

**SELECTIONS OF ZEN BUDDHIST POETRY IN *KANBUN*
REFLECTING EARLY MEDIEVAL CROSS-CULTURAL
AND CROSS-SECTARIAN TRENDS**

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Introduction

This paper provides translations of a couple of dozen Zen Buddhist poems from early medieval Japan, accompanied by an introductory essay providing the background for understanding the significance and religious symbolism of this literature. The selections mainly represent a particular faction of the Sōtō Zen sect, which is generally not recognized for its contributions to Zen poetry yet did play a major role that needs to be explored and explained. Some of the material included here appears in my recent book *Flowers Blooming on a Withered Tree: Giun's Verse Comments on Dōgen's Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*.¹

In the intellectual history of Japanese Zen, the Rinzai (Ch. Linji) sect is particularly well known for the production of voluminous poetry written in the *kanbun* 漢文 (Sino-Japanese) style consisting usually of four-line, seven-character verse that was typical of the religious elite. Although there are many exceptions to the basic form, the Zen poems do follow various intricate rhetorical rules for rhyming, tonal patterns, thematic progression, symbolic indicators, and more. During the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, these poems produced the basis of the great artistic movement known as Five Mountains Literature (*Gozan bungaku*) that dominated, along with Zen painting and other practical arts such as gardening and tea ceremony, the cultural scene in both Kyoto and Kamakura, which was strongly supported by the shogunate seeking to promote continental learning and the exchange of ideas.²

While some eminent Chinese monks relocated to Japan in order to teach Zen poetry, especially Yishan Yining (1247–1317) who arrived in 1299,

¹ Steven Heine, *Flowers Blooming on a Withered Tree: Giun's Verse Comments on Dōgen's Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

² See David Pollack, *Zen Poems of the Five Mountains* (New York: Crossroad, 1985).

dozens of Japanese pilgrims who traveled to the mainland to learn the method of writing in the authentic Chinese fashion returned to practice their craft while residing at Kyoto temples. Today, several prominent collections of Five Mountains Literature containing multiple volumes with hundreds of examples of verse represent but a small sampling of the full amount of Rinzai Zen poetry composed in early medieval Japan. In addition, the monks also generally wrote traditional Japanese *waka* 和歌 verse with five lines in thirty-one syllables and participated regularly in *waka* competitions known as *uta awase* that were often held at the shogun's elite salons in order to create linked verse (*renga*) in collaboration with their colleagues.

By contrast, the Sōtō (Ch. Caodong) Zen sect that was established by Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253) and significantly expanded by the followers of Keizan 瑩山 (1268–1235) a century later in temples located in the northern provincial territory of Hokuriku (covering the mountains of Echizen, currently Fukui prefecture, and the Noto peninsula, currently Ishikawa prefecture), far removed from the capital, was thought to have eschewed literary pursuits. Instead, Sōtō leaders favored a strict adherence to the notion that “just sitting” (*shikan taza*) in meditation was the only true path to enlightenment, whereby writing was seen as a distraction that detracted from realizing one's spiritual goal.

After all, Dōgen is often cited for proclaiming in a sermon included in the *Miscellaneous Talks* (*Shōbōgenzō zuimonki*), “Zen monks these days are fond of literature and seek to write verses or essays, but this is a mistake...Reading poetry is a waste of time and should be completely cast aside.” Adding to the typical view, we find that relatively few Sōtō monks other than Dōgen ventured to China, and those that managed to get involved in the poetry ethos for the most part moved to Kyoto and converted to one of the Rinzai temples.

Nevertheless, there is ample evidence showing that Sōtō monks did take part in the composition of *kanbun* poetry and contributed to the overall Zen literary environment cutting across apparent, but often misleading, boundaries of geography and sectarian divisions, especially up to and during the first half of the fourteenth century when various sociohistorical factors caused the trend to subside rather abruptly. First, Dōgen himself composed more than five hundred poems, including about 450 *kanbun* verses that adhere to continental discursive guidelines in addition to 63 *waka* verse. Although only a tiny handful of his *kanbun* poems are included in the major Five Mountains collections, Dōgen's poetry as well as prose writing, which is highly prized for its profound literary qualities by interpreting Chinese

texts in Japanese vernacular syntax, in addition to his calligraphy, is valued for its literary qualities.

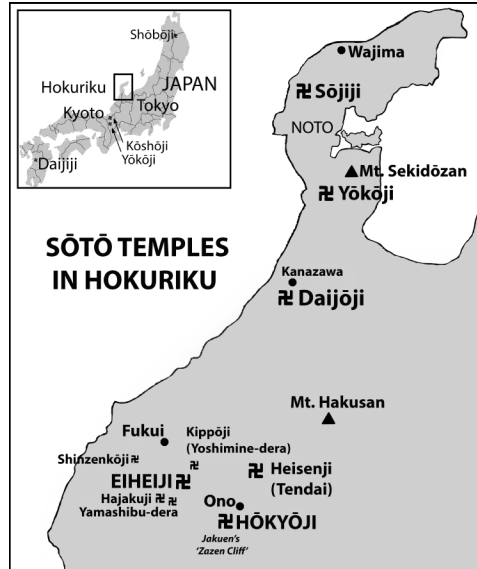


Figure 1. Spread of the Sōtō sect to the far northwestern provinces³

Dōgen's texts, for example, are usually grouped along with the *Tale of Heike* (*Heike monogatari*) and Chōmei's *An Account of My Hut* (*Hōjōki*) as examples of thirteenth-century writing that deeply explore the multiple levels of meaning of impermanence. They have also been inspirational for many important figures in the history of Japanese literature that include: Fujiwara Teika (1162–1241), famed *waka* poet who communicated with Dōgen in Kyoto; Yoshida Kenkō (1284–1350), author of *Tzurezuregusa* who appreciated Dōgen's creative discourse; Zeami (1363–1443), the great Noh theater playwright and theorist who integrated the Sōtō founder's philosophy of aesthetics into his thespian approach; *haiku* innovator Bashō (1644–1694), who reported on his visit to the out-of-the-way locale of Dōgen's Eihei-ji temple in *Oku no hosomichi* journeys; and Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972), who surprisingly mentioned the impact of Dōgen's *waka* at the very

³ Map designed by María Sol Echarren and Steven Heine.

beginning of his 1968 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, “Japan, the Beautiful, and Myself” (“Utsukushii Nihon to Watakushi”). Moreover, Dōgen’s work greatly influenced many of the few famous Sōtō Zen poets, ranging from Daichi Sokei (1290–1366), who spent ten years studying in China and is included in some of the Five Mountains collections, and the brilliantly eccentric hermit Ryōkan Taigu (1758–1831), a great poet who evokes Dōgen’s prosody numerous times.

One of the main examples of Sōtō Zen poetry from the early medieval period, translated in my latest book, is the poetic remarks by monk Giun 義雲 (1253–1333), the fifth abbot of Eiheiiji temple, regarding Dōgen’s masterwork, the *Treasury* (*Shōbōgenzo*). This text titled *Comments on the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* (*Shōbōgenzō honmokuju* 正法眼藏品目頌) is an important early commentary on the 60-fascicle edition of the *Treasury* that was composed in 1329 in the specific *kanbun* style known as *juko* 頌古 (Ch. *songgu*) typically used for interpreting *kōan* (Ch. *gongan*) cases that was prevalent in voluminous continental Zen records from the Song dynasty.⁴

Giun’s text also includes cryptic capping-phrase or *jakugo* 着語 (Ch. *zhuoyu*) remarks, which are epigrammatic expressions that accompany each verse, thereby evoking another literary form that was featured in Chinese Zen sources. Consequently, an alternative title that adds the term “*jaku*,” refers to the *Verse Comments with Capping Phrases on the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* (*Shōbōgenzō honmokujujaku* 正法眼藏品目頌着). An additional set of capping phrases on the 60-fascicle edition of the *Treasury* was composed in the Edo period by Katsudō Honkō 活動本興 (1710–1773), a disciple of Shigetsu Ein (1689–1764). Honkō’s sayings are part of his own commentary on Giun’s text called *Diamond Reflections on Giun’s Verse*

⁴ The main versions consulted include: a) the edition in volume 82 of the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* (T82.476a–578a, #2591), the standard modern canon of Buddhist works used in China and Japan that sometimes contains minor misprints; b) a manuscript featuring Japanese grammatical marks (*kundoku*) modifying the original *kanbun* that appears in volume 5 of the *Complete Writings of the Sōtō Sect* (*Sōtōshū zensho*, or SSZ.5.35–40); and c) a partially modernized internet version produced by Eiheiiji temple as a component of a summary of the fifth patriarch’s life and thought.

Comments (Shōbōgenzō honmokuju kongōjitsuzan 正法眼藏品目頌金剛莖參), and all those capping phrases are included in my translation.⁵

Giun's religious outlook was most likely influenced by diverse historical and spiritual factors, especially the impact of a small but important Zen movement known as the Wanshi (Ch. Hongzhi)-ha 宏智派 school that was prominent in Japan during the first half of the 1400s based on an emphasis on the writing of *kanbun* poetry to express the Dharma. The Wanshi-ha reflected the profound influence of the writings by Hongzhi Zhengjue (1091–1157, Jp. Wanshi Shōgaku), an essential Chinese Sōtō predecessor of Dōgen whose distinctive approach to poetic composition was also studied by many Rinzai/Linji monks in both China and Japan during this period. Hongzhi is often cited in Dōgen's *Treasury* and in the formal sermons of his *Extensive Record (Eihei kōroku)*.

A couple of generations after his death, Hongzhi's direct lineage spread to Japan beginning in 1309 with the advent of a follower named Dongming Huiji (1272–1340, Jp. Tōmyō Enichī). There, the Wanshi-ha literary approach greatly impacted both the Sōtō and Rinzai sects for at least half a century. It encompassed various monks who either came from or stayed in China to teach Japanese travelers, especially the renowned poet Gulin Qingmao (1262–1329, Jp. Kurin Seimo), who taught many foreign visitors and sent some of his disciples to the islands.⁶ The school's Japanese members included the eminent Sōtō monk-poets Betsugen Enshi (1294–1364) and Daichi Sokei (1290–1366), both of whom traveled for a long time to China to study under Gulin and also visited Eiheiji, in addition to Kōhō Kakumyō (1271–1261) and Chūgan Engetsu (1300–1375), who started as followers of

⁵ In *Shōbōgenzō chūkai zensho 正法眼藏注解全書*, 11 vols., ed. Jinbo Nyoten 神保如天 and Andō Bun'ei 安藤文英 (Tokyo: Nihon bussho kankōkai, rpt. 1956–1957), volume 11. Honkō was known for his own poetic approach to interpreting Dōgen's philosophy, as in his remark on the notion of "Dreams" (Yume): "The dream of a person dreaming of a world of dreams that cannot be forgotten— / If someone wakes up from such a dream, then that is the true dream."

⁶ Several of Gulin's disciples accompanied Japanese visitors to the islands in 1326, at least in part to escape the Yuan dynasty leadership that was not sympathetic to Zen Buddhism in China, and they generally lived happily abroad and often stayed there until they died. See Arthur Braverman, trans., *A Quiet Room: The Poetry of Zen Master Jakushitsu* (Boston: Tuttle, 2000).

Dongming and interacted with Giun at Eiheiji but eventually switched affiliations to the Rinzai sect. This contributed to the misunderstanding that the Wanshi-ha should be seen as a wing of Rinzai rather than connected with Sōtō Zen.

The impact of the Wanshi-ha as a transnational and trans-factional movement is much more significant than has been recognized in recent Western studies of Zen history, and Giun was at the very least an indirect participant. His *Recorded Sayings (Goroku)*⁷ sermons cite Hongzhi more frequently than Dōgen and occasionally suggest the theory of Five Ranks (*goi* 五位) attributed to Caodong school founders Dongshan (807–869) and Caoshan (840–901).⁸ The theory is also associated with numerous later texts, including Hongzhi’s poetic writings treating this complex interpretative method in addition to other similar pedagogical devices that were popular in Southern Song-dynasty Zen discourse and transmitted to Japan. According to traditional accounts, Giun enjoyed a reputation for expertise in the subtleties of the Five Ranks (*goi*) that was sought out by adherents of Sōtō and Rinzai Zen, even if his writings offer only a glimpse of this area of specialty. On the other hand, Dōgen’s *Treasury* is known for either ignoring or, in a couple of places, refuting the Five Ranks interpretative technique, particularly in the fascicle on “Spring and Autumn” (“Shunjū”).

Therefore, Giun’s position in Sōtō Zen can well be compared to that of another essential figure from this period, Gasan Jōseki (1275–1366), the major follower of Keizan Jōkin (1268–1325), who was the second most influential Sōtō leader after Dōgen. Gasan’s evangelical efforts were, in large part, responsible for the rapid spread of the sect throughout the Japanese

⁷ The standard edition of the *Giun oshō goroku* in vol. 4 of the *Nihon no goroku* series edited by Shinohara Hisao (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1978), unfortunately, does not contain Giun’s *Verse Comments* collection as an appendage to Giun’s recorded sayings; neither does another edition edited by Ishii Seijun, *Giun oshō: mukyoku zenji* (Tokyo: Shikisha, 2005). On the other hand, there is a photo-facsimile of an early modern version of the text appears in *Eihei Shōbōgenzō shūsho taisei* 永平正法眼藏蒐書大成, 27 vols. (Tokyo: Taishukan shoten, 1974–82), volume 20:3–8.

⁸ See Seong-Uk Kim. “The Zen Theory of Language: Linji Yixuan’s Teaching of “Three Statements, Three Mysteries, and Three Essentials” (*sanju sanxuan sanyao* 三句三玄三要),” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 36/37 (2013/2014), 69–92.

countryside in the fourteenth century and he was also very much involved in disseminating Five Ranks theory through various esoteric writings.⁹ Also, apparently both Giun and Gasan received visits from well-known Rinzai monks on their way to or from visiting the mainland, where they usually studied poetry with Gulin or his associates. These monk-poets, including Chūgan, Betsugen and some others, were eager to learn the details of the Five Ranks method from Giun or Gasan, despite the fact that the Sōtō leaders had not ventured to China and sojourned in areas remote from the major Rinzai centers in Kyoto or Kamakura. However, unlike Gasan, Giun's base of religious authority was limited to Eihei-ji, where many disciples came to read the 60-fascicle edition of the *Treasury*.

Contents

The poems selected for translation below highlight just a few examples of the Wanshi-ha approach, including three sections from Giun's *Verse Comments* plus additional *kanbun* poems composed by Giun and several other prominent monk-poets from both the Sōtō and Rinzai schools in China and Japan. The work of those monks is particularly relevant for providing a context by which to understand the crucial role played by the fifth Eihei-ji abbot in shaping the early medieval history of Zen's approach to studying Dōgen's *Treasury* through appropriating Chinese poetic sources, including interpretations of the doctrine of the Five Ranks, and embracing key elements of the boundary-crossing Wanshi-ha movement's literary standpoint for Zen training.

The first part of the translation section contains verses originally included in Giun's *Recorded Sayings*, either from the section of *Treasury* comments, a dedicated segment of fourteen *kanbun* poems, or other portions of the text.¹⁰ The first three poems, which are accompanied by my comments on the symbolism of the verses and capping phrases by Giun and Honkō, cover the "Genjōkōan," "Makahannya," and "Zazengi" fascicles of Dōgen's *Treasury*. Then, the fourth, fifth, and sixth poems by Giun are in the form of

⁹ See Marta Sanvido, "Multiple Layers of Transmission: Gasan Jōseki and the Goi Doctrine in the Medieval Sōtō school," *Annali di Ca' Foscari: Serie orientale* 53/1 (2017), 337–367.

¹⁰ *Giun*, ed. Shinohara Hisao (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1978), which includes the *Giun Oshō goroku* 義雲和尚語録 in two parts: the *Hōkyō Zenji goroku* and the *Eihei Zenji goroku* (this verse is from the former).

“eulogies” (*san* 贊), a typical genre used by nearly all Zen masters, in this case dedicated to the memory of the main patriarchs of Giun’s Sōtō Zen lineage: Dōgen, the founding abbot of Eihei-ji; Ejō, Dōgen’s main disciple and the second abbot; and Jakuen, Dōgen’s primary Chinese disciple who founded Hōkyō-ji temple which Giun joined and then led after the death of Jakuen. These poems evoke the essence of the predecessors’ largesse of character in that their meditative state “resounds with the crack of thunder” or results in “smashing the clouds and splashing the waters.” This small group is followed by two poems expressing “self-praise” (*jisan* 自贊), another poetic category used in Zen records, which emphasize the humility of Giun, who says he simply “eats from and washes his bowl” while yielding to the spiritual power of “spring flowers blooming in the fragrant forest.” The five poems that deal with either praise of others or Giun himself are longer and have variations in the number of characters per line compared to the *juko* remarks of the *Verse Comments*.

The other poems in this part of the chapter are four-line verses. Two poems written at a mountain retreat near Eihei-ji deal with Giun’s feelings of quietude and solitude while meditating alone amid the beauty of nature. Beginning in the Tang dynasty, it was common practice for Zen abbots to occasionally leave the temple grounds for extended periods in pursuit of spiritual renewal by, in part, composing poetry. Giun records the standpoint of his imperturbable mind that remains undistracted by ordinary thoughts or sensations yet, from an enlightened perspective, compares the breeze and moon to the interaction of guest and host, according to the Five Ranks theory. Both verses feature seven characters per line. The next poem with five characters per line is culled from one of Giun’s Dharma hall sermons on the notion of the one mind influenced by the pantheistic philosophy of the *Huayan Sūtra*, and the last piece with four characters per line represents Giun’s verse on death-anticipation (*yuige* 遺偈), a form of expression that was expected of all Zen masters who could, it is said, know in advance and lyricize about the time of their demise.

The next part of the chapter contains a dozen poems by six Zen monk-poets, who can be considered part of the orbit of figures and ideas that either influenced or were impacted by Giun. The first group includes five poems by Daichi Sokei, an early fourteenth-century Sōtō leader who refined his literary skills while studying in China and returned to establish a temple in his native area of Kyushu, where he received a copy of the *Treasury* and

wrote verse comments on a couple of its fascicles.¹¹ Daichi is unique in being considered one of the great medieval Zen poets during an era when Rinzaï monks who were mainly located in Kyoto or Kamakura, clearly dominated the composition of verse.

This group of poems is followed by a selection of three verses written by Betsugen Enshi, another exceptional Sōtō figure linked to the Wanshi-ha school whose work is included in the list of eminent medieval Zen composers of *kanbun* poetry. Beginning in 1320, Bestugen trained for ten years in China, where he received the seal of transmission from the master, Gulin Qingmao, who received dozens of Japanese visitors and sent some of his main Chinese disciples to teach in Japan. Although his mastery of Chinese language and literature was unsurpassed among foreign disciples of Buddhism, Betsugen is mainly known for expressing feelings of homesickness, as in the first two poems in this group. Once he returned to his native land, as conjured in the third poem, he stayed for years in his native Fukui province, where he maintained ties with Eihejiji and resisted the shogunate's efforts to appoint him head of one of the main urban Rinzaï temples.

Next is a poem by Gentō Sokuchū, the renowned reformer who published the Main Temple edition of the *Treasury* with 95 fascicles in the early 1800s following years of delay. Gentō's verse features in four lines two of Dōgen's major notions, *genjōkōan* and *datsuraku shinjin* (or *shinjin datsuraku*). Gentō, who was given his name by the emperor and served as the 50th abbot of Eiheiji, is also renowned in Zen lore for having set fire to the large fish-shaped drum (*mokugyo* 木魚) used for chanting because he wanted to purge Pure Land elements from Sōtō practice. An older dharma brother of the famous Sōtō reclusive Edo poet Ryōkan 良寛 (1758–1831), who also sought to restore an appreciation for Dōgen's writings, Gentō's efforts to "purify" Sōtō of syncretistic elements upset Ryōkan so much that he decided to live out his life as a hermit far from the headquarters of the religious institution.

I conclude with a small group of verses by other monks in Giun's orbit, with one poem each by Gulin Qingmao on the topic of sending off a foreign trainee (Ch. *songbieji*, Jp. *sōbetsuge* 送別偈) to return to his teacher in Japan that uses six sets of reduplicatives in lines five and six; Zhongfeng

¹¹ *Daichi: Geju, Jūni hōgo, kana hōgo*, ed. Mizuno Yaoko (Tokyo: Kōdansha, rpt. 1994).

Mingben, another prominent Chinese Rinzaï mentor for Japanese monk-poets in the Wanshi-ha, on the philosophy of undertaking the rigorous everyday chores; and Musō Soseki, a famous Rinzaï abbot, poet, and garden designer in the first half of the fourteenth century who did not travel to China, but uses the term *genjōkōan* prominently that was also favored by Zhongfeng, showing that Dōgen was not alone in highlighting the concept.

Themes

Musō's verse at the end of the translations raises the important question of whether Zen monks who participate in a "special transmission outside the teachings" (*kyōge betsuden* 教外別傳) should be encouraged or even allowed to write verse or must, instead, be instructed to regard literary pursuits as a distraction and thus an activity that detracts from the path of enlightenment. One of the reasons the Sōtō sect was considered aloof from poetry composition is that in the *Miscellaneous Talks* (*Shōbōgenzō zuimonki*) Dōgen says, "Zen monks are fond of literature these days, finding it an aid to writing verses and tracts. This is a mistake...No matter how elegant their prose or how exquisite their poetry might be, they are merely toying with words and cannot gain the truth." Nevertheless, Dōgen wrote over five hundred poems, with nearly ninety percent in the *kanbun* style and the rest as Japanese *waka*. However, aside from the *Verse Comments*, Giun composed only a small fraction of what the founder produced.

The response to the question of the role of literary production indicated by Musō Soseki's poem is characteristically ambiguous in that he recognizes his responsibility to disclose the truth through "word-branches," but wishes that everyone could be able to realize what is already apparent without needing the crutch of words. Dōgen similarly speaks ambivalently about the function of language in relation to expressing enlightenment in the following verse written at an Eihei-ji retreat:

Living in the world for so long without attachments,
 Since giving up using paper and pen.
 I see flowers and hear birds without feeling much,
 While living on the mountain, I am embarrassed by this
 meager effort.

久舍(捨)人間無愛惜
 文章筆硯既拋來

見花聞鳥風情少
乍在山猶愧不才

It is interesting to note that an analysis of the linguistic structure of the poem shows that Dōgen could execute the AABA rhyme scheme and related tonal patterns that were among the rhetorical options required for Chinese poets:

Jiǔ shè rénjiān wú aixī
Wénzhāng biyàn jì pāo lái
Jiàn huā wén niǎo fēnqíng shǎo
Zhà zài shān yóu kuì bù cái

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In addition, Dōgen's verse recalls the sentiments suggested by one of his Song-dynasty Chinese predecessors, Touzi Yiqing 投子義青 (11th c. 投子義青), who lived a couple of generations before Hongzhi. This verse is from Touzi's collection on "self-realization" (*zijue* 自覺):

Though I am in the business of Emptiness,
I cannot avoid being at the mercy of my inclinations.
Although I have long been practicing Zen meditation,
Instead, I remain preoccupied with literary content...

雖然所業空
免被才情役
忝曾學參禪
叨以習文義

The following *waka* syllables shows that Dōgen used this Japanese genre to reveal the complicated aspects of literary pursuits and surmise the way his writing is received by the audience:

Haru kaze ni	Will their gaze fall upon
Waga koto no ha no	The petals of words I utter,
Chirimuru o	Shaken loose and blown free by the spring breeze,

Hana no uta to ya	As if only the notes
Hito no nagamen	Of a flower's song?

This view recalls that of modern American poet Robert W. Service, who in *Rhymes of a Rolling Stone* (1912) wrote, "I have no doubt at all the Devil grins, / As seas of ink I splatter. / Ye gods, forgive my 'literary' sins — / The other kind don't matter."

Another element found in Musō's verse that also appears in a vast majority of Zen literature, including Giun's, involves an admiration for nature and the turning of the seasons as a reflection and standard for cultivating an intellectual comprehension of unity as well as for moral behavior highlighting the equality of all beings. According to Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), the most famous secular poet of the Song dynasty who often practiced meditation and collaborated in his writings with Zen masters, poems are pictures without forms just as paintings are unspoken poems. Many examples of Zen verse were originally composed as inscriptions for paintings so that they feature an ekphrastic or descriptive quality by providing a vivid depiction of a scene or, frequently, a work of art. Through the imaginative act of narrating and reflecting on the "action" of a landscape, the poet offers a verbal representation of a visual image that may amplify and expand its meaning.

In that vein, we can consider the verse by Betsugen showing that nature is the poet's muse: "The courtyard is so lonely in autumn rain / That I open the window and gaze all day at the peak. / From the very beginning my two eyes / Have been fixed to those mile-high pines far away." Also, another Wanshi-ha member, Chūgan Engetsu 中巖円月 (1300–1375 中巖円月), writes of the natural landscape: "Autumn leaves swirl in the wind, slanting down one by one, / In a single night the mountain cottage is engulfed by them. / Without a thought, this monk-poet sweeps them into a creek: / Not at all like the way he treats falling blossoms in spring." Finally, the tenth volume of the *Extensive Record* includes a poem composed in the village of Fukakusa (literally, "deep grass") around 1230, when Dōgen was back from China but had not yet established his first temple, Kōshōji, that would be built near this location just a few years later:

How pitiful is life and death's ceasing and arising!
 I lose my way yet find my path as if walking in a dream.
 Even though there are still things that are hard to forget,
 The deep grass of Fukakusa settles with the evening rain.

生死可憐休又起
 迷途覺路夢中行
 雖然尚有難忘事
 深草閑居夜雨聲

Here we find from a structural analysis that Dōgen uses an ABAB rhyme scheme:

Shēngsǐ kělián xiū yòu qǐ
 Mítú juélù mèngzhōng xíng
 Suīrán shàng yǒu nánwàng shì
 Shēn cǎo xiánjū yèyǔshēng.

生死可憐休又起
 迷途覺路夢中行
 雖然尚有難忘事
 深草閑居夜雨聲
 平仄仄平平仄仄
 平平仄仄仄中平
 平平中仄平中仄
 中仄平平仄仄平

During this period, Dōgen was staying in a retreat in the area of Fukakusa to the southeast of the capital that was favored by many of the literati as a pristine getaway from the turmoil of court life. Because the name of the town literally means “deep grass,” this term was ripe for being the source of many puns in Japanese waka of the era reflecting on life in the city versus the countryside. The profound sense of vulnerability and instability Dōgen was experiencing is disclosed in a way that makes such attitudes productive for stimulating dedication to the religious quest. Many of the characters in the second line can also bear an explicit Buddhist connotation, including delusion, awakening, transcendence (literally, “within a dream,” and practice, so that the passage could be rendered, “I practice within a transcendental realm while experiencing both delusion and awakening.” This wording does not alter the meaning but highlights that the verse can be read as directly or indirectly evoking the effects of Buddhist discipline.

Selected Translations

FROM GIUN'S *VERSE COMMENTS ON DŌGEN'S TREASURY*
 Fascicle 1: Genjōkōan (Realization Here-and-Now 現成公案)

Capping Phrase: What is it? 是什麼

Do not overlook what is right in front of you,
 Endless spring appears with the early plum blossoms.
 By using just a single word you enter the open gate,
 Nine oxen pulling with all their might cannot lead you astray.

面前一著莫蹉過
 空劫春容此早梅
 一字入公門內了
 九牛盡力挽無迴

Title: “Realization Here-and-Now,” based on one of Dōgen’s most famous and frequently used expressions, is the opening section of the 60-fascicle and 75-fascicle editions, although it appears as the third section in the 95-fascicle edition. A letter to a lay disciple from Kyushu, who may have been the boatman Dōgen used for his journeys to and from China in the 1220s, the fascicle is generally considered one of the three sections that best introduce Dōgen’s primary themes, especially the notion that enlightenment is neither a potential from the past nor a goal to be attained in the future, but the realization of the dynamism of authentic reality (*kōan*) manifested here-and-now (*genjō*). The three major fascicles are referred to as Ben-Gen-Butsu (“Bendōwa,” “Genjōkōan,” and “Busshō,” although the first is not part of the 60-fascicle edition). The term *genjōkōan* was used prior to Dōgen, especially in the Chinese *kōan* collection commentary, the *Blue Cliff Record* (Ch. *Bīyanlu*, Jp. *Hekiganroku*), and other Japanese Zen masters also used it, including Musō Sōseki, albeit with a different emphasis than found in the *Treasury*.

Capping Phrase: *What is it?* 是什麼. This comment reads in the original *kanbun* grammar as an interrogative, but Giun was well aware that Dōgen often interpreted apparent queries as declarative statements to show the

“what-ness” or quiddity of reality; therefore, this capping phrase could be rendered as, “This is what it is” or “This is it!”

Key Terms:

- *Right in front of you* 面前一著. Truth is readily apparent in all phenomena, but it is all too easily overlooked if you overtly seek or expect that it represents a disconnected realm.

- *Endless spring* 空劫春. Spring is not the abstraction of a date on the calendar somehow separable from seasonal manifestations; rather, it exists in and through concrete particulars whenever spring-like conditions become apparent, such as the flowering of plum blossoms.

- *Open gate* 公門. Creative expressions are strongly encouraged by Dōgen, despite the conventional Zen emphasis on “a special transmission outside the teaching,” so an appropriate saying functions as a turning word that releases obstructions and enables awakening.

- *Nine oxen* 九牛. An ox symbolizes selfish desires and attachments that need to be tamed and controlled lest they discourage even determined practitioners, who must utilize the utmost single-minded concentration accompanied by minute attention to the finest details; however, nine oxen cannot distract a true adept from realizing the immediacy of each and every moment as it occurs.

Honkō’s Phrase: 既參本卷

Already engaged in studying the fascicle. A trainee is engrossed with this endlessly ambiguous text because *genjōkōan* represents neither an idea nor a set of images, but the standpoint of ongoing practice regardless of whether one has awareness of the process at any given moment.

Fascicle 2: Makahannya (Great Wisdom 摩訶般若)

Capping Phrase: Every single detail is completely clear. 照了綿密

The lamp of knowledge illumines all the shadowy spaces,
Reaching even those occupying a darkened room.
Who doubts that nothing is hidden in the entire universe?
Such is the joy of the perfection of wisdom.

智燈照徹解陰空
 什麼處人居暗室
 遍界不藏誰敢疑
 摩訶般若波羅蜜

Title: “Great Wisdom,” also known as “The Perfection of Great Wisdom” (“Makahannya haramitsu” 摩訶般若波羅蜜, Skr: *Prajñāpāramitā*), refers to the vast corpus of Sanskrit literature known as the *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras*, which serves as the basis for the main teachings about the notions of emptiness and compassion that is followed by nearly all schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Attributed to the Indian philosopher Nāgārjuna and translated into 600 volumes of Chinese script by Xuanzang and his assistants, the doctrines expressed in these works are drastically condensed in this short fascicle that was written at a cloister outside Kyoto at the time Dōgen’s first temple, Kōshōji, was being opened. A year later, his scribe and confidante, Ejō, who would eventually edit nearly all the fascicles, joined him. Dōgen mainly comments in the fascicle on passages from the ever-popular *Heart Sūtra* and does not cite the sayings or records of Zen teachers, except for a brief mention of a poem he particularly admired by his mentor Rujing about the sounding of a wind-bell that signifies multiplicity within emptiness.

Capping Phrase: *Every single detail is completely clear* 照了綿密. An alternative, “The finest of details, once concealed, suddenly become clear,” is a lengthy rendering that captures the complex notion that illumination spontaneously brings into focus all aspects of existence as expressions of universality that were covered up by ignorance and attachments.

Key Terms:

- *The lamp of knowledge illumines* 智燈照. The lamp or flame symbolizes the inner wisdom that all beings possess as an innate endowment, according to the Mahāyāna doctrine of universal Buddha-nature and as emphasized by various Zen sayings, especially by the master Yunmen.
- *Shadowy spaces* 暗室. This image suggests that people are typically unconscious of their own capacity to attain insight, so that the light generally appears to be an exterior force emanating from beatific Buddhas, yet it has the capacity to radiate into every possible area of existence.
- *Nothing is hidden in the entire universe* 遍界不藏. A noteworthy phrase included Dōgen’s *Instructions to the Chief Cook (Tenzokyōkun)*, which

indicates that the continuing process of illumination reveals each element of reality without exception manifesting Buddha-nature; according to a saying, “Once your eyes are opened, then everywhere reflects the true teaching.”

- *Joy* 蜜. The final line of the poem simply repeats the longer, seven-character title of the fascicle but the last word, which is used as a Sino-Japanese transliteration of the Sanskrit title, implies the “honey” or sweetness of enlightenment contrasted with the sour bitterness of suffering.

Honkō’s Phrase: 身心脫落

Casting off body-mind. One of Dōgen’s most famous catchphrases uttered at the moment he gained enlightenment in 1225 while practicing zazen.

Fascicle 11: Zazengi (The Principles of Zazen 坐禪儀)

Capping Phrase: Flowers blooming on a withered tree 枯木花開

Flowers blooming on a withered tree 枯木花開
 Cattails sitting tall are silently swaying,
 Dragons humming as clouds float in the vast darkness.
 No longer counting the number of breaths,
 Three thousand realms are collected in the sacred sea.

兀兀寥寥倚蒲團
 龍吟雲起黑漫漫
 箇中消息絕思議
 刹海三千祇一般

Title: “The Principles of Zazen” provides instructions on sitting mediation in a way that is similar to two essays by Dōgen, the *Universal Recommendation for Zazen (Fukanzazengi)* and *Methods of Practicing the Way (Bendōhō)*. The fascicle title is derived from a short tract (Ch. *Zuochan yi*) that is included in the 1103 Chinese Zen text on monastic regulations, *Pure Rules for the Zen Garden* (Ch. *Chanyuan qinggui*, Jp. *Zen’en shingi*) by Changlu Zongze. Dōgen borrows heavily from this work in composing his own meditation and other disciplinary guidelines, but he is also critical of Zongze’s understanding of Zen, especially in the fascicle on “The Lancet of Zazen” (“Zazenshin”), which is not included in the 60-fascicle edition. In that

section, Dōgen provides an extensive and innovative discussion of a kōan case that is mentioned briefly in “The Principles of Zazen” and the *Universal Recommendation* about the role of “non-thinking” (*hishiryō*) understood in relation to the possibilities of “thinking” (*shiryō*) and “not thinking” (*fushiryō*); for Dōgen all forms of thought are essentially aspects of non-thinking.

Capping Phrase: *Flowers blooming on a withered tree* 枯木花開. This saying, which was used occasionally in early works of the Chinese Sōtō school but does not appear in the *Treasury*, suggests an integration of two extremes: the quietude and timelessness of the leafless, barren tree and the dynamism of spring blossoms coming into view again signifying spiritual renewal.

Key Terms:

- *Cattails sitting tall* 兀兀寥寥. Cattails are narrow-leafed wetland plants that appear to be upright and tall while silently swaying in the breeze, suggesting basic characteristics of zazen meditation: determination and dedication somewhat softened by flexibility and adaptability.

- *Dragons humming* 龍吟. This phrase, which is the title of Fascicle 51, refers to the legend that a dragon’s ongoing intonation is a sound resembling that of wind blowing through a desolate grove of trees that is only heard by those whose concentration shows a mastery of just sitting.

- *Counting the number of breaths* 箇中消息. This line reinforces passages in which Dōgen maintains that counting breaths, which is crucial to some forms of meditation, can become a distraction that detracts from, rather than enhances, genuine contemplative awareness.

- *Sacred sea* 刹海. This term symbolizes the idea that the highest meditative state involving the full capacity of samādhi is as broad and expansive as the boundless waters of the ocean.

Honkō’s Phrase: 洗足已坐

Sitting still with clean feet. This saying highlights that Dōgen’s approach to meditation combines lofty discussions of non-thinking as key to contemplative awareness with specific instructions for cleaning one’s feet and related preparatory functions, so that bodily purity is conducive and essential to the attainment of an authentic state of realization without obstructions or diversions.

ADDITIONAL GIUN VERSES

Eiheiji Temple Founding Patriarch: Dōgen 永平初祖

He had an extraordinary capacity for receiving transmission,
By learning thoroughly, the original teaching of Huineng and
expressing its inner nature.

Dōgen grabbed Rujing's staff and brought it back to Japan,
With nostrils inhaling the pure air,
And pupils seeing the radiant light.

A five-petal flower blossoms in the warmth of spring,
And lasts until the chilly breeze during the full autumn moon.

捷俊奇相傳大心量
吸盡曹溪源淵而湛性海
奪取太白柱杖而返扶桑
鼻孔端有衝天氣
眼瞳重具射人光
一花五葉春日暖
嶺月洞風秋夜涼

Eiheiji Temple Second Patriarch: Ejō 永平二祖

His resolve is revealed by his eyebrows,
His mind is as expansive as the landscape,
The core teachings of the Sōtō lineage,
Are an eyeball as blue as the sea.
Treading joyfully an auspicious path,
The hair on his head resembles a snowy forest.
When his jewel-like mind encounters myriad phenomena,
It resembles empty space with nothing hanging in midair.
Ejō's teachings illuminate like a flash of lightning,
And his stately seated posture resounds like the crack of
thunder.

肝膽彰眉目
乾坤斂寸心
湛洞水派兮

眼睛如碧海
 繼吉祥踵兮
 頂毛似雪林
 若寶鑑含萬象
 同虛空不掛鍼
 閃電威光舒又卷
 儼居狴座震雷音

Hōkyōji Temple Founding Patriarch: Jakuen 慶寶初祖

His wondrous forms and illuminated self,
 Gaze out from the Peak of Dongshan Mountain,
 And permeate the sacred inner chambers of this monastery.
 Jakuen contemplates calmly each and every object,
 And explains vividly all aspects of momentary existence.
 Picking up the flywhisk, he scares the daylights out of his
 monks.
 And gloats while smashing the clouds and splashing the
 waters.

全相之妙.通身之照
 奪得洞山.頂上眼睛
 透徹吉祥.堂奧心要
 據於塵塵.三昧座床
 暢於刹刹.常說曲調
 拈弄拂柄兮殃及兒孫
 打雲打水兮好一場笑

Self-Praise 自贊: Verse 1

Do not strive to become a sage and do not reject being
 ordinary,
 Just play the melody without trying to put it into words.
 The blind turtle has the capacity to float along on driftwood,
 The wind is felt the same way up high on peaks and down
 low in valleys.
 Every year the snow piles high on the summit,

While the trees withstand it to reveal their crimson color,
Effortlessly yet wondrously maintaining their place.
For three thousand mornings and eight hundred nights,
I eat from and wash my bowl.

聖也不慕凡也不疎
曲泉倚身未涉箇言路
龜毛橫握能質卦爻圖
衣薄洞峯風徹骨
年邁嵩岳雪侵顛
堪攀鐵樹注紅血
倦處天堂受妙娛
朝三千暮八
喫粥了洗鉢盂

Self-Praise 自贊: Verse 2

He who has a deceitful appearance is deceived,
And he who lives humbly in the world is not deceived.
The flywhisk helps to open the eye.
The demon's whisk distracts you from the true path.
On Kichijō Peak [Eiheiji Temple] the moon is shining
bright,
And the spring flowers are blooming in the fragrant forest.

面容醜受彼欺瞞
一世貧無物與人
拂子毫頭眼睛綻
佛魔驗了絕齋隣
吉祥峯月孤輝
薔薇林花累春

Two Poems from a Mountain Retreat 山居二首

Nobody else is here on the peak of Mount Kichijō.
It looks the same even though the seasons are changing.
Sitting upright in solitary meditation can never be disturbed,
In these deep blue mountains with fluffy white clouds
floating by.

吉祥峯頭不人間
 莫作四時遷變看
 兀坐寥寥無對待
 清山深處白雲閑

Quiet and secluded in the unpretentious realm of the forest,
 There is no reason to look anywhere other than toward
 what is close at hand.
 The quiet breeze and clear moon are as related as guest and
 host,
 Anyone who remains steady and committed will never be
 misled.

林下幽閑一世貧
 無由向外問疎親
 清風白月賓兼主
 去就平常不誑人

From a Dharma Hall Sermon 上堂

心心無異心
 一心一切法
 念念非異念
 一念是萬年

Death Verse 遺偈

For eighty-one years,
 I have flouted the teachings and reviled Zen.
 Now the sky falls, and earth splits open.
 Hidden within the flames lies a bountiful spring.

毀教謗禪
 八十一年
 天崩地裂
 沒火裡泉。¹²

¹² Note: On the 22nd day of the 10th month of 1333, Giun presented a poem in anticipation of his death. The whole assembly attended the stūpa ceremony

VERSES BY OTHER ZEN MONK-POETS

Daichi Sokei 大智

“On Receiving a Copy of Dōgen’s *Treasury*”

The enlightened mind expressed in the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*,
Teaches us the innermost thoughts of past sixty Zen ancestors.
A mystical path stemming from Eiheiiji temple reaches my remote village,
Where I see anew an ethereal mist rising from among remarkable shoots.

賀永平正法眼藏到来
正法眼藏涅槃心
二三四七密單傳
吉峰路入鳳山塢
又見異苗長淡煙

“Insentient Beings Preaching the Dharma” (Mujō Seppō)
(2 poems) 無情說法話二首

Sentient beings can hear insentient beings preaching the Dharma.
A breeze that rustles the leaves in a wintry forest fills our garden.
However, no one beyond the walls is listening
To whispers that spread everywhere amid lanterns and columns.

無情說法有情聽
風攪寒林葉滿庭

at Eiheiiji, and it was given the name Spiritual Plum Stūpa 師.正慶二年癸酉十月十二日辭世の頌に曰く.全身を吉祥山に塔す.號して靈梅と曰ふ(靈梅塔). The death verse of Rujing reads, “For sixty-six years committing terrible sins against heaven, / Now leaping beyond, / While still alive plunging into the yellow springs of netherworld. / O, why did I once think that life and death are not related?” 六十六年罪犯彌天 / 打箇[足+李]跳 / 活陷黃泉 / 曠從來生死不相干. Dōgen’s verse follows his teacher’s pattern but the italicized phrases indicate the changes he makes, “For *fifty-four years following the way of heaven*, / Now leaping beyond *and shattering every barrier*. / O, *from head to toe with no more longings*, / While still alive plunging into the yellow springs of netherworld.” 五十四年照第一天 / 打箇[足+李]跳 *触破大千* / 曠渾身無覺 / 活陷黃泉.

踏壁無人却有耳
燈鎖國露柱且低聲

Leaning on a handrail gazing at the new moon,
Floating high above the mountains as I fall fast asleep.
In the middle of the night my head falls off the pillow,
Smashing against the floor but staying solid as a brick.

人倚欄 干月在天
月轉山來上床眠
夜深枕子撲落地
無端打破常住磚

“This Very Mind is Buddha” (Sokushin zebutsu)
(2 poems) 即心即仏話二首

Blows received from the master’s scolding staff leave their mark,
This mind itself is Buddha is not a matter to be discussed.
A three-foot long hair-splitting sword cuts away all obstacles,
Every evening, celestial light beams down from the Big Dipper.

一棒一痕知痛痒
即心即仏没商量
塵埋三尺吹毛劍
夜夜神光射斗傍

Reality right before us deteriorates if it is weighed and exchanged,
Even in cold bitter times, do not conceal your inner treasure.
Instead, strive to preserve the truth that this mind itself is Buddha,
By releasing the light that emits day and night between the eyebrows.

現成公案没商量
藥苦水寒不覆藏
保護即心心即仏
眉間日夜放毫光

Betsugen Enshi 別源円旨 (1294–1364)

“A Clear Barrier” 清關

Green mountains and white clouds are briskly intertwined,
Now is the time for this disciple to return and follow his teacher.
Though difficult to enter into the gate and come back to that strict style,
I no longer wish to remain on the outside looking in.

山青雲白冷相依
是子歸來就父時
寒淡門風難入作
且從門外見容儀

“A Zen Retreat at Taibai Temple” 太白禪居

A wandering monk comes from the east in pursuit of Zen,
These green mountains are like a great emerald blanket spread wide,
At dawn the light from the stars of the Milky Way starts to fade,
So many years have passed since I last welcomed a disciple.

東晉沙門曾此禪
青山都是舊青氈
長庚星沒天河曉
童子不來經幾年

“The Gateway of 10,000 Pines” 萬松關¹³

Over a path covered with dark green that lasts for nearly twenty miles,
The billowing of a fresh breeze resounds through the chilly forest.
Its rushing sound brushes by and shakes us while on a leisurely jaunt.
Who can play pipes so fine as the sounds made around this mile-high gate?

廿里蒼髯夾路遙
清風樹々響寒濤

¹³ “10,000 Pines” is the name of a temple, to which Betsugen is returning from a trip and appreciates all the more the way its gate captures the sound of the wind.

等閑掉臂那邊過
誰管門頭千尺高

Gulin Qingmao 古林清茂 (1262–1329)

“On Bidding Farewell to a Japanese Visiting Monk” 送別偈

No shackles on this body so you can come and go as you please,
Half a lifetime spent in journeys to prominent temples.
From one blow to the gut, you learned about pain;
With three answers to the call, you passed through the gate.
The essence of essentials and mystery within mysteries are complete.
Effortlessly at ease, you continually remain carefree.
When you meet your master, do not ask questions!
Gazing at one other with knowing smiles to appreciate mutual understanding.

身世無拘任往還
半生行脚為名山
一拳肋下才知痛
三應聲中已透關
要要玄玄并了了
勞勞役役與閒閒
師資會遇都休問
只合相看展笑顏

Zhongfeng Mingben 中峰明本 (1262–1323)

“Sweeping the Floor” 掃地

Try sweeping away piles of dirt and trash,
But dust still ends up covering the floor.
Once you stop wasting time and toss away its handle,
Five-petal udambara flowers blossom on the broom.

蕩盡從前垃圾堆
依然滿地是塵埃
等閒和柄都拋卻
五葉曇花帚上開

Musō Sōseki's 夢窓疎石 (1275–1351)

Autumn-colored word-branches dropping many leaves,
 Frosty clouds carrying rain passing this nook in the mountains.
 Everyone is born with the same sort of eyes –
 Why can't we see the kōan case that is right in front of us (*genjōkōan*)?

秋色辭柯落葉多
 寒雲載雨過山阿
 人人自有娘生眼
 爭奈現成公案何

Gentō Sokuchū 玄透即中 (1729–1807)

Huayan Sūtra's, "Triple World is Mind Only" 華嚴經三界唯心

The kōan is displayed (*genjōkōan*) right before your eyes,
 By autumn chrysanthemums, spring orchids, and plum trees blossoming in
 the snow.
 Body-mind cast off (*datsuraku shinjin*) opens the eye that realizes,
 What our ancestors have known well for countless generations.

現成公案呈蹉過
 秋菊春蘭冬雪花
 脫落身心高著眼
 先尼流輩恐滋多

