrariness of choice but rather to highly perfected forms which, though relying on a certain repertoire of typical artistic devices, are original creations in every instance. That is to say, they follow an "individual law" arising from both the essence of the particular "matter at hand" and the essence of the personality understanding and giving form to it.

The formative powers of the Zen artist are not less but rather more severely tested than those of artists producing cult paintings. Though we are not dealing with beauty in the traditional sense, if only because the artists may have consciously shunned it and because their works were no longer linked in function to *pûjâ* and *shôgon*, Zen paintings with all the modesty and austerity of the language of their forms are sustained by a formative power equal to their meaning, and this imparts to them a greatness and profundity unexcelled in all of East Asian art.¹⁸²

The most magic devices relied upon by Zen painters are brush and ink. We have already characterized the relationship between the strict, "wirelike" and the loose, modulating ink lines within the tradition of classic cult painting (p. 145). In the more typical forms of Zen painting,¹⁸³ the ink line, which had played a minor role in cult painting, now assumes the major role. Zen paintings do not, however, stop at a predominantly linear use of ink, but add that infinitely rich art of ink tones and shadowing in painterly fashion on which the fame of East Asian painting is largely based. Brush and ink, technically speaking, make it possible to arrive both at drawing precise forms in clear, sharp and rhythmically expanding and contracting exterior and interior lines, and at a "wet" interplay of broad surfaces and ephemeral tones or dot-like spots of varying depth.¹⁸⁴ This makes it progressively more difficult to arrive at a clear distinction between ink "painting" and ink "drawing" as this art realizes its own true nature.

Furthermore, the ink technique is also suitable for expressing opposite moods and dynamic states between the poles of absolute rest and quietude (142, 148) and of rapid and vigorous movement (143, 146). Through the interplay of such states, frequently in the same picture, an extremely rich and differentiated pictorial texture is created which combines vigorous formal structures and evanescent moods (139). The nuances achieved by masterful ink painting techniques are so varied that it was customary in East Asia to claim that works done in ink, though monochrome, contained "all five colors." The suggestive powers of ink paintings are great, and this fact in particular was bound to recommend this style of painting to the Zen artists

(even though they, as mentioned above, did not invent it and were also not the only ones to use it).

One of its sources was calligraphy, cultivated since antiquity and technically sharing the same foundation, which demanded an infallible accuracy of eye and hand. Like ink painting, calligraphy had to be executed on absorbing paper or silk "alla prima" which ruled out any later corrections. But above all calligraphy and ink painting have in common the fact that both permit and even require a direct "graphological" expression of the creative personality. Both are, therefore, a perfect match for the needs of Zen artists. Like calligraphy, ink painting, too, offers a rich scale of possibilities between the poles of a strict, regular, exact treatment and one that is free and loose and permits a sovereign exercise of enormous, even demonically expressive force. It is characteristic of the Zen spirit that it tends toward the latter pole rather than to the former without, however, shunning it altogether.

In calligraphy and painting but also in the arts of the garden, flower arrangement and tea, the same artist, depending on both intent and occasion, may employ side by side the cursive, sketch-like suggestive style (*sô*), the strict, correct style (*shin*), and the loose, more flexible style which maintains a relaxed transition ground between strictness and freedom (*gyô*). The looser, less restrained style has greater suggestive powers even though it grasps and reproduces the object far less exactly. It employs the greatest degree of abstraction, but if this abstraction is the result of a genuine grasp of reality, it does not lead away from the essence of things but rather directly to their very heart. Moreover, it also leads through and beyond them, which is the very effect Zen artists hope to achieve.

But this abstraction is not radical. It always leaves itself open to the world of objects no matter how much it strips these objects of their gravity and material substance. It does not turn away from them but elevates or transcends them without, however, stripping them of their reality. Here, too, ink painting approaches calligraphy, because the latter had also moved from originally pictorial signs imitating objects to linear-abstract ciphers which never, however, entirely lost their character as eidetic images. The cipherlike ink painting and the image-like characters meet each other halfway and can, therefore, over and over again be combined harmoniously in one and the same work.

In contrast to the abstract-decorative lines of cult paintings, the freely modulating and shadowing ink lines are closer to reality and life, both objectively and personally. Objectively, they follow to a much higher degree material forms and their appearance. Their spiritualization and focus on the essential nature of the objects notwithstanding, they continue to identify the "object" and can and will remain very close to living reality. Ink lines are also closer to reality and life by being a direct expression of the individual artistic personality as it emerges in its unique qualities. This personality provides the medium through which the supra-personal reality is infused into expressive forms. They, unlike the forms of classic cult paintings, are not elevated and ultimately cancelled by making them generally valid and transcendent by virtue of their abstract, typical and decoratively formalized qualities.

For all their ability to capture reality in individually expressive forms, ink paintings aim beyond the personal as well as real aspects into the sphere of

transcendence. This art leaps, so to speak, directly from an innermost and highly personal state of mind into the "Buddha Nature" and experiences during this process the insight that both are actually one and the same. We encounter an objectivity spiritualized and essentialized into emptiness or nothingness from a most personal experience and sudden intuition. No other artistic means could be more suitable for this task than the ink paintings with their ability to realize satori-like the "Absolute Presence" by means of their direct and yet sublimating, time-bound and yet time-transcending qualities. While the lines of cult paintings, for all their gentle flow, have the tendency to harden into timeless and closed forms, here the lively and mobile ink lines are pronouncedly transitory artistic means and become meaningful only in the sweep of their movements--both during the process of painting and, later on, during the act of thoughtful viewing. This artistry imparts to the depicted objects a certain fleetingness and freedom pointing to a realm beyond all limitations and flowing into Timelessness or Absolute Presence; i.e., it contains in itself, or at least hints at, a perfection leading to Ultimate Essence but reaches it with means other than the "eternal line" of classic painting.

In contrast to this line, which always limits itself to defining forms and bodies, the ink line, wherever it is allowed to be itself, indicates by means of its expanding and contracting flow the contours and at the same time the corporeal substance of the depicted objects. It suggests a high degree of plasticity of the objects, of lively movement and, simultaneously, even an atmosphere suspended around them (143, 144). Ink washes may add to these effects but not in every instance. Definition of form, realization of substance, and calligraphic-rhythmic line patterns come together in one single process.

Furthermore, the swelling and thinning of the ink lines helps to blur the boundary between line and surface and, in contrast to the strictly defining contour lines, achieves a gliding transition. We may, therefore, also say that while the linear technique of cult paintings approaches the form from the outside and describes and defines it, ink painting approaches form from the inside, and from an act of an identifying vision of object and essence. The former establishes boundaries and is more "dualistic"¹⁸⁵ than the latter which, in one synthetic act, presents the objects in their totality and transforms them at the same time into images of expressive rhythm flowing in a creative moment from the artist's personality.

This makes it possible to speak, in a Zen sense, of a "non-duality" of ink image and object on the one hand, and of ink image and creative personality on the other, and ultimately, of object and personality (even though such notions are basically beyond rational formulation). This makes obvious the crucial, object-transcending function of the ink line. The Zen spirit would have hardly been able to express itself so directly and perfectly through any other artistic medium.

The abbreviated formula "ink line" includes ink tones in most, or at least in the most important cases, if for no other reason than that both are technically so closely related. To be sure, ink tones may display an artistic value of their own which is independent of the linear treatment of ink. There is no need to comment at this point on the nearly incredible skill with which East Asian painters handle ink tones. As an artistic means they are applied with equal power to symbolize objects and to create non-objective moods. More than any other means the ink tones are suited to indicate the transgression of empirical barriers and the non-duality of

essence and phenomenon. Ink tones, no matter how suggestive to our imagination, usually have no representational, imitative-illusionist significance whatsoever, such as, for example, in reproducing darker or lighter objects, or supplying realistic-optic illumination or shadowing in a Western sense. Rather, they have to be understood as a purely artistic-functional, if you will, "abstract" formative means in the service of direct spiritual statements (145, 148, 149).

The fundamental polarity of black and white constitutes one of the most distinct properties of ink. In East Asia, especially in Buddhism, all colors and hence all phenomenal objects of the *samsāra* world, are contained and at the same time transcended either in blackness or in a white ground. Deep, perfect black indicates in the symbolic language of Zen (p. 237) the "ultimate overcoming and negating of all distinctions" which becomes the "highest absolute affirmation, that ultimate freedom" which "Ch'an (Zen) masters ascribe to enlightenment."¹⁸⁶ But in Zen pictures, even the contradistinction of black and white is transcended and a new higher level is reached which, in its dialectic dimension, is beyond forms and colors. Thus, the black/white of ink painting is of equal rank in meaning with the gold of cult painting even though the latter represents the opposite end of the color scale and is rooted in an entirely different religious perception.

The black-white tension has a peculiar "spatial" effect within the undimensional picture world of this art. The strong gradation of ink tones and the prominent impact of the graphic-linear forms or surface dottings of intensive blackness make us experience the darker parts as approaching, advancing towards us, and the lighter parts as retreating and, finally, seemingly vanishing in the white ground (148, 149). The "spatial" effect which dark black or light gray grounds can achieve merely by their own "absolute" value is frequently a source of amazement, particularly since it is achieved without the presence of any three-dimensional-objective structure in a measurable picture space--or at least with only the barest hint of the presence of such a structure. Every object, even the world itself, becomes transparent and reveals a "depth" no longer merely optically manifest but rather metaphysical. None of the tones produces this effect alone by itself. This happens rather in relation to all the other tones of the picture and to the ground on which they all stand and with which they enter into a dialogue.

The lively dialogue between black and white, positive and negative, advancing and retreating, present and non-present, speaking and non-speaking, points beyond all opposites to that which is really meant--the realm in which all dualism is canceled. But what it is that is meant is not elaborated on, described or represented. Ultimately, there is no longer any talk at all--and we should remind ourselves that the detailed depiction of well-defined objects in pictures is also a form of talk and a communication within the realm of empirical coexistence--but only a silent indication of the Absolute unveiling itself in its truth. Talk corresponds to *samsāra*, silence to *nirvāna*.

A picture like the "Persimmon Fruits" by Mu Hsi (148),¹⁸⁷ perhaps the purest and most radical of all Zen pictures in existence, is filled with a tremendous, all-pronouncing silence--that "thundering silence" of which the Zen masters speak when they quote the crucial passage of the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*. East Asians hear this silence above all in the things and creatures of nature, and most clearly in the simplest of them. If man immerses himself in them--in vision, poetry, and painting--

he is close to the essence of the world, the Buddha essence, and he answers all doubting, nagging questions in a silent detachment gained from that knowledge of emptiness, of non-duality, in which all opposites vanish and ready-made answers would only shackle the enlightened mind.

Is the world a dream?
Does it have substance? Tell!
Neither substance,
Nor a dream, as far as I know.
A Something, a Nothing, in One.

