

No-Mind and Sudden Awakening: Thoughts on the Soteriology of a Kamakura Zen Text

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Zen Soteriology

Zen Buddhism is famous for its no-nonsense approach to religious salvation. "We are," Zen likes to say of itself, "a special tradition apart from scripture that does not depend on the written word; we simply point directly at the person's mind, that he may see his own nature and become a buddha." The contrast between this self-definition and what we are used to in religion could hardly be starker, particularly when we consider what has been left out of it. There is no talk of God, of course, nor of a savior by whom we are redeemed; no mortal sin from which we are delivered, nor better land to which we shall repair. There is no holy writ to be revered nor divine revelation before which to bow; no church dogma to be believed nor church ritual to be performed. Instead, we are to abandon our rituals and dogmas, simply examine directly our own minds and see into our own natures. "Just turn the light around," says Zen, "and shine it back."

How are we to accomplish this revolutionary shining? Here Zen offers concrete, practical advice. We are to sit quietly in the exercise known as *zazen* (seated meditation), focusing our minds (perhaps on the enigmatic *kōan* stories of Zen tradition) until our conceptual thought processes have come to rest and we suddenly perceive things as they are "before" we have understood them. In this sudden perception, we discover the preconceptual level of consciousness that is the nature of our minds; in this discovery, or *satori*, we have become buddhas, freed forever from attachment to the false dualities of conceptual thought and done with the need for religion.

This is, to be sure, a crude model of Zen soteriology, but I think that something like this model (no doubt loosely derived from the sort of psychology cum metaphysics introduced to the West by the great Japanese

Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki) helps to account for some of the popularity of Zen in our day. It looks like a kind of "secular mysticism" for skeptical modern man: no dogma, no faith, no ritual; just a frankly utilitarian psychological technique for achieving an "altered state," a "peak experience" of raw reality that will radically and permanently transform our relation to ourselves and the world (presumably for the good). Perhaps so. Perhaps this is all there is to Zen Buddhism. But if we are to follow Zen's advice to question religious dogma, it may behoove us to ask about the status of Zen's own self-definitions; and if we are to represent skeptical modern (or perhaps "post-modern") man, we shall want to be suspicious not only of the epistemological claim that Zen Buddhism offers direct, preconceptual access to reality, but also of the historical notion that there is something called "Zen Buddhism" in the abstract—some single, definable religious entity that stands behind the various expressions, modern and premodern, of those who have called themselves Zen Buddhists. In particular, we may want to doubt whether our present model of Zen soteriology—or any given model—can adequately capture the range of what Zen Buddhists throughout history have wanted from their religion and how they have gone about getting it. This doubt arises not only from the historical range but also from the ambiguities of soteriology itself. Before I proceed to the historical case, I want to say a few words about these ambiguities.

Soteriological Models

The term "soteriology," drawn as it is from a branch of Christian theology, initially suggests the science of the salvific or healing function of the *sōtēr*, or savior, and in this sense seems a peculiarly inappropriate designation not only for our model of secular mysticism but for most (though perhaps not quite all) of what we find in the records of Zen. Yet, depending on how far we want to stretch the term from this initial theological context, it can reach to the very limits of religion itself and, at least by analogy, even beyond. Though these limits are by no means clear, and it would be naive to imagine that we can set neat stages in the stretching of "soteriology," it is helpful to distinguish narrower and broader senses of the term. The narrower senses tend to get fixed in one or both of two ways: (1) according to genre, by retaining the idea of a theological "science" and by limiting the extension of "soteriology" to explicit, more or less systematic accounts of religious goals and means; and (2) according to content, by accepting some version, more or less tightly defined, of the religious notion of salvation (though not necessarily of a savior) and by restricting "soteriology" to accounts of those religious goals, and their means, that are taken to be functionally or conceptually analogous to this notion. The former restriction yields a

distinction between what we may call "theological" and "nontheological" religious expression. The latter restriction, when based on a loose definition of salvation as something like the final spiritual goal, gives a distinction between "ultimate" and "proximate" religious concerns; when derived from tighter criteria (such as notions of transcendence, liberation, transformation, and the like), it implies additional distinctions between forms of religion or religiosity that are "salvational" and "nonsalvational," "otherworldly" and "this-worldly," and so on.¹

When thus restricted in these two ways to systematic, theological accounts of ultimate spiritual ends and their means, soteriology tends to be associated with the "great religions," and with the "great traditions" within those religions. When it is not thus restricted, there is a broader sense in which we can say that all religions have (or even are) soteriologies, insofar as all are cultural systems that have as a goal the justification of human experience (whether of individual or group) by bringing it into right relationship with a particular value structure. In this latter sense, "soteriology" intends little more than definitions of this relationship and the ways it is supposed to be achieved. Those "great" theological systems that define the relationship as individual salvation, seen as the transcendental solution to what is considered a radically problematic human condition, are in this sense simply subsets of the broader soteriological enterprise.

Buddhism is usually treated as such a "great" theological system, and discussion of its soteriology tends to assume the more restricted senses of the term, focusing on its systematic accounts of such transcendental ends as *nirvāṇa* or buddhahood, and on the renunciate's path of meditation and wisdom through which they are achieved. Yet as a historical phenomenon, the Buddhist religion is of course much more than this, and an adequate historical understanding even of its disparate theological systems can hardly do without some consideration of the broader soteriological interests within which they occur and with which they continually interact. Such an understanding must take into account not only what Buddhists should want and should do according to the norms of the "explicit," "official" soteriologies of the theologians, but also what Buddhists (including the theologians) have wanted and have done in the exercise of their "implicit," "de facto" soteriologies. Whether at explicit or implicit levels, it must acknowledge not only the "ultimate" soteriologies of final goals and means but also the many and varied "proximate" soteriologies of more immediate religious needs. Whether taken as ultimate or proximate, it must be willing to ask about the implicit soteriological purposes of the explicit soteriological systems themselves and be ready to recognize that both the production of such systems and the specific forms they take may well serve ends (whether individual or group) quite different from those defined by the

systems themselves. Moreover, such an understanding must come to appreciate a wide range of soteriological genres—elite and popular, metaphysical and ethical, scientific and poetic, public and private, theoretical and practical, descriptive and prescriptive, and so on—each with its own ends and its own devices. And it must be sensitive to the complex conversation among these various kinds of soteriologies and to the ways they have talked to and against each other in particular historical, social, and intellectual settings, as they continually redefine what we call Buddhism.

One approach to understanding the major redefinitions of Buddhism that have recurred throughout its history is to see them as responses to crises or breakdowns in the soteriological conversation. Such crises can arise when, for whatever reasons, the perceived gap among the various soteriological models—and especially that between the dominant explicit and implicit models—no longer admits easy intercourse. At this point we can expect some attempt at reformation of the models—a reformation that typically tries simultaneously to lift the implicit and proximate to some “higher,” more “orthodox” level of discourse and to lower the explicit and ultimate to some more accessible, more familiar stage of meaning. Something like this process was at work, I think, in the redefinitions of Buddhism that occurred in the early Kamakura (1185–1333), the period that saw the introduction of Zen to Japan.

The Kamakura Reform

According to the explicit soteriology of the regnant scholastic Mahāyāna systems imported to Japan from the T'ang, the ultimate goal of Buddhism was buddhahood—by official definition, a state transcending time and space, a state of omniscience, a state of substantial mastery over the forces of history and nature that gave one the paranormal powers through which a buddha was supposed to work for the spiritual benefit of all beings. This sublime state was not only the sufficient condition for liberation from the misery of rebirth in *saṃsāra*, it was also the necessary condition: in the standard versions of the Mahāyāna favored in Japan, there was no true liberation short of buddhahood.² The recognized means to this ultimate goal were appropriately daunting: they required a life of strictest renunciation and purest self-sacrifice, a life of perfect morality, profound meditation, and universal learning. Indeed, they demanded not just one such life but countless lives: by official *sūtra* count, it was to take no less than three great incalculable aeons to master the myriad practices and ascend the many stages of the bodhisattva's career.

In contrast to this imposing official religion, the implicit Mahāyāna soteriologies offered a range of considerably less exalted, more immedi-

ate goals. Generally speaking, I think it fair to say that most Buddhists of Japan, like most Buddhists elsewhere, whether monk or layman, probably looked to their religion less for final liberation from *saṃsāra* than for various kinds of consolation in *saṃsāra*—for the proximate resolution of particular personal problems, to be sure, but also for some broader, more comprehensive sense that these problems made sense; that in the big picture, their sufferings were not in vain; that in the long run, the ups and downs of their lives were headed more up than down. The means to such consolation were basically twofold: first of all, faith—faith in the compassionate power of the Buddha, the verity of the Buddhist teachings, and the purity of its institutions; and second, action—ethical action, to the extent possible, but more importantly, the ritual actions that were the most powerful forms of spiritual merit (donation of alms, recitation of sacred texts and formulae, participation in religious rites, and so on).

The gap between the explicit and implicit soteriologies was bridged by the notion that the means to consolation were also the first steps toward the official goal of liberation—steps that would eventually lead, through the laws of karma, to rebirth at higher spiritual levels, on which the distant ideal of buddhahood and the arduous path of the *bodhisattva* would one day become personally relevant. Yet for many Buddhists of the late Heian (794–1185) and Kamakura, this bridge no longer spanned the gap. On the near side, so to speak, the historical upheavals of the age, and the attendant prevalence and intensity of personal anxiety and pain, threw into doubt the hope that real consolation in *saṃsāra* could be found short of total liberation from it, raising the demand for more immediate access to the ultimate goal in this lifetime (or at least in the one to come). Meanwhile, on the other side of the gap, the possibility of actually achieving this goal in any lifetime looked increasingly remote. The validity of the sanctioned soteriological models was being undermined by two sorts of theological developments within the official systems themselves: one that gave exaggerated emphasis to the metaphysical interpretation of buddhahood and hence cast doubt on its status as real religious experience; and another that introduced the historical doctrine of the inevitable decline of the dharma and thus raised fears that no one in the present, final age could actually negotiate the *bodhisattva* path.³ These theological doubts and fears were exacerbated by the increasing empirical evidence of the times that the established Japanese Buddhist institutions supposed to embody the official soteriology fell far short of the ideal.

To meet the new religious demand and to revalidate the Buddhist response, some of the Kamakura reformers looked back to China for culturally sanctioned but hitherto neglected soteriological strategies that might liberate them from the practical and theoretical difficulties of the

old bodhisattva path. They found there two prime candidates in the flourishing traditions of Pure Land and Zen. Of these, perhaps the more radical, and surely the more popular, was that of the Pure Land. This movement took seriously the soteriological implications of the doctrine of the last, degenerate age. In effect (though of course it had ways to soften its break with tradition), it abandoned the remote, official ideal of buddhahood in favor of the more proximate goal of birth in the Western Paradise of the Buddha Amida—a goal already assured by Amida's vow to take into his land all who called on him in faith. Given this new goal, the movement could substitute for the difficult practices of the bodhisattva path the more accessible style of the implicit religion: faith in the saving vow of Amida, and ritual participation in the power of this vow through the recitation of his name. In the reformed soteriology, then, the same means by which one was consoled in this life—faith and ritual action—became the sufficient conditions for deliverance into the new final goal of the Pure Land.

In the Chinese Zen tradition, the Kamakura reformers discovered a soteriology that was in some ways structurally similar. While continuing to pay lip service to the traditional ideal of buddhahood, the Zen masters had brought the ideal down into the human sphere in two ways. First, they had "demythologized" the perfections of the Buddha, such that his omniscience tended to be seen simply as freedom from epistemological error and his supernormal powers over the world became his pure, spontaneous participation in the world, as enacted in the lifestyle of the Zen master himself. Second, they had taken advantage of the metaphysical definitions of buddhahood to emphasize that such a demythologized buddha was latent in the mind of every being and needed only to be recognized there. The single, simple practice of Zen meditation, in which one abandoned the erroneous thoughts that covered this latent buddha, was sufficient to uncover it and permit the Zen Buddhist to discover, in the new goal of satori, that his own mind already possessed the ultimate spiritual state.

We may notice here that, for all its reputation as a radical critique of religion, Zen Buddhism was theologically (and institutionally) more conservative than Pure Land: the end of its soteriology remained (in name, at least) the traditional goal of buddhahood; the way to this end remained (albeit in truncated form) meditation, one of the central spiritual practices of the standard bodhisattva path, and a practice traditionally left to the professional religious. This conservative quality made it easier for the Kamakura Zen Buddhist apologists to argue for the orthodoxy of their reform, but it also made it more difficult for them to bring that reform down to the implicit soteriologies of the mass of Japanese Buddhists. For all the theoretical proximity of the latent buddha-mind, to those without the actual experience of satori, it offered little

consolation; for all the claimed spiritual power of Zen meditation, to those without the spiritual power to master the meditation—to those more comfortable with faith and ritual—Zen practice remained rather remote. In fact, many historical expressions of Zen have tended to remain rather remote, and frankly elitist, but in spreading the religion in Kamakura Japan, the early Zen reformers did have ways of softening their definitions of both goal and practice to accommodate the values of the implicit soteriologies. Here I want to look at the ways such softening might be at work in one text of the period.

The *Zazen ron*

The *Shōichi kokushi kana hōgo* (Vernacular Dharma Words of the National Teacher Sacred Unity) is a work attributed to the important Kamakura figure Enni (or Ben'en, 1202–1280), one of the first and most successful exponents of Zen in Japan.⁴ Like many of the early Japanese Zen converts, Enni began his career as a Tendai monk. After studying with a disciple of the famous Tendai and Zen teacher Yōsai (or Eisai), he traveled to the continent, where he was eventually certified in the understanding of his new faith by Wu-chun Shih-fan, a prominent master of the Yang-ch'i branch of Lin-chi who trained several of Japan's first Zen students. Soon after Enni's return to the islands in 1241, he was invited to the capital by the powerful Fujiwara minister Kujō Michiie and installed as the founding abbot of Michiie's grand new monastic complex, the Tōfukuji. From this exalted post he quickly became one of the most influential leaders of the nascent Japanese Zen movement, enjoying the patronage of both court and shōgunate, serving as the abbot of several important monasteries, and producing a goodly number of dharma descendants.⁵

Unfortunately, little of Enni's Zen teaching is preserved for us. We know that, like his forebear Yōsai and many of his Zen contemporaries, he retained broad interests in various forms of Buddhism and taught both the esoteric and exoteric systems popular in his day. Aside from a brief collection of his recorded sayings, his teachings on Zen are best known from the *Kana hōgo*. The provenance of this work, however, is quite problematic. The text is a brief tract, in the form of a catechism of twenty-four questions and answers preceded by a short introduction. It is traditionally said to have been written for Enni's patron, Michiie, and the vulgate version of the text ends with the complimentary close of an epistle and a colophon identifying it as Shōichi's private instructions to the minister. Nevertheless, not only this tradition but Enni's authorship itself are subject to considerable doubt.

Enni's *Kana hōgo* is perhaps more popularly known as the *Zazen ron* (Treatise on Seated Meditation), a title identical to that of a work attrib-

uted to Enni's contemporary Lan-ch'i Tao-lung (Rankei Dōryū, 1213-1278), the first Sung missionary to Japan. Tao-lung's text is of course written in Chinese, but one need not read far in it to recognize that it is a version of the Japanese work associated with Enni. It has been suggested that, when asked by Michiie for private instruction, the overworked abbot of Tōfukuji simply borrowed Tao-lung's text and put it into the vernacular.⁶ But this suggestion is rather dubious. The association of Enni's text with Michiie seems to have been a late development and does not appear in the earliest extant version.⁷ More importantly, whoever wrote the original text, and whether in Chinese or Japanese, it was probably not the Chinese master Tao-lung: the writing bears no resemblance to his other work, and the diction, scriptural sources, and religious themes of the *Zazen ron* all seem to stamp it as a work of Japanese authorship. I am reluctant at this point to hazard a guess about its provenance, but I do think the internal evidence of style and content allows us to accept the *Zazen ron* as a product of the early Kamakura; for my purposes here, this is enough.

By the early Kamakura, the Japanese had been Buddhists for some seven centuries, but they had not been Zen Buddhists. While Zen Buddhism had been enjoying a long and glorious history on the continent, the Japanese had continued to favor the older, more scholastic forms of Mahāyāna imported from the T'ang. Hence the first native converts to Zen were forced to contend with these established forms, and it is not surprising that, like the *Zazen ron*, much of the earliest Japanese Zen writing has a strongly apologetic character. As such, it tends to involve arguments for three general points: the orthodoxy of Zen, in terms acceptable to traditional Mahāyāna; the superiority of Zen over other forms of Mahāyāna; and the relevance of Zen to the religious needs of the community of Mahāyāna believers. Needless to say, such arguments are not necessarily mutually supportive: certain sorts of claims for the superiority of Zen, for example, can undermine the grounds for both orthodoxy and relevance; by the same token, overemphasis on orthodoxy may vitiate the case for superiority or rob the teaching of its appeal to those seeking new, more accessible forms of religion.

Of course, what one chooses to emphasize and how one goes about it depend to a large extent on the particular audiences and purposes of the argument. Thus, within the broad category of early Zen apologetic writing, we find quite disparate presentations of the religion. Yōsai's famous *Kōzen gokoku ron* (Promotion of Zen for Protection of the Country), for example, addressed as it was to the government and written to defend the faith against charges of antinomianism, emphasizes the institutional integrity and superior social benefits of Zen practice; Shōjō's *Zenshū kōmoku* (Outline of Zen Teaching), in contrast, composed in response to theological doubts among the author's colleagues in the

Kegon school, focuses on the legitimate place of Zen within the doctrinal structure of the Kegon orthodoxy.⁸

The *Zazen ron* is rather different from these more traditional, more learned essays. As its alternative title, *Kana hōgo*, indicates, it belongs to the popular new homiletic genre through which reformed versions of Buddhism (both Zen and others) were being spread throughout (at least the marginally literate levels of) late Heian and early Kamakura society. Given its intended audience, this genre eschewed the classical literary language of Chinese in favor of the contemporary vernacular; largely abandoned the traditional rhetorical device of argumentation through the marshaling of scriptural citation; and translated and reduced the complex technical vocabulary of scholastic Buddhism to a relatively few key religious notions. Due to both its audience and its purposes, the genre tended to put strong emphasis on the last of our apologetic points: the relevance and accessibility of the faith to everyman. Typically, as in the *Zazen ron*, it focused directly on the ultimate issue of individual salvation and offered more or less concrete advice on how to win salvation. Thus it was deeply concerned with soteriology. As we shall see in our text, not only this general concern but also the particular approaches taken to soteriology go hand in hand with the means and ends of the apologetic argument.

Sudden Awakening

Although the *Kana hōgo* is popularly called a "Treatise on Seated Zen," and although it opens by declaring this practice to be the very essence of Buddhism, the text as a whole is both more and less than an account of zazen—less, in that it does little to describe the actual techniques of seated meditation; more, in that it ranges well beyond this practice to offer an apologetic for a particular vision of Buddhism. This vision is very close to the sort of thing one finds in some of the literature of the early Zen movement of the T'ang, especially in the eighth-century texts associated with the so-called sudden teaching of the Southern school. Like that literature, it often seems to reduce Buddhism to a single, transformative insight into the ultimate truth.

When asked, for example, to explain how Zen can lead to buddhahood, the author of the *Kana hōgo* distinguishes between two kinds of practice: that of the traditional bodhisattva path, which is based on the accumulation of good karma and requires three great incalculable aeons; and that of the Zen way, which "points directly at the person's mind" (*jikishi ninshin*) and permits him simply to "see his nature and become a buddha" (*kenshō jōbutsu*) (7; 414).⁹ Similarly, the author calls on us to abandon the quest for the paranormal spiritual powers developed on the path and simply "extinguish at once the three great incalcu-

lable aeons [of the bodhisattva path] and abruptly see our natures and become buddhas" (15; 416). Elsewhere, quoting "an ancient," he says, "When you suddenly recognize the Zen of the Tathāgata (*nyorai zen*), the six perfections and the myriad practices [of the bodhisattva path] are all complete within your body" (3; 412).¹⁰ Dismissing the study of the Buddhist scripture, he remarks that "reading the true sūtra" consists of nothing but "awakening to the original mind and returning to the root source" (6; 413). Knowledge gained by studying the sūtras and śāstras is not "true knowledge," which lies only in "recognizing the inherent buddha-nature by turning the light around and shining it back (*ekō henshō*)" (16; 416). All the teachings of the sūtras are merely "a finger pointing at the moon"; all the words of the Zen patriarchs are simply "a tile [taken up] to knock on a gate": once the moon is seen and the gate opened, once we have "awakened to the one mind," the teachings are irrelevant (23; 419–420). The awakening to this mind itself suddenly dispells all the delusions and afflictions of saṃsāra; it is like the bright moon emerging from behind the clouds (18; 417), like a lamp taken into a dark cave (22; 419). There is no need for any spiritual verification beyond this awakening (2; 411).

As a kind of corollary to its emphasis on awakening, the *Zazen ron* repeats the classical Zen warnings against misguided attempts to overcome the afflictions (*bonnō*, Skt. *kleśa*) through meditation. This is the way of the Hīnayāna practitioners who, hating the afflicted state, try to "extinguish body and mind, becoming like dead trees, tiles and stones." This practice leads only to rebirth in the formless realm (*mushiki kai*, *ā rūpyadhātu*); it is not "the true dharma" (12; 415). In a similar vein, the author rejects the notion that Zen practice is limited to seated meditation (19; 417) and criticizes those who "stop the thoughts of the three poisons (*sandoku*) [of desire, aversion, and delusion] only in zazen" and therefore "lack the authentic mind of the way (*dōjin*)" that "clarifies the root source of saṃsāra" (20; 418). In more general terms, he dismisses all efforts to seek buddhahood through religious endeavor: lesser types cling to the characteristics of things and seek the goal outside of themselves; higher types abandon these characteristics and turn within, trying to "rouse the mind to seek the mind"; both types fail to see that the afflictions are empty and the mind originally pure; their practices simply lead to more saṃsāra (22; 418–419).

As this last passage indicates, the rationale for the *Zazen ron*'s criticism of such spiritual practices is, not surprisingly, the ancient Mahāyāna notion of emptiness and the classical Zen teaching of the inherent buddha-mind (*bushin*). "Everything merely appears provisionally, like a dream, like an illusion" (11; 415); "when we awaken to the one mind, all things are empty, and not a single thing remains" (21; 418). "If we seek the source of the afflictions, they are like dreams, illusions, bub-

bles, or shadows" (22; 419); "when we open the gate of the great liberation (*dai gedatsu no mon*), . . . there is no Buddha and no sentient being; from the beginning there is not a single thing" (23; 420). Since (as the usual Zen logic goes in these matters) "from the beginning the mind neither arises nor ceases, . . . saṃsāra is nirvāṇa"; since "the mind is originally pure, . . . the afflictions are enlightenment" (22; 418–419). In like fashion, since there are no real buddhas or sentient beings, they are equivalent (23; 419–420). To put this more ontologically,

All beings have a self-nature (*jishō*). This nature is intrinsically without arising or cessation; it constantly abides without change. Therefore, it is called the inherent self-nature. The buddhas of the three worlds [of past, present, and future] and all sentient beings have this same nature, which is the dharma body of the original ground (*honji hosshin*) (17; 417).

To put it more personally, "One's own mind is the Buddha" (2; 411). This buddha-mind is free from attributes and free from attachments (*musō mujaku*) (5; 413); it is immaculate, without concepts, with no thought of attainment (6; 413). It is, to use the standard metaphors, like the bright moon behind the clouds, like the clear mirror beneath the dust (18; 417). Because this mind is our "original lot" (*honbun*) (24; 421), we are buddhas from the beginning (*jiko honrai*) and not only as the fruit of the path (7; 414). It is only because this mind is covered by the clouds and dust of deluded thoughts (*mōnen*) that we fail to recognize it (18; 417); it is just because we believe that these thoughts are the "original mind" (*honshin*) that we wander in saṃsāra (17; 417). If we once awaken to the mind that is the source of these thoughts, we share in the supernatural clarity and power of buddhahood (18; 417).

Those familiar with the early Zen texts will recognize the standard moves of the sudden teaching, complete with the orthodox equivocation on the notion of buddhahood as ultimate truth and as realization of this truth, and the usual uncertainties on the question of whether we really need to eliminate deluded thoughts (as in 3; 412) or only (deludedly) think we do (21; 418). More interesting for our purposes here (and for Zen study more broadly) than these tricky bits of Zen soteriological strategy is the way in which the strategy is played out in the actual tactics of salvation. For these tactics, the opening questions posed by the sudden teaching become something like this: Assuming that being a "buddha from the beginning" is not quite the end of the matter, what is that end and how do we reach it? Assuming that the emptiness of deluded thoughts does not eliminate the need to eliminate (at least deluded thoughts about) them, how shall we proceed? In the apologetic context of our text, these questions take on a particular thrust: How is the Zen understanding of the ends and means of Buddhism related to other, more familiar versions of the religion—especially those Mahā-

yāna versions that also teach emptiness and posit an innate buddha-mind? And what are the implications of this understanding for those who choose to adopt the Zen religious life? Let us consider these two questions in order.

The Buddha-Mind School

The apologetic thrust and polemical concerns of the *Zazen ron* are already apparent in its opening section, which provides a brief introductory statement announcing the basic position of the text:

The school of seated meditation (*zazen no shūmon*) is the way of the great liberation. All the various dharmas flow from this gate; all the myriad practices are mastered from this way. The mystic functions of wisdom and psychic powers are born from within it; the life of men and gods have opened forth from within it. Therefore, the buddhas have resided in this gate, and the bodhisattvas practice it and enter into this way. Even those of the Lesser Vehicle and non-Buddhists practice it, although they do not yet accord with the true path. All the exoteric and esoteric schools have their self-verification by attaining this way. Therefore, a patriarch has said, "All the wise men of the ten directions enter this school." (1; 411)¹¹

Here we see a familiar style of Zen apologetic argumentation: Zen is the most orthodox form of Buddhism because it is the very essence of the religion, that "way of the great liberation" (*dai gedatsu no michi*) from which all else derives and toward which all else intends. All the Buddhist teachings and practices flow from Zen; all the Buddhist goals are achieved through Zen. Therefore, all religious seekers of whatever spiritual level—whether pagan or Buddhist, Hīnayāna or Mahāyāna, exoteric or esoteric—strive to practice this way; and all who would attain the great liberation of enlightenment must ultimately do so through this way.

If this opening statement reflects familiar Zen apologetic strategy, it also raises familiar questions about the implications of that strategy for understanding the relationship between Zen Buddhism and other forms of the religion. This question is immediately taken up in the first section of the catechism:

Q: Why do you say that this Zen gate is the root of all the teachings?

A: Zen is the buddha-mind. The discipline is its outer marks; the teaching is its explanation; the recitation of the [Buddha's] name is its expedient. These three samādhis have all come from the buddha-mind. Therefore, this school represents the root. (1; 411)

Zen is the "root" (*konpon*)—both the essence and source—of all Buddhism because it is the Buddha's own mind—that ultimate state of mind

achieved by the Buddha, that enlightened set of mind from which he taught his religion, that fundamental quality of mind through which we are one with him. Here, of course, the *Zazen ron* is implicitly invoking the common Zen distinction between the buddha-mind (*bushin*) and buddha-teaching (*bukkyō*) schools—that is, between the tradition based on the actual experience of enlightenment, as transmitted from mind to mind by the Zen patriarchs, and the other Buddhist traditions that rely on the explanations of the experience in sūtra and śāstra.

To this distinction, the text seems to be coupling two other dichotomies regularly employed in Zen apologetics: (1) that between the ordinary, mundane religion of “marks” (*sō, lakṣana*), or phenomenal characteristics, and the noumenal Zen religion, which, being grounded only in emptiness, transcends all characteristics; and (2) that between religion based on “expedients” (*hōben, upāya*, in the sense both of the Buddha’s accommodation to the spiritual level of the practitioner and of the practitioner’s spiritual techniques appropriate to his or her level) and the Zen religion, based solely on the ultimate truth revealed to enlightenment and therefore beyond any need for such expedients. It is no accident that the styles of religious practice identified here with marks and expedients (i.e., discipline, *ritsu*, and recitation, *shōmyō*, respectively) were probably the two most powerful alternatives to Zen meditation in the new religious movements of the Kamakura—the former emphasized especially by the monastic reformers of the established Nara and Heian schools, the latter, as we have seen, by the swelling ranks of Amida devotees.

Taken by itself, the metaphysical claim that Zen represents the root buddha-mind, from which all Buddhism emerges, seems to leave open the question of how the Zen Buddhist is to view its relationship to the historical forms of the Buddhist religion. From one angle, this claim can be read to mean only that there is one spiritual truth (or state or practice)—here called “Zen”—that stands behind or runs through all forms of Buddhism, and that, insofar as they participate in (or express or aim toward) this truth, all forms are valid as the explanations, marks, and expedients through which the buddha-mind is made accessible to the world. This kind of reading is sometimes adopted by those in the tradition who emphasize the ultimate unity of the buddha-mind and buddha-teaching schools. It is a reading, however, that is not well suited to the advertisement of Zen as a compelling religious alternative, not only because it validates the spiritual utility of competing Buddhist forms, but also because it does not address the question of whether and in what way Zen actually takes some concrete, historical form beyond its merely metaphysical status as pure, transcendental essence. The author of the *Zazen ron* of course wants to promote such a form and hence must argue that Zen is not only the one truth that stands “behind” all forms of Bud-

dhism but the supreme version of Buddhism that stands "above" all others and obviates or supersedes their practice. The argument takes two, probably not wholly compatible forms: one negative, which dismisses the ordinary goals and practices of the Buddhist path as being based on shallow understanding; the other positive, which locates Zen at the final stage of this path, as the culmination of all Buddhist religious endeavor.

Zen and the Path

We have already seen the negative form of this argument in the *Zazen ron*'s frequent attacks on traditional Buddhist accounts of the spiritual life. Here I shall consider just two examples, one theological, the other practical, that help show how the polemical positions of the apologetic impinge on soteriological issues. The first example concerns the common Buddhist expectation that the spiritual adept will possess (and be able to display) paranormal powers and supernatural qualities. According to the traditional theology, the buddhas, through aeons of cultivation on the path, were supposed to have perfected a wide range of such powers and qualities; but even less exalted types, insofar as they were masters of meditation, were held to be skilled in psychic travel, mental telepathy, and so on.¹² Thus it is not surprising that adherents of the early Zen school, which claimed to be the meditation school par excellence and to offer buddhahood to all, were embarrassed by such expectations and felt the need to counter them. The problem is directly addressed in our text:

Q: Why is it that, although one who sees his nature and awakens to the way is immediately a buddha, he does not have the psychic powers (*jīnzū*) and radiance (*kōmyō*) [of a buddha] or, unlike ordinary people, show the mystic functions (*myōyū*) [of a buddha]? (15; 416)

The answer comes in several forms. First it is held that the physical body, even of one who has seen his nature and become a buddha, because it is the karmic product of past delusion, does not display the powers and radiance. Behind this position one can imagine the common Mahāyāna distinction between the physical body of the Buddha (*nirmāṇakāya*) that appears in history and the spiritual body (*saṃbhogakāya*), known only to the advanced adept, that is the product and shows the signs of the Buddha's perfections. The text itself, however, does not invoke this distinction, and later on in section 15, it takes a rather different approach to the problem, declaring that the desire for paranormal powers is "the way of Māra and the pagan religions" (*tenma gedō*). Even

foxes, the author reminds us, have magical powers, but they are not particularly honored for that. In either case, whether it relegates them to a hidden world or limits them to the mundane world, the thrust is to dismiss the common understanding of the paranormal powers as irrelevant to the Zen religious program.

The real meaning of the powers, the text goes on to explain, is the "mastery of the six dusts and the deluded conceptions" (*rokujin mōsō*)—i.e., psychological freedom from attachment to the objects of sensory and intellectual experience. In like fashion, the "mystic functions" of the enlightened are identified with the sudden practice of one who, without requiring the three great incalculable aeons of ascetic practice, "abruptly sees his own nature and becomes a buddha"; and the supernatural "radiance," or aureola, supposed to emanate from the body of the Buddha is interpreted as the "light of wisdom" through which the Buddhist teacher saves beings from the "darkness of ignorance" (15; 416).

The *Zazen ron*'s redefinitions of the supernatural powers and qualities are quite typical of the way Zen apologetics likes to use the standard categories of Buddhist theology to its own ends; they are also quite suggestive of how this use at once closes and discloses the gap between ultimate and proximate soteriological concerns. On the one hand, the dismissal of the "literal" interpretation of the supernatural or superhuman character of buddhahood and its redefinition as an internal, epistemological state demystifies and humanizes the ultimate spiritual goal and thus reduces it to a level seemingly more accessible to actual experience. On the other hand, by dismissing the supernatural as irrelevant, this internalization and demythologization rob it of its power as a buffer between real and ideal. To the extent that the buddhas are within, there are no other powers "out there" to whom we can turn for solace and aid; we are left alone with ourselves. To the extent that buddhahood is directly within our reach, there is no safe distance from which we can gaze on the glories of the ultimate end to come, or across which we can imagine ourselves gradually progressing toward them; our proximate hopes and partial victories are in vain. In effect, our spiritual options have been reduced to indefinite suffering in *saṃsāra* or immediate ascent to supreme, perfect enlightenment.

The stark soteriological implications of the Zen apologetic are equally evident in our second example, the *Zazen ron*'s treatment of the traditional Buddhist practices of *sūtra* reading and recitation. In section 6, the interlocutor complains that the uncompromising Zen style of religion seems "difficult to believe in and difficult to practice" and asks whether one might not "seek the merits of reading the *sūtras* and reciting *dhāraṇī*, or keeping the precepts, or recollecting the Buddha and calling his name" (6; 413). The answer begins on a high note, by

declaring that "the sūtras and dhāraṇī are not words: they are the original mind of all beings." This metaphysical interpretation is immediately followed by a rather different, more utilitarian reading: "They are speech, intended for those who have lost their original minds," taught simply in order to "bring about awakening to the original mind and put an end to birth and death in delusion" (ibid.).

Such a reading seems to hold out the hope that those who have lost their minds might yet make use of reading and recitation to regain them; and elsewhere the *Zazen ron* does somewhat grudgingly acknowledge the utility of scripture reading for those who, having not yet "awakened to the buddha-mind," must "rely on the finger" to "see the moon" (23; 419–420). But in our passage, the text immediately shifts back to its initial approach with the remark that "reading the true sūtra" consists simply of "awakening to the original mind" itself. It then goes on to dash any hope for the spiritual efficacy of reading or recitation: to use language to bring about realization is like saying "fire" to get warm or "breeze" to get cool, like trying to assuage one's hunger with the picture of a pastry or quench one's thirst with the word "water" (6; 413). Finally, the author moves his argument beyond the topic of language to a deeper religious issue: the problem here lies not merely in the futility of the particular practices of reading and recitation but in the more fundamental mistake of practicing the Buddhist dharma with the intention of attaining something (*ushotoku*). This is "the great stupidity" of the ordinary man (*bonpu*, *prthagjana*), deluded by his belief in birth and death; in the "wisdom of the Great Vehicle," one "practices all dharmas with no thought of attainment" (ibid.).

If the rather rambling rhetoric of this passage reflects the venerable Zen tradition of a rough-and-ready approach to argumentation, its content reminds us of the tradition's readiness to play rough with the religious aspirations of proximate soteriology. The *Zazen ron*'s final warning in section 6 against the fundamental Buddhist practice of merit-making recalls the legendary opening statement of Zen in China, in which the First Patriarch, Bodhidharma, dismisses the pious deeds of the Liang Emperor Wu with the remark, "No merit whatsoever."¹³ As in our passage, the patriarch goes on to contrast mundane notions of merit with "pure wisdom, perfect and profound." This wisdom, of course, is the *Zazen ron*'s perfect "wisdom of the Great Vehicle" (*daijō hannya*)—the knowledge that, as Bodhidharma says, "the substance is naturally empty and still." In the light of such wisdom, which sees through the causal structure of "birth and death," there is no confinement by that structure and hence no "thought of attaining" (*ushotoku no kokoro*) the spiritual fruits of karma within it. As Bodhidharma tells the emperor, "the primary sense of the holy truth" (*sheng ti ti-i i*) taught by the Buddha is that there is nothing particularly holy. Here again, if we are

absolved of the obligation to perform the religious deeds that would make us holy, we are also deprived of the faith that such deeds will serve us in the short run or lead us in the long run to the goal. In this sense, at least, we can appreciate the interlocutor's lament that Zen is difficult to believe in and difficult to practice.

This difficulty of Zen is only intensified by some of the *Zazen ron*'s positive claims for the superiority of its religion—claims that seek to identify it with the highest levels of the spiritual path. For these purposes the apologetic must reaffirm the very notion of religious progress that we have just seen it dismiss, and in several places the *Zazen ron* does explicitly acknowledge the validity of such a notion. In section 7, for example, the author admits that “one who seeks buddhahood through accumulating the merits and good roots (*zenkon kudoku*) [of spiritual karma] may become a buddha after three great incalculable aeons,” whereas one who “sees his nature” through Zen recognizes that he is a buddha from the beginning (7; 414). Here we seem to have two alternative forms of religion—one slow, the other quick—from which we are free to choose.

Elsewhere, however, the choice seems not so free. In section 14 we are told that “the three [ranks of the] wise and ten [stages of the] holy (*sangen jishō*) [i.e., the *laukika* ranks of the *bhadra* and *lokottara* stages of the ārya that together constitute the bodhisattva path] are established for the sake of those of dull faculties (*donkon*)”; Zen, in contrast, is intended for those of such acute faculties (*rikon*) that they reach enlightenment at the very outset of the bodhisattva path, “when they first produce the thought (*hosshin, cittotpāda*) [of seeking enlightenment]” (14; 416).

Here we can see quite clearly how the apologetic is caught between two conflicting desiderata: by invoking the standard Buddhist hermeneutical categories of more and less spiritually advanced audiences and identifying itself with the former, it asserts its superior religious status at the expense of its relevance to those who count themselves among the latter. For the less spiritually advanced, it would seem, the old path, long and difficult as it is, remains the only choice. Indeed, however much we may celebrate the ease and speed with which the spiritually acute come to Zen practice, if we measure this practice against the stages of the traditional path followed by the dull, it is almost out of reach. When asked whether the bodhisattvas of the Great Vehicle have achieved Zen practice, the author of the *Zazen ron* responds that, until they have completed the tenth and final stage of their path, bodhisattvas still have not reached it; they only achieve it at the last moment of their careers, in the state of “virtual enlightenment” (*tōgaku*) from which they pass directly into buddhahood (13; 415).

The reason the bodhisattvas do not achieve Zen practice until the end

of their careers is, we are told, that throughout their path they are still subject to the afflictions (*wakuchi no shō*).¹⁴ At first glance this may seem an odd way to explain the matter, since we have already been warned against making the Hīnayānist mistake of hating the afflictions and enjoined to understand them as empty and as enlightenment itself (13; 415, 418–419). This oddity is not peculiar to our text or to Zen: it is the sort of thing that comes easily to all Mahāyāna theologians, who can nimbly move back and forth across the distinction between ultimate and conventional levels of discourse. Though such moves are common throughout our text, at this point the author prefers a slightly different approach: to say that the bodhisattvas are subject to the afflictions, he explains, is simply to say that they have “aspirations to seek the dharma” (*guhō no nozomi*) and hence “do not accord with their original lot” (*honbun ni kanawa[zu]*) (13; 415).

In other words, the prime attitudinal failing that separates the religion of the traditional Buddhist path from Zen practice is its intentionality—the “thought of attainment” (*ushotoku no kokoro*) that is the key defect of merit-making. Zen practice begins where this failing stops, in the attitude that the *Zazen ron* calls “no-mind” (*mushin*). Despite its seeming remoteness at the very end of the bodhisattva path, it is precisely this attitude of no-mind that the *Zazen ron* uses to span the gulf between real and ideal and bring the experience of awakening across from the other shore.

No-Mind

When asked how one is to use the mind (*yōjin*) in Zen spiritual practice, the author of the *Zazen ron* replies that the true use of the mind is no-mind and no-thought (*munen*) (5; 412–413). Since all things appear only provisionally, we should not consider (*shiryō*) them (11; 415); if we do not consider them—if we have “the ultimate [practice of] no-mind”—we put a stop to all false views and discriminations of thinking (*akuchi akuken shiryō funbetsu*) (9; 414). This way of no-thought, or no-mind, “does not consider any good or evil” (9; 414); hence it has no aspirations for merit (*kudoku*) (8; 414) or even for the buddhadharma itself (13; 415). It simply “sees all things without seeing them in the mind and hears all things without hearing them in the mind” (24; 421). This is by no means the Hīnayāna practice of stilling the mind (12; 415): indeed, it is beyond the stages of the bodhisattva path (13; 415) and eliminates the three aeons of the path (15; 416). One who “does not consider any good or evil” directly cuts off “the root source of saṃsāra”; he is “a buddha without beginning or end and is [practicing] Zen whether walking, standing, sitting or reclining” (19; 417).

The teaching of no-mind, or no-thought, is one of the most famous

features of early Zen literature, especially that espousing the sudden doctrine. Like many of the central terms of this doctrine, "no-mind" and "no-thought" function at several levels, from concrete religious prescription to abstract metaphysical description. At the former level, they are associated with the common warnings about the evils of conceptual thought and with the standard injunctions to avoid "giving rise to thoughts" in regard to sense objects—injunctions no doubt reflected in the *Zazen ron*'s suggestive claim that, in no-mind, one "sees all things without seeing them in the mind." As I have pointed out elsewhere, this general psychological advice is sometimes linked in the early literature to a particular contemplative exercise in which one suspends consideration of good and evil and passively observes the arising and ceasing of one's thoughts until one has recovered, or uncovered, one's original mind. By the Kamakura, this exercise had been formalized as "the essential art of zazen" in the meditation instructions of the *Ch'an-yüan ch'ing-kuei* (Pure Rules of the Zen Gardens), the Sung Zen monastic code introduced to Japan around the turn of the thirteenth century.¹⁵

In this practical sense, then, "no-mind" could refer to a spiritual expedient for the psychological uncovering, and epistemological discovering, of the buddha-nature; as the *Ch'an-yüan ch'ing-kuei* says, once the waves of the mind are stilled, the pearl of enlightenment resting beneath will appear.¹⁶ Even as it used the term in this sense, however, the tradition was acutely aware that the soteriological model resting beneath that use could threaten some of the claims of the sudden doctrine. Hence, at the upper end of the Zen theological spectrum, no-mind was simultaneously held to represent a metaphysical disclosing of the nature of the buddha-nature and a theoretical foreclosing of the expedience of spiritual expedients. At this higher level, the point of no-mind was not that one should avoid giving rise to thoughts (*pu ch'i nien*) but that thoughts do not arise (*nien pu ch'i*). Everything that appears to the mind, as the *Zazen ron* says, does so only "provisionally" (*kari ni*) (11; 415); the mind itself—the inherent buddha-nature—is "intrinsically without arising and ceasing." We arise and cease in saṃsāra only to the extent that we believe our thoughts to be our original mind (17; 417). In this sense of no-mind, the only authentic Zen practice was the abandonment of such belief through the sudden recognition of the original mind.

Between the psychological and metaphysical senses of no-mind lay what we may loosely describe as an ethical sense of the term, which I am calling the "attitude" of no-mind—namely, the attitude of nonintentionality expressed in the early literature by the notions that Zen practice was "without action" (*wu-wei*), "without artifice" (*wu-tso*), and so on. Since the religious goal of buddhahood was inherent and not something to be achieved, the key to religious practice was, as the *Zazen ron* emphasizes, to give up merit-making and abandon aspirations for the

dharma; since our distance from the goal is measured only by the persistence of our attempts to achieve it, one who abandons such attempts—one who, in the famous words of the Sixth Patriarch, “does not consider any good or evil”—immediately closes that distance. He is, as the *Zazen ron* says, “a buddha without beginning or end, [practicing] Zen whether walking, standing, sitting or reclining” (19; 417). To put the point a little differently, in the attitude of no-mind, Zen practice is its own reward—the direct, spontaneous expression of buddhahood in daily life.

As models for the religious life, these various traditional uses of no-mind are clearly in tension with one another: (1) the psychological use seems to imply a contemplative life aimed at cultivating the *zazen* exercise for control of the mind; (2) the metaphysical sense of no-mind tends to undermine such a religious style and, at least in theory, reduce spiritual practice to the single transformative experience of sudden awakening to the buddha-mind; and (3) the ethical use appears to dismiss the quest for such an experience and locate the goal of spiritual practice in the ongoing expression of the mind in action. From the broader perspective of intellectual history, the tension among these uses of no-mind may be viewed as a sudden-style analogue to such venerable Buddhist polarities as *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, *darśana* and *bhāvanā*, and to such enduring Chinese ethical dichotomies as knowledge and action, recovery and cultivation, and the like. But rather than pursue this broader perspective here, I want to ask how our text handles this tension in dealing with the troubled relationship between its twin themes of no-mind and sudden awakening.

Historically speaking, the Zen tradition was loath to abandon any of these three models of no-mind; hence the tension among them became a prime ideological factor in the development of variant interpretations of the tradition's sudden soteriology. By the thirteenth century, when the *Zazen ron* was written, these interpretations had already begun to crystallize in the two styles of teaching that would eventually dominate Japanese Zen: the so-called *kanna* (story viewing) Zen of the Rinzai school, based on the *kōan* teachings of the Sung figure Ta-hui (1089–1163); and the *mokushō* (silent illumination) Zen of the Sōtō, promulgated by Enni's famous Japanese contemporary, Dōgen (1200–1253). Ta-hui strongly rejected the notion that *zazen* was an end in itself and emphasized the need for the experience of awakening, brought about through concentration on the sayings of the Zen patriarchs; Dōgen criticized the utilitarian interpretation of *zazen* as means to an end and held that its practice was itself the enlightened activity of the patriarchs.¹⁷

Accustomed as we are to associating the Rinzai tradition with *kanna* Zen, the attribution of the *Zazen ron* to the Rinzai master Enni might lead us to expect it to offer a spiritual program designed to generate

direct intuitive insight into the mind through kōan concentration. However, the *Zazen ron* makes no mention of the *kanna* technique and shows almost no awareness of the kōan stories so popular during the Sung, or of the considerable corpus of Zen transmission histories and recorded sayings already circulating in Japan. In fact, the *Zazen ron* seems blissfully ignorant of the contemporaneous disputes swirling around it over the interpretation of meditation and awakening. Yet to the extent that we can identify it with any position in these disputes, our text seems to fall closest to those that would emphasize the ethical attitude of no-mind.

Practice after Getting the Point

In his commentary to Dōgen's *Shōbō genzō* (Treasury of the Eye of the True Law), the Kamakura author Kyōgō criticizes Dōgen's rival Enni for teaching that zazen is a practice to be done only after one has "gotten the point" (*tokushi*), in contrast to Tao-lung, who is supposed to have made the opposite mistake.¹⁸ Enni's follower Ichien has a similar charge against certain unnamed disciples of his master who say that zazen before one has "seen one's nature" (*kenshō*) is worthless.¹⁹ Kyōgō, who probably felt some animosity toward Enni's more prosperous Rinzai movement, wanted to assert the superiority of Dōgen's Zen; Ichien, who has been called "a voice for pluralism," wanted to play down the distinction between Zen and Tendai meditation.²⁰ Whether or not their claims about Enni (or his followers) are historically accurate, we cannot say; but they do give us pause. Whether or not Enni actually wrote the *Zazen ron* I also cannot say; but I do see some interesting reflections of the claims in the text. Elsewhere I have written in passing that the remarks of Kyōgō and Ichien bear little relation to the *Zazen ron*, but I may have been wrong.²¹

The issue raised by these remarks can be put as follows: Is Zen meditation something to be done simply to gain a special insight, after which it is unnecessary? Or is it something else—something supposed to presuppose such insight, without which it is inauthentic? Clearly this issue is closely cognate to the dispute between *kanna* and *mokushō*. Though the *Zazen ron* does not enter into the dispute and, like many earlier Zen texts, can probably be read in either way, its treatment of no-mind seems to tip it heavily toward the latter style. Its penultimate dialogue is particularly interesting in this regard because it addresses the very issue raised by Kyōgō and Ichien. The question here is, "After one has seen his nature, must he still use the mind [to practice]?" The answer, bits of which I have already cited for its emphasis on awakening, seems at first glance to be "no" and hence to be an assertion of the merely utilitarian view of Zen practice:

All the teachings of the sūtras are like a finger pointing at the moon. . . .
 After one has awakened to the one mind, there is no use for any of them.
 All the words of the patriarchs are like a tile [taken up] to knock on a gate.
 . . . Once you have entered the gate, why pick up the tile? (23; 420)

Note, however, that the answer has sidestepped the question: the question had to do with the need for practice (*yōjin*) after awakening (*kenshō*); the answer concerns the role of the teachings in such practice. Before one has awakened, the text explains, "to the original meaning of the buddhas and patriarchs," one should study the Zen teaching of "seeing your nature and becoming a buddha"; after one has awakened, one will realize that "'seeing your nature' is nothing special (*kitoku*) and 'becoming a buddha' cannot be attained (*fukatoku*)" (ibid.).

The answer does emphasize the pivotal point of awakening, but it does not tell us on which side of that point we should put the cultivation of no-mind. I have no doubt that the author of the *Zazen ron* fully expected this cultivation to yield spiritual insights into Buddhism and therefore to serve as a means to an end; but this is not the prime justification he offers for it. On the contrary, we should remember that the key characteristic of no-mind is precisely its freedom from all aspiration for spiritual advancement: "Since [in the state of no-mind] we do not produce any views of cultivation, we do not aspire to become buddhas" (9; 414).

Where the text first takes up the notion of no-mind, it cites the *Diamond Sūtra's* (*Vajracchedikā*) famous teaching that buddhas are free from "marks" (*lakṣaṇa*) and says, "The buddha-mind is without marks and without attachments (*musō mujaku*). . . . Therefore, we should be without mind and without thought (*mushin munen*)" throughout all activities (5; 413).²² This, I think, is the prime justification: we should practice no-mind because it puts into practice what is distinctive about our buddhahood. No-mind is not merely our practice but the very nature of our "original mind" (22; 419); it is not merely our mind but "the original teacher" (*honshi*) of all the buddhas of the three worlds. It is "the cardinal buddha" (*daiichi no butsu*), the realization of which is called the supreme perfect enlightenment of the buddhas (24; 422). It is probably this enlightened practice of no-mind that the author has in mind when he claims that Zen is itself the buddha-mind (1; 411) and reiterates that Zen cultivation represents "the ultimate of the buddha-mind" (4; 412). In the latter section, the concrete implications of this way of understanding Zen practice are expressed in dramatic terms:

Even if you have not attained the way, when you sit in meditation for one period, you are a one-period buddha (*ichiji no butsu*); when you sit in meditation for one day, you are a one-day buddha; when you sit in meditation for one lifetime, you are a lifetime buddha. To have this kind of faith is to be one of great faculties, a great vessel of the dharma. (ibid.)

Sōtō exponents of the enlightened zazen of “just sitting” (*shikan taza*) would no doubt find little to quibble with here; advocates of *kanna* would surely smell the stench of silent illumination and ask what has happened to satori. The answer, I think, lies in the last line of this passage.

The fact that one can practice buddhahood without having “attained the way” (*tokudō*) reminds us that the *Zazen ron* has not abandoned the notion that its Zen practice leads somewhere, and that there is some difference between the practitioner who has attained the way and one who has not. Yet the soteriological thrust of our passage is not on this difference but on the simultaneity of practice and buddhahood; to focus on the difference and the spiritual attainments produced by the practice is to miss that thrust and put the horse before the cart. The cart here must go before the horse. The real awakening—the real turning point for the practitioner that frees him to put buddhahood into practice—must precede the practice, in some act of turning to it and taking it up. As soon as he turns to it and takes it up, he is a buddha, whether or not he has attained the way. If we call this turning point “getting the point,” then Kyōgō’s depiction of Enni’s zazen could be applied to the *Zazen ron*.

Belief and Liberation

The difference between a style of Zen that teaches meditation practice only before awakening and one that speaks of it only after awakening can be seen in part as a reflection of the difference between psychological and metaphysical approaches to the interpretation of enlightenment. But in practical terms—in terms of the religious experience of the practitioner—that difference may also point to a distinction between two senses of the famous Zen call for a sudden “awakening” to, or sudden “seeing” of, the original nature. The former (the kind of seeing that occurs within, and comes as a result of, meditation practice) suggests a direct, intuitive apprehension of the higher state of mind that is supposed to be our original nature; the latter (the kind of seeing that precedes, and becomes the basis for, the practice) looks more like an act of intellectual assent to the doctrine of such a nature, and of emotional and volitional commitment to the religious course that is said to follow from that doctrine. The epistemological difference here is something like that between “knowing” and “knowing that.” In soteriological terms, this difference can provide a distinction between the ultimate attainment of liberation through mystical identification with the buddha-mind and the more proximate goal of consolation in the certainty that there is such a mind.²³

Traditional systems of Buddhist soteriology, of course, included analogous distinctions in their schemas of the path—distinctions, for exam-

ple, between the initial "seeing" (*darśana*) of the truth, through which one eliminated the intellectual afflictions (usually counted as doubt and false views) and entered the transmundane path, and the final cessation of all cognitive and affective afflictions in complete enlightenment at the end of that path; or between the bodhisattva's preliminary knowledge of the metaphysical nature of all dharmas (*sarvajñatā*), which establishes him irreversibly on his religious course, and the full omniscience of buddhahood (*sarvākārājñatā*).²⁴

It was no doubt in recollection of such distinctions that the famous T'ang scholar Tsung-mi (780-841) was able to divide the Zen spiritual experience into a first, sudden "awakening of understanding" (*chieh-wu*) of the buddha-nature, which launched one into authentic Zen practice, and a final "awakening of realization" (*cheng-wu*) of buddhahood, which was the culmination of such practice.²⁵ Tsung-mi's doctrine was directed against those within the Zen movement who wanted to draw antinomian conclusions from the sudden teaching; it sought to rationalize the teaching in terms of the path, to play down the soteriological significance of the initial understanding, and to emphasize the need to proceed to the final realization through a continued "gradual practice" (*chien-hsiu*) after the sudden awakening. In contrast, the message of the *Zazen ron*, directed as it is to those outside of Zen who seek alternatives to the hierarchies of the bodhisattva course, has little use for the notion of progressive stages in enlightenment but prefers to advertise the sufficiency of an initial awakening experience and to celebrate the freedom from spiritual need beyond.

The salvific power of the initial encounter with the buddha-mind teaching and the sense of liberation that follows from it are well expressed in sections 3 and 4 of the text. In the former, the questioner asks why we should abandon the spiritual merits of "the myriad practices and good works" of the traditional Buddhist path in favor of the sole dharma of "the one [buddha-]mind." The answer given is twofold: first, that this one practice fulfills all Buddhist practices; second, that, whatever practices we may do, in the end the only significant issue is "putting a stop to delusion and attaining the awakening" that is the necessary condition for buddhahood (3; 412). In the next section, the questioner pursues this second point. Surely Zen cannot guarantee such an awakening, "and, if it is not certain [that we will attain awakening], what good is there in cultivating [the buddha-mind teaching]?" The answer is that this teaching is itself "the way of inconceivable liberation" (*fushigi gedatsu no michi*). Hence, "if one but hears it, it forms the surpassing cause of bodhi (*bodai no shōin*); and, if one cultivates it, it is the ultimate of the buddha-mind (*busshin no shigoku*)." Simply to hear (and presumably to acknowledge) the good news of the buddha-mind is to be assured of the inconceivable liberation; simply to act on it is to be

liberated. To seek awakening beyond this is to miss the point, since "the buddha-mind is basically without delusion and awakening" (4; 412).

Once we are assured of liberation, there is nothing to do but be liberated; once we have put the issue of awakening behind us, there is only the waking life before us. In other words, once we shift the turning point of the *Zazen ron*'s soteriology from the adept's achievement of mystical knowledge in meditation to the neophyte's experience of belief in the teaching, we also shift the religious role of its practice of no-mind from that of a concentration exercise designed to bring about the transcendental goal to that of a spiritual attitude or psychological habit that frees the believer from the demands of the path so that he may go about his business in the world. By allowing him to abandon all "considerations of good and evil," no-mind offers him an ongoing vehicle for liberation from nagging doubts about his spiritual state and the need to perfect it; by permitting him to "see all things without seeing them in the mind," it provides him with a moment-to-moment means for taking the world as it comes to him, in all its ambiguity. For no-mind, then, the karmic law of birth and death in saṃsāra holds no fear.

In the final, most poignant (and in some ways most religiously telling) passage of the *Zazen ron*, the questioner asks how the unenlightened man should use his mind (*yōjin*) to prepare himself for the end. The answer is that there is no end:

When there is no thought and no mind, there is no birth and no death.
 . . . When we do not think that there is birth and death, when we are without mind and without thought, this is the same as the great nirvāṇa.
 . . . If we only cultivate no-mind and do not forget it, whether walking, sitting, standing or reclining, there is no special way to use the mind at the last. When we truly rest on the path of no-mind, [we go] like blossoms and leaves that scatter before the wind, like frost and snow melting in the morning sun. (24; 420-421)

If we have clearly come quite far from our initial model of Zen as a utilitarian approach to mystical experience, we have also come much closer to the values of the implicit soteriology of Kamakura Buddhism. While the orthodox ideal remains the ancient Zen call to the direct seeing of the buddha-nature, the operative goal is now the hearing of that call itself; while the official means to the ideal continues to invoke the traditional Zen practice of no-mind, the meaning of the means now lies not in its end but in itself.

By this reading, the *Zazen ron* is not far from the Pure Land. As in the contemporaneous Pure Land soteriology, the liberated state of buddhahood has come down to this world as the liberating fact of a buddha—not, to be sure, an external buddha who has vowed to free us from this land to another, but a buddha nonetheless, whose presence within

promises to free us from our need to free ourselves. As in the Pure Land, this promise is activated by abandoning the old models of spiritual perfection in favor of faith in this buddha—not perhaps the *feducia* of the devotee's trust in that buddha's saving compassion, but at least the *fides* of the believer's assent to the saving fact. The promise is realized here, as in the Pure Land, through commitment to the ongoing expression of this faith in daily life—if not in the continuous celebration of the peerless power of this buddha's primal vow, then in the habitual reenactment of the markless wisdom of the inherent buddha-mind. The disagreement within Pure Land theology about whether such expression is to be found primarily in the inner life of piety or in the outward recitation of Amida's name has its analogue in the *Zazen ron*'s equivocation about whether its enactment of buddhahood is simply the internal habit of no-mind, “whether walking, standing, sitting or reclining,” or whether it requires (or perhaps also is) the external ritual act of *zazen*—one period of which, we may recall, makes “a one-period buddha.” Whichever is the case, in this style of Zen, as in the Pure Land, meditation is no longer an obstacle: one does not have to be good at it to be a buddha.

The Soteriology of Conversion

In the end, it will not do to overstate this “protestant” reading of the *Zazen ron*—a reading that represents, at most, a likely ideal type against which to test the more complex, more ambiguous mix of soteriological models found in this text. For example, the psychological distinction I have drawn between the mystical and intellectual experiences of the buddha-mind may not be easy to maintain in a teaching, like that of the *Zazen ron*, that tends to dismiss conceptual understanding as incapable of grasping religious truths; similarly, the soteriological distinction between ultimate and proximate stages in such experience cannot always be charted neatly in a text, like the *Zazen ron*, that wants to avoid the model of an articulated spiritual path. Nevertheless, as a heuristic device, the reading as a whole and some version of the distinctions on which it is based may help to make sense of the paradoxes of our text, to adjudicate the conflicting models of no-mind, and, more broadly, to take some of the mystery out of the sudden practice of Zen. At the very least, the notion of awakening as an act of faith points up the religious importance of that mystery and the extent to which it could—and in certain historical contexts probably did—serve as the main gateway (in the sense both of barrier and entrance) to Zen life.

The mystery of the sudden practice of Zen lies in its conflation of cause and effect. Whether the practice is reduced to the goal of awakening or whether the goal is embedded in the act of practice, the two must

occur simultaneously. Theologically speaking, such a conflation is supposed to represent the culmination of the path, the crowning vision of the buddha himself, who sees no distinction between himself and the beings below him on the path. Because Zen claims to be the buddha-mind school, based solely on this vision, it must keep itself above any such distinction by collapsing the path and its goal and by asserting a transcendental plane of religion beyond the causal laws governing human spiritual works. Hence the key soteriological issue of the sudden practice becomes how one ascends to this higher plane and gains access to such religion. By definition, this cannot be done by climbing to it on the path but only by leaping to it from the path.

In existential terms, then, the path functions for the Zen Buddhist, perhaps no less than for the Pure Land believer, not as a road to freedom but as a symbol of bondage—as the law that binds him to cause and effect and thus chains him to the worldly plane. The power of the symbol grows, and the chains of the law bind ever more tightly, precisely to the degree that the would-be Zen Buddhist is a believing Buddhist whose faith is rooted in traditional scripture and whose religious life is grounded in the common assumptions and established practices of the path. For him, the leap to the higher perspective of Zen means abandoning his old faith, and the call to the sudden practice of Zen is a summons to a second “going forth” (*shukke*)—not from family life, this time, but from the familiar confines of Buddhist life.

The distance between the old law of the path and the new dispensation of Zen varies with the particular style of Zen teaching. In more conservative, more catholic styles that seek accommodation with the tradition, it may be merely the gap between alternative readings of what is taken to be a common spiritual system; in more radical, more protestant versions, it can become a yawning chasm—in effect, the gulf between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* itself, and hence the very stuff of Zen soteriology. Most Zen teachings probably fall somewhere between these extremes, but wherever they fall, Zen’s distance from the path is most strongly felt and most explicitly expressed in those contexts in which the religion is addressing itself to the believing Buddhist and seeking to convert him to the faith. This was, of course, the context for many of the early Kamakura Zen teachings, as it had been for the T’ang originators of Zen.

By the late Heian and early Kamakura, when they first began to take Zen seriously as a religious alternative, Japanese Buddhists were quite familiar with the transcendental teaching of a supreme, sudden vehicle—a teaching they had long heard espoused by Kegon, Tendai, and Shingon scholars. What they lacked, and what seems to have most struck them about Zen (apart from the fact that it represented the preferred Buddhism of the Southern Sung elite), was (1) its claim to a reli-

gion based solely on the ultimate truth and perfect enlightenment of the buddha-mind itself, as transmitted outside scripture in the lineage of the patriarchs, and (2) its offer of a single, simple spiritual practice, beyond the techniques of the bodhisattva path, through which anyone could directly realize the buddha-mind and immediately accede to this lineage. Here was the ancient ideal of the final buddha-vehicle made flesh; and the sudden advent of men (not yet, so far as we know, women) claiming to be living buddhas and offering as much to everyman must have been a scandal to some learned doctors of the dharma.

Scandal or no, it certainly raised the question of just how these men understood their buddhahood and why they thought their practice immediately ensured it; dharma doctor or not, it raised both the eyebrows and the anxiety of those accustomed to looking at the final ideal from the safe distance of three incalculable aeons. Faced with such resistance, the early Zen apologists argued along two lines: one, as seen conspicuously in Dōgen's famous *kana hōgo* text, the *Bendō wa* (Talks on Pursuing the Way), that linked the Zen claims to the authority of the historical Buddha through the esoteric lineage of the patriarchs; the other, pursued by our *Zazen ron*, that grounded those claims in the ultimate import of the transhistorical buddha-mind. Though they differ in style, it is not surprising that both lines of argument end with a call for a leap of faith in the new dispensation, an abandonment of the old models of spiritual perfection, and a commitment to the life of buddhahood in the immediate world of everyday experience.

In one sense, the emphasis on these three elements—faith, and the abandonment and commitment that flow from it—can be seen as a reflex of the particular purposes of the apologetic genre itself: just as the goal of the genre was to turn the faith of its reader from the old religion and establish him in the new, so the goal of the new religion was to be found precisely in this turning. In this sense, the model of sudden awakening that I have proposed here might be styled a “soteriology of conversion,” of a sort we could look for in Zen (and perhaps elsewhere) especially in those contexts of religious reformation where the new is pitted against the old. The original Mahāyāna soteriology itself arose in such a context, and there is another sense (not without its ironies) in which these same three elements in the new religion of Zen can be seen as a recapitulation or revalidation of the old model of the bodhisattva path, at least as it may have functioned at the implicit level.

In the religious structure of the *Zazen ron*'s call to a higher faith that abandons the old ideal in favor of renewed commitment to everyday experience, there seems to be what we might call a “poor man's parallel” to the bodhisattva's vow to relinquish the old goal of early nirvāṇa for the sake of indefinite service in saṃsāra. If the explicit consequences of this vow were supposed to demand three great incalculable aeons of

heroic ascesis leading to buddhahood, the implicit result was the indefinite postponement of the demand for final transcendence and the rejustification of participation in the more proximate affairs of worldly life. At this implicit level, the *Zazen ron*'s critique of the bodhisattva path, despite (or precisely because of) its assertion of the radical immediacy of buddhahood, may amount to much the same result: whether the end of the path is too far away to see or too close at hand to miss, the way is open all the way to the horizon, and the wayfarer is free to linger along it where he will.

Notes

1. The tighter definition, in other words, would recognize soteriology only in the "ultimate" ends of those forms of religion that have some notion of "salvation" from the world; the looser definition would include as well the ultimate ends of forms that do not seek such salvation.

2. This was the soteriological dark side of the famous doctrine of the "one vehicle" taught in the popular *Lotus Sūtra* (*Saddharmapundarika*): if the doctrine proclaimed that everyone was really destined for the ultimate goal of buddhahood, it also revealed that no one really entered nirvāṇa except through buddhahood.

3. The former development, seen especially in the theology of the influential Tendai school, is now often referred to as the *hongaku*, or "original enlightenment," movement; the latter is, of course, the famous *mappō*, or "final dharma," doctrine that is widely (if perhaps somewhat too easily) used to explain the religious sensibilities of late Heian culture.

4. The text appears at *Zenmon hōgo shū* 2 (Tokyo: Kōyūkan, 1921), 411-422; I have published an English translation in *The Ten Directions* 9:1 (Spring/Summer 1988): 7-10.

5. For an English account of Enni's biography, see Martin Collcutt, *Five Mountains: The Rinzai Monastic Institution in Medieval Japan*, Harvard East Asian Monographs 85 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 41-48.

6. On these grounds Enni's version has been dated between 1246, the year of Tao-lung's arrival, and 1252, when Michiie died; see Etō Sokuo, *Shōbō genzō josetsu: Bendō wa gikai* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1959), 156. The text of Tao-lung's *Zazen ron* can be found at *Kokuyaku zengaku taisei* 23 (Tokyo: Nishōdō shoten, 1930), 1-8; it has been translated into English by Thomas Cleary in *The Original Face: An Anthology of Rinzai Zen* (New York: Grove Press, 1978), 19-41.

7. A Muromachi manuscript discovered in the Hōsa bunko; see Sanae Ken-sei, "Hōsa bunko bon Shōichi kana hōgo no kenkyū (1): Honbun hen," *Zen bunka kenkyū jo kiyō* 6 (May 1974): 265-294.

8. For the *Zenshū kōmoku*, see Kamata Shigeo and Tanaka Hisao, eds., *Kamakura kyū bukkyō, Nihon shisō taikēi* 15 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1971), 390-400.

9. Numerals in parentheses following citations refer to the pagination of the Japanese text in the *Zenmon hōgo shū* (see note 2 above); though the sections of the text are not numbered, for convenience of reference, I also supply the section number (always before the relevant page reference).

10. The quotation is from the *Cheng-tao ko* of the T'ang master Yung-chia; *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu* 30, T 51.460a.

11. The words of the patriarch here are from the *Hsin-hsin ming*, attributed to the Third Patriarch of Zen, Seng-ts'an; *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu* 30, T 51.457b.
12. So, for example, the five "supernatural knowledges" (*abhijñā; jñzū*), held to be accessible to advanced yogis, whether Buddhist or pagan.
13. The conversation occurs at *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu* 3, T 51.219a.
14. That is, the *kleśa-* and *jñeyāvaraṇa*; in the text's subsequent definition of the afflictions, only the former is mentioned.
15. See Kagamishima Genryū et al., *Yakuchū Zen'en shingi* (Tokyo: Sōtōshū shūmichō, 1972), 279-284; for my discussion of this text and the contemplative practice of no-mind, see Carl Bielefeldt, "Ch'ang-lu Tsung-tse's *Tso-ch'an i* and the 'Secret' of Zen Meditation," in Peter Gregory, ed., *Traditions of Meditation in Chinese Buddhism*, Studies in East Asian Buddhism 4 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 129-161.
16. Kagamishima et al., *Yakuchū Zen'en shingi*, p. 283.
17. I have discussed these two styles of Zen in Carl Bielefeldt, *Dōgen's Manuals of Zen Meditation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
18. *Shōbō genzō shō*, *Sōtō shū zensho*, *Shūgen* 1 (Tokyo: Kōmeisha, 1929), 348a.
19. Ichien, *Zōtan shū*, Yamada Shōzen and Miki Sumito, eds., *Chūsei no bungaku* 1:3 (Tokyo: Miyai shoten, 1973), 253, 255, 273.
20. Robert Morrell, *Sand and Pebbles (Shasekishū): The Tales of Mujū Ichien, A Voice for Pluralism in Kamakura Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985).
21. Bielefeldt, *Dōgen's Manuals*, p. 76n.
22. The *Diamond Sūtra* passage cited here occurs in Kumārajīva's translation at T 8.750b.
23. It *can* provide such a distinction, but of course I do not mean to imply here that what I am calling the intuitive experience is necessarily supposed to be the ultimate soteriological goal.
24. The analogy here is to the soteriological distinction between proximate and ultimate stages of spiritual awakening, not to the epistemological characteristics of the awakening. The traditional schemas generally assumed that even the more proximate experiences here were the product of, and occurred within, yogic practice; to this extent, we might find a closer analogy in the common distinction between wisdom derived from hearing (or reading, *śrūtamayī*) and that derived from meditation (*bhāvanāmayī*).
25. See, for example, Tsung-mi's *Yüan-chüeh ching ta-shu ch'ao*, ZZ 1/14/3/280b. Tsung-mi's model has been well studied by Peter Gregory, in "Sudden Enlightenment Followed by Gradual Practice," in idem, ed., *Sudden and Gradual Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, Studies in East Asian Buddhism 5 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 279-320.

Glossary

akuchi akuken shiryō funbetsu

愚知愚見思量分別

bodai no shōin 菩提の勝因

bonnō 煩惱

bonpu 凡夫

bukkyō 佛教

busshin no shigoku 佛心の至極

Ch'an-yüan ch'ing-kuei 禪苑清規

Cheng-tao ko 證道歌

cheng-wu 證悟

chieh-wu 解悟

chien-hsiu 漸修

Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu 景德傳燈錄

dai gedatsu no mon 大解脱の門

daiichi no butsu 第一の佛

daijō hannya 大乘般若

Dōgen 道元

dōjin 道心

donkon 鈍根
 ekō henshō 回光返照
 Enni (Ben'en) 圓爾辯圓
 fukatoku 不可得
 fushigi gedatsu no michi 不思議解脱の道
 guhō no nozomi 求法の望
 hōben 方便
 honbun 本分
 hongaku 本覺
 honji hosshin 本地法身
 honshi 本師
 honshin 本心
 hosshin 發心
 Hsin-hsin ming 信心銘
 Ichien 一圓
 ichiji no butsu 一時の佛
 jikishi ninshin 直指人心
 jiko honrai 自己本來
 jinzū 神通
 jishō 自性
 kanna 看話
 kari ni 假に
 kenshō jōbutsu 見性成佛
 kitoku 奇特
 kōmyō 光明
 konpon 根本
 Kōzen gokoku ron 興禪護國論
 kudoku 功德
 Kujō Michiie 九條道家
 Kyōgō 經豪
 Lan-ch'i Tao-lung (Rankei Dōryū)
 蘭溪道隆
 mappō 末法
 mokushō 默照
 mōnen 妄念
 munen 無念
 mushiki kai 無色界
 mushin 無心
 musō mujaku 無想無著
 myōyū 妙用

nien pu ch'i 念不起
 nyorai zen 如來禪
 pu ch'i nien 不起念
 rikon 利根
 ritsu 律
 rokujin mōsō 六塵妄想
 sandoku 三毒
 sangen jisshō 三賢十聖
 Seng-ts'an 僧璨
 sheng-ti ti-i 聖諦第一義
 shikan taza 只管打坐
 shiryō 思量
 Shōbō genzō shō 正法眼藏抄
 Shōichi kokushi kana hōgo
 聖一國師假名法語
 Shōjō 證定
 shōmyō 稱名
 shukke 出家
 sō 相
 Ta-hui 大慧
 tenma gedō 天魔外道
 Tōfukuji 東福寺
 tōgaku 等覺
 tokudō 得道
 tokushi 得指
 ushotoku 有所得
 wakuchi no shō 惑智の障
 Wu-chun Shih-fan 無準師範
 wu-tso 無作
 wu-wei 無爲
 Yōsai (Eisai) 榮西
 Yüan-chüeh ching ta-shu ch'ao
 圓覺經大疏鈔
 Yung-chia 永嘉
 zazen no shūmon 坐禪の宗門
 Zazen ron 坐禪論
 zenkon kudoku 善根功德
 Zenshū kōmoku 禪宗綱目
 Zōtan shū 雜談集