

祖師西來意
The Intention of the Ancestral Master's Coming from the West
(*Soshi seirai i*)

NOTES

1. “The intention of the ancestral master’s coming from the west” (*soshi seirai i* 祖師西來意): A favorite topic in Chan literature, often the subject of lectures and discussions. The “ancestral master” here is of course the first ancestor of Chan in China, Bodhidharma, said to have come from India in the sixth century. The Chinese term *yi* 意, translated here as “intention,” can indicate either (a) “intent,” or “purpose,” or (b) “meaning, or “significance”; hence the phrase can be (and perhaps more often is) read “the meaning of the ancestral master’s coming from the west.”

“Great Master Xideng of Xiangyan zi” (*kyōgenji shōtō daishi* 香巖寺襲燈大師): I.e., Xiangyan Zhixian 香巖智閑 (d. 898); also written 香巖; disciple of Guishan Lingyou 澆山靈祐, known as Dagui 大滄 (771-853). This famous episode appears in several sources (see, e.g., *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄, T.51:284b21-25), including Dōgen’s *shinji* 真字 *Shōbōgenzō* (DZZ.5:254, case 243). Parentheses in the quotation here are in the original text.

“Senior monk Hutou Zhao” (*kotō shō jōza* 虎頭照上座): Biography unknown. In the *Jingde chuandeng lu* version of this story, his name is given as Hutou Zhao 虎頭招; in the *shinji Shōbōgenzō* version, he is identified simply as “senior monk Hutou” (*kotō jōza* 虎頭上座).

“Reverend (*oshō* 和尚): Or “reverend preceptor”; from (some variant of) the Sanskrit *upādhyāya*; a term used for a monk qualified to teach and to bestow the precepts; regularly applied as an honorific especially for a senior monk.

2. “Discussions and comments” (*shōryō nenko* 商量拈古): The former term translates *shōryō*, a common expression for “discussion” or “consultation” among several parties, but often used in Chan texts for literary “discussions” of a topic; the latter term is a loose translation of *nenko* (literally, “taking up the old [cases]”), the genre of Chan writing that comments on *kōan*, or the “old cases” (*kosoku* 古則) of previous masters.

“Be at a loss” (*bōzen naru* 茫然なる): A common colloquial expression, occurring often in Chan writings, for a state of confusion, ignorance or blank incomprehension.

“When we take up not thinking, when we take up non-thinking, and think about it” (*fushiryō wo nenrai shi hishiryō wo nenrai shite shiryō sen ni* 不思量を拈來し非思量を拈來して思量せんに): Allusion to the words of Yaoshan Weiyuan 藥山惟儼 (745-828); see **Supplemental Note 1**.

“The same cushion” (*ichi futon* 一蒲團): I.e., the same meditation cushion; in Zen usage, *futon* typically refers to a round cushion stuffed with rushes or cattails (*kama* 蒲).

“Sitting fixedly” (*gotsuza* 兀坐): Continuing the allusion to Yaoshan’s words; see **Supplemental Note 1**. The term *gotsuza* (Chinese *wuzuo*) is regularly used in reference to seated meditation, or *zazen* 坐禪; the element *gotsu* 兀 (as in the common expression *gotsugotsu*

兀兀) bears such senses as “towering”, “massive”, “solid”, “concentrated”, etc. (sometimes likened to the weightiness of a great boulder).

3. “If it is not a column, we should not call it a post” (*rochū ni arazuba bokuketsu to ifu bekarazu* 露柱にあらずば、木樞といふべからず): The sense is unclear; presumably something like “it is neither pillar nor post.” The columns (*rochū*) of monastic buildings are regularly used in Chan talk to represent the things of the objective, insentient world; perhaps here in contrast to the following sentence on the self.

“The face of a buddha and the face of an ancestor breaking into a smile” (*butsumen somen no hagan* 佛面祖面の破顔): Allusion to the famous story of the founding of the Zen tradition, in which the Buddha Śākyamuni held up a flower on Vulture Peak, his disciple Mahākāśyapa smiled (*hagan mishō* 破顔微笑), and the Buddha recognized him as the heir to his “treasury of the eye of the true dharma.” (See *shinji Shōbōgenzō*, case 253 [DZZ.5:258]. Though this story appears throughout the Chinese Chan literature, Dōgen’s version of it does not seem quite to match any extant text.)

“We should not be mistaken about the meeting of self and other” (*jiko tako no sōken ayamarazaru beshi* 自己他己の相見あやまらざるべし): The implication is unclear; perhaps simply that, even the encounters between buddhas and ancestors, should be understood as a “person” meeting a “person.”

“A hundred foot pole” (*hyakushaku kantō* 百尺竿頭): A common expression in Chan literature for the extreme limit of religious practice, as in the saying, “proceed one step beyond the hundred foot pole” (*baichi gantou jin ibu* 百尺竿頭進一步).

“Even if he drops off” (*tatohi datsuraku ko su tomo* たとひ脱落去すとも): Taking *datsuraku* as an intransitive verb. Dōgen here seems to be playing with this term, more commonly used as a transitive verb meaning “to drop,” or “slough off,” something—as in Dōgen’s well-known expression “slough off body and mind” (*shinjin datsuraku* 身心脱落).

“Ascent is a thousand feet, descent is a thousand feet” (*kōjō ya senjaku nari kōge ya senjaku nari* 向上也千尺なり向下也千尺なり): Dōgen switches into Chinese syntax for these and the following members of this list. The terms *kōjō* (“ascent”) and *kōge* (“descent”) can also be read as “above” and “below”—a sense suggested here by their pairing with the following “left” (*satō* 左頭) and “right (*utō* 右頭).” The two terms are sometimes used to indicate the two phases of the bodhisattva path: “ascending” toward liberation, and “descending” into the world for the sake of sentient beings.

“The old mirror” (*kokyō* 古鏡); **“the brazier”** (*karo* 火爐): Allusion to a conversation between Xuefeng Yicun 雪峰義在 (822-908) and his disciple Xuansha Shibeī 玄沙師備 (835-908); see **Supplemental Note 2**.

“The seamless pagoda” (*muhō tō* 無縫塔): I.e., a stone memorial for a monk. Likely an allusion to another story of Xuefeng and Xuansha; see **Supplemental Note 3**.

4. “Searching the branches and plucking at the leaves” (*jinshi tekiyō* 尋枝摘葉): Probably indicating something like “examining the particulars.” Recalls lines from the famous poem

Zhengdao ge 證道歌, attributed to the early Chan figure Yongjia Xuanjue 永嘉玄覺 (d. 723) (T.48[2014]:395c21-22):

直截根源佛所印。摘葉尋枝我不能。

Just cutting off the root source — this is sealed by the buddha;
Plucking at the leaves and searching the branches — this I can't do.

“It is mouth throughout the body; throughout the mouth is the body” (*tsūshin ku nari tsūku ze shin nari* 通身口なり通口是身なり): The first clause could also be read “throughout the body is the mouth.” Dōgen may be recalling here the saying “throughout the body are hands and eyes” (*tongshen shi shou yan* 通身是手眼), by Daowu Yuanzhi 道吾圓智 (769-835); see **Supplemental Note 4.**

“Step forward and step back” (*shinpo taiho* 進步退步): An expression occurring regularly in Dōgen's writings. The contrasting pair can indicate advancement toward to goal (“stepping forward”) and return to the world (“stepping back”); or participation in the world (“stepping forward”) and looking within (“stepping back”) in meditation.

“Hanging in space” (*ka kokū* 掛虛空): Perhaps reflecting a verse on the wind chime by Dōgen's teacher, Tiantong Rujing 天童如淨 (1163-1228), cited in *Shōbōgenzō makahannyaharamitsu* 正法眼藏摩訶般若波羅蜜 (DZZ.1:11) and elsewhere in Dōgen's writings:

渾身似口掛虛空、不問東西南北風、一等爲他談般若、滴丁東了滴丁東。

Its entire body is like a mouth hanging in space.
Without asking if the wind is north, south, east or west.
Equally, for the sake of the other it speaks of *prajñā* —
“Dingdong dingaling dingdong.”

5. “He would have no sound filling his mouth; he would have no mouth filled with words” (*manku no onjō nashi mangon no ku arazu* 滿口の音聲なし滿言の口あらず): Dōgen is here playing with the colloquial expression *manku* (“filling the mouth”), which carries the sense “to speak at length” or, as we might say, “to say a mouthful.” He will return to this term below.

6. “Everyday routine” (*kajō* 家常): A loose translation of a colloquial expression, meaning more literally something like “usual at home,” most often associated with the daily fare of the household (what we might call “home-style” cooking) — as in the expression, often encountered in Chan texts, “everyday tea and rice” (*jiachang chafan* 家常茶飯). Dōgen seems to be playing here with the notion that the branch is the everyday fare of the “whole mouth.”

“Flipping his body and restoring his life” (*honshin katsumyō* 翻身活命): To “flip one's body” (*honshin* 翻身; also writtin 翻身) is a common Chan expression for spiritual transformation.

“Each person with a mouth full is saying it” (*ninnin manku ze dō* 人人滿口是道): A tentative translation of an ambiguous passage in Chinese syntax; it might also be rendered “each person with a mouth full is the way.” Similarly, the phrase translated below as “the mouth biting the saying” (*ku kan dō* 口嚙道) can be read “the mouth biting the way.” Dōgen seems to be playing here with two common Chan expressions: (1) “X is the way” (as in, e.g., “the ordinary mind is the way” [*pingchang xin shi dao* 平常心是道]; and (2) “though his mouth is full, he can't say it” (*mangu dao bude* 滿口道不得).

7. **“Have answered it”** (*tōrai seru* 答來せる): Following Kawamura’s reading here; some texts read *monrai seru* 問來せる (“have asked it”).

8. **“The Chan Master Mingjue of Xuedou”** (*setchō myōkaku zenji* 雪竇明覺禪師): I.e., Xuedou Chongxian 雪竇重顯 (980-1052). The saying here appears as a comment (*niangu* 拈古) on Xiangyan’s case in the *Mingjue chanshi yulu* 明覺禪師語錄, T.47(1996):685c19-20.

9. **“Venerable old awls”** (*rō kosui* 老古錐): A common expression in Chan texts for a master. The term “old awl” may indicate a dull awl and, hence, represent ironic praise.

10. **“The second year of Kangen (*kinoe-tatsu*)** (*kangen ninen kinoe-tatsu* 寬元二年甲辰): I.e., 1244, the first stem and fifth branch in the sexagenary cycle.

“In the deep mountains of the region of Etsu” (*zai etsuu shinzan ri* 在越宇深山裡): I.e., in the province of Echizen 越前, present-day Fukui prefecture. During this period, Dōgen was residing at the monastery known as Kippōji 吉峰寺 in this region.

11. **“Copied”** (*shosha shi* 書寫之): The copiest is unidentified; 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 (*tsuchinoto-u*)” (*kōan ninen tsuchinoto-u* 弘安二年己卯): I.e., 1279, the sixth stem and fourth branch of the sexagenary cycle.

“At Eihei Monastery, Mt. Kichijō” (*zai kichijō san eiheiji* 在吉祥山永平寺): I.e., the monastery, in present-day Yoshida-gun 吉田郡, Fukui prefecture, founded by Dōgen in 1244; originally called Daibutsuji 大佛寺, the name was changed to Eiheiji in 1246.