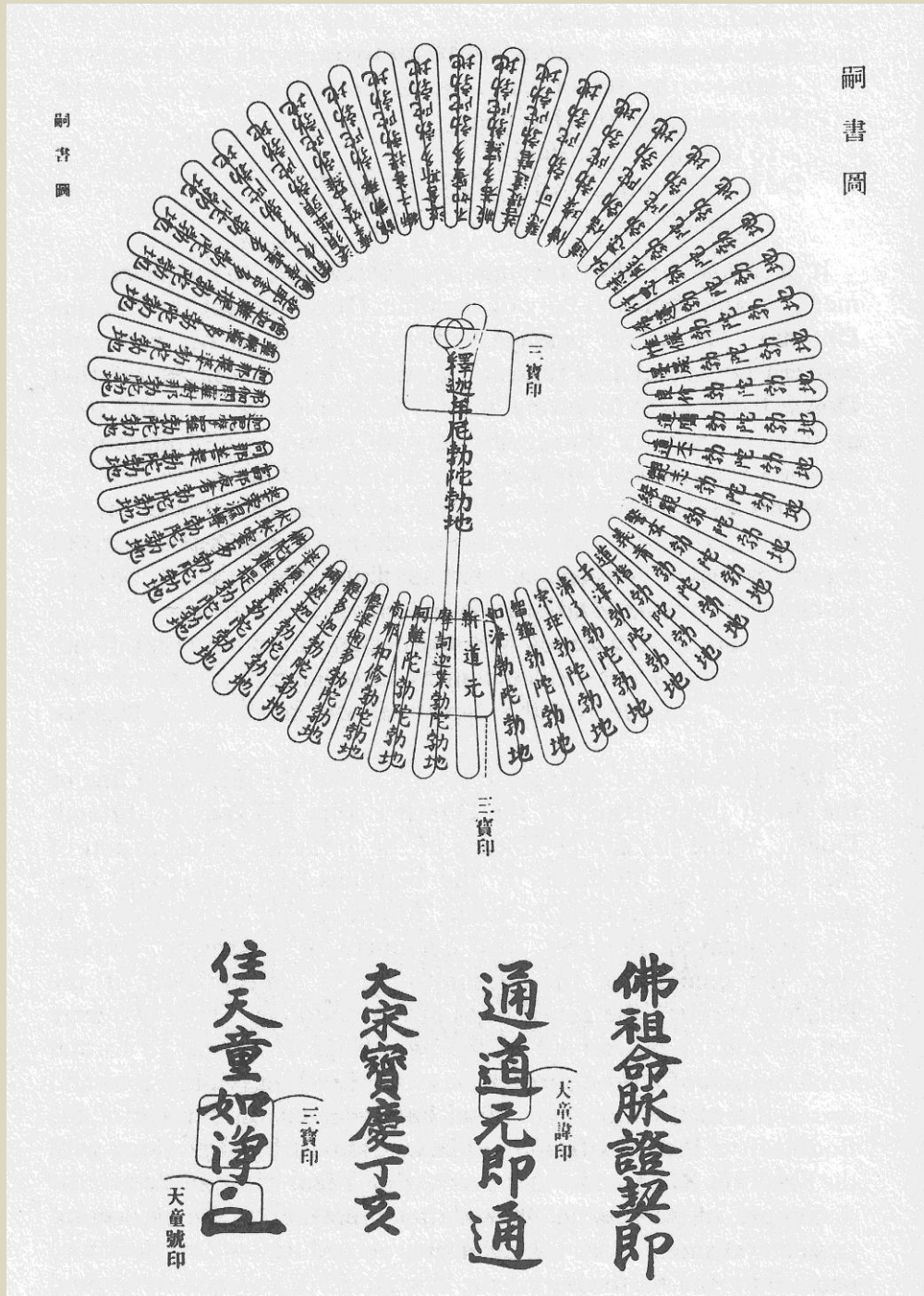


Dogen's Certificate of Succession: A National Treasure

Hyatt Carter



Dōgen zenji zenshū 道元禪師全集 [Collected works of Zen master Dōgen], vol. 2,
ed. Ōkubo Dōshū 大久保道舟
Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1970.

This is a picture of the “certificate of succession” that was formally presented to Dogen in 1227 by Master Rujing, abbot of Tian-tong monastery in China. The purpose of the document is to certify that there was a person-to-person transmission of the Dharma, or Truth, between Rujing and Dogen, and that Dogen is Rujing’s Dharma heir.

The certificate is preserved at Eihei-ji, the Zen temple that Dogen founded in 1244, and has been officially designated as a national treasure of Japan. Since this document, and all it signifies, marks the genesis of the Japanese school of Soto Zen, with Dogen as founder, it has great religious value and is highly revered by the Soto faithful.

“Certificate of succession” is 嗣書 in Chinese and these two characters are at the top right of the document and, in smaller characters, also at the top left. The Japanese pronunciation of this term is *shisho*.

嗣書
shisho

The circle in the picture, formed by Chinese characters, represents the unbroken line of succession from Shakyamuni Buddha to Dogen.

Note the eight characters in a vertical line in the center of the circle:

釋迦牟尼勃陀勃地

The first four characters name the founder of Buddhism, Shakyamuni:

釋迦牟尼
Shakyamuni

Two lines are drawn through Shakyamuni’s name.

The line of the left leads down to, and is drawn through, the name of his successor, Mahakasyapa (摩訶迦葉), the first patriarch. This line continues, up and then down, through the name of his successor, Ananda (阿難陀). And so on, the line weaving its way around the circle through, in successive order, all the patriarchs and ancestors in the Buddhist lineage. The line “ends,” bottom center, with Dogen’s name—

道元

—and then returns, completing the circle, to Shakyamuni. What Dogen has received from Shakyamuni, via the line of transmission, he now gives back to the founder.

The name preceding Dogen’s in the circle is that of his Chinese Master, Rujing (如淨), under whose guidance Dogen experienced enlightenment. Rujing’s signature, with the monastery seal, is at the lower left of the document—as in the following line where the signature is duplicated:

住天童如淨

The Tian-tong monastery seal, designated as such by a notation (天童號印), follows the two characters that form his name (如淨). The notation, in smaller characters, is to the left of the seal.

Here, in tabular form, is a duplication of the Chinese text at the bottom of the picture:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
	住		大	通		佛
	天		宋	道	天	祖
	童		寶	元	童	命
	如	三	慶	即	諱	脉
	淨	童	丁	通	印	證
天	(seal)	印	亥			契
童						即
號						
印						

Some of the spacing is not the same, especially in the way the smaller characters are aligned, but that's as close as I could get it in a digital duplication. The smaller characters are not part of the original certificate but were added later, as notations, pointing out the various seals (印) in the document.

Since the document reads from right to left, I'll take the columns in that order:

Column 1: Names the document as Buddha Ancestors (佛祖) Lineage (命脉) Contractual Agreement (證契)

Column 2: Notation—Tian-tong (天童) seal

Column 3: Specifies Dogen (道元) as recipient of the document

Column 4: Place and time—Great Song (大宋) China, Bao-Qing Era (寶慶), 24th year of the Sexagenary Cycle (丁亥) or 1227

Column 5: Notation—Sangha (三寶) seal

Column 6: Rujing signature (住天童如淨 - Reside Tian-tong [Temple] Rujing) and seal.

Column 7: Notation—Tian-tong (天童) seal

And here, also in tabular form, are the 51 patriarchs, or ancestors, whose names are listed in the circle of succession. For the Chinese masters, beginning with number 29, I have included their four-character names, but only the unbracketed characters appear in the document.

1. 摩訶迦葉 Mahakasyapa	18. 僧伽耶舍 Sanghayasas	35. [石頭] 希遷 Shi-tou Xi-qian
2. 阿難陀 Ananda	19. 鳩摩羅多 Kumarata	36. [藥山] 惟儼 Yao-shan Wei-yan
3. 商那和修 Sanavasa	20. 闍夜多 Jayata	37. [雲儼] 曇晟 Yun-yan Tan-cheng
4. 優波鞠多 Upagupta	21. 婆修槃頭 Vasubandhu	38. [洞山] 良价 Dong-shan Liang-jie
5. 提多迦 Dhritaka	22. 摩拏羅 Manorata	39. [雲居] 道膺 Yun-ju Dao-ying
6. 彌遮迦 Michaka	23. 鶴勒那 Haklenayasas	40. [同安] 道丕 Tong-an Dao-pi
7. 婆須密 Vasumitra	24. 師子菩提 Simhabodhi	41. [同安] 觀志 Tong-an Guan-zhi
8. 佛陀難提 Buddhanandi	25. 婆舍斯多 Vasiastia	42. [梁山] 緣觀 Liang-shan Yuan-guan
9. 佛陀蜜多 Buddhamitra	26. 不如密多 Punyamitra	43. [大陽] 警玄 Da-yang Jing-xuan
10. 婆栗濕婆 Parsva	27. 般若多羅 Prajnatara	44. [投子] 義青 Tou-zi Yi-qing
11. 富那夜奢 Punyayasas	28. 菩提達摩 Bodhidharma	45. [芙蓉] 道楷 Fu-rong Dao-kai
12. 阿那菩提 Anabodhi	29. [神光] 慧可 Shen-guang Hui-ke	46. [丹霞] 子淳 Dan-xia Zi-chun
13. 迦毘摩羅 Kapimala	30. 僧璨 Seng-can	47. [真歇] 清了 Zhen-xie Qing-liao
14. 那伽闍樹那 Nagyaharajuna	31. [東山] 道信 Dong-shan Dao-xin	48. [天童] 宗珏 Tian-tong Zong-jue
15. 迦那提婆 Kanadeva	32. [黃梅] 弘忍 Huang-mei Hong-ren	49. [雪竇] 智鑑 Xue-dou Zhi-jian
16. 羅睺羅多	33. [曹溪] 慧能	50. [天童] 如淨

Rahulata	Cao-xi Hui-neng	Tian-tong Ru-jing
17. 僧伽難提 Sanghanandi	34. [青原] 行思 Qing-yuan Xing-si	51. 道元 Dogen



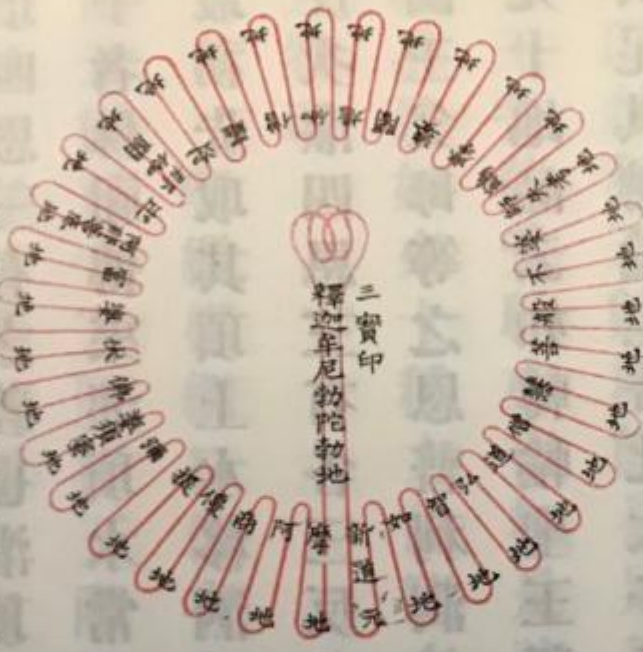
<http://book.kongfz.com/206287/950711266/>

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分丁自... 豎十七折橫四折也十... 頂上合印囉之字也此

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祖號圓相之圖



松鶴堂

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即通道元即通

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下段四行共如淨禪師自筆也後代兒孫宜準習焉

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I will end with a Dogen story.

Before the *shisho*, or certificate of succession, was bestowed on him, and while visiting various monasteries in China, Dogen had the good fortune to see and examine a *shisho*. He wrote about the experience as follows.

“Around the seventh lunar month of the previous year [1223], in the Hall of Serene Light, Chief Officer Shiko had told me about the *shisho* in secret. I had asked the chief in passing, ‘Nowadays, what person would have one in their possession?’ The chief said, ‘It seems that the venerable abbot has one in his room. In future, if you cordially request him to bring it out, he will surely show it to you.’ After hearing these words, I never stopped hoping, day or night. So in that year (1224), I cordially put my humble request to brother monk Chiyu. I did so with all my heart, and the request was granted. The base on which the certificate was written was a lining of white silk, and the cover was red brocade. The rod was precious stone, about nine inches long. The scroll’s extent was more than seven feet. It was never shown to an idle person.

“I thanked Chiyu at once, and then went straightway to visit the abbot, to burn incense and to bow in thanks to Master Musai. At that time Musai said, ‘This sort of thing is rarely able to be seen or known. Now, venerable brother, you have been able to know of it. This is just the real refuge in learning the truth.’ At this my joy was uncontainable.

“Later I thought inwardly, ‘It would be very difficult indeed to see and to hear this sort of thing without the mystical help of the Buddhist patriarchs. Why should a stupid fellow from a remote land be so fortunate as to see it?’ My sleeves became damp with tears of gratitude.”

From Dogen’s [Shobogenzo](#) “Shisho,” Nishijima-Cross translation.