

Ensō (Zen circle)

Calligraphy by Arthur Witteveen

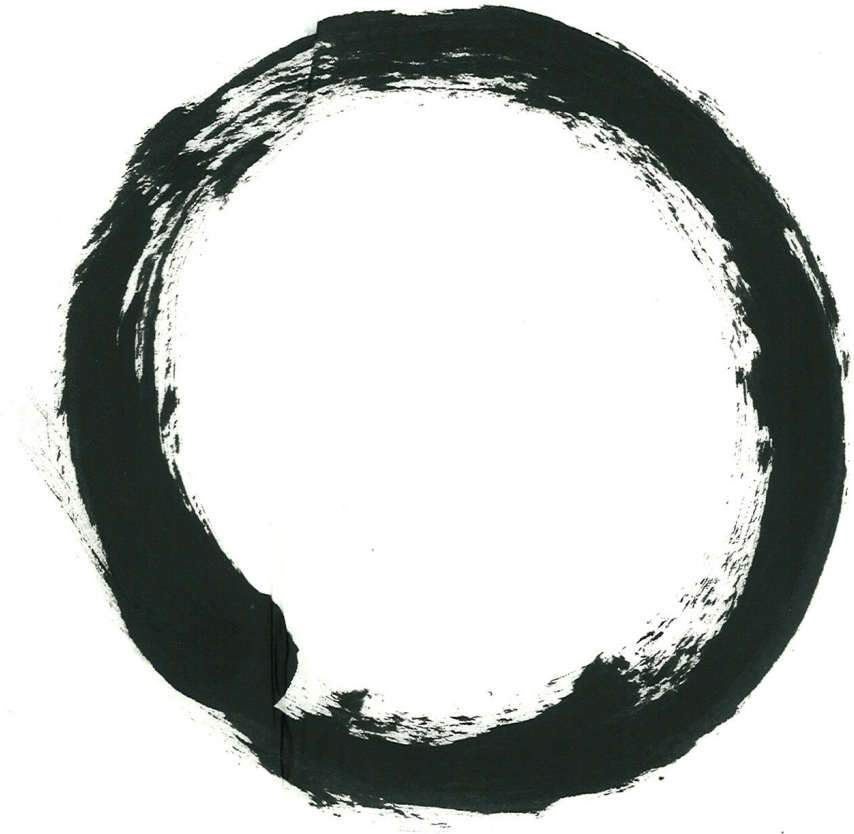
A Zen (Chinese: Chan) circle is at the same time empty and full. It reflects the complexities of the teachings of the Buddha.

The text accompanying this *Ensō* reads: 是什麼 ‘What is this?’ It is a *koan* (Zen saying/case) which refers to the story of the ninth-century Chinese Zen master Yunmen Wenyan (862/4-949 CE), who asked one of his disciples every day this same question. The disciple never had an answer. It took eighteen years before he suddenly, one day, said: ‘I understand’.

In order to bring the underlying idea closer to the Western way of thinking, the twentieth-century Japanese Zen master Fukushima Keidō (1936) wrote an *Ensō*, adding the text: ‘Watch, touch and bite’.

(Sources: Ōmori Sōgen and Terayama Katsujō (Transl. by John Stevens). *Zen and the Art of Calligraphy; The essence of sho*. London, etc., 1983) and Seo, Audrey Yoshiko & Addiss, Stephen. *The Art of Twentieth-Century Zen; Paintings and Calligraphies by Japanese Masters*. Boston & London, 2000).

A.Th. Witteveen LLM BA is nowadays Research Master student of Chinese Studies at Leyden University. He started his study of Sinology after his retirement as a First Secretary of the International Court of Justice in the Hague. He has been practising Chinese calligraphy for some thirty years; in 2002 he wrote, at the request of the Nederlandse Vereniging voor Druk- en Boekkunst (Dutch association for printing art and book art), De dans van het penseel. Een korte inleiding tot de Chinese Calligrafie (‘The Dance of the Brush: A Short Introduction to Chinese Calligraphy’). In his Japanese school of calligraphy he has a 9th dan.



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