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Keizan's Denkōroku

A TEXTUAL AND CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW

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THE *DENKŌROKU* (CONVEYING Illumination) is a short Zen text attributed to Keizan Jōkin (1264–1325; not 1268–1325). Its existence was completely unknown until 1857, when a Zen cleric named Busshū Sen'ei (1794–1864) published a two-fascicle woodblock edition. In the more than 150 years since its publication, the *Denkōroku* has attracted little attention. To date it has been read primarily by dedicated practitioners of Sōtō Zen, who value it because of its association with Keizan. He is important to them because the Japanese Sōtō School of Zen identifies Keizan as their Great Ancestor (*taiso*), the teacher who stands alongside their High Ancestor (*kōso*), Eihei Dōgen (1200–1253), as one of that school's two main patriarchs. Officially Keizan's *Denkōroku* ranks with Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* as the two fundamental texts (*konpon shūten*) upon which the Sōtō School bases its sectarian distinctiveness.[1]

The religious influence of these two texts, however, could hardly be more dissimilar. Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* exerts a pervasive influence over modern Sōtō discourse, especially descriptions of Sōtō orthopraxy. Even outside of Sōtō circles it is widely celebrated for its penetrating religious and philosophical insights. The *Denkōroku*, in contrast, remains largely ignored. There seems to be no place for it within modern Sōtō thought.[2] It is easy to imagine reasons why the *Denkōroku* has failed to attract much attention. I will mention a few of them. First, since more than four hundred years separate its initial appearance in print from its purported author, some Sōtō clerics have doubted whether it really is the work of Keizan. Second, it is written in an unconventional format, which mixes elements from disparate Zen genres without agreeing with

any of them. Third, it appeared in print too late to play any role in the great eighteenth-century revival of interest in Dōgen and his writings. It was never cited by influential Sōtō clerics, such as Menzan Zuihō (1683–1769), who relied on the writings of Dōgen to distinguish Sōtō norms from other forms of Zen practice (whether Chinese or Japanese).[3] As a result even today when people interpret Dōgen they almost never draw on the *Denkōroku*. Fourth, in comparison to other Zen literature the *Denkōroku*'s content and literary style can seem repetitive, if not flat and pedestrian. Unlike the *Shōbōgenzō*, it rarely soars with the kind of poetic imagery that resonates with readers outside the walls of monastic cloisters.

The *Denkōroku*, however, rewards closer examination. While it exerts less influence on modern Sōtō than its exalted official status might lead one to expect, its contents reveal much useful information regarding the literary culture of early Japanese Zen communities, the features of Japanese Zen literature, and the methods of Zen training that once flourished in medieval Japan. Limitations of space do not permit each of these topics to be addressed in depth, yet I hope a brief introduction to each one can highlight the scholarly value of the *Denkōroku* and dispel some of the confusion regarding its authorship, its unconventional format, and its literary style.

Textual History

The *Denkōroku* tells stories about the successive generations of Buddhist patriarchs. It begins with Sakyamuni Buddha and continues across twenty-eight generations of ancestors in South Asia, twenty-three generations in China, and two generations in Japan, concluding with Eihei Ejō (1198–1280), the second abbot of Eiheiji monastery. It presents these generations as the exclusive lineage (*tanden*) by which Zen teachers conveyed the brilliance of Sakyamuni Buddha to Japan. In the 1857 woodblock edition published by Busshū, the text is not divided into separate chapters or sections. No internal titles or special marks separate the stories. Nonetheless its textual format renders the beginning and end of each story perfectly clear. Each episode begins with a passage written in Chinese, which describes the next patriarch attaining awakening under the guidance of the previous patriarch. The Chinese passage is followed by a longer commentary, which is written mostly in Japanese with some Chinese portions. Finally, the commentary concludes with a verse written in Chinese.

In his preface to the woodblock edition, Busshū neither identifies the manuscript source on which he based his woodblock version nor mentions

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any emendations he made to the text. Yet it is clear that he must have corrected the text to agree with what he thought it should say. He rewrote many of the passages in Chinese. The passages tend to agree word for word with the editions of Chinese Buddhist texts published during the Tokugawa period (seventeenth to nineteenth century), which were available to Busshū—but not to Keizan. Upon close examination many passages in Chinese do not agree with the earlier Song-dynasty (tenth to thirteenth century) versions that would have been available to Keizan. For this reason almost as soon as the *Denkōroku* appeared in print some textual critics suspected it of being apocryphal, charging that it is a compilation by a later author to which Keizan's name was attached.

Other internal evidence, however, supports the purported link between the *Denkōroku* and Keizan. Editors of subsequent editions therefore attempted to correct Busshū's version to eliminate its textual anachronisms. Since they lacked access to any earlier manuscript versions, they could base their revision only on their own sense of whatever seemed most reasonable. Each new revised and corrected edition thus became less reliable than its predecessors. Noteworthy new versions appeared in 1885 (reprinted in 1985–87) with revisions by Ōuchi Seiran (1845–1918), in 1925 (reprinted in 1985) with revisions by Ishikawa Sodō (1842–1920), in 1934 (reprinted in 1937, 1942, 1956, 1967) with revisions by Kohō Chisan (1879–1967), and in 1940 (reprinted in 1944 and 1980) with revisions by Yokoseki Ryōin (1883–1973).[4] In 2005 the Sōtō sect published its own authorized revision of Ōuchi's 1885 version.

Each subsequent revision adopted and revised the changes introduced by the previous ones. For example, Ōuchi rewrote some Chinese passages in Japanese word order and used Chinese glyphs to replace phrases written in Japanese syllabary. Ishikawa converted all the Japanese syllabary from *katakana* to *hiragana* and indicated the Japanese pronunciations of Chinese glyphs.[5] Yokoseki introduced chapter divisions and subdivided each chapter into four sections: the kōan (*honsoku*), its circumstances (*kien*), examination (*teishō*), and verse summary (*juko*). This four-part subdivision has become standard, but revisions after Yokoseki usually use the label *nentei* for the examination.[6] For this reason the *Denkōroku* as it exists in print today represents the culmination of a modern editorial evolution.

In 1958 Tajima Hakudō discovered an early manuscript of the *Denkōroku* at the Kenkon'in (or Kenkōin, a Sōtō Zen temple in Aichi Prefecture). This manuscript in two fascicles was copied between 1430 and 1459 by Shikō Sōden (d. 1500), the third-generation abbot of Kenkon'in.[7] It preserves language and orthographic conventions that correspond to Keizan's own age. After Tajima's discovery, three other medieval (i.e., prior to 1650) manuscripts have come to

light. They are the Ryūmonji (Ishikawa Prefecture) manuscript in five fascicles copied in 1547 by Tessō Hōken; the Shōzanji (Ishikawa Prefecture) manuscript in two fascicles copied between 1599 and 1627 by Yūzan Senshuku; and the Chōenji (Aichi Prefecture) manuscript in five fascicles copied in 1637 by Kidō Sōe. The discovery of these early manuscripts enabled scholars to establish the early textual history of the *Denkōroku* and has silenced most questions as to its authenticity. The Kenkon'in manuscript clearly is a copy of an earlier text.[8] While that earlier text has yet to be found, its inferred existence demonstrates that some version of the *Denkōroku* probably existed during the lifetimes of Keizan's disciples. Therefore it preserves teachings from the fourteenth century.

Comparison of Busshū's 1857 version of the *Denkōroku* with the medieval manuscripts reveals many radical discrepancies. It appears that Busshū prepared the text for publication by replacing Japanese-language passages with quotations from Chinese texts, by rewriting ambiguous lines, by adding additional materials, and by deleting some passages and abbreviating others. In short, he created a new version of the *Denkōroku*.[9] For these reasons neither the 1857 edition nor its subsequent revisions (which serve as the basis for the available foreign-language translations) should be used uncritically as an introduction to the teachings of the Keizan Jōkin, who lived and taught in the early fourteenth century, although they can be used as a guide to how his teachings have been conveyed in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Textual Format

The fact that Busshū extensively edited the *Denkōroku* for publication suggests that he regarded the original language and format of the *Denkōroku* as deficient. To understand why this would be so, it is useful to contrast the *Denkōroku* with the genres of Zen literature familiar to Keizan and to Busshū. The language of the earliest manuscript (the Kenkon'in text) in fact presents many difficulties. Passages that appear to be quotations from Chinese texts sometimes contain sections where the word order has been inverted to reflect the influence of Japanese-language patterns. Moreover in numerous lines homonyms (or near homonyms) replace standard vocabulary in ways that render some passages almost meaningless. For example, in one place the term "three jewels" (*sanbō*) is written as "three types of karma" (*sangō*). Significantly the visual forms of the Chinese glyphs for these terms—and for the many other mistaken homonyms in the text—do not resemble one another. It seems unlikely that a copyist looking at a written original could have mistakenly

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written one glyph for the other. The use of inverted word order in Chinese passages and the numerous homonyms suggest that the text of the *Denkōroku* originated as a transcription (*kikigaki*). In other words, the text was not written or edited by Keizan himself. Rather it seems to have been compiled by one or more students who took notes while listening to Keizan's lectures.[10] Other transcriptions of Zen lectures survive in manuscripts at Sōtō temples, but they typically date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[11] The *Denkōroku* appears to be an early forerunner of a method of compiling texts that became common much later in the Japanese Zen tradition.

One might assume that its transcriptions of monastic lectures locates the *Denkōroku* within the genre of Zen literature known as recorded sayings (*goroku*). In agreement with this assumption, the Kenkon'in manuscript of the *Denkōroku* actually begins with an inner title (*naidai*) that identifies its contents as Keizan's recorded sayings compiled by his attendants.[12] But even if the *Denkōroku* literally consists of sayings recorded by attendants it certainly does not conform to the usual conventions of the *goroku* genre in Japanese Zen.

Within the Sōtō lineage to which Keizan belonged we can point to at least four other early examples of this genre. They are *Eihei Gen Zenji Goroku*, the record of Dōgen (1200–1253) at Kōshōji and Eiheiji monasteries; *Giun Oshō Goroku*, the record of Giun (1253–1333) at Hōkyōji and Eiheiji monasteries; *Keizan oshō goroku*, the record of Keizan at Yōkōji monastery; and *Tsūgenroku*, the record of Tsūgen Jakurei (1322–91) at Sōjiji, Yōkokuji, and Ryūsenji monasteries. The content and structure of all four of these texts are remarkably similar to one another but differ greatly from the *Denkōroku*. The four texts of recorded sayings are episodic, consisting of brief comments written in Chinese to commemorate ceremonies conducted according to the liturgical calendar of the various monasteries. Frequently these ceremonies mention the occasion and especially the names of lay patrons or sponsors. Moreover the contents of the recorded sayings are assembled into specific categories, such as addresses delivered in the dharma hall (*jōdō*) or in the abbot's quarters (*shōsan*), dharma epistles (*hōgo*), inauguration remarks (*kaidō*), poems written on portraits (*san*), funerary remarks (*shōbutsuji*), and Buddhist verse or *gatha* (*geju*). All of these categories agree with the content of other texts labeled as recorded sayings that were produced in other Zen temples, whether in Japan or in China.[13] The consistent format and structure of these *goroku* texts serves to demonstrate that Zen practice in Japan maintains a linguistic continuity with its namesake in China. It is for this reason that Japanese Zen teachers endeavored to produce recorded sayings written in literary Chinese.[14]

The ability to write literate Chinese declined among Sōtō Zen clergy during the medieval period. Hardly any *goroku* survive from Sōtō teachers active

during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a period when the number of Sōtō clergy increased dramatically and Sōtō temples were built in every corner of Japan.[15] Recorded sayings written in Chinese did not become common among Sōtō Zen teachers until after the widespread revival of Chinese learning in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Eventually they became so common that we can reasonably assume that almost every Zen teacher produced at least one. For example, Busshū—the Sōtō teacher who printed the woodblock edition of the *Denkōroku*—produced several *goroku* as Chinese-language records of the monastic events over which he presided at his temples.[16] When Busshū edited the *Denkōroku*, therefore, he must have been painfully aware of the poor impression that would be conveyed by the faulty Chinese passages in its manuscript versions.

Although the *Denkōroku* dates from the fourteenth century, when Zen teachers in Japan still wrote Chinese, it reflects a Japanese conversational style in which the word order of Chinese passages (subject-verb-object) would be adapted to Japanese speech patterns (subject-object-verb). Moreover it does not include any of the above-mentioned categories (*jōdō, shōsan, hōgo*, etc.) of monastic pronouncements. It fails to convey any sense of the routines and rhythms of Keizan's monastic life. In these respects it does not easily fit into the genre of recorded sayings.

The *Denkōroku* also resembles the Zen genre of genealogical hagiography known as flame (or lamp) records (*tōroku*).[17] It is impossible to determine with certainty which flame records the *Denkōroku* might have drawn upon for the stories of Zen patriarchs it recounts. The fact that the *Denkōroku* was preserved only as a transcription means that we cannot know when it corresponds precisely, word for word, with any original text that might have been read aloud during the lectures being transcribed. Nonetheless most of its hagiographical episodes could have come only from Chinese flame records. Moreover the *Denkōroku* cites three flame records by name: the *Jingde Era Transmission of the Flame* (Ch. *Jingde Chuandenglu*, Jp. *Keitoku Dentōroku*; ca. 1011), the *Jiatai Era Universal Flame Record* (Ch. *Jiatai Pudenglu*, Jp. *Katai Futōroku*; ca. 1204), and the *Combined Essentials of the Five Flames* (Ch. *Wudeng Huiyuan*, Jp. *Gotō Egen*; ca. 1252). During Keizan's day these texts would have been imported from China. Within a few decades after his death, all three were reprinted in Japan. They were reprinted repeatedly down to Busshū's time. Even today they constitute representative examples of Zen flame records.

In China the compilation, printing, and distribution of these flame records signified imperial recognition of Zen (Chan) as the official Buddhism of the realm. They were compiled by Buddhist clerics who enjoyed imperial patronage, who presented the texts to the throne, and who received imperial

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authorization to include them within the official editions of the Buddhist canon.[18] Each flame record presents the hagiographies of hundreds of Zen teachers, arranged in genealogical sequences that go back through India to the Buddha Sakyamuni. In this way they depict Zen as the only authentic Buddhism because it has been handed down in each generation by patriarchs (*soshi*) who constitute the Buddha's true religious family. This religious family functions conceptually like one of the aristocratic clans (*sō*) of ancient China, with several branch houses (*ke*). Each household collectively authenticates and transmits the same authentic religion. Buddhist clerics could attain recognition as a legitimate Zen teacher and receive appointment as abbot of a Zen monastery only if they were able to claim membership in one of these documented Zen lineages.[19]

Chinese flame records thus convey an overall impression of Buddhism as consisting of everlasting standards shared by all members of the Zen family regardless of geographical location or the passage of history. Both the *Jingde Era Transmission of the Flame* and the *Combined Essentials of the Five Flames* reinforce this sense of everlasting truth by identifying the origins of the Zen lineage not just with Sakyamuni Buddha alone but with the seven buddhas (*shichibutsu*) of the past. The seven buddhas are the last three buddhas of the previous eon (*shōgon kō*) as well as the first four buddhas of the present eon (*kengō*; Skt. *bhadra kalpa*), of which Sakyamuni is number four. Each eon is an infinitely long period of time during which one thousand buddhas appear, only one buddha appears at a time, and each new appearance is separated from the others by an incalculable number of years. In spite of the vast distance of time and space separating these seven buddhas, they all proclaim the same doctrines and practice. Moreover they transmit this truth from one buddha to the next via dharma transmission verses (*denpō ge*). Each generation of the Zen lineage, from the first buddha of the past down to Sakyamuni and continuing through all the patriarchs of India down to the thirty-third ancestor, Huineng (the sixth ancestor of China), chants a Buddhist verse (*ge*; Skt. *gatha*) that plays on the same doctrinal motifs as found in the verse chanted by the previous generation. Thereafter this model of seven buddhas and their dharma transmission verses became part of the standard image of Zen.[20] This emphasis on poetic expression of timeless truth served the religious agenda of the literary Zen (*monji zen*) that prevailed in elite monasteries during the Northern Song dynasty (960–1086).

The *Denkōroku* clearly aims to demonstrate that the Buddhism that Keizan inherited from his teacher is the same authentic Buddhism depicted by the flame records as having been handed down from generation to generation within the Buddha's true religious family. In this sense it shares the same

worldview and religious agenda as the flame records mentioned earlier. In many other respects it differs from them. First, the *Denkōroku* presents only one genealogical line, the Sōtō Zen lineage. As a result its progression is strictly diachronic. It lacks any synchronic sense of Zen as a collective activity. Second, it does not attempt to present the same kind of hagiographic details as in the flame records. Unlike them, it does not attempt to present representative teachings, sayings, poems, or essays by the well-known figures it discusses. It concentrates solely on each generation's moment of awakening. Third, it ignores the seven buddhas of the past. It omits the mythological dimension of the Zen patriarchate as a universal entity standing outside of time and space. By ignoring the seven buddhas and starting with Sakyamuni, the *Denkōroku* locates the Zen lineage clearly within our world, our history, and our circumstances. It focuses on how each generation must achieve for itself the knowledge of the previous one. Rather than the static, unchanging nature of Zen as a religious organization, the *Denkōroku* emphasizes the inner journey by which one must encounter that truth. In this respect the *Denkōroku* differs in focus and purpose from traditional Chinese flame records. Fourth, instead of linking the generations together with dharma verses, the *Denkōroku* links them through kōan (pivotal events or words) that depict the crucial moment in each generation when the truth was fully authenticated (*shō*).

The word "kōan" has entered the English language. Nonetheless its connotations in Zen literature and its connotations in English are not necessarily the same. Here I adopt the "kōan as literary framework" definition proposed by T. Griffith Foulk. He stipulates that a kōan consists of "any text that combines, at a minimum, the following two formal features: (1) a narrative that has been excerpted from the biography or discourse record of a Chan, Son, or Zen master, and (2) some sort of commentary on that narrative." As Foulk notes, "to treat a particular passage from the patriarchal records as a kōan is precisely to single it out and problematize it as something profound and difficult to penetrate."[21] This is exactly what the *Denkōroku* does. It singles out a specific episode from the records of each generation of the Sōtō Zen lineage and comments on that episode as a demonstration of the process by which one attains insight into truth.

Since the *Denkōroku* consists of a series of lectures on patriarchal records, it also shares some characteristics with the Zen genre of kōan commentaries. The *Blue Cliff Collection* (Ch. *Biyanji*, Jp. *Hekiganshū*) stands out as the most widely studied example of this genre.[22] In modern times its popularity has declined among Sōtō clerics, but the situation once was just the opposite. It was especially popular among Sōtō circles. In medieval and early modern Japan it was reprinted repeatedly at Zen temples, including temples affiliated with

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the Sōtō order. Sōjiji, the monastery founded by Keizan and the headquarters of the largest network of Sōtō temples, published the *Blue Cliff Collection* in the 1490s.[23] Sōtō clerics such as Nan'ei Kenshū (1387–1459) and Daikū Genko (1428–1505) composed some of its earliest extant Japanese commentaries. For Japanese Zen audiences, even Sōtō audiences, the complexity of the *Blue Cliff Collection* would highlight the relative simplicity of the *Denkōroku*.

The skeleton of the *Blue Cliff Collection* consists of one hundred brief passages (kōan) from patriarchal records. Xuedou Chongxian (Jp. Setchō Jūken; 980–1052) selected this set of kōan and then wrote an accompanying verse in praise of each one. His collection of one-hundred kōan with verses was published in 1038. About seventy years later Yuanwu Keqin (Jp. Engo Kokugon; 1063–1135) lectured on Xuedou's compilation, and the *Blue Cliff Collection* purports to convey the content of his lectures. The resulting text introduces each kōan with Yuanwu's introductory instructions (labeled *jishu* or *suiji*). Next there appears the kōan originally selected by Xuedou. Each line of this kōan is accompanied by appended comments (labeled *chūkyaku* or *jakugo*) by Yuanwu. These appended comments clarify, criticize, and sometimes offer alternatives to the individual lines of dialogue in the kōan. Next the text presents Yuanwu's critical evaluation (*hyōshō*) of the kōan as a whole. Here Yuanwu discusses not just the text of the kōan but also its larger context and significance. Xuedou's verse appears next. Each line of the verse is interrupted by Yuanwu's appended comments. Finally, the text presents Yuanwu's critical evaluation of Xuedou's verse. While the appended comments tend to praise or criticize Xuedou's choice of words, the critical evaluation addresses the overall relationship between the verse and the kōan it accompanies.

These various layers of text combine to produce a whole greater than the sum of its parts. The *Blue Cliff Collection* gains its power through a complex interplay between its layers: the kōan and Yuanwu's appended comments, the kōan and Xuedou's verse, Xuedou's verse and Yuanwu's appended comments, as well as all of the above within the larger context of Yuanwu's introductory instructions and his two sets of critical evaluations. The intertextual impact provides readers with a multifaceted overview of the famous Zen personalities who appear in the kōan and the religious issues and concerns encapsulated by their stories. It also serves as an excellent textbook for learning the specialized vocabulary and discursive techniques characteristic of Zen language.

Keizan's lifetime (1264–1325) overlaps with a period when several other Zen (Chan) clerics in China compiled similar kōan commentaries. In 1224 Wansong Xingxiu (Jp. Banshō Gyōshū, 1166–1246) published the *Record of Serenity* (Ch. *Congronglu*, Jp. *Shōyōroku*), his appended comments and critical evaluations on one hundred kōan with accompanying verses by Hongzhi

Zhengjue (Jp. Wanshi Shōgaku, 1091–1157). In 1285 the *Empty Valley Collection* (Ch. *Kongguji*, Jp. *Kūkokushū*) was published. It is a collection of one hundred kōan with accompanying verses by Touzi Yiqing (Jp. Tōsu Gisei, 1032–83), with appended comments by Danxia Zichun (1064–1117) and critical evaluations by Linquan Conglun (Jp. Rinsen Jūrin, 1223–81). Ten years later, in 1295, the *Vacant Hall Collection* (Ch. *Xutangji*, Jp. *Kidōshū*) was printed. It is a collection of one hundred kōan with accompanying verses by Danxia Zichun with appended comments and critical evaluations by Linquan Conglun.

All the authors (Wansong, Hongzhi, Touzi, Danxia, and Linquan) represented by these subsequent kōan commentaries were members of the Sōtō (Caodong) lineage. It might seem therefore that if Keizan wanted to compile a kōan commentary he naturally would have joined the ranks of other Sōtō teachers who emulated the format of the *Blue Cliff Collection*. The historical record, however, does not support this assumption. The *Blue Cliff Collection* probably did not circulate in Japan until after 1300, when it was first reprinted in China.[24] That is the same year that Keizan delivered the lectures that formed the bases for the *Denkōroku*. The other kōan commentaries were reprinted in China as early as 1342, but that is long after Keizan's death.[25] Even then they probably did not circulate in Japan until the 1580s at the earliest. Moreover the *Denkōroku* contains no textual parallels that suggest the direct influence of any of these texts. The Sōtō patriarchs Yunyan Tancheng (Jp. Ungan Donjō, 782–841) and his disciple Dongshan Liangjie (Jp. Tōzan Ryōkai, 807–69), for example, appear prominently in both the *Blue Cliff Collection* (kōan nos. 43, 72, 89) and the *Record of Serenity* (nos. 21, 49, 89, 94). But the *Denkōroku* presents their attainments without mentioning even one of these kōan. For these reasons we cannot assume that Keizan drew upon the *Blue Cliff Collection* or its brethren.

The *Denkōroku* certainly makes no attempt to emulate the literary features or structure of the *Blue Cliff Record*. It does not provide introductory instructions for each episode. It does not offer line-by-line comments on each kōan. It does not suggest alternative answers or dialogue. Also the individual lectures regarding each kōan do not attempt a critical evaluation along the lines of the other kōan commentaries mentioned above. In those works the critical evaluation passes judgment on the quality of the repartee as a whole and on the religious implications behind each choice of words. This feature enables the kōan commentaries to function as textbooks of Zen rhetoric. The lectures of the *Denkōroku*, in contrast, do not display any fascination or curiosity with language, vocabulary, or rhetoric. Occasionally they might define terms, quote lines of verse, or introduce analogous dialogues. Even in these instances, however, the *Denkōroku* conveys very little sense of linguistic play or lyrical

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expressiveness. Its lectures seem to address rather different sets of concerns (regarding which, see below).

Rather than looking to the *Blue Cliff Collection* and similar texts as possible model for the *Denkōroku*, it probably makes more sense to compare it to the underlying text that gave birth to the *Blue Cliff Collection*. That text is the collection of one hundred kōan with accompanying verses by Xuedou. After Xuedou published his collection of kōan with verses in 1038, other Chinese Zen teachers emulated his example. Within a hundred years it became common for the published recorded sayings of Chinese Zen teachers to include a collection of kōan with accompanying verses. In Japan Dōgen's recorded sayings similarly include one section (in volume 9) that consists of ninety kōan with accompanying verses. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, long after Japanese Sōtō Zen teachers ceased to compile recorded sayings in Chinese, they nonetheless continued to compose Chinese verse, especially Chinese verses that comment on individual kōan and on kōan that they compiled into collections. Frequently they composed alternative verses (*daigo*) for existing kōan collections. Indeed so many of these collections of verses for kōan survive that the historian Andō Yoshinori identifies the production of this genre of literature as one of the distinctive features of medieval Sōtō Zen. Andō suggests that the production and circulation of the *Denkōroku* presaged this development.[26]

The textual format of the *Denkōroku*, though, once again belies this suggestion. No other medieval Sōtō kōan collection follows a genealogical sequence. This emphasis on genealogy connects the *Denkōroku* more closely to flame records. Moreover each of the main kōan episodes in the *Denkōroku* are accompanied by a somewhat lengthy commentary in Japanese. The verses in Chinese that conclude each episode frequently reflect the contents of the Japanese commentary as much as they do the language of the Chinese kōan. For this reason one can interpret the meaning of the verses fairly easily. In the *Denkōroku* the appended verses generally are very short, with only two lines of seven glyphs per line (*shichigon niku*; in forty-six cases). Only a very few episodes have verses of four lines.[27] These verses amplify the main themes of the kōan under consideration and place them in a larger context by alluding to other passages in Chinese texts where related issues appear. But the verses are so terse that they would become enigmatic without the preceding prose commentary to identify main themes.

Other collections of Chinese verse comments on kōan produced by Sōtō Zen teachers in medieval Japan generally lack any prose commentary. The significance of their verses cannot be easily determined. The example of the *Denkōroku* serves to demonstrate how these kinds of terse and seemingly

enigmatic Chinese verses could have conveyed meaning when provided with the proper context. Although the *Denkōroku* does not endeavor to provide the kind of thick linguistic commentary found in texts like the *Blue Cliff Collection*, its lectures nonetheless provide a discursive framework accessible to modern audiences, within which one can more easily appreciate the Chinese verses composed by Japanese Zen teachers to convey Zen teachings.

Its Japanese-language commentaries on each kōan distinguish the *Denkōroku* from the other genres of Zen literature discussed earlier. Unlike the typical recorded sayings, they do not provide a Chinese-language record of the lectures presented at monastic ceremonies conducted according to the liturgical calendar. Unlike the typical flame history, they do not present full-fledged hagiographies of the Zen patriarchs. Unlike a typical kōan commentary, they do not evaluate the language of each kōan. The Japanese-language sections of the *Denkōroku* do not ignore the Chinese models discussed earlier, but they do not try to imitate them either. Rather they combine features from each of these genres. While modern readers familiar with the standard genres might find their juxtaposition in the *Denkōroku* somewhat dissonant, the combination probably reflects the needs of the nascent Sōtō Zen community, which existed in relative isolation in rural Japan where knowledge of Chinese Zen would have been limited. It allows the text to introduce readers to a wide variety of literary tropes from Chinese Zen literature, to explain how those literary tropes relate to actual practices, and to address broader issues. Of these issues the most important ones were its religious identity as Sōtō and the significance of that imported Sōtō lineage for a new audience in faraway Japan.

Content and Style

The genealogical structure of the *Denkōroku* obviously focuses on the unique identity of the Sōtō lineage. As mentioned earlier, it tells stories about the successive generations of Sōtō patriarchs who conveyed the true teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha to Japan. Each story begins with a kōan in Chinese that links a new patriarch to the previous one, and through him to all the previous generations. The Japanese commentary presents the significance of the kōan for an audience far removed in time and space from actors depicted in the kōan.

Ever since the publication of the edition edited by Yokoseki,[28] it has become commonplace to divide the commentary into two sections: circumstances and examination. When I read the *Denkōroku* as preserved in the earliest manuscripts, I detect a more complex sequence. First, the commentary presents the briefest possible biographic summary of the new patriarch's background. For

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an audience in Japan, where Zen lore was relatively unknown, this biographical information must have been very welcome. Nonetheless overall the *Denkōroku* makes little effort to present the patriarchs as identifiable individuals with unique lives in their respective homeland. In the few cases where the commentary presents more than a bare-bones account, the background information primarily concerns the spiritual cultivation and virtuous qualities that prepared new patriarchs for their encounters with the previous patriarchs. The patriarchs seem to function mainly as generic role models. Each one serves to illustrate how one should approach Zen training and overcome spiritual obstacles.

The commentary typically discusses the kōan from at least three perspectives. It recounts the circumstances under which the patriarchs met and the sequence of events preceding the exchange that constitutes the kōan proper. Next it presents a conventional explanation of the contents of the kōan. This explanation frequently includes distinctive discussions of Buddhist doctrines, such as karma, or ritual activities, such as ordination. Sometimes it summarizes the ways that other Buddhists or Zen teachers might address specific aspects of the kōan. These passages in the commentary provide valuable information regarding the reception of Buddhist teachings in fourteenth-century rural Japan. Finally, the commentary will discuss the kōan again in terms of how the present audience should apply themselves to the kōan. In commentary after commentary the *Denkōroku* repeatedly admonishes its audience that the kōan refer not to other people, not to other, far-away places, not to another time long ago. Instead each kōan always refers to the members of the present audience, right here and now. Or rather the *Denkōroku* repeatedly reminds Zen students that they must transform each kōan into their own story, a story about themselves.

For example, this excerpt from the commentary on Sakyamuni's disciple Mahakasyapa takes this episode out of its historical Indian context and relocates it in contemporary Japan:

> Right now, today if you discern the Way, then Mahakasyapa will not be inside Cocksfoot Mountain [in India] but surely will appear here in Japan. Thus, even now you must keep Sakyamuni's flesh warm! Keep Mahakasyapa's smile fresh! Upon reaching such a field, you will become Mahakasyapa's successor and Mahakasyapa will inherit [the Zen lineage] from you.

> 只今日急辨道せハ迦葉非入鷄足正扶桑國ニ在出世スルヿヲ得ン故釋尊ノ肉親今猶アタヽカニ迦葉微笑又更ニ新ン恁マ田地ニ到得ハ汝等却迦葉ニ紹迦葉却汝等ニ受ン[29]

This passage contains a key term, "field" (*denchi*), which occupies a prominent place in the commentary on almost every kōan. "Field" literally refers to the physical land on which one stands and stakes out a position. Figuratively it denotes a state of affairs or frame of mind. Metaphorically it symbolizes the human heart (or subconscious), where one plants karmic seeds and reaps karmic results (fruits), just as farmers plant seeds and harvest crops in fields of land.[30] Almost every commentary includes at least one exhortation to reach the same field attained by each patriarch. The *Denkōroku* does not provide step-by-step instructions regarding how this feat is to be accomplished, but it does discuss psychological factors (senses, perception, layers of consciousness, etc.) with a frequency and level of detail not typical in other kōan commentaries. While other kōan commentaries draw our attention to the linguistic features of Zen discourse, the *Denkōroku* describes each kōan as a psychological journey to a field where one encounters the Buddha, the patriarchs, and oneself.

The psychological journey depicted in the *Denkōroku* constitutes one of its most neglected and yet most intriguing features. It presents an approach to Zen kōan that seems rather different from the models that dominate modern scholarship. Most descriptions of kōan practice focus on the teachings of Dahui Zonggao (Jp. Daie Sōkō; 1089–1163)—especially his technique of observing the phrase (Ch. *kanhua*, Jp. *kanna*, Kr. *kanhwa*) in which one focuses on a single keyword (Ch. *huatou*, Jp. *kanna*, Kr. *hwadu*) to raise doubt—and their subsequent elaboration in the Japanese methods of Kōan Zen attributed to Hakuin Ekaku (1686–1769) and in Korean methods of Kanhwa Son (Ch. Kanhua Chan, Jp. Kanna Zen). The *Denkōroku* similarly emphasizes the importance of thoroughly mastering kōan, but in terms unrelated to Dahui. For example, "keywords" and "doubt" play no role. I wonder if the *Denkōroku* actually describes a different psychological approach to kōan study. Any attempt to address this question, though, must wait for a more careful study of the *Denkōroku* and related texts.

The repetitive format of the commentaries renders them somewhat predictable. Each kōan receives the same style of treatment in the same sequence of approaches. Each kōan concludes with the same kinds of exhortations to penetrate its spiritual core. This pedantic tone limits the appeal of the commentaries to a narrow readership. Yet this same pedagogical agenda provides the *Denkōroku* with a resolute purposefulness. Taken one at a time, each episode can be quite engaging. They not only introduce the Sōtō religious identity to a new audience but collapse the distance of time and space separating that audience from the Sōtō patriarchs of India and China. The *Denkōroku* explicitly rejects the narrative of Buddhist decline (*mappō*), according to which the

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spiritual abilities of people living today cannot measure up to those of earlier Buddhist patriarchs. It insists that people today confront the same spiritual issues faced by those patriarchs and can use the exact same Buddhist practices as they did to resolve them. Most significantly for devotees of Sōtō Zen, it provides that audience with an especially suggestive psychological guide to those practices.

Conclusion

In the eyes of many critics today, the *Denkōroku* presents an approach to Zen that seems out of step with the ethos of modern Sōtō Zen. It lacks the linguistic profundity of Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* and it does not advocate "just sitting" (*shikan taza*), which nowadays is regarded as the sine qua non of Dōgen's Zen.[31] It does not fit easily into any of the standard genres of Zen literature. When viewed within its own historical context, however, the very qualities that render the *Denkōroku* anomalistic also enhance its significance. It conveys an account of Zen from a time before the Zen traditions of Japan solidified into their present configuration. It contains invaluable information regarding a host of significant topics: the reception of Dōgen's writings and teachings during the first several generations following his passing, the earliest biographies of Dōgen and his disciple Ejō, as well as detailed descriptions of Buddhist doctrines, practices, and folklore. It is an important early source for investigating complex issues in the history of Japanese Zen, such as sectarian sensibilities, concepts of awakening and spiritual transformation, the reception of Chinese kōan language and practice, Buddhist notions of history, as well as how practitioners of Zen saw themselves and viewed other Buddhist traditions. Before the *Denkōroku* can contribute to our understanding of any of these topics, though, first it must escape from the confines of the anachronistic standards of early modern Zen that have led scholars both within and outside of Sōtō circles to overlook it.

NOTES

1. Arita Eshū, "Sōjo," in Shūten Hensan Iinkai, ed., *Taiso Keizan Zenji Senjutsu Denkōroku* (Tokyo: Sōtōshū shūmuchō, 2005), 2–3. This essay supersedes William M. Bodiford, "The Denkōroku as Keizan's Recorded Sayings," *Zen no Shinri to Jissen* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 2005), 640–20. I thank Mr. Tetsuya Ueda of Shunjusha Publishing Company for permission to incorporate parts of that essay here.
2. Takeuchi Kōdō, "Denkōroku to shūshi: Denkōroku wa shūshi kara dono yō ni tokareta ka?," *Shūgaku Kenkyū* 50 (2008): 87–92. Some sense of the disparity in

the reception of these two texts can be discerned by contrasting the number of times they appear in standard bibliographic databases. The Indian and Buddhist Studies Treatise Database (INBUDS DB; accessed September 1, 2013, http://tripitaka.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp//INBUDS/search.php) maintained by the Japanese Association of Indian and Buddhist Studies, yields 764 results for *shōbōgenzō* but only seventy for *denkōroku*. Likewise the Sōtōshū Kankei Bunken Mokuroku Onrain Sakuin (accessed September 1, 2013, http://www.sotozen-net.or.jp/tmp/kensaku.htm), the Sōtō school's own database of popular and scholarly publications related to Zen, yields 2,032 results for *shōbōgenzō* but only 174 for *denkōroku*.

3. David E. Riggs, "Meditation for Laymen and Laywomen: The Buddha Samadhi (*Jijuyū Zanmai*) of Menzan Zuihō," in Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, eds., *Zen Classics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 247–74.
4. See Ishikawa Sodō, *Denkōroku Hakuji Ben: Daien Genchi Zenji Suiji*, ed. Arai Sekizen (1925; Yokohama: Daihonzan Sōjiji, 1985). For a complete list of the published editions of the *Denkōroku*, see Azuma Ryūshin, *Kenkon'in bon Denkōroku* (Tokyo: Rinjinsha, 1970), 138–142; Azuma Ryūshin, *Denkōroku: Gendaigoyaku* (Tokyo: Daizō shuppan, 1991), 58–61. He lists more than twenty editions, of which the 1934 version by Kohō Chisan is most widely read.
5. *Katakana* is the block form of Japanese phonetic glyphs that traditionally was used for formal or official texts, especially when accompanied by Chinese glyphs (*kanji*). *Hiragana* is the cursive form of Japanese phonetic glyphs that traditionally was used for informal texts but that in modern times has become the standard script.
6. The words *nentei* and *teishō* are synonyms. Both refer to the act of presenting a topic or raising an issue for examination. Frequently these words introduce a teacher's comments on a topic, a textual passage, or a kōan.
7. *Denkōroku*. 2 fasc. Copied by Shikō Sōden (d. 1500). Reprinted as *Denkōroku: Kenkon'in Shozōbon*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Sōtōshū shūhō eiinbon kankōkai, 1994).
8. Azuma Ryūshin, *Denkōroku: Gendaigoyaku*, 48.
9. Azuma Ryūshin, *Kenkon'in bon Denkōroku*, 132.
10. Azuma Ryūshin, *Denkōroku: Gendaigoyaku*, 24.
11. William M. Bodiford, *Sōtō Zen in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 157–62.
12. Azuma Ryūshin, *Kenkon'in bon Denkōroku*, 5.
13. Tamamura Takeji, "Zen no tenseki," in *Nihon Zenshūshi Ronshū* (1941; Tokyo: Shibunkaku, 1981), 3: 117–39.
14. William M. Bodiford, "The Rhetoric of Chinese Language in Japanese Zen," in Christoph Anderl, ed., *Zen Buddhist Rhetoric in China, Korea, and Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 285–314.
15. Andō Yoshinori, *Chūsei Zenshū Bunken no Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 2000), 33–46.

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16. Yokoseki Ryōin, *Ibun Taikyo Shutten Sokō, Denkōroku Shōkai* (1940; Tokyo: Sanbō shuppankai, 1982), 84–85.
17. In translating *tō* as "flame" I am following the lead of T. Griffith Foulk, "Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice in Sung Ch'an Buddhism," in Patricia B. Ebrey and Peter N. Gregory, eds., *Religion and Society in T'ang and Sung China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 200n20, who points out that the metaphor normally translated into English as "conveying a lamp" (*dentō*) can best symbolize the conveyance of wisdom (illumination) from one generation to the next only when it is conceived of as "the flame of one lamp [being] used to light another." To demonstrate that Zen texts refer to the flame (not the body) of the lamp, Foulk cites the following passage from the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (*Rokuso Tanjing*): "Good friends, how then are concentration (*jō*) and discernment (*e*) alike? They are like the flame (*tō*) and its light (*kō*). If there is a flame there is light; if there is no flame there is no light. The flame is the substance (*tai*) of light; the light is the function (*yū*) of the flame. Thus, although they have two names, their substance is not of two types. The practices of concentration and discernment are also like this" (T 48.338b). See Philip B. Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch: The Text of the Tun-huang Manuscript with Translation, Introduction and Notes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 137, sec. 15; Chinese text, 6.

    Foulk explains: "If (following Yampolsky) one reads 'lamp' for 'flame' here, the statement becomes patently false, and the entire metaphor loses its force, since a lamp may exist (unlit) without there being any light."
18. Foulk, "Myth, Ritual, and Monastic Practice in Sung Ch'an Buddhism," 154.
19. Morten Schlütter, *How Zen Became Zen: The Dispute over Enlightenment and the Formation of Chan Buddhism in Song-Dynasty China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 87.
20. The *Jingde Era Transmission of the Flame* reproduces the transmission verses found in the *Ancestral Hall Collection* (*Zutangji*; 20 fasc.) of 952. I cite the later text because after its publication in 1004 the *Jingde Era Transmission of the Flame* was included in the official versions of the Chinese Buddhist canon and consequently influenced all subsequent flame histories. The *Ancestral Hall Collection*, in contrast, circulated very little in China before becoming lost. It survived only in Korea, where it was published in 1245.
21. T. Griffith Foulk, "The Form and Function of Koan Literature: A Historical Overview," in Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, eds., *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 17, 27.
22. In modern Japan it is most commonly referred to as the *Blue Cliff Record* (*Biyanlu*; Jp. *Heikiganroku*).
23. Tajima Hakudō, "Noto Sōjiji 'Hekiganshū' no kenkyū," *Aichi Gakuin Daigaku Ronsō: Zengaku Kenkyū* 1 (1959): 1–22.

24. This conclusion is complicated by the existence of an early manuscript version of the *Blue Cliff Collection* owned by Daijōji monastery (Kanazawa City, Ishikawa Prefecture). This manuscript, titled *Yuanwu's Cracking the Barriers at the Blue Cliffs* (Ch. *Foguo Biyan Poguan Jijie,* Jp. *Bukka Hekigan Hakkan Gekisetsu*), is said to have been brought to Japan by Dōgen. It is popularly known as the "single night" (*ichiya*) text, since Dōgen supposedly copied it by hand in a single night. Because Daijōji is the monastery where Keizan presented the lectures that became the *Denkōroku*, one might well assume that he must have seen the single night manuscript owned by that temple. The Daijōji where Keizan lectured, however, was located in Kaga Prefecture. During the late sixteenth century it was destroyed by warfare. During the late seventeenth century (ca. 1690) Gesshū Sōko (1618–96) built a new Daijōji at its present location and became its twenty-sixth-generation abbot. The earlier history of the single night manuscript is undocumented. It played no role in the version of the *Blue Cliff Collection* printed in the 1490s at Sōjiji monastery (the other temple where Keizan taught) at a time when the original Daijōji still existed. Evidence for the possible use of this single night manuscript by Dōgen is ambiguous at best. Only four or five passages in Dōgen's writings seem to be derived from the *Blue Cliff Collection*. Of these, two are closer to the wording of the reprint edition of 1300, while two are closer to the wording of the single night manuscript. It is likely, therefore, that Dōgen saw another version of the *Blue Cliff Collection*, one that fits between the two extant versions. Or he could have seen another, as yet unidentified text that served as a source for the *Blue Cliff Collection*. See Kagamishima Genryū, *Dōgen Zenji to In'yō Kyōten-Goroku no Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Mokujisha, 1965), 162–80.
25. According to Shiina Kōyū, "Genban 'Shikeroku' to sono shiryō," *Komazawa Daigaku Bukkyō Gakubu Ronshū* 10 (1979): 227–56, the *Record of Serenity, Blue Cliff Collection, Empty Valley Collection*, and *Vacant Hall Collection* were reprinted as a set titled *Records of the Four Critical Evaluations* (Ch. *Sijia Pingchanglu*, Jp. *Shike Hyōshōroku*) in 1342. Japanese catalogues of Buddhist literature mistakenly identify this set as having originated with its reprint version, dated 1607. Because complete copies of this set are so rare, the cataloguers also fail to notice that it includes the *Blue Cliff Collection* as the second of the four critical evaluations.
26. Andō Yoshinori, *Chūsei Zenshū Bunken no Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 2000), 35–46.
27. Seven cases, according to Tajima Hakudō, *Keizan*, Nihon no Zen Goroku, vol. 5, ed. Furuta Shōkin and Iriya Yoshitaka (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1978), 46.
28. Yokoseki, *Ibun Taikyo Shutten Sokō, Denkōroku Shōkai.*
29. Azuma, *Kenkon'in Bon Denkōroku*, 7; see *Denkōroku*, Kenkon'in ms., fasc. 1, leaf 5a.
30. Tajima, *Keizan*, 244.

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31. Recently Foulk demonstrated that a careful reading of all the passages where Dōgen mentions "just sitting" in his writings calls into question whether Dōgen actually taught a specific approach to Zen practice that can be characterized by that term. T. Griffith Foulk, " 'Just Sitting'? Dōgen's Take on Zazen, Sutra Reading, and Other Conventional Buddhist Practices," in Steven Heine, ed., *Dōgen: Textual and Historical Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 75–106.

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