

The Sanbo Zen Lineage

Sanbo Zen International is an independent lay Zen order formerly known as the Sanbo Kyodan. Sanbo means Three Treasures in Japanese and the Sanbo Zen line combines the best practices of the Soto (intensive zazen) and the Rinzai (koan practice) schools of Zen. Unlike most other schools of Zen, Sanbo Zen International does not require its followers to embrace monastic life or to convert to Buddhism. Some of the Zen masters, associate Zen masters and Zen teachers are in fact Catholic priests or nuns or Christian pastors.

Sanbo Kyodan was officially founded by Yasutani Haku'un Roshi (1885-1973) on January 8, 1954. It was also referred to as the Harada-Yasutani school because its method of training is largely based on the practice and tradition that Yasutani Roshi received from his master, Harada Dai'un Sogaku Roshi (1871-1961).



Harada Roshi became a Soto Zen monk at the age of seven. Through the years he sought guidance from various Soto and Rinzai masters, eventually completing koan study under the Rinzai master Kogenshitsu Toyoda Dokutan Roshi. In 1922, he was appointed head monk of a small temple called Hosshinji near the inland Sea in the Obama Prefecture. Under Harada Roshi's leadership, Hosshinji became a training center well-known for his severe but inspired guidance. Harada Roshi also instituted some unconventional practices such as incorporating koan study in his monks' training, writing a series of introductory talks on zazen for beginners, and allowing lay people and foreigners to practice with the monks in Hosshinji. Among the foreigners who came to seek his guidance were the German Jesuit Priest Hugo

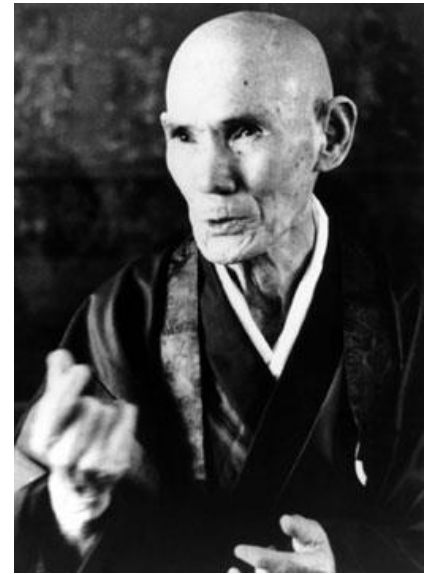
Enomiya-LaSalle and the American Philip Kapleau.

Harada Roshi was an outspoken critic of some Soto teachers who taught that it was enough to believe in one's intrinsic Buddhahood without experiencing realization. He and his followers were quite vigorous in stressing the need for a genuine kensho (awakening) experience to practice and uphold the Buddha Dharma. This was the reason why he integrated koan study in the training of Soto monks in Hosshinji. However, Harada Roshi remained a Soto monk until his death.

Yasutani Roshi was Harada Roshi's best-known Dharma successor. He became a monk at the age of 13 and was ordained as a Buddhist priest at 17. He trained at various temples under various masters, studied to become a teacher and married and raised a family. When he turned 40, he became qualified to be a residential monk and set up a Dharma hall. He was then put in charge of two major Soto temples in Tokyo and Kanagawa. All this time, Yasutani Roshi's heart was not at peace. He still had not experience an awakening. Fortunately, he met Harada Roshi and attended his first sesshin with the Roshi at the age of 41. Two years later, his kensho was confirmed at

Hosshinji and he continued practicing with Harada Roshi for 20 years, eventually finishing his koan study in 1938. In 1943, at the age of 59, Yasutani Roshi received Dharma transmission from Harada Roshi.

Yasutani Roshi took on Harada Roshi's mantle as a reformer and an outspoken critic against what he perceived were erroneous interpretations of the Dharma by some Soto factions. In his public teaching and in various publications, he promoted the need for both earnest zazen and the experience of enlightenment. Starting in 1949, he started establishing zazen groups called Haku'un-kai throughout Japan. In 1954, he finally resigned from the Soto sect, declaring himself to be directly connected with Dogen Zenji, the 13th century founder of the Soto sect in Japan. When the Sanbo Kyodan was officially recognized as an independent Zen organization on January 8, 1954, Yasutani Roshi became its first abbot. Like Harada Roshi, Yasutani Roshi felt that integrating the best aspects of Soto and Rinzai training methods would be the best approach for Zen practitioners. He also maintained the lay nature and the simplified structure of the Sanbo organization. He opened Sanbo Kyodan to earnest seekers from foreign countries and confirmed the kensho experiences of a number of foreigners. Yasutani Roshi travelled to the United States seven times to lead sesshin and give Dharma talks, thereby starting the spread of Zen in the Western hemisphere.



In 1970, Yasutani Roshi retired from the office of abbot and his Dharma heir Yamada Ko'un Roshi (1907-1989) took over. Unlike the first two abbots, Yamada Roshi was a layperson and a businessman with a family. With the support of his wife Dr. Kazue Yamada, he built a small zendo in their family compound. To this day, the San'Un Zendo remains the main training zendo of Sanbo Zen.



Yamada Roshi spoke English and under his guidance, Sanbo Kyodan attracted a large number of foreign practitioners. Most of them had their kensho experiences confirmed by Ko'un Roshi and more than a dozen, including Catholic priests and nuns and Christian pastors were given the authority to teach and lead others in the practice of Zen. He also travelled abroad to lead sesshin and give dharma talks. It would be an understatement to say that Yamada Ko'un Roshi was a major factor in the spread of the Buddha Dharma in Europe, North America and Asia. In the Philippines, he co-founded Zen Center Philippines with Sr. Elaine and a good number of ZCP members have undergone dokusan with him.

Ko'un Roshi felt that the fruits of Zen were accessible to all earnest seekers and that zazen was the true instrument for achieving genuine peace in the world. He dreamt of meeting with powerful heads of state and the pope to pursue the possibility of propagating Zen for this purpose.

Unfortunately, Ko'un Roshi passed away in September 1989. His Dharma heir Kubota Ji'un Roshi (b. 1932) took over as the third abbot and served in that capacity for 15 years. He was the Dharma successor of both Yasutani Roshi and Yamada Roshi, having started Zen training as a teenager. Kubota Roshi was a former businessman with a good command of English, having studied in the United States and worked there as well as in England. Under his abbotship, Sanbo Zen continued its emphasis on zazen, the need for kensho and authentic koan study. Kubota Roshi travelled widely, making sure that the Dharma was being taught and upheld in the countries with Sanbo Zen sangha. During his abbotship, two non-Japanese Authentic Zen Masters were named and the number of students influenced by the Sanbo lineage worldwide continued to grow.



In 2004, Kubota Roshi stepped down and Yamada Ryo'un Roshi (b. 1940) took over as abbot. Like his father Ko'un Roshi, Ryo'un Roshi is also a layperson and a businessman. Ryo'un Roshi has excellent command of English and a very good grasp of international economic, social and ecological issues, having studied in Harvard and worked in the United States, United Kingdom, Europe and Russia. Ryo'un Roshi's emphasis is ensuring the clarity of practitioners' realization. He travels regularly to lead sesshin and advanced students' training in North America, Europe and Asia. While intensive zazen, kensho and authentic koan study remain the foundation of Sanbo Zen practice, one of Ryo'un Roshi's tasks is the restructuring of Sanbo Zen International to fully support the international circumstances of its mission.



Today, the first generation of teachers that Ko'un Roshi trained has raised a new crop of teachers – around 30 in fifteen countries. There are more than 3,000 Sanbo Zen students worldwide. In addition, several Zen lines have spun off from the main Sanbo Kyodan line: the Diamond Sangha and the White Plum Asanga in North America, Europe and Australia, and the Willigis Jaeger line in Germany.

Like the development of Zen in China during the T'ang and Song Dynasties, Zen has taken root and is spreading quickly in the West. And in this growth, Sanbo Zen is one of the major wellsprings.

For a detailed history of Sanbo Zen International, please see this [article](#) by Joan Rieck and Henry Shukman. Joan and Henry are Sanbo Zen Associate Masters of the Three Treasures of the Sandias Zendo and the Mountain Cloud Zen Center respectively.