

龍吟
Song of the Dragon
(*Ryūgin*)

NOTES

1. **“Song of the dragon”** (*ryūgin* 龍吟): The word *gin* (translated here as “song”) is used in reference to a range of sounds, from singing, chanting, and reciting, to crying, moaning, sighing, humming, etc., both human and animal. The term *ryūgin* (“dragon song”) is used in traditional music to refer both to a type of flute (*ryūteki* 龍笛), and to a melody in court music (*ryūgin chō* 龍吟調).

“The Great Master Ciji of Mt. Touzi in Shuzhou” (*jōshū tōsu zan jisai daishi* 舒州投子山慈濟大師): I.e., Touzi Datong 投子大同 (819-914), a disciple of Cuiwei Wuxue 翠微無學, in the lineage of Qingyuan Xingsi 青原行思. “Great Master Ciji is a posthumous title. Shuzhou is in the vicinity of present-day Anqing 安慶 in Anhui. This conversation can be found in the *Jingde chuan deng lu* 景德傳燈錄, T.51[2076]:319a29-b1.

“Dried tree” (*koboku* 枯木): Or “dead tree”; the somewhat awkward translation “dried tree” seeks to preserve lexical continuity with Dōgen’s other uses of *ko* (“to dry out,” “to be dried out”) in this text. The term is regularly used in Chan literature for an immobile state of meditation; see below, **Note 2. “Dried trees and dead ashes.”** The phrase “dragon’s song in the dried tree” (*koboku ryūgin* 枯木龍吟) evokes the sound of the wind in bare branches; often used in Chan to suggest action within repose, or the power of life within the lifeless.

“The skull” (*dokuro* 髑髏): I.e., of a skeleton; often used in Chan texts in a sense similar to “dried tree.” The “lion’s roar” (*shishi ku* 師子吼; *simha-nāda*) is regularly used in Buddhist literature for the preaching of a buddha.

2. **“Dried trees and dead ashes”** (*koboku shikai* 枯木死灰): Or “dead wood and cold ashes”); a common expression in Chan texts, often used in a perjorative sense, for the mind in trance. See **Supplemental Note 1.**

“A teaching of the alien ways” (*gedō no shokyō* 外道の所教): I.e., something taught by non-Buddhists. While the term *gedō* (*tīrthika*) is usually used in reference to Hinduism and other Indian religions, Dōgen is no doubt thinking here of Daoist texts like the *Zhuang zi* (see, **Supplemental Note 1**).

“Meet the spring” (*hō shun* 逢春): Dōgen here introduces a term from the verse by Damei Fachang 大梅法常 that he will quote below. (See **Note 3. “How many springs has it met without changing its mind?”**) The sense is likely “revive after the dead of winter.”

3. **“The ocean drying up”** (*kaiko* 海枯): Dōgen will return to this theme below. For the source of this expression, see **Supplemental Note 2.**

“Germination of a sprout” (*hōga* 萌芽): Presumably the “sprout” that appears when the dried tree “meets the spring.” While seemingly not a term of art in Chan literature and not used elsewhere in Dōgen’s writings, this expression is somewhat reminiscent of the common “before

the germination of a subtle sign” (*chinchō mibō* 朕兆未萌), used to represent the “unborn” (*mushō* 無生).

“The mark, nature, substance, and power of dried” (*ko no sō shō tai riki* 枯の相性體力): Probably here indicating something like “the meaning of ‘dried.’” The phrase draws on a famous line in the *Lotus Sūtra*; see **Supplemental Note 3**.

“A dried post” (*koshō* 枯樁); **“not a dried post”** (*hi koshō* 非枯樁): Or, we might say, “a rotted stake.” For the likely source of these expressions, see **Supplemental Note 4**.

“The leaves are spread based on the root” (*e kon yō bunpu* 依根葉分布); **“root and branch return to the source”** (*honmatsu shu ki shū* 本末須歸宗): From the famous poem *Cantong qi* 參同契, by Shitou Xichen 石頭希遷 (700-790), disciple of Qingyuan Xingsi (*Jingde chuan deng lu*, T.51:459b15).

“Long dharma body” (*chō hosshin* 長法身); **“short dharma body”** (*tan hosshin* 短法身): From the Chan saying, “the long one is a long dharma body; the short one is a short dharma body” (*chang zhe chang fashen duan zhe duan fashen* 長者長法身短者短法身).

“How many springs has it met without changing its mind?” (*kido hō shun fu hen shin* 幾度逢春不變心): Or “without changing its core.” From a verse by Damei Fachang 大梅法常 (752-839) (*Jingde chuan deng lu*, T.51:254c12-13):

摧殘枯木倚寒林、幾度逢春不變心。

Broken dried tree keeping to the cold forest.

How many springs has it met without changing its mind?

“Notes of the scale” (*kyū shō kaku chi u* 宮商角徵羽): A loose translation for what is in the original simply a listing of the five notes of the traditional scale of Chinese music: *gong* 宮, *shang* 商, *jue* 角, *zheng* 徵, *yu* 羽. Dōgen is here playing on the common uses of *ryūgin* in reference to music (see above **Note 1. “Song of the dragon”**)—a play he will continue below.

“The second or third sons of the song of the dragon” (*ryūgin no zengo nisan shi* 龍吟の前後二三子): A tentative translation; possibly “two or three former or later sons of the song of the dragon.” The point would seem to be that the musical scale is derivative of the dragon’s song.

4. “The appearance of a topic” (*watō no genjō* 話頭の現成): Or “the realization of a saying”; i.e., a significant utterance. The term *watō* is regularly used in Chan texts for the main topic, or point, of a *kōan*.

“What’s been concealed?” (*u jinmo en sho* 有甚麼掩處): I.e., it is everywhere obvious. Likely reflecting another saying of Touzi (*Jingde chuan deng lu*, T.51:319b25-26):

問、如何是火焰裏藏身。師曰、有什麼掩處。

[Someone] asked, “What is the body hidden within flames?”

The master said, “What’s been concealed?”

“Never ceasing to subdue oneself and promote others” (*kukko suinin ya mikyū* 屈己推人也未休): The sense here may be simply that Touzi’s words are “never ceasing.” For a possible source, see **Supplemental Note 5**.

“Skulls fill the fields” (*dokuro hen ya* 髑髏遍野): Though this Chan expression might be read in a negative sense, presumably in its context here it is intended to suggest that the roaring skulls Touzi speaks of are ubiquitous. The expression can be found, e.g., attributed to Gushan 鼓山 at *Jingde chuan deng lu*, T.51:347c11.

5. “Great Master Xideng of Xiangyan zi” (*kyōgenji shūtō daishi* 香巖寺襲燈大師): I.e., Xiangyan Zhixian 香巖智閑 (d. 898), disciple of Weishan Lingyou 滙山靈祐. Xideng dashi is a posthumous title. His biography occurs at *Jingde chuan deng lu*, T.51:283c-284a. This discussion of the dragon song occurs in several collections, including Dōgen’s *shinji Shōbōgenzō* (DZZ.5:142, case 28).

“Shishuang” (*sekisō* 石霜): I.e., Shishuang Qingzhu 石霜慶諸 (807-888). His biography occurs at *Jingde chuan deng lu*, T.51:320c1.

“Caoshan” (*sōsan* 曹山): I.e., Caoshan Benzhi 曹山本寂 (840-901), disciple of Dongshan Liangjie (洞山良价); his posthumous title is Great Master Yuanzheng 元證大師.

“The blood vessel” (*kechimyaku* 血脈): Or “bloodline”; a standard Chan expression for the lineage of the buddhas and ancestors.

“Everyone who hears it loses his life” (*monja kai sō* 聞者皆喪): Or “All who hear it are to be mourned”; taking *sō* here as in *sōshitsu* 喪失 (“loss”). The expression “to relinquish one’s body and lose one’s life” (*sōshin shitsumyō* 喪身失命) is regularly used in Chan for the experience of awakening.

6. “The hearer and singer spoken of here are not equal to the singer of the dragon’s song” (*ima gidō suru monja ginja ha gin ryūgin ja ni fusei nari* いま擬道する聞者吟者は吟龍吟者に不齊なり): A tentative translation of a passage subject to interpretation. The sentence might also be read, “the hearing and singing they seek to speak of here is not equal to the singing of the singing dragon (*ginryū ginja*). The commentary of the *Shōbōgenzō monge* 聞解 suggests that the point here is that the authentic “song of the dragon” is beyond the active and passive opposites of “singing” and “hearing”; it also offers an alternative opinion to the effect that what the monks are discussing is not the authentic “song of the dragon” (*Shōbōgenzō chūkai zensho* 正法眼藏注解全書, 7:566-67).

“This tune is the dragon’s singing” (*kono kyokuchō ha ryūgin nari* この曲調は龍吟なり): The antecedent of “this” is unclear; it could refer either to the quoted passage or to Dōgen’s comment on it—or to neither. “Tune” here, while playing on the music of the dragon’s song, might be taken as the exploration of the theme of the dragon’s song—i.e., the study of the dragon’s song is the singing of the dragon.

“The present and the past” (*nikon niko* 而今而古): Probably to be taken in the sense “at once present and past” or, perhaps, “timeless.”

“Horn growing on the head” (*zu kaku shō* 頭角生): A colloquial expression usually indicating something impossible or worthless, as in the Chan saying “where wisdom doesn’t reach, speech is prohibited; speech is a horn growing on the head” (*zhi budao chu qie ji dao Zhao dao Zhao ji tou* 智不到處切忌道著道著即頭角生) (*Jingde chuan deng lu*, T.51:314a16).

“Skin entirely shed” (*hifu datsuraku jin* 皮膚脱落盡): Perhaps reflecting a conversation between the Chan masters Mazu 馬祖 and Yueshan 藥山 (*Mazu Daoyi chanshi yulu* 馬祖道一禪師語錄, ZZ.119:816b5-6):

一日祖問之曰、子近日見處作麼生。山曰、皮膚脱落盡、唯有一真實。

One day, [Ma]zu asked him [i.e., Yueshan], “Son, what have you seen recently?”
[Yue]shan said, “Skin entirely shed, there’s just a single reality.”

7. “Speaking without avoidance” (*dō fuki* 道不諱): Or “a saying that does not conceal.” A rather unusual expression, in Chinese syntax, not appearing elsewhere in Dōgen’s writings.

“Turning the body in the stream of words” (*gomyaku ri tenshin* [or *tenjin*] 語脈裏轉身): The translation loses Dōgen’s play here with the graph *myaku* (“stream”), rendered as “vessel” in Caoshan’s saying. The expression, variations on which occur elsewhere in the *Shōbōgenzō*, reflects a common Chan usage (as, e.g., in the *Biyān lu* 碧巖錄 [case 29, T.48:169a19]: “The immeasurably great person turns round [or is turned round] within the stream of words” [*meiliang daren yumo li zhuanque* 沒量大人語脈裏轉却]).

“When the ocean dries up, it does not entirely [dry] to the bottom” (*kaiko fujin tei* 海枯不盡底): Variation on the saying, “When the ocean dries up, you finally see the bottom”; see above, **Supplemental Note 2**.

“Raising its voice and bringing it up within the mud” (*ni ri no sashō konen* 泥裏の作聲舉拈); **“breathing it out within its nostrils”** (*biko ri no suiki* 鼻孔裏の出氣): The translation supplies the object pronoun “it,” assuming the preceding “question” as antecedent. To “bring up” (*konen*) is often used for a Chan master’s presentation of a topic for comment; the word “mud,” while here perhaps suggestive of the “bottom” of the ocean, is often used in Chan for the sphere of the master’s teaching activities.

8. “Forms clouds and forms water” (*kumo wo nasu mizu wo nasu* くもをなし水をなす): Evoking the association of the Chinese dragon with clouds, rain, and bodies of water, no doubt here suggesting spiritual nourishment.

“It does not talk about the way; it does not talk about the eyeball or skull” (*fudō dō fudō ganzei dokuro* 不道道不道眼睛髑髏): Dōgen here shifts into Chinese syntax. The translation takes “song of the dragon” as the unexpressed subject; “the way” (*dō*) here likely refers back to the opening question in the quotation, “what is the way?”

“The croaking of frogs” (*gama tei* 蝦蟆啼); **“the murmuring of worms”** (*kyūin mei* 蚯蚓鳴): (*Gama* [“frogs”] is more commonly written 蝦蟆; the reader may supply for the verb *tei* 啼 [rendered “murmur”] whatever sound she would like worms to make.) Frogs and worms appear regularly in Chan sayings. The reference here is likely drawn from a verse by Dōgen’s teacher Tiantong Rujing 天童如淨 (1163-1228), see **Supplemental Note 6**.

“The bottle gourd succeeds the bottle gourd” (*koro shi koro* 葫蘆嗣葫蘆): In Dōgen’s usage, the intertwined vines of the bottle gourd can stand for the relationship between master and disciple. Variation on another saying of Rujing often cited in the *Shōbōgenzō*: “the bottle gourd vine entwines the bottle gourd” (*koro tōshu ten koro* 葫蘆藤種纏葫蘆). (*Rujing yulu* 如淨語錄, fascicle 2 [Kagamishima, 306-307].)

“The columns conceive and give birth” (*rochū kaitai shō* 露柱懷胎生); **“the lanterns face the lanterns”** (*tōrō tai tōrō* 燈籠對燈籠): The lanterns and columns of the monastic halls are common topics in Chan conversation, seemingly used especially to represent the concrete reality of the immediate surroundings; “columns pregnant” (*rochū kaitai*), also commonly found in Chan texts, seem to function rather like the “dragon song in the dried tree” to suggest vitality within a seemingly lifeless object.

9. “The first year of Kangen (*mizunoto-u*)” (*kangen gannen mizunoto u* 寬元元年癸卯): I.e., 1243, the year of the 10th heavenly stem, 4th earthly branch in the cyclical calendar.

“Beneath Yamashibu, in the domain of Etsu” (*etsuu yamashibu ge* 越宇禪師峰下): Apparently, a small temple (sometimes read Zenjibuji 禪師峰寺) not far from Dōgen’s residence at Kippōji 吉峰寺, in the province of Echizen 越前 (modern Fukui prefecture); a site given in the colophon of several texts of the *Shōbōgenzō* from this period.

10. “Copied this” (*shosha shi* 書寫之): The copyist’s identity is unknown; perhaps Dōgen’s close disciple Koun Ejō 孤雲懷奘 (1198-1280), whose name appears as the copyist of many *Shōbōgenzō* texts.

“The second year of Kōan” (*kōan ninen* 弘安二年): I.e., 1279. Eiheiji was the temple in Echizen that became the chief center of Dōgen’s community in Echizen; originally founded as Daibutsuji 大佛寺 in 1245, then refounded as Eiheiji in 1247.