



# **The Evolution of the White Plum**

A short and incomplete history of its founders  
and their practice

by Barry Kaigen McMahon

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Professor Victor Sogen Hori, author of *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Koan Practice*, was very kind in sharing with me his translation of the koan curriculum of Ekkei Shuken (1810-1884), the great dharma grandson of Inzan Ien (1751-1814), and 5th in line from the Hakuin Zenji (1685-1768). He, along with Thomas Yuho Kirchner, author of *Entangling Vines*, both long term Rinzai monks in Japan, helped shed light on the two main lines of koan practice, Inzan and Takuju. Stefanie Sozui Schubert Sensei of the Hidden Valley Zen Center was kind enough to share with me the early koan order of her teacher, Shodo Harada Roshi of Sogen-ji. And Meido Moore Roshi in Wisconsin helped to clarify the two variations of the Inzan koan line as well.

I'm also indebted to Jikyo McMahon Roshi who edited this article with great care.

## Introduction

My name is Barry Kaigen McMahon and I'm a dharma successor of Charles Tenshin Fletcher Roshi, abbot of Zen Mountain Center in California. I began my Zen training in the early 1970s with Maezumi Roshi before going to Japan on the University of California's Education Abroad Program where I was introduced to a Japanese way of practicing Zen Buddhism. At the time I knew little of the differences between different Rinzai schools, and all I knew of the Soto school was that they didn't generally do koan practice.

It was during my return to Zen practice with Maezumi Roshi at ZCLA in 1993 that I gradually became aware that I had been exposed to both schools of koan study, but in a different way than most of Maezumi Roshi's students, specifically because of my exposure to Osaka Koryu Roshi in Japan.

Many years ago I drew up a chart and gave a lecture about our more immediate ancestors in Zen, the ones I was most familiar with given my time in Japan at Koryu Roshi's Hannya Dojo. The list began with Hakuin Zenji (1686-1769) and followed the Rinzai Lineage through Koryu Roshi to Maezumi Roshi in the modern era.

The talk included a discussion of the different types of koan study used in the two lineages flowing from Hakuin, and my estimation on how they merged into the White Plum practice today. After this talk, and other discussions throughout the years, I realized that many of the students and even teachers in the White Plum were not familiar with the recent history of our lineage, nor with the structure and differences in the two schools of Rinzai koan study.

As the White Plum has evolved koan study has not necessarily been the primary study of all teachers in the lineage, nor is it used by them as a teaching tool. That being said, it must be acknowledged that it is the

method that Maezumi Roshi used with all his successors. So when I speak of a "traditional" White Plum koan training curriculum, I'm speaking of the system developed by Maezumi Roshi and used by him with his successors, and they with their students.

My goal in this article is to attempt to highlight the various streams of Zen practice that evolved into what Taizan Maezumi Roshi developed in America, including what the White Plum calls, "The First 200", its origin and makeup, as well as the differences and flavors of the two koan schools, Inzan and Takuju. I touch only briefly on the Soto influence in the White Plum because I believe it to be more straightforward and easier to appreciate.

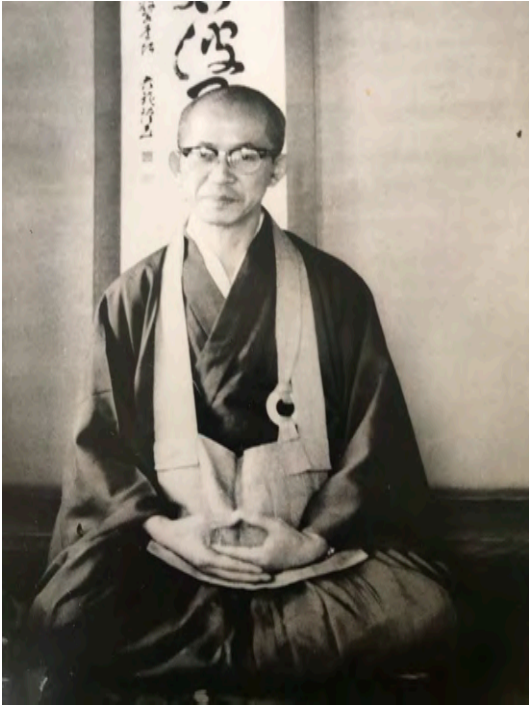
I'd also like to give readers an overview of Koryu Roshi, his teaching and some of his interesting students. I believe historical background information is not only interesting but also helpful in giving us a larger perspective on our evolution as the White Plum Zen community.

I do not intend this article to be definitive in any way. My hope is that others with more information and understanding of, for example, Yasutani Roshi and his relationship to Maezumi Roshi, or Maezumi Roshi's training in the Soto school, might write other articles that could be included in the White Plum archives for the reference of future teachers and students.

*Note: readers can refer to the modified Rinzai lineage chart that appears on page 38 and click on the highlighted names to get more information about various ancestors.*

## **Biographical notes on Koryu Roshi**

Osaka Koryu Roshi was born in 1901 and was adopted into a family that had no son (an accepted practice in Japan at the time). His original fami-



ly name was Matsumoto, and his adopted family name was Osaka. His elder blood brother was Noburo Matsumoto who became the president of Shiseido, Japan's largest cosmetic company. I remember Shiseido's young executives coming to the Hannya Dojo for some mandatory Zen/good employee training back in the 1970s. In high school Koryu Roshi lead a student protest for education reform and actually got some changes to take place. He attended Tokyo University with a major in Indian Philosophy. It was around this time that he began studying Zen under Muso Joko Roshi 1884-1948. (Joko Roshi was originally a Shingon priest as was his Zen teacher, Muchaku Kaiko Roshi (dates unknown), who studied Zen under Kazan Genku

(1837-1917) of the Myoshin-ji line of Rinzai Zen.)

Although Joko Roshi was a Buddhist priest who was known to diligently follow all the priestly precepts, he established a Zen training center for lay people near Mt. Fuji known as the Fuji Hannya Dojo, and later one in Tokyo adjacent to the large Inogashira Park, or the Tokyo Hannya Dojo. Although he was a dedicated priest who followed all the precepts, he was determined to make a Zen practice strictly for lay people. Joko emphasized that the power of Zen lay firmly in the same three pillars made famous in the West by Philip Kapleau, i.e. *Kai, Jo, and Ei...* or Precepts, Samadhi, and Wisdom. Joko considered the many duties of an actual priest to be unnecessary to the study of Zen. He is reported to have said, "If I could burn down every monastery and kill every priest, I would."

Koryu Roshi loved zazen so much he desired to become a priest but obeyed Joko Roshi's request to remain a layman. I remember Koryu Roshi once saying he thought of becoming the caretaker of a cemetery because he thought that might give him plenty of time for zazen.

Koryu Roshi told me about his first kensho experience saying he had been frustrated in his attempts at realization and was thinking of quitting the practice entirely. But Joko convinced him to come to one more 3 day retreat in which Koryu sat diligently and extensively. After the retreat he returned home to his college dormitory and while opening the sliding rice paper door, something shifted deeply in him and he returned to the Fuji Hannya Dojo either that same day or the next. Arriving at the dojo late at night he sat zazen until morning. When he entered dokusan all he could do was stare at his teacher, unable to talk. Joko Roshi hit him with his kotsu and Koryu passed out on the floor. He awoke into a new understanding and Joko Roshi made a special breakfast for him in recognition of his kensho.

Koryu Roshi was given the Tokyo Hannya Dojo to lead sometime in the early 1930s. But as he was a lay person, he had no deferment from the military and was eventually drafted into the Army. He became an officer in a transportation unit working in China but was back in Japan in 1945 based in Hiroshima when the first atomic bomb was dropped. I remember him telling me that he actually saw the Enola Gay fly overhead and watched as the bomb fell slowly attached to a parachute and detonate at 2000 ft. He happened to be next to a bomb shelter at the time and he either instinctively jumped in, or was propelled into it by the blast. (Logic might dictate the former, prior to the blast). When he emerged there was nothing left standing, and window glass had been turned into small sand sized pieces that embedded in peoples' skin. (As an historical side note, the Navy Captain who armed the bomb onboard the Enola Gay enroute to Hiroshima was Capt. William Parsons, the uncle of my UCSB college roommate, Frank Parsons.)

When Maezumi Roshi was in college he was sent by his father Kuroda Roshi, a Soto priest and friend of Joko Roshi, to live at the Hannya Dojo and study koans in the Rinzai tradition with Koryu Roshi. This would have been around 1947. I think Maezumi Roshi's brothers also studied there, as well as the future abbot of Eihei-ji, Hata Egyoku Roshi.



*Maezumi Roshi in front of the Tokyo Hannya Dojo with Koryu Roshi.*

I found my way to the Hannya Dojo in 1973, as an exchange student from the University of California at Santa Barbara. I had attended a few short sesshin at the Santa Barbara Zen Center when Maezumi Roshi and Bernie Tetsugen Glassman would come up from ZCLA. Dennis Genpo Merzel was apparently living there at the Santa Barbara center in those days before he became a priest at ZCLA. In any case, I recall following Maezumi Roshi downstairs after a retreat and asked him who his teacher was in Japan. At the time I knew I was going to Japan as an exchange student and wanted some advice on where to study. He merely waved his hand and said, “Oh, I had many teachers”, and walked away. So after the next retreat I explained to him why I had asked and was seeking any guidance on where I could study. He then copied down the address of the Hannya Dojo for me, and as my great luck would have it, it was merely one short train stop away from the school I was to attend, ICU, the International Christian University, the college which had the exchange agreement with University of California.



*The author and Koryu Roshi in the zendo of the Hannya Dojo c1975*

## **Notes on the Hannya Dojo**

In 1973 the Hannya Dojo looked like an old temple to me, wooden structures with temple like tile roofs built in the early 1930s at the edge of a large lake and park at what as then at the outskirts of Tokyo. The main structure housed a good sized zendo connected by hallways to the entrance, main office and further back to Koryu Roshi's small office, dokusan room and living quarters. Behind the main building was the Tansui-ryo, or dormitory, that could house ten people in five separate 6 mat rooms. (The Japanese measured room size by the number of tatami mats in room, and a 6 mat room was about 9ft by 12 ft.)

The residents were young men of mostly college age, who maintained the dojo, practiced there and went to school during the day. Although there were a few of us "Zen bums" who lived there, worked sporadically and practiced Zen. The normal day would start with zazen and dokusan from 5-6am, cleaning, breakfast, then off to school or work. In the evening zazen and dokusan was 7-8pm. Sesshin were held every month, with eight 3 day sesshin and four weeklong sesshin per year. Sesshin would begin on the evening of the last day of a month and end on either the morning of the 4th or 8th day, so it was a full 3 day or 7 day schedule. Sesshin wakeup was at 3:45 with zazen starting promptly at 4am.



The ten hour schedule would end with Teisho from 8-9pm, followed by the residents participating in voluntary/mandatory zazen back in the dormitory dining area for an extra 30 minutes, or far into the night on the last day of a retreat. Sesshin meals were eaten in the Japanese seiza kneeling position with short tables set up in the zendo. The dokusan line was made with participants kneeling in seiza on hard wood floors. (My western legs took a real beating.) All the residents took turns being tenzo, so that everyone would have an equal chance at zazen practice.

## **Koan Practice with Koryu Roshi**

Koryu Roshi descended from the Inzan line of Rinzai Zen (see chart on page 38). Everyone who practiced with him was given the koan *Mu* to start and would continue on with his list of Inzan koans. I've assumed his list of koans was quite traditional and mostly unchanged from what he and his predecessors used from the time of Inzan Ien himself. My research for this article helped me clarify that issue. Unlike Americans who, for better or worse, are often inclined to change and modify systems quickly, the Japanese are traditionally loathe to do so. Their respect for tradition makes that unpalatable at best, and even profane at worst. Still, we shall see that the various Inzan lineages themselves have diverged since the time of Inzan Ien.

## **The Two Koan Streams of the White Plum**

To begin with a general overview, there is a good excerpt from a Wikipedia article on koans:

### **Koan curricula**[\[edit\]](#)

In Rinzai a gradual succession of koans is studied.<sup>[74]</sup> There are two general branches of curricula used within Rinzai, derived from the principal heirs of Rinzai: the Takuju curriculum, and the Inzan curriculum. However, there are a number of sub-branches of these, and additional variations of curriculum often exist between individual teaching lines which can reflect the recorded experiences of a

particular lineage's members. Koan curricula are, in fact, subject to continued accretion and evolution over time, and thus are best considered living traditions of practice rather than set programs of study.

Koan practice starts with the *shokan*, or "first barrier", usually the mu-koan or the koan "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"<sup>[51]</sup> After having attained *kensho*, students continue their practice investigating subsequent koans.<sup>[75]</sup> In the Takuju-school, after breakthrough students work through the *Gateless Gate* (Mumonkan), the *Blue Cliff Record* (Hekigan-roku), the *Entangling Vines* (Shumon Kattoshu), and the *Collection of Wings of the Blackbird* (鳩羽集, *Chin'u shū*).<sup>[76]</sup>

The Inzan-school uses its own internally generated list of koans.<sup>[76]</sup> Hakuin's descendants developed a fivefold classification system:<sup>[74]</sup>

1. *Hosshin*, dharma-body koans, are used to awaken the first insight into *sunyata*.<sup>[74]</sup> They reveal the *dharmakaya*, or Fundamental.<sup>[77]</sup> They introduce "the undifferentiated and the unconditional".<sup>[78]</sup>
2. *Kikan*, dynamic action koans, help to understand the phenomenal world as seen from the awakened point of view;<sup>[79]</sup> Where *hosshin* koans represent *tai*, substance, *kikan* koans represent *yu*, function.<sup>[80]</sup>
3. *Gonsen*, explication of word koans, aid to the understanding of the recorded sayings of the old masters.<sup>[81]</sup> They show how the Fundamental, though not depending on words, is nevertheless expressed in words, without getting stuck to words.<sup>[82]</sup>
4. *Hachi Nanto*, eight "difficult to pass" koans.<sup>[83]</sup> There are various explanations for this category, one being that these koans cut off clinging to the previous attainment. They create another Great Doubt, which shatters the self attained through *satori*.<sup>[84]</sup> It is uncertain which are exactly those eight koans.<sup>[85]</sup> Hori gives various sources, which altogether give ten *hachi nanto* koans:<sup>[86]</sup>
  - Miura and Sasaki:
    - Nansen's Flower (Hekigan-roku Case 40)
    - A Buffalo Passes the Window (Mumonkan Case 38)
    - Sōzan's Memorial Tower (Kattō-shō Case 140)
    - Suigan's Eyebrows (Hekigan-roku Case 8)
    - Enkan's Rhinoceros Fan (Hekigan-roku Case 91)
  - Shimano:

- The Old Woman Burns the Hut (Kattō-shō Case 162)
  - Asahina Sōgen:
    - Goso Hōen's "Hakuun Said 'Not Yet'" (Kattō-shō Case 269)
    - Shuzan's Main Cable (Kattō-shō Case 280).
  - Akizuki:
    - Nansen Has Died (Kattō-shō Case 282)
    - Kenpō's Three Illnesses (Kattō-shō Case 17).
- 5. *Goi jujukin* koans, the [Five Ranks of Tozan](#) and the Ten Grave Precepts.<sup>[87][83]</sup>

According to **Akizuki** there was an older classification-system, in which the fifth category was Kojo, "Directed upwards". This category too was meant to rid the monk of any "stink of Zen".<sup>[88]</sup> The very advanced practitioner may also receive the Matsugo no rokan, "The last barrier, and Saigo no ikketsu, "The final confirmation".<sup>[88]</sup> "The last barrier" when one left the training hall, for example "Sum up all of the records of Rinzai in one word!"<sup>[88]</sup> It is not meant to be solved immediately, but to be carried around in order to keep practising.<sup>[88]</sup> "the final confirmation" may be another word for the same kind of koan.<sup>[88]</sup>

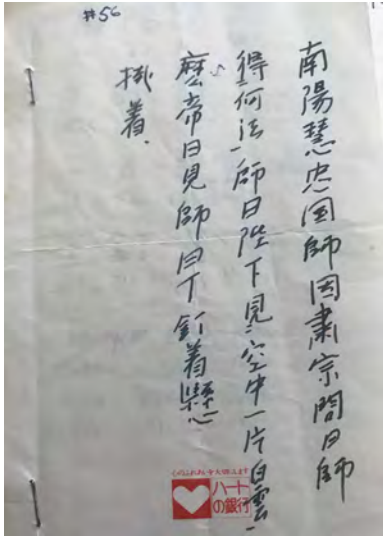
(End of Wikipedia quote)

Isshu Muira and Ruth Fuller Sasaki state in their 1965 book, *The Zen Koan*:

This koan system was developed and refined by Hakuin's disciples, including his direct heir Gasan Jito (1727-1797). But it was Gasan's two heirs, Inzan Ien (1751-1814) and Takuju Kosen (1760-1833), who finally fixed 'Hakuin Zen' in the two teaching styles current today. Neither Hakuin nor his disciples compiled any collections of koans, at least none that were ever published. The koans that Hakuin created are still transmitted only by word of mouth to the student in the master's room.

In contrast with the above statement, the White Plum has published what it calls, "The First 200" (which are in fact Koryu Roshi's first 200 Inzan

koans), and students can then easily find the other koans in the *Mumonkan*, *Hekigan-roku* etc. Yet Koryu Roshi's students would be given one koan at a time. In my case, he would jot down the koan in kanji (Chinese ideograms) and my roommates would help me translate that into modern Japanese which I would then translate into English for myself. On the left is an example.



(This koan is #58 in *The First 200*, but was the 56th koan I did with Koryu Roshi in case you're wondering what the #56 means in the top left.)

Philip Kapleau tells us in his *Three Pillars of Zen* that to complete training under Yasutani Roshi a student must pass 50 miscellaneous koans followed by the *Mumonkan* with verses, the *Hekigan-roku*, the *Shoyo-roku*, the *Denko-roku* and finally precepts. (Interestingly, the *Five Ranks* of Tozan Ryokai is not mentioned). This order would make sense in that Yasutani trained with Harada Sogaku, who purportedly received transmission from Dokutan Sosan of Nanzen-ji, a Takuju master. (Interesting aside...Maezumi Roshi told Mr. Yu Ohgushi, a Hannya Dojo roommate of mine and frequent visitor to ZCLA, that it was indeed doubtful if Harada ever actually received or accepted dharma transmission from Dokutan Sosan. The reason being that Harada had already received transmission in the Soto school and it would have been religiously/politically incorrect to get it in the Rinzai school at that time. As Maezumi Roshi did receive dharma transmission from Koryu Roshi perhaps it had become a non-issue after the war.

Prof. Victor Sogen Hori points out in his book, *Zen Sand*, that Rinzai Takuju monks work systematically through the *Mumonkan*, case by case, and then through the *Hekigan-roku* in the same manner while also employing the *Katto-shu* (*Vines and Entanglements*) and the *Chin'u-shu* (*Wings of the Blackbird Collection*). Koan study would then finish with *The Five Ranks* and precepts.

I think it's interesting to note the addition of the *Shoyo-roku* and *Denko-roku* to the list that Yasutani Roshi used in his koan curriculum, as those Soto school texts surely would not have been in a traditional Rinzaï Takuju system.

Some years ago Bernie Roshi and I had an email exchange in which we discussed two White Plum issues. The first issue was this addition of the *Shoyo-roku* and *Denko-roku* to the koan system that Yasutani and the White Plum has employed. Where did that come from? We concluded that those texts, which are considered to be Soto texts and not used in the Rinzaï school, must have been added by Harada Sogaku, with interpretations and answers provided by Harada Sogaku himself. Whether Yasutani or Maezumi Roshis stuck to the answers that Harada wanted I do not know. But Bernie Roshi once remarked to me that he used koans to work with the student and didn't depend on any fixed or required answer. While that approach may certainly have its own merits I do not believe that would generally be true in Japan, the land that gave us this practice. Isshu Muira Roshi states, in *The Zen Koan*:

In the Inzan and Takuju lines, the answers to the koans were more or less standardized for each line respectively.

The second point Bernie and I discussed was his objection to White Plum teachers claiming dharma transmission in the Rinzaï line. His point was that Maezumi Roshi's transmission came from his father in the Soto school and Yasutani Roshi also in the Soto school even though trained in koans by Harada Sogaku, again in the Soto school. Claiming Rinzaï transmission from Osaka Koryu Roshi was inaccurate, according to Bernie, as Koryu Roshi was head of an independent lay organization, the Shakamuni-kai, started by his teacher, Muso Joko, who was himself officially of the Shingon sect, not actually a part of the modern day Rinzaï monastic system. I argued that being that as it may, Koryu's line was easily identifiable as directly linked to the Inzan line of Rinzaï Zen with Koryu being 9th in line from Hakuin Zenji himself. Still, I understood then Bernie's objection.

But returning to the two koan schools, the Takuju systematic method of proceeding from one koan to the next in textual order is quite different from that

of the Inzan school. Hori writes that Inzan monks proceed on the koan path in 'what appears to be random order'.

...however the order is fixed, so much so that a monk transferring from one Inzan school to another need merely tell the new roshi his last koan in order for the new roshi to know where to continue without leaving any gap or requiring any repetition of work already done.

White Plum koan teachers can see that after *Mu-ji* in the first 200 koans that the rest of the 199 koans seem to appear haphazardly, one miscellaneous (probably from the *Katto-shu* for example), then one from the *Mumonkan*, one from the *Hekigan-roku*, then back to a miscellaneous koan. This seemingly haphazard approach continues throughout Koryu's Inzan list of koans.

Given the claim above I still wondered if the Inzan curriculum of Koryu Roshi remained a "traditional" Inzan scheme. That is, being that Koryu Roshi was a good 3 generations removed from the Japanese Rinzai monastic system, could we honestly say it was the traditional Inzan system?

I was able to get some handle on the issue with help from Souzui (Stefanie Schubert) Sensei of the Hidden Valley Zen Center and Prof. Victor Sogen Hori, author of *Zen Sand*. Souzui Sensei trained with Harada Shodo Roshi of the Inzan school, while Prof. Hori trained for 13 years in Rinzai monasteries in Kyoto after receiving his doctorate in philosophy from Stanford. Our own Chozen Roshi connected me with Prof. Hori and he revealed to me that he had the full koan *takei*, or curriculum, of Ekkei Shuken (1810-1884), recorded by his successor Kazan Genku (1837-1917). When I told him I had the full list of Ekkei's great great dharma grandson, Koryu Roshi, we agreed to exchange lists to compare.

I compared Ekkei's curriculum koan by koan with the Maezumi translation of Koryu's list. And they are by and large, identical. The numbering systems are different in that Maezumi Roshi's translation of Koryu's list does not list checking questions and capping phrases as separated koans after #200, for the most part, whereas Prof. Hori's translation follows the numbering system originally assigned, or given by the scholar/Zen Master Akizuki Ryumin, a

student of Koryu Roshi's and author of the Japanese book, *Koan*, in which he provides the Ekkei Shuken koan curriculum. There are 19 koans from Ekkei's list missing from Koryu's. So out of 524 total koans in Ekkei's list, that's a similarity of 96.4%, and the koan order is virtually identical.

There are 5 koans in Koryu's list missing in Ekkei's. Maezumi Roshi's numbering system shows a blank from #242-257 for some reason, but there is no gap there in comparison with Ekkei's. That is, Koryu's #242 is Baso's Sick-ness, Blue Cliff Record # 3, and #257 the next koan listed, is from Blue Cliff #96. And this is the exact order in Ekkei's list which shows those koans as #325 and #326, with no gap.

Maezumi Roshi's translation also conflates two koans into one, #157, mistakenly, I believe. In the White Plum' First 200 koan #157 is:

What is a drop of water of Sogen? (from *Blue Cliff* # 7 commentary and *Chin'u -Shu* #60 *The Book of Poison Feathers*...Sogen refers to the place of residence of the 6th Patriarch, Hui Neng)

Hogen of Seiryō went to the hall etc.....(*Mumonkan* #26)

I did this koan in Japan with Koryu Roshi and it was at that time merely *Mumonkan* 26, with no inclusion of the "drop of water of Sogen". Still, the Ekkei document indeed lists the "drop of water of Sogen", but as a separate koan entirely, which would be correct, in my estimation.

There is one more point I'd like to clarify about The First 200. The White Plum's koan #12 is translated as, "When the world was created, what was god (the creator) like?" I don't know how it got translated in that way. Perhaps Maezumi Roshi or Bernie Roshi changed it for some reason or other. But there is a more accurate translation of the original that challenges our understanding of both self and time, and remains one of my favorite early koans.

I checked the original Japanese version I was given and my translation was, "At the beginning of the world, how did the (Shinto) god Kuni no toko tachi no mikoto *appear*." The Japanese word for *appear* was given to me as...*shutsugen shita ka?* Or, *how did he appear?* Not in the sense of , what was he like, or what did he look like, or what kind of person was he. But in the sense

of how did he make his appearance? I checked this with Prof. Horii who wrote:

When I first got this koan, I was a monk at Daitoku-ji and received *Tenchi kaibyaku izen, Kuni-toko-tachi no mikoto wa dou arawareta ka* "Before the separation of heaven and earth, how did the god Kuni-toko-tachi no mikoto appear?" The Koryu version uses *dou shutsugen shita no ka. Shutsugen shita* is a slightly more formal word than *arawareta* but they mean the same. How did the god manifest himself? The question is not what was his physical appearance.

Having said all the above about the truly traditional nature of Koryu Roshi's Inzan curriculum, my comparison with Souzui Sensei's koan list did not provide the same assurance. Her teacher was Harada Shodo whose line goes back to Ekkei Shuken's dharma brother Tekisui Giboku. I was only able to compare Koryu's list with Souzui Sensei's first 36 koans and they bare no resemblance to Koryu's list, Inzan though they may be. Whether this variation is due to Harada Shodo or someone else in his line, it seems I cannot claim that Koryu's list is in accordance with Inzan Ien himself. But that at least it is quite consistent with his line going back five generations to Ekkei Shuken.

The question I have is that I've always been told (or assumed) that Hakuin Zenji's attempt, or that of his successors through both Inzan and Takuju, was to establish a system that would in effect allow for a spiritual path to take one from a sow's ear to a silk purse. That is, a system that progressed from a more basic spiritual opening or kensho to a more nuanced, fluid and powerful understanding. Perhaps I got this impression from Ruth Fuller Sasaki's statement in *The Zen Koan*:

The course of koan study as devised by Hakuin Zenji from the koans of the old masters brings the student by degrees from the first awakening to Reality, the Principle, Absolute Mind,



into full realization and oneness with the Absolute Principle in all manifestations of Its activity, whether these be beyond time and space or in the humblest acts of daily life.

She suggests the idea that the koan system envisioned by Hakuin was indeed intended to be a gradual yet concerted approach to ever higher levels of understanding.

One example is koan # 268 in Koryu's Inzan list, *The mind of the great sage of India was intimately conveyed from west to east*. I'm sure White Plum teachers might easily come up with an answer, or expression, that would satisfy them. But it would more than likely not satisfy an Inzan master. Without discussing any standard answer for this koan, Yamamoto Roshi in Japan (after Maezumi Roshi's passing) pointed out the capping phrase (*jakugo*) required for this koan and impressed upon me the truly subtle point being revealed. The answer was not a simple appreciation. The required capping phrase for this koan was something from an old Chinese (or Japanese) love poem, presumably addressed to a girl...

(paraphrasing....*O Yu, O Yu! No matter how hard I try  
I'm unable to express my love for you.*)

The point being emphasized in this phrase is that the very inability to express one's love, that very angst itself, is already the *intimate conveyance of the Mind of the Great sage of India*. To be honest here, Yamamoto Roshi was not at all pleased with the answer that Maezumi Roshi allowed me to pass it with, i.e. "I hear it's going to rain tomorrow." In defense of Maezumi Roshi, the next time I met him after passing this koan, he looked at the list and he pointed to #268 and asked if I had already done it. I said that, "Yes, we did it last time". His comment was, "Oh, I have to be more careful". So at that point he remembered the importance of that koan in the Inzan curriculum. In a later discussion with Yamamoto Roshi I told him that the point he was raising

was certainly covered in Maezumi's overall teaching, in my opinion. It just wasn't covered on that particular koan.

So all this is just a long way of saying that it seems to me the Inzan koan list seemed to proceed in a 'stair step' manner that I always thought Hakuin envisioned. Before his death, Maezumi Roshi told me he would sit me down one day and tell me the reasoning behind Hakuin's system. Sadly, he passed away before that happened. Still we can get a good handle on that system with books like *The Zen Koan* by Isshu Miura and Ruth Fuller Sasaki, *Zen Sand* by Victor Sogen Hori, et al. Their explanations of the various types of koans, the *Hosshin*, *Kikan*, *Gonsen*, *Nanto*, and *Goi* koans, give us a very good idea of the progression envisioned at or immediately after Hakuin's time.

I always thought that the Inzan system seemed to stick to this progression scheme better than the Takuju system which stuck to the order of the original koan texts. So the question remains, was it actually Inzan Ien and Takuju Kosen themselves that fixed the order of the koans for their particular curriculum? And if so, what gradually progressive credence is there to the Takuju approach that merely follows the textual order of the main koan collections?

Of course, any extensive course of study, whether Inzan or Takuju, can provide the tools to deepen understanding. It would all depend on how the teacher utilizes the system he or she has.

## **The Inzan Flavor**

My experience with both the Inzan and Takuju schools closely correspond to Victor Hori's statement in *Zen Sand*:

The two teach basically the same body of koan and both consider themselves to be transmitting the Zen of Hakuin. But the Inzan school is thought to be

sharper and more dynamic in style, while the Takuju school is thought to be more meticulous and low-keyed.

Dokusan with the Koryu Roshi was usually a quick and intense affair. After my bows I'd rise to be confronted with a stern face and glaring eyeballs. I'd bark out my koan and receive a grunt in response, as if to say, "Go ahead, give it to me!". After my answer his face would often soften and he might smile, nod an affirmation or shake his head in the negative, say a few words, then ring his bell. And when I returned to practice with Maezumi Roshi in 1993 he kept that same atmosphere in our dokusan. No need for idle chit chat. For a long time I wondered if perhaps he didn't like me very much as my dokusan with him were always short, compared to the long dokusan he would seem to have with both his senior and junior students. It took me awhile to realize that as he kept me on Koryu Roshi's Inzan koan list, he also kept me with the same flavor of that school.

Of course with advanced students on long koans the process might indeed take longer, but the emphasis was on dynamic presentation of the koan, not verbal repartee. But without some verbal give and take, even though it might lean toward intellectualization, how could the teacher really see how clear the student's understanding was of that particular koan?

The answer to that lay in the importance of the capping phrase, the jakugo. I never realized this until I traveled to Japan to do capping phrase study with Yamamoto Roshi. You see, when I returned to Zen practice in 1993 with Maezumi Roshi at ZCLA, he kept me on the Inzan koans of Koryu Roshi. At one point he said, "When you finish with this, I'll send you to Japan and have Shakamuni-kai people check you out."

I never fully understood what he meant by that, nor did I have a chance to ask him before he passed. As I was almost at the end of the Inzan system when Maezumi Roshi passed away, I felt lost as how to proceed. I discussed it with Roshis Bernie, Yamamoto and Tenshin at Maezumi Roshi's funeral and it was decided I would finish those Inzan koans with Tenshin Roshi then visit Yamamoto Roshi in Japan. Dharma transmis-

sion was not actually discussed and I eventually realized that it would have been foolish to ask for or receive it as my training was not fully realized in the Inzan way, for two reasons. While Tenshin Roshi did his best to finish the Inzan system with me, in truth he wasn't trained in that way and the appreciations of those advanced koans could be quite different from the same koans he did with Maezumi Roshi. My story earlier for koan # 268 in Koryu Roshi's Inzan list is a perfect example of that.

Then there's the capping phrase issue. When I finally visited Yamamoto Roshi in Japan he wasn't interested in going over my koan answers, he just wanted to see my capping phrases. When capping phrases were called for in a particular koan, Maezumi Roshi merely asked me to bring in my own poem, as even in the early 90s there weren't many translations of the capping phrase texts.

Since the Inzan school is more focused on dynamic expression and shied away from too much verbal give and take, or dharma combat, the only way a teacher had to judge the depth of a student's appreciation of the koan was to have him or her find an appropriate capping phrase for the koan. And that capping phrase would have to come from established texts. There are literally thousands of capping phrases to choose from and the process might indeed take some time. (For a detailed explanation and translation of the capping phrases used by Rinzai monks in Japan, see Victor Hori's, *Zen Sand*.)

## **The Takuju Flavor**

Maezumi Roshi's koan system utilized the First 200 koans of Koryu Roshi's Inzan curriculum. From research I did for this article I've come to understand that that this was a system that was at least faithful to Koryu's great great dharma grandfather, Ekkei Shuken, even perhaps Inzan Ien himself. But after those First 200 Maezumi Roshi stopped using the Inzan system and switched completely to the Takuju system. He pro-

ceeded then with the Rinzai koan books of the *Mumonkan* and *Hekigan-roku* in their textual order. Following that Maezumi Roshi followed the system of his other koan teacher, Yasutani Hakuun, a Soto priest who trained with Harada Sogaku. Harada Roshi was another Soto priest who some claim had dharma transmission from his Rinzai Takuju teacher Dokutan Sosan of Nanzen-ji in Kyoto. I believe it must have been Harada Sogaku then that added the Soto koan books of the *Shoyoroku* and *Denkoroku* to the curriculum he employed and passed down to Yasutani Roshi and subsequently to Maezumi Roshi. Maezumi Roshi's curriculum ended with a study of Tozan Ryokai's Five Ranks and 100 precepts. (Note: Koryu Roshi's precept study was entitled, *Master Bodhidharma's Formless Mind Precepts*, and entailed 31 questions.)

And in my view Maezumi Roshi employed the flavor of the Takuju system with his students. Why do I say this? Because in the early 1980s I had the opportunity to work with Bernie Roshi for a time, then known as Tetsugen Sensei, in New York. I remember my first dokusan with him as I went in filled with the Inzan intensity I thought common to interviews with Zen Masters. But I was surprised to find a very relaxed man sitting before me without the fierce stare and pursed lips I was used to. And the entire dokusan continued in that manner. Likewise when I returned to ZCLA in 1993 to resume my studies, my various daisan with teachers such as Tenshin, Jikyo and Jitsudo were calm and peaceful affairs. And Maezumi Roshi, though not inclined to much discussion with me, was at least not glaring intently at me as I had been accustomed to in Japan. And after Maezumi Roshi passed my work with Tenshin Roshi was very much in the same manner. No need to prepare for a dharma brawl, but be ready to answer some questions.

## **The Capping Phrase Issue**

Although my experience with the Inzan school impressed upon me the importance of that practice in that school, from what I've gathered this

importance is not universally felt. When working with Maezumi Roshi and the Inzan list called for a koan he would merely ask me to bring in my own poem. And his constant response was, "Hmm...could be better." Then we'd move on. He even said to me, "Harada Roshi felt capping phrases were a waste of time. But I had to do them, so you have to do them." It was through my experience with Yamamoto Roshi in Japan (and the Inzan koan #268 related on p. 17) that I felt that the capping phrase study had great importance in the Inzan style of koan training. Yamamoto and I translated about 90% of the capping phrases accepted by Koryu Roshi. I saw anywhere from two to four acceptable phrases for any koan requiring them. (Yamamoto kept that list, not wanting the "cat to get out of the bag".) But it was his hearing of my capping phrase for koan #268 that alerted him to my poor understanding of the true spirit of that koan.

Yet when I related Harada Roshi's feelings about capping phrases to Thomas Yuho Kirchner, author of *Entangling Vines* and a long term Rinzai monk in Japan, he replied:

This is not an unusual point of view. I get the impression that there are, broadly speaking, two "schools" of thought on the matter of Zen practice. One is very much focused on samadhi practice and regards the koans and capping phrases as just an annoying but necessary part of becoming a Rinzai master -- my first teacher, Kato Kozan Roshi, was of this view -- while others (like Harada Shodo) feel that koans and capping phrases are essential to developing prajna.

Perhaps some of the confusing differences arise from the fact that there are actually two styles of the Inzan school, which I only learned doing research for this article. Meido Moore Roshi of the Korini-ji school in Wisconsin wrote to me that:

Inzan and Takuju of course are so-called schools of koan practice, and one commonly hears that such and such teacher carried one or the other. But there are sub-schools as well - in the Inzan line, currently Mino-ha and Bizen-ha sub-schools still exist. The Mino-ha lineage remains at Shogen-ji Sodo, Zuiryu-ji Sodo, Heirin-ji Sodo and Nanshu-ji Sodo. The shitsunai of Tenryu-ji (which we inherited here) belongs to Bizen-ha of the Inzan school. But it is not pure Bizen-ha, since it also carries some Mino-ha as well as Takuju elements (due to the training backgrounds of teachers at Tenryu-ji a few generations ago).

The above information then could account for the fact that although Koryu Roshi's Inzan curriculum is faithful to that of his great great dharma grandfather, Ekkei Shuken, Harada Shodo Roshi of Sogen-ji's curriculum seems vastly different, though they both would claim inheritors of the Inzan-ha (school).

Thomas Yuho Kirchner further informed me that:

In any event, from everything acquaintances in the Zen monastic world here have told me it would seem that a set Inzan capping-phrase list doesn't exist. All of the various teaching lineages in the Inzan and Takuju traditions have their own "classical" answers, and this applies to capping phrases as well. Friends who have done koan work in several different lineages tell me that the capping phrases for the same koan are often quite different. It would even appear that they can differ in the same teaching line, depending on how the individual master understands a particular koan (not always the same for master and disciple -- Harada Shodo Roshi, for example, sometimes has a rather different "take" on a koan than his teacher Yamada Mumon did).

So where does all of this leave us? It would be easy for the Takuju school to have some claim to traditional koan curriculum, if not accepted

answers or capping phrases. After initial study of Joshu's *Mu* or Hakuin's *Sound of One Hand* and some associated miscellaneous koans, the textual order of the koan books themselves make knowing where one stands, so to speak, easier to figure out. We have seen that understanding where one stands in his koan practice may also be true in certain Inzan lineages (Koryu Roshis' for example) to some extent, but not universally so in that school as a whole.

My own experience, limited as it may be, does inform me that the flavor of the two schools remains true. Perhaps others with a variety of Zen training experience can flesh this out further.

## **The Soto Stream**

Maezumi Roshi was officially a priest of the Soto school, as was his father from whom he received dharma transmission. After his time with Koryu Roshi he spent a few years in Soto training at Soji-ji before coming to the United States. He eventually finished koan training with Yasutani Roshi and later Koryu Roshi and received dharma transmission from each teacher.

Maezumi Roshi set up ZCLA with the structure of his Soto lineage. That is, the robes, rituals, and liturgy was highly influenced by his Soto training and family background. The chanting of the lineage during morning service, for example, is the chanting of the names of his Soto lineage alone, with a nod at the end to:

..and to *Gonshin Ryoko Daiosho* and *Musa Koryu Ro Dai Shi*

*Gonshin Ryoko* being the formal Buddhist name for Yasutani Roshi, and, if memory serves me correctly, *No Activity Koryu Old Great Teacher* being of course, Koryu Roshi.



The other major Soto influence can be found in Maezumi Roshi's teachings on Dogen Zenji, the 13th century founder of the Soto school in Japan. His translation of Dogen's famous *Genjokoan* remains by far the best I've read and his lectures on Dogen and other Soto writings have been a major influence on his students.

## The White Plum

It is recognized that the White Plum is a combination of the Soto school as well as both major streams of Rinzai koan study. That is indeed unique. The traditional White Plum koan curriculum, in its use of 200 of Koryu Roshi's Inzan koans, plus the full Takuju study of the *Mumonkan* and *Hekigan-roku*, and the Soto texts of the *Shoyo-roku* and *Denko-roku*, not to mention a full suite of precept study and the Five Ranks, is the most extensive curriculum I've ever encountered, or even heard of.

The terms used for dharma transmission in the White Plum are also a combination of both Soto and Rinzai nomenclature. The White Plum uses a variety of terms in its dharma transmission. The Soto ceremony of *Denkai* indicates full priest status. The Soto terms *Denbo* and *Shiho* seem to be used interchangeably where one becomes a *Sensei*. I'm told that Maezumi Roshi coined the term *Hoshi* for one who has completed a period of training as either Head Monk or Head Trainee and given the status of a Dharma Holder.

The White Plum has continued the Harada/Yasutani/Maezumi use of the Rinzai term, *inka* (short for *inka shomei*, or *the legitimate seal of clearly furnished proof*) to indicate the final seal of approval, a "senior teacher" status, given to someone who has already had dharma transmission but has been teaching for some years and has evidently, or hopefully, ripened into a seasoned teacher of the dharma. Certainly Maezumi Roshi could legitimately use the term *inka*, since he received it from Koryu Roshi. Whether Harada Sogaku can say the same thing is an open ques-

tion. But it is undoubtedly a mute point, since Harada's teaching and his heirs have had a profound effect. For example, it is my understanding that Hakuin Zenji himself never actually received any dharma transmission from anyone, but became so famous for his teaching that the Rinzai school was forced by general consent to acknowledge him as a descendent of Dokyo Etan, more popularly known as Shoju Rojin, the Old Man of Shoju.

## **A Contrast in Practice**

And I find all of this an interesting contrast with, for example, the bare bones approach of Koryu Roshi's Hannya Dojo. I doubt if many in the White Plum realize that Koryu Roshi's training style was devoid of most ceremony and titles. Some chanting was performed, i.e. prior to morning zazen there was a short period of chanting, and Hakuin's Song of Zazen was chanted before afternoon sitting during sesshin. The Four vows were chanted after breakfast and lunch during sesshin, and at the end of the day during sesshin as well. There was really no altar in the zendo, but in the alcove in the front of the zendo there were two statues, one of Joko Roshi and one of Koryu Roshi. There were no services and there were no rakusos worn by anyone but Roshi as there was no jukai. You can see the "standard uniform" if you look at the picture of Roshi and I on page 8. I'm wearing a simple Japanese yukata, or bathrobe, with a kendo skirt. That's what everyone wore. It was very comfortable to sit in.

The jigijitsu was Harigane Sensei, who had been practicing with Koryu Roshi for 30 years when I arrived, having received inka 15 years before I met him. He was a kind man who had perfected the art of sleeping in full lotus. I could remember his head bobbing back and forth in long undulations but he never fell off his seat.

The tanto, or head of the other side of the zendo, was Takahashi Sensei who had been there 20 years and who finished koan study early in my stay there. Then Koryu Roshi had him start over. During sesshin once I witnessed Takahashi Sensei sit from 1pm until 9pm in full lotus with no food and maybe a total of 20 minutes off the cushion. There were only two kinhin periods a day during retreat, interspersed with a few minutes off every 30 minutes or so to run to the bathroom if you needed to. Most of the "pros" never stood up except when forced to by the schedule. I was definitely NOT one of the pros.

Although having received dharma transmission, Harigane and Takahashi Senseis only wore a rakusu when giving a talk, and that was extremely rare. They were dedicated students of the dharma who set an example for the rest of us.

## Chido Roshi

The most interesting of all the senior dharma people I knew there was Chido Roshi. (We called him "Sensei", as he was junior to Koryu Roshi in the Dharma, even though he was a successor of Joko Roshi long before I met him.)



*Chido Roshi is pictured here as the small gentleman on the right, next to Nakagawa Soen Roshi, with Koryu Roshi on the left.*

Chido Roshi spent 20 years with Joko Roshi living and practicing with him at the Fuji Hannya Dojo. As he was a layman with no full time career, I was told, he asked Joko Roshi if it would be ok to go train with the famous Roshi of Engaku-ji in Kamakura, Yamamoto Gempo, one of the "two mountains of Zen" in the 20th century, along with Kato Kozan .

Joko gave his consent and Chido spent the next 20 years practicing with Yamamoto Gempo. He told me he got stuck on a koan for 2 years with Yamamoto Gempo. Imagine Chido's dedication as he was willing to subject himself to that kind of training, after already having received transmission himself.



When Mr. Ohgushi took me to visit him in 1998 Chido Roshi he told me the story about the koan. I asked him which koan it was? He said, "I don't remember." That got a good laugh from everyone.

## The Two Yamamotos

I could not end a discussion of the Hannya Dojo and its members without mentioning Yamamoto Yukiro (pictured on the left) and Yamamoto Ken (on the right). These two Yamamotos were not related by blood, but certainly by practice. Although the Hannya Dojo held no Ango (3 month training periods), it did provide a center for two long sesshins that I knew of. A 100 day sesshin and subsequently a 1000 day sesshin that was specifically held for these two Yamamotos.



*Left to right: Yamamoto Yukihiro, Koryu Roshi, the author, Yamamoto Ken*

The picture taken above was at the start of the 1000 day sesshin begun sometime around 1976. I took the official picture (which did not include me) with my new camera, then Roshi asked me to stand in for another



photo. I think he was trying to put pressure on me to sit the sesshin with the two Yamamotos. I politely and judiciously declined. I had enough trouble getting through 7 days!!

My sense was that after the two Yamamotos concluded their 100 day sesshin a few years earlier, a drunken dare propelled them to the 1000 day sesshin. Yamamoto Ken was a college professor with a young son and it was terribly difficult for him to arrange to sit such a long retreat. He got one day off every 6 months to visit his wife and child who would come to Tokyo to see him for one day only.

Yamamoto Yukihiro was my roommate at the Hannya Dojo and I greatly admired his strength, dedication and good humor. He was unmarried and a full time dharma practitioner when I met him. He is now Yamamoto Ryuko Roshi and head of the Shakamuni-kai. ZCLA members may well remember him from his few visits there.

## **Conclusion**

As we have seen, Maezumi Roshi developed a unique system of Zen training in America. It encompassed his training and experience with both schools of Rinzai koan study, the Inzan and Takuju, as well as his Soto Zen background and training.

Although employing Koryu's First 200 Inzan koans for his students, I believe Maezumi Roshi leaned toward the Takuju flavor throughout. He engaged in dharma dialogue, or dharma combat, along with insisting on dynamic presentation of the koan. This Takuju flavor evidenced by his successors, in my view, was much more amenable to the Western temperament.

Maezumi Roshi generally stopped requiring traditional capping phrases in his curriculum. But in my case, because I was kept on Koryu Roshi's

Inzan list, he required me to bring in my own poem as a capping phrase. While it is my belief that capping phrases were critical parts of traditional Inzan koan training, their use would have proven impractical for Americans. While Yamamoto Roshi and I were translating the required koan capping phrases, many of them were so obscure as to force Yamamoto Roshi himself to use a Chinese/Japanese dictionary for clarification. In my view, many of the nuances were so culturally Asian in nature as to unnecessarily hamper the practice for Western students. Although I found many of the capping phrases quite illuminating (see page 17 about the Inzan koan #268), outside of scholars interested in the study of Chinese and Japanese capping phrases, I believe Maezumi Roshi's focus on actual koan work alone was the best way forward.

## Attachments

Mr. Barry McMahon,  
thank you very much for  
your kind letter. I would  
like to pronounce a  
benediction upon your  
graduate at the top of  
your class.  
This Dojo has reached the  
50th year of its existence, and  
I become 80th years old.  
We hold a celebration at the  
Ginga Shirodo at the 16th of May,  
May I ask you, you have

children or not. I wish  
to see you again.  
Please remember us to  
your family.  
Sincerely yours,  
Koryu Oshaka.  
26th Feb 1981.

Koryu Roshi didn't speak English, but he enjoyed writing letters to his foreign friends and students in English. He might have been fierce in dokusan, but he was a very kind gentleman. I'll never forget him



## Muchaku Kaiko Roshi



## Muso Joko Roshi



*pictured here in the  
dokusan room of the  
Fuji Hannya Dojo*



*This is the "dokusan face" of Koryu Roshi, seen here seated at the head of the zendo of the Tokyo Hannya Dojo, in front of the alcove that contained a statue of himself and Joko Roshi, in place of a traditional altar.*

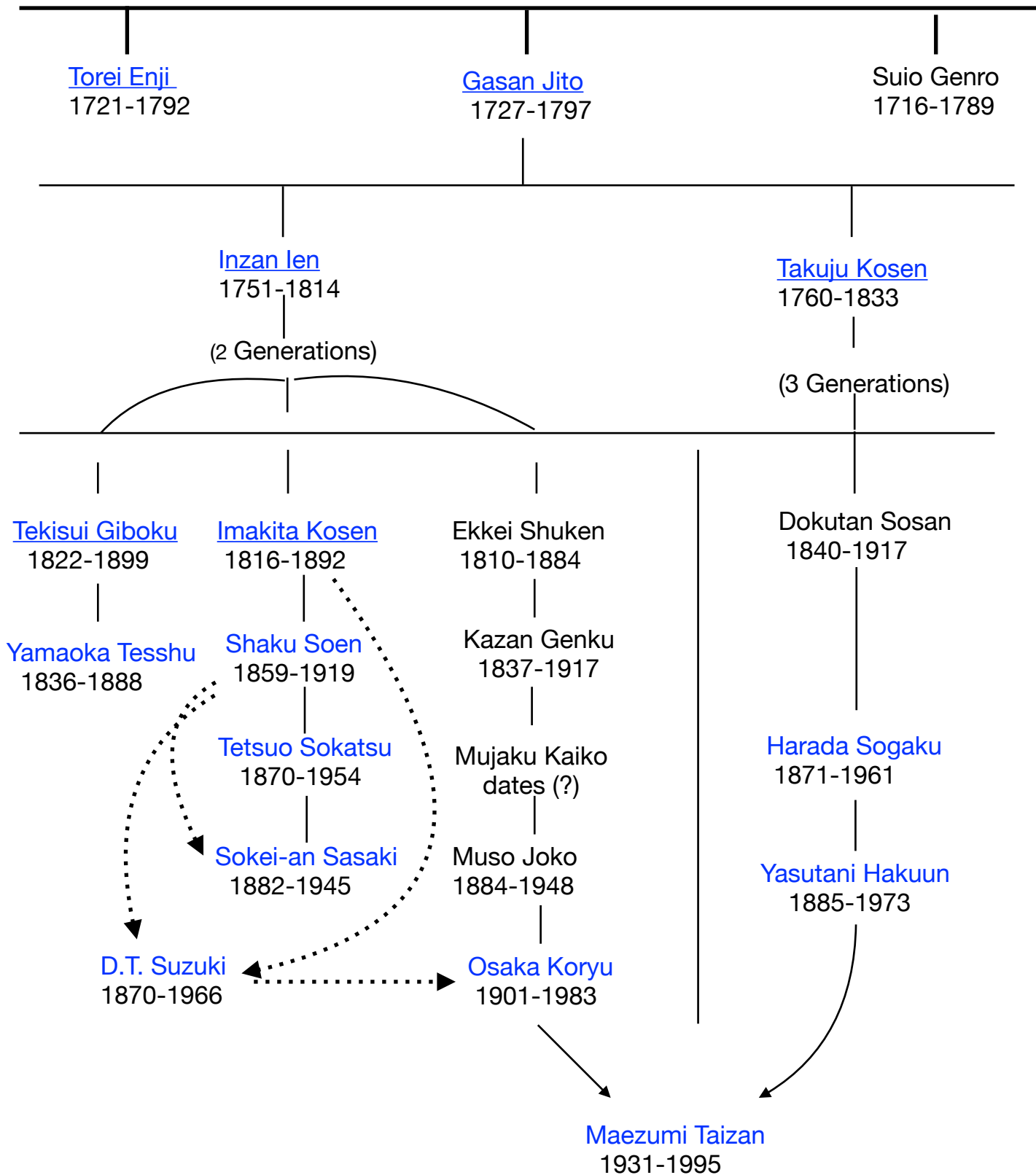


*My copy of the statue of Koryu Roshi that sat in the alcove of the zendo.*



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# Hakuin Ekaku (1685-1768)



### **Notes**

*The dark lines indicate direct Dharma Transmission. The dotted lines indicate some other kind of Dharma relationship. For example, Imakita Kosen was actually D.T. Suzuki's first teacher, although he practiced more extensively with Shaku Soen. D.T. Suzuki was a friend of Osaka Koryu, and I remember seeing a picture of him at the Hannya Dojo, attending some function or reunion. Also, I was told once that a foreigner asked D.T. Suzuki where he could practice Zen in Japan. I was told his response was, "In the Kyoto area see Shibayama Zenkei. in the Tokyo area, go see Yamamoto Gempo or Osaka Koryu."*