

# A Study on the Beauty of Zen Garden – Cases of Ginkaku Temple, Ryōan Temple and Sankei Garden

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**Abstract** “Zen” in Chinese called “Chan” welcomed by the Western countries. Indian people’s meditation is somehow like sitting, so Zen also called “Zazen” means sit and meditation. A Zen painting which means the thinking in mind of the author expressed on the painting. That’s a kind of spiritual thinking. In Muromachi Era and Kamakura Era, Japanese culture was profoundly influenced by the Chinese Song and Yuan Dynasty. Most of the arts such as tea ceremony, painting, incense, lacquer ware...etc. Rito Akisato built the Ryoan Temple in 1797. The 15 stones were famous across the world. They are 5, 2,3,2,3 five groups. The garden in Ginkaku Temple using sand to make waves for imitating sea waves also very famous. Sankei Garden is a natural style garden which built in Edo era, and has Study room (Shoin) style tea house in it. There tea ceremonies were opened very often. An empirical test garden built in the campus of National Pingtung University of Science and Technology. With landscape facilities of dry stream, water basin, ‘Run and Chase’ grouping stone, three-stone grouping, small pond and stone lantern to intimate the Zen garden.

**Keywords** Zen garden, Beautifulness, Ryoan Temple, Ginkaku Temple, Sankei Garden

## 1. Background and Objectives

Zen is written as 「禪」 in Japanese and the pronunciation also ‘Zen’, in recent years the westerners are more interested with it. And anything related with Zen will gather interests such as, Zen art, Zen Buddhism. Although Zen art might look like simple, it seems that there is something spiritual and would strengthen our hearts. The influences of Zen are widely spread i.e. tea ceremony, Noh play, sword play, Japanese archery and calligraphy. In India it is called ‘Dhyana’ and is called ‘Jhana’ in Bali. Thus in China it is called ‘Channa’ and finally the last syllable missed to become ‘Chan’. The meaning of the word ‘Zen’ means meditate silently, and in India, people seat for meditation by crossing their legs. So, in China it is also called ‘zuòchán’ that means seating meditation. They concentrate on it and become a kind of spiritually centralized state. Thus Zen should be looked as a kind of spiritual, invisible and philosophical activity. In Japan they always called some artistry as ‘Dō’ such as, calligraphy (shodō), flower arrangement (kadō), tea ceremony (sadō), kendo (kendō), judo (judō) and bushido (bushidō). Everything should be perfect, everything should make it extremely. That is the essence of ‘Dō’. Zen is genuine, ultimate pursuing, and wholesome integrating, and is a kind of genuine practicing.

A Zen garden is not necessary to be located in a Zen temple. A scroll painting of Dharma is affected by Zen but might not be called as Zen painting. A scroll painting of Zen should be a painting painted with Zen spirit. That means there has already Zen in mind and just paint it on the paper. A realization in mind and change it into art is important. The degree of skill might be equal to the degree of spiritual realization. (Shunmei Masuno 2003 p.8-15)

Two surges of Chinese waves influenced Japan during Kamakura and Muromachi Eras. The Buddhism, Zen and scroll painting had great influences. Around a study room (shoin) there might be a dry garden (Karesansui) created. And the image is always a scroll look. The monks who made the gardens were called ‘Ishidatesō’. They are monks and also can be called gardeners. In Muromachi Era the gardeners are called Kawaramono, they are specialists of garden making. Although they use natural material to make a garden, but the garden is a kind of abstractive. The so called ‘natural’ is internal other than external. In Kamakura Era (1185-1336 A.D.) the second wave of Chinese influence came to Japan. Shogun and samurai liked Zen Buddhism. Zen spirituals were derived from the Song Dynasty thinking. Tea ceremony vessels, scroll painting, incense and lacquerware were all came from China. When the monks came back they learned the culture about Pure Land Buddhism. Mongolia emperor conquered Japan, and brought monks to Japan. Meditation is a kind of inner strength not outward one. A new style of garden-making appeared during Muromachi Era. That is dry garden (Karesansui). It is a kind of simplified pattern which mostly

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made by samurais or monks. Small garden turned to be 'seat and watch' type not a 'walk in' type. A book about garden-making 'Tsukiyama Teizōden' was written by Ritō Akisato. The author reconstructed Ryōan Temple in the year of 1797, and the style became popular during that time. A 15 stones grouping which divided into 7, 5, 3 stones or subgroups (another saying) 5, 2, 3, 2, 3 stones was a symbol of islands and the ripples in the sea. Overlooking of the garden is somehow like islands floating on the sea. And odd numbers of stones make the garden looks balanced. And there also has a saying that is a symbolization of tigress sent its sons across the sea (tora no ko watari ishi). (Nitschke, G. 2003)

A dry garden has no water, so the white sand was used spread out as if the water does. (Ritō Akisato 1797) Sankei Garden was constructed in 1906, and is a type of Suki-style (elegant pursuits) garden. There are pagodas, pavilions, palaces and tea houses. The stone in the garden was ingeniously arranged. The Suki-style study room was famous in Edo Era. Reed thatched tea house called 'Shunsōro' stood at the southern side of Chōshū Pavilion and tea ceremony was held quite often at there. The landlord of Sankei Garden considered that although the land belongs to him the scenery is a gift of God. So, he opened the garden to public and let all people can see it (Inoue, Y. and M. Sensou 1989). During 8th century the capital of Japan was moved to Kyoto, a garden in nobility house is important. 'Hill and Pond' garden became the main type. There were water resources and natural streams. In the southern part of the garden, there always have ponds or lakes. In the middle of a pond there would have islands. This is a typical nobleman garden look likes (Yoko Kawaguchi, 2003). In this study, the gardens of Ginkaku Temple, Ryōan Temple and Sankei Garden were surveyed. And an empirical test garden built in the campus of National Pingtung University of Science and Technology. The landscape facilities of dry stream, water basin, grouping stones and stone lanterns are to intimate the Zen garden.

## 2. Literature Review

### I. Zen and Zen garden

The word 'Zen' became an international phrase same as the word 'Karate' and 'Judo' had become popular in the world. Karate and Judo has been the competition games in Olympic Games. Zen Buddhism originated from India and transferred to China then Japan. Indian people meditate under the tree and Chinese people meditate in the cave, and in a temple the monks might meditate on a bench. Zen art is simple, strong, fortitude and spiritual. 'No minded' (mushin) does not mean that one has no conscious but concentrated on one thing. The 'earthliness' (sezoku) things such as, gorgeous housing, famous cars etc. are not the objects to be concentrated on. Greed, anger and defect (貪、嗔、痴) are

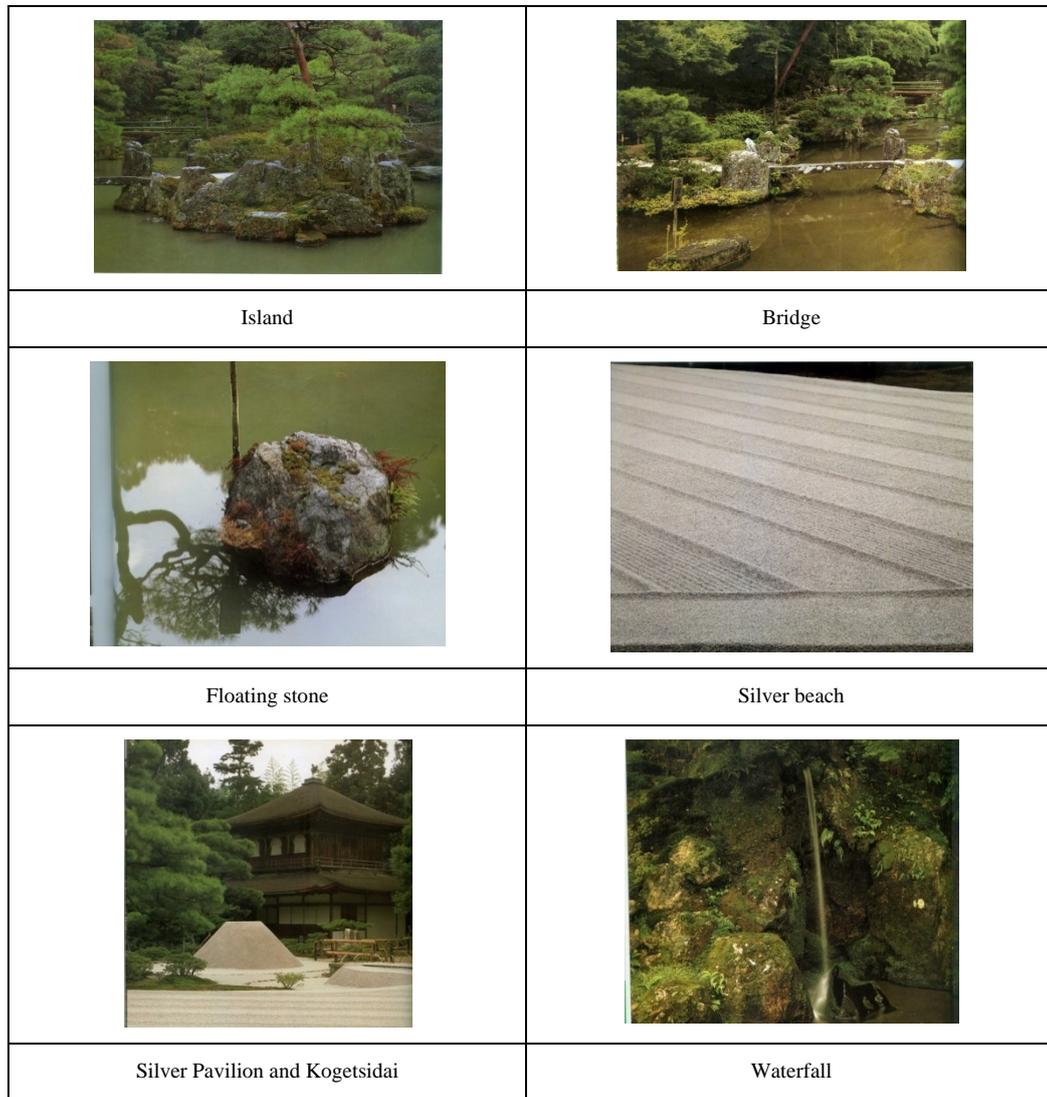
three things which were considered as spiritual poisoning. To do one thing without dedication and pressure, just as un-minded and concentrated would be beautiful. The bird's singing un-mindedly but will move the people. Zen is a kind of spiritual, the expression is quite different. A simple dry garden might not be called a Zen garden, although it uses stone and white sand to imitate mountains and water. Zen garden might be a garden that has already in mind and expressed in a physical way. A Zen garden might express the builder's characteristics and his life. So, it is emotional. That means it is from mind turn to physical and from physical turn to mind. A Zen garden's simplification, abstraction and symbolization were usually found. That is seldom used in the early history. The inner spirit of an author can be transformed into physical space with tension and strictly rules. The space was quenched and became unpredictable tranquil. The garden of Ryōan Temple white mortar painted on the wall and the acreage of the garden is only about 23x9 m<sup>2</sup>. The whole garden was built by white sand and 15 stones. The structure is quite simple, but would make the viewers feel tension and energetic. After the stone groups arranged there still some space leaved. That is called 'white leaving' and makes the whole space as if a natural world. In this way, it is a kind of Zen art expression (Shunmei Masuo 2003 p.8-15).

### II. The role of sand and stone

The two surges of Chinese influence on Japan during Kamakura and Muromachi Eras had introduced Zen culture, and mountain and water paintings (Shanshui Ga) to Japan. Dry garden landscape and together with study room type housings were popular in that stage. The gardeners in Kamakura Era was called Ishidatesō, they are replaced by the monks in the temples. In Muromachi Era the gardeners were called riverbank workers (Kawara Mono) and they were very specialized. Zen meditation is a kind of 'no-minded' but it does not mean 'no mind', or 'unconscious' but full of awareness. Zen garden means the inner knowledge turn to outer realization. Yoshimasa Ashikawa (158-1408) made a garden in Silver Pavilion (Ginkaku Temple) is a garden with pond and islands. He made his inner knowledge turn to outer realization and the garden can be seen as a whole on a higher point. An excursion type of water pond garden changed into dry garden lately (Nitschke, G. 2003).

### III. Mountain and Water type Zen garden

Zen garden is a kind of innovation which need not to express all the elements, like wind and mist painted in a scroll painting, some part were abbreviated and makes the viewer to imagine. That is Zen thinking which leave some parts for imagination. The imagination is important in Zen garden such as, a standing stone might be the image of a mountain, and white sand paving might be the image of a great river or sea. In Daitoku Temple and Ryōan Temple were all made this way (Jizo Ohashi and Chuichi Saito 2000).



**Figure 1.** The landscape in Silver Pavilion (Cited from Inoue, Y. and M. Sen 1989)

### 3. Methods

In this research, the historic literature review method was used (Chen, Chien-Ho, 2002, P.285-296).

#### I. Setting up the research problem

The beauty of Zen garden is a kind of elegant. Most of the cases were built by the monks and the philosophy of Zen was introduced. Three gardens namely, Silver Pavilion (Ginkaku Temple), Ryuan Temple and Sankei Garden, are investigated in this study.

#### II. Definition of the problem

The Zen garden is not necessary built by a monk or a Zen learner. Actually, the builder has the Zen idea or philosophy is all right. Most of the good Zen gardens were built by Japanese gardeners.

#### III. Information collection

To analyze the design ideas some Chinese, English and Japanese literatures are collected.

#### IV. Information analysis

The information about the artistic conception, beauty and Zen concept of the three gardens namely, Silver Pavilion, Ryōan Temple and Sankei Garden were analyzed.

#### V. Integration and explanation

The descriptions in the articles of concerning designing ideas, beauty and Zen concepts were aggregated and interpreted.

#### VI. The results

The results are materials used to write the discussion and conclusion.

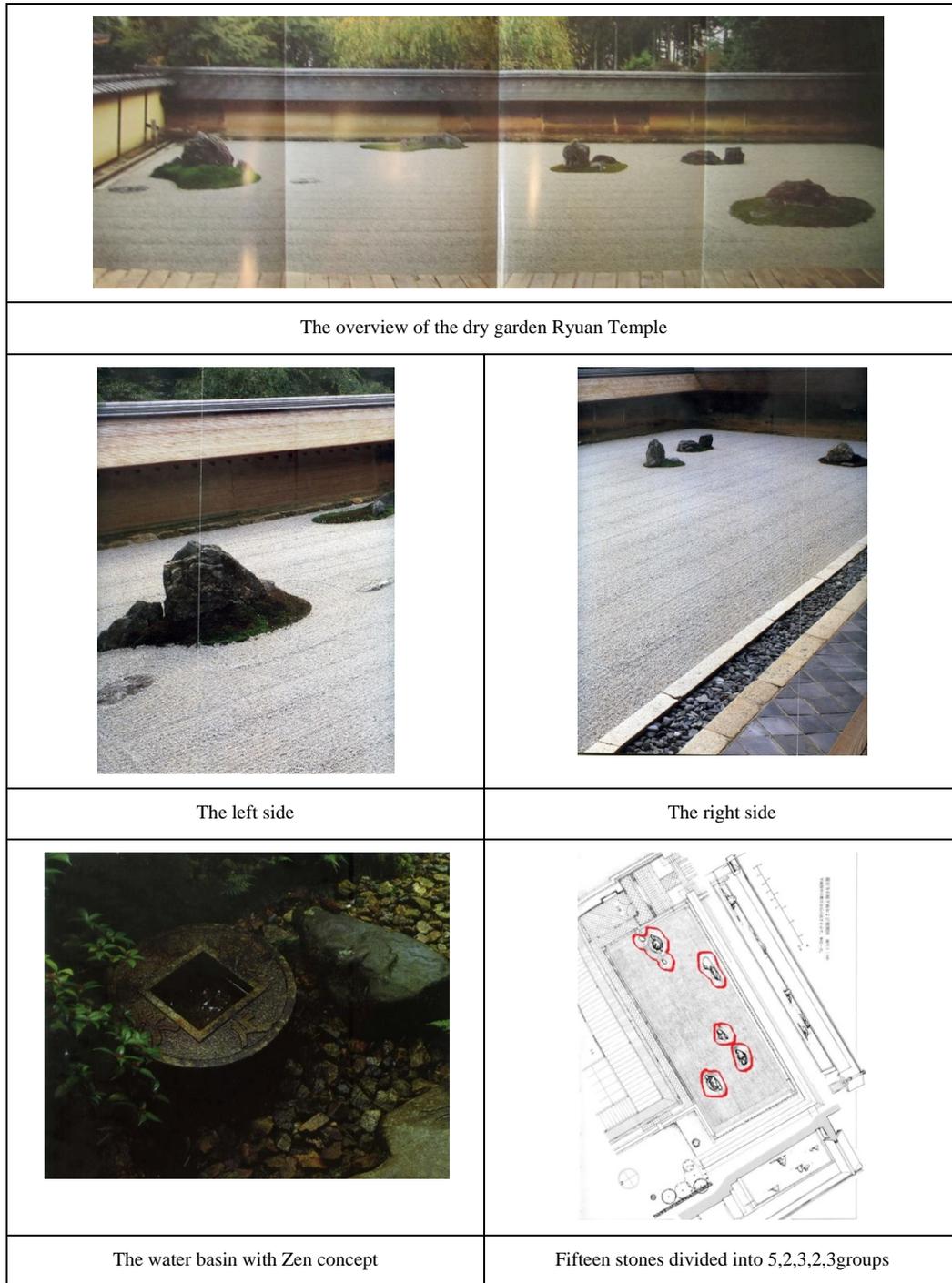


Figure 2. The landscape in Ryuan Temple (Cited from Inoue, Y. and M. Sen 1989, Shimamoto, S. 2002, Ohashi, J. and C. Saito 2000)

## 4. Results and Discussion

According to Japan's indigenous religion, Shinto, certain natural objects – mountains, hills, trees and stones house divine spirits. Even today, a hiker in the forest might come upon a shrine area spread with white gravel and enclosed in simple bamboo or rope fencing. In the middle might stand a large stone called Iwakura, which would be bound with rice-straw rope, an indication of the presence of kami (god), or spiritual guardians. The most famous of these sanctified

spaces is the Ise Shrine. For more than thousand years, this holly site has housed thatched shrine buildings that are fully reconstructed every twenty years. An adjacent site stands ready for new buildings, and when these are completed a transferal ceremony is held and the old buildings are disassembled. Each vacant shrine site, standing in the pristine forest, suggests the belief in the sanctity of natural beauty that is at the heart of Japanese garden design.

During the Nara Era (710-794) there was extensive intercourse between Japan and Tang-dynasty China. In its

gardens, architecture, legal system, city design, and even language, the nation began to borrow from its sophisticated continental neighbor. The symmetrical design of the garden of the Shishin Den (Hall of the Screened Mansion) one of the great ceremonial buildings of the Kyoto Imperial Palace, suggests the growing Chinese influence: with gravel – like that at the Ise Shrine – is spread in a courtyard between wooden buildings flanked by a mandarin orange tree and a cherry tree (Earle, J. and S. Hibi 2000 p.7).

During the Muromachi period (1335-1573) small Zen gardens were built, in which Zen monks tried many different approaches to the design of stone gardens in an attempt to convey Zen concept of discipline, self-examination and ultimate enlightenment. Often on southern-facing side of a Zen temple's prayer hall, Karesansui gardens (dry garden for meditation) featured white sand or gravel as the ground cover, raked in various patterns to suggest waves, droplets, ripples or other effects. The garden of Daisen-In in Kyoto houses a miniature natural landscape, said to be a three-dimensional representation of the Chinese scroll painting that influenced Zen thought at the time. Three sections of the garden, two of them less than ten feet in depth, hold stones arranged as a course of water falling over a waterfall through a mountain stream-bed, past a broad river and into a vast ocean, all indicated through stones and raked gravels. Other gardens are more abstract. The most famous of these is Ryōan Temple, a rectangular space about the size of a tennis court with five 'islands' of moss and stone, comprising five, two, three, two and three rocks (also said : seven, five and three stones) respectively, rising from a bed of raked gravel symbolizing the sea. While the composition as a whole is asymmetrical, balance is achieved through hierarchy. One's eyes and mind travel around the garden in a kind of circle, from the highest rocks to the lowest, giving the garden a sense of motion. From no point of the veranda can all fifteen rocks be seen at once: one rock is always hidden. Looking at the garden, one feels like the fifteen rocks, a part of the total composition. Soothed by the serene simplicity of the space materials, one becomes an island, like Japan itself, floating on a vast sea.

### **I. Case of Silver Pavilion**

In Muromachi Era the 8th generation Shogun, Yoshimasa Ashikaga, had tired of politics and retired. In 1482, with Saiho Temple as example he made the buildings of Tōzan Hall. Silver Pavilion and Tōkyū Hall remained and surrounded by a great white sand garden. The sand paving, a sand mountain (Kōgetudai) and a silver sand beach (Ginshatan) are marvelous. Especially when the moon rises, the scenery is indiscernible. A water fall called 'Sengetsusen' was built at the foothills and the water fall down from northeast to southwest and to the Nishiki-kagami Pond. The pond is divided into two parts, and there are islands inside. The building in northwest is Kannon Temple (Silver Pavillion) and in southeast is Tōkyū Hall. There are seven stone bridges, four floating stones and

many famous stones arranged in the pond. The Tōkyū Hall was an imitation of Sailai Hall in Saihō Temple. A study room called Doninsai has a 4.5 Tatami (90cm x180cm) space. Yoshimasa had referred about Saihō Temple said that to build an arbor on the top of a mountain and a hut at the mountainside. (Inoue, Y. and M. Sen 1989 p.1-8)

### **II. Case of Ryōan Temple**

A garden with 15 stones that simulated islands in an ocean or in a cloud sea. The area has only 247.5m<sup>2</sup> of acreage, an old monk constructed it. Inspired by the mountain and water paintings and created an innovative garden. Hundreds of years passed, and the garden still stand there. The garden encircled with earthen wall called 'dohei'. The housing built before the garden had fire disaster three times. The earthen wall should be built at a suitable height to screen off the unharmonious back ground and to highlights the scenery inside the garden and should be strong enough to stand there for thousands of years. In the garden there is no tree and grass, there are only some mosses, stone and white sand. A water basin with four Kanji (Chinese characters) set up with Zen concept. The meanings of the words are: 'I would be satisfied while I know that I am enough.' (吾唯足るのを知る) (Inoue, Y., M. Sen 1995. p.1-17).

The Hojo Garden of Ryuan Temple is a kind of Zen beauty, sober refinement (wabi) and antique look (sabi). It is built by stones and white sand and there is a weeping cherry tree. The outer space was circled by pine trees. The house of Zen institute beside was once burned and reconstructed. And the stones were brought from Arashi Mountain in Kyoto. (Shimamoto, S. 2002 p.20-25)

The arrangement of stones had used the method of Bonsai-setting. In the back of one stone of the second stone group there was engraving of the builders' name - Shotaro and Sejiro. (Ohashi, J. and C. Saito 2000, p.110)

### **III. Case of Sankei Garden**

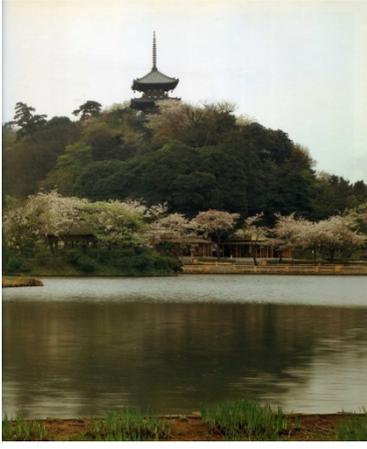
Sankei Garden was built by Tomitarō Hara, a very wealthy merchant and art-loving person. His name was Tomitarō and changed to Sankei, so that the garden was named Sankei Garden. He collected many garden facilities from Kyoto, Nara, and Kamakura. It takes 20 years for him to complete the construction of the whole garden. The garden is so beautiful that even was called as 'Eastern Katsura Detached Palace'. The three-storey pagoda (Sanjūtō) was made in Muromachi Era and moved from old Tōmyō Temple, now located in the front of the entrance and is the symbol of the garden. With a big pond, many green trees and flowers are so beautiful that attract many people to visit here. In the year of 1906 the outer garden had been opened to public and was sold to Yokohama City Government in the year of 1947 became a public park. The marvelous tea ceremony arbor (Sukiya) is in harmony with the garden very well. Many famous decorative stonemason were move from many other places. Some stone-made washing basins were used by Hideyoshi Toyotomi (shogun), and a stone lantern called Migawari Stone Lantern was used

by Rikyū Sen (the stone lantern which saved Rikyū from being killed).

**IV. An empirical test for Zen garden**

This is an empirical test garden built in the campus of

National Pingtung University of Science and Technology. With landscape facilities of dry stream, water basin, ‘Run and Chase’ grouping stone, three-stone grouping, small pond and stone lantern.

	
<p>The big pond</p>	<p>The stream in natural style</p>
	
<p>The bridge pavilion</p>	<p>The tea house</p>
	
<p>The house of Chōshūkaku</p>	<p>The three storey pagoda</p>

**Figure 3.** The landscape in Sankei Garden (Cited from Inoue, Y. and M. Sen 1989, Shimamoto, S. 2002, Ohashi, J. and C. Saito 2000)

	
<p>Dry stream</p>	<p>A wash basin similar as in Ryōan Temple</p>
	
<p>A 'Run and Chase' grouping stone</p>	<p>A three-stone grouping</p>
	
<p>A small pond</p>	<p>The stone lantern</p>

Figure 4. An empirical garden built in campus of National Pingtung University of Science and Technology

## 5. Conclusions

Zen should be looked as a kind of spiritual, invisible and philosophical activity. A Zen painting which means the thinking in mind of the author expressed on the painting. That's a kind of spiritual thinking. In Kamakura Era (1185-1336 A.D.) the second wave of Chinese influence came to Japan, shogun and samurai liked Zen Buddhism. Zen spirituals were derived from the China Song Dynasty thinking. A simple dry garden might not be called a Zen garden, although it uses stone and white sand to imitate mountain and water. Zen garden might be a garden that has already in one's mind and expressed in a physical way. The gardeners in Kamakura Era was called Ishidatesō, they were replaced by the monks in the temples. In Muromachi Era the gardeners were called riverbank workers (Kawara Mono) and they were very specialized in gardening. Zen

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Case of Silver Pavilion: Silver Pavilion and Tokyu Hall remained and surrounded by a great white sand garden. The

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Case of Ryōan Temple: A garden with 15 stones that simulated islands in an ocean or in a sea of cloud. The area has only 247.5m<sup>2</sup> of acreage, an old monk constructed it. Inspired by the mountain and water paintings and created an innovative garden.

Case of Sankei Garden: Sankei Garden was built by Tomitarō Hara, a very wealthy merchant and art-loving person. His name was Tomitarō and changed to Sankei, so that the garden was named Sankei Garden. The three-storey pagoda (Sanjūtō) was made in Muromachi Era and moved from old Tōmyō Temple, now located in the front of the entrance and is the symbol of the garden. The marvelous tea ceremony arbor (Sukiya) is in harmony with the garden very well. Many famous decorative stonemason were move from many other places.

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