

TRADITIONAL ART PORTRAYAL IN MODERN MEDIA: NUANCES OF *SHODŌ* EXPRESSION IN *MANGA*

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Abstract The present article analyses how Japanese calligraphy (*shodō*) is portrayed in the media, particularly in the Japanese comic book (*manga*) *Barakamon*. Although it is an art strongly anchored in tradition, *shodō* has continuously found new ways to reinvent itself and to become an integral part of everyday life. In order to observe the role of Japanese calligraphy in the media, the article will analyse the *manga* series *Barakamon*, showcasing several issues related to calligraphy, and how they are treated in the *manga*: the link between the visuals and the text of a calligraphic work (and how it might create difficulties for the *manga*'s translators), the issue of value within a calligraphic work and the importance of the calligrapher's individuality and of finding a unique style.

Keywords Japanese calligraphy, *shodō*, *manga*, Japanese comics, Japanese studies.

Japanese calligraphy's ability to remain anchored in tradition while reflecting contemporary Japanese artistic changes and currents has helped it to remain integrated into people's everyday lives. Despite the fact that *shodō* has undergone subtle changes over time, its essence has stayed intact. This art also plays a particularly important role in the life of modern man, not only as a way of finding new creative horizons, but also as an exercise in purification and the achievement of inner balance.

Japanese writing is known for its complexity and, although this aspect might be seen as an impediment to learning the language, it is this very feature that allows Japanese calligraphy to be a unique art, fundamentally different from other types of calligraphy. This connection creates countless possibilities for character (*kanji* or *kana*) representation, either in simplified form, where certain lines are incorporated into a single brushstroke to create fluidity in movement (like the cursive style of calligraphy), or in full, harmonious form, where each

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feature is well defined and synchronized with the other components of the character (such as the formal style that follows the form and order of each feature).

Japanese calligraphy evolved together with writing, the two influencing each other constantly. Modern Japanese language concomitantly uses three writing systems: *kanji*, *hiragana*, and *katakana*. Between the 4th and the 6th centuries,¹ Japanese writing began to take shape by borrowing Chinese characters which would ultimately be known as the *kanji* logograms. Although they went through various changes over the years, *kanji* are still used to this day in writing and, implicitly, in calligraphy. During the Heian period (794-1185) a new system of writing, called *hiragana*, increased in popularity.² *Hiragana* took shape from the cursive brush writing of *kanji* logograms³ and, as a result, it is characterised by a round, elegant visual appearance. Similar to how *hiragana* sprouted from calligraphy, the roots of the *katakana* syllabary were in the formal writing style known as *kaisho*.⁴ Because of its origin, the *katakana* characters have geometric, angular features. As a result of this evolution, in contemporary written Japanese, one uses all three systems: *kanji*, *hiragana*, and *katakana*. However, each of them has a specific role: *kanji* are used to transcribe nouns or numerous verbal and adjectival roots, *katakana* contains written words of foreign origin (*gairaigo*) or native words that the speaker wants to highlight or emphasize, and although *hiragana* and *kanji* can have similar functions, *hiragana* is used for affixes, structures and grammatical particles (and many elements related, in general, to grammatical information).

Over time, as writing gradually evolved, keeping up with the country's socio-cultural changes, it eventually became an art form known as *shodō*. Considering that Japan borrowed the *kanji* logogram writing system from China, the close connection between the origins of calligraphy and Chinese writing appears that much more natural. Later on, as a Japanese style became more and more prominent, supported by the evolution of *kana* syllabaries, *shodō* calligraphy was able to find its own way.

The word “calligraphy” in Japanese can indicate several types of practices, out of which only one can be defined as an art form. Therefore, “calligraphy” can be translated into Japanese as *shūji*, but this word defines the act of writing using a brush, which can be an element that facilitates the assimilation of *kanji* logograms, rather than an art form in itself. Through *shūji*, the practitioner has the opportunity to assimilate the order of the strokes of a logogram and the means by which it is balanced in relation with the overall structure of the character. Calligraphy can, however, transcend the level of its mere practice – through *shodō*, it becomes an important component of traditional Japanese arts, expressing the calligrapher’s

¹ Rodica Frențiu, *Caligrafia japoneză în memoria clipei* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară clujeană, 2021), 25.

² Kyuyoh Ishikawa, *Taction. The Drama of the Stylus in Oriental Calligraphy* (Tokyo: International House of Japan, 2011), 158.

³ H.E. Davey, *The Japanese Way of the Artist* (Albany, California: Michi Publishing, 2015), 220, Frențiu, 50; Ishikawa, 159; Christopher Seeley, *A History of Writing in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2000), 70-71.

⁴ Davey, 220; Frențiu, 50.

aspirations, ideas, and experience. The personality of the calligrapher and their vision are impregnated in the traces of black ink drawn on the paper. The creativity of the calligrapher is not limited to symmetrical and visually pleasing shapes, since they are free to alter the form of a logogram or character so as to reflect the meanings they wish to convey.

Because *shodō* is both word and image, our research is built on the premise that a calligraphic work consists of two elements: a linguistic component and a visual component. The linguistic component is the word or the text written by the calligrapher, while the visual component is the way in which the semantic element of the work is represented visually. In order to understand the calligrapher's perspective and the meaning of a *shodō* work, the viewer must analyse and understand both components as a whole. This aspect is essential for Japanese calligraphy, since the absence of a visual component limits the artistic creativity of the calligrapher, while the absence of the linguistic component turns the piece into abstract art, rather than calligraphy.

The flexibility of calligraphy is highlighted by the fact that *shodō* is, simultaneously, both a communicative and a creative act. As an element that evokes beauty (*bi*) and a practical element (*yō*),⁵ *shodō* succeeds in conveying the message to the receptor clearly, through the act of communication and, at the same time, in helping them perceive the meaning of the calligraphic work. These three characteristics have maintained the position held by the *art of writing* in society at the same degree of relevance - it managed to find a way to remain interesting and it is continuously rediscovered by the younger generations.⁶ Thus, the two components (visual and linguistic) and the dual function of *shodō* are depicted in movies, *anime*, and *manga* as well.

The impact of *shodō* on the Japanese culture and the way in which it has become part of people's daily activities are made visible by the presence of this art form in pop culture, especially in the animated series known as *anime* and the Japanese comics *manga*. The series that cover issues related to *shodō* (and that focus on this art form in particular within the story) include the movie *Shodō gāruzu!! Watashitachi no kōshien* ("Shodō girls!! Our kōshien competition", 書道ガールズ!!わたしたちの甲子園), the *manga* and *anime* series *Barakamon* ("Energetic Child", ぼらかしん), or the *manga* and *anime* series *Handa-kun* ("Handa", はんだくん).

One of the most famous series focused on the *art of writing* is *Barakamon* – the *manga* version was published between 2013-2018, and the *anime* version aired in 2014. *Barakamon* tells the story of how the changes in a man's life are reflected in *shodō*, thus illustrating the proverb that defines calligraphy: *Sho wa hito nari* ("Writing becomes the

⁵ Seiichi Hirakata et al., *Zenkoku Daigaku, Shodo Gakkai, Sho no koten to riron* (Tokyo: Mitsumura Tosho, 2013), 90; Yanagida Taiun, "Sho," in *Words in Motion: Modern Japanese Calligraphy*, Yomiuri Shinbun (Tokyo: Library of Congress and Yomiuri Shinbun, 1984), 44.

⁶ Rossella Menegazzo, "A New Frontier in Art: From Calligraphy to Performance," in Calvetti, Paolo, Mariotti, Marcella, *Contemporary Japan: Challenges for a World Economic Power in Transition* (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2015), 127.

person,” meaning: “Calligraphy becomes an expression of man’s personality”, 書は人なり).⁷ Calligraphy as self-expression is a topic that has gradually drawn the interest of the media to ever greater extents, with the *Barakamon* series illustrating how, as the main character’s perception of the world changes, his personal calligraphy style synchronises with the new inner dimension thus revealed, helping the protagonist discover himself. The present article will focus on the *manga* series *Barakamon* and its portrayal of calligraphy.

1. *Shodō* depicted in the *Barakamon* manga

The main character in *Barakamon* is Seishū Handa, a calligrapher who experiences professional failure when, during a calligraphy exhibition, the director of the exhibition criticizes his conformist calligraphy style, which causes Seishū to punch the interlocutor, in an angry outburst. As a result, Seishū is forced to spend a good amount of time on the Gotō Islands, where his friends and family hope that the protagonist will be able to find his inner balance. The story focuses on Seishū Handa’s daily life and the interactions between the character and the inhabitants, especially between him and the energetic girl Naru Kotoishi (to which the title of the series alludes), managing to outline, through a warm and welcoming atmosphere, the route to finding oneself and their calligraphic writing style. As Seishū evolves and rediscovers the things and values that are truly important to him, his calligraphy style, formerly criticized as “textbook-style,”⁸ evolves, reflecting the changes in his life and the shifts in his worldview. The reader is immersed in Seishū Handa’s journey, witnessing his evolution from rigorous calligraphic writing (focused on winning awards) to practicing calligraphy for pleasure, which allows him to immortalize and to even publically display certain precious moments, memories, and experiences.

Although the series predominantly focuses on the characters and particularly on their relationships, calligraphy itself becomes a character that determines the way in which friendships are formed and the evolution of those around them, both as people and as professionals. Throughout the series, the reader has the opportunity to see calligraphy in a multitude of instances: although it is initially presented in the formal context of an exhibition, where the participants were connoisseurs of the art, *shodō* is gradually illustrated as much more than an exclusive art or homework for learning to write *kanji* logograms - it becomes a leisure activity and an important element for other fields, such as advertising.

Shodō representation appears in various forms in *Barakamon*. Adapting to the new lifestyle, Seishū helps two local girls, Tamako Arai and Miwa Yamamura with their homework, which consists of practicing writing with a brush, thus reflecting on the role that calligraphy plays for the modern man, as a tool for learning writing systems. Furthermore, in several instances, Seishū illustrates how calligraphy can be a means of promoting certain goods or services. In chapter 4, the protagonist is shown creating the sign that will be displayed in

⁷ Frențiu, 16.

⁸ Satsuki, Yoshino, *Barakamon*, vol. 1 (New York: Yen Press, 2014), 11.

front of a restaurant, fulfilling the role of a logo. In Chapter 106, the liquor store owned by Miwa Yamamura’s father is about to close, and for the remainder of its days, Seishū creates a sign that displays the name of the shop to be placed out front. Although the act is done as a gesture of friendship, seeing how well the calligraphic writing reflects the essence of the place, Miwa Yamamura decides to reopen the place one day, taking over the management role from her father.

Thus, *Barakamon* presents *shodō* from various perspectives: from the small details it brings to everyday life, to the role it holds in the art world and the relationship that tradition and modernity have in the contemporary world. In a comical style, the *Barakamon* series tackles deep issues that define the art of writing and that have puzzled audiences and practitioners alike over the years, such as the value of a calligraphic work or the importance of a personal style.

2. The difference between practical writing and writing as an art in *Barakamon*

From the very beginning of the series, in chapter 4, the issue of what transforms a simple written work into an exceptional calligraphic work is addressed through the lens of the differences between calligraphy as a *shūji* brush writing exercise and calligraphy as a *shodō* art form. Tamako Arai, a local girl who wants to become a *manga* artist (thus having enough creative experience when it comes to using some of the tools necessary in *shodō*), writes *dame ningen* (“A person good for nothing” ダメ人間) with a brush. Her friends Miwa Yamamura and Naru Kotoishi, watching the shape of the characters that were written quickly, in one stroke, conclude that just about anyone can do calligraphy. Disturbed by this statement, Seishū calligraphically rewrites the same work, leaving the three girls in awe. Looking at the result, the girls are convinced that the version written by the calligrapher is definitely better, but they do not have a clear explanation for this certainty.



Fig. 1 ダメ人間 (dame ningen, “A person good for nothing”) written by Tamako Arai

Source: Yoshino, Satsuki, *Barakamon* vol. 1 (New York: Yen Press, 2014), 120.



Fig. 2 ダメ人間 (dame ningen, “A person good for nothing”) written by Seishū Handa

Source: Yoshino, Satsuki, *Barakamon* vol. 1 (New York: Yen Press, 2014), 121.

As far as the linguistic and visual components are concerned, the scene brings up an important issue in *shodō*: the difference between exceptional work and mediocre or unsatisfactory work. It is often difficult to precisely point out what is striking in an exceptional calligraphic work, since the public is captivated by the dynamic movement of the brushstrokes and the story they outline with no explanation for this attraction, which is why calligraphy and its effect on the viewer sometimes seem difficult to understand. Admiring the result, the receptor is often not immediately aware of the years that have made possible the harmonious writing before their eyes, causing them, in some cases, to minimize the effort and practice needed to master the art of writing.

In an attempt to define what makes calligraphy an enjoyable process, Barnet and Burto identify three areas: recognition of forms, the “aura” of the work, and the aesthetics of the work as a finished product.⁹ Although calligraphy is not a mimetic act, the receptors, through their openness to transpose themselves into the admired work, often notice various forms that can make a character appear dry or angry.¹⁰ This phenomenon is given by the vitality of the line, by the creative act of writing which, in turn, arouses the creativity of the viewer. The “aura” of the work emphasizes the personal importance that a calligraphic work can have for the receptor and manages, in some cases, to confer unlimited personal value even to seemingly ordinary objects.¹¹ The aesthetics of the work as a finished product includes the calligraphic work as a unitary whole, the way in which the characters are calligraphed, the connection between them, and the way in which they are harmonized with the support on which it is written.¹²

Similarly, with regard to Chinese calligraphy, Chen Tingyou identifies three important areas: beauty of the strokes, beauty of composition, and beauty of the work as a

⁹ Sylvan Barnet, William Burto, “Some Thoughts on Shodō: the Way of Writing,” in Miyeko Murase, *The Written Image* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002), 34-35.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹² Barnet and Burto, 35.

whole.¹³ The three categories are similar to the elements identified by Barnet and Burto,¹⁴ the beauty of the written characters being given by the vigour of the brushstrokes,¹⁵ similar to how the forms identified by the receptor have the ability to immerse them in the interpretative process and discover the “aura” of the calligraphic work. Thus, a line lacking vigour will not have the ability to transpose the receptor into the admired work. The beauty of the character composition is similar to what Barnet and Burto¹⁶ identified in the last category, emphasizing the importance of architectural character composition. To achieve beauty of form, the characters must be straight, well balanced, uneven, so as to not create redundancy (for example, the three strokes of the number “three” are different sizes, despite the fact that they are, essentially, three horizontal lines: 三), coherent and dynamic.¹⁷ The last categories overlap both for Tingyou and for Barnet and Burto, as he emphasizes the importance of calligraphy not as separate component elements, but as a set of elements that require the interpretative act of the receptor.

In order to balance these elements, the calligrapher must practice daily, imitating the works of the great masters, analysing their technique, the differences between the various writing styles and ultimately seeking a rhythm that suits them.¹⁸ Years of practice allow the calligrapher to master the rules of writing and subsequently surpass them, creating works valuable for their ability to reflect their personality.¹⁹ The in-depth knowledge of the art, the classics, and the history of *shodō* that the master possesses may sometimes not be visible at first glance, but they establish the foundation on which the entire calligraphic work is built.

In the case of *Barakamon*, when it comes to the visual component of the two aforementioned variants of the *dame ningen* works – the first variant made by Tamako Arai and the second by Seishū Handa –, the elements that, in the terms described by Barnet, Burto and Tingyou, define what gives value to a calligraphic work, become an effective tool in explaining why the three girls simultaneously came to the conclusion that the version written by Seishū was “amazin’.”²⁰

Upon observing the two works, the inner rhythm of Seishū Handa’s version becomes strongly visible, even to an uninitiated receptor. While the lines of Tamako’s characters are uncertain, with the brush trembling especially at the end of the last stroke of the 人 logogram (“person”, *nin*), Seishū’s brushstrokes are precise and clear. Similarly, the end of the sixth stroke of the 間 logogram (“interval”, *gen*) is uncertain, disrupting the balance of the character’s composition. This tremor is absent from Seishū’s written version, since the lines

¹³ Chen Tingyou, *Chinese Calligraphy* (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2003), 43-58.

¹⁴ Barnet and Burto, 34-35.

¹⁵ Tingyou, 43-44.

¹⁶ Barnet and Burto, 34.

¹⁷ Tingyou, 47-52.

¹⁸ Christine Flint Sato, *Japanese Calligraphy. The Art of Line & Space* (Osaka: Kaifusha, 1999), 36.

¹⁹ Barnet and Burto, 30.

²⁰ Yoshino, *Barakamon*, vol. 1, 121.

drawn by him are defined by certainty and firmness. The calligrapher's expertise is given by his ability to guide the line with precision and to use advanced techniques that are absent from Tamako's work. One such example is the use of the *kasure* technique, in which writing with a nearly dry brush causes the hairs to split into several strands, creating small lines that accompany the features of the characters. They allow the receptor to observe every motion of the brush on the paper, reliving the creative act of writing the calligraphic work. The following of the traces of ink on paper, which is the very essence of admiring *shodō*,²¹ becomes a unique feature of the art, as it creates a deep connection between the viewers and the calligrapher in the very moment of his writing.

Another essential element for calligraphy is the balance between the ink traces and the white space (*yohaku*) that surrounds them. The white space in *shodō* is an active one,²² white and black coexisting in harmony and complementing each other. The two must be balanced in such a way that the attention of the receptor is not excessively struck by either. However, in the case of Tamako's work, the white space seems to absorb the hesitantly drawn characters, since the distance between the logograms is too wide, thus overall altering the aesthetics of the work (in the classification proposed by Barnet and Burto), or the beauty of the work as a whole (in the terms of Tingyou). In the case of Seishū's work, however, the *yohaku* brings out the alert rhythm of the brush line, amplifying the vigour of the written characters. The dynamism of the features and the asymmetrical balance of the characters give three-dimensionality to Seishū's work, as opposed to Tamako's one-dimensional writing. Although Tamako is a good artist, wanting to one day create a *manga*, the drawing experience is not enough to master *shodō* in the absence of extensive practice, the *Barakamon manga* thus succeeding in comically problematizing what gives value to a calligraphic work.

The ability to discover the details that distinguish an exceptional calligraphic work from a mere writing exercise is built over time, as is the ability to write such impactful works. This does not negate the importance of the elements that build the calligraphic work and give vitality to the line, since *shodō* is a way of expressing oneself through the established norms of writing. The affection that the calligrapher puts into the ink traces comes from three sources: his character, knowledge, and feelings.²³ Seishū Handa's dedication and passion becomes visible through the work thus produced, despite the comical content of the linguistic component.

From the perspective of the linguistic component, the works created by Tamako Arai and Seishū Handa stand out through the mix of *katakana* and *kanji*. In calligraphy, as the art was borrowed from China together with the logographic writing system, *kanji* logograms continue to be often utilized in *shodō*. However, one of the elements that distinguish Japanese calligraphy from Chinese calligraphy is the use of the *kana* syllabaries. The combo that consists of *kanji* and *kana* is known as *chōwatai* (調和体),²⁴ defining a unique calligraphic style that

²¹ Ishikawa, 133.

²² Freñtiu, 59.

²³ Tingyou, 66.

²⁴ Christopher J. Earnshaw, *Sho. Japanese Calligraphy*, 5th ed. (Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 2000), 96.

exists due to the complexity of the Japanese language. However, although *katakana* can be and is used in *shodō*, the combination of *hiragana* and *kanji* is more popular than that of *katakana* and *kanji*.

The two *dame ningen* use a combination of *katakana* and *kanji*. The word *dame* (“no good”) is written in *katakana*, while the word *ningen* (“human”, “person”) is written in *kanji*. Although the use of *katakana* might indicate that the word *dame* is of foreign origin, the word is not a *gairaigo* and can be written in both *kanji* (駄目) and *hiragana* (だめ). In more recent years, particularly in the informal discourse, *dame* has been written in *katakana* in order to emphasize its meaning and to make it stand out in a text. Tamako Arai’s choice for the linguistic component is a peculiar one for calligraphy, as reflected by Seishū Handa’s reaction “Write something nicer!”²⁵ This nonconformist aspect is given not only by the meaning of the words, but also by the fact that the girl chose the informal writing in *katakana* over the standard one.

The translation of *dame ningen* in English cannot encapsulate the complex underlining implications of the use of two writing systems and the choice of *katakana* over *kanji* or *hiragana*. Although the translation “failure” does a great job at presenting the readers with the meaning of the expression, there are elements that can be picked up only by speakers of Japanese. The subtle effect made by writing 駄目 (*dame*) and the choice of *katakana* create different layers of understanding the scene, as someone who speaks Japanese and is knowledgeable of *shodō* may note certain hints towards the fact that Tamako Arai is not a *shodō* professional, given not only the composition of her calligraphic work, but also her choice of the linguistic component and writing style. These elements could become problematic for translators, as a quick, self-sufficient translation or even an explanation could be difficult to give.

3. The Link Between Tradition and Modernity: Expressing One’s Individuality Through *Shodō*

A recurring theme of the *Barakamon* series is the relationship between tradition and modernity, tracing the connection between following established rules and expressing individuality through personal contribution. This connection is relevant to the study of how *shodō* is grounded in techniques that uphold tradition, while adding modern elements. Seishū was brought up to appreciate the works of the classics, and, in the early chapters, his motivation for calligraphy is given by the possibility of winning prizes at various exhibitions, which prompts him to create works that conform to the established norms. This is what propels the story, the criticism thus received (“textbook style”, “highly conformist”, “simply contrived to win calligraphy awards”²⁶) causing him to embark on the path of self-discovery and, implicitly, of the contribution that novelty elements should have in a calligraphic work. In Chapter 22, sometime after arriving on the Gotō Islands, through the experience of new ways of calligraphy, Seishū faces a new challenge: his rival and fan, Kōsuke Kanzaki, reproaches that the

²⁵ Yoshino, *Barakamon*, vol. 1, 120.

²⁶ Yoshino, Satsuki. *Barakamon*, vol. 3 (New York: Yen Press, 2015), 82.

new style he had adopted is by no means representative: “It’s like you’re pointlessly trying to add too much individuality. This writing is just forced. It’s not like you at all!”²⁷ While his earlier style was far too conformist, exposing the risk of over-practice which, according to Flint Sato, can lead to “killing essential spirit,”²⁸ the current style is criticized for being the extreme opposite.

The issue of individuality in *shodō* and the need for self-expression arose from the very beginnings of calligraphy practice in Japan, when calligraphers gradually began to move away from the direction provided by the Chinese masters and to find a Japanese style. This was initially possible by including specific writing systems (*hiragana* and *katakana* syllabaries) and Japanese aesthetics, *shodō* thus becoming a new branch, different from Chinese calligraphy.²⁹ Another factor that influenced *shodō* is Zen Buddhism, as the intuition of the Zen masters, which was cultivated through discipline, seems to have endowed them with an exceptional set of artistic senses,³⁰ which allowed them to create unique *shodō* works. Another important moment on the path to self-discovery through *shodō* can be pinpointed in the period after the Second World War, when, under the influence of Western thought, this process was taken a step further, calligraphy thus becoming a way of externalizing the calligrapher’s feelings.³¹

Calligraphy’s evolution is also reflected in *Barakamon*, when, as an answer to Kanzaki’s reproaches, Seishū replies “...I want to...create calligraphy that can only be written by Seishū Handa,”³² illustrating the importance of finding one’s own style in the *shodō* creative process. Because calligraphy has tremendous potential for self-expression within a traditional art,³³ Seishū wants to evolve, from a conformist style to finding his own unique style built on the foundations of writing conventions with which he was already familiar. Although *shodō* is carefully crafted based on a rigorous set of rules, it gives the calligrapher great creative freedom, which is also reflected in *Barakamon*.

The *Barakamon* series is a comical way of illustrating the role played by the art of writing in the Japanese culture and society through a humorous, emotional story depicting the characters’ adventures that encourage the reader to evolve alongside them. Various other aspects related to the contemporary use of *shodō* are also highlighted in the *manga* and *anime* series, such as the importance of calligraphy for learning how to write *kanji*, its role in advertising, and how calligraphy can be a way of (re)discovering the self. Calligraphy itself becomes an indispensable character in this *manga*, a character that determines the story’s course of action and strengthens the relationships that Seishū creates with those around him.

²⁷ Yoshino, *Barakamon*, vol. 3, 80.

²⁸ Flint Sato, 43.

²⁹ Tingyou, 117.

³⁰ Suzuki, 52.

³¹ Flint Sato, 50.

³² Yoshino, *Barakamon*, vol. 3, 90.

³³ Stephen Addiss, *77 Dances. Japanese Calligraphy by Poets, Monks and Scholars, 1568-1868* (Boston, Massachusetts: Weatherhill, 2006), 11.

4. Conclusions

Calligraphy encompasses a variety of dualities: on the one hand, a duality created by joining a linguistic component and a visual component; on the other hand, through the possibility of practicing *shodō*, either as a method of learning how to write *kanji* and *kana*, or as an art form. Furthermore, calligraphy can be seen as both an art form with a strong modern influence and an art form that reflects traditional Japanese values. Whichever side a calligrapher focuses on, they cannot completely exclude the opposite side of the spectrum. Despite it being a modern approach, *shodō* remains strongly anchored in tradition. Moreover, even if the calligrapher wants to emphasize the visual component, the linguistic component cannot be overlooked, since every calligraphic work must contain the linguistic element. If the linguistic component is absent, the final result can no longer be considered a calligraphic work, but rather abstract art made with the help of brush and ink.

Following the rules and the tradition of Japanese calligraphy, artists across the world, specializing in various arts, manage to emphasize the charm of *shodō*, simultaneously adapting it to contemporaneity and to the needs of the modern man. The result is a striking connection between new and old, flexible and rigid, traditional and modern, keeping elements of each without relinquishing any aspect in favour of the other and without altering their essence. The art of calligraphy has shared its benefits, practices, and charm with other fields, becoming a valuable tool in the media.

An integral part of everyday life, *shodō* constantly finds new ways of reinventing itself while maintaining the relevance of its traditional elements. As the case of *Barakamon* clearly showed, through a light-hearted, comical storyline, the series manages to depict some of the most important issues of *shodō* and its role within society, both for artists and the public. Thus, the art is showcased not only to Japanese fans, but to the people all across the world who are interested in Japanese comics or animation. In spite of its traditional roots, the way *shodō* is depicted in *Barakamon* brings it closer to modern-day humour and captures the public's attention through dynamic events and entertaining characters.

As it is constantly embraced by other arts and other forms of media, *shodō* reinvents itself constantly, all while staying true to its origins. The elements of novelty do not aim to completely replace the old ones, but rather to coexist and to present *shodō* to the public from numerous new perspectives. Such is the case of *Barakamon*, a series that manages to entertain its readers regardless of their knowledge of *shodō*. By showcasing the art to both national and international audiences, Satsuki Yoshino perpetuates a centuries-old art while adding a modern, personal twist to it that brings it closer to the public.