

The Temple of Aspiration: Zuiryu-ji, a One-Hundred Year History of the Hokkaido Dojo, by Matsumoto Tokuji

TRANSLATOR NOTES: Because of the nature of these materials, and the need to convey the author's meaning and often indirect sense of expression, in some sections I have translated by overly literally and precisely tracking words and sentence structure in Japanese in a manner which frequently may sound awkward in English. Translator notes are in [brackets].

TRANSLATED BY JUNDO COHEN

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THE BIRTH OF JOSHU SASAKI ROSHI

Two years ahead of [his] appointment as Abbot, Jōten [Sōkō Miura] Roshi in 1947 bestowed Inka on Joshu Sasaki Osho. (note 40, note 41).

Note 40: Society of the Promotion of Buddhism [仏教伝道協会], “The 30th Cultural Award for the Promotion of Buddhism”, 1996

Note 41: The Zen of Myoshin-ji Comes to the West: 25 Years of Joshu Roshi in America, 1962-1987

Joshu Osho was the first apprentice trained by Jōten Roshi as Head Priest of Zuiryuji temple [瑞龍寺]. From among the apprentices trained at Zuiryuji, Roshi's Dharma Successor[s] [Hassu; 法嗣] would be born, and thus this was the highest cause for celebration for Zuiryu-ji as well.

Three years before this time, in February, 1944, Sasaki Joshu Osho was appointed the Fusu [副司, translator: the monk traditionally in charge of financial affairs at a Rinzai temple] at Zuiganji Temple [瑞巖寺]. In addition, this occasion was also [his] birth as a Shike [師家; teaching master]. So, this fact can be said to have made possible Jōten Roshi's later appointment as Abbot. Namely, Jōten Roshi thus was able during his absence to leave Zuiganji in the hands of Joshu Roshi, the Fusu, and further, to delegate to Joshu Roshi, his Dharma Successor, the role of Acting Shike [師家代行] for the Sodo [僧堂; Monk's Hall] at Zuiganji, and so [Jōten Roshi] could with peace of mind take up residence at the Head Temple [Honzan; 本山] in Kyoto.

On the other hand, at Zuiganji, the Meiji Period Hondo [本堂] Onari-mon Gate [御成門] Chumon Gate [中門] Kuri [庫裡] and Corridor [回廊] were designated as buildings under special national cultural protection. (note 42) This led to large scale renovation having to be conducted with receipt of [financial] subsidies from the national government. This was the so-called “Great Showa Period Renovation”. This too was delegated to Sasaki Joshu Roshi as the Fusu, and constituted a great responsibility.

Note 42: “A History of Zuiganji”, by Munetosh [?] Horino, published by Zuiganji, 1997

THE “ZUIGANJI AFFAIR”

However, with two full years passing after Jōten Roshi’s appointment as Abbot, not long after entering the third year of 1952, an unbelievably big incident would occur. This was that Joshu Roshi, the Fusu of Zuiganji, would end up being the object of a criminal prosecution [刑事訴追] involving the affair. This is what is popularly known as the “Zuiganji Affair”. The details of the affair are unclear due to records no longer remaining at Zuiganji today, but it seems that the inquiry concerned management oversight responsibilities [管理責任] for the funds received from the national government for purposes of the above described “Great Showa Period Renovation”.

In response, Rev. Joshu answered only that all came down to his own personal blame [translator: or “indiscretion”; literally “moral failings”; すべてを自分の不徳の致すところとのみ答え], and it is said that he ended up recognizing/admitting all of the fault [translator: or more literally, “offenses”; 罪] as his own [すべての罪をご自分のこととして認めてしまわれた]. For this reason, it is said that even the people at the temple administration office [寺務局] who were anticipating Rev. Joshu’s words in defense [弁護] were left without their own room to make a defense. Furthermore, Rev. Joshu, who while held in confinement [収監中] sat in the Full Lotus position (Kekkafuza = the cross legged way of sitting Zazen) all day long on top of the hard bed, impressed the penal guards [刑務官], and further a guard who could not bear to see it is said to have slipped him a Zabuton cushion. (note 43, note 44).

Note 43: According to conversation of Rev. Chisaka Seiya [Naruya ?; 千坂成也師] of Toenji Temple in Shiogama City, Miyagi Prefecture [宮城県塩釜市東園寺]

Note 44: According to conversation of Rev. Hoshi Chiyu [星智雄師] of Taibajji Temple in Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture [宮城県仙台市大梅寺]

However, when a Head Priest is sent off to be Abbot of a Head Temple, and so for Zuiganji as well, it is probably naturally to be expected that somehow tangible and intangible funds [有形無形の資金] would become necessary. What’s more, for Zuiganji itself, even if we say that there had been recovery from the Meiji [Era] impoverishment, it was a fact that it was in a condition quite far from the wealthy temple that can be seen at Zuiganji today. This writer is thinking that it might have been an affair which makes one recall the bitter labor of Joshu Roshi, who was in the position of having to work as Fusu amid all that.

It is said that, when first notice of this affair entered the ears of Jōten Roshi, the Roshi left the Head Temple in a flash. He could not be found in the Kohojo [the Abbot’s quarters; 小方丈], nor wherever they looked at Myoshinji Head Temple, and there was no sign of His Eminence the Roshi [管長祝下]. By around the time that Myoshinji Head Temple fell into a big uproar from top to bottom searching for His Eminence the Roshi, Jōten Roshi had already gotten back to Zuiganji. Later, he of course left his letter of resignation as Abbot. Thus, Jōten Miura resigned as Head [Kancho] of the Myoshinji School [妙心寺派の管長]. Roshi was a full 79 years old at the time. He was succeeded by Taiko Furukawa Roshi.

After this, Joshu Roshi, through the arrangements/good offices of Taiko Furukawa Kancho, ended up crossing to America [古川大航管長の計らいで渡米されることになる]. The assignment was that Roshi would be given the task of “Propagation of the Zen of the Myoshinji School”. Thereafter, Joshu Roshi would vigorously carry out this assignment in America. (note 45).

Note 43: The Zen of Myoshin-ji Comes to the West (above cited)

Among peoples whose lives and shared sense and language differ, it may be asked how it was that such a thing could have come to be possible, and thought really strange, but Joshu Roshi’s exceptional strength of mind toward others and wisdom seems to have caught the hearts of a great number of Americans. The reach of that propagation did not stop in America, but spread to Canada, each country of Europe, as far as New Zealand, and truly came to be seen on a world-wide scale. That very effort and results would come to be seen, and at last, in March 1996, the “Award for Distinguished Service for the Promotion of Buddhism” of the Society of the Promotion of Buddhism [was awarded to Joshu Sasaki].

SECTION III – Joshu Sasaki Roshi

Picture 165 Joshu Sasaki Roshi

Joshu Sasaki Roshi was born April 21, 1907 to a farming family in Tsurusu, Taiwa-Cho, Miyagi Prefecture. Joshu's mother came from the Chisaka family, which was the actual family of Shuho Osho, the former resident of the famous Toenji Temple [東園寺] in Shiogama City, Miyagi Prefecture, and also the grandfather of the current Head Priest, Chisaka Seiya [Naruya?] and Joshu Roshi are cousins it is said. (note 1).

Note 1: According to conversation of Rev. Chisaka Seiya [Naruya ?; 千坂成也師] of Toenji Temple in Shiogama City, Miyagi Prefecture

Perhaps through the help of this Toenji, at age 14 Joshu formed the resolution to cross to Hokkaido and become the apprentice of Jōten Miura Roshi of Zuiryuji. This was in 1921. He arrived at Sapporo's Zuiryuji on April 8th, namely the birthday of Shakyamuni Buddha. The young Joshu is said to have considered the schedule in advance in order to enter the temple on such day. (note 2) The person known as Joshu Sasaki was already at age 14 the type of person who could think in such way.

Note 2: The Zen of Myoshin-ji Comes to the West: 25 Years of Joshu Roshi in America, 1962-1987

Joshu Roshi has said that, at that time at Zuiryuji there were four adult priests and two other young student [学徒] novice priests [修行僧] of the same age as him. (note 2) However, there is no record thereof at Zuiryuji, nor any lore of that in the Matsumoto family. At such time, 1921, it would be surprising if Zuiryuji would have had sufficient means to keep that number of people. In the records that do remain, Joshu Roshi is stated as the first apprentice of Jōten Roshi at Zuiryuji.

... When the tea meeting was over, teacher stood up, and with a sharp glance while looking round at the priests, said, "Today I will not ask you all any questions. I will ask the students." I was nervous that this would be the first time that I would perhaps be asked a question, but teacher said, "I want to ask in the order of your entering this temple", so I was relieved knowing that I would be the last one. Teacher asked the following: "How old is Shakyamuni?" The first person he pointed to said, "2500 years old". I was desperate to think of my own response, so I don't recall what the second person said.

No good answer came to mind no matter how much I thought about it, so when it finally came to my turn, I thought to just say the first thing that came to mind. The teacher then asked me "How old is Shakyamuni?" I suddenly answered, "The same as me", and the teacher look round at the other monks and then pointed at me, saying, "This young man will begin Zazen training from tomorrow". Was my answer good or not? The teacher did not say. That night, the teacher showed me how to sit Zazen.

FROM THE MYOSHINJI SODO TO THE ZUIGANJI SODO, AND ON TO ROSHI ...

At Zuiryuji, Joshu Sasaki, who had become the apprentice of Jōten Roshi thereafter, while keeping his registration at Zuiryuji, was going to Kyoto's Hanazono Middle School and the preparatory course for Komazawa University in Tokyo. Then, when he was about 28 years old (about 1935), he entered Myoshinji Monk's Hall (掛搭 = Katou = to enter a monks hall for training) . (note 3) Around this time, at Zuiryuji there were 5 Unsui [雲水] including Joshu. (note 4) All kept a friendly and easy-going interchange with the temple parishioner families.

Note 3: Society of the Promotion of Buddhism [仏教伝道協会], “The 30th Cultural Award for the Promotion of Buddhism”, 1996

Note 4: For details on conditions during that period, please consult Chapter 1, Section II of this book.

In 1935, due to the illness of Matsubara Banryu Roshi, Jōten Miura Roshi became the Acting Shike [師家代行] for the Sodo of Zuiganji, and moved that year from Zuiryuji to the Sodo Monk's Hall of Zuiganji in Matsushima. Two years later, in 1937, Joten Roshi took up the position of Chief Priest [晋山] at Zuiganji, and formally was appointed the Shike [師家] of Zuiganji Sodo. In that year, Joshu moved from Myoshinji Sodo to Zuiganji Sodo (転錫 = to change Monk's Hall).

In February 1944, Sasaki Joshu Osho was appointed the Fusu [副司], translator: the monk traditionally in charge of financial affairs at a Rinzai temple] at Zuiganji Temple. Joshu Osho was about 37 years old at the time. Thereafter, in 1947, he received Inka from Joten Roshi. Under Jōten Miura Roshi, 10 years were spent in hard diligent effort and self polishing [苦節研錯], which came to the good result that he became the Fusu of Joten Roshi. Joshu Roshi was 40 years old.

I have already so written in Chapter 2, Section I of this book, but around this time at Zuiganji there were designated buildings under special national cultural protection from the Meiji Period, being the Hondo [本堂] Onari-mon Gate [御成門] Chumon Gate [中門] Kuri [庫裡] Corridor [回廊] and so forth, and with receipt of [financial] subsidies from the national government, it was a period where large scale renovations had to be conducted. This was the so-called “Great Showa Period Renovation”. Joshu Roshi was also the person responsible for this matter as Fusu.

And so thereafter, in December at the close of 1949, Joten Roshi was appointed Abbot [管長] of Myoshinji Head Temple. Zuiganji was left in the hands of Joshu Roshi as the Fusu, and the Sodo Monk's Hall was left to Joshu Roshi as Daisan (“Daisan”, 代参 – Acting Shike, 師家代行), whereupon Joten Roshi took up residence at the Head Temple.

Around this time, Joshu Roshi was the Head Priest of Zuiganji's Sub-temple Tatchu Yotokuin [塔頭陽徳院]. So, at that time period, it is said that a kindergarten was opened inside the Yotokuin. The management of the kindergarten at Zuiganji's Sub-temple Tatchu Yotokuin, for that time period, even thinking about and looking at it, was not something easily undertaken it seems. Onlookers are said to have given looks of amazement.

Furthermore, it is said that Joshu Roshi, during the period of being Fusu of Zuiganji, made a plan to build a yacht harbor at the Matsushima shoreline. The person that is Joshu Roshi was someone who could think to step a bit outside the current state of things, and he had an ability to take action well beyond ordinary people.

THE ZUIGANJI AFFAIR AND ROSHI'S DECISION TO GO TO AMERICA

Maybe this personal nature of Joshu Roshi was his bane and cause of problems [この性格が災いしたの], but in 1952 Roshi ended up causing a criminal case [刑事事件を起こしてしまわれる]. This was the so-called “Zuiganji Affair”. It is even said that [he?] was roped in/enticed by bad men [悪い人間にそそのかされたともいわれる], but for Zuiganji, one can sufficiently think that the sending of the Head Priest to the Head Temple necessitated quite of bit of funds tangibly and intangibly [有形無形にかなりの資金が必要であった]. In addition, unlike present day Zuiganji, it was work as Fusu of Zuiganji at a time of financial vulnerability and weakness. From an impatience [焦り] where one feels one has to do something to help the temple, wasn't it a case of getting hooked in/taken advantage of by bad people? [悪い人間につけこまれた事件だったのではなかろうか] That is how this writer understands it. However, with regard to precise matters, there are no materials/records at Zuiganji, so the only thing to say is that it is unclear [不明という他はない].

When the police came to take into physical custody [警察が拘束に来た時], Joshu Roshi stated “This is something I did alone” [私一人でやったことだ], and in the detention cell [拘置室] it is said that he quietly sat in Full Lotus Position (Kekkafuza = To Sit Zazen) (note 5)

Note 5: According to conversation of Rev. Chisaka Seiya(Naruya ? : 千坂成也師) of Toenji Temple in Shioyama City, Miyagi Prefecture

The fact that, because of this affair, Joten Miura Roshi had to resign as Kancho [管長] has already been written about in Chapter 2, Section 1 of this book.

In 1953, Joshu Roshi left Zuiganji Yotokuin [瑞巖寺陽徳院], and moved to the Shoju-an Temple in Iiyama, Nagano Prefecture [長野県飯山の正受庵]. The Shoju-an is a temple that was founded by Hakuin Zenji's teacher, “Old Shoju” (Dokyo Etan) [正受老人- 道鏡慧端], and is famous as a place where Hakuin Zenji experienced Satori. Joshu Roshi exerted himself for the rebuilding of this famous and historic temple that had become dilapidated.

However, a cold wind blew from the Buddhist world [仏教界の風は冷たかった] toward Joshu Roshi who had caused a criminal case. Amidst that cold wind, there is the strength of a Zen monk, as well as the aspect that eyes were fixed on this Roshi who had both foresight and an ability to take action [先見力も行動力もあるこの老師に目をつけた]. Succeeding Joten Miura Roshi as Head (Kancho) of the Myoshinji School was Taiko Furukawa Roshi. In 1960, Taiko Furukawa Roshi went to America as the then current Kancho, and while staying there several months, engaged in activities for the propagation of Zen. That alone seems to show how deeply he felt the importance of spreading Myoshinji's Zen in America. On returning to Japan, the Roshi commanded Joshu Sasaki Roshi to engage in the promotion of the teachings in America.

In order to perform this duty, a preparedness not to ever return to Japan was necessary. Joshu Roshi, with a sorrowful determination, declared, “I shall not die until Zen takes root in America”, and set off headed to America.

AUTHOR PROFILE

Tokuji Matsumoto [松本篤二]

Born in Sapporo in 1929. Graduated from the Physics Department in the Science Faculty of Hokkaido University. Subprofessor [文部教官] and Assistant in the Science Faculty of Hokkaido University, engaged in a domestic exchange program with the Hitotsubashi University Department of Business Management in the Faculty of Commercial Sciences. In 1957, joined the Hinomaru Sangyo Co. in Sapporo. After serving as a Managing Director and Senior Managing Director, retired from the company in 1983. In the same year, became a trainer for Recruit Co. internal company training. Retired in 1999.

During this period, in 1977, became the General Representative of the Board of the Zuiganji Temple Religious Corporation [宗教法人瑞龍寺責任役員総代]. In 1983, he once retired from the position, but in 1996 returned again as General Representative of the Board at the request of Joint Head Priest Soujyo Hirano Roshi. He continues today.

BOOK INFORMATION

The Temple of Aspiration: Zuiryu-ji, a One-Hundred Year History of the Hokkaido Dojo (志の寺。|. 瑞龍寺・北海道場百年史話)

Published August 31, 2009

Author Tokuji Matsumoto

Issuer Tokuji Matsumoto

Sapporo City, Chuo-ku, Kita Nanajo 43-Chome 28-152

Post: 060-0007

Tel: XXXXXXXXX

Place of Printing Sando Sanyo Printing Co. Ltd.