

DOGEN

JAPAN'S ORIGINAL
ZEN TEACHER

Steven Heine



L I V E S O F T H E M A S T E R S

Praise for *Dogen*

“Heine’s definitive research illuminates the life and creative process of a towering thinker—a Zen monk who initiated an uncompromised monastic tradition in Japan almost eight hundred years ago and whose work begins to shed light on issues of our time worldwide.”

—KAZUAKI TANAHASHI, editor of *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen’s Shobo Genzo*

“An extraordinary and fascinating exploration of Zen master Eihei Dogen’s life and works done by scholar Steven Heine, who has unwrapped Dogen’s legacy bravely, richly, and skillfully.”

—JOAN HALIFAX, author of *Being with Dying* and *Standing at the Edge*

“Based on his lifetime of research, Heine offers a superb introduction to Dogen’s life and work. By exploring Dogen’s vast oeuvre, Heine illuminates Dogen’s fascinating thought on enlightenment and understanding of Buddhist practice. *Dogen: Japan’s Original Zen Teacher* is a highly recommended read for all Zen practitioners as well as scholars in Buddhist and Japanese studies.”

—MICHAELA MROSS, coeditor of *Kōshiki in Japanese Buddhism*

LIVES OF THE MASTERS



If you consider this portrait to be real, then who am I, really?
But why put it there if not to give people a chance to know me?
When you look at this painting,
And think that what hangs in empty space embodies the real me,
Your mind is clearly not one with wall-gazing meditation.

Dogen's poem is an inscribed verse
from volume 10 of his *Extensive Record*

Dogen

JAPAN'S ORIGINAL ZEN TEACHER

Steven Heine



Shambhala

Shambhala Publications, Inc.
2129 13th Street
Boulder, Colorado 80302
www.shambhala.com

© 2021 by Steven Heine

Cover art: Robert Fenwick May, Jr.
Cover design: Gopa & Ted2, Inc.

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

FIRST EDITION

For more information please visit www.shambhala.com.

Shambhala Publications is distributed worldwide by Penguin Random House, Inc.,
and its subsidiaries.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Heine, Steven, 1950– author.

Title: Dogen: Japan's original Zen teacher / Steven Heine.

Description: First edition. | Boulder, Colorado: Shambhala, [2021] | Series: Lives of the masters | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021002121 | ISBN 9781611809800 (trade paperback)
eISBN 9780834843851

Subjects: LCSH: Dōgen, 1200–1253. | Dōgen, 1200–1253—Teachings. | Zen Buddhism. | Zen priests—Japan—Biography.

Classification: LCC BQ9449.D657 H455 2022 | DDC 294.3/927092 [B]—dc23
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021002121>

a_prh_5.8.0_c0_r0

Contents

[Series Introduction](#)

[Note on Translations](#)

[Preface: Birds Singing and Boats Drifting: A Lifetime Studying Dogen](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Introduction: Eating Rujing's Fist: Making Sense of Dogen's Intricate Zen Teachings](#)

[Life and Thought](#)

[1. An Aristocratic Orphan: The Development of a Buddhist Prodigy](#)

[2. Casting Off Body-Mind: Resolving the Great Doubt](#)

[3. Coming Back Empty-Handed: Dogen's Teaching Mission](#)

[4. "I Am the First in Japan": The Eihei-ji Years](#)

[Literature and Legacy](#)

[5. Nothing Concealed in the Entire Universe: Dogen's Miscellaneous Writings](#)

[6. Distinguishing between a Gem and an Ordinary Stone: Four Major Collections](#)

[7. Dignified Demeanor in All Activities: The Legacy of Dogen Zen](#)

[Appendix 1: Dogen's Timeline](#)

[Appendix 2: Selected Passages from Dogen's Extensive Record](#)

[Notes](#)

[Bibliography](#)

[Index](#)

[E-mail Sign-Up](#)

Series Introduction

BUDDHIST TRADITIONS are heir to some of the most creative thinkers in world history. The Lives of the Masters series offers lively and reliable introductions to the lives, works, and legacies of key Buddhist teachers, philosophers, contemplatives, and writers. Each volume in the Lives series tells the story of an innovator who embodied the ideals of Buddhism, crafted a dynamic living tradition during his or her lifetime, and bequeathed a vibrant legacy of knowledge and practice to future generations.

Lives books rely on primary sources in the original languages to describe the extraordinary achievements of Buddhist thinkers and illuminate these achievements by vividly setting them within their historical contexts. Each volume offers a concise yet comprehensive summary of the master's life and an account of how they came to hold a central place in Buddhist traditions. Each contribution also contains a broad selection of the master's writings.

This series makes it possible for all readers to imagine Buddhist masters as deeply creative and inspired people whose work was animated by the rich complexity of their time and place and how these inspiring figures continue to engage our quest for knowledge and understanding today.

KURTIS SCHAEFFER, *series editor*

Note on Translations

ALL TRANSLATIONS of Dogen's writings are my own based on consulting Kawamura Kodo, Kagamishima Genryu, Suzuki Kakuzen, and Kosaka Kiyu, eds., *Dogen's Complete Works* [*Dogen Zenji zenshu*], 7 vols. (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1988–1993). Some of the translations have been modified slightly, especially by eliminating the use of ellipses. In most instances, where relevant, one of the primary English translations of Dogen's works is cited in the endnotes, but readers should be aware that the version used in this book may and usually does differ from those renderings, typically in minor details but sometimes significantly because of the varied ways Dogen's complex writings can be interpreted. Also, for many of Dogen's works, readers can find additional translations available.

Translations of other Buddhist or Zen sources are generally based on the following: Takakusu Junjiro and Watanabe Kaigyoku, eds., *Complete Buddhist Canon* [*Taisho shinshu daizokyo*], 100 vols. (Tokyo: Taisho issaikyo kankokai, 1924–1932), esp. vols. 47, 48, 51, 82; and Sotoshu Zensho Jokankokai, ed., *Soto Sect Collection* [*Sotoshu zensho*], 18 vols. (Tokyo: Soto shumucho, 1970–1973), esp. vols. 1–4.

Preface

Birds Singing and Boats Drifting: A Lifetime Studying Dogen

Dogen's philosophy of Zen has long been with me.
I discover anew the teachings of Dogen nearly every day.

THE CORE of my research during fifty years of teaching East Asian religions has involved reading and translating the multifaceted writings of master Dogen (1200–1253). As founder of the Soto sect, Dogen introduced to medieval Japan many different aspects of Zen Buddhist teaching that he learned and imported from China. I have attempted to decode and explain various prose and poetic works in light of his iconic personal story, which centers on a grave sense of doubt about the possibility of attaining enlightenment. He eventually overcame this doubt through attaining the transformative experience of casting off body-mind (*shinjin datsuraku*), or the shedding of all physical and mental impediments to authentic spiritual realization.

In this book, I analyze this fascinating narrative, which is expressed in Dogen's masterwork, *The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* (*Shobogenzo*, hereafter *Treasury*), and other writings, as connected to the cultural background of premodern Japanese society as well as the contemporary significance of his innovative mode of contemplative training. Some of the major topics I examine include the following: Dogen's nondual philosophy of time and death in relation to the unity of the human and natural realms; his creative renderings of dozens of Zen koan cases based on interpreting

various Chinese collections; his views regarding the practice of seated meditation (*zazen*) and clerical discipline in connection to social ethics; questions about the historicity and veracity of traditional accounts of Dogen's travels and monastic activities; and the poetry he wrote in both Japanese and Chinese styles.

The name Dogen and the term *Dogen Zen*, often used to refer to his distinctive method of introspective teaching, conjure somewhat conflicting feelings for many students of Japanese religious philosophy and practitioners of Zen. These feelings range from a profound sense of exhilaration concerning Dogen's lofty theoretical ideals and powerful emphasis on a rigorous technique of just sitting (*shikan taza*) to a deep uncertainty or frustration in trying to decipher his dense and perplexing writings. Dogen's works are famously replete with intricate rhetorical flourishes and wordplay crossing between Chinese and Japanese pronunciations and grammatical constructions, which make his texts quite difficult to comprehend or translate.

Dogen himself would likely be pleased with the prevalence of contrasting attitudes. His aim was not to reassure his audience of typical verities but to continually probe and challenge conventional notions and assumptions in order to disclose a holistic awareness that acknowledges and embraces multiple and often conflicting perspectives. To cite a saying from the most famous Chinese koan collection, the *Blue Cliff Record* (Ch. *Biyuanlu*, Jp. *Hekiganroku*), which greatly influenced his approach, Dogen's view is that a genuine Zen teacher must seek to "startle his audience." This is accomplished, according to case 97, when "there is thunder pealing and lightning flying, clouds moving and rain rushing, lakes overturned and cliffs toppled, like a pitcher pouring or a bowl emptying, but you have still not told even half of the story. You must be like someone who can tilt the polar star and shift the axis of the earth."¹

In addition to providing a concise yet comprehensive summary of Dogen's life and cultural contexts, the goal of this book is to analyze Dogen's basic interpretative standpoint in light of my own sense of thought-provoking ambiguity, which has grown considerably over decades of research. The task of evaluating Dogen's complicated philosophy of Zen and its historical implications has been intimately part of my scholarly musings for more than half a century, since the time I serendipitously encountered an example of his poetry while studying Japanese literature in college in 1969. Nevertheless, after all this time, and with each new project dealing with different aspects of Dogen's distinctive approach, I find myself discovering and absorbing new ideas nearly every day as I read more of his writings or reread passages that I have looked at carefully on countless occasions but probably never really understood. This mindset continues to unfold in large part because there are so many primary and secondary materials being published every year in Japanese. Poring over these sources triggers in me a never-ending sense of appreciation of Dogen's subtle and nuanced, albeit contradictory, views on the authentic structure of existence as well as diverse methods for expressing and realizing these insights. In other words, I have found that with Dogen, familiarity by no means breeds contempt but rather a heartfelt and growing admiration of the refinement and depth of his thought.

To evoke an analogy used by Dogen, it is important that we not only take into account the pearl that is rolling around in a bowl, which symbolizes an object being examined. We should also be able to comprehend how the bowl is engaged in turning the gem, or the overall framework influencing the topic, including historical investigations and personal reflections. Reinforcing this idea is the metaphor of traveling in a boat, which represents the dynamic, interrelated qualities of human experience and its surroundings. Dogen writes, "While sailing along by using the vessel's rudder and pole, I do not exist apart from the boat and the boat functions as a

vehicle because I am riding in it. At just such a moment, life makes me what I am, and my activity fulfills the life of all things that contribute to that fleeting instant of the boat's movement."²

Why Dogen?

Given the vast challenges to interpreting Dogen's work, I am often asked by colleagues and students, including dedicated Japanese experts, to explain what has motivated my seemingly unshakeable drive to continue the study of Dogen. Was there an existential turning point that led me to initially become and long remain committed to the task? Looking back, I have come to realize that the dharma can work in mysterious ways. At the time I was first exposed to Dogen, I did not consciously realize how this apparently uneventful happenstance would eventually shape my professional destiny as well as my individual identity.

As an undergraduate student, I was intrigued by reading Japanese literature, in addition to ancient Buddhist texts. It was a thrill for those in my cohort in the Japanese studies program to learn in 1968 that the novelist Kawabata Yasunari would be the first author from Japan to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. About a year later, I found in the college bookstore a slim bilingual edition of Kawabata's acceptance speech that was delivered in Stockholm, *Japan, the Beautiful, and Myself (Utsukushii Nihon no watakushi)*.³ The lecture was translated by E. G. Seidensticker, who also rendered a number of Kawabata's novels but is probably best known for his version of *The Tale of Genji (Genji monogatari)*. Published in 1976, it includes hundreds of examples of Japanese *waka* poetry written in five lines with thirty-one syllables.⁴

Kawabata opened his lecture by citing a poem composed by Dogen. This was quite surprising, and even shocking for some Soto Zen priests, because the sect's founder is generally not celebrated as a poet. In fact, he is better known for making statements that

reject the role of literary endeavor as a preoccupation that distracts practitioners from unimpeded concentration. Nevertheless, Kawabata chose to comment on the profound influence of the Zen worldview on his writing by starting with a Dogen verse called “Original Face” (“Honrai no memmoku”).

Seidensticker translated the waka under the title “Innate Spirit.” It reads,

Haru wa hana	In the spring, cherry blossoms,
Natsu hototogisu	In the summer, the cuckoo,
Aki wa tsuki	In autumn, the moon,
Fuyu yuki kiede	And in winter, the snow, clear,
	cold. ⁵

Suzushi kari keru

According to Kawabata, this verse is notable because “by a spontaneous though deliberate stringing together of conventional images and words, it transmits the very essence of Japan.” The modern novelist refers to how Dogen’s simple connecting of seasonal imagery, typical of medieval Japanese poetry, conjures the ephemeral yet renewable quality of nature. By using a literary device, whereby the title seemingly bears no direct link with or may even appear opposite to the verse’s content, Dogen suggests that the true essence of any person, or their original face or innate spirit, represents oneness with the environment.

Although this first brush with Dogen’s poetry made an impression on my mind, it would take a number of years for the encounter to ripen. By the mid-1970s, a strong sense of determination regarding the pursuit of Dogen studies was developing for me. It was a time when many of the first Dogen translations and commentaries were being published. The field of Zen Buddhism had long been dominated by the works of D. T. Suzuki, who died in 1966 at the age of ninety six. Suzuki’s analysis generally gave priority to numerous

masters associated with the Rinzai sect so that many Western readers were just getting to learn of the importance of Dogen. This was an exciting time in the world of Buddhist studies that saw the emergence of intriguing new themes and distinctive research methods.

In 1980 I spent time examining Dogen's poetry at Komazawa University in Tokyo, which has the largest department of Buddhist studies in the world. I lived through a rather harsh winter while staying in a traditional Japanese wood house with knotty pine and tatami-matted floors that did not provide much insulation (which my late wife often pointed out, as dreary weeks of cold weather dragged on). I also had the anxiety of fearing difficult job prospects back home during a prolonged period of economic recession and cutbacks in budgets for higher education. Suddenly, late one night, in the midst of overall doubts and uncertainty, I had an inspiring vision. I was sitting on the floor by the heated table (*kotatsu*), wearing about six layers of clothes. Numerous dictionaries and diverse reference books were piled high on the table, and my electric typewriter was barely functioning due to an incompatibility with the Japanese electrical current. It was in this circumstance that I encountered an apparition of what I have referred to ever since as the Soto angels.

This was not a vision of Dogen himself nor of any of the Soto sect's other luminaries. It was instead a couple of midlevel manager monks who appeared to me that night, floating in midair while calmly sitting on ethereal lotus leaves. The angels appeared mysteriously to offer me a kind of "crossroads" proposition, similar to what is said to occur in the American blues tradition for aspiring guitarists. They counseled that I should accept and embrace the difficult circumstances as a necessary test and gateway to greater knowledge of Dogen. "Stick with us"—meaning, with studies of Dogen Zen—they assured me, and eventually, if I remained patient and persistent regarding my scholarly path, doors would fly open enabling me to advance and even prosper in the academic world.

This was going to lead to more opportunities to promote research on Dogen in the West.

It was at this time, while looking critically at Kawabata's verse with the vision of angels tucked in the back of my mind, that I realized that Seidensticker's translation, taking up just four of the customary five lines, simply did not do justice to Dogen's poetic quality. The main reason for his truncated version is that he overlooks how the last Japanese line is based primarily on the multiple nuances of the adjective *suzushi*. This word can be taken to mean, as Seidensticker indicates, the physical characteristic or bodily sensation of the brightness and coldness of the snow. However, that rendering, which suggests that *suzushi* merely amplifies *kiede* (frozen) in modifying snow, represents but one level of meaning.

In the tradition of Japanese court poetry, from which Dogen borrowed many aspects of symbolism and diction, *suzushi* often implies the serene and cool outlook—encompassing both objective appearance and subjective response—generated by phenomena that are not necessarily literally cold. The term is used by the renowned waka poet Tamekane, for instance, to describe the purity and coolness of the voice of the cuckoo (*hototogisu*), a synesthesia that illustrates the underlying and complex interrelatedness of personal reaction and external stimulus, body and mind, and sensation and awareness.

Based on an analysis of the rhetoric of the verse in light of medieval poetics in addition to Dogen's philosophical intentions to evoke the notion of the oneness of being-time (*uji*)—the unity of incessant change (*ji*) with all forms of existence (*u*), manifested spontaneously here and now and simultaneously throughout past, present, and future—I devised an alternative translation of "Original Face":

Haru wa hana

In spring, the cherry blossoms,

Natsu hototogisu	In summer, the cuckoo's song,
Aki wa tsuki	In autumn, the moon, shining,
Fuyu yuki kiede	In winter, the frozen snow.
Suzushi kari keru	How pure and clear are the
	seasons! ⁶

In the revised rendition, the aesthetic configuration of the waka reinforces its religious message by showing how the “one word” *suzushi*, as Professor Kawamura Kodo emphasized when we read Dogen’s poetry together, indicates neither just the snow nor the observer, neither the physical nor the mental levels. Rather, it suggests a lyricism rooted in, but unlimited by, the forms previously portrayed in the poem.

In this context, Dogen employs the term *suzushi* in a religio-aesthetic fashion to comment creatively on human involvement in the rotation of the seasons. It is an evocation of the immediate and renewable response to the uninterrupted cyclicity of four distinct yet overlapping natural phenomena. Thus, just one word reflects the lyricism of the entire poem in expressing the primordial unity encompassing infinite diversity and demonstrating the possibility for momentary change by modifying each of the seasonal images: the vivid colors and graceful scattering of spring flowers, the sharp cry of the cuckoo at dawn or dusk, the clarity and tranquility of autumn moonlight, and the purity of freshly fallen snow. As a slogan on a sign posted outside a local Zen temple reads, “When the cherry blossoms fall, new shoots emerge and blow freely in the breeze.”

Five Decades Later

A couple of years ago, nearly five decades after my first unassuming contact with this Dogen verse, I was helping advise a doctoral candidate working at a Japanese university on the reception of *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*). We were looking at various

translations of the hundreds of waka that are included in this text, especially those by Arthur Waley, Royall Tyler, Dennis Washburn, and Seidensticker. During this process, it became abundantly clear from a careful reading of these and other versions that, despite the considerable strengths of his prose renderings, Seidensticker's translations of waka are particularly weak in almost every instance compared to others available.⁷ It seems that he did not try to immerse himself in the genre of classical poetry when he took on the immense task of translating the epic tale. Therefore, I understood for the first time that it was not out of character for his effort to have fallen short in dealing with Dogen's poem. I thought it was quite interesting that I happened to stumble on this realization so many years after Seidensticker's work first opened the door to Dogen studies for me.

Around the same time, as I started analyzing in detail Dogen's "Original Face" in a lecture to a class of Japanese undergraduate students on medieval Japanese culture, I could sense the powerful presence of the Soto angels. It was very gratifying to hear many fine interpretations offered by the students that day. This included some interesting comments on the key word *suzushi* in terms of the students' historical knowledge of literature as well as their understanding of present-day uses of the term. I found by the end of the session that my copy of the handout I had distributed was filled with new notes I had taken, and an inner sense of continuity with my bookstore discovery of the Kawabata lecture five decades before was palpable.

A vision of the Soto angels was also very much with me one day a few years ago while riding a shuttle bus to O'Hare Airport after giving a lecture at the University of Chicago, and when I was on the verge of publishing a new book examining the use of Zen rhetoric in the *Blue Cliff Record*. A new apparition of the strange messengers conveyed the idea that my recent phase of mainly studying Chinese Zen writings was part of a roundabout journey that would lead back

to a focus on Dogen. Sure enough, exciting new opportunities for research and publishing started to open up soon after that vision. A number of projects fell nicely into place, including this one.

During a long academic journey with Dogen, I have found that various *détours*—to use the French word because the phonetic quality of the phrase “*tours, détours, retours*” does not quite work in the English phrase “turns, detours, returns”—reflect the mazelike effort of the ongoing process of finding, unfinding, and refinding one’s pathway. This has included researching numerous additional elements of East Asian or comparative religious thought and practice. Indeed, my dedication to Dogen studies has been sustained and greatly enhanced despite—or, perhaps, because of—having taken a few digressions to explore different but nonetheless closely related areas of investigation. Some of these topics concern the history of koan collections in China, which exerted a tremendous influence on Dogen’s rhetoric. This is particularly the case regarding the origins and implications of the fox koan and the *mu* koan, both of which he interpreted extensively in various writings. Other research themes focused on the role of traditional Japanese aesthetics and the impact of Buddhist institutions as viewed from premodern and postmodern perspectives, including the contemporary functions of Soto sect temples and institutions as seen in relation to the founder’s teachings.

Straying from the beaten path or taking the road less traveled is meaningful because it eventually reinforces a more direct course of action. Traveling a scenic route rather than taking a shortcut, which is what I feel Dogen recommends to followers through his elaborate interpretations of koans, has much to offer. This is the case even if a specific aspect of circuitous meandering may seem confounding or lead to diversions, delays, and dead ends that do not feel beneficial at the time. Sometimes the meandering route results in a payoff so far down the road that underlying connections are mostly obscured.

I will let Dogen have the final word of Zen by citing another waka that features the same title as his masterwork, “Treasury of the True Dharma-Eye” (“Shobogenzo”):

Nami mo hiki	In the heart of the night,
Kaze mo tsunaganu	Moonlight framing
Sute obune	A small boat drifting,
Tsuki koso yawa no	Tossed not by the waves
Sakari nari kere	Nor swayed by the
	breeze. ⁸

These words reflect Dogen’s feelings of vulnerability mixed with courage while returning to Eihei-ji temple from his teaching visit with Hojo Tokiyori (an episode analyzed in chapter 4), and they epitomize Dogen’s appropriation and application of the repository of dharmic insight. As he also says, “When people ride in a boat, if they turn their eyes and gaze at the shore, they make the mistake of thinking that the shore is moving. But if they fix their eyes more closely on the vessel, they understand that it is the boat that is advancing.”⁹

Dogen’s waka also recalls an intriguing passage by the renowned Chinese author and renaissance man Su Shi, whose spiritual poetry greatly influenced the Zen master. Su wrote an essay about his journey to investigate a mysterious site where, it was said, stones occasionally rang out, making sounds like bells: “That evening,” he says, “the moon was bright and, alone with my son, I rode a little boat to the base of a steep precipice, where huge rocks on our flank stood a thousand feet high, looking like fierce beasts and weird goblins, lurking in a ghastly manner and getting ready to attack us.”

In ruminating over the deep connections between Dogen and his Chinese predecessor, I recall talking in the early 1980s with my good friend, the ever kindly but sadly departed (as of 2014) Yoshizu Yoshihide Sensei. During our reading sessions with Kawamura Kodo, Yoshizu’s animated way of explaining the multiple meanings of

Dogen's "little boat" (*obune*) moving along in the water with such determination yet fragility was priceless for capturing in his voice feelings of vulnerability and instability accompanied by an underlying confidence and firm persistence. May he rest.

Acknowledgments

I HAVE APPRECIATED the opportunity to work on this book with my editor Matt Zepelin. Some of my initial brainstorming took place at a Dogen symposium held at Florida International University in March 2018 that included Charlotte Eubanks, Victor Forte, Taigen Dan Leighton, Alan May, Michaela Mross, Pamela Winfield, and George Wrisley. I also appreciated several conversations in Tokyo that summer with Matsumoto Shiro and Frederic Girard. In addition, I thank Maria Sol Echarren for her work on all the illustrations, including drawings and other images, as well as Rachel Levine and Maria Sol for help with copyediting.

Introduction

Eating Rujing's Fist: Making Sense of Dogen's Intricate Zen Teachings

Dogen's teachings are endlessly thought-provoking and inspiring.
The approach to writing taken by Dogen is exceptionally perplexing
and challenging.

AS ONE OF the most esteemed figures in the history of East Asian religion, Dogen is considered the first eminent Zen teacher in Japan. Following a pivotal four years of practice and study in China, he returned home in 1227 to found Soto Zen (Ch. Caodong Chan), one of the major new Buddhist sects of the Kamakura period (1185–1333), and to introduce many different and enduring aspects of meditative training and monastic discipline to Japanese Buddhism. Eisai, considered the founder of Rinzai (Ch. Linji) Zen, took two trips to China that preceded Dogen's by more than three decades. Yet his view of Zen practice was very much syncretized with the ritualism of Tendai (Ch. Tiantai) Buddhism, and so he did not establish an altogether independent religious movement. Also, even though Eisai contributed many important writings, unlike Dogen he did not produce a significant collection of sermons and maxims, known as recorded sayings (Ch. *yulu*, Jp. *goroku*), which was expected of all Zen teachers.¹⁰ Thus, while Dogen was not technically the initial Zen teacher in Japan, he was the original figure to formulate a discrete and distinctly Japanese Zen school.

This book examines several main aspects of Dogen's approach to teaching the path of sitting meditation, or *zazen*, in terms of the historical context of his time and the implications of his teaching for today's world. What would come to be called Dogen Zen was propagated at two major temples, one in the capital and the other in the provinces, where he produced voluminous compilations of essays, koan interpretations, lectures, letters, ceremonial remarks, and poems—all hallmarks of a Zen master's literary output. His teaching method was based largely on the sustained practice of just sitting (*shikan taza*), or purposeless *zazen*. This technique was linked to an introspective, yet eminently active, clerical lifestyle based on observing daily chores and ceremonies as well as undertaking in a gracious manner the essential everyday tasks of life in a monastery: cooking meals, cleaning the temple grounds, reciting sutras, sweeping floors, and washing one's body.

As Japan's original great Zen teacher, Dogen expressed a philosophy that epitomized the ethos of medieval Japanese society, which was characterized by keen awareness of the instability of impermanent existence. This worldview extended beyond the boundaries of Japanese Buddhism, being found, for instance, in the court culture and poetics of the day. For Dogen and other Buddhist monastics, it was particularly evident in how personal travails and societal turmoil greatly inspired their aspiration for attaining enlightenment. He embodied the Zen quality of enacting dignified behavior (*iigi*) in a way that replicates the actions of compassionate buddhas (*gyobutsu*). A strict disciplinarian who enforced the austerities of monastic practice among members of his assembly (*sangha*), Dogen was also flexible and open-minded in recognizing that human foibles and delusions are inevitably integrated with the realization of enlightenment. This outlook is derived from a dedication to exercising supreme self-control and self-reliance (*jijiyu zammai*) in every endeavor, understood as a manifestation of true

reality encompassing all beings even when an experience appears to represent deception.

Such an unrelenting effort, Dogen maintained, involves ongoing exertion (*gyoji*) by means of perpetually carrying out meditative exercises. This effort is made in order to realize and renew an awakening to the universality of buddha-nature (*busscho*) that is fully revealed here and now (*genjokoan*), or at all moments of time (*uji*), for those with genuine insight into the dharma. In many ways, Dogen's premodern standpoint presaged and resonates evocatively with various contemporary views and concerns. These include existential authenticity prevailing over bad faith, realization of the dynamism of temporality through facing one's own finitude, the capacity to express the depths of spirituality by using indirect language, and notions of holistic environmentalism embracing the human and natural worlds. These ideas are all related to Dogen's experience of awakening maintained by constantly cultivating contemplative consciousness attuned to one's surroundings.

The Traditional Dogen Narrative: Textual and Material Resources for Studying Dogen's Life

Scholars of Dogen sometimes refer to the version of his life story that has been handed down through the Soto Zen school as the "traditional Dogen narrative" (*Dogen no denkiteki na monogatari*). This narrative is not derived from a single biographical record. Rather, the account represents a saga stitched together by Soto adherents over the course of several centuries. It sifts among partial explanations and disjointed discussions as well as various corollary or secondary materials that reveal something about Dogen's religious life and career path. By incorporating legendary accounts, these resources offer a cogent and compelling story of a Buddhist seeker's overcoming of delusion and self-deception through sustained meditation. They further depict a teacher who surmounted

various obstacles to establish a new sect and growing assembly in Japan. As I discuss at various points in this book, the materials from which the traditional Dogen narrative is drawn have been subjected to scholarly scrutiny and show gaps, contradictions, mythical elements, and areas of ambiguity. They are nevertheless the most important sources we have for piecing together a meaningful and coherent picture of Dogen's life and teaching.

My review of the diverse premodern sources concerning Dogen's life has led me to conclude that many of the main elements of the traditional narrative seem to be valid. These include the origins of Dogen's aim to pursue the dharma at a young age, his attainment of enlightenment while training in China, and the pedagogical approaches he adopted for instructing assemblies of followers in both the capital and the provinces. The narrative, however, also contains many myths and exaggerations that perhaps complement, yet at times overshadow or destabilize, some of the core facts as best we can decipher them. Tall tales about Dogen contribute to the powerful spiritual symbolism of the overall narrative, even if those reports cannot be verified. The legends include prophecies of greatness proclaimed at the time of his birth; reports that he was assisted by Japanese deities at difficult times while traveling in and from China; and mysterious perceptions, recorded at Eihei-ji, involving the magical sounds of invisible bells or mystical skies filled with colorful clouds or falling flowers.

Such reports are of course rather common for religious saints, but what are we, as modern observers and commentators, to make of them? The Zen scholar John McRae's "four rules of Zen studies" offer pithy comments about assessing the historical (or ahistorical) quality of the school's mythologized histories. In the first of these, he writes, "It's not true, therefore it's more important."¹¹ This approach values the underlying meaning of a myth, even if its surface significance is discredited. On the other hand, the Japanese scholar Watsuji Tetsuro takes a decidedly antisectarian and

antihagiographical stance by calling the legendary accounts an “insult” to the integrity of Dogen. According to Watsuji, “The more I appreciate Dogen’s work, the more I cannot help but feel resentment toward senseless biographies. They ignore Dogen’s noble lifestyle of authenticity, focusing instead on all the secular values and nonsensical miracles piled up to create an artifice of nobility for him.”¹²

A number of the major episodes and anecdotes in the Dogen narrative are interfused seamlessly with hagiographical elements, which often pose as objective reports. For this reason, as well as the usual issue of gaps in the historical record of a figure from many centuries in the past, key questions concerning some of the main events in Dogen’s life have given rise to considerable conjecture and speculation. A few of the issues facing modern scholars are as follows: What were the actual circumstances of Dogen’s ancestral background and his initial practice of Zen? How do we explain Dogen’s decision to leave Japan, and how do we accurately depict the circumstances of his travels in China? Why did he later move, at the peak of his abbacy in Kyoto, to a distant region?¹³ What are the full implications of his visit in 1247 to preach to the shogun in the garrison town of Kamakura? And why are there at least four main, as well as numerous subsidiary, versions of *The Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*?

Some important aspects of the Dogen narrative probably will never be thoroughly understood. Nevertheless, one aim of this volume is to make the narrative, as well as its controversial parts and lacunae, as clear as possible.

The main materials for constructing the narrative include diverse historical texts written by Dogen and his chroniclers. There are also objects or material sources, such as artifacts Dogen used in his travels, in addition to charts, designs, and statues demonstrating key components of the account created either during or since his time. Dogen did not attempt to write a systematic autobiography, and,

unfortunately, there are no known sectarian biographies produced during or shortly after his lifetime. The earliest such work, a chapter included in the fifty-two-chapter *Transmission of Light (Denkoroku)* by the fourth Soto patriarch, Keizan, is from 1300 (which may be an unreliable date), and the rest were produced at least several generations after this.

Despite the variety of sources that went into the construction of the traditional narrative, many of its major elements, and some of its crucial details, are very much indebted to personal ruminations provided by Dogen himself. He appears to have had a keen sense of self-awareness that his life played a crucial transnational and crosslinguistic role in fostering the transplantation of Zen to Japan. He helped craft a Zen practice, derived largely from Sinitic writings and sacraments, that he felt carried over the heart of Chinese Chan while being well adapted to the medieval Japanese context. In speaking of traveling to the mainland, for example, Dogen commented emphatically that he was greatly impressed by the hygiene and grooming habits of Chinese monks, as well as their exhaustive dedication to sustained discipline and meditative practice. He thought that they understood, much better than his Japanese counterparts, how to adhere to the precepts and other behavioral codes for monastic activity, such as wearing robes and utilizing implements correctly. Indeed, he perceived a greater depth of knowledge concerning how Chinese monastics conducted themselves in every activity carried out on the temple grounds: washing their hands and face, relieving and wiping their bodies, sweeping the halls of the monastery, preparing meals for the assembly, and so forth.

Yet Dogen was also very much disappointed to see Chinese practitioners growing long fingernails, a Confucian habit meant to show that intellectuals should avoid manual labor. They also failed, in his view, to follow the Buddhist method of using a willow twig to brush their teeth, thus causing decay, disease, and halitosis. He

noted that Japanese monastics, by contrast, cleaned their teeth the correct way, but compared to the Chinese, they were basically uninformed about the proper mode for performing other daily tasks. The appearance of such concrete details in Dogen's writings not only helps reveal the social and material circumstances of his life but also tell us much about his worldview and temperament.

On a more intimate level, Dogen's writings reveal the motivations as well as challenges he faced in the early years of his pilgrimage. The postscript to the essay "Discerning the Way" ("Bendowa"), composed in the midautumn of 1231—four years after his return from China but before he opened his first temple—refers modestly to the author as "a mendicant monk [*sramana*] who entered China and received transmission of the Dharma."¹⁴ At the beginning of this treatise, following a brief opening statement about the lofty zazen practice that enhances all beings, Dogen reflected on the meandering spiritual path that led to his journey abroad:

Shortly after my aspiration arose to seek the Dharma, I began searching throughout our country for a knowledgeable teacher until I encountered master Myozen at Kenninji temple. Staying there while autumn frosts and spring blossoms quickly cycled for nine years, I absorbed from this teacher a bit of the Rinzai tradition. As the main disciple of ancestral teacher Eisai, Myozen alone truly transmitted the unsurpassed Dharma of the Buddha: definitely no one was comparable among his contemporaries.

I then traveled with Myozen to the land of the great Song dynasty to look for an authentic teacher on both sides of the Yangzi River, in Zhejiang province, and to learn more about Chinese Zen teachings as propounded through the Five Houses. Ultimately, I trained with Zen master Rujing at Mount Tiantong, and the great matter (*daiji*) I had spent my whole life seeking to understand was finally resolved.¹⁵

The Five Houses Dogen refers to here were the five sects of Chan/Zen practiced in China: Caodong (Jp. Soto), Linji (Jp. Rinzai), Yunmen (Jp. Unmon), Guiyang (Jp. Iggyo), and Fayan (Jp. Hogen).¹⁶

Several other writings express in greater detail Dogen's feelings regarding the practice conducted at both Kenninji and Tiantong temples. In the essay *Instructions for the Cook (Tenzokyokun)*, for instance, he wrote of how impressed he was on meeting a couple of elderly monks who demonstrated supreme dedication to their functions as chief monastery cook, even though what they accomplished in that role might seem like a trivial or demeaning task. In referring to one of these encounters, Dogen wrote:

When I stayed at Mount Tiantong in China, a monk named Yong, who hailed from the same province as the temple, held the position of cook. Once, after the midday meal, I was passing through the east corridor on my way to the room [where my sick teacher Myōzen was being nursed] when I saw the cook in front of the Buddha hall airing mushrooms. He carried a bamboo staff in his hand but had no hat on his head. That day the heat from the sun was blazing, the floor tiles were scorching, and sweat streamed over him as he worked diligently to dry the mushrooms in full daylight. He was clearly in pain. With his backbone bent like a bow and shaggy eyebrows thoroughly white, he resembled a crane.

As I approached and asked the cook his age, he replied, "Sixty-eight years." I said, "Why do you not employ an assistant to help you?" He replied, "They are not me." I said, "Venerable sir, your attitude is indeed proper, but the heat is sweltering so why are you working at this hour?" The cook said, "What time should I wait for?" Without anything else to say I took my leave, and as I walked along the eastern corridor, I began to realize how important a responsibility it is to serve as head cook of the temple.¹⁷



A statue at Dairyuji temple in central Tokyo depicting with icons and words the story of Dogen meeting a cook as told in *Instructions for the Cook*.

As shown in the photo above, this episode is vividly brought to life by the icons and inscriptions that form part of a contemporary monument celebrating Dogen's journey displayed at Dairyuji temple in central Tokyo.

Several additional key texts by Dogen are particularly important for understanding what he learned and thought about while staying in China. First, the *Record of Private Conversations (Hokyoki)* contains accounts of memorable colloquies held in Rujing's inner chamber. These dialogues preview key ideas Dogen eventually

introduced to Japan. Many of these varied from typical Rinzai Zen approaches. They concern, for instance, the significance of language and the efficacious role of the sutras in expressing the dharma, in addition to a strong refutation of the “three teachings” theory that more or less equated Buddhism with Confucianism and Daoism. Second, the *Treasury of Miscellaneous Talks* (*Shobogenzo zuimonki*), a series of informal sermons given in the mid-1230s to converts from the Daruma school (an early but proscribed Zen movement in Japan), contains numerous comments regarding the excellent behavior of both Buddhist and secular leaders in China. Dogen frequently praised the mainland models, while also commenting on how monastic behavior at Kenninji had fallen into a state of decline because of a lack of proper leadership following the deaths of Eisai and Myozen.

Moreover, several chapters in the *Treasury* highlight the way Chinese monks demonstrated a level of conviction to realize the dharma not usually found among Japanese Buddhist trainees prior to the introduction of Zen. For example, the eleventh-century Soto lineage teacher Furong Daokai is celebrated in the chapter “Sustained Exertion” (“Gyoji”) for refusing to accept the prestigious purple robe proffered to the highest ranked clerics by the emperor. Disdaining this secular award showed how emphatically Daokai preferred to observe his reclusive lifestyle free from worldly concerns.¹⁸ It is also said that Dogen turned down a similar offer from the shogunate twice, before finally accepting the robe the third time in 1251.

The chapter “Inheritance Documents” (“Shisho”) discusses five certificates that Dogen was shown by monks whom he met during his travels in China, representing various Zen schools. Usually kept as sequestered treasures not disclosed to outsiders, these documents highlighted the merits of leading disciples who were acknowledged recipients of a particular lineal transmission. Moreover, a collection of fifty Chinese-style (*kanbun*) poems

composed while Dogen was practicing in China—the main example of his writing during this early career phase—gives an indication of what it was like to be a Zen priest at that time. One feature was an ongoing engagement with the lay community through exchanges of poetry, especially for rites of passage such as childbirth, an offspring passing examinations to begin a career, or a death in the family. Although Dogen continued to write Chinese as well as Japanese poetry after his return, interacting with lay followers was not a pattern of preaching he pursued very much in Japan, where his communications were mainly limited to monks and perhaps some nuns.

Another important example of Dogen's work concerning a crucial event that we otherwise do not know well is a formal sermon he delivered during the spring of 1248. The sermon was given after he had returned to Eihei-ji from a six-month visit to preach to the shogun in the temporary capital of Kamakura. In this lecture, entry 3.251 of the *Extensive Record*, Dogen expressed that the rank-and-file monks were upset with him during his absence, as they did not understand their teacher's motives for making the trip. He understands their wariness that their teacher may have abandoned his strict religious principles for the sake of finding accord with a worldly leader.¹⁹ Dogen assured the assembly that his preaching to the shogun maintained the same focus concerning the inevitability of karmic retribution that he had long maintained. Some modern commentators suggest, however, that this doctrinal focus was new, having developed in reaction to feeling unsettled by the shogun's offer. If so, it marks a modification in his overall thinking about human behavior in relation to the universality of buddha-nature, a shift from emphasizing nonduality to highlighting moral imperative.

Many other passages in the *Extensive Record* and Dogen's other writings illuminate various events in his life and his attitude toward certain people and places. A great many occurrences and stretches of his life, however, simply are not represented in his works, or at

least not sufficiently for us to understand his view of them. Some of this information and interpretation is supplied, instead, in sectarian biographies that complement or supplement the first-person accounts provided by Dogen's musings and exchanges. A few prominent historical accounts contribute to the traditional narrative by providing details about his parents, ancestors, and significant religious experiences, including the origins of the feeling of great doubt and the cause and aftermath of casting off body-mind. These sources are also instructive concerning some of the reasons for Dogen's move in 1243 to Echizen (currently Fukui Prefecture in Japan's Hokuriku region) and his travel to Kamakura four years later, since there is no clear explanation given for those developments in any of his writings.

The first major biography of Dogen is included as a chapter in the *Transmission of Light*, which was originally a series of lectures by Keizan. The lectures were presented during the summer retreat at Daijōji temple, and they also contain sections dealing with fifty-one other patriarchs of Soto Zen, including Dogen's teacher Rujing and main disciple Ejo.^{[20](#)} This work, which was lost for hundreds of years before being rediscovered and published officially by the Soto sect in 1885, primarily focuses on the episode in which Dogen's experience of liberation is confirmed in a private discussion with Rujing. Although Keizan's discussion of Dogen is probably the most widely read biography, the most thorough sectarian account of the founder's life is provided by the *Record of Kenzei* (*Kenzeiki*). This writing was first published in 1472 but apparently was composed twenty years before by Kenzei, the fourteenth abbot of Eihei-ji, as part of the celebration of Dogen's two-hundredth death anniversary. While the *Transmission of Light* pays attention to Dogen's early years and experiences in China, including his viewing the five transmission documents that are also mentioned in a chapter of the *Treasury*, the *Record of Kenzei* covers all aspects of his life.

Modern researchers have discovered that, after the time of its composition, copies of the *Record of Kenzei*, which often differed considerably in content and emphasis, were kept at various Soto temples. A standard edition was produced to mark Dogen's five-hundredth death anniversary in 1752, when the core text was significantly expanded and appended by the eminent Edo-era scholiast Menzan, in the *Annotated Record of Kenzei (Teiho Kenzeiki)*. Menzan is best known for his rigorous philosophical and linguistic studies of Dogen's writings in the context of the literary history of the Zen tradition. Even so, one of the main features of his glossed biography is the inclusion of numerous intriguing but improbable mythical episodes that took place at certain of Dogen's career stages for which little factual information is available.

For instance, Menzan's version includes four legends concerning Dogen's departure from China in 1227: (a) on his way from Tiantong monastery to the port, he bested the advances of a tiger through the power of meditation while hiding in the branches of a tree; (b) when he felt sick during the journey, he received medicine from the Japanese fertility god, Inari, who was miraculously transported to China to provide him with a special medicinal formula that has for centuries been sold as a panacea at Soto temples; (c) the night before leaving China, Dogen, assisted by the deity of Mount Hakusan (a sacred mountain close to Eihei-ji), wrote out the entire *Blue Cliff Record* koan collection, known as *Dogen's One-Night Copy of the Blue Cliff (Ichiya Hekigan)*; and (d) when a terrible sea storm threatened his returning ship, the bodhisattva Kannon magically appeared floating on a single leaf (Ichiyo Kannon) to guide him to safety.

Another period in Dogen's life for which Menzan's text features supernatural occurrences is the final years at Eihei-ji. The text depicts multicolored clouds drifting and flowers cascading from the sky overhead, resembling mystical sights Dogen envisaged at Mount Tiantai in China. It also tells of an invisible bell resounding one day in

the deep mountains. In 1803, for the 550th death anniversary memorial, an updated edition was produced called the *Illustrated Annotated Record of Kenzei* (*Teiho Kenzeiki zue*), which includes floating-world-style illustrations (*ukiyo-e*) showing about sixty scenes in Dogen's life and highlighting many hagiographical episodes. Initially black-and-white, these images were eventually colorized for publications produced during the 2003 celebrations of the 750th death anniversary.

Because traditional accounts represent a mixture of factual data and fictional reports, from the standpoint of modern historiography it is often asked whether the details mentioned in premodern works should be considered hearsay or invented traditions designed to fill in gaps in the Dogen narrative. Scholars have inquired whether some of these can be corroborated by external sources, such as Buddhist or secular records from the period—for instance, the standard thirty-volume *Japanese Buddhist History* (*Genko shakusho*), published in 1322 by the eminent Rinzai monk-poet Kokan Shiren, which includes a short section on Dogen's life. From a contemporary standpoint, a good number of the flourishes represent exaggerations and distortions, or even misrepresentations and fabrications, which enrich the sacred atmosphere but lack basic veracity.^{[21](#)}

Therefore, one aim of my research is to demythologize these stories so as to discern their inner meaning devoid of false elaboration. For example, the story of Dogen copying the *Blue Cliff Record* highlights his role in introducing koan commentarial styles to Japan, and the record of flowers descending from above emphasizes the sacred quality of his reclusive mountain temple. But it is important to recognize that a focus on the symbolism of such far-fetched accounts can, ironically and unfortunately in some instances, seem to reinforce the merit of probable fabrications. Therefore, it is necessary to document what can be known with relative certainty as best we can, while continuing to speculate about various seemingly

unknowable, or black-hole, events. Although the seemingly unknowable can only be speculated, the intellectual process of offering a plausible hypothesis often provides new insights and perspectives on Dogen's underlying intentions and motivations.

Dogen's Writings in Medieval Japanese and Contemporary Global Contexts

A prolific author, Dogen produced a remarkably large body of innovative writings encompassing assorted types of addresses, commentaries, epistles, instructional manuals, memos, and verses. These continue to motivate countless practitioners and other interested readers, both in Japan and throughout the world. Especially important in his corpus is the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* (*Shobogenzo*), a wide-ranging set of sermons on diverse topics regarding Zen rituals, robes, scriptures, and other observances that Dogen was rapidly introducing to his home country. There are currently extant several different versions of the *Treasury* that were edited by Dogen and his primary disciple and scribe, Ejo, but also revised and sometimes altered considerably by later generations of interpreters. Japanese scholars today are still trying to sort out and theorize the significance of the various editions. In addition to this work, Dogen is particularly recognized for the compilations of formal sermons included in the *Extensive Record* (*Eihei koroku*—see appendix 2 in the back matter for a sampling of translations from this text), the essays on clerical behavior in the *Monastic Rules* (*Eihei shingi*), and his journal kept in China known as *Private Conversations*. He is also known for excelling at the arts of poetry and calligraphy.

For many centuries, Dogen's multifaceted model of religious practice, as conveyed in his complicated writings, was studied carefully and followed scrupulously in numerous Soto Zen monasteries in Japan. Such study was never easy, however, for

Dogen integrated Chinese sources with Japanese syntax to elucidate the true meaning of enlightenment, while intending to leave it open to individual readers to draw conclusions based on their own perception and level of religious insight. Since his works were often considered somewhat indecipherable, and for other reasons, they were neglected by most rank-and-file members of the sect and taken up only by groups of the most advanced devotees able to understand Dogen's dense and intricate forms of discussion. According to the *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism's* comment on the challenge of reading the *Treasury*, "Part of the difficulty arises from the fact that Dogen quotes freely from Buddhist sutras and Chinese [Chan] masters but interprets these passages quite ingeniously." For example, he "invented a number of Buddhist neologisms that were largely unique to him, including creative 'mis'-readings of original Chinese passages."²² Therefore, those who have sought to understand Dogen throughout the centuries have needed a strong background in the assorted Sinitic sources that he cites but refashions and critiques through integration with vernacular phrasings.

Beginning a century ago, various developments took place, both within and well beyond the confines of the Soto sect, that helped promote the merits of this seemingly obscure Zen teacher. Indeed, the imaginative resourcefulness and approach to meditative awareness in Dogen's Zen demonstrates great relevance for the modern age and has come to garner a worldwide following.

In 1926 the Japanese intellectual historian Watsuji Tetsuro argued in his seminal book *Monk Dogen (Shamon Dogen)* that Dogen should be regarded not only as a denominational founder from the past but also as a genuinely universal thinker whose teachings are appropriate for all of humanity, regardless of background, status, or prior belief.²³ Among proponents in the Soto sect, numerous mid-twentieth-century monks—such as Sawaki Kodo, known as "Homeless Kodo" because of his constant traveling

to visit many temples—helped spread Dogen’s teaching by initiating the custom of holding zazen retreats and related study groups for lay practitioners.²⁴ A more recent monastic leader and scholar, Nakano Tozen, recently authored the book *Sunday’s Treasury (Nichiyobi Shobogenzo)*²⁵ This is just one of numerous examples of contemporary works attempting to apply Dogen’s complex Zen approach to the ordinary life of nonclerical spiritual seekers trying to find their way from feeling trapped by a world of deception to attaining liberation from self-imposed conceptual and emotional barriers.

The first major English translation of Dogen was *The Soto Approach to Zen*,²⁶ produced in 1958 by the eminent Japanese professor Reiho Masunaga, who followed in 1971 with *Record of Things Heard*, a translation of the text also called the *Treasury of Miscellaneous Talks (Shobogenzo zuimonki)*²⁷ These volumes were quickly supplemented by Jiyu Kennett’s *Selling Water by the River* in 1972,²⁸ followed three years later by *Zen Master Dogen* by Yokoi Yuho and Daizen Victoria.²⁹ The decade ended with a series of translations of the *Treasury* by Norman Waddell and Masao Abe that originally appeared in *The Eastern Buddhist* journal,³⁰ plus additional renderings of the masterwork by Kosen Nishiyama and John Stevens.³¹ Moreover, two books greatly advanced historical and theoretical examinations of Dogen: Hee-Jin Kim’s *Dogen Kigen—Mystical Realist* (reissued as *Eihei Dogen—Mystical Realist*)³² and Takashi James Kodera’s *Dogen’s Formative Years in China*.³³

Soon after this initial wave of publications, there were wide-ranging studies produced by Carl Bielefeldt, William Bodiford, Bernard Faure, Griffith Foulk, and William LaFleur, in addition to translations by Shohaku Okumura, Kazuaki Tanahashi, and Taigen Dan Leighton, among many others. The *Treasury* and some of Dogen’s other major writings have now appeared in numerous English versions. My first monograph, *Existential and Ontological*

Dimensions of Time in Heidegger and Dogen, was published in 1985, and since then I have edited a volume by Masao Abe and written or edited several other books on Dogen, including the playfully titled *Did Dogen Go to China?*

Dogen's main writings have by now been translated into English, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish, in addition to Mandarin Chinese, which brings the textual trajectory full circle after eight centuries since the time of his travels to the mainland. Currently there are half a dozen complete renderings of the *Treasury* in English, with some of the popular chapters featured in more than a dozen versions, while some key sections serve as the subject matter of book-length studies by leading scholars or practitioners. Also, the publication of an authoritative multivolume version of the *Treasury* is now underway through the auspices of the Soto Zen Translation Project based at Stanford University. This translation promises to capture the incomparable depth, as well as the sometimes-incomprehensible difficulty, of Dogen's text as it crosses in zigzag fashion over diverse linguistic, cultural, and conceptual boundaries.

Dogen's Distinctive Teachings

A recent study discussing prominent Asian religious classics suggests that Dogen "has become the most renowned and most studied figure in Buddhist history in the West."³⁴ It further asserts that the *Treasury* has "secured a place among the masterworks of the world's religious and philosophical literature," as it is frequently analyzed for affinities with key Western exemplars, ranging from Aristotle and Aquinas or Plato and Plotinus to Kant and Kierkegaard or Husserl and Heidegger. The distinguished historian of Zen Heinrich Dumoulin further maintains that Dogen is preeminent for the pure integrity of his spiritual character, which places him among the great thinkers of humankind based on a "unique blend of lofty

religious achievement and uncommon intellectual gifts.”³⁵ These qualities helped Dogen produce the *Treasury* as “a literary work of exceptional quality and unique experience without equal in the whole of Zen literature.”³⁶

There are several reasons for the remarkable degree of attention now being paid to Dogen, evident in both scholarly studies and the wide dissemination of just-sitting meditative practice. His 750th death anniversary, celebrated in 2003, was an occasion for several Dogen conferences and helped trigger many academic and popular publications, plus major upgrades to the infrastructure of Eihei-ji temple. The anniversary also led to the production of a Kabuki play performed at the Ginza Kabuki-Za theater in downtown Tokyo and a major biopic distributed internationally, in addition to numerous manga paperbacks and TV shows treating key episodes from Dogen’s story. The memorial was a significant opportunity for creatively reassessing the multiple levels of the legacy of the Soto founder.

One theme of Dogen’s writing sparking intense interest is his view of time. Dogen advocates an uncompromising acceptance of impermanence (*mujo*) seen in terms of realizing the oneness of birth-and-death (*shoji*) each and every moment. His writing on time vividly captures early Indian Buddhist notions that our fluid existence is thoroughly characterized by nonsubstantiality (*anatman*) and nonpersistence (*anitya*). This emphasis on ephemerality was often overlooked or dismissed, Dogen felt, by an unfortunate focus on everlasting truth expressed in various earlier forms of East Asian Buddhism, such as the Tendai and Kegon (Ch. Huayan) schools that were dominant before the emergence of Zen in Japan in the thirteenth century. This standpoint is relevant for living in the modern world, in which theoretical physics and applied technology reinforce a sense of the fleeting, rapid-fire quality of everyday experience.

Moreover, Dogen’s understanding of the central Mahayana doctrine of original enlightenment (*hongaku*), or the innate

endowment of the buddha-nature embedded in all beings, radically reinterprets previous beliefs that tended to reify or eternalize this central principle. Whereas original enlightenment had come to be seen as separate from concrete forms of existence—and thus failed to be integrated into everyday life—for Dogen, buddha-nature is thoroughly infused with evanescence and assimilated with the undeniably ephemeral experiences of all people and things. Contemporary readers can well appreciate these ideas, often considered radical at the time of their inception, because of their emphasis on living life to the fullest here and now.

It is also fascinating to see how Dogen frequently expresses views that are borrowed from, but provide a creative refashioning of, classical Chinese philosophy. In particular, his work is imbued with the influence of writings attributed to the early Daoist thinker Zhuangzi, which greatly influenced the formation of the Zen school. Like Zhuangzi, Dogen articulates a view of vibrant activity by using key examples from the natural and humanly created spheres to highlight the movement of temporal reality in relation to stationary existence. He focuses, for example, on images of fish swimming and birds flying or of rivers streaming in relation to boats sailing against the background of shorelines and bridges.

Dogen's career exemplifies the basic pattern expressed in voluminous Chinese quasi-historical records concerning the exploits of eminent Zen monks. Like some of his prominent predecessors reputedly did, he overcame deep-seated feelings of insecurity about his capacity for attaining authentic awareness. Through vigorous self-reliance, he eventually not only achieved the realization he so yearned for but also became a prominent, charismatic teacher attracting and leading multitudes of followers.

An additional point of interest is the way Dogen's religious standpoint is rooted in the importance of Japanese aesthetics at the dawn of the Kamakura period. In that historical milieu—a turbulent era of far-reaching social change caused by civil upheavals that

unfolded amid multiple natural disasters—the literary and fine arts were considered the primary means of discerning truth and articulating transcendence. The efficacy of Dogen’s writing depends on his creative use of various complicated rhetorical devices featured in the literature of this period. These include profusive wordplay and puns, since there are so many homophones in Japanese, in addition to inversions of conventional meaning based on examples of chiasmus, misdirection, paradox, or tautology.

Dogen’s teachings on the physicality of monastic behavior are similarly resonant with cultural concerns of his era. His emphasis on undertaking repetitive physical movements while engaging in monastic chores, based on practicing the way of doing (or seeing) for yourself (*yattemiru*) how to carry out a particular task through constant effort, evokes Japanese cultural endeavors that cultivate the flawless form (*kata*) of actions. This method applies to the practice of meditation in addition to the performance of daily chores like preparing food efficiently or cleaning thoroughly. These functions thus represent a way to achieve and maintain spiritual cleansing.

Yet another aspect contributing to growing interest in Dogen is appreciation for the way his approach to Zen resonates with many aspects of modern worldviews. Prominent examples here include the vitality of the space-time continuum, according to quantum mechanics; the renewability of existence through efforts to create ecological recovery; the possibilities of philosophical notions of the comprehensive scope of reality to foster gender and class equality; and existentialist views of heightening feelings of angst as a constructive stepping-stone to attaining authentic awareness.

Over the past twenty years, best sellers published on both sides of the Pacific have highlighted in distinctive ways key aspects of Dogen’s thought for a contemporary readership. Kaoru Nonomura’s *Eat Sleep Sit: My Year at Japan’s Most Rigorous Zen Temple (Kuneru suwaru)* is a fascinating firsthand account by a thirty-year-old “salaryman.”³⁷ Nonomura gave up conventional life in Tokyo to

pursue a reflective path of living mindfully in the present moment at Eihei-ji, the rigorous monastery founded by Dogen in the 1240s in the relatively remote region of the Echizen Mountains (currently Fukui Prefecture), located several hours north of Kyoto.

Ruth Ozeki's novel *A Tale for the Time Being* highlights Dogen's innovative concept of the unity of being-time (*uji*). This concept links holistic temporality with all forms of existence by making a constructive wordplay on the everyday word for "sometimes" (*arutoki*). Dogen's use of *uji* can be interpreted to indicate that all beings (*u* or *aru*) are equal to time (*ji* or *toki*). By relating Dogen's *uji* to concepts in quantum physics, the main character of Ozeki's narrative writes that she herself, like all people and things, exists "for the time being." Likewise, she cites the master's dazzling insight that, "in essence, everything in the entire universe is intimately linked with each other as moments in time, continuous and separate."³⁸ Thus, Dogen's archaic Zen expression transforms into a persuasive modern approach to self-understanding in relation to true reality.

Is Dogen Consistent or Inconsistent?

The two-sentence contrasting epigraphs that appear at the beginning of this chapter and precede other parts of this book are designed to underscore a set of conundrums that frequently become apparent in investigating Dogen. His standpoint for many readers reflects a fundamental conflict. On the one hand, he seems to be thoroughly consistent throughout his career in promoting the practice of just sitting as the core of Zen training. On the other hand, he appears vexingly inconsistent on many occasions in enunciating diverse doctrines and advocating complex rituals that seem to deviate from what we take to be his simple, central commitment to just sitting.

I find that, even with intense admiration for Dogen's approach to Zen continually growing, some people, ranging from determined zazen practitioners to more casual enthusiasts of worldwide mystical

writings, consider Dogen's overall attitude a bit off-putting or even forbidding. Such confusion and consternation are not limited to those who approach Dogen's work in translation or as nonspecialists. Many leading Japanese scholars continue to put forward competing views about central themes in analyzing Dogen, such as why there are various versions of the *Treasury* or the reasons for his midcareer departure from leading a temple in Kyoto to take up residence in a distant province. Researchers are actively questioning assumptions regarding Dogen's historical circumstances and intentions in ways that alter and undermine varied stereotypes about him.

Among my main goals in this book is to identify and sort through some of the implications of the discrepancies one finds in the Dogen literature. I have attempted to examine Dogen's outlook from a comprehensive standpoint that acknowledges how he often takes, though usually seeks to reconcile, nearly opposite positions. Dogen is best known for an aloof ecclesial deportment, sophisticated philosophical ruminations, and austere practical instructions founded on a rigorous, detached, and uncompromising view of Zen training. Yet there is also an equally compelling though sometimes less visible side of his approach that is eminently concerned, compassionate, and tolerant. Who is the real Dogen? Does Dogen Zen seek to find a middle way between polarized standpoints, such that they should be understood as complementary rather than contradictory?

In considering this set of issues, I am reminded of something said in 2015 by a leading scientist about discoveries from a recent outer-space project intended to clarify the inscrutability of the ninth planet: "The complexity of the Pluto system—from its geology to its satellite system to its atmosphere—has been beyond our wildest imagination. Everywhere we turn there are new mysteries." He went on to say that evidence is continually being uncovered that hopefully "will help unravel these obscurities."³⁹ In a similar way, Dogen often seems more and more complicated, but he strongly encourages readers to

keep trying to disentangle the inevitably tangled threads (*katto*) of his Zen wisdom.

Similarly, I have learned helpful lessons regarding evaluating Dogen's discourse from a very different discipline—archaeology. Many archaeologists, citing the principle of *verisimilitude*, evaluate new findings concerning what they have expected to discern. By contrast, Eilat Mazar of the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University, who researches the ancient city where the tabernacle of the ark of the covenant once stood, is recognized for her advice, "Let the stones speak for themselves."⁴⁰ In that light, while keeping in mind the multiple legends and theories that tend to populate accounts of Dogen's life, it is important to understand as best we can what he said and did before speculating on what he might have done or what people should do to apply his teachings to circumstances today.

An interesting illustration of the two sides of his approach to teaching is Dogen's harsh punishment of a follower named Gemmyo. In 1248, Gemmyo disobeyed the master's orders by negotiating and accepting the offer of a gift of land in Kamakura from the shogun. Dogen had already explicitly rejected this gift because it seemed tainted by secular entanglements. It is celebrated in Soto sect lore that, on learning of the flagrant misdeed, Dogen had Gemmyo's meditation seat fully removed and burned along with all his clothes and belongings so that nobody else would ever be associated with the discredited erstwhile adherent's practice site. That was an even stronger penalty than dismissal or excommunication—the typical Zen punishments for extreme misdeeds. Despite this uncompromising reproach, near the time of his death, as he prepared to transfer the leadership of Eihei-ji to one of his disciples, Dogen passed over the chance to name a brilliant young monk, Gikai, as successor, citing his lack of "grandmotherly kindness" in handling novices. Instead Dogen chose as abbot the steady and generous Ejo, even if he was a less impressive mentor. It

is notable that Gikai went on to have a prominent but somewhat mixed legacy in the history of Soto Zen.

In another dramatic instance of apparent contradiction, in some of his early writings Dogen declared it foolish to discriminate against female practitioners since all beings are deemed equal based on the universality of buddha-nature. He is even said to have instructed several nuns by giving them private lessons concerning the significance of paradoxical koan cases. Most of this inclusive activity was undertaken, however, while Dogen stayed in cosmopolitan Kyoto. It appears that, in organizing monastic functions at Eihei-ji, he generally reinforced the traditional Buddhist hierarchy by favoring the status of male over female clerics. The same held true in his ranking of fully ordained renunciants (or home leavers, *shukke*) higher than lay adherents.

An additional apparent contradiction lies between Dogen's status as the founder of the Soto Zen sect in Japan (though this was probably a claim first made a couple of generations after he died) and his expressed purpose to convey the essential quality of the dharma rather than to represent the doctrines of a particular clique. He was wary of causing discord or dissension within the larger Buddhist community, and he sometimes criticized those who boasted of Zen as a distinctly superior teaching.

Nevertheless, in many ways Dogen remained loyal to the lineage that he inherited from his mentor Rujing. He sometimes argued that Rujing, because of his untiring dedication to sustaining the daily practice of zazen without trying to promote either his own status or that of his followers, was the only genuine teacher he encountered. In a sermon delivered nearly a decade after he returned home, Dogen humorously expressed his veneration of his teacher, writing, "Having spent time at many monasteries in China, I was fortunate to meet my late teacher Rujing. I was never deceived by Rujing, but in return Rujing was deceived by this itinerant monk."⁴¹

There are other apparent contradictions between Dogen's aspiration for a peaceful nonsectarianism and his loyalty to Buddhism, Zen, Rujing's lineage, and his own realization and style of pedagogy. For instance, he stood against the claim that the three traditions—Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism—are basically one and the same, which was a commonly held view in China. Moreover, he was often relentless in condemning eminent continental Zen figures with whom he disagreed about the meaning of meditation or the role of language in communicating truth. He was an uncompromising author who often took creative license to challenge, revise, or rewrite the sayings of notable rivals and predecessors, including Rujing and other luminaries associated with the Soto lineage. A frequent rejoinder he used after citing the words of previous teachers was, "Others expressed an opinion reflecting a certain standpoint, but if I had been there, I would have articulated the topic in a different way."⁴² This admonition encouraged the members of the audience to read between the lines and reach their own conclusion without relying on the words of ancestors, no matter how revered.

In one of numerous examples, Dogen pointed out that Rujing once responded to a question about "whether or not there is Buddha Dharma on a steep cliff in the deep mountains" by declaring, "The cliff collapses, the rocks split, and the empty sky is filled with a noisy clamor." Dogen stated, "I propose another way of explaining this. If someone were to ask me, I would say, 'Lifeless rocks nod their heads over and over again, and the empty sky vanishes completely.' " He then pounded his staff one time before descending from his high seat.⁴³ This mischievous posturing concerning Rujing helps stimulate a constructive sense of doubt about the nature of reality and the impact of expressivity.

On the other hand, in a Chinese-style verse, Dogen combined bravado and humility in deliberately disingenuous fashion by referring to himself as a "granny." He used this term to highlight what

he felt was wrong with Gikai's lack of empathy, which can conversely imply a lack of fortitude:

Having eaten the ancient fist raised by Rujing,
With bulging eyes, I see both the North Star and Altair.
Deceiving only myself, with nowhere left to turn,
For your sake, this granny adopts suitable teaching
methods.⁴⁴

These instances show that Dogen was unwavering and unrestricted in making or breaking admonishments. This approach was largely derived from the Mahayana view that, whereas unexceptional Buddhist seekers must always follow rules strictly, genuine bodhisattvas know precisely when to flout or overthrow them. He asserted views—variously conciliating, confrontational, or even shocking—in accord with the Zen spirit of upending prior assertions to startle the assembly of followers. This was done in the belief that any and all utterances—by no means excluding Dogen's own—fall short of fully communicating the meaning of the dharma.

On Buddhas Becoming Buddhas: Dogen's Approach to Buddhist Training

In the above section, we have surveyed apparent differences in the attitudes that Dogen revealed or conjured. Such differences or contradictions are amply apparent in his teaching style, wherein he could be both unsparingly single-minded in propagating an idea for instruction and indisputably flexible and open-ended in challenging all truth claims and guidelines. Most basically, I believe these differences reflect his ongoing efforts to address suitably the pedagogical concerns of disciples pursuing the path toward enlightenment. He sought to meet the idiosyncratic needs of followers in light of the specific circumstances of their respective

stages and the particular sense of urgency in their religious quests. The key element determining the effectiveness of this stance is whether the teacher is able to see clearly and assess appropriately each mentee's progress or deficiency in terms of their overall training situation.

Dogen's writings demonstrate the ongoing process of determining whether a novice's religious path requires an instructional style either of "holding tight," with stern oversight exerted by the master, or "letting go," by indulging the disciple.⁴⁵ This is also known as choosing between vertical or horizontal methods of teaching, with the ultimate aim of releasing the practitioner to undertake their own interpretative evaluation of doctrines. That approach corresponds to a famous story of how the Chinese Zen master Yuanwu's major koan collection, the elaborately crafted *Blue Cliff Record*, was first published in 1128. The volume was apparently destroyed by his main disciple, Dahui, about a decade later, for distracting trainees with what he considered its overly convoluted rhetoric. A preface for a restored edition written a century and a half after that event maintains:

Yuanwu was mostly concerned for students of later generations, so he listed cases and commented on them extensively. Dahui was mostly concerned with saving people from burning or drowning, so he eradicated the *Blue Cliff Record*. Likewise, Shakyamuni Buddha spoke the whole great canon of scripture but, in the end, said that he had never uttered a single word. Was he fooling us? Whether you push or pull, the primary concern is only that the cart moves forward.⁴⁶

Traditional Zen anecdotes frequently criticize those masters who were perceived to enact a given pedagogical strategy without balancing it with an opposing perspective, thus rendering their

teaching unreliable and ineffective. Mindful of the tendency of many of his predecessors to either over- or underreact to one of their disciple's concerns, Dogen carried out both stern and forbearing approaches, frequently at the same time or in overlapping yet unpredictable ways. This enabled him to topple conventional assumptions and expectations by compelling students to gain insight based on their own capacity and background. He thus encouraged the Zen ideal of self-realization, challenging those approaches mired in stereotypical or uninspired misconceptions.

Dogen seems to have been very comfortable with the power of his views to upset one-dimensional understandings. Consider the following famous teaching, for instance, in which he declared, in chiasmic fashion, about the process of Zen realization, "To study the Buddha Way is to study the self, and to study the self is to forget the self and be confirmed by all things."⁴⁷ In such statements, he embraced the extremes of maintaining strict discipline on one end of the spectrum while accepting adaptable dissonance on the other end, or of esteeming hierarchy while promoting productive forms of disruption. Dogen similarly stated, about the role of speaking, "We disentangle tangled vines [katto, a term that in Zen usually has the negative connotation of 'delusion'] by making use of those very intertwined creepers as the vehicle for self-release."⁴⁸ Relatedly, he wrote, "We inevitably make a series of mistakes (*shoshaku jushaku*)"⁴⁹ until we stumble on the right mistake. On the theme of reality versus illusion, he wrote, "Although the painting of a rice-cake seems to be a symbol of unreality or falsity, only this image truly satisfies our hunger,"⁵⁰ and "only a dream within a dream explicates that dream."⁵¹ All of these enigmatic expressions incorporate the displacement and inversion of basic Buddhist concepts regarding delusion versus realization. They show Dogen being purposefully unpredictable in order to disclose an underlying compatibility. He urged comprehension of the genuine significance of conflicting views through attaining a holistic awareness embracing nonduality.

Philosophical standpoints are thereby extended to their utmost conclusion. Yet even this does not represent a culmination, as the same ideas can be upended or reversed in a different context.

Another analog for Dogen's teaching method is the model conveyed in some drawings of the wheel of samsara, or the mandala, whereby the Buddha appears in each of six realms to preach a particular lesson for the beings dwelling there. In the case of the denizens of hell, he holds up a mirror so that they will repent and reform their transgressions. Before the gods, he plays a lyre to sing a song of restless warning for divinities, who are not impervious to suffering and pain. In front of titans, he wields a weapon, and before the hungry ghosts, he appears to offer sustenance. For animals, the Buddha reads a book so that ideas get embedded in their consciousness for consideration in future lifetimes. And in the realm of humans, he is a beggar teaching the value of humility and detachment.

Dogen's view is comparable to these examples of a relativist and conditional instructional approach. Like the Buddha, he fitted his teachings to various kinds of followers, some of whom are close to the goal while others do not necessarily wish to become Buddhas. From his standpoint, genuine teachers must recognize that they are always invariably dealing with buddhas, even if this is by no means understood by the target audience. All beings are already in the process of becoming or enacting the state of buddhahood. Regardless of their current state and self-perception, proper practice will eventually cause dignified demeanor in every activity, whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down (*gyoju zaga*), which are all expressions of buddha-nature.

As Dogen suggested in a dense passage in "The Lancet of Zazen" ("Zazenshin") chapter of the *Treasury*, the embodiment of Buddha (*shinbutsu*) by practicing as Buddha (*gyobutsu*) or sitting as Buddha (*zabutsu*), should be contrasted with a futile attempt to make

a Buddha (*sabutsu*), as if this goal were something different than the everyday behavior people exhibit. He further wrote:

We should realize that the usual method of learning the Way is to pursue the path of sitting meditation. The essential point of this endeavor is that there is a practice of enacting Buddha that does not seek to “make” a Buddha but is a realization of Buddha attained right here and now. At just such a time, whether leaping forward or stepping backward, any ditches and gullies are clearly filled.⁵²

Extending this view in his other writings, Dogen distinguished between four levels of understanding evident in the process of teaching that enables buddhas to become buddhas:

- The highest level is marked by supreme, self-surpassing knowledge, in that an active buddha no longer thinks about being a buddha, which is why buddhahood is uninterruptedly maintained.
- On the next level, practitioners are seeking to attain the state of buddhahood without fully realizing that the effort itself reveals they are always already exemplary of being Buddha yet have been obstructing themselves from this realization.
- This level refers to those who aspire to become buddhas but their unreflective and instrumental separation of means and end prevents them from making significant progress along the path.
- The final level is occupied by those who have not yet aroused the *bodhi*-seeking mind, or appropriate aspiration, since they do yet know enough about the meaning of suffering from understanding inevitable experiences of change to begin seeking buddhahood.⁵³

Therefore, Dogen's use of inconstant or paradoxical rhetoric and deliberately perplexing expression captivates and does not stymie fully realized buddhas, for they know that all Zen sayings indicate that every sentient being is inseparable from universal buddha-nature realized in terms of endless particularities. This discourse inspires practitioners who are aware they are on the path as well as those who aspire to enact buddhahood, yet it purposefully upsets beginners who remain mired in the process and need further prodding. It is also intended to gain the attention of those too ignorant to pursue the goal and not yet able to react productively.

Whether delivered in prose or poetry or as formal or informal sermons, Dogen's teachings were firmly rooted in a traditional Japanese Buddhist worldview emphasizing awareness of the instability and evanescence of all forms of existence. These expressions bear significant contemporary resonance in highlighting the power of contemplative consciousness to cross conceptual and cultural boundaries. They inspire extrication from attachment to a false sense of stability by recognizing fragility as the key to attaining spiritual liberation.

—

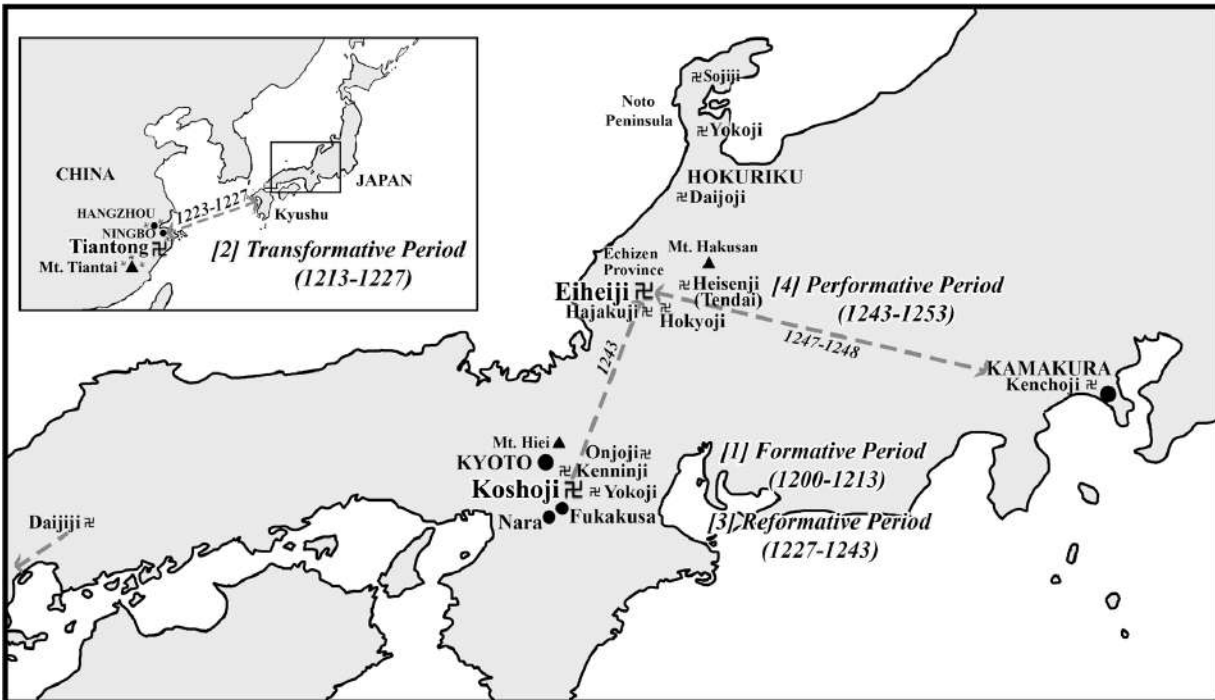
While researching this book, I was struck by an inspiring haiku, written on a sign posted at a Soto Zen temple, that seems to epitomize the legacy of Dogen's teaching. This brief poetic expression reads:

The chanting of sutras
Resonates with the freshness of spring
Both within and without the mountain landscape.

The term "mountain" is used to refer to sacred grounds, regardless of whether they are located in the countryside or city, used as a locus for fostering an awakening to meditative ideals. Yet

“within and without” indicates that the “mountain landscape” is by no means the only such locus and that such awakening can and must be applied to practical everyday concerns. The verse suggests that, as readers and interpreters, we should consider in wide-ranging ways how Dogen’s Zen view of continuing renewal, symbolized by seasonal change, pertains to modern society. Without losing sight of the significance of its original premodern context, this is precisely what I attempt to do in this book.

Four Main Periods in the Life of Dogen (1200-1253)



Regions and temples associated with four stages of Dogen's life. Temples in larger font are directly connected with his practice or abbacy. The Hokuriku region covers the area from Eihei-ji in Echizen Province (currently, Fukui Prefecture) north to Daijoji temple and the Noto peninsula, where Keizan established two prominent Soto temples. (Image © 2020 Maria Sol Echarren and Steven Heine.)

Life and Thought

Dogen's life story is well known and follows patterns typical of traditional Zen teachers.

Few details assumed about Dogen's career path are reliable, and many seem implausible.

IN MANY WAYS Dogen was a child of the turbulent era of history into which he was born, a time marked by sweeping changes as Japanese society transitioned swiftly from the long-standing power of the aristocracy to the dominance of the samurai. This instability also led to wide-ranging reformations in religious institutions. Various new Buddhist schools, including the Soto sect, promoted their methods for gaining salvation. Dogen fulfilled and enhanced many of the main features of medieval Japanese spirituality by successfully integrating key elements of Chinese Zen practices, infused with traditional Mahayana doctrines, into the local cultural milieu. His creative mixture of nondual philosophical standpoints (articulated through innovative literary devices) and sacred ceremonies fostered a novel approach to attaining and maintaining contemplative consciousness.

Part 1 of the book surveys and assesses the major events and crucial religious ideas and ideals that were expressed during the four main periods of Dogen's life. As shown in the image on [this page](#), each of these four periods lasted about a dozen years. Each period, both in and outside of Japan, can best be understood in light of the cultural geography involving the locations where he trained or served as abbot, based in the capital city of Kyoto, the Zen temples of China, or in distant provinces. The map also highlights additional Tendai or Zen Buddhist cloisters that played a key role in the

formation and dissemination of Dogen Zen as well as subsequent developments in the Soto sect. The four periods are these:

1. The first, or formative, period (1200–1213) revolves around Dogen's aristocratic background in Japanese court society, including his high level of religious and secular education, with connections to the fading but still powerful Fujiwara clan. At age seven, he experienced profound feelings of evanescence at the time of his mother's death and resolved to renounce society. Five years later he became a Tendai priest on Mount Hiei, located to the northeast of the capital. There, Dogen quickly became deeply disillusioned because of a sense of grave misgiving about the doctrine of original enlightenment (*hongaku*). This doubt propelled him to take leave of the Tendai temple in order to join the fledgling Zen movement that had been established in Japan by the Rinzai priest Eisai.
2. The next stage, or transformative period (1213–1227), encompasses the religious path Dogen started after he quit Mount Hiei and began training at Eisai's Kenninji temple in central Kyoto. At Kenninji, *zazen* meditation was featured as the primary, though not exclusive, practice technique for the first time in Japanese Buddhist history. A decade later, during a four-year journey to the mainland in the company of Eisai's foremost disciple, Myozen, Dogen met and began studying under his mentor Rujing at Mount Tiantong. There Dogen gained a realization of enlightenment and thereby earned the transmission of the Soto lineage.
3. The third, or reformatory, period (1227–1243) begins with Dogen's slow-starting efforts to establish Soto Zen in Japan. After six transitional years, he became very successful in opening the first authentic Song-dynasty (960–1279) Chinese-style monastery in Kyoto. The practice center,

named Koshoji, featured a dharma hall and monks' hall. At this location on the outskirts of the capital, Dogen started to produce many outstanding writings and also earned the support of the powerful one-eyed samurai patron, Hatano Yoshishige, who supported the rest of his career. Because Hatano's patronage brought out the contrast with Fujiwara family objections to Dogen's novel approach to teaching, as well as other complex circumstances that are still not entirely clear, Dogen decided to move his assembly to a provincial site long celebrated for its splendid landscapes.

4. Finally, the performative period (1243–1253) covers the fulfillment of Dogen's mission to become leader of a genuinely reclusive Zen monastery. This he did at Eihei-ji, where he remained true to the continental methods of meditation and ritual he almost single-handedly imported to Japan. Once ensconced at the new cloister, he left only once for a six-month visit to the shogun in Kamakura. At Eihei-ji, Dogen tended to put greater emphasis on the functions of clerical discipline, especially the performance of daily chores that he saw as linked to a deep understanding of the universal impact of karmic causality. This trend seems to represent a divergence from some of the views he endorsed while leading Koshoji, where the technique of just-sitting meditation prevailed.

In his writings, Dogen often discusses the Buddhist allegory of the four phases of awakening. Seen through this lens, his career trajectory included the stages of (a) arousing the striving for wisdom (*hotsu bodaishin*) during the formative period, after profoundly grasping the meaning of transient existence when he was orphaned; (b) learning the value of ongoing practice (*gyoji*) during the transformative period while training at numerous Zen temples in Japan and China, where he attained enlightenment; (c) after

returning to his native land in the reformatory period, developing groundbreaking methods at Koshōji for guiding disciples to their own insights into how buddha-nature is manifested as everyday truth (genjokōan); and (d) enacting postrealization practices during the performative period at Eihei-ji by emphasizing repentance (*zange*) as key to redemption.

CHAPTER 1

An Aristocratic Orphan

The Development of a Buddhist Prodigy

TRADITIONAL RECORDS depict Dogen as a prodigy born into an elite family at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Upon his mother's death when he was seven, while looking at the smoke drifting from the burning incense during her funeral, Dogen found himself deeply moved by an awareness of transiency. At the age of twelve, he relinquished the chance offered by an adoptive father to be trained in court society, opting instead to take the tonsure and become ordained as a Tendai monk. This he did on Mount Hiei, which was then the primary destination for all Buddhist seekers from Kyoto and beyond. Once he joined the Tendai community, however, he quickly faced a grave sense of doubt about original-enlightenment thought—one of the main tenets of Tendai teaching and a dominant force in Japanese Buddhism. In particular, he questioned its relevance for coming to terms with the vicissitudes of ephemeral existence that he faced as an orphan raised in an unsettled period of Japanese history. He endured a great doubt (*taigi*), feeling wary and unsettled regarding this key aspect of Mahayana Buddhist teaching. This occurred during an era when the need for pathways to individual salvation was being promoted by various new forms of Japanese Buddhism that sought to address widespread personal feelings of fragility, instability, and loss.

This chapter examines the first of the four main periods in Dogen's life, the formative period (1200–1213), which is divided into two substages of uneven length. The first phase (1200–1212) covers Dogen's early education, sense of despair, and initiation. The brief second phase (1213) involves the pivotal year in which he became disillusioned by uncertainty before leaving Mount Hiei and soon after began discovering the Zen approach to meditation recently introduced to Japan by Eisai.

Dogen's Birth and Early Childhood

According to the traditional narrative, Dogen was born on the second day of the first lunar month of the year 1200. His birthday is now celebrated on January 26, following the modern solar calendar. As indicated in the lineage map on [this page](#), he had direct ties to the three most prestigious clans in the empire:

- The imperial (Yamato) line, through the legacy of Emperor Murakami, who reigned during the mid-900s. The imperial lineage had dominated the entire Heian period but lost power by the end of the twelfth century.
- The Minamoto (Genji) clan, through his father, which was derivative of the royal family. The Minamoto members were temporarily ascendant but in stiff competition with, and soon to lose out to, other samurai clans for leadership of the early Kamakura period.
- The Fujiwara clan, through his mother, which had long supported and in many ways eclipsed imperial rule through a system of endogamy. The Fujiwaras also entered into decline, although their prestigious members continued to maintain considerable influence that was still being exerted in the capital.

Despite their prominence and power, each of these families was facing a challenging situation based on far-reaching sociopolitical changes. Indeed, Dogen was born into a crucial turning point in Japanese cultural history.

Dogen's father was Michichika, a general and chancellor of the court who hailed from the Minamoto clan. In 1192, the clan had wrested the power of the government from the Fujiwara-backed regency. Through his father's lineage, it is claimed that Dogen was also a ninth-generation descendant of Murakami, who reigned for two decades (946–967) in the tenth century. Thus, he was distantly related to the current sovereign, Go Fukakusa, for whom, many years later while serving as a temple abbot, he occasionally said prayers during sermons. When Michichika died in 1202 at the age of fifty-four, Dogen's foster father became Michitomo Minamoto—supposedly an uncle, though he may have been the son of his father and therefore Dogen's considerably older half brother. In later years, Dogen only acknowledged Michitomo, rather than Michichika, in a couple of memorial sermons. This has led to speculation that Michitomo was the true father, but perhaps Dogen simply remembered him more fondly since he knew him while growing up.

Ishi, Dogen's mother, was the offspring of Fujiwara Motofusa. Motofusa had apparently arranged for his daughter, celebrated for her beauty, to be wedded to the much older Michichika as a desperate attempt to regain prestige. He had failed in previous efforts to broker a power-based marriage for her because of the family's decline. Shortly after Dogen's birth, a physiognomist, customarily brought along by aristocrats as a fortune-teller, looked at his face and said to Ishi, "This son is a sagely child whose eyes have double pupils. He definitely is a great vessel for truth. Ancient prophecies indicate that the birth of such a child endangers the life of the mother. When this child is in his sixth or seventh year, you will surely die."⁵⁴ It is said that Ishi was not upset or fearful but loved her child all the more. With Michitomo's support, she arranged for Dogen

to learn to read Chinese classics, including Confucian and Daoist texts, imperial chronicles, and poetry collections, as well as important Japanese literary works. As part of her deathbed conversation, Ishi recalled the birth-time divination and implored Dogen to join the monkhood when he felt mature enough to undergo a conversion.

Modern historians generally agree that Dogen's outstanding literary skills, evident in the rhetorical style of his many writings and in his excellent calligraphy, provide confirmation of his aristocratic education. In addition to its contribution to Buddhist thought, the *Treasury* is regarded as an exemplary work of medieval Japanese literature, and extant samples of Dogen's handwriting remain highly valued.

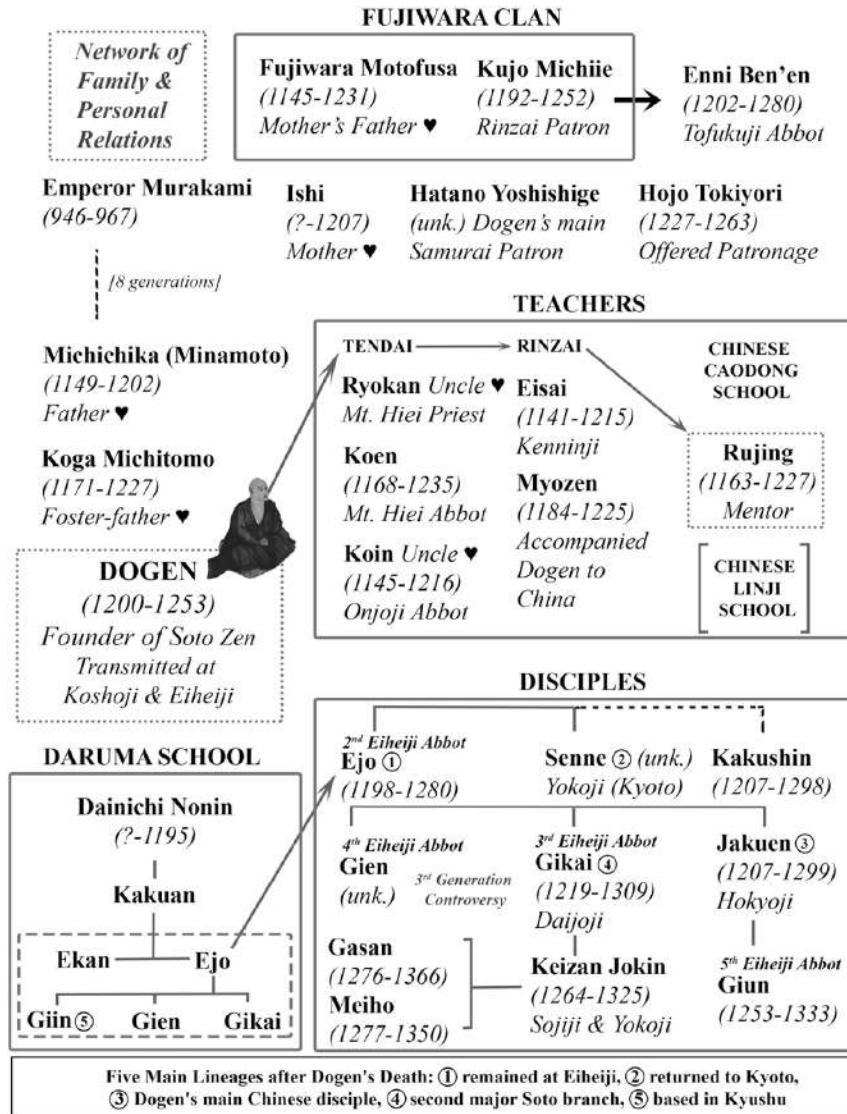
By virtue of his heritage, Dogen had many powerful relatives in Kyoto's secular and religious circles, and they would affect some of his career choices, one way or the other, for years to come. After he was orphaned at age seven, relatives on both the Minamoto and Fujiwara sides offered to adopt him and provide prospects for worldly success. Apparently, he was taken in by Motofusa's brother, Fujiwara Moroie (1172–1238), who lacked an heir, although some versions of the story claim it was Motofusa himself who raised young Dogen. In any case, he continued to study traditional Chinese and Japanese writings. It is said that by the age of eight he could read through the dense Indian Buddhist philosophical compendium the *Verses on the Treasury of the Dharma* (*Abhidharmakosa*)—a scripture that was widely studied in Sinitic editions, whether or not the usually elite reader was being trained for a life in the monkhood.

Buddhist Renunciation

The Fujiwara family began to prepare Dogen for an important role in court society. In 1212 they planned to celebrate a twelfth-year capping ceremony, or confirmation of adulthood. According to

traditional Japanese counting, which refers to someone as one year old at the time of birth, this would be performed in the thirteenth year. That occasion was to represent the gateway to making Dogen ready for a high-level administrative position. However, he surreptitiously rejected this arrangement. In the spring of that year, he decided instead to run off and enroll at Mount Hiei. He went to the high priest Ryokan, a maternal uncle from the Fujiwara side, who led a small cloister in the Yokawa District. Ryokan initially rebuffed Dogen's request to enter the cloister. Upon inquiring whether Dogen's choice would fulfill his family's wishes, Dogen replied, "When my loving mother passed away, she made a request by saying, 'You should go forth from household life and become a student of the Way.' Therefore, I do not want to be involved in the futility of the profane world. I want to make a home-departure so as to repay the blessings of my grandmother, aunts, and mother."⁵⁵ Shedding tears on hearing such a powerful explanation, Ryokan permitted Dogen to enter the abbey for his preliminary studies.

DOGEN'S LINEAGES



The familial and Buddhist lineages that influenced and succeeded Dogen.
(Image © 2020 Maria Sol Echarren and Steven Heine.)

A year later he took the tonsure under Koen, the Mount Hiei abbot. The dharma name Dogen was apparently bestowed based on a passage in the Flower Garland Sutra (Ch. Huayan jing, Jp. Kegonkyo) that refers to faith as the mother of the “merit of the original Way” (*dogen kudoku*) that gives rise to the essential goodness of all beings. Shortly after this, Dogen received the forty-eight bodhisattva precepts (*bosatsu kairitsu*) that were typical of Tendai initiation ceremonies. By not also receiving the 250 Hinayana precepts—at the time only being offered at temples in the former capital of Nara, to the south of Kyoto—Dogen would eventually face a problem in trying to enter China, where both sets of precepts were required for all incoming monks.

The Mount Hiei induction ceremony was the first of several ordinations Dogen underwent. He later underwent additional ones under the auspices of Myozen, representing the Oryu (Ch. Huanglong) lineage of the Rinzai (Ch. Linji) stream of Zen, and under Rujing of the Soto (Ch. Caodong) lineage. Fujiwara Motofusa and/or Moroie were likely upset with Dogen’s secret decision to renounce their offer of secular success. Evidence for that includes the fact that thirty years later Motofusa’s son, Chancellor Kujo Michiie, supported Enni Ben’en, Dogen’s Rinzai rival. When Enni returned in 1243 from spending six years in China, a magnificent new temple, Tofukuji, was constructed with Fujiwara backing near Koshoji. By eclipsing the stature of Dogen’s monastery in size and grandeur, even though Enni’s pilgrimage took place over a decade later, this humiliation probably contributed to Dogen’s decision to leave Kyoto that same year.

Medieval Japanese Tendai and the Birth of Kamakura Buddhism

At the time of Dogen’s ordination on Mount Hiei, Tendai Buddhism had long been dominant in Japan. The school had by then been in a

hegemonic position for nearly the entirety of the four hundred years of the Heian period (794–1185), as well as the early decades of the Kamakura period (1185–1333). Japanese Tendai began with Saicho (767–822), who founded the sect after he returned from studying in China in the first decade of the 800s. Known for its esoteric ritualism, Japanese Tendai greatly contributed to the establishment of Kyoto as Japan's capital city. Sacred Tendai rites were thought to protect Kyoto from chaos and disturbance, and they became an important part of the city's thriving culture. The Tendai sect often catered to the concerns of the nobility and in turn received substantial support. Priests offered ceremonies that combined the teachings of the Lotus Sutra (considered applicable to all humans and sentient beings) with views about tantric symbolism and its sacramental power. The increasingly important esoteric component of Japanese Tendai was imported from diverse practices popular on the mainland, though not from the Chinese Tiantai school itself, which was highly doctrinal. The Tendai approach to ritualism, with its complex social and financial connections to the Kyoto aristocracy, could only be enacted by the most highly trained monks, and others were excluded from participating in these ritual performances.

With the onset of the Kamakura period, various monks began to reject the Tendai insistence on restricting access to ritual knowledge only to those who occupied an inner sanctum of the school. Such monks even began leaving the Hiei cloisters to start their own schools, doing so despite the challenge of needing their new sects to be sanctioned by the state. They sought to personalize religious experience in a way that would be open to a much broader range of social classes. These included not only the ascendant warriors but also peasants and outcasts, and the new ways of practice were also more gender inclusive. For example, Dogen's congregations encouraged the incorporation of nuns, a practice he witnessed in China. It seems from some of his writings that several nuns were close to him, although they were in the end considered of a lesser

status than male monastics. The Pure Land schools included female lay practitioners and Shinran, the founder of True Pure Land (Jodo Shin) in the early 1200s that broke off from Honen's Pure Land school, even got married. All legitimate seekers, including those who lacked the credentials to joint Mount Hiei, were suddenly being encouraged by this newly inspired set of teachers to pursue spirituality. These innovators advocated the use of training techniques, especially sitting meditation and chanting the name of Amida Buddha, that had been incorporated into Tendai rituals but without having much importance. Although Tendai has remained a viable sect to this day, it never regained the level of influence it had during the classical period.

During Dogen's life, several new Buddhist movements emerged and almost instantly began to prosper. These novel sects, referred to collectively as the New Kamakura Buddhism, emphasized the path to individual deliverance for lower classes and marginalized groups. Dogen's own Soto Zen school is counted among them, as is Rinzai Zen. Both Zen groups were based largely on transplanting Chinese contemplative practices to Japan. They emphasized the approach of self-power (*jiriki*) through combining meditation with strict monastic regulations. This combination was approached by virtue of understanding the universality of ultimate reality. One way Dogen phrased this was the unity of "whole-being-buddha-nature" (*shitsu bussho*), by which he meant that oneness is considered inseparable from a multitude of concrete individualities.

Among the other medieval schools that came to be grouped as the New Kamakura Buddhism were Pure Land (founded by Honen), based on chanting the name of Amida Buddha; True Pure Land (founded by Shinran), based on giving thanks to Amida without requiring the recitation; Momentous Pure Land (founded by Ippen), known for ecstatic dancing to celebrate Amida; and Nichiren (so named for the monk Nichiren), based on the doctrines and symbolism of the Lotus Sutra. In contrast to the two Zen sects, all of

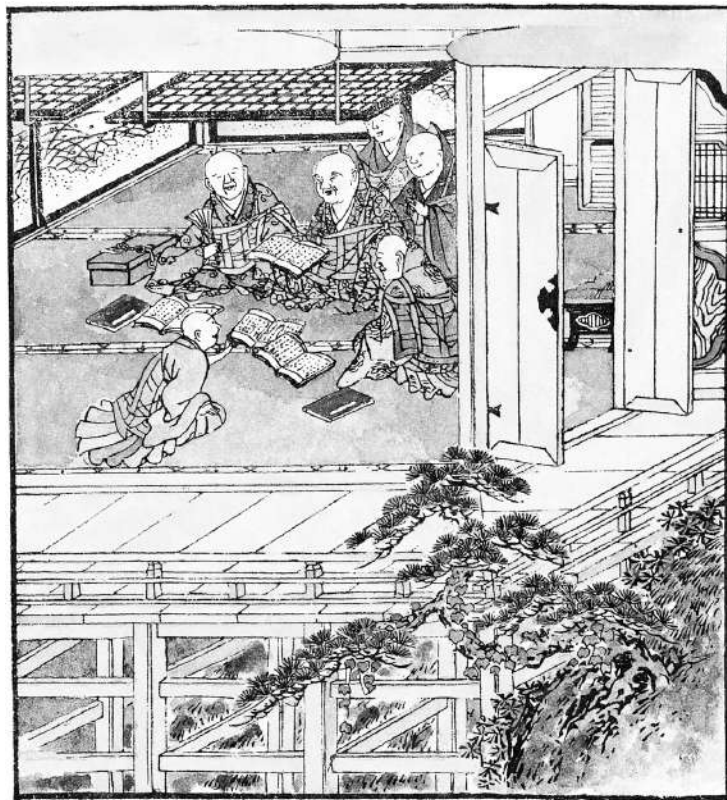
those devotional movements stressed the value of the other-power (*tariki*) outlook, evoking the efficacy of worshipful rites, such as celebrations, mantras, petitions, prayers, and visualizations. Although they had many basic differences, the leaders of the new movements also shared commonalities. Each initially studied but decided to abandon the Tendai sect to establish their own school grounded on the selection (*senjaku*) of a single simple soteriological pathway. Each sought to find and propagate a practice that would be effective for all practitioners to attain enlightenment, regardless of age, rearing, intelligence, or education.

Indeed, it was Dogen's doubt about the doctrinal coherence and soteriological effectiveness of the Tendai school that led him to begin searching elsewhere. Despite his young age, he quickly became convinced that the teaching of original enlightenment failed to address his sense of urgency about the religious quest. He sought a teaching that would address the profound uncertainties created by the pervasive impermanence of all aspects of existence, which Dogen experienced deeply in his personal life and which the Japanese nation was then undergoing dramatically in ways that affected all sectors of society.

Dogen's Great Doubt

The matter of Dogen's great doubt is summed up succinctly in the *Record of Kenzei*: "If all sentient beings possess the buddha-nature and Tathagata exists without change [as enunciated in the *Nirvana Sutra*], then why must people develop the aspiration for awakening and vigorously engage in austerities in order to realize this truth?"⁵⁶ This conundrum is also evoked in a series of questions and enigmas posed in the opening passage of Dogen's short essay *Universal Recommendation for Zazen* (*Fukanzazengi*). The first main work Dogen wrote after returning from China in 1227, it is considered a manifesto for the practice of just sitting:

Fundamentally, the basis of the Way is thoroughly pervasive, so how could it be contingent on practice and realization? The vehicle of the ancestors is naturally unrestricted, then why should we expend sustained effort? Surely whole being is far beyond defilement, so who could believe in a method to cultivate it? Never is the Way apart from this very place, so what is the use of a journey to practice it? Yet, if there is a hair's breadth of distinction between existence and training, this gap becomes as great as that between heaven and earth. Once the slightest sense of liking or disliking something arises, confusion reigns and one's mind is hopelessly lost in delusion.⁵⁷



The classic scene of Dogen challenging his elders on the notion of original enlightenment as depicted in the *Illustrated Record of Kenzei*.

As shown in the image above, the precocious Dogen, preoccupied with such questions, began to challenge the senior monks on Mount Hiei by debating the meaning of original enlightenment with them. Despite his youth, his intelligence and resourcefulness were evident, as he had a full set of scriptures in hand that he apparently understood as well or better than they did. Even though he must have appreciated the chance to debate, in the end he felt dissatisfied by their weak responses. The elder priests apparently did not take seriously his objections. Instead, they seemed intent on protecting the status quo of conventional beliefs indicated in the scriptures prized by the Tendai tradition. Since they seemed uninterested or unable to acknowledge the individualistic imperative Dogen was eager to highlight based on his personal experiences of impermanence, the young monk must have sensed that he was not in a context in which his spiritual growth could continue.

In the second major work written after his return from China, “Discerning the Way,” Dogen wrote in a more positive vein about the significance of undergoing doubt for attaining spiritual realization. The piece is included as the first chapter in some editions of the *Treasury* and is considered an ideal introduction to his oeuvre:

Although the Dharma is allotted amply to everyone, when we have not practiced properly it does not appear, and when we do not realize this it is not attained. Let it go and it fills the hand—how could it ever be limited by one versus many? Speak of it and it fills the mouth—vertically and horizontally, without boundary. Buddhas, always within the Dharma, dwelling in and maintaining it, do not have any awareness of restrictions. Living beings, continuously within and making use of it, also have no restrictions delimiting their awareness.^{[58](#)}

In several additional writings, Dogen revisited the primal question of why, if all beings are endowed with buddha-nature, people must undergo a training process to gain awakening. The challenge to all practitioners, he argued, is to encounter thoroughly and penetrate fully the depth of this inquiry, thereby discovering for oneself the challenges it poses to original-enlightenment thought. Dogen consistently emphasized that practice does not “make” or transform human beings into buddhas. Instead, practicing the dharma expresses or reveals one’s enlightened nature, or manifests the dynamic activity of spiritual illumination. Therefore, it must be understood that it is not we, as calculative selves, who perform practice. It is the buddha we always already are that is practicing through each of us as an appropriate vessel. Realization in this view makes continuous effort with neither regard for an outcome nor anticipation of the result of accumulating merit from previous phases of practice.

As a young teenager, however, such realizations lay in the future for Dogen. What he knew is that he felt unsatisfied and stifled, and he yearned to search out new relationships and sources of teaching. As mentioned above, Dogen’s departure from Mount Hiei fit the pattern of other founders of new Kamakura Buddhist sects, who similarly had sharp differences with the Tendai approach to training. Each of the emerging leaders sought an alternative pathway based on his own distinctive religious vision. However, unlike Honen, Shinran, and Nichiren, who spent more than a decade before taking leave of the Tendai bastion, Dogen’s initial doubt occurred after less than two years. He made a full exit by 1217, at the latest estimation, sensing from the outset that the doctrine of original enlightenment was self-contradictory.

Based on his later reflections, it is clear that Dogen must have been pondering ephemerality since the time of his mother’s death and would not rest until its meaning was clarified and his quest fulfilled. The first step on this path was for him to join Kenninji

temple. It was there that he first practiced zazen intensively before traveling to China in the 1220s, where he would learn about Zen directly from the great continental teachers he had been hearing about. We will pick up this thread of Dogen's biography in the next chapter.

Before moving on to the transformative period—the time from Dogen's midteens to his late twenties, culminating in his crucial realization experience in China and his return to Japan—in the remainder of this chapter we will look at Dogen's religious vision in the context of the violent and disorienting era of Japanese politics and culture in which he lived.

Dogen's Religious Vision in Light of Kamakura Society

Dogen's life occurred at the dawn of the Kamakura period, when Japanese society was making a drastic transition in sociopolitical leadership. The peaceful dominion of the Fujiwara clan, which was linked through endogamy with the imperial family for four hundred years during the Heian period, was coming to an end. An ascending warrior class known as samurai (with the warlords being called shoguns) was establishing a new style of rule, one that contrasted strongly with the Heian model of governance by the aristocratic regency. After centuries of patrician rule uncomplicated by battle, political stability came to an end. Ongoing civil war occurred as samurai factions clashed frequently. Two powerful shogunal clans—first the Hojo family until the 1330s and then the Ashikaga clan until the mid-1500s—remained dominant for the next three and a half centuries.

The Heian period had seen an efflorescence of connections between Buddhist teachings and Japanese literary arts, and it was a period characterized by the prestige of literature (*bun*) and the rejection of martial arts (*bu*). The Kamakura period reversed this by

sanctioning battle, yet the new rulers did not eschew connections to Buddhism. A number of the Hojo and, later, Ashikaga shoguns turned to Zen meditative techniques as a compelling form of behavioral discipline sustained by mindful self-control. The move from Tendai aristocratic ritualism to Zen-inspired self-discipline attuned to the needs of samurai practitioners shows how religious affiliations were radically changing in conjunction with abrupt yet enduring governmental transformations. The new leaders saw Zen as a source of creativity for religious and literary pursuits and one that would help them maintain a sense of prestige in the face of ongoing skepticism and ridicule from the dethroned yet still forceful Fujiwara clan.

The unrest in thirteenth-century Japan was not limited to domestic politics or topsy-turvy social and cultural changes. By the 1270s, the country had also had to fend off two successive Mongol invasions. In addition, Japanese society was greatly affected by a sequence of natural catastrophes that plagued the capital, including earthquakes, tsunamis, tornadoes, typhoons, and resultant fires. These incidents inspired several eminent Buddhist authors to embrace an outlook referred to as the “contemplation of impermanence”—attaining full comprehension of how and why ephemerality is experienced in all aspects of daily life.⁵⁹

Consider, for example, the evocation of the impact of fierce combat in the epic *Tale of Heike* (*Heike monogatari*). The following passage relates to events that took place at the beginning of the shogunal era in the late twelfth century: “The sound of the Gion temple bell echoes the impermanence of all things, and the color of the fragrant flowers reveal the truth that even the prosperous must decline. The proud do not endure for they are like a dream on a spring night; the mighty fall in the end because they are as dust before the wind.” Another example comes from the opening passage of *An Account of My Hut* (*Hojoki*), a text that greatly influenced Henry David Thoreau’s period of reclusion at Walden pond seven centuries

later. The text was written by the prominent literary figure Chomei, who renounced life in Kyoto to become a Pure Land eremite living in a ten-foot Buddhist hermitage. As he famously wrote in 1212, "The river flows ceaselessly, and its water never stays the same. The bubbles that float upon its pools disappear and form again, but never last very long. It is the same with people in this world and their residences.... Death in the morning and birth in the evening is the way of things, which are ephemeral like foam on a stream."

In the Japanese Buddhist world, the chaotic violence of the Kamakura period, and the cultural emphasis on ephemerality, led to an embrace of the theory of the deterioration of the dharma, also known as the age of decline (*mappo*). This notion was linked to an ancient Buddhist prophecy indicating that, beginning fifteen hundred years after the death of Shakyamuni, or around the year 1000 C.E., common people would no longer be able to attain enlightenment for themselves. Instead, they would need to rely on the power of a salvific buddha or bodhisattva, such as Amida, Kannon, Monju, or Jizo, to facilitate their awakening.

Unlike many of the era's other sectarian founders, Dogen adamantly rejected the theory of mappo. In contrast to that view, which emphasized spiritual and moral collapse, Dogen came to adamantly advocate the method of unwavering commitment to zazen. He held that the practice of just sitting was an example of realizing the true dharma (*shobo*) that can be attained at any time, without partiality or lack, by virtue of making an effort by and for oneself in conjunction with all other beings. Dogen's practice approach thus stood in stark contrast to the advocates of the theory of decline, who generally advocated the path based on other-power belief in Amida. Like them, however, Dogen affirmed that everyone, whether clever or foolish, is capable of attaining enlightenment so long as they act with dignity and practice with determination.

Dogen's approach required extensive periods of silent meditation undertaken not to reach a set goal but with sitting as an end itself

that infuses all thoughts and other activities. He encouraged his followers to cast off any unconscious concern with having a purpose, since that instrumentalism would betray an ulterior motive or underlying pragmatic intention. In his writings, he frequently criticized examples of concentration, especially but not limited to introspective methods propagated by the Rinzai Zen sect, that did not live up to his ideal of purposelessness. He did not, however, regard the method of just sitting as a solitary technique, since he also strongly emphasized that genuine awareness must occur in each and every possible situation.

This implication meant that the seemingly mundane actions of a monastic, performed throughout the year and continuing during a full lifetime, were to be conducted with a stately demeanor emulating the majestic conduct of practicing buddhas. Dogen's view was that authentically awakened adepts perpetually realize what he called the one great matter (*ichi daiji*). This perpetual realization entails coming to terms with the ultimate meaning of life and death, or the arising and desistence of all elements of existence. That insight enables the practitioner to undertake enlightened behavior in routine affairs as well as exceptional events. "In the swift march of ephemerality," Dogen wrote, "birth and death are vital concerns." Moreover, "Just by understanding that birth-death is itself nirvaṇa, one neither despises birth-death [as a form of bondage] nor pursues nirvaṇa [as a goal]. Only then will you be able to gain freedom from birth-death within the realm of birth-death."⁶⁰

Although he rejected the theory of decline that was so prominent in the Japanese Buddhist culture of his time and in the writings of his fellow founders of new Buddhist sects, we can see in the quotes above that Dogen nevertheless reflected the zeitgeist of early medieval Japan. He emphasized intensely subjective religious experience based on keen awareness of mortality and finitude. He wrote compellingly of the effects of impermanence while adding the moral imperative that seekers must be able to seize the moment (an

idea often referred to in the West by the Latin phrase *carpe diem*) through attentive awareness and dignified behavior. He exhorted his followers to realize enlightenment right here and now rather than as a remote, future-based goal:

Impermanence is swift, so negotiating life-and-death is the great matter. For the short while you are alive, if you wish to study or practice some activity, just practice the Buddha Way and study the Buddha Dharma. Our life is like a dream. Time passes swiftly. Dewlike existence easily disappears. Since time waits for no one, strive to do good unto others and follow the will of the Buddha as long as you are alive.⁶¹

Dogen's imperative to undergo self-renewal in light of ephemerality highlights that his approach was by no means pessimistic or life denying. Rather, he held an altogether positive outlook, as is evident in the injunction used as the title of a waka verse: "Not a moment is to be spent idly in the twenty-four hours of each day!"

Dogen and the Chinese Tradition

It is critical, in understanding Dogen, to examine the Japanese political, cultural, and religious currents of his time. But it is equally important to grasp the extent to which he was influenced by, and saw his work as an extension of, the model of Chinese Chan. The arc of Dogen's religious path—facing persistent challenges to attaining spiritual authenticity in the first half of his life and enacting effective institutional authority in the second half—is emblematic of the pathway of classical Zen teachers as expressed in numerous Chinese "transmissions of the torch" (Ch. *chuandeng lu*, Jp. *dentoroku*) records, an important literary genre that Dogen helped introduce to Japan. During the Tang and Song dynasties, hundreds

of prominent masters were said to have spent a significant period (in some cases, as much as several decades) dealing with a deep feeling of instability concerning their capacity to attain enlightenment. These incidents reflected an interior deficiency that was overcome by realizing that the “gateless gate” (Ch. *wumen*, Jp. *mumon*) of true reality remains wide open.⁶²

These intrepid wayfarers had in most cases explored alternative forms of Buddhism, Confucianism, or Daoism early in life, prior to undergoing rigorous Zen training. At some turning point, they felt hopelessly trapped, like a rat in a cage, or as confused as a dog that cannot resist licking a bowl of hot oil. They wandered in delusion while enduring additional psychological tests and setbacks. The intensity of their mental conditions often manifested in physical maladies, such as panic attacks, with symptoms resembling those of what is today called nervous breakdown. Eventually a spontaneous sense of revulsion regarding egotistical attachments triggered liberation based on self-extrication from ignorance. This was usually brought about by fortuitous meetings with wise teachers or auspicious supernal events initiated by bodhisattvas or other ethereal guides. These encounters enabled the seeker to realize an electrifying moment of awakening and, after cultivating this experience, to become an independent leader of his or her own self-sustaining Zen community.

Dogen was particularly fond of citing the propitious accounts of two Tang-dynasty monks, each of whom realized enlightenment in an instantaneous flash of spiritual awareness after years of unresolved confusion. One monk was Lingyun, who resolved thirty years of unproductive training upon seeing peach trees in bloom one day. The other was Xiangyan, who, following years of struggling to clarify doctrine and having gone so far as to burn all his books, had an intuitive awakening while sweeping the temple grounds when he heard the pinging sound of a pebble striking a bamboo tree. After experiencing seemingly innocuous, fleeting sensations that ironically

connected them with the wholeness of reality, both Zen masters found creative ways to build large assemblies of devotees to carry on the leadership of their lineages. This paradigm of undergoing spontaneous insight following years of uncertainty was reenacted in Dogen's own experience of enlightenment at Mount Tiantong, which came after years of anxiety and doubt to the point of hopelessness.

As another example of continental influence, Dogen, once he became a temple abbot, introduced to Japanese Buddhism the Zen custom of the master delivering formal sermons (*jodo*) in a dharma hall. Following the Chinese approach, he took a high seat on a platform before the assembly of monks, who lined up according to institutional seniority and ranking. These sermons usually involved the citing and interpreting of koans, while demonstrating the self-confidence to refashion the puzzling and paradoxical sayings of his predecessors (and the standard commentaries on them). Dogen often accompanied these homilies with dramatic gestures, such as banging his foot on the floor, throwing down his staff, or waving in the air his ceremonial fly whisk before walking away from the dais. Such dramatic enactments were meant to encourage the assembly members to think through their own conclusions.

Dogen often took liberty with Chinese teachings, including a prominent injunction by Rujiing that he frequently cites in his writings. Rujiing recommended that practitioners adhere solely to just sitting as the gateway to casting off body-mind rather than performing the typical Mahayana Buddhist rites of burning incense, reverential bowing, offering repentance, or chanting scriptures. Despite Rujiing's cautionary words, Dogen found creative ways to incorporate almost all of these observances into the activity of his assembly. He also placed emphasis on enacting the daily chores of cooking rice, wearing and washing ecclesial apparel properly, cleaning floors thoroughly, scrubbing one's face and body immaculately, and spotlessly brushing one's teeth. He likewise recommended carrying out numerous supplementary responsibilities in addition to

celebrating miscellaneous weekly or monthly ceremonies as well as anniversaries and memorials. Dogen was a subversive thinker in many ways, but it is clear he mainly sought to develop an effective form of monasticism true to Buddhist principles and relevant to medieval Japanese society.

Despite certain differences in emphasis, interpretation, and form, it is clear that Dogen intended to signal full agreement with the essence of Rujing's admonition. Dogen consistently highlighted the value of purposeless zazen while deemphasizing the role of the outer trappings of monastic endeavors. These were primarily to be valued for their focus on interior cultivation, and thus they could be modified based on circumstances. Moreover, he did not endorse one of the methods rejected by Rujing, the votive recitation of Amida Buddha's sacred name (*nenbutsu*) as used in Pure Land Buddhism. Dogen compared this technique to the useless croaking of a frog, although there are clearly indications in his writings that he appreciated the value of prayerful devotion. The criticism was no doubt part of the scathing put-downs volleyed back and forth by leaders of the new Kamakura movements, who were eager to promulgate their own lineages in the midst of a highly competitive religious environment. Dogen must have recognized that one of his evangelical goals as Japan's original Zen teacher was to win over adherents of chanting by convincing them of the greater merits of just-sitting practice.

—

To understand more clearly how Dogen integrated Chinese models of Zen theory and practice with Japanese customs and methods, the next chapter examines the critical thirteen or so transformative years of his life. During this period, he quickly abandoned the Tendai school to take up sitting meditation at Kenninji, Japan's first Zen temple, established in Kyoto by Eisai. After practicing there for close

to a decade, a period for which little is mentioned in the traditional narrative, Dogen left with Eisai's main disciple, Myozen, for the continent. There he struggled mightily with doubts and frustration for the first two years. Then, in 1225, he encountered the ideal teacher in Rujing, attained enlightenment, and studied with great determination under Rujing's tutelage for two additional years before returning to Japan to begin his teaching mission.

CHAPTER 2

Casting Off Body-Mind

Resolving the Great Doubt

THE SECOND PHASE of Dogen's life, the transformative period (1213–1227), centers on his training with two eminent Zen teachers. The first was Eisai (1141–1215), founder of Rinzai Zen in Japan. Head of Kenninji temple, which he established in central Kyoto in 1202 using a gift of land from the Minamoto clan, Eisai passed away at approximately the same time that Dogen arrived at Kenninji. Dogen spent at least six and perhaps as many as nine years there after the Rinzai founder's death before joining with the new Kenninji leader, Myozen, to make a pilgrimage to the mainland.

The second teacher was Rujing, head of Mount Tiantong in China. Although Dogen had learned a rigorous style of meditative practice at Kenninji (albeit one mixed with Tendai esotericism), it was not until his practice with Rujing that he realized enlightenment through the act of just sitting. Furthermore, it was at Tiantong that he gained knowledge of the Chinese Zen writings and rituals that would guide his approach to teaching during the entire second half of his life.

The transformative period is divided into three substages. The first phase (1213–1223) encompasses Dogen's training in Zen at Kenninji. Not much is known about the years beginning in 1216; it is assumed Dogen was then working inconspicuously on polishing his

meditation technique. In the second phase (1223–1225), Dogen made the journey to China and experienced further disillusionment due to the inauthenticity of teachings he found at several prominent temples. The last stage (1225–1227) involved Dogen's intensive studies and eye-opening conversations with Rujing, including his enlightenment realized during the summer retreat of 1225 and his return to Japan after two years at Mount Tiantong.

Controversial biographical issues involved in understanding the transformative period include the question of whether and to what extent Dogen ever actually interacted with Eisai; why he stayed on board the boat at the port city of Ningbo for three months before disembarking in China; the circumstances surrounding his meeting and attainment of enlightenment under the tutelage of Rujing, in addition to encounters with other teachers and their religious standpoints at various temples in China; and the symbolism of several supernatural stories that are said to have transpired during the time of his return from the mainland.

Early Studies of Zen

After leaving Mount Hiei temporarily in 1214, Dogen first visited Onjoji temple (also known as Miidera, or “Three Wells” temple). This was the primary site of a second powerful Tendai sect, based in Kyoto, which had a strong network of alliances in the northern countryside. The school at Onjoji was known as the Temporal Gate (Jimon) of Tendai, whereas Mount Hiei represented the Mountain Gate (Sanmon). Located down the hill from Hiei on the beautiful shores of Lake Biwa, Onjoji had long felt threatened by the towering reputation of its rival monastic complex, and the two sects engaged in extended feuds. The differences between the schools primarily concerned issues of institutional authority, lineal succession, and ritual performance rather than significant doctrinal discrepancies regarding original-enlightenment thought.

At Onjoji, Dogen found that the abbot was yet another maternal uncle, a Fujiwara named Koin, who would die two years later. Koin told the intrepid inquirer that he could not help resolve his doubt because the Temporal Gate's answer would likely be based on the same scriptural sources cited by the leading monks of the Mountain Gate. Perhaps sensing that the young monk needed more support in pursuing his question about the relationship between universal buddha-nature and the need for individual practice, the prelate also suggested that Dogen plan to visit Kenninji.⁶³

Based on Koin's advice, Dogen likely made at least a brief visit to Kenninji in 1214 at the start of a several-year period in which he probably continued to wander between Tendai and Zen temples. According to traditional accounts, he was sufficiently impressed by the training atmosphere that he returned a couple of years later to enlist as a full-fledged novice. It is not likely that he would have had a chance to meet Eisai. According to various records, Eisai was then in residence at Jufukuji, an important Zen cloister he had established in Kamakura. It was just a year before his death, and he is thought to have remained at Jufukuji until the end. There is, however, an alternative narrative based on an obscure entry in a journal supposedly kept by Myozen in China. In recalling a turning-point event that took place a decade before, Myozen noted that his younger colleague received an inspirational koan-based teaching directly from Eisai during Dogen's initial visit to Kenninji.

This unverifiable account indicates that Dogen met the temple founder and asked him how to resolve his great doubt. Eisai responded by citing the second line of a prominent two-sentence case. Nanquan (Jp. Nansen), teacher of the famous Tang-dynasty master Zhaozhou (Jp. Joshu), once said in a lecture to his assembly, "The Buddhas of past, present and future do not know it. But badgers and white oxen do know it." The reference is no doubt to buddha-nature, original enlightenment, or related conceptions of ultimate reality. When cited as case 69 in the *Record of Serenity* (Ch.

Congronglu, Jp. *Shoyoroku*), the following paradoxical capping phrases are used: “Just because they do know it,” which playfully contradicts the first sentence, and “Just because they do not know it,” which ironically reverses the next statement. In another notable commentary on the second statement, the master Changsha declares, “What is so strange about that?”

Myozen supposedly recorded that, after hearing Eisai’s response, Dogen wept so many tears that his sleeve was soaked from wiping away the moisture. Eto Sokuo, a famous twentieth-century Japanese commentator on Dogen’s thought, discusses this passage without passing judgment on the reliability of the story.⁶⁴ He suggests that, if it did indeed transpire, even though Dogen would have been greatly impressed by Eisai’s insight, he also would likely have felt let down on some level because the eminent predecessor relied on citing previous teachings rather than uttering his own distinctive interpretation of Nanquan’s brief lecture. This disappointment, if it did occur, may have contributed to Dogen’s desire to travel to the mainland to find answers regarding his doubt directly from current Chinese Zen teachers. Perhaps he sensed that a definitive resolution would not be available in his native country.

Eto further points out some important theoretical and practical connections between the two famous Japanese Zen founders, Eisai and Dogen, which are sometimes overlooked when they are regarded merely as sectarian rivals. Even though Eisai’s eminence is well recognized, he suffers a mixed reputation in that he has been characterized as acting like an aloof “bishop” seeking worldly acclaim. The evidence cited for this view is that he was known to shuttle between a small network of Zen temples he led in Kyoto, Kamakura, and Kyushu, while receiving support from powerful political figures. Dogen, however, wrote emphatically that Eisai’s abbacy at Kenninji featured authentic spiritual training. He also lauded the strict monastic regulations guided by appropriate organizational decision making, which consistently balanced

compassion and severity concerning various clerical and lay followers. Indeed, Eisai is one of the few precursors on whom Dogen heaped only praise, without any sign of criticism.

Furthermore, Eto suggests that Dogen's early essay, "Discerning the Way," was greatly influenced by Eisai's 1198 masterwork, *Propagation of Zen for the Protection of the State* (*Kozen gokokuron*).⁶⁵ Eisai included a section with answers to twenty-six hypothetical questions posed about the importance of Zen in relation to Japanese society and other forms of Buddhism, and Dogen's text features eighteen dialogues that are quite similar in function and content. In general, both masters emphasized the value of zazen, although for Eisai this was not considered the only form of training but rather part of a combined technique known as the "mixed method of exoteric-esoteric-meditative-behavioral practice" (*en-mitsu-zen-kai*). Also, both teachers highlighted the significance of enacting dignified demeanor in all activities. Yet unlike Eisai, Dogen did not connect personal conduct with the need to receive the full set of bodhisattva and Hinayana precepts or with a defense of the nation through evoking the merits of Zen ritual.

An additional overlap between the two great Zen teachers is that Eisai and Dogen stressed that the Mahayana sutras, especially the Lotus Sutra, were not extraneous or detrimental forms of teaching, as is often indicated in the Zen view of representing a "special transmission outside the teachings" (*kyoge betsuden*). Instead, they considered the scriptures coeval with other types of Zen instruction, including koans. Dogen, however, made it clear that the awakened state of mind of a true adept takes priority and serves as the basis for any form of textual or oral expression.

A final point of commonality regards tea. Eisai introduced to Japan the role of tea drinking and tea ceremony in *How to Stay Healthy by Drinking Tea* (*Kissa yojoki*). The text was published in 1212, in part to help the shogun conquer alcoholism. In the *Treasury*

chapter “Summer Retreat” (“Ango”), Dogen also advocated drinking tea as an important part of the contemplative routine.

Regardless of whether Dogen met Eisai, traditional sources agree that after a few years of wandering among temples, Dogen returned to join Kenninji in the eighth month of 1217. He signaled his intention to seek full-time instruction by entering Myozen’s private chamber. There, he received the bodhisattva precepts once again and was also transmitted a robe and bowl as accessories required for all Zen novices. At the same time, as an outstanding disciple, Dogen received initiation into the secret practices, including a fire ritual (*goma*), of an esoteric school that had been integrated into Kenninji practice. Dogen was also trained in the traditional Buddhist teachings of monastic discipline (*vinaya*) and the meditative technique of calming and contemplation (*samatha-vipassana*). Additionally, he learned the particular style of the Rinzai school—especially the Oryu lineage, which incorporated the use of koans—for the first time. After a short time, Dogen alone was considered the legitimate heir of Myozen’s lineage and therefore a second-generation successor to Eisai.

Very little is known about Dogen’s life during the period from 1217 through 1222. It is clear that, despite accumulating years of Zen study, he remained deeply perplexed by persistent doubt. This is surely the reason he became interested in making plans to join Myozen, along with two other junior monks from Kenninji, in venturing to China. Conditions were ripe for pilgrims to travel to the mainland for the first time in several decades. The reason for the shift was the ending of the Jokyu Disturbance, a civil war between the old imperial forces and Yoshitoki, the second shogun of the Hojo clan that succeeded Minamoto rule. Hojo dominion resulted in a peaceful realm for the first time in many years. It also led to tremendous interest in importing Chinese religion and arts as a means of regaining social status for the samurai class, which felt intellectually inferior to the Fujiwara clan.

Song-dynasty rulers in China, feeling the threat of Mongol incursions to the north, were also eager to develop cultural and commercial exchanges with the new Japanese military government. Genghis Khan was rapidly expanding his empire, which would, a half century later under Kublai Khan, attack Japan in 1274 and 1281. Both invasions were offset in part because of the “divine wind” (*kamikaze*) of typhoons that threw the attacking armada off its course. Another factor in successful Japanese resistance was the role played by Zen meditation, generally based on Rinzai teachings, which the shogun advocated for his warriors to help steady their minds during battle.

Although the political landscape had opened the possibility of travel to China, in early 1223 Myozen was hesitant to make the journey abroad because one of his former teachers was gravely ill, and he was encouraged by various members of the assembly to stay and care for this elder. According to Dogen’s recollection of the decision-making process, Kenninji monks advised Myozen by saying, “What is wrong with going to China half a year or a year from now? It would not go against the bond between master and disciple, and you would still be able to carry out your wish to go to China.” After various disciples had given their opinions, Myozen replied:

All of you agree that I should remain. However, my resolution is different. Even if I put off my trip for the time being, someone who is certain to die will die anyway. My staying here will not help prolong his life. Should I continue to nurse him, his pain will not cease. Furthermore, it would not be possible to escape from life-and-death because I took care of him before his death. This would just follow his request to comfort his feelings for a while, but it is entirely useless for gaining emancipation and attaining the Way. To mistakenly allow him to hinder my aspiration to seek the Dharma would be a cause of evil deeds.

But if I carry out my aspiration to go to China to seek the Dharma and gain some insight into enlightenment, although this goes against one person's somewhat deluded feelings, it will become a cause for attaining the Way of many people. Since the merit of this is greater, it will help return the debt of gratitude to my teacher. Even if I were to die while crossing the ocean and failed to accomplish my aspiration, since I would have passed away with the intention to seek the Dharma, my vow would not cease in any future life. Vainly spending time, which is easily lost, for the sake of one person would not be in accord with the Buddha's will. Therefore, I firmly resolve to leave for China.⁶⁶

Journey to China

Dogen realized that Myozen's decision was fully in accord with his own sense of the urgency of the quest for realization in light of the pervasiveness of impermanence. On the twenty-second day of the second lunar month of 1223, in the spring of his twenty-third year, Dogen bid farewell to the ancestral stupa of Eisai and began his journey to the continent along with several colleagues.

Dogen's four years in China spanned from the spring of 1223—shortly before the beginning of the annual summer retreat, which he was not able to attend due to delays in entering the monastic system—to the summer of 1227, when he returned to Japan with some of Rujing's transmitted implements in tow. This phase of his life, a substage of the transformative period, can be divided into two sub-stages. The first is the pre-enlightenment phase during the early months of travel, which were marked by ongoing bewilderment that compounded Dogen's sense of delusion and doubt. The second phase involves Dogen's initial meetings with Rujing in the fifth month of 1225 leading to the time of awakening and post-enlightenment, which covers the final two years of his stay in China.

The small party from Kenninji set out for the port of Hakata in the northwestern region of Kyushu, near where Eisai, returning from China in the early 1190s, had established Shofukuji as the very first Zen temple in Japan. The group probably reached this harbor in large part by navigating inland waterways in a small boat. The much more dangerous part of the trip still lay ahead. Dogen wrote of the monumental journey to the mainland that he “entrusted his ephemeral existence to the roaring waves.”⁶⁷ Indeed, although he was by no means the first Japanese monastic to make the trip to China, there was significant novelty and risk in the voyage. The major trip across the Sea of Japan would have felt like a tremendous challenge in that Dogen was cast out in the deep waters of the ocean, where storms and piracy were so common in this era that it is estimated over half of those who ventured to the continent did not return.

Dogen’s time on the sea precipitated a dramatic shift in his view, with profound philosophical implications. In a key passage in the chapter “Realization Here and Now” (“Genjokoan”), written in 1233 as an epistle to the boatman who had piloted the ship, Dogen wrote of the fundamental mental transformation involved in grasping the relativity of sensations while sailing out to sea. The passage starts by highlighting paradoxes involved in coming to terms with the relation between delusion and realization: “When in this body-mind we have yet to study the Dharma fully, we generally feel that it is already sufficient; but when the Dharma is present in this body-mind, we consider it lacking in some respect.”⁶⁸ It then comments on the initial impact of the seafaring experience:

When we board a boat and sail into the middle of the ocean where the mountains are no longer in sight [i.e., beyond the horizon, *yamanaki kaichu*], we look around in the four directions and all we seem to see is a circle. We do not perceive any other shapes. Nevertheless, we know that the

great ocean is not round, nor is it square, and the features of the ocean are altogether inexhaustible, so that for some creatures it is like a palace or a jeweled necklace. We quickly realize, for this moment, that it is just the part our eyes can take in that appears circular. There are countless forms both amid and beyond the realm of sensations, yet we see and understand based only on the capacity of the eye.⁶⁹

Here we see Dogen's previously landlocked standpoint shifting to a more comprehensive, multiperspectival understanding of the complexity of reality in relation to human perception. This alteration in his self-awareness of perceptivity could be the first glimmer Dogen had of his eventual enlightenment.

Delays and disruptions ensued for Dogen when the ship arrived in the port of Ningbo in the fourth month of 1223, about six weeks after leaving Hakata. Even though it was said that he and Myozen traveled by using "a single staff," they quickly got separated.⁷⁰ Myozen disembarked and joined the summer retreat already underway at Mount Tiantong, but Dogen remained aboard the ship for several months. According to a brief comment he made a decade later, the reason for that interval is that he suffered from diarrhea.⁷¹

But there is an alternative explanation of why Dogen did not enter into temple life right away. According to this theory, the real reason was that his credentials were not accepted by the authorities because he lacked the Hinayana precepts, which were required of all Buddhist monks traveling in or to China. Eisai, after his return from the mainland, had made known the need for all novices in Japan to take the full set of precepts, which had not been the custom in the Japanese Tendai sect. Because of that prerequisite, Myozen apparently went to Nara to receive them in advance of the trip, but Dogen failed to do so and therefore had to wait until his petition for landing was approved. A third theory endorsed by some contemporary Chinese scholars is that Dogen disembarked sooner

than we usually think. In that case, he spent an unaccountable amount of time wandering among the multitude of smaller temples that populated the landscape before reaching Mount Tiantong, located a number of kilometers from the harbor. In any event, he arrived there some weeks after Myozen's entry.

Proponents of the precepts-based theory point out that there may have been a silver lining in Dogen's delay. Myozen proceeded straight to Tiantong, but he never made it back to Japan. According to a prominent theory endorsed by leading Japanese scholars, the probable reason he died just two years later was the stress and exhaustion of the rapid series of cultural, linguistic, and behavioral shocks he had to deal with in adjusting to the new locale. There is a sense that Myozen was demoralized in part because he was accepted into the monastic system right away. In this view, Dogen ironically benefited from at first being denied access. It allowed him to take his time to adjust to China. Also, by not being accepted at Tiantong during the first summer retreat after arrival, he could learn so much more, both pro and con, about the status of Zen training in various locations. One of the positive lessons took place while he was still on board the ship. There Dogen had his first of two encounters with a cook from Mount Ayuwang, another major Zen center near Mount Tiantong. In *Instructions for the Cook*, Dogen recalled the story vividly as a complement to the moving episode mentioned in the introduction, featuring an inspiring sixty-eight-year-old cook from Tiantong.

In this instance, an elderly monk came on board the ship, where Dogen was holed up in the port of Ningbo, in order to buy highly valued Japanese shiitake mushrooms. Dogen invited him to stay the night rather than make the long trek back to the temple. The cook simply shrugged off this suggestion because it would belittle his duty to serve the assembly by preparing food first thing in the morning. He thus gave the pilgrim an important lesson on the meaning of sustaining determination while performing menial tasks. In the 2009

biopic *Zen*, the cook is portrayed as a wizardly, almost otherworldly old man. Feeling embarrassed, Dogen asks him about the meaning of words and practice for discerning the Way (*bendo*), but he does not really understand the cook's response, suggesting that such topics would not be clear until all delusions are discarded.

Later that summer, Dogen once again met the cook. The older monk came to visit him at Tiantong to say farewell because he was soon to retire and return to his native province. Dogen reported:

I jumped for joy and was very grateful. In the ensuing conversation that I had with him I brought up the question of the meaning of words and practice that we had discussed previously on the ship. I asked, "What are words?" The cook answered, "One, two, three, four, five." I also asked, "What is practice?" He said, "Nothing is concealed in the entire universe (*henkai fuzozo*)." The little bit I now know about words and understand about practice is due to the great kindness of that cook. I told my late teacher Myozen about what I have just related, and he was very happy to hear this account.^{[72](#)}

Dogen also noted he was reminded by the cook of a verse written by Xuedou, a famous eleventh-century master who wrote the poetic commentaries later commented on by Yuanwu as included in the *Blue Cliff Record*:

One letter, seven letters, three or five letters,
Investigating ten thousand things that are devoid of substance.
In the depth of night, the bright moon sets on the dark sea—
Seeking a single dragon's jewel, I find one gem after another.^{[73](#)}

Dogen reacted to the cook in light of the Xuedou verse by saying to himself, "Six, seven, eight, nine, ten," showing he was suddenly aware of the unlimited multiplicity of truths. Elsewhere in the essay,

he discusses the notion that an authentic cook should be able to conserve rice so that there would not be a single grain prepared that is unneeded, and yet no one in the assembly would be hungry for even one more grain. This notion eventually became known in the world of Soto Zen practice as using “a vessel that contains just enough” (*oryoki*, literally “a bowl [*ki*] with a measured or appropriate [*ryo*] degree of reciprocity [*o*]”). The entire setting for cooking and eating should be minimalistic, with all containers and utensils in addition to the food and other provisions kept sparse and efficient.⁷⁴ The character for “reciprocity” indicates mutual interplay engaging the capabilities and facilities of the cook and their kitchen supplies with the needs of those who receive and eat the nourishment. The frugality of “just enough” represents a meditative form of consumption that, with each act of preparation and ingestion, cultivates the qualities of gratitude, mindfulness, and genuine comprehension of self in relation to community and environment.

Although the exact timing of Dogen’s departure from the ship is unknown, it is clear that he eventually disembarked and began traveling to various monasteries on China’s eastern seaboard. Among the temples Dogen visited was the prestigious group of cloisters referred to as the Five Mountains (Ch. Wushan, Jp. Gozan) of Zen. This included the preeminent monastery at Mount Jingshan, situated in the countryside to the west of Hangzhou; Lingyin and Jingci temples, located in the capital city; and Tiantong and Ayuwang, both positioned near Ningbo.⁷⁵ A century later, the system of Five Mountains was emulated in Japan through groupings of prestigious Rinzai temples, supported by the shogunate, in Kyoto and Kamakura. Soto temples were excluded from this ranking system because of practice style and location.

Visiting the Five Mountains as well as other Buddhist temples, Dogen walked with his belongings held in a wooden backpack as shown in the image on [this page](#). This period of wandering was productive for several reasons, including that he was permitted to

witness transmission or inheritance documents representing the styles of each of the Five Houses of Zen. This was an occasion not available to most itinerant practitioners, much less for one who was young and a foreigner. The viewing of these precious materials forms a key part of the traditional narrative, as it seeks to highlight how Dogen was supposedly destined to succeed in his religious quest. Access to see the documents is taken to mean that Dogen, unlike Myozen—a dedicated but perhaps less talented seeker—was in a position to overcome various challenges to appropriating the dharma. This was in part through receiving favored treatment by those colleagues who intuitively recognized his prowess.

On viewing the first of these transmission certificates, he thought to himself, “Truly, without mysterious help from the Buddhas and ancestors based on karmic conditions, it would be impossible for me to hear of and view such precious materials. How fortunate it is for a foolish person from an outlying land like me to be shown several of them!”⁷⁶ Once again, tears of emotion wet his sleeve. During this itinerancy, Dogen also witnessed a special ritual in which monks placed their folded robes on the top of their heads. This made him appreciate more deeply the importance of the clerical garment, first used in India and adapted in various ways in East Asia, and he wrote two chapters dedicated to this theme for the *Treasury*.

On the other hand, Dogen had several disillusioning experiences, which even led him to consider returning prematurely to Japan. From the beginning of his stay at Mount Tiantong, once he finally was allowed to enter its gates and join the assembly as one of the outsiders, Dogen was singularly unimpressed with the Rinzai school abbot Wuji. He decided to look elsewhere for a genuine teacher. But on his visits to the Chinese temples, Dogen found on several occasions that he was disappointed because of the deficiency of the abbot.⁷⁷ In meeting Ruyan of Jingshan in 1224, for example, Dogen was asked, “When did you arrive in China?” He replied with a literal answer: “The fourth month of the previous year.” Ruyan then

inquired playfully, “Did you come in a way that mimicked the crowd?” Dogen said, “When one does not come in a way mimicking the crowd, what is that?” Ruyan said, “That is still mimicking the crowd.” Dogen responded, “Well, I definitely came in a way mimicking the crowd, but what way would be more appropriate?” Ruyan slapped him and said, “What a talkative little monk!” Dogen replied, “I am not saying I am not a talkative little monk, but what would be more appropriate?” Ruyan said, “Sit a while and drink some tea.”⁷⁸



The travel case Dogen carried during his journeys in China.

Dogen felt that, even though this priest started with what seemed like a creative koan-like dialogue about entering the Chinese

monastic system, in the final analysis he was just going through the motions of speaking with an air of authenticity but was unable to reveal genuine Zen teaching. Dogen also had a meeting with Sizhuo, the teacher at another temple in the area. In their conversation the Japanese venturer asked, “What is Buddha?” Sizhuo replied literally, “That which occupies the Buddha hall.”⁷⁹ In a kind of inverted expression of his doubt, Dogen said, “If it is that thing in the hall, how can it pervade realms as innumerable as the sands of the Ganges River?” Sizhuo said, “It does pervade the innumerable realms.” Dogen ended the conversation with, “Not really!”—an idiom suggesting that Sizhou’s expression failed to pass muster.

Dogen went back and forth in this unproductive manner with various teachers in the course of his travels to Zen temples and other sacred sites in the area, including Tiantai school cloisters. He realized he had not yet encountered a true master with whom he could thoroughly investigate the genuine meaning of awakening. Despite the lessons in humility learned from the two cooks and several other relatively unknown but truly dedicated practitioners that he met early on, Dogen started to become a bit arrogant, thinking to himself, “In both my home country and Song China, there is no one who compares to me.”⁸⁰

This impression seems to have been reinforced by some of his encounters with other monks, as well. During the summer retreat of 1223, when he first visited Mount Ayuwang, he found that monks were discussing the significance of the mysterious appearance of a portrait of the Indian ancestor Nagarjuna as a full moon rather than the painting of a human figure. Dogen was at first unsure of the symbolism of this imagery and became upset that he could not obtain a meaningful explanation from any of the Ayuwang monks, junior or senior.

Nagarjuna was a prominent Madhyamika school philosopher, also considered the fourteenth patriarch of Zen. His disciple Kanadeva had written a famous poem about visualizing the moon

when gazing at his sacred image. Dogen likened this to seeing the painting of a rice cake (*gabyo*), which is the main topic of a chapter in the *Treasury*. When he returned to Mount Ayuwang temple two years later, shortly after his enlightenment experience, Dogen's own understanding was suitable to the occasion, but he saw that he could still not hold a useful discussion with any of his colleagues. "How sad," he remarked, "to think that not a single layperson or priest throughout the land of the Song dynasty has ever heard or understood Nagarjuna's image or has become intimately familiar with Kanadeva's words, much less has anyone ever been truly illuminated by this lunar vision."⁸¹

Meeting Rujing

Just when Dogen thought he wanted to return to Japan, several events presaged his supposedly foreordained face-to-face (*menju*) meeting with an authentic teacher. One was a strange apparition, as he was leaving Jingshan, of an ethereal sage (Skr. *arhat*, Jp. *rakan*). This figure encouraged him by saying, "You should go back to Mount Tiantong because, in the entire land, the only one fully prepared to instruct you just became the new abbot there."⁸² Based on this vision while realizing that Wuji had been replaced by a charismatic prelate, Dogen felt "half doubtful, yet half hopeful" as he headed to that destination.

His return to Tiantong was also motivated by news that Myozen had fallen ill there. He died a couple of weeks after Dogen's return in the fifth month of 1225. Dogen knew that it was his responsibility to memorialize Myozen and gather his relics for safekeeping before eventually transporting them back to Japan.

During the course of Dogen's trip back to Tiantong, which took a couple of months, both he and Rujing had numinous dreams indicating that their respective long-standing quests to find a genuine master or an ideal disciple would soon be fulfilled. When he stayed

at Damei (literally, “Great Plum”) temple, founded by a famous Tang dynasty disciple of master Mazu, Dogen visualized the branch of a plum tree, signifying both seasonal renewal and spiritual awakening. Meanwhile, Rujing dreamed that a reliable follower of the lineage of Dongshan, the founder of Chinese Soto Zen, would be coming to visit his temple.

Dogen finally had a chance to meet Rujing, known for his supreme dedication to meditation practice without plan or purpose. When Dogen asked about his great doubt, Rujing immediately “broke the spear point” (*hokosaki wo oru*) of the student’s false sense of self-assurance. Although what Rujing said is not recorded, as these conversations were almost always kept confidential, from what we know from traditional records he parried Dogen’s brash attitude in a way that deliberately caused a breakdown of the young trainee’s ego. According to the Zen paradigm of the quest for enlightenment, suffering a psychological or physical malady is a necessary step to achieve a radical advance leading to realization. One must die to be reborn. Aware of the unique opportunity for gaining religious insight, Dogen accepted his status and felt immense gratitude for meeting Rujing. He thought there must have been a strong karmic connection between them formed in past lives, a feeling shared by the mentor, who had been quietly anticipating the arrival at the end of his career of an ideal disciple.

As a result of the mutual respect that arose from what the teacher referred to as spiritual communion (*kanno doko*), Rujing and Dogen conducted a ceremony sanctifying their relationship as master and disciple. As part of the ceremony, Dogen once again received the bodhisattva precepts. Rujing, who was serving his last of five abbacies at different temples, was a twelfth-generation follower of Dongshan, and he transmitted this ancestral style to Dogen. Rujing, however, also emphasized that the primordial Zen inheritance emanated directly from Shakyamuni, not any specific faction. This openness was mirrored by the flexible authority structure of the

monastery itself. The former abbot of Tiantong, Wuji, was a Rinzai affiliate, yet such a sectarian discrepancy was rather common among Chinese monasteries because leaders were not selected from within the ranks but appointed by secular authorities.

Wishing to undergo the most thoroughgoing and meaningful level of learning, Dogen sent a letter asking Rujing if he could go to the abbot's quarters from time to time to inquire about the fundamentals of the dharma, without being concerned for the hour of the day or distinguishing between formal and informal conduct. Rujing agreed to act like a father by accepting his proverbial son's occasionally casual dress and impromptu behavior. Day or night, Dogen could request instruction and receive explications directly from the master. The fifty interactions they held over two years are reported in *Private Conversations*, which is based on the notes Dogen kept. This work was first discovered by Ejo in 1255 and then was lost until its rediscovery in 1299 by Giun at Hokyoji temple. For this reason, some modern scholars believe this record may have been composed much later in Dogen's life and only shown to a small handful of disciples. According to this view, *Private Conversations* is reflective of his outlook from the final stage of his career rather than the beginning.

The dialogues between Rujing and Dogen cover diverse topics. These include the steps for practicing zazen in relation to the significance of the precepts and the functions of the robe, the connection between meditation and doctrine, the role of monastic institutions in China, and the relation between reading sutras and composing poetry. Several exchanges deal with the effects and possible ways of mitigating karmic retribution, including various dos and don'ts of clerical life. A lesson that is particularly valuable for what it reveals about the status of Buddhist temples in thirteenth-century China occurs in dialogue 32. There, Rujing explains the differences between temples based on the schools of meditation (Zen), doctrine (Tiantai), and discipline (Vinaya).⁸³ Discipline temples

were considered self-contained organizations that not only emphasized the need for following codes of conduct but also, free from government oversight, were able to select their own leaders rather than having these assigned. This, however, left them without much prestige or power. Doctrinal temples were public institutions and therefore subject to official supervision and the appointment of abbots by external adjudicators, and they were in decline.

As Rujing further explained, many of the temples associated with the Tiantai or other doctrinal schools, whose teachings were largely based on interpretations of specific sutras, had already been transformed into Zen temples. Such institutions were also considered part of the public sector but had significantly higher standing. Dogen had seen this for himself when he stayed briefly at the Zen cloister of Wannian temple on Mount Tiantai, which Eisai had visited nearly fifty years earlier during his first trip to China. Dogen also found that the Five Mountains Zen temples, which usually had more than a thousand members in the assembly, were known for the distinctive layout of their compounds. These centers featured buildings with “large corridors stretching from east to west,” as well as “pagodas in the front and pavilions in the rear,”⁸⁴ demarcating that the grounds were considered to inhabit the symbolic body of the Buddha. With their emphasis on oral instruction, Zen monasteries were regulated by a set of rules requiring the abbot to present formal and informal sermons on a regular basis, at least a dozen times every month.

Once Dogen started meeting frequently with Rujing, he pursued the Way day and night without wasting even a moment. It was said that his ribs never touched a bed, and he vowed to persevere unrelentingly even when the weather was extremely hot and despite any extraneous circumstances, such as soreness or pain. Rujing routinely remarked, “You have the behavior of an ancient Buddha (*kobutsu*) and are sure to propagate the path of the ancestors. Finding you as a disciple is like when Shakyamuni recognized the

merit of Mahakasyapa.”⁸⁵ (According to Zen lore, Mahakasyapa was the only follower to receive a symbolic gift from the Buddha.) Rujing invited Dogen to serve as his assistant, but the acolyte declined, saying, “I am from a distant land. I appreciate the request, but if I were to join the office of monks at this large monastery in such a great country, would there not be trouble from skeptics within some of the major monasteries? I seek only to receive direct instruction from you at any time, nothing more.”⁸⁶

Rujing accepted Dogen’s unassuming response. Then, entrusting him with an assignment that Rujing compared to Bodhidharma bringing the special transmission of Zen from India to China, he instructed, “When you return to your home country and propagate the Dharma, retire deep in the mountains and nourish the sacred source.”⁸⁷ This injunction was reinforced by dialogue 5 in the *Private Conversations*. After listing thirty prohibitions, this entry cites as obligations for contemplative practice “residing amid green mountains and waterfalls,”⁸⁸ along with reading sutras to illumine the mind, keeping one’s feet thoroughly clean for meditation, and reciting the bodhisattva precepts regularly.

Years later, when he wrote the *Treasury* chapter “Sustained Exertion,” Dogen praised Rujing’s own unswerving commitment to zazen from the time of his entrance into the Buddhist community at the age of nineteen to his Tiantong abbacy forty-five years later. Dogen wrote, “Throughout China, only my late master demonstrated true determination. Monks far and wide were alike in praising Rujing for practicing just to practice, yet he did not praise all monks far and wide because they were generally stubborn or selfish.”⁸⁹ Also, Rujing did not compromise his values by associating with the imperial family, and he often turned down generous offerings from lay followers if they were unable to express the meaning of the dharma. Stalwart meditators flocked to his temple from all parts of the country, and he enthusiastically accommodated monks arriving from Korea and Japan. Rujing also made room in the training area

for irregular practitioners, such as Daoists and shamans, to line up behind the female clerics as part of a hierarchical system that recognized the priority of male monastics.^{[90](#)}

Casting Off

The climax of Dogen's experience at Tiantong was when his mentor proclaimed that the prized disciple had achieved the standpoint of "casting off casting off" (*datsuraku datsuraku*). During the summer retreat of 1225, held under Rujing's supervision, Dogen finally resolved his deep-seated doubt about the relationship between true reality and authentic practice. He spontaneously experienced the shedding of hindrances, the surpassing of all attachments and impediments, to attain insight into the dharma. According to Zen tradition, Dogen thus joined the group of ancestors in the fifty-first generation of Buddhism.

There are nine passages in his collected writings in which Dogen quoted Rujing's saying "casting off body-mind." Dogen also frequently used the expressions "casting off" and the "unity of body-mind" (*shinjin itchi*), along with the "oneness of practice-realization" (*shusho itto*), in his collected works. Like Rujing, Dogen sought to emphasize the importance of this singular self-extricating experience as the basis of all forms of Zen training.

However, Dogen's writings do not offer an account of his experience, so the episode must be pieced together from several sources. The following passage represents a paraphrase based primarily on the *Transmission of Light* by Keizan, written nearly five decades after Dogen's death. The event is highlighted as key to the whole chapter on Dogen. The paraphrase also makes reference to the account in the *Record of Kenzei*, a sectarian biography written by the fourteenth abbot of Eihei-ji:^{[91](#)}

The soon-to-be fifty-first ancestor, Dogen, frequently sought instruction from Rujing. Very late one night, during an intensive session of seated meditation as part of the summer retreat, upon seeing the monk sitting next to Dogen dozing off, Rujing admonished him by saying, “Studying Zen (*sanzen*) is a matter of casting off body-mind. Why are you engaged in single-minded slumber, rather than single-minded meditative sitting?” Hearing this, Dogen suddenly had a great awakening. That night Dogen went straight to the abbot’s quarters and burned incense. Sitting on his high seat Rujing asked, “Why are you here?” Dogen said, “I have cast off body-mind.” Rujing confirmed this by saying, “You have cast off body-mind; your body-mind is cast off” (*shinjin datsuraku, datsuraku shinjin*).

Apparently expecting to be tested by the teacher Dogen suggested, “This is a tentative state. Please do not approve me too hastily.” Rujing said, “I am not hastily approving you.” Then Dogen asked, “What is it you are not hastily approving?” Rujing said, “You have cast off body-mind.” Dogen made prostrations and Rujing proclaimed, “You are casting off casting off (*datsuraku datsuraku*)!” At that point, an acolyte in attendance named Guangping from Fuzhou Province said, “It is no small matter that a foreign monk can achieve this.” Rujing added, “Among those studying here, how many like him have savored the real significance of a master’s fist? He is genuinely liberated and is as calmly composed as rolling thunder.”^{[92](#)}

Rujing’s verification of Dogen’s enlightenment is particularly notable for its creative play with traditional language. Rujing inverted the main phrase, “casting off body-mind,” as shown above, to become “Your body-mind is cast off.” He further presented the tautology “You are casting off casting off.” These sayings sanction and consecrate

the ongoing dynamism of awakening. The “fist” that Rujing mentioned is a typical Zen image highlighting the value of direct, embodied experience without interference from mental distractions. According to a remark in the *Transmission of Light*, “If you think that there is even an iota of awakening, or that there is something attained, then it is not the Way, for that is merely the occupation of ‘toying around with the spirit.’”⁹³ This chapter of Keizan’s text concludes by offering a short verse:

Clear and perfectly bright, no difference between interiority or exteriority,

How could there be any body or mind to cast off?⁹⁴

身
心
脫
落

Calligraphy by Kazuaki Tanahashi of Dogen’s “casting off body-mind.”
(Image © 2018 Kazuaki Tanahashi.)

Dogen sometimes intentionally read queries as declarative expressions. Following his lead, some commentators interpret the second line as the affirmative pronouncement: “This is how one casts off body-mind!”

Several modern scholars have pointed out that Rujing and other Song-dynasty masters were known to have used a slightly different expression, “cast off the dust from the mind,” which is homophonic in Japanese (although not quite in Chinese). Perhaps Dogen misheard, deliberately or not, what Rujing said. Or perhaps he was trying to correct the teaching’s potentially dualistic implication of separating the defilement of contamination from the purity of mind. It should be noted, on the other hand, that the term for dust (Ch. *chen*, Jp. *jin*) in Buddhist discourses suggests the neutral notion of “perceptions” or “sensations,” referring to the realm of awareness in which one’s conceptual and corporeal functions are integrated. In that sense, the phrase would mean “casting off perceptions,” which is rather similar to Dogen’s phrasing of his teacher’s statement.

Another key issue in assessing Dogen’s breakthrough experience is the question of consistency. How could he speak of undergoing a one-time, seemingly irreversible experience of awakening when the whole point of great doubt was to refute that there is a set goal and to promote the purposelessness of just sitting? Dogen addressed this issue in the *Treasury* chapter “Great Awakening” (“Daigo”). There he pointed out that some occurrences can be remembered but not reversed, as in trying to put together the pieces of a broken mirror, and others can be anticipated but not accelerated, like trying to celebrate a new year or a birthday before the calendar date. Though these examples are intended to provide metaphors to assist in thinking about realization experiences, they do not imply that all existence represents a progression of linear moments moving inextricably from past through present to future.

Instead, Dogen suggested in the chapter “Being-Time” (“Uji”) that three tenses of temporality are inextricably linked, such that

preparing through sitting before enlightenment and the ongoing cultivation of meditation after enlightenment fundamentally express the same level of realization. Peaks and valleys continue to occur, but they do not affect the inseparability of time encompassing before and after, memory and hope, backward and forward, as well as horizontal and vertical motion. In “Discerning the Way,” this state is referred to as the oneness of practice-realization (shusho itto). “Since it stems from the very first realization occurring during practice, realization is endless,” wrote Dogen, “but since it stems from practice within realization, practice is beginningless.” Furthermore, he asserted:

When just one person does zazen even one time, he becomes imperceptibly one with each and all of the myriad things and permeates completely all time, so that within the limitless universe, throughout past, future and present, he performs the eternal and ceaseless work of guiding beings to enlightenment. For each and every element, this is the identical undifferentiated practice and the identical undifferentiated realization. But this is not limited to the practice of sitting alone: the sound that issues from the striking of emptiness is an endless and wondrous voice that resounds before and after the hammer strikes. This is not limited to the activity of the practitioner alone: each and every element in its basic aspect is endowed with original practice that cannot be measured or comprehended.^{[95](#)}

—

Following the experience of casting off body-mind, Dogen stayed for two more years in China. An important feature of this time is that, based on literary skills he cultivated with Rujing’s enthusiastic encouragement, Dogen composed over fifty examples of Chinese

poetry. He especially favored quatrains using Sinitic rhetorical rules involving tonal and thematic patterns and rhyming schemes. Some of the verses were written for or about monks and hermits, but most were directed to lay practitioners, including administrators, military commanders, secretaries, and supervisors. Dogen “rhymed along” with these poetic interlocutors, his discourse following the assonance of their unrecorded poems.

Many of the poetic themes expressed for the sake of lay followers involved rites of passage, such as birth, graduation, illness, or death. Others spoke of travels, such as visiting Mount Potalaka, the island near Tiantong that was said to be the earthly abode of Kannon, or returning home to one’s native province. Here is a representative verse written for an occasion that Dogen titled “Visiting a Pious Layman Mourning the Death of His Son.” He consoled the bereaved parent by praising his resolute Zen outlook in the face of tragic circumstances:

When he opens his true eyes, the pupils are clear.
Looking at his face, he seems steady, tears having already
 been shed.
Though his son has entered the realm of the dead,
Lord Yama, you won’t catch him crying!⁹⁶

After his return to Japan, Dogen no longer regularly interacted with such an array of nonclerical disciples. Unlike in China, in Japan it was uncommon for lay Buddhists to attend Zen observances and receive teachings by leading priests. Although correspondence with laypeople was thus less frequent, poetic interplay remained a part of Dogen’s teaching repertoire. For instance, many years later at Eihei-ji, Dogen emulated the way Ru-jing would typically assign poetic compositions to his monks during the three nights of the midautumn moon. Ru-jing did so by presenting the assembly with the following koan: “Clouds disperse in the autumn sky and this very mind

watches the moon. Look!” Uttered as he raised the abbot’s ceremonial fly whisk, this prompt required the trainees to craft their own responses. As an example, Dogen wrote of the reference in the second part of Rujing’s main sentence to the role of the mind watching the moon:

It is difficult to contemplate this particular koan.

Accentuate the physical aspect of fullness and you miss the moon-that-is-mind.

When you see the brightness of clouds swirling about the moon,

How will you behold the actual moon on this autumn night?⁹⁷

The Return to Japan

According to the *Transmission of Light*, in the summer of 1227 Rujing informed Dogen that he considered him to be equal to ancient sages because he had opened his eye of the Way, witnessed several scrolls of inheritance certificates, and experienced a series of mysterious spiritual events leading to realization of the dharma. For resolving his great doubt and measuring up to the standards of the full line of Buddhist ancestors, Dogen obtained the seal of verification from his mentor. He was also given a robe, a ritual portrait of Rujing, a copy of the *Precious Mirror of Samadhi* (*Hokyo zammai*, a famous philosophical poem by Dongshan), and a special explanation of the Soto school doctrine of the five ranks (*goi*) that is supposed to have originated with Dongshan. Dogen is said to have departed China shortly before the death of Rujing at the age of sixty-five. There is, however, an alternate theory that Dogen left in 1227 because the time was ripe for his return to Japan. Under this theory, even though Rujing was still in good health and did not pass away until the seventeenth day of the seventh month of 1228, a year after Dogen’s departure, the foreign disciple left in 1227 because he had a

sufficient sense of confidence and enthusiasm about returning home to try to initiate his teaching mission.

The traditional Dogen narrative tells of a series of miraculous events that supposedly occurred in the summer of 1227, highlighting the intercession of various deities who guided Dogen's departure from the continent and safe return to Japan. These are featured in drawings in the *Illustrated Annotated Record of Kenzei*. The legend with the most important symbolic value concerns the *One-Night Copy of the Blue Cliff Record*. This title refers to a version of the classic koan collection, including Xuedou's poetic and Yuanwu's prose comments on one hundred cases. Dogen, with the assistance of the protector god of Mount Hakusan, located near Eihei-ji, supposedly wrote out a version of the manuscript in a single evening just before leaving China. In the earliest accounts of this legend, the supernatural aid came from Daigenshuri (Ch. Daquanxiuli), a local water spirit who assisted all kinds of transits near the port, especially those involving the transfer of the dharma or the movement of sacred writings. According to another legend, Daigenshuri, who usually took the form of a dragon, became a small snake so Dogen could keep it hidden in his begging bowl as a form of protection while traveling.

Regardless of the origin or variations of the story, there is an actual manuscript of the *Blue Cliff Record* that was long rumored to exist but was apparently lost for centuries. This text was finally located in the 1920s in the archives at Daijōji, a prominent Soto temple founded in the late thirteenth century near the town of Kanazawa and well known for its devotion to studies of Dogen's writings. Containing the same basic content as the usual edition of the *Blue Cliff Record*, albeit with some important differences in sequence and wording, the manuscript was first published in the mid-twentieth century by the famous Rinzai Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki. Numerous other scholars have assessed its historical significance. It is impossible to determine whether Dogen could have been directly

responsible for transporting this text from China, since the earliest version known is from 1345. Nevertheless, the lore is emblematic of the fact that Dogen was the first Zen pilgrim to introduce the extensive body of koan literature to Japan.

This fact notwithstanding, Dogen typically indicated mixed feelings about relying on koan cases. To him, they represented a double-edged sword, at once enhancing and hindering the authenticity of meditative concentration. He reported a revealing anecdote in which an older monk, visiting Tiantong from a faraway province, saw Dogen reading koan texts and asked repeatedly, “What is the use of reading this?” Dogen offered matter-of-fact responses suggesting he was seeking to learn Zen teaching. But the monk continued to ask the same question, demanding, “Yes, I see, but in the long run, what is the use?” After this encounter, Dogen reflected,

I pondered his remarks in regard to the meaning of the phrase, “in the long run.” Studying the deeds of ancient masters by reading koans and related records in order to explicate these expressions to deluded people is ultimately of no use either to my own practice or for teaching others. Even if I would not understand a single word, I could explain truth in inexhaustible ways if I devote myself to just sitting in order to clarify the one great matter [of life and death].⁹⁸

The trip back to the homeland was a challenging but exhilarating time as Dogen looked ahead to establishing his own Zen community. He probably left Mount Tiantong in the seventh month of 1227, but it is not entirely clear how long the journey lasted. Most records suggest that he reached Kenninji temple by the end of that summer, but another important source refers to the return to Eisai’s former facility taking place sometime later. Therefore, it may have actually taken at least a few months for Dogen to complete the boat trip to

the southernmost port of Kumamoto in Kyushu, where he disembarked, and then to reach the capital by traveling along various footpaths and inland waterways. A passage in “Discerning the Way” suggests that his arrival occurred in early 1228. This probably indicates the time he was fully resettled at Kenninji, where he stayed for about two years before setting up his own hermitage.

An interesting indicator of the Zen insight Dogen attained in China can be seen by comparing two poems written about Mount Potalaka, off the coast of the port of Ningbo. Dogen visited the famous island on both legs of his journey, writing a poem on each occasion. Mount Potalaka was long considered by Mahayana tradition to represent the earthly abode of the compassionate bodhisattva Kannon (Ch. Guanyin). Still today it is filled with many temples and icons celebrating the beneficent powers of the goddess. When he first reached China in 1223, Dogen wrote the following verse:

The ocean waves crash like thunder below the cliff.
I strain my ears and see the face of the deity.
Beholding this, who could measure the ocean of merit?
Just turn your eyes to look at those green mountains.⁹⁹

In that verse Dogen more or less equated the sacred quality of Kannon with the sublime features of the island’s landscape. A verse written during a visit to the same site that took place as he returned to Japan four years later, however, reflected Dogen’s just-sitting standpoint by demythologizing the status of the goddess. In the new version, Kannon is no longer regarded as a revered divinity merging with nature. Instead, she is considered identical with the continuing cultivation of an interior contemplative standpoint leading to self-realization:

Kannon is found amid hearing, thinking, practicing, and
verifying the true mind,
Why seek appearances of her hallowed face within a
particular location?
I proclaim that pilgrims must awaken themselves to this notion

—

Kannon does not reside only on Mount Potalaka.[¹⁰⁰](#)

Despite the implicit critique of devotion evident in the poem, the traditional Dogen narrative preserves a key example of Kannon-related mythology. According to the *Annotated Record of Kenzei*, the so-called One-Petal Kannon magically appeared on a single shoot floating in the tumultuous waters in order to save Dogen from a terrible storm that imperiled his journey home. Partially substantiating this account is the record of a short verse, held at a Kyushu temple, in which Dogen pays tribute to Kannon by proclaiming, “Each blossom [of the dharma] gives rise to five petals.”

CHAPTER 3

Coming Back Empty-Handed

Dogen's Teaching Mission

THE REFORMATIVE PERIOD, covering the time between Dogen's return to Kyoto and his move to Echizen sixteen years later, encompasses numerous remarkably resourceful examples of institutional expansion and literary accomplishment. These years can be divided into three substages, each lasting about half a decade. In the first phase (1227–1232), Dogen grappled with basic issues concerning how to establish an assembly in Kyoto. At the time, the city featured only one Zen temple, Kenninji, which was considered a nominal Zen cloister in that its practice regimen included considerable syncretism with Tendai esoteric practice. During the second substage (1233–1237), Dogen founded his own temple, Koshoji, and began to develop creative ways of introducing Chinese-style pedagogical techniques. This was also when he began establishing new clerical facilities and rituals for a congregation that was by then primed to receive advanced levels of instruction based on Sinitic sources stripped of Tendai influence.

The last phase (1238–1243) featured the flourishing of the Koshoji community and the continued enhancement of Dogen's discursive abilities. These were expressed in *Treasury* lectures that, by interactively exploring numerous koan cases, underscored his distinctive interpretative method. It was in this period that Dogen

began to put his own imprimatur on previous forms of East Asian Buddhist discourse, effectively superseding their authority. Despite the significant advances Dogen achieved in developing a Zen monastery in the capital, warning signs began to emerge in the early 1240s that there would soon be a need for a change of location. These indicators included increasing pressure, or even direct attacks, on Koshoji from jealous Buddhist groups and rival secular forces. Dogen also came to feel more and more the allure of residing in a secluded location ideal for reclusive meditative practice.

Finding His Footing

After landing in Japan, Dogen may have stayed for at least a few weeks in Kyushu. Interest in the emerging Zen sect was growing in the southwestern area of Japan, leading to ongoing exchanges with Chinese religious communities and interest in their cultural resources. Eisai's very first temple, Shofukuji, had been built there in the 1190s and maintained contact with mainland monasteries, to which he sent aid after a disastrous fire.^{[101](#)}

During the course of his journey from Kyushu to Kyoto, it is likely that Dogen was exposed to a wide admixture of religious seekers traveling around Japan to find the right teacher. It was a time in medieval Japanese history when traditional forms of Buddhist training, as well as divisions between clerical and lay followers, were breaking down and being reconfigured. He probably encountered many kinds of pilgrims who were practicing outside the confines of the Tendai sect for the first time. The irregular practitioners included various wandering holy men (*hijiri*) preaching specific techniques or trying to raise funds for their temples, in addition to ascetics, shamans, visionaries, and chanters of the Buddha's name (*nenbutsu*). These strivers often posed as priests while purposefully bending some of the conventional rules for clerical behavior. Such interactions likely encouraged Dogen, who would have seen in them

the opportunity to find his own unique footing as a Buddhist leader—one who could win followers by breaking free of Tendai doctrines and related influences while maintaining steadfast in his commitment to just sitting.

One theory suggests that, as part of his journey home, Dogen briefly attended or at least traveled in the vicinity of Kozanji. A prominent temple a little northwest of Kyoto, Kozanji was led by the monk and meditator Myoe.^{[102](#)} It is also possible that Dogen met Myoe not at Kozanji but elsewhere in the vicinity of the capital. Myoe was a charismatic and innovative teacher who helped revive two traditional Buddhist schools. One was Shingon, which was based on such esoteric practices as the use of mantras, as established by Kukai in the early ninth century. The other was Kegon (Ch. Huayan), which focused on the pantheistic doctrine that Buddha is embedded in all entities. Its Japanese iteration was founded in the city of Nara in the eighth century. Dogen's familiarity with the reputation of Myoe's teaching may have come from familial or religious relationships, including connections to former followers of Eisai who went on to play key roles at non-Zen temples after leaving Kenninji. Myoe was known for his eclecticism. In a disciple's painting, he is famously depicted practicing meditation while sitting high amid the branches of a tree near his temple. In general, his approach was based on integrating steadfast dedication to zazen with recitations as well as persistence in upholding the precepts. Myoe rejected outdated types of practice that were not conducive to individual realization, and his standpoint appealed to those interested in combinatory practices.

Similar to Dogen, Myoe held the view that seeing things just as they are constitutes a realization attainable by all novices, regardless of their background. For this reason, he criticized the new Pure Land schools for encouraging followers to seek paradise separate from the concrete world. He believed that, notwithstanding its contradictions and strife, the world as it is must be fully embraced.

Myoe's view of Buddhist practice was based on the notion of doing whatever is appropriate to the circumstances (*arubeki yo wa*). He emphasized that trainees, whether from elite or disenfranchised sectors of society, should act fully in accord with their distinctive personal and social situations. The lifestyle at Kozanji stressed seated meditation in addition to the punctual observance of the daily round of monastic activities, regulated through an hourly schedule. In these ways, the practice there resembled what Dogen later initiated at his cloisters. Although this suggests the possibility that Dogen modeled his own community's practice in part on what he saw at Kozanji, it is not feasible based on historical sources to demonstrate definitively any direct influence absorbed from Myoe. Perhaps both teachers reflected the new trends in spirituality of the Kamakura period.

In the tenth month of 1227, Dogen wrote a short essay commemorating his former companion Myozen, who had died in China at the end of the fifth month of 1225. His death had come just as Dogen was reentering practice at Mount Tiantong after having spent a year traveling to visit various Zen temples. Myozen's remains included the manifestation of 360 crystalline relics. According to Dogen's document, this was a spectacular phenomenon—more or less expected for eminent monks in China but something entirely new in the six-hundred-year history of Japanese Buddhism. Dogen dedicated a portion of the sacred remnants to a nun, Myochi, who had been a devoted disciple ordained by Myozen sometime before he left Kenninji and was, therefore, a colleague of the Soto founder.^{[103](#)}

By the end of 1227, Dogen produced two major writing projects. One was the *Record of Private Conversations*, based on notes from his encounters with Rujing in the abbot's chamber. We cannot be certain of when these logs were turned into a single volume, and a prominent theory argues this occurred toward the end of Dogen's life. Regardless of the exact timing, it is clear that this record of

intimate exchanges held between master and disciple offers a compelling overview of many of the religious themes Dogen expressed during his teaching career in Japan. These include Rujing's thoughts on the way zazen eclipses but does not necessarily exclude the merit of reading sutras, engaging in repentance or devotion rituals, and performing other mainstream forms of Buddhist practice.

The second major text composed in 1227 is the *Universal Recommendation for Zazen* (*Fukanzazengi*). This short proclamation is essentially an ingenious rewriting of a brief yet highly influential Chinese instructional manual for the practice of meditation, first published in 1103.¹⁰⁴ The *Universal Recommendation* demonstrated Dogen's ability to transform the Sinitic source into a showcase for ideas distinctive to his approach to Zen. These notions include just sitting in order to actualize realization here and now (*genjokoan*), which is based on casting off all attachments through the power of nonthinking (*hishiryo*). This outlook represents a level of pure awareness unbound by customary distinctions of the logical versus the illogical, since Dogen believed it misleading to suggest these modes of thought are at odds.

In the *Universal Recommendation* Dogen also employed the typical Kamakura-era religious view that authentic training should be based on selecting a single method of practice. He concurred with other Buddhist reformers of the era that such a commitment outweighs the superiority or inferiority of the practitioner's intelligence, ultimately an irrelevant factor for attaining enlightenment. The following quote offers a few highlights of this important early work, reorganized into three paragraphs:

You may wander freely in the entranceway [of the dharma gate], but still fall short of finding the dynamic path that leads to emancipation. Therefore, put aside the intellectual practice of investigating words and interpreting phrases, and learn to

take the backward step that turns the light and shines it within. Body-mind of themselves will be cast aside, and your original face will be manifested.

You must think of not thinking. What kind of thinking is not thinking? Non-thinking, which is the essential art of zazen. This is realization here and now, which is unreachable by traps and hindrances. If you grasp this point, you are like a dragon abiding in the water or a tiger traversing the mountains. You should realize that the true Dharma appears of itself, so from the start deception and diversion must be renounced.

Why leave the seat in your own home to wander in vain through the dusty realms of other lands? If you make one misstep, you stumble past what is directly in front of you. Since intelligence or lack of it is not an issue, make no distinction between the dull and the sharp-witted. Concentrating your effort single-mindedly is in itself wholeheartedly engaging the Way.^{[105](#)}

For the next two years, from 1228 through 1229, Dogen stayed at Kenninji for his second sojourn there. He quickly became disillusioned, just as he had at Mount Hiei and various Chinese temples. Dogen maintained that the loss of the leadership previously provided by Eisai and Myozen led to an entirely different atmosphere in the temple. He observed that the monks preferred to spend much of their time chatting idly while seeking associations with wealthy patrons in Kyoto, instead of resolutely pursuing monastic discipline and meditative practice.^{[106](#)} And the cooks at Kenninji disappointingly chose food they personally favored rather than considering what best served the assembly. To avoid such pitfalls, Dogen became determined to lead an independent cloister as soon he could muster sufficient support. A few years later, this support would come from various sources, including a friendly faction of the Fujiwara clan. It

took until 1233, however, before Dogen was able to open his own full-fledged Zen temple.

During the early phase of his return, Dogen was joined by several followers who would go on to become prominent figures in the lineage. One was Jakuen (Ch. Jiyuan), a monk he had befriended in China who spent the rest of his days in Japan as a loyal member of the Soto sect. Another new disciple, Senne, probably came to join Dogen at Kenninji around this time. Because of his expertise in reading Chinese compositions as well as Tendai doctrinal expositions, Senne eventually became one of the main editors of Dogen's recorded sayings. Along with his student Kyogo, Senne also produced the only medieval-period interlinear prose commentary on the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*, known as *Distinguished Comments* (*Gosho*).

The most important source of new students for Dogen was the Daruma school. Founded by Dainichi Nonin in the 1180s, the sect was proscribed by the government in 1228 for its antinomian tendencies in disregarding any emphasis on the traditional precepts. The school had been criticized by both the Tendai sect and Eisai for failing to follow monastic rules, instead equating ordinary manners, like simply lifting one's arm to make a gesture, with the realization of true reality.¹⁰⁷ Eisai requested the government to declare the Daruma school heretical in a famous tract published as early as 1198. Moreover, Dainichi Nonin never traveled to China and therefore was considered an imposter by Eisai and Dogen, both of whom received transmission based on their face-to-face meetings with eminent continental teachers. Despite the scathing criticisms of Dainichi Nonin by Dogen and many other Buddhist and secular authorities, some key followers of this lineage were among his most prominent and influential disciples. Ejo, Gien, and Gikai—who would later become the second, third, and fourth abbots of Eihei-ji, respectively—all derived from the defunct Daruma school. In addition, Giun, who probably was linked to the same movement,

became the fifth abbot in 1314. The critical contributions of Daruma school followers to Dogen's imported sect of Zen is therefore a fascinating aspect of this history. It is even speculated that the success of the Soto sect in the generations after Dogen's death was indebted to the remarkably successful evangelical efforts of former Daruma school members, especially Gikai.

The first major example of the impact of the Daruma school was the appearance of Dogen's eventual long-term assistant and loyal scribe, Ejo, who visited Kenninji in 1228. At that time, the existence of the Daruma faction was seriously threatened by government prohibition, and Ejo came to Kenninji to try to determine whether it would be beneficial for his colleagues to become disciples of the returnee from the mainland. Ejo's visit shows that Dogen's reputation as an expert in Chinese Zen was beginning to spread. Dogen's attractiveness as a potential teacher was also likely enhanced by the fact that the Rinzai sect was struggling to gain traction after the deaths of Eisai and Myozen (although that misfortune was reversed by the middle of the century, when Rinzai temples began to prevail). It is reported in Keizan's *Transmission of Light* that, for the initial three days of their meeting, Dogen and Ejo felt fully compatible and more or less on the same level in discussing their respective religious views.¹⁰⁸ But on the fourth day, Dogen demonstrated his immense knowledge based on Sinitic sources, which greatly impressed and inspired Ejo. Even though he was the older monk by two years, he made it known he was very interested in studying with Dogen. Dogen, however, said he was not yet ready to accommodate a group of students and advised Ejo to return in a few years, after Dogen had a chance to open his own temple.

In 1230 Dogen began residing alone in a small hermitage known as Anyo'in, on the grounds of a dilapidated temple owned by the Fujiwara family in the town of Fukakusa. Moving there was probably Dogen's choice because of his disappointment with current Kenninji practice, but another theory is that he was forced by jealous monks

to leave the temple founded by Eisai. With a name literally meaning “deep grass,” Fukakusa was well known during the Heian period as a pastoral getaway for the Kyoto elite. Apparently Jakuen and Senne remained at Kenninji for a while after Dogen’s departure, but several other disciples came to this retreat to receive his teachings.

One of the new arrivals was a nun, Ryonen, for whom Dogen gave three dharma lessons (*hogo*). These were recorded in entries 8.4, 8.9, and 8.12 of the *Extensive Record*, all of which deal with interpreting various koan cases. Dogen noted that her sincerity in pursuit of the Way “cannot be matched by others.” He later wrote two memorial poems in honor of her death, which occurred just a few years after their interactions. This attention paid to Ryonen is evidence of the enhanced role of female practitioners in Japan that occurred as part of the new Kamakura Buddhist movements. The trend appears to have influenced Dogen to state, in “Discerning the Way,” composed on a midautumn day of 1231, “For gaining an understanding of the Buddha Dharma, men and women, and noble and common people, are not to be distinguished.”¹⁰⁹ This view was further highlighted in the *Treasury* chapter “Venerating and Attaining the Marrow” (“Raihai tokuzui”), written in 1239, which adamantly supported the impact of female practitioners, highlighting several prominent nuns who were successful teachers in China.¹¹⁰

The following verse, composed while Dogen was at the Anyo’in hermitage, is one of many examples showing how Chinese literary styles had significant influence on Dogen’s early teaching method. In this case, Dogen “continued a rhyme with [an unnamed] Zen practitioner,” although that anonymous monk’s poem was not recorded. Dogen’s verse reads:

So much evening rain falls from the evening clouds,
Using frost as a robe and dew for a pillow, a cypress tree
keeps me dry.

How wonderful that sky and water do not obstruct one
another,
As the breeze flows briskly through my hut.[111](#)

This verse offers an eloquent depiction of enlightenment as communion with the elements of nature. Another of Dogen's Chinese-style poems from this period, however, suggests an alternative view of enlightenment. The poem reads:

Like pitiable clouds drifting along I am tossed between birth
and death,
I lose the way yet find my path as if awakening from a dream.
Even so, there is still something I must remember well—
The sound of evening rain rustling the deep grass at my
Fukakusa hut.[112](#)

This lyric follows a conceptual progression typical of Chinese poetry: (a) the opening comment regarding the uncertainties and travails of human existence; (b) personalizing the quest to gain insight through promoting rather than suppressing awareness of instability; (c) a turnabout remark made from the perspective of having reached, instead of pursuing, a state of realization, though while still feeling a sense of uncertainty; and (d) the conclusion based on indirect expression of resolution of the great doubt, evoked through a landscape symbolic of the author's tranquility and unperturbability.

The single main example of prose writing from the initial stage of Dogen's teaching career is "Discerning the Way," which was composed in Japanese vernacular. Lost for several centuries before being rediscovered in the Edo period, it eventually became the opening chapter of one of the main editions of the *Treasury* and is thought to provide a compelling summary of the whole text's contents. Some commentators, however, prefer to view "Discerning

the Way” as an independent work. In any case, it consists of a preface, which supplements the teachings in the *Universal Recommendation*, and a brief conclusion, with these two components surrounding eighteen hypothetical queries with replies about Zen theory and practice. “Discerning the Way” was heavily influenced by Eisai’s 1198 masterwork, the *Propagation of Zen for the Protection of the State*. Eisai composed that text to address possible concerns about the role of the new religious movement in medieval Japan. It is thought that the question-and-answer section in Dogen’s essay was primarily intended to persuade Ejo’s Daruma school colleagues of the merits of the Soto sect. In autobiographical reflections about the need to define his teaching mission, Dogen wrote:

I returned to my native land at the beginning of 1228 with the intention of spreading the Dharma and rescuing sentient beings. It seemed as if I were shouldering a heavy load, so I decided to bide my time until I could vigorously promote methods designed to release the discriminatory mind. As a result, I drifted like a cloud and floated like a reed, ready to learn from the customs and habits of clear-minded Zen teachers of the past.

Although I was still a weak practitioner of the Way, I was determined to lead a transient life and wondered, on what mountain or by what stream could seekers find me? Because of my feelings of compassion for potential aspirants, I hereby write down everything I observed and learned from the behavior and practices in Chinese monasteries in order to preserve the transmission of what Rujing understood to be the most profound goal, which is to propagate the true meaning of the Buddhist Dharma.^{[113](#)}

It is important to note that, by choosing in “Discerning the Way” to present his message as a straightforward explication of ideas—rather than a deliberately paradoxical form of discourse, as he would begin doing later in the 1230s—Dogen tried to assert a position of authority that stood in sharp contrast to his rather lowly social status at the time. Still young and with no clear clerical rank, he had only the endorsement of a continental master from a denomination that was not yet officially recognized in Japan. By the next decade, it would come to haunt Dogen that, in the eyes of many contemporaries, he was not linked to one of the traditional lineages or sets of doctrine. Over time he gained a degree of notoriety among the elites for seeming hypercritical of the modes of teaching of rival clergy while, some said, not offering distinct and persuasive alternatives because of the pervasive ambiguity in much of his writing.¹¹⁴ Despite confronting such obstacles, this conflictive situation emboldened Dogen’s determination to succeed in promoting the path of just sitting.

Bringing Home Song-Style Zen

During the second stage of the reformative period, Dogen achieved two primary goals, one institutional and one literary. The main organizational accomplishment was opening his own monastery, Koshoji, in 1233. Located in Fukakusa, the temple quickly became the first fully dedicated Zen facility in Japan.¹¹⁵ The literary goal was reached as Dogen started to develop various discursive methods based on interpreting Sinitic sources. This approach appealed to an increasingly knowledgeable audience of native monks, especially through Dogen’s extensive citations of koan collections buttressed by his incomparable flair for inventive commentaries. These two goals complemented one another, as the institutional context provided new ritual resources and pedagogical demands, which stimulated the rapid expansion of Dogen’s literary innovations.

Shortly after Koshoji was established, Ejo arrived to stay for good with Dogen. He quickly became an all-purpose companion, serving as the main recorder and editor of Dogen's writings. Born to the Fujiwara family, Ejo was well trained in Tendai doctrine and had also experimented with other Buddhist practices, including chanting the nenbutsu. He found that, after many years of practice in the Daruma school, he was eager to turn to Dogen's training style because he still desperately sought a genuine spiritual breakthrough.

Ejo was ordained in the Soto lineage in 1234. Soon after, he delivered his first sermon to the assembly, dealing with the koan case known as Dongshan's "three pounds of flax." It was said that the intimate relationship between Ejo and Dogen was "like water meeting water or sky meeting the sky," such that the main follower was allowed to lead many of the temple ceremonies held throughout the yearly cycle. Furthermore, Ejo was privileged with direct access to the founder and once remarked, "Although Dogen had many disciples, I alone went regularly to his quarters. There, I heard special teachings that others did not hear, but I also did not miss anything they did learn."¹¹⁶

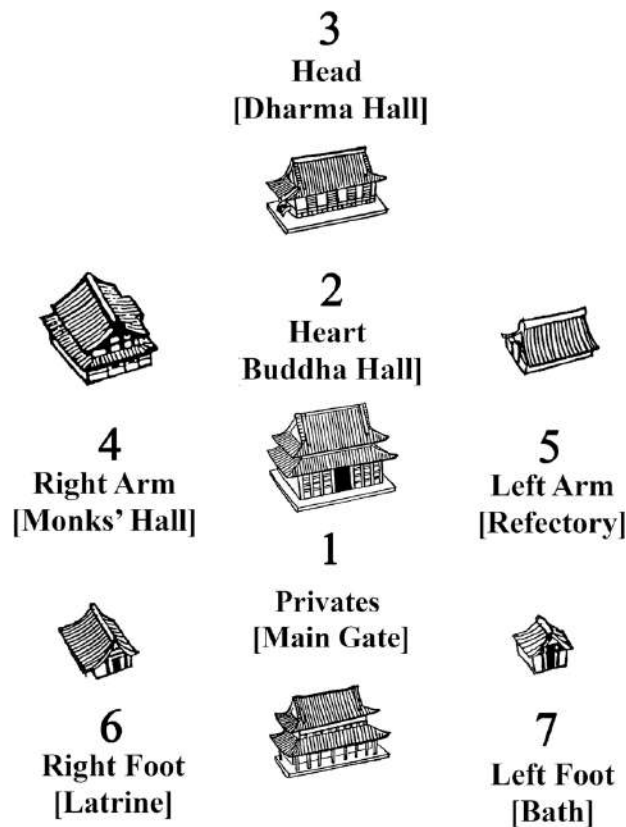
According to the enlightenment dialogue held by master and disciple, Ejo one day was awakened by hearing the Zen saying "A single thread pierces through multiple holes." That evening he made prostrations to Dogen and said, "I do not ask about the 'single thread,' but where are there 'multiple holes'?" Dogen smiled and confirmed the insight by responding, "Completely pierced!" Keizan's paradoxical poetic commentary on this episode reads, "Do not say that 'A single thread pierces through multiple holes.' Spotlessly clean, there is nary a mark."¹¹⁷

It is not clear how many other former Daruma school followers also joined Koshoji in the mid-1230s, but the evidence in the *Treasury of Miscellaneous Talks*, collected by Ejo over the next few years, suggests that Dogen was then interacting with a variety of colleagues and students eager to experience and test his teaching.

The text records all manner of questions and objections designed to probe the master's judgment of key issues concerning Zen practice in relation to mainstream Buddhist rites and values. These sessions, generally held in the early evening, were completed by 1238. Thus, the text captures the full range of teachings during a pivotal phase of Dogen's career. For the most part, his answers were direct rather than paradoxical. They were filled with homespun wisdom drawing on lessons Dogen learned during his time at various temples. For example, he commented that Eisai once received a bolt of silk from a wealthy donor and was going to use the gift to buy food for his hungry group of novices. When a needy layman asked for Eisai's charity, however, he handed him the silk instead. Eisai then instructed his monks not to complain, because helping ordinary people in trouble would result in accruing karmic merit. Dogen also frequently cited examples of benevolent rulers in China and Japan who looked out for their poor countrymen rather than exploiting their status for personal gain, thus demonstrating the qualities of an authentic leader.¹¹⁸

A major administrative development of the reformatory period took place in 1236 when Koshoji gained a dharma hall for giving lectures and a monks' hall for meditation. The construction came about in part through the support of a female lay donor named Shogaku, who became a nun near the end of her life. These buildings were part of the Chinese Zen style of seven-hall temple construction (*shichido garan*). As shown in the image on [this page](#), in addition to the dharma hall and monks' hall, this arrangement also featured a Buddha hall for public gatherings, a main gate (also known as the mountain gate), refectory, bathhouse, and latrine, plus additional buildings for administrative and ritual purposes. The seven halls were arranged in anthropocentric fashion, with three buildings along the central axis and two each to the right and left sides.¹¹⁹ Numerous other structures on the compound were used for housing guest monks or for various ritual and managerial functions.

SEVEN-HALL MONASTERY



The seven main halls at Eihei-ji and other Zen temples of the period associated with various parts of the body of the Buddha to be aware of his presence. (Image © 2020 Maria Sol Echarren and Steven Heine.)

The three new buildings provided a venue for enacting rites that Dogen had participated in while in China and considered essential for Zen life. He was thus able to transmit to Japan for the first time many of the authentic Song-dynasty behavioral models. These activities included seated meditation practiced by the whole assembly in the same room where the monks slept, as well as the hosting of vegetarian banquets for lay patrons in the Buddha hall. The new setup also facilitated the regular presentation of formal sermons in the ceremonial setting of the dharma hall, with the rank-and-file members lined up in rows as the abbot spoke while perched in his high seat. Dogen began delivering such homilies in the fourth

month of 1236 and continued this practice throughout his career, except during two intervals of travel when no hall was available.

In contrast to the dharma hall sermons, which might be taken to indicate that Dogen adopted a hierarchal approach dominated by the role of the abbot, his *Instructions for the Cook*, written in 1237, emphasized that cooking—one of the seemingly menial and undervalued tasks of monastic life—is as essential as lofty clerical functions. In championing the role of the cook, he ridiculed the utter indifference he observed in the chief cook at Kenninji in 1228, who “for a year did not come close to lifting a pan, stirring rice, or planning a meal.”¹²⁰ To Dogen, this attitude represented an unacceptable unresponsiveness. It stood in sharp contrast to the atmosphere at Mount Tiantong, where the cooks knew how to act in ways that benefited others, enhanced the monastery’s preeminence, and respected elders as well as the memory of Zen ancestors. He celebrated the capacity of awakened cooks to cultivate a mind that is joyful, kind, and elevated beyond petty concerns or trivial constraints. In another example of praising a member of the assembly for undertaking a humble task with sincerity and enthusiasm, one of Dogen’s dharma talks expressed great appreciation for a repairman. The monk, along with his assistants, had mended a leaky roof covering a hallway during a torrential storm, allowing trainees to resume walking from the monks’ hall to the nearby washroom without getting soaked.¹²¹

The single major literary accomplishment of this career phase was Dogen’s development of his ability to make innovative commentary on koan cases. He must have been surrounded by enough followers with strong backgrounds in Chinese literature that they were able not only to comprehend his rapid-fire citations of dialogues but to appreciate his deliberately distorted interpretations and intentional reversals of meaning.¹²²

Though Dogen’s emphasis on koan interpretation flourished with the establishment of Koshoji, it had its roots in his earliest writings, in

which he usually mentioned a koan record but did so without significant commentary. For example, in the *Universal Recommendation*, he had cited a case about Yaoshan's notion of "non-thinking," and in "Discerning the Way," he noted another case about Fayen's story of the "lamplighter looking for fire."¹²³ At this point in Dogen's teaching, koans were being used primarily as a kind of punctuation mark in support of a more direct style of discourse. That approach was still evident in his doctrinal essay written in 1234, *Essentials of Learning the Way* (*Gakudoyojinshu*), which briefly refers to the famous case of Zhaozhou answering, "No!" (*mu*) in response to the question of whether a dog has buddha-nature.¹²⁴

Dogen's initial reluctance to comment on koans is mentioned in a warning he gave to Ryonen in 1231, which alludes to the case of why the first patriarch, Bodhidharma, "came from the west." Dogen indicated the risk of growing attached to the words and letters of interpretative discourse:

Without holding back any explanations, I will show you the meaning of why Zen was brought from the west [to China and Japan]. Be aware that you must not hold on to a single phrase or half a verse, a brief conversation or a cryptic saying; only then will you be in accord in your physical form with the pure, clear source of truth. But, if you are attached to a single word or half a phrase of the sayings of Buddhas and ancestors or koan cases, these will surely become dangerous poisons. You can appreciate those expressions, but do not try to memorize any explanations and avoid being caught up in conceptual deliberations.¹²⁵

A couple of years later, however, a significant shift toward embracing creative commentary began to occur in Dogen's teaching. In "The Heart of Perfect Wisdom" ("Makahannya haramitsu"), a *Treasury* chapter written during the initial summer retreat held at

Koshoji in 1233, Dogen reinterpreted passages from the Heart Sutra by rewriting some of the original wording. This bold intervention in a canonical Mahayana text presaged what he would later do with dozens of koan cases. In that chapter, he also quoted a verse written by Rujing concerning the sound of a wind bell. Dogen greatly admired Rujing's koan-like expression and mentioned it on various occasions throughout his career:

The bell looks like a mouth, gaping wide open,
Indifferent to whether the wind blows in the four directions.
If you ask about the meaning of wisdom,
It answers with a jingling, tinkling sound.^{[126](#)}

There are a couple of sections in the *Record of Private Conversations* in which Dogen proclaimed this wind bell verse the most insightful Zen utterance he ever heard. As noted in chapter 2, Rujing had encouraged Dogen to cultivate the dharma eye by authoring his own poetic compositions.^{[127](#)} Dogen would again refer to Rujing's verse in the first *Treasury* chapter written at Eihei-ji, in 1245, "Space" ("Koku"), where it is suggested that citing this passage was a productive way to inaugurate and sanctify the newly established site.^{[128](#)} Furthermore, in a passage in the *Extensive Record* from 1236, Dogen rewrote Rujing's original composition with the following version:

The bell is a voice articulating emptiness,
Playing host to the wind blowing in the four directions.
Expressing clearly in eloquently crafted language,
Tintinnabulation: the ringing of the ringing.^{[129](#)}

In both poems, the second line literally refers to "winds from east, west, south, or north," but Dogen's depiction of this setting seems more dynamic than his mentor's. Other differences occur in the opening line, where Dogen's change of two characters emphasizes

the power of expressiveness, and in line three, in which he alters five characters to highlight that the bell's sound can be as instructive as human discourse. The fourth lines are identical, but I have chosen to translate them a bit differently in light of Dogen's comment on an ancient Buddhist story in the chapter "Suchness" ("Inmo"). There he wrote that the sound of a bell is not caused by the breeze blowing or the brass being swayed but is simply the "ringing of the ringing."¹³⁰

Following "The Heart of Perfect Wisdom," the next *Treasury* chapter that Dogen wrote was "Realization Here and Now" ("Genjokoan"), which he composed in the autumn of 1233. In its final passage, he cited a koan case about why a fan is needed to move air that is already circulating. Dogen explicated this case succinctly yet without challenging the typical interpretation. Nevertheless, this innovative text, composed as a letter, achieved a breakthrough via Dogen's unique use of the term *genjokoan*—literally indicating an "open-and-shut case" in the legal sense. Here the term symbolizes how koan-based insight can and should be realized (*genjo*) in terms of the seemingly trivial circumstances of everyday life. This outlook recalls a saying attributed to the Buddha, "There are three things that cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth," with the latter being evident in any and all phenomena and situations.

In "Realization Here and Now," Dogen used a series of deceptively simple natural metaphors: flowers blooming and weeds falling, firewood burning and ash smoldering, the moon reflected in water, viewing mountains while journeying out to sea, fish swimming and birds flying. He evoked these images to demonstrate that all forms of existence, if properly understood, constitute the paradoxical, multifaceted, yet ultimately resolvable truth embedded in Zen dialogues. At this point, Dogen no longer saw koans as paradigmatic anecdotes portraying exchanges that took place in the past. They had come to appear as a level of perception occurring in the unmediated present experience of an enlightened adept, endlessly open to reexamination and reinterpretation.

Over the next few years, Dogen quickly advanced his approach to koan interpretation. In 1235, by selecting passages from a variety of Song-dynasty sources, he compiled the *Three Hundred Koan Case Collection* (*Shobogenzo sanbyakusoku*), a listing of some of his favorite encounter dialogues, without offering his own commentary. The next year he produced a collection of ninety cases, later included as the ninth volume of the *Extensive Record*, each with four-line poetic commentary (*juko*). One of the cases that appears in both texts involves the famous story of master Nanquan killing a cat. Nanquan finds that two groups of monks, who cannot stop arguing over who possesses the pet, remain speechless when he, their teacher, threatens its life as a way of challenging their ill-conceived actions.

According to Dogen's verse remark,

Nanquan held up the feline and said,
"If you can speak, the cat will live, otherwise it dies."
Now, tell me whether the cat could hear
The monks in both groups
with voices sounding like thunder.^{[131](#)}

In the original version, Nanquan does indeed slay the cat. But by introducing the notion that the monks expressed themselves eloquently through their roaring silence—a kind of nonvoice, symbolically resonant with meaning—Dogen demonstrated his willingness to depart from the usual meaning of the story. This was done for the sake of bringing out a nuanced interpretation, even—or especially—if it defied conventional views.

Seen in retrospect, Dogen's two koan compilations of the mid-1230s were preparatory exercises for the rhetorical innovations that characterized the final stage of the reformative period. He discontinued his use of four-line Chinese-style poetry after the experiment with this genre in 1236. It was replaced by a

freewheeling prose interpretative method based on revisiting and revising almost every phrase of the traditional case under consideration. Going further, Dogen also took to revising the related sayings or stanzas in various Chinese Zen commentaries, either challenging or expanding their connotations. As a minor but important example, he took up the well-known verse

When hungry I eat rice;
When tired I sleep.
Fools may laugh at me,
But the wise understand.

Dogen's ironic interpretation transposed the lexical components so that it reads, "There is knowing rice after being full; there is being full after eating rice; there is being full of rice after knowing it; there is eating rice after being full."¹³² The focus is thereby changed from the specific function of eating (and sleeping) to the full range of activities before, during, and afterward.

Dogen applied the same pattern of logic-defying commentary to other sayings, such as "Explaining a dream within a dream," and a maxim attributed to master Mazu, "Mind itself is Buddha" (*sokushin zebutsu*). By switching the order of the characters in the latter phrase, Dogen implied that we must investigate, as four of twenty-four possible variations (according to later Soto commentators): "mind itself Buddha is" (*shinsoku butsuze*), "Buddha itself is mind" (*butsusoku ze shin*), "itself mind Buddha is" (*sokushin butsuze*), and "is Buddha mind itself" (*zebutsu shinsoku*).¹³³ The last of these expressions, in blurring the line between a declarative statement and an inquiry, represents another rhetorical device typical of Dogen's writings from this inventive period of his output.

Seen in terms of this development, we can better understand what Dogen meant in the poem cited above about the cat koan when he referred to the monks responding to Nanquan with "thunder."

Dogen's take stood in contrast to most explanations, which held that it was the monks' inability to answer that led to the pet's demise. In a fascinating prose analysis of the case included in the *Miscellaneous Talks*, Dogen's aim was to react to various queries so as to persuade and absorb into his assembly new members from the proscribed Daruma school.

In this passage, Dogen is asked, "What is the meaning of 'not being blind to cause and effect' (*fumai inga*)?"¹³⁴ This question refers to another famous case, involving the story of a shape-shifting fox spirit that mysteriously appears in the form of a monk at a temple. The fox spirit had been punished over the course of hundreds of lifetimes for having once denied the impact of karmic causality on enlightened masters. By bringing up the cat koan in this context, Dogen switched the emphasis. Rather than lamenting the sins of the ignorant monks who are attached to their pet, he criticized the apparent crime of the master for slaying a living being, even if this was done to teach an important lesson about overcoming attachment. Using the discursive method of changing and amending both the source text and its usual interpretations, Dogen's explication substituted his own reactions for those of both the master and his disciples:

If I were Nanquan I would have said, "If you cannot speak, I will kill the cat; and if you can speak, I will kill the cat. Why fight over this animal? Who can save the cat?" On behalf of the students, I would have said, "We are not able to speak, master. Go ahead and kill the cat!" Or, I might have said, "Master, you only know about cutting the cat in two with one stroke, yet you do not know about cutting it into one by just one stroke!"¹³⁵

Ejo followed up by asking Dogen, "How does someone cut the cat into one by a single stroke?" And Dogen responded cryptically,

“With just the cat!” He added, “If I had been Nanquan, when the students were unable to give an adequate answer, I would have released the cat by saying that the students had already spoken. As an ancient master once said, ‘When the great function is manifest, there is not just one right way of doing things.’”¹³⁶ The latter phrase, borrowed from the *Blue Cliff Record*, epitomizes Dogen’s open-ended approach to interpreting koans.

This passage in *Miscellaneous Talks* continues with an extensive discussion of the role of the precepts, which were received and sometimes retaken, as needed, in relation to crimes committed or sins confessed. Dogen also here considered the power of repentance to mitigate the effects of retribution. He maintained that even if a teacher violates the precepts by killing, in doing so as a bodhisattva for the sake of giving spiritual life to others, he must be forgiven and “allowed to receive the precepts anew.” He continues, “The meaning of reciting the precepts day and night and observing them single-mindedly is nothing other than the practice of just sitting and following the activities of ancient masters. When we sit in zazen, is there any precept not maintained or any virtue left unrealized?”¹³⁷

Reaching a Creative Peak

Following an interval of nearly five years from the time of the previous *Treasury* composition, Dogen in 1238 resumed that work by writing a chapter on Xuansha’s dialogue involving “one bright pearl.” An examination of this chapter shows that Dogen was reaching a peak level of originality in his thinking and writing style. Using an interpretative standpoint that applied a principle known in the Japanese literary tradition as allusive variation (*honkadori*), Dogen began commenting on hundreds of koan cases in dozens of *Treasury* chapters.¹³⁸ To understand this development, let us look more closely at Dogen’s discussion of Xuansha.

Xuansha was a fisherman before becoming a disciple in the assembly of Xuefeng. In the source case, he is asked by an anonymous monk to elucidate the saying, “All the worlds of the ten directions are one bright pearl.” The symbolism of the bright pearl in Buddhist literature implies a wish-fulfilling gem protected under the water by a dragon, the sign of grandeur worn in a monarch’s topknot, or the luminous consciousness of an enlightened mind that, like the pearl rolling freely around a bowl, is at one with its surroundings. Xuansha at first denies the need for a conceptual understanding of this all-encompassing principle. But in a turnaround the very next day, he demands that the disciple explain his own understanding of the phrase.

Most interpretations of the Xuansha exchange focus on the apparent befuddlement of the novice, whom the master criticizes for “living in a ghost cave on the dark side of the mountain.” By borrowing from a saying attributed in Zen records to Shakyamuni, Dogen, by contrast, sought to highlight the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the teacher’s mode of instruction. “One day,” he wrote, “Xuansha explained the principle of certainty, and the next day he expressed another standpoint by explaining the principle of uncertainty. In reversing the previous standpoint, he laughed to himself and winked.”¹³⁹ Dogen further altered the traditional interpretation of the case by not disregarding the merits of the disciple. He maintained that even the pitch-black cave occupied by the supposedly ignorant monk reveals the luster of the pearl. Since all things are identified with this gem, not only knowing but also not-knowing or doubting manifests luminosity. Even a partial understanding or a sincere misunderstanding reflects in its way the whole truth.

Over the next four years of preaching at Koshoji, Dogen composed more than forty chapters of the *Treasury*. As with the Xuansha chapter, he innovatively interpreted koan cases featuring masters interacting with students or rival teachers. He also drew

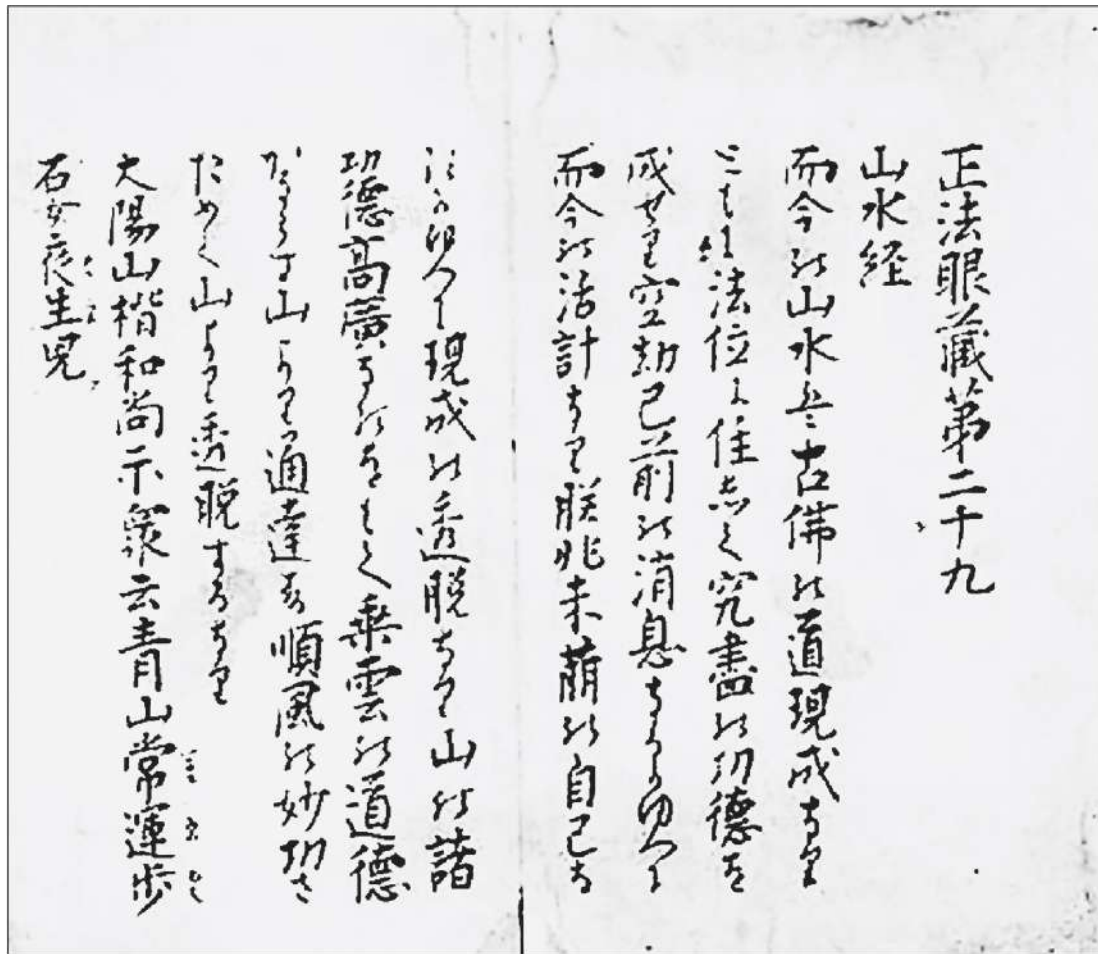
from numerous other forms of expression contained in Zen writings, as well as passages culled from various Mahayana sutras. In the chapter “Mountains and Waters Proclaiming the Sutras” (“Sansuikyo”), (for which there is a sample of calligraphy brushed by Dogen’s hand, shown on [this page](#)), the master commented extensively on the paradoxical saying “the lush mountains are moving.” Based on other passages in the chapter, this saying carries the implication that it is the waters that remain still and unmoving.¹⁴⁰ This image symbolizes both the dynamism of the natural environment along with the ongoing activities of adepts sitting tall and firm in meditation. Dogen saw their dignified activity as being like an elevated peak that seems to flow even as the river below, representing the universality of buddha-nature, appears constant and steady.

In his prose remarks on this passage, Dogen scathingly criticized those monks he met in China who understood such utterances merely as suggesting an irrational state of mind that cannot be depicted with language, a state of mind that, in their view, has no need for words or phrases, which are nothing other than hopeless entanglements. So cutting were Dogen’s remarks that this chapter became one of nearly two dozen sections that were left out of the sixty-chapter version of the *Treasury* by sectarian editors who were apparently uncomfortable with the partisan tone:

At the present time in China, there is a certain bunch of illiterate shave-pates who have formed a faction so strong that they cannot easily be put down by the handful of real teachers. Their point is that any speech that involves thinking is not the preaching of Buddhas and ancestors, since only the irrational is Zen talk. Those who argue for this view have never met a genuine master and lack the eye of Dharma. I saw many of these “sons of Mara” with my own eyes. They are to be pitied for they do not know that thoughts consist of

words, nor do they realize that words are at once liberated by and from thoughts. When I studied in China, I made fun of these fools, who never had any explanation other than the false notion of “irrationality.”^{[141](#)}

In contrast to an emphasis on abandoning language because thoughts and words are delimiting, Dogen maintained that discourse genuinely reflecting the true dharma eye has the power to reveal truth (*dotoku*). He saw this as especially so when language is expanded to encompass such rhetorical flourishes as punning and wordplay, chiasmus and complication, or revision and reversal. He insisted on the merits of speaking in order to disclose the authentic meaning of reality. Such language, for Dogen, reflected the principle of nonduality that underlies all apparent contradictions and stands beyond the false sense of conflict between the logical and the illogical. By regarding flexibility as the key to effective verbal expression, Dogen maintained that the essence of Zen is sometimes to release or let go and sometimes to hold on or gather up—like a double-edged sword that can either kill or give life.



Dogen's own handwriting for the beginning of the *Treasury* chapter "Mountains and Rivers Proclaiming the Sutras."

A prominent example of Dogen's view of open-ended discourse is featured in the chapter "Sounds of Valley Streams, Colors of Mountains" ("Keisei sanshoku"). Here he cited a verse by the prominent lay poet Su Shi, written during a vigil overlooking the impressive landscape from a high peak. Su Shi's reflections came after hearing an inspiring sermon by master Changzong, while visiting a Zen temple on Mount Lu, on the unity of sentient and insentient beings:

The valley stream's sounds are the long tongue of Buddha,
The mountain's colors are none other than his pure body.

With the coming of night, I heard eighty-four thousand songs,
But with the rising of the sun, how am I ever to offer them to you?

Dogen's comments on this verse ask probing questions that challenge, without eliminating, the persistent duality of buddhas and the unenlightened in relation to the environment:

Was Su Shi awakened by the sound of the valley stream, or by the voice of the master's sermon? Perhaps Changzong's comment that insentient beings express the Dharma had not ceased to reverberate in his mind and, although he was unaware, this intermingled with the stream rippling through the night. How does one fathom the depth of water, and whether it fills a bucket or the whole ocean? In short, was Su Shi awakened by the mountains and streams, or were the mountains and streams awakened by him? Who clearly sees the tongue and body of the Buddha?^{[142](#)}

Many of the *Treasury* chapters from this phase of Dogen's career express the theme of an all-encompassing oneness disclosed through endless variation and multiplicity. This outlook can be grasped on several levels of understanding. Prominent among them is the unity of ordinary and extraordinary existence, which overcomes any subtle distinction between attaining enlightenment and the path of training, practice, and realization. Moreover, the present moment that transpires here and now is not isolated from but rather encompasses recollection of the past as well as anticipation of the future. Dogen's nondual standpoint further encompasses the following levels of interconnectivity:

- Reality and unreality—the seemingly illusory or delusive realm of dreams and visions, that of paintings and other representations of existence, and various kinds of deceptions

or mistakes are all manifestations of truth if penetrated by genuine understanding.

- Temporality and eternity—even though people are confined by the boundaries of impermanence, through genuinely facing one's contingency and mortality, the gap between instantaneous awakening and timelessness is surpassed.
- Sensation and setting—although human awareness is innately limited, even for the awakened, by the horizon of human perception, an adept realizes holistic truth in each particular sensation and in every situation.
- Nature and humanity—an adept understands that a flower does not bloom because spring is a recurring season and its time has come, but rather springtime itself manifests through the opening of the blossom and other such phenomena.
- Logic and illogic—genuine discourse is essential for advancing knowledge and should be explored and cultivated instead of relinquished, so even when discourse is intricate, knotty, or entangled, its complications themselves help disclose truth.
- Ritual and spontaneity—since no distinction between subjective and objective truth applies, each example of ritual behavior, whether mysterious like chanting sutras or mundane like washing one's feet before meditation, is an external confirmation of interior awareness.
- Reliability and individuality—even though monastic comportment must be regulated with the strict consistency of all actions required, the functions of adepts inevitably give rise to spontaneous examples of adaptability, variability, and uniqueness.

From a rhetorical standpoint, Dogen's final years at Koshoji temple were a resounding success. For many observers, they marked the high point of his entire career. Yet despite the significant

achievements of this phase, Dogen's activity in the capital was quickly coming to end. There were signs of discord percolating beneath the surface, especially contentiousness with rival Buddhist schools. His stay in Kyoto would soon give way to the single major geographic alteration in Dogen's teaching: his surprising move to Echizen Province.

By the late 1230s, Dogen's temple life in Kyoto was thriving. He had a large enough assembly and sufficient aristocratic support to expand the facilities and continue to develop his unique Zen teaching capacities and literary pursuits. However, when considered retrospectively from the standpoint of what would take place just half a decade later, we realize that seeds of tension and turmoil must have been starting to manifest. Soon enough, Dogen's successes triggered jealousies among other Buddhists. This caused the Fujiwara clan to back a Rinzai factional rival, and Dogen sought new funding from samurai patronage. He also responded to new impacts from Chinese influences and the influx of additional Daruma school converts by advocating a more exclusive lineal outlook. This stood in contrast to his prior, more universalist standpoint, which had seemed so well suited to the diverse and rapidly changing society in the capital. Although these new developments would soon bring about major changes, for the time being Dogen was able to continue focusing on his literary output.

CHAPTER 4

“I Am the First in Japan”

The Eihei-ji Years

IN 1243, a decade after opening his first monastery in Kyoto, Dogen left Koshoji to found a new practice center in a secluded mountain area. Named Daibutsuji at the time of its opening in 1244, the temple was renamed Eihei-ji two years later. Except for two short trips away, he remained there until his death. This period of teaching—the performative period, spanning 1243 to 1253—encompasses some of the most highly disputed aspects of Dogen’s biography and teaching career. Fundamental questions persist regarding how Dogen’s approach during this time related to his previous modes of instruction. Does the performative period give evidence that there was a basic inconsistency in the style and content of Dogen’s pedagogy or that he underwent a change of heart? These questions become especially pertinent following his return from a six-month visit to the shogun’s headquarters in Kamakura in 1247, when Dogen seems to have become primarily interested in the ethical implications of Zen meditation in relation to karmic causality.

The performative period can be thought of in two substages. The first of these (1243–1247) began with the remarkably productive phase when Dogen’s assembly was settling in the deep mountains for a nine-month interval while Eihei-ji was being built. During this time, while staying at a couple of temporary hermitages, Dogen

composed nearly thirty chapters, or about one-third, of the *Treasury*. Once the new monastery opened, however, he put a much greater focus on other kinds of writing, especially the formal sermons included in the *Extensive Record* and the essays of another crucial text, the *Monastic Rules*.

The second substage (1247–1253) covers the journey to Kamakura and return to Eihei-ji, which was marked by another shift in Dogen's religious teachings. He commenced the composition of a new style of *Treasury* chapters, which are included in a separate edition known as the twelve-chapter *Treasury*. In these and related works, he emphasized the importance of seeking reconciliation with the effects of karmic causality. This focus has been seen by some observers as being at odds with the high-minded nondual philosophical approach that characterized most of the writings Dogen had composed at Koshoji as well as during the interim phase after moving to Echizen. Others, however, see the emphases as complementary.

From a biographical standpoint, the two most impenetrable features in Dogen's life occurred during the performative years. Not surprisingly, these black holes have given rise to a variety of conjectures. One of the gaps involves the reasons for the move to Echizen. In this case, the causes remain unclear since traditional records offer no explanation as to why this event transpired, and the explanation is contested by modern scholars. The other area of uncertainty, which is also not explained fully in sectarian accounts, concerns Dogen's trip to Kamakura to visit Hojo Tokiyori. Here, the cause is evident, as Dogen was responding to a summons from the regent. But there is heated debate about whether the trip actually took place and, assuming it did, if it had a significant impact on Dogen's overall teaching mission.

These topics call into question central aspects of Dogen's pedagogical intentions in light of his relationship with the then-current nexus of religious institutions in early medieval Japan, which

was to a large extent regulated by, or at least answerable to, the strictures of secular authority. They leave the door open for divergent and sometimes wildly different interpretations about what teachings Japan's original Zen teacher intended to offer his assembly. Soto traditionalists, who tend to be skeptical that the Kamakura trip even occurred, find an underlying uniformity despite any apparent changes. Advocates of the approach known as Critical Buddhism (Hihan Bukkyo), which became prominent in the late 1980s, argue that Dogen's literary production changed significantly in the aftermath of his visit to the shogun, and they posit the trip to Kamakura as key to evaluating a series of conceptual and literary modifications that took place throughout the various stages of Dogen's career.¹⁴³

Productivity in the Provinces

The reasons why Dogen left the capital in the seventh month of 1243 are difficult to determine. He had achieved towering successes at Koshoji on both organizational and rhetorical levels. Furthermore, he mentioned no rationale for the move in his own writings; nor do the main biographies offer any. That being the case, scholars today are left to speculate on what happened. They are divided between offering positive evaluations that posit constructive reasons for the move or negative ones suggesting that it reflected a marked decline in his leadership and creativity.

Looking back on the last few years at Koshoji, one can see how conditions leading up to the move were building. One factor involved the increasingly argumentative tenor of some of Dogen's writings, evident in chapters like "Mountains and Waters Proclaiming the Sutras." Such polemics probably triggered condemnation from his rivals in the capital. This trend was heightened in 1241 when Dogen received from China a copy of Rujing's recorded sayings, which helped foster a deeper sense of fidelity to his teacher's lineage. For

a prolonged period, Dogen had rarely discussed Rujing in depth. Now, for the first time since returning from China, he dedicated several *Treasury* chapters—especially “Plum Blossoms” (“Baika”) and “Eyeball” (“Ganzei”)—to commenting extensively on his mentor’s sayings and poems.

In 1242, several former members of the Daruma school, including Gien, Gikai, and Giin, joined Dogen’s assembly. Despite their provocative sectarian background, they, like Ejo before them, would come to play leading roles in his movement. Dogen’s polemical tendency, combined with his practice community’s shifting network of affiliations, no doubt heightened a sense of jealousy on the part of his Buddhist and secular adversaries. At the same time, he was being cut off from some of his past alliances—particularly with the Fujiwara clan, which threw its support behind Enni Ben’en, the leader of a rival temple. In response to this challenge, Dogen began developing a new association with his samurai benefactor, Hatano Yoshishige. Between the end of 1242 and the early months of 1243, Dogen produced sermons to be delivered outside the grounds of Koshoji, specifically for Hatano’s entourage in Kyoto. These included “Total Activity” (“Zenki”), presented at the warrior’s residence, and “Ancient Buddha Mind” (“Kobusshin”), given at his local temple in the Kyoto neighborhood of Rakuhara, not far from Koshoji.

Hailing from Izumo Province in western Japan, Hatano was assigned to oversee several districts in the capital and owned land in the mountains of Echizen Province. The Echizen area would soon supply Dogen with a vital set of supportive sociopolitical linkages, which also provided respite from the adversarial reproaches of his former Fujiwara sponsors. “The Moon” (“Tsuki”), a lecture given shortly after “Total Activity,” is sometimes interpreted as a repudiation of key notions of aesthetic symbolism endorsed by Fujiwara leaders, who were traditionally the leaders of the Japanese literary tradition. Their aesthetic outlook, when stripped of a meditative foundation,

stood in contrast to Dogen's Zen view of seeing reality as it is, without artifice or the intervention of conceptual frameworks.

In evaluating the reasons for the move north, orthodox Soto commentators generally maintain that Dogen ventured to the new site primarily because he grew weary and disillusioned with the capital. Although he was now of higher stature—a teacher rather than a student—such a situation would mirror what happened on several previous occasions in his life, such as while he was studying at Mount Hiei and during his second sojourn at Kenninji. Perhaps Dogen felt that the pushes and pulls of ordinary society were again obstructing his efforts to maintain the purity of genuine practice. He decided, instead, to fulfill Rujing's injunction, evoking East Asian eremitic customs, to stay free from the distractions of secular life. In advice imparted to Dogen at the time of his departure from China and echoed in passages in the *Record of Private Conversations*, Rujing encouraged his disciple to seek solace through the path of contemplative reclusion. And he believed this could best be found in distant mountains far removed from the mundane world.

As Dogen later said in a sermon in the *Extensive Record*:

The first steps of practice are to cut away all attachments and have no family ties, or to abandon social obligations and enter the non-artificial realm. Do not sojourn in towns and maintain ties with rulers but enter the highlands to seek the Way. From ancient times, noble people who yearned for awakening all entered the high elevation and calmly abided there in quiet serenity. Even if you are foolish, you should abide in the deep mountains, just as how in my vigorous youth I searched for the Way in the mountains of China, and now in my older years I abide in the northern mountains of Japan.^{[144](#)}

Eschewing competition with other monastic organizations for aristocratic and governmental patronage, Dogen abandoned the

effort to become an officially acclaimed national teacher (*kokushi*), an ambition that was evident in his early works like “Discerning the Way.” Instead, he reoriented his community toward the ideal of a fully cloistered life (*tonsei*) and strove to develop a model of temple administration that would assure freedom from extraneous interferences. But this decision brought with it new challenges. Since Zen was brand new to the Echizen area, in order to grow his community Dogen would need to convert monks who generally lacked sufficient knowledge of Chinese sources.

Other observers, particularly some nonsectarian scholars affiliated with Rinzai Zen or other Buddhist schools, have taken a more critical view of Dogen’s move to Echizen than that suggested above. They point out that, since Dogen’s partisan polemics caused opposition on the part of powerful religious and civil groups in Kyoto, the transition would not have been possible without the support of Hatano. This view paints Dogen as a struggling monk who needed help to escape rising turmoil. As a sign of the decline in Dogen’s social standing, in 1243 the Fujiwara family began building an impressive new temple, Tofukuji, in the vicinity of Koshoji. This was constructed to house the abbacy of the Rinzai monk Enni Ben’en. Enni in 1241 had returned from China, where he studied Zen for six years. He was a leader of the Rinzai Zen movement favored by Kyoto officials. Compared with Dogen, he was also better tolerated by Tendai factions because his eclectic teaching method did not threaten their status quo to the same degree.

Some skeptics argue, based largely on indefinite historical evidence, that the diminished yet powerful leadership at Mount Hiei chased Dogen from the capital by incinerating Koshoji later in 1243. It is not clear that Koshoji was destroyed, although it is known that when Senne returned to Kyoto after Dogen’s death, he established a new temple called Yokoji, suggesting that Koshoji was by then relatively inactive. In any event, skeptics think that some disaster forced Dogen’s unforeseen relocation and that his departure should

therefore be considered a desperate flight rather than a purposeful choice. The move could be considered a kind of “velvet exile,” in that banishment from the realms of power was a fate that befell numerous Zen priests in Song China, including the otherwise prominent master Dahui, who was forced to live away from Hangzhou for decades before returning to lead the major temple in the capital. The same kind of penalty was also imposed at some point in the careers of Dogen’s fellow new Kamakura-era Buddhist leaders, including Honen, Shinran, and Nichiren.

Many of the skeptics claim that Dogen’s creativity declined significantly while he dwelled in Echizen. They refer to this phase as “late Dogen,” implying that his output was inferior and deficient compared to the “early Dogen” in Kyoto, despite the fact that the master is most famous for leading Eihei-ji. These assessments, however, generally fail to take into account the full picture of the considerable organizational and discursive achievements attained by Dogen during his last ten years. Critics tend to ignore the fact that the first year was tremendously productive for the composition of the *Treasury*, and the subsequent years also demonstrated noteworthy accomplishments in Dogen’s teaching mission.

In the absence of any concrete confirmation as to why the move took place, all discussions about the reasons for his midcareer transition need to acknowledge that they are conjectural and therefore partial. Based on my own evaluation of traditional records as well as diverse modern interpretations, I argue for a compromise position bypassing the conflict between positive and negative judgments that cannot be substantiated. This view stresses that, whether he was chased away or chose to leave of his own accord, the transition afforded Dogen a grand opportunity to renew older religious allegiances and forge novel ones. These networks helped promote his brand of Zen for a growing assembly of monks who were primed to forsake old-fashioned Tendai doctrines in order to embrace the Soto ideology Dogen imported from China.

Whatever the rationale, the result was that Dogen took excellent advantage of the shifting circumstances by succeeding at Eihei-ji perhaps to an even greater extent than he had in Kyoto. As Yoshiro Tamura notes, “The reason Dogen retired to the mountains of Echizen province was to remove himself from the arena of power.”¹⁴⁵ Tamura argues, however, that we should not simply assume that Dogen preferred the purity of the Buddhist order to secular authority. This is because he recognized that the former was not free from the taint of conventional hierarchical structures. For instance, the gender and class inequalities that had long infected the Tendai sect were already getting embedded in Zen practice. Therefore, Dogen moved in large part to find a place that was open, on physical and conceptual levels, to refashioning conventional mores for the sake of sanctifying diverse sectors of society.

The key for understanding a compromise view of the move to Echizen is to recognize the various connections afforded to Dogen and his community in the region. Eihei-ji was located in the area near Mount Hakusan, a sacred snow-covered peak that dominated the spiritual landscape of the entire region. It remains today a primary site for Eihei-ji novices to undertake the practice of ritual austerities during the annual summer retreat. In the medieval era, before Tokyo was built in the 1600s with Mount Fuji as its protective sanctified mountain, Mount Hakusan was central to Japanese religiosity, supporting various esoteric Buddhist and shamanistic practices. Also located close to the peak were two other important monasteries. One was Heisen-ji, a major branch monastery of the Tendai Temporal Gate’s Onjo-ji temple. Dogen had visited Onjo-ji briefly in 1214, when he first left Mount Hiei, and it is possible he renewed connections with this school during his move to Echizen. The other was Hajaku-ji, where the remaining members of the Daruma school practiced. Once Dogen moved to the area, these monks frequently interacted with monks at Eihei-ji, since some leaders of that temple had been members of the other cloister.

At the outset of their transition, Dogen and his band of followers passed a strenuous winter at Kippoji and Yamashibudera, two temporary temples. Despite the challenges of the new climate and the lack of permanent facilities, Dogen achieved an astonishing level of literary productivity. This fecund interval lasted nine months in all, from the time of the assembly's arrival in Echizen in the seventh month of the intercalary year of 1243 until the construction of Eihei-ji was completed in the fourth month of the following year. The circumstances of the actual construction are not fully clear because record keeping is limited or lost, although some mention is included in an encyclopedic traditional history of Eihei-ji. The architects and craftsmen were likely brought from China, or at least had knowledge of continental techniques. These experts, along with more routine carpenters and construction workers, were probably subsidized by Hatano and the local members of his clan, which was powerful not only in Echizen but also in Izumo Province and Kyoto.

From the standpoint of Dogen's writing, this phase was more of an extension of the Kyoto years than it was a transition to a new outlook. His composition of *Treasury* chapters continued to highlight and amplify many of the major themes regarding nonduality that he had been developing at Koshoji. About seventy chapters, or three-quarters of the total number, were composed in the highly compressed phase between 1240 and the spring of 1244. It was also during these years that Dogen initiated the idea of compiling the miscellaneous sermons into a single volume titled the *Treasury*, with each chapter numbered in sequence. He remained unsettled, however, until his death about the total number of chapters as well as which version of the chapters were to be included in the final edition. Several manuscripts of the *Treasury* were still being edited or rewritten by Ejo or by Dogen himself when he died.

The main evidence of Dogen's success in moving was that Eihei-ji quickly became an expansive Zen institution attracting disciples from all over Japan. At the start of the second volume of the *Extensive*

Record, compiled at Eihei-ji after a two-year gap from the time of the last formal sermon (delivered at the dharma hall at Koshō-ji), Ejo inserted a memo stating, “Dogen moved to this mountain on the eighteenth day of the seventh month of 1244. In the next year, many students from all over the four directions gathered like clouds to practice with him.”¹⁴⁶ We cannot be sure of the quantity, but it seems clear the new location helped attract a variety of acolytes who were not available in the elite territory of Kyoto.

Rujing as Model Teacher

One of the interesting things about Dogen’s writings during the initial nine-month phase of the move to Echizen is the way they reflected his reaction to the new surroundings. In an observation included in the *Extensive Record*, Ejo noted that, amid the stark yet magnificent solitude and frosty weather of the Echizen environment, “from winter through spring the fallen snow does not disappear and at times stands seven to eight or even more than ten feet deep.”¹⁴⁷ It was at this point that Dogen began to cite frequently Rujing’s inspirational saying “Plum blossoms emerge in the fallen snow.” The fragrant and colorful plum is the earliest flower in East Asia to bloom in late winter, when a tree’s branches still appear withered and covered in white. This image of rebirth is frequently evoked in Buddhist poetry as a symbol of the Buddha’s moment of awakening. It also signifies the perpetual renewal of seasonal cycles, representing how human awareness should be keenly attuned to the fragility of impermanence.

In the early winter of 1243, Dogen wrote the chapter “Plum Blossoms” (“Baika”). As indicated in the postscript to the piece, three feet of freshly dropped snow were then covering the mountains near the Kippō-ji hermitage. In this chapter, he quoted numerous poems by Rujing, including the following short verse (originally part of a formal sermon delivered by his mentor):

The willows are decorated with sashes,
The plum blossoms are entwined with armbands.

Dogen commented that “the term ‘armbands’ does not indicate fine brocade from Sichuan Province, nor the proverbial jade ball discovered by Bian He”—both examples of precious craftsmanship.¹⁴⁸ Rather, the image evokes the simple function of the opening of plum blossoms. The armband is an instance of adornment that is not considered something additional or excessive but the full manifestation of the phenomenon as it is. In this way, it is like the typical Zen monochromatic metaphors of frost piled on top of snow or a crane sitting in moonlight that shines on a silver vase, or like the apparent redundancy of the image of Kannon’s head rising above another head. Furthermore, Dogen wrote, “The opening of plum blossoms is ‘my marrow has attained you.’” This is an intriguing rhetorical reversal of the famous Bodhidharma saying that, by winning a contest with other clerics, the second patriarch, Huike, “gained my marrow.”¹⁴⁹

Dogen wrote a waka in a similar vein, in the autumn of the following year, when one foot of snow fell early in the season. The poem transforms his feeling of being overwhelmed by the weather into an expression of the longstanding yearning in the Japanese poetic tradition to respond with literary flair to the occurrences of natural beauty:

Nagazuki no	Crimson leaves
Momiji no ue ni	Whitened by the season’s first
	snow—
Yuki furinu	Is there anyone
Minhito tareka	Who would not be moved
Uta o yomazaran	To celebrate this in song?

In this verse, the striking elegance of contrasting and interspersed hues highlights the dramatic transition of the seasons. Clearly, it inspired a moment of poetic rapture in Dogen, revealing a convergence of individual sentiment with the arising of a literary impulse.

As evidenced by his more frequent use of Rujing's favored phrases and images, such as those in the poems just noted, it is clear that during the interim phase before Eihei-ji was built Dogen formed a new emphasis on the role of Rujing as a Zen master. At this time Dogen began to refer to Rujing as "my late teacher (*senshi*), the old master (*kobutsu*)"¹⁵⁰ terms used in tandem to indicate an exceptionally high level of respect and affection. He also heightened his use of partisan rhetoric by asserting the superiority of his mentor compared to other Zen teachers in China, and he emphasized the sense of honor he felt in gaining the chance to train at Mount Tiantong as a young foreigner. According to "Plum Blossoms," "When my late teacher was leading the monastery, there were those able and those unable to practice with him. Since he died, China is darker than a bleak night. I say this because, before and after Rujing, there has not been an old teacher quite like him."¹⁵¹

This new emphasis on Rujing speaks in two main ways to the conditions of Dogen's teaching situation in Echizen, where his Kyoto followers were commingled with newcomers who needed to learn quickly various Zen writings and rites. One reason for this focus was that Dogen wanted to instill a feeling of loyalty to his Chinese lineage, especially among Daruma school monks whose previous ties were primarily with the Rinzai sect. Although the Daruma school had by this point been proscribed for more than a decade, Dogen still had reason to be concerned about the loyalties of the sect's former members. In the late 1100s the founder of the Daruma school, Dainichi Nonin, who was criticized for never visiting the mainland himself, sent a couple of disciples to gain transmission

certificates. They did so in the lineage stemming from the prominent yet controversial twelfth-century Rinzai leader Dahui, who had been a severe critic of the Chinese Soto school in ways that raised Dogen's ire.

Dogen's praise for Rujing was accompanied by strong attacks on Dahui. This was especially the case in the chapter "Self-Realization Samadhi" ("Jisho zanmai"), in which Dogen went so far as to question whether Dahui was genuinely enlightened since "he just memorized sayings and conveyed a few passages of sutras yet lacked the bones and marrow of Buddhas and ancestors."¹⁵² Furthermore, "because Dahui conflated awakening to natural splendor with merely affirming the existence of grass and trees, it is apparent that he never investigated the great Way but nevertheless brazenly took charge of several large monasteries." Although, in Dogen's view, Dahui succeeded in misleading his followers, "those who truly know are certain that he did not have an authentic understanding, but idly blathered gibberish."¹⁵³

The second, more positive reason for Dogen's increased esteem for Rujing was that he greatly admired his mentor's distinctive method for inspiring his followers. In particular, Dogen sought to emulate Rujing's style of initiating impromptu group sessions for delivering sermons, followed by individual meetings to test the understanding of novices. In a passage written during the summer retreat of 1245 (included in the *Extensive Record* and echoed in the *Treasury* chapter "True Form of All Dharmas" ["Shoho jisso"]), Dogen maintained that whether a monastery is considered great or small must be based on the quality of preaching rather than the number of adherents in attendance. He then pointed out that Rujing's leadership "was as rare as a single encounter in a thousand years. Without being caught up in the procedural regulations often imposed to insure regularity of process in the age of the decline of the Dharma, Rujing spontaneously asked an attendant to beat the drum to signal that monks should enter the hall for a lecture, without any

concern over the time of day or whether it was evening, midnight, or following lunch.”¹⁵⁴ After this, Rujing would strike the wooden sounding block three times as a signal to invite disciples to be tested in his private quarters, where they were required on the spot to comment on the meaning of a koan case—at the risk of being mocked or scolded for foolish responses.

Based on this influence, Dogen proclaimed, “As a child of Rujing, I also conduct such meetings, which are taking place right here for the very first time in Japan.”¹⁵⁵ It is not clear, in Dogen’s case, whether sessions were held in such a spontaneous or unpredictable way. Our impression is that, like most Zen teachers, he kept to a routine schedule by delivering a certain number of lectures per month, some of which included impromptu comments left unrecorded. Also, there were no doubt other occasions of spontaneous instructions that did not find their way into Dogen’s collected writings. In any case, the phase shortly after the establishment of Eihei-ji was marked by a significant increase in the number of the *Extensive Record*’s formal sermons, along with a drastic reduction in the amount of the informal sermons in the *Treasury*.

The formal sermons were often delivered for ceremonial purposes, such as a holiday or festival, the beginning of a season, a memorial or anniversary, to acknowledge a particular monk, or to deal with a thematic topic that the assembly wished to discuss. Even so, Dogen used those occasions as opportunities to offer compelling, innovative expressions of his religious vision. In this he made significant use of the teaching of another Chinese Soto Zen predecessor—Hongzhi, abbot of Mount Tiantong in the first half of the twelfth century—whose words he cited yet frequently altered in subtle ways. For example, when Hongzhi maintained that an unfinished jewel is preferable to one that is polished, Dogen argued conversely that it is better to refine the ornament. And whereas Hongzhi recommended silence and inactivity, Dogen argued

adamantly for making use of creative discourse to reflect dynamism.^{[156](#)}

A major feature of the *Extensive Record* sermons is their performative quality. Borrowing from the style of delivery used by Chinese teachers, Dogen frequently wielded his walking staff, cane, or ceremonial fly whisk to draw circles in the air; held it horizontally or vertically to “swallow up all deceptions, great or small”; shook the implement, pounded it, or threw it down on the floor.^{[157](#)} A passage from 1246 indicates that he pounded his staff on the floor and said:

Only this staff always knows thoroughly. Why does the staff always know thoroughly? Because this is the case, all Buddhas in the past are thus, all Buddhas in the present are thus, and all Buddhas in the future are thus. After a pause Dogen said: I long for the days of the past, when a single piece of emptiness was recognized. Confused by illusions, the great earth bleeds. Blood and tears fill my chest as I wonder, to whom can I speak? I only wish that the teaching of this staff would spread widely.^{[158](#)}

At the end of the sermon, Dogen threw his staff down in front of the platform and descended from his high seat.

Following this ironic opener, Dogen brought up the case of master Baizhang, who was asked by a monk, “What is the most extraordinary experience?” Baizhang replied, “Sitting alone on Mile High Peak,” which refers to solitary meditation he practiced outside the main gates of his temple. Dogen pointed out that Rujing once commented, “If someone were to ask me this question, I would reply, ‘My eating bowl has moved from Jingci temple to Mount Tiantong, where I now take rice.’” This response shifts the focus to daily activities occurring inside the monastery compound. Dogen then remarked, “What these two venerable teachers said expresses the matter well, but they cannot avoid being laughed at. If someone asks

me, I will immediately reply: 'My staff stands upright in Japan!' ”¹⁵⁹ Once again Dogen pounded the ritual object and stepped down. Dogen cited this koan a total of five times, including twice in the *Treasury* chapters “Everyday Practice” (“Kajo”) from 1243 and “Monk’s Bowl” (“Hatsu’u”) from 1245. In those instances, he mentioned Rujing’s alternative response but did not provide his own. A subsequent *Extensive Record* sermon from 1249, however, suggested a new reply: “The most extraordinary thing is to give sermons at Eihei-ji!”¹⁶⁰

There are many other significant examples from this career phase of overlap in the subject matter and themes of *Treasury* and *Extensive Record* sermons. One such instance involves the *Treasury* chapter “Turning the Dharma Wheel” (“Tenborin”) from the fourth month of 1244, which can be seen in relation to *Extensive Record* sermon 2.179, presented in 1246. The latter seems like a condensed version of the former. In both sermons, Dogen mentioned that Rujing once cited a saying attributed to Shakyamuni in a sutra: “When one person opens up reality and returns to the source, all space in the ten directions disappears.”¹⁶¹ Rujing then referred to three previous Zen masters but disagreed with their interpretations and offered his own. After reviewing how all these comments lean toward the partial standpoints of ideation, materiality, transcendence, or immanence, Dogen suggested, “I have my own saying that is not like theirs: When one person opens up reality and returns to the source, all space in the ten directions opens up reality and returns to the source.” Some commentators ask if Dogen avoided the fallacies of the other views or claimed to make one more “mistake after mistake,” since his standpoint is also partial and provisional.

Another indication of the change in teaching that took place between 1244 and 1246 is that Dogen composed four of the six sections of his *Monastic Rules* text during these years. He was increasingly emphasizing the role of discipline in all aspects of the life of clerics in his assembly, many of whom were unfamiliar with

Buddhist behavioral regulations. Like both the *Treasury* and *Extensive Record*, the *Monastic Rules* cites or alludes to numerous koan cases, thereby demonstrating that the shifts taking place in Dogen's pedagogical style by no means involved a weakening of his innovative approach to interpreting Chinese sources.

The half dozen *Treasury* chapters that Dogen wrote during this phase mainly deal with aspects of monastic training. These include "Summer Retreat" ("Ango"), "Monk's Bowl" ("Hatsu'u"), "Instructions for the Kitchen" ("Jikuinmon"), and "Home Departure" ("Shukke"), all of which mix practical instructions accompanied by nondual philosophical ruminations. Dogen said, for example, that the ninety-day period of withdrawal from regular activities to focus on intensive meditation and repentance "is the crown of the head and the face of Buddha after Buddha and ancestor after ancestor, who experienced it in their skin, flesh, bones, and marrow."¹⁶² But he also recognized the need to reconcile the distinctive quality of the retreat time with his view that all occasions of temporality, although ever changing, are fundamentally consistent examples of dynamic activity.

Dogen's typically paradoxical expression on this point contains some of the main elements of his philosophy of oneness incorporating variability when he comments on the opening and closing ceremonies of the practice period:

The hallmark of the summer retreat is that it is neither new nor old and does not come or go. Its measure is the size of a fist, and its mode is the way of a pierced nose-ring. Nevertheless, when we bind together (open) the retreat, it arrives, and all of space throughout the ten directions is completely filled; and when we unravel (close) the retreat, it ceases, and the entire earth is broken apart without an inch remaining. This is realizing here-and-now the binding, which appears to arrive, and the breaking through of obstacles by unraveling, which appears to pass. While that is so, those intimately familiar with

the coming and going of the summer retreat simply come and go along with it.¹⁶³

In other words, as Dogen also suggested in the chapter “Being-Time” regarding the relation between firewood and ash, the retreat with all its participants is at once encompassing and cut off from past and future (*zengo saidan*). Since experiencing the period of reclusion is very much like solving a koan case, or a way of attaining an adept’s fist and nose ring as symbolic of genuine realization, Dogen concluded the passage by suggesting ironically that once the retreat has ended, “there is not even a single blade of grass to be seen for ten thousand miles.”¹⁶⁴ In the end, this and all ritual activities are external manifestations of truth, which is a matter of subjective experience.

The Kamakura Venture

The final stage of Dogen’s career revolved around the profound institutional and literary ramifications of his trip to meet the current shogun, Hojo Tokiyori, in Kamakura. Tokiyori, who ruled Japan from 1246 to 1256, was the fifth shogun from the Hojo clan, which took power over the entire nation beginning in 1203 by defeating the Minamoto. He became fascinated with Zen practice as a balm for his spiritual anxieties and, after stepping down as sovereign, practiced meditation until he died in 1263. It appears that Dogen had been asked on previous occasions to travel to Kamakura but had refused. This time, however, his patron Hatano strongly encouraged him to trek across the country in 1247 to see Tokiyori. Some records indicate that Tokiyori requested Dogen to accept the abbacy of a new monastery, which was opened as Kenchoji temple in 1253. After Dogen declined this offer, the temple leadership was granted to the émigré monk Rankei Doryu (Ch. Lanqi Daolong). Doryu arrived in Japan in 1246 and quickly became closely connected with the

shogunate, which highly valued his continental pedigree.¹⁶⁵ Although Dogen declined the position offered to him, he remained in Kamakura for approximately six months, preaching to Tokiyori and his entourage. The trip lasted from the third day of the eighth month of 1247 to the thirteenth day of the third month of 1248.

Dogen's preaching in Kamakura at first seemed successful, but in the end, it proved deeply disappointing. After his return from the journey, Dogen appeared to change not only the style but also at least some of the content of his teaching, newly emphasizing the basic Buddhist doctrine of karma and its ethical implications. This was apparently a response to his dismay at the possibility that his preaching would be exploited by the shogun. Dogen may have suspected that Hojo Tokiyori sought, perhaps halfheartedly, to remove his sense of shame for committing violent acts but without undergoing genuine repentance. This provides a plausible explanation for why Dogen, upon his return to Eihei-ji, began focusing his writings on the theme of moral causality. At the same time, according to traditional biographies, there took place at Eihei-ji several prominent acausal or miraculous occurrences, and these would also have an effect on Dogen's literary output.

Paired with the uncertainty surrounding the reasons for his move to Echizen, the lack of clarity about his trip to meet Hojo Tokiyori forms the second major black hole in Dogen's biography. Its occurrence has either been trivialized or, to the contrary, considered of great importance by many observers. Some Soto traditionalists do not consider the venture a career-defining or even particularly relevant event for Dogen, and they do not acknowledge that the encounter with the shogun, if indeed there was one, resulted in any modification in Dogen's philosophy. On the other hand, for some nonsectarian skeptics of Dogen's preaching after he left Kyoto, the apparent shortcomings of the Kamakura trip are seen as further evidence of the gradual decline of the teacher's creativity and

legitimacy since leaving Kyoto. This group refers pejoratively to this entire phase as “late Dogen.”

A third view has been put forth by scholars who employ the methodology known as Critical Buddhism. Critical Buddhism developed in reaction to several complicated socioethical issues that took place in twentieth-century Japan. Perhaps foremost among these was the complicity of Zen and other Buddhist schools with social discrimination toward the outcast community (*burakumin*), as well as these schools’ reluctant acknowledgment and apparent inability to fathom the full extent of the consequences of their support for pre-World War II militarism.

Proponents of Critical Buddhism see Dogen’s visit to Kamakura as the most crucial turning point in his entire teaching mission. These scholars claim that the trip led to a fundamental shift wherein Dogen made a new commitment to moral philosophy based on karma rather than nonduality. In their view, this allowed him to explicate Zen in a positive way that surpassed his teaching from earlier periods, and it was what led him to repudiate some examples of his previous writings—even, in several prominent cases, to rewrite *Treasury* compositions to reflect his modified standpoint. In terms of periodization, Critical Buddhism recommends that the aftermath of the trip, the five years from the time of Dogen’s return to Eihei-ji until his death, should be referred to as the “late-late” phase of his career. Whereas the term *late* is generally used to indicate all the years in Echizen, representing a decline, *late-late* indicates that Dogen had a period of productivity until the time of his death. Although this period has generally been overlooked or dismissed, according to the Critical Buddhists’ view, it was just as significant as any of the prior career stages. In my view, this phase could also be designated the stage of the “last (*saigo*) Dogen,” because Critical Buddhists feel that it represents a culmination of his thinking from the time of his resolution of the great doubt about original enlightenment.

In contrast to both traditionalists and skeptics, Critical Buddhists argue that the post-Kamakura stage is when Dogen finally broke through all the fallacies and misguided implications of Tendai theory. This freed him to try to create a truly egalitarian and socially responsible communal religious order, in which all choices would be seen as imbued with ethical ramifications reflecting the principle of karmic causality. This view stands in accord with the doctrines of early Indian Buddhist thought, which Dogen was reading carefully for the first time, made possible because Hatano sent a new set of the complete Buddhist canon (Skr. Tripitaka, Jp. Daizokyo) to Eiheiiji in 1250. Prior to receiving this special gift, Dogen was probably exposed mainly to Mahayana sutras.¹⁶⁶ It is difficult to know for sure the extent of Dogen's familiarity with Indian sources before he received Hatano's gift. It is clear though that his citations of early Buddhist texts not only greatly increased during the late-late stage of his career but that they eclipsed in importance his reliance on Mahayana or Zen writings.

Given all of the contention surrounding the interpretation of Dogen's trip to Kamakura, it is notable that there are also those who hold that it simply never took place. The main evidence for this view is based not so much on historical annals from the period but on several of Dogen's writings and references in different editions of the *Record of Kenzei*. For instance, there is a passage in section 2.7 of the *Miscellaneous Talks*, from the mid-1230s, in which Dogen said he was invited to travel to Kamakura, where Zen influence was gaining ground, but decided it would not be necessary to make such a venture at that time.¹⁶⁷ It is possible that, in the effort to at once associate Dogen with national leadership and celebrate his ability to avoid being co-opted by it, the entire story of the trip was a legend that eventually became accepted as fact.

During his time in Kamakura, Dogen did not write any *Treasury* chapters or give other kinds of lectures but instead presented a dozen waka that were used to evangelize the shogun and his wife.

These interactions are vividly depicted in a 2009 biopic titled *Zen*, which features a prominent kabuki actor playing the part of Dogen. The film shows intense interactions between the ruler, who is haunted by guilt, and the calm, benevolent but fiercely independent Zen teacher. One of the poems the teacher wrote for the shogun is titled “Everyday Practice” (“Gyoju zaga”). The term refers to the way an adept adjusts quietly but flexibly to the daily activities of walking, standing, sitting, and reclining based on nonthinking. It reads:

Mamoru tomo	Not seeming to protect
Oboezu nagara	The paddy field,
Oyamada no	A scarecrow standing
Itazuranara	On the hillside—
Kagashi nari keri.	By no means useless. 168

The apparent passivity of the scarecrow, symbolic of the sustained quietude of zazen, at once conceals and reveals the perpetual exertion accomplishing its task.

The teaching implied in this and the other waka was apparently successful in helping convert Hojo Tokiyori to the path of zazen, as he eventually became a monk. The mission, however, was singularly unfulfilling from Dogen’s point of view since he doubted that instruction on nonduality could in this case create genuine spiritual rejuvenation. Dogen’s misgivings were revealed in the way he recast a Rujing verse celebrating solitary reflection. Dogen’s version of the poem acknowledged that his trip left him longing to return to westerly Japan, experience spring, and resume his teaching mission at Eihei-ji:

For half a year I have taken my rice in the home of a layman.
Like an ancient plum tree’s blossoms opening amid frost and
snow,
I am awakened from my slumber by the crash of thunderbolts.

And recall how, near the capital, springtime is colored red by peach blossoms.^{[169](#)}

In the first sermon delivered the night after he returned to the monastery, number 3.251 in the *Extensive Record*, Dogen adopted a penitent yet instructive tone. He suggested that, while his travels may have upset monks in the assembly who felt abandoned, his new emphasis on causality was consistent with his previous teaching of nonduality:

Some of you have questions about the purpose of my travels. It may sound like I value worldly people and take lightly the role of monastics. Moreover, you may wonder whether I presented some teaching there that I never expounded here, and you have not heard before. However, this was not the case. I merely explained that people who practice virtue will improve and those who produce unwholesomeness will decline, so everyone should clarify causes and experience results by discarding the tile of mundane affairs while taking up only the jewel of the Dharma.^{[170](#)}

Did Dogen really intend to suggest that the emphasis on causality was what he had previously taught? Or was this comment, in fact, a ploy designed to console his followers and also redeem his own misgivings? He concluded the discourse by admitting, “How many errors have I made in my efforts to cultivate the way! Today, I deeply regret that I stand here like a water buffalo [symbolizing stubbornness]. Gone for more than half a year, I was like a solitary wheel placed in vast space.” Yet the last words of the sermon offered a cheerful outlook: “Now that I have returned to the mountains, the monks are full of joy, and my appreciation of this beautiful landscape is greatly enhanced.”^{[171](#)}

What is the significance of this rather remarkable acknowledgment of mistakes and uncertainties? Critical Buddhists argue that the key is Dogen's newly formed ethical outlook. His focus on the need to repent in order to try to mitigate the effects of karma is epitomized by the severe punishment he demanded for the disobedient follower Gemmyo. As noted above, the monk had his meditation seat removed and possessions tossed away because he accepted a contribution from the shogun.

Defining Late-Late Dogen

Dogen's fundamental change, Critical Buddhists argue, was further reflected by his literary activities following the Kamakura trip. These mainly involved continuing to present formal sermons in the *Extensive Record*, such that more than half the total number of discourses in that text were written during this phase—an average of sixty homilies per year. Supporting this new focus, and in addition to the last essay written for the *Monastic Rules*, in 1249, Dogen composed a series of undated *Treasury* chapters. These too represented a new style of writing, frequently citing Indian scriptures and highlighting the role of karma. These sections were eventually included in the twelve-chapter version of the *Treasury*.

Soto traditionalists see the twelve-chapter edition as an uncontroversial addendum to the rest of the *Treasury*, intended to target novice monks. According to Critical Buddhists, by contrast, this edition of the masterwork showcases Dogen's most authentic teachings. The chapter "Karmic Effects over Three Times" ("Sanjigo"), for instance, emphatically highlights the inviolability of moral retribution:

What is there to doubt? The recompense for good and evil exists through past, present, and future. Ordinary people, seeing only that in some cases the benevolent die young

while the violent live long, or the treasonous have good fortune while the righteous have misfortune, think that cause and effect do not really exist, so evils and blessings are void. They are completely ignorant of the fact that the shadow and echo of karma follows all beings without a hair's breadth of variation. Even over a hundred thousand myriad eons, the effects will never be erased.¹⁷²

In another prominent example from the twelve-chapter edition of the *Treasury*, Dogen thoroughly recast a view he had expressed in the chapter "Great Cultivation," written in 1244. In that chapter, in interpreting the famous koan about a monk who was transformed into a shape-shifting fox for transgressions and sought release, he had emphasized the ultimate indistinguishability of affirming and denying karma, such that the power of retribution becomes delusory.¹⁷³ Yet the chapter "Deep Faith in Causality," written near the end of Dogen's life, asserted that only the sincere acceptance of karmic consequences is an acceptable ethical view. Dogen here held that such consequences can be mitigated through repentance but that the counterproductive denial of causality (*hotsumu inga*) is mistaken and must be renounced. "The single greatest limitation of the monks of Song China today," he wrote, "is that even leading teachers do not recognize that negating causality is a false teaching."¹⁷⁴ This is no doubt why he increasingly turned to Indian Buddhist texts for inspiration during this final stage.

On the other hand, Dogen's career trajectory was never uniform or one-sided. Despite its emphasis on karmic causality, the late-late phase was also marked by several examples of supernatural or mystical (*fushigi*) and unexplainable (*funogo*) occurrences. These were recorded by Dogen or mentioned in one of the traditional biographies, thus revealing an interest in noncausal aspects of reality. This trend begins with a legend that was dramatized in the 2003 production of the kabuki play *Dogen's Moon* (*Dogen no tsuki*).

When the shogun, who was enraged by Dogen's refusal to lead a new temple in Kamakura, raised his sword to cut off the master's neck, the power of meditation repelled and broke the weapon. This show of spiritual strength so impressed the Hojo that he permitted Dogen to return safely to Eihei-ji.

The *Transmission of Light* also reports of this period: "At Eihei-ji, dragon spirits came, visibly, and requested the precepts or begged to be included in the daily dedications of merit offered to the assembly."¹⁷⁵ Further legends from this time include that multicolored clouds hovered over the monastery in 1248, and a year later, numerous light-emitting saints (Skr. arhat, Jp. rakan) were visualized. In 1251, mysterious bell sounds were heard echoing at Eihei-ji, despite that no one was ringing any of the temple's bells or chimes, and wondrous fragrances filled the air. Moreover, several passages in the twelve-chapter edition of the *Treasury*, including "The Merits of Home Departure" ("Shukke kudoku"), speak of the effect of miracles, such as the case of a prostitute suddenly becoming enlightened from accidentally brushing against the robe worn by a monk. Additionally, according to the *Record of Kenzei*, Dogen himself performed an exorcism for the penitent spirit of a baleful ghost by reciting the powerful phrase "realization here and now (*genjokoan*) is the great matter."¹⁷⁶

Thus, in his last years, we find evidence of Dogen exploring karmic causality as well as strong hints of his involvement with acausal or supernatural events. These examples notwithstanding, in many ways Dogen continued his previous literary pursuits. For instance, he went on writing poetry based on contemplative experiences reflecting a naturalistic standpoint that rises above the polarities of roots and fruits or causality and noncausality. A prominent example, as shown in the image on [this page](#), is a verse composed in 1249. It concerns a portrait of Dogen that can be read alongside the verse written for the portrait included as the frontispiece for this volume:

A clear, pure autumn breeze blows around this aging monk,
As I see the white moon floating above.
With nothing to depend on, nor any place to cling,
It moves freely, like steam rising from a bowl of rice,
Or fish swimming and splashing about.
In this world, puffy clouds glide above as waters are gushing
below.^{[177](#)}

Another verse, composed while Dogen practiced meditation at a retreat outside Eihei-ji, reads:

What a joy to dwell on this mountain hut, so solitary and
serene,
Deciphering, each day, the words of the *Lotus Sutra*.
Single-mindedly sitting under a tree, what becomes of the
meaning of love versus hate?
As I watch the moon while listening intently to the evening
rain.^{[178](#)}

This poem bears resemblance to Baizhang's "most extraordinary experience," discussed above.

Dogen fell ill sometime in 1252, with the causes unknown. According to some portrayals, which are likely melodramatic, he never fully recovered psychologically from the disappointment of dealing with the shogun in Kamakura. Whatever the cause, his delivery of sermons and performance of other clerical responsibilities began to trail off. He produced one last *Treasury* chapter—"Eight Teachings of a Great Person," which is based on Shakyamuni's final directives before his death—in the first month of 1253, after which he did not write any additional major compositions.

"Dogen's Final Instructions in the Master's Room" ("Eihei shitchu kiki-gaki"), a record of oral guidelines, was composed in the eighth month of 1253, just before he went to Kyoto for medical assistance.

In this important essay, he appointed his successor. For this role, Dogen chose Ejo over Gikai. The latter had served as chief cook and was enlightened through experiencing the casting off of body-mind but was not considered mature or kindly enough to become abbot of Eihei-ji.¹⁷⁹ After traveling for a few years in China in the early 1260s to learn more about continental practices, Gikai inherited the abbacy in 1267, albeit not without controversy and complaints. He would leave Dogen's monastery to wander and eventually establish Daijōji as a major Soto temple fifteen years later.

In a waka written on his way back to Kyoto (one of two composed on this occasion), Dogen employed diction and syntax that convey a dual sense of exhilaration and anxiety, as well as expectation and frailty during this journey:



The portrait of Dogen viewing the moon with poem inscribed at the top.

Kusa no ha ni	Like a blade of grass,
Kadodeseru mi no	My frail body
Kinobe yama	Treading the path to Kyoto
Kumo ni oka aru	Seeming to wander
Kokochi koso sure.	Amid the cloudy mist on Kinobe

Pass. [180](#)

In Dogen's time, the image of "a blade of grass" (*kusa no ha*) was multidimensional in connoting travel (*tabi*), a theme usually evoked in court poetry to suggest someone's feeling of dismay or relief in leaving Kyoto. Here it ironically expressed uneasiness about an imminent return to that city. On a symbolic level, this indicated the fragility and vulnerability that pervades yet undercuts the existence of each and every being. The symbol also recalls several passages in the *Treasury* in which Dogen equated "the radiance of a hundred blades of grass"^{[181](#)} with the true nature of reality. A blade of grass therefore expresses a convergence of departure and return, feeling and detachment, and particularity and frailty. Dogen employed this classic image to represent the universal nonsubstantiality of phenomena.

The syllable *ka*, appearing in the word *oka* (literally, "hill") in the fourth line, indicates a question. Here it also conveyed Dogen's sense of a fleeting moment of liberation from his health condition, as his spirit seems to float and feels lost amid the clouds, despite the prevailing deep uncertainty of his condition. He both transcends physical problems and realizes he can never be free from the travails of impermanence. The alliteration of *k*'s at the beginning of each line adds a solemn or reverent undertone, while the word *kokochi* (a synonym for *kokoro*, or "heart/mind") softens the sentiment and transmutes the fleeting sensation into an expression of personal realization. Although the body (*mi*) is bound by suffering, the mind appears to be released.

Dogen died while staying in the home of a layman in Kyoto. Shortly before his death, he wrote on a wall a famous passage from the Lotus Sutra indicating that anywhere and everywhere one is located, whether or not it is part of a temple district, is the realm of Buddha. Then, sitting in the full lotus position, he offered a Chinese-style death verse (*yuige*). Asserting his literary autonomy and creativity right to the end, Dogen reconfigured the rueful, repentant tone conveyed in a similar poem by Rujing, instead evoking the notion of unabashedly breaking down all obstacles:

For fifty-three years
Following the way of heaven.
Now leaping beyond,
Shattering every barrier,
Amazing! I cast off all attachments.^{[182](#)}

It is said that Dogen's remains were taken by his entourage back to Eihei-ji, where the urn containing his ashes is still displayed today. Monks who play the role of tour guides for the regular flow visitors coming to the temple, whether members of the sect or outsiders, point out this memorial and say with poignancy, "Teacher Dogen is living there."

Dogen's Institutional Legacy

In part 2 of this book, we will examine from various angles Dogen's legacy as a Zen literary figure and teacher. Before moving on, however, I will conclude this biography of Dogen by looking at the institutional connections that he helped forge between Japan and China. These linkages between monasteries in the respective countries stemmed not only from Dogen's own journey to China but also the visits to the mainland on the part of key disciples in his lineage. They were further developed by Chinese monks migrating to

Japan to spread Zen there. Such connections were kept alive for several decades following Dogen's death; they then, for the most part, died out for centuries until they were revived in recent decades.

There are various indications that associations were maintained with Tiantong temple after Dogen's return to Japan. The monk named Jakuen, with whom Dogen studied while in China, traveled to Japan to join Dogen's assembly in the late 1220s and stayed for the rest of his life. After leaving Eihei-ji when Dogen died, it is said that Jakuen meditated while sitting on a cliff for seventeen years, accompanied only by a vigilant dog and cow (now enshrined), when a relative of Hatano discovered and was determined to sponsor him. With that support, in 1280 Jakuen established Hokyō-ji temple near Eihei-ji, where he was joined for a time by Keizan and Giun, who became Hokyō-ji's second patriarch before being appointed the fifth patriarch of Eihei-ji. Jakuen's presence in Japan helped initiate a long series of émigré monks who gained prestige in the Kamakura period. This group was mainly affiliated with Rinzai Zen but also included two crucial Soto school followers, Dongming and Dongling, who both arrived in the first half of the fourteenth century and led to interactions between the two branches.

As noted above, in the early 1240s Dogen received the gift of a newly edited version of Rujing's recorded sayings, brought by several Chinese monks from Mount Tiantong. Around this time, Dogen apparently recruited continental carpenters and craftsmen to help build Eihei-ji temple. These Chinese workers were also able to help introduce the proper use of religious implements, such as bowls, robes, scrolls, and staffs. Likewise, it appears that Dogen succeeded in bringing more Chinese monks to practice at Eihei-ji and to help clarify modes of discipline and etiquette according to Tiantong standards. It is unknown whether these monks remained in Japan and became integrated into Dogen's lineage or in some cases returned to China, where they perhaps further established connections between Eihei-ji and Chinese Soto temples.

After Dogen's death, Eihei-ji remained the head monastery for training practitioners who adhered to the disciplinary regimen of the Soto sect—as is still the case today. Even though this temple's legacy has been perpetuated, Soto Zen in late medieval Japan was mostly spread by subsequent generations of followers who established new temples throughout the northwestern Hokuriku territory. As noted above, Jakuen founded Hōkyō-ji temple in 1280. In 1282, Gikai opened Daijō-ji temple in the town of Kanazawa. While giving rise to the lineage of Keizan, Gikai's most prominent student, Daijō-ji has continued to function as a center for studies of Dogen's writings. Additional Soto cloisters—especially based on evangelical initiatives undertaken by Keizan and his main follower, Gasan—were built farther north on various peaks associated with the consecrated network of Mount Haku-san. Both Keizan and Gasan served as abbots at Yokoji and Sojiji temples, located in the Noto peninsula in the proximity of the hallowed peak of Mount Sekidozan, considered a “daughter” of the maternal Mount Haku-san.

In the 1260s, a decade after Dogen's death, his disciple Giin, a former Daruma school member, was commissioned to take a copy of Dogen's recorded sayings from Eihei-ji to Tiantong to gain approval by leading monks. According to a popular account, Giin was accompanied during his return to Japan by the esoteric goddess Dakini shinten, who helped him and his associates open several Soto temples in southern and central Japan. These sites gained popularity by integrating esotericism with zazen practice in a way that Dogen himself well might have rejected. Also, in the early 1300s, some Soto monks, including those interested in continental poetic techniques, traveled to China to receive teachings from then-current abbots at Tiantong and nearby temples, and they returned to become important teachers in Japan. This was a custom far more common among members of the Rinzai school's prominent Five Mountains temples in Kyoto.

The interactions between Japanese and Chinese Zen practitioners and institutions related to Dogen lasted for about three-quarters of a century after his death. After that, there ensued more than six centuries of diminished contact between Japanese Soto Zen institutions and adherents and their Chinese counterparts. Links were reestablished beginning in the 1980s, following the end of the Cultural Revolution. This transition ushered in a renewal of Japanese interest in traditional Buddhism in China, including exchanges with Japanese monks and lay practitioners seeking to learn the continental roots of Zen. Before the Chinese economic boom, these visitors were also interested in helping to support the rebuilding efforts of Chinese Buddhist communities, which had suffered decades of persecution. For over twenty years, it was mainly Japanese supporters who sponsored the revival of Tiantong and other great Soto and Rinzai Zen temples in the region. An owner of a restaurant located near the gates of Tiantong temple told me in 2004 that his year-round income was mainly derived from the holidays and other special occasions when there was an influx of Japanese tourists.

Tiantong has now been refurbished in a remarkable way. The integrity of the traditional practice areas has been kept intact, while the tourist areas near the main entrance to the sacred sites have been expanded. The temple attracts visitors not only from China but other Buddhist countries as well. According to reports from Eihei-ji, a more recent trend has been the appearance of Chinese tourists there and at other Zen sites in Japan. The narrative and teachings of Dogen will likely continue to form the foundation for many of these cross-cultural developments. It is said that, in the city of Ningbo near Tiantong, several Chinese researchers have gained expertise in Dogen's career after leaving China. Likewise, Japanese scholars frequently make trips to find new materials on continental Zen and give lectures at conferences sponsored at Tiantong and related temples.

Literature and Legacy

Dogen has a clear and direct message that was consistent throughout his career.

Dogen's writing is difficult to decipher and underwent dramatic shifts in style and content.

DOGEN HAS LONG BEEN highly regarded by Soto Zen practitioners for an outlook reflecting solicitous quietude and supreme silence as enacted through the sustained practice of just-sitting meditation. This core method and the mindset it fosters serves as the basis for undertaking diverse monastic activities, such as cleaning, cooking, and other daily chores, as well as performing the Buddhist rites of adhering to precepts, donning robes, or reciting sutras. For cultivating these kinds of meditative and ritualistic behaviors, the study of the founder's texts may seem an unnecessary distraction.

Since the early twentieth century, however, Dogen has become renowned among worldwide enthusiasts of mysticism and comparative philosophy of religion mainly for his remarkable literary accomplishments. These works display an inimitable and sometimes impenetrable eloquence. They creatively convey the multiple meanings of the dharma based on profound musings regarding the topics of epistemology, hermeneutics, ethics, and metaphysics as they pertain to the rigors and routines of Zen practice. For many readers, the ideas expressed by Dogen can be further applied to a range of contemporary issues concerning self-awareness, rhetorical innovation, environmental protection, and social inequalities derived from discrimination or gender disparities.

Despite the fact that their value is well recognized today, over the centuries Dogen's works were sometimes neglected outside of a small circle of the most advanced and dedicated sectarian supporters—those capable of comprehending his dense, logic-defying prose and poetic constructions. Even for them, it took dedication to grasp Dogen's obscure allusions and imaginative discursive flourishes, which often combine Japanese and Chinese syntax in ways that flout grammatical rules, upend intellectual conventions, and confound or reorient long-standing sacred customs. Less sophisticated readers were cautioned not to attempt to approach the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* until they were deemed ready by their teachers, who would first steer them toward others of Dogen's works that were considered more appropriate for entry-level trainees. This pattern recalls the strictures of the Kabbalistic tradition that advises students not to begin high-level studies until at least the age of forty.

Dogen's writings, most of which have now been translated at least once, with several of the more popular texts featured in numerous renderings in English and several other languages, are many and varied. They consistently demonstrate his ingenious ability as a wordsmith, who in many ways created a hybrid language. Even in Japanese, Dogen can best be studied today through paraphrased commentaries referred to as modern translations (*gendaiyaku*), much like the way Chaucer's Middle English is made accessible in contemporary editions. The works of Dogen show how he sought to turn nearly every situation and perspective, whether special and ritualized or mundane and fleeting, into a grand opportunity for disclosing Zen insight. In that manner, he explored diverse means of conveying the absolute truth of the here-and-now realization of the universality and uniformity of buddha-nature. This unity is experienced in terms of the multiplicity of individual manifestations prompting distinct and often conflicting but ultimately compatible and resolvable human perceptions.

Dogen's Writings

TITLE	SINO-JAPANESE	TRANSLATION
"Bendowa" ^e	辨道話	"Discerning the Way"
<i>Dogen Zenji zenshu</i> ^a	道元禪師全集	<i>Dogen's Complete Works</i>
<i>Fukanzazengi</i>	普勸坐禪儀	<i>Universal Recommendation for Zazen</i>
<i>Gakudoyojinshu</i>	普勸坐禪儀	<i>Essentials of Learning the Way</i>
<i>Eihei koroku</i>	學道用心集	<i>Extensive Record</i>
<i>Eihei juko</i> ^b	永平頌古	<i>Verse Comments on Ninety Koan Cases</i>
<i>Kanshi-shu</i> ^a	漢詩集	<i>Chinese Poetry Collection</i>
<i>Eihei shingi</i>	永平清規	<i>Monastic Rules</i>
<i>Eihei shitchu kikigaki</i>	永平室内聞書	<i>Final Instructions in the Master's Room</i>
<i>Hokyoki</i>	寶慶記	<i>Record of Private Conversations</i>
<i>Ichiya Hekigan</i>	一夜碧巖	<i>Dogen's One-Night Copy Blue Cliff Record</i>
<i>Junikanbon Shobogenzo</i> ^c	正法眼藏	<i>Twelve-Chapter Treasury</i>
<i>Junishu no waka</i> ^d	十二首和歌	<i>Twelve Waka (for the Shogun's Wife)</i>
<i>Myozen shari sodenki</i>	明全斜里相伝記	<i>The Relics of Myozen</i>
<i>Rakan koshiki</i>	羅漢講式	<i>Memorial for Arhats</i>
<i>Risshun daikichimon</i>	立春大吉門	<i>Auspicious Signs of Spring</i>
<i>Sanshodoei</i>	傘松道詠	<i>Japanese Poetry Collection</i>
<i>Shobogenzo</i>	正法眼藏	<i>Treasury of the True Dharma Eye</i>
<i>Shobogenzo sanbyakusoku</i>	正法眼藏三百則	<i>Three Hundred Koan Case Collection</i>
<i>Shobogenzo zuimonki</i>	正法眼藏隨聞	<i>Treasury of Miscellaneous Talks</i>

	記	
<i>Tenzokyokun</i> ^c	典座教訓	<i>Instructions for the Cook</i>

This list, presented in alphabetical order with the inclusion of Sino-Japanese characters, supplements the lists of texts in chapters 5 and 6 that are arranged chronologically. Also, ^a indicates that this is a modern compilation of Dogen's entire oeuvre edited by scholars, ^b indicates the text is included in *Eihei koroku*, ^c is included in *Eihei shingi*, ^d is included in *Sanshodoei*, and ^e is usually included in the *Shobogenzo*.

In part 2 of this book, we will look from various angles at Dogen's writing and at his legacy. Chapter 5 explores sixteen short, miscellaneous writings that were composed at critical turning points in Dogen's life. Chapter 6 moves on to consider the four major collections of his writings, including their editorial histories and variant forms. Lastly, chapter 7 undertakes a multifaceted analysis of Dogen's legacy, including his pertinence to contemporary lay practice and to issues of social justice and environmental recovery.

From Dogen's works listed above in alphabetical order, about two-thirds of these texts are discussed in chapter 5 under the rubric of miscellaneous writings. The remainder, constituting Dogen's four major collections, are examined in chapter 6.

CHAPTER 5

Nothing Concealed in the Entire Universe

Dogen's Miscellaneous Writings

THIS CHAPTER briefly examines sixteen miscellaneous, mostly shorter compositions that are independent or stand-alone works in terms of how, when, why, and for whom they were written. Although there are more than sixteen works that fit this description, I have selected this group because they were composed at key junctures in the development of Dogen's teaching mission. It is important to clarify the sequence and progression of these writings before assessing Dogen's major collections, which we will do in the next chapter. (The major collections consist of the *Treasury*, the *Extensive Record*, the *Monastic Rules*, and the *Japanese Poetry Collection*—works that encompass assorted essays, homilies, instructions, letters, manuals, and poems written in both Japanese and Chinese styles.)

Almost all of Dogen's writings are extant in varying editions. This is because they were originally preserved through manuscripts held at medieval temples, leading to rampant copyist discrepancies and inconsistencies. During the early modern or Edo period, his works were heavily revised and annotated by numerous dedicated monk-scholars and then printed in woodblock print editions. Beginning in the twentieth century, most of Dogen's writings have been

extensively reexamined and amended once again for publication in typeset editions. Many of the works have received increasing attention in Japanese scholarship based on groundbreaking discoveries of lost manuscripts, mostly found in temple archives, causing new theories about their status.

Since there is so much interest in interpreting the meaning of Dogen's works, yet a lingering deep uncertainty about their authentic content, Japanese scholars continually produce annotations, commentaries, concordances, dictionaries, and other reference or interpretative materials. These explications compare manuscripts, explain their origins and implications, and rethink and often revise what should be considered a definitive edition in light of the full range of research available. In addition to voluminous examples of analytical scholarship (*hyosho*) seeking to analyze Dogen in an historiographically impartial way, there are numerous exegetical and instructive commentaries (*teisho*) that try to convey the essential importance and timeless relevance of Dogen's view of Zen for contemporary readers. Examples of these efforts include modern translations and introductory volumes (*nyumon*), as well as illustrated comics (manga) designed for the edification and, to some extent, entertainment of relatively uninformed readers. All of these materials can be useful tools in their respective ways for advancing an understanding of Dogen's complex literary production.

The entirety of the corpus has been included in *Dogen's Complete Works* (*Dogen Zenji zenshu*), although because of the intensity of research efforts, several different editions bear the same title. The first such comprehensive collection was officially published in 1908 by the Soto sect. It was soon surpassed by several revised versions that were produced by Okubo Doshu, the preeminent modern researcher in the field of Dogen studies. Beginning in the early 1930s, Okubo published four different versions of the complete collection, including a 1939 edition that contains all of Dogen's writing in a single volume printed with a small font size. Okubo kept

updating his version of each of the texts by continuing to consult medieval manuscripts discovered in the archives at Eihei-ji and several other prominent Soto monasteries.

The most recent and important edition of *Dogen's Complete Works* produced by Okubo, which is still frequently cited by scholars today, was published in 1969 and 1970 as two encyclopedia-sized volumes, with the *Treasury* included in the first volume and all the additional major and minor compositions contained in volume 2. A third volume was included that contains an index plus facsimile versions of several texts, including some rare samples of Dogen's own handwritten manuscripts. Okubo's latest *Complete Works*, although it is still considered reliable and is frequently cited, has been supplemented and, for the most part, eclipsed in contemporary Japanese studies by a seven-volume edition published from 1988 to 1993. This was produced by multiple editors from the Department of Buddhist and Zen Studies at Komazawa University, the main institution of higher education of the Soto sect, and contains extensive annotations, in addition to Japanese renderings for Dogen's Chinese-style (kanbun) writings, including the *Extensive Record* and *Monastic Rules*.

—

Prior to examining specific examples of Dogen's literary prowess and their significance, it is important to examine his complex views regarding the efficacy of language for disclosing the dharma. What is the function of oral and written discourse? And how is his outlook, conveyed in various compositions, relevant to differing didactic circumstances? How does it relate to comparable Buddhist approaches? Lastly, where does Dogen stand in relation to the famous Zen motto, dominant in his era, that the school represents "a special transmission outside doctrine" (kyōge betsubuden), maintained "without reliance on words and letters" (*furyū monji*)?

Hee-Jin Kim argues that “the single most original and seminal aspect of Dogen’s Zen is his treatment of the role of language in Zen soteriology.”¹⁸³ Why, then, does the Soto founder occasionally seem to devalue or criticize a preoccupation with rhetoric? For example, traditionalists, wary of overemphasizing Dogen’s rhetorical achievements, often point out that in the *Miscellaneous Talks* he insists, “Zen monks are fond of reading literature these days, finding it an aid to writing verses and treatises. This is a mistake. Reading classics is a waste of time and should be abandoned.” This passage, however, is accompanied by a contrary notion that encourages impromptu forms of expression: “Even if you cannot compose formal verse, just say what is in your heart.”¹⁸⁴

The key to answering questions about Dogen’s view of language is to recognize that his approach is never one-sidedly bound to either affirmation or rejection of the popular catchphrases that had become a central element of Zen sloganeering about the “special transmission” since the eleventh century. Their emergence was always somewhat disingenuous because it occurred at the same time that dozens of voluminous collections of sayings and comments by numerous masters were being published. Zen sects sought to propagate their teachings among elite scholar-officials in China, who were intrigued by meditative discipline but found eloquent literature a necessary avenue for accessing Zen thought. Dogen’s position is deliberately ambivalent and flexible in navigating all forms of verbal and nonverbal communication. He sought to explore their capacities, which he found to be unlimited, while also confronting their limitations, which he concluded were severe. His view can therefore be referred to as *just speaking*, or expressing the Way through exceptional uses of discourse. This should be understood in much the same fashion that the term *just sitting* suggests neither the passivity of mind nor an activity strictly of the body. Dogen promotes an astute level of awareness, continually cultivated by means of

contemplative engagement with creative discussions of the true meaning of dharma.

To accomplish the state of just speaking, Dogen frequently twists the typical meaning of words and phrases. He thus innovates with language while insisting, in a way that may seem contrary to the dictum of “a special transmission,” that resourceful expressions can and must be used. In this way Dogen is consistent with previous Chinese Zen teachers, who diligently studied and extensively commented on sutras while regarding the scriptures not as indisputable but as subject to complicated and contradictory interpretations. Dogen’s thought-provoking remarks commonly challenge readers unfamiliar with the intellectual historical background of his intricate discourse. The second half of the catchphrase, “outside doctrine,” does not necessarily indicate being opposed to articulating principles, though these should not be considered fixed.

The aim of Dogen’s writing is to open the mind to reacting, without hesitation or impediment, to living experiences that are unbound but nevertheless can be expressed in words and letters. Realizing that the complexity of his rhetoric was likely to be at least partially misconstrued, while preaching to the shogun in Kamakura, Dogen offered a poetic comment featuring natural imagery on the motto about special transmission:

Araiso no	The Dharma, like an oyster,
Nami mo eyosenu	Washed atop a high cliff.
Takayowa ni	Even waves crashing against
Kaki mo tsukubeki	The reef-like coast, like words,
Nori naraba koso	May reach but cannot wash it
	away. ¹⁸⁵

In this waka, the symbolism of the oyster and waves presents an analogy for the relationship between the dharma, or truth, and its

relative manifestations, exemplified by the vicissitude of waves. The oyster has been cast out of its background by the movement of a particular surge of water but must inevitably return to its source for sustenance. Thus, the dharma is not seen as a remote entity since it finds its place beyond the water precisely because of the perpetual motion of the breakers. Yet doctrines, sutras, or proverbs expressed by ancestors come to reside on a lofty peak, like the mollusk, and may seem separated from the motions of everyday life. This causes a chasm between the two realms, which struggle to join together again. Therefore, the so-called special transmission, for Dogen, reconnects the oyster and water by situating authentic spirituality within concrete existence and evoking this as the experiential basis for Zen discourse.

As reported in the *Instructions for the Cook*, an old monk who was dedicated to the task of drying mushrooms informed the still naive Dogen that “nothing is concealed in the entire universe.” This saying originated in a koan (cited by Dogen as case 58 in his *Three Hundred Koan Case Collection*¹⁸⁶) that appeared in various Chinese works, including the ninety-ninth case of the *Blue Cliff Record*. That text’s commentary by the master Yuanwu, who suggests that full disclosure is possible through using words, says, “When a dragon howls the mist arises, and when a tiger roars the wind blows. In the fundamental design of manifesting the world gold and jade play together, and in the strategic actions of savvy adepts two arrow points meet in midair. The entire universe is not concealed, such that far and near are equally revealed and past and present are vividly integrated.”¹⁸⁷

Nevertheless, a profound sense of uncertainty about the efficacy of language remains, as disclosed in another waka by Dogen. He conveys the feeling of being overwhelmingly compelled to press ahead with the task of expressing the dharma. This was based on a combined sense of accountability and exhilaration, while knowing that his writings will likely fall on deaf ears:

Haru kaze ni	Will their gaze fall upon
Waga koto no ha no	The petals of words I utter,
Chirikeru wo	Shaken loose and blown free by
	the spring breeze,
Hana no uta to ya	As if only the notes
Hito no nagamen	Of a flower's song? 188

A similarly ambivalent thought about discourse is evoked in a Chinese-style verse titled “Snowy Evening in Spring.” It was written near the end of Dogen’s life when, like many previous Zen masters, he occasionally departed from the main temple compound to practice meditation in a secluded forest retreat. There, he could commune with the pristine natural environment yet remain cognizant of the challenges involved in turning raw perceptions of nature into a refined aesthetic sensibility:

Peach and plum blossoms in the snow and frost do not feel
emotion.
Green pines and emerald bamboos are shrouded in cloudy mist.
I am not yet dried up and over the hill,
It’s been several decades since I renounced seeking fame and
fortune.[189](#)

What Are the Miscellaneous Writings?

Over the course of a career spanning twenty-five years following his return from China, Dogen wrote a series of short works in different styles and for disparate audiences. Whereas the four main collections were assembled by Dogen, Ejo, and/or other immediate or subsequent disciples into large compilations representing long spans of his career, the miscellaneous writings represent single texts that reflect his thoughts at a particular time of teaching.

The chronological sequence of Dogen's sixteen miscellaneous writings is divided, in the table on page 000, into three main categories, which overlap some of the career phases examined in the first four chapters. These include (a) the pre-Koshoji years in China and Japan, when Dogen started transmitting continental views of meditation and monasticism prior to establishing his initial temple; (b) the early Koshoji years, when Dogen introduced koan cases in order to comment on various rites or doctrines before developing an emphasis on composing *Treasury* chapters; and (c) the phase following his return to Eihei-ji from the trip to Kamakura, or the late-late period in which the dual themes of causality and noncausality were given priority. It is important to note that this categorization leaves out the crossover years from 1238 to 1246, during which Dogen primarily focused on composing the essays, poetry, and sermons contained in the major collections. Also, while the miscellaneous writings mainly include stand-alone works that are indicative of specific phases in the formation of Dogen's teaching mission, there are several noteworthy exceptions as a few of these texts are also contained in one of the major collections. That group includes *Instructions for the Cook*, which is the introductory section of the *Monastic Rules*, and three works featured in the *Extensive Record*. Those are the *Chinese Poetry Collection*, the third and final version of the *Universal Recommendation for Zazen*, and the *Verse Comments on Ninety Koan Cases*. Moreover, "Discerning the Way" appears in some editions as the opening chapter of the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*, whereas the *Twelve-Chapter Treasury* is included in many versions as a supplemental section of Dogen's masterwork.

Nevertheless, each of the miscellaneous writings can and often is considered independent, for reasons to be explained below. Another exception to the categorization scheme is that the *Private Conversations* and the *Miscellaneous Talks* are both compilations of either dialogues or sermons. They are included in this list, however,

because they were completed in a relatively compressed time frame covering just a few years at one temple—Tiantong and Koshoji, respectively—rather than over the course of a decade or more at two temples, and therefore are representative of a specific career stage.

Sixteen Miscellaneous Writings

THE PRE-KOSHOJI YEARS (1223–1233)
<i>Record of Private Conversations (Hokyoki)</i> , 1225–1227
<i>Chinese Poetry Collection (Kanshi-shu)</i> , 1225–1227 [*]
<i>Dogen's One-Night Copy of the Blue Cliff Record (Ichiya Hekigan)</i> , 1227
<i>The Relics of Myozen (Myozen shari sodenki)</i> , 1227
<i>Universal Recommendation for Zazen (Fukanzazengi)</i> , 1227 (rev. 1233 and 1243 [*])
"Discerning the Way" ("Bendowa"), 1231 [*]
THE EARLY KOSHOJI YEARS (1233–1238)
<i>Essentials of Learning the Way (Gakudoyojinshu)</i> , 1234
<i>Three Hundred Koan Case Collection (Shobogenzo sanbyakusoku)</i> , 1235
<i>Verse Comments on Ninety Koan Cases (Eihei juko)</i> , 1236 [*]
<i>Instructions for the Cook (Tenzokyokun)</i> , 1237 ^{***}
<i>Treasury of Miscellaneous Talks (Shobogenzo zuimonki)</i> , 1236–1238
THE LATE EIHEIJI YEARS (1247–1253)
<i>Twelve-Chapter Treasury (Junikanbon Shobogenzo)</i> , mostly post-1248 ^{**}
<i>Auspicious Signs of Spring (Risshun daikichimon)</i> , 1247
<i>Twelve Waka (for the Shogun's Wife) (Junishu no waka)</i> , 1248 ^{****}
<i>Memorial for Arhats (Rakan koshiki)</i> , 1249
<i>Final Instructions in the Master's Room (Eihei shitchu kikigaki)</i> , 1253

This chronology details Dogen's independent works, although several are included in one of the major collections discussed in chapter 6, as follows: ^{*} the *Extensive Record*, ^{**} *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*, ^{***} *Monastic Rules*, and ^{****} *Japanese Poetry Collection*.

In analyzing Dogen's various writings, we must furthermore take into account that modern discoveries of lost editions that reveal significantly altered or different versions of particular texts have in

several key instances upended previous assumptions about the work in question and its relationship to other writings. This is what compelled Okubo Doshu to keep revising the *Complete Works* and has also caused other scholars to spin novel theories about the origins of texts and their implications for interpreting the question of consistency versus inconsistency concerning Dogen's teachings. For example, the *Three Hundred Koan Case Collection* was long rumored but not considered legitimate, in part because Dogen's approach to Zen was not thought to be grounded on the study of koans. At least, that was the orthodox Soto sect view until early twentieth-century discoveries forced scholars to appreciate the important role that commenting on hundreds of koans played in Dogen's overall view of Zen discourse.

While I examine Dogen's writings primarily in terms of the sequence of his teaching mission, it must be recognized that some aspects of the dating of these works are uncertain and continually debated by current researchers.^{[190](#)} To gain a sense of whether Dogen's views about pedagogy evolved or remained constant throughout his career, in addition to tracing thematic intersections between writings, I also consider the textual background of each work (i.e., when and where it was written), along with its style and content (i.e., what message it conveys and to which audience sector it was addressed).

Evaluating Dogen's literary production further involves taking into account methodological debates between interpreters who represent the Soto sect (*shukyosha*) and expect subjective spiritual responses on the part of readers and nonsectarian commentators or outsiders (*mongejin*), who produce an objective analysis that tends to be skeptical of insider bias but nevertheless often reveals their own contentious assumptions. These distinctions, however, are not necessarily black-and-white, because it seems that almost all leading investigators of Dogen's thought highlight the importance of identifying with and trying to occupy the conceptual territory, so to

speak, of the religious experience the master expresses.¹⁹¹ For example, Kishizawa Ian, a prominent Soto monk who published a monumental twenty-four-volume commentary of the *Treasury* in the 1920s, maintains that it is necessary for any exegete, regardless of background or approach, to be able to read Dogen “with both eyes.”¹⁹² This attitude seems to concur with the views of non-Soto scholars, such as Watsuji Tetsuro and, in the postwar era, Umehara Takeshi, who tend to disregard or reject sectarian implications.¹⁹³

The Pre-Koshoji Years (1223–1233)

During the initial phase of writing, Dogen sought to transport basic Zen ideas about meditative and behavioral training techniques from China while addressing the spiritual concerns of a broader Japanese Buddhist audience. His readers were concerned with practical questions of how, during such a turbulent period of history, an individual practitioner could best cultivate their understanding of the dharma in order to attain awakening. Dogen identified zazen training as the centerpiece of the Buddhist tradition transmitted from India to China and now to the remote islands of Japan for the first time. He claimed it would become accessible to everyone, regardless of class or intellectual ability, interested in its capacity for transformation.

Record of Private Conversations (Hokyoki), 1225–1227

After a brief autobiographical introduction, the *Private Conversations* encapsulates a series of fifty conversations held on demand in Rujing’s cloistered chambers. It is considered the earliest and one of the most important writings produced by Dogen. The title indicates that it is the record (*ki*) of what took place during the Hokyō (Ch. Baojing) era of the Southern Song dynasty, which began in 1225. Based on notes or journal entries made during his last two years in

China, the text reveals much about Zen practice on the mainland and has crucial implications for understanding the way Dogen's teaching career unfolded in Japan. Since it was not titled or circulated during Dogen's lifetime and was later lost for lengthy stretches, however, there are fundamental questions about this work's origins and dating. For this reason, some of the main assumptions about its status have been called into question by modern scholarship.

In the first of two colophons, Ejo reports that he discovered the manuscript in 1255 and, while shedding hundreds of thousands of tears of joy, wondered if there might be other lost treasures left behind by Dogen. That version of the text was maintained at Eihei-ji. A copy with some variations was made in the fourteenth century by the Soto monk-poet Daichi, who stored this document at his temple in Kyushu. As suggested by the text's second colophon, Ejo's version was apparently neglected for several decades until another edition was discovered in 1299 by Giun, when he took over leadership of Hokyō-ji temple. Hokyō-ji was founded in 1280 by Jakuen, Dogen's main Chinese disciple, so it must have been him who brought the manuscript there from Eihei-ji. It was not until the eighteenth century that the various versions were compared and amended. This was done by the prominent Soto scholastic Menzan Zuiho. In the twentieth century Okubo Doshu served as the major modern commentator revising the work for his edited collections.

In the 1970s another prominent researcher, Mizuno Yaoko, made the argument that, even if records of his master's instructions may have been kept and brought back from the mainland by Dogen, the text of the *Private Conversations* was compiled very late in Dogen's life as a summation of what he then considered to be Rujing's most helpful teachings. This theory, therefore, posits the *Private Conversations* as one of the latest works composed by Dogen instead of being the earliest writing. Mizuno's view has been supported by the Critical Buddhism movement, which has argued

that the *Private Conversations* was a key part of a revival in Dogen's teachings that took place near the end of his career, after he returned to Eihei-ji from Kamakura, when he felt compelled to reassess his Chinese mentor's instructions.

In any event, the conversations recorded primarily concern the function of zazen in relation to various doctrines and practices, and they also address other teachers and aspects of the Chinese monastic institution.¹⁹⁴ The dialogues can be divided into five categories based on those dealing with (a) zazen methods, in sixteen entries; (b) doctrine and philosophy, in sixteen entries; (c) practice, precepts, and rituals, in thirteen entries; (d) Zen values and teachers, in three entries; and (e) the integration of doctrines and practices, in two entries. The portrayal of Ru-jing reveals a teacher who is conservative in that he advocates for the consistency and continuity of Zen with previous forms of Buddhism, both Indian and East Asian as well as Hinayana and Mahayana. But Ru-jing is also innovative in his determination to highlight that just sitting, as taught by the Soto lineage according to his own presentation of this history, is essential to attaining enlightenment. This sets him apart from other Buddhist schools and the majority of Zen masters of the time who were affiliated with the Rinzai school and advocated other forms of practice, particularly koan studies.

Some of the passages are very short and specific, such as a couple of entries dealing with how one is to put on socks before, or to stand up after, practicing zazen. Others are extended discourses—especially entry 32, which analyzes several types of monasteries in China by comparing those based on Zen meditation with Tiantai doctrine or Vinaya discipline. This section offers rare insight into how Chinese Buddhist institutions functioned in the early thirteenth century, as narrated by a savvy, foreign practitioner-observer. Although detailed record keeping was typical of accounts produced in China, the kind of personalized narrative Dogen offers is unique.

Other main topics that later influenced the practices of Dogen Zen in Japan include affirming the role of the sutras, in entries 2, 6, and 21; denying original enlightenment, in entry 4; emphasizing spiritual communion (*kanno doko*) between master and disciple, who must engage in face-to-face (*menju*) meetings, in entries 22, 43, and 44; highlighting the casting off of body-mind in relation to just sitting, in entries 16, 17, and 33; the idea that Zen is not a separate school, in entry 14; the practice of walking meditation (*kinhin*), in entries 12, 28, and 46; and the importance of wearing simple robes, in entries 30, 34, and 35. Also significant is the mention of Rujing's verse on the wind bell, in entries 38 and 39; his injunction regarding the need for Dogen to reside in lofty mountains, in entry 10; and his focus on the invariability of karmic causality, in entries 7, 8, and 20. Many of these passages helped give rise to the theory, promoted by Mizuno and endorsed by Critical Buddhism, suggesting that the *Private Conversations* might be a late-late text.

Chinese Poetry Collection (Kanshi-shu), 1225–1227

This group of fifty poems written in Chinese style (*kanshi*) is included as part of the tenth and final volume of the *Extensive Record*, which contains a total of 150 verses and is not usually published as a stand-alone text. The reason for including it in this list of miscellaneous works is because this subcollection, unlike the *Record of Private Conversations*, represents the only body of writing that we can say with certainty was produced by Dogen during his last years of training in China after he experienced the casting off of body-mind. On the other hand, a passage in the *Private Conversations* reinforces the importance of Dogen's verse compositions. According to a dialogue, when Dogen remarks how much he appreciates the teacher's wind bell verse, Rujing responds by strongly encouraging him to express his own thoughts through Chinese-style poetry. This

was quite a task, given the difficulties for any foreigner seeking to master the intricacies of rhyme schemes, tonal patterns, and other rhetorical devices required for this genre. In passages from the *Chinese Poetry Collection*, Dogen indicates that Rujing set up poetry contests for his monks during the three nights surrounding an auspicious full moon, a custom that Dogen emulated at Eihei-ji.

Perhaps the most important takeaway from reading the *Chinese Poetry Collection* is the extent to which Dogen spent time at Mount Tiantong preaching, through the use of poetic works, to an assortment of secular scholar-officials, including a commissioner of law and a military commander in addition to various ministers and managers. He also engaged with examination graduates and other laypersons, including a concerned mother in addition to a father grieving a deceased child. In most of these poetic exchanges, Dogen “continues the rhyme” of the other party, whose verse is not recorded. He also wrote poetry for Ryuzen, a Japanese monk already training in China, and Kakunen, one of three monks who accompanied Dogen to the mainland, in addition to an anonymous Chinese Zen trainee, a head monk, a nun, and a practitioner at a local hermitage. As noted above, there are also two verses celebrating the sacred island of Mount Potolaka, located near the port at Ningbo and considered the earthly abode of Kannon, with one of these composed before Dogen entered China and the other written at the time of his departure.

Dogen’s One-Night Copy of the Blue Cliff Record (Ichiya Hekigan), 1227

The *One-Night Copy of the Blue Cliff Record* is so named because of the legend that Dogen handwrote a version of the famous koan text in a single evening before he departed China. It is claimed that he did so with the help of the Mount Hakusan deity, who magically appeared when he became fatigued. This is easily the most

contested of the miscellaneous works, especially because the *Blue Cliff Record* was apparently not in circulation when Dogen was in China, which makes one wonder how he could have seen it, although some temples may have had hidden copies. Whether or not Dogen's version is apocryphal, the notion that he brought it to Japan by himself has powerful symbolism. It highlights the way he single-handedly introduced the role of koan commentary into Zen discourse in his native land, showing that he was "empty-handed" but not at all "empty-headed" during his return.

The Relics of Myozen (Myozen shari sodenki), 1227

This short essay is technically Dogen's very first work written after returning to Japan. It commemorates Myozen's death, which took place in the fifth month of 1225. Myozen died about ten days after becoming ill, apparently from the stress of two years of practice in China while trying to overcome a variety of cultural barriers. In a display of filial piety, on the fifth day of the tenth month of 1227, Dogen returned his late mentor's ashes, containing 360 crystalline relics, to Kenninji temple. A nun residing there, who had previously studied under Myozen and was thus a dharma sister of Dogen's, was respectfully bestowed a portion of her teacher's remains.

Universal Recommendation for Zazen (Fukanzazengi), 1227 (revised in 1233 and 1243)

This monumental manifesto on the merits of just sitting consists of less than one thousand Chinese characters and is usually translated in just three to four pages of English prose. It is considered the earliest prominent writing and perhaps the single most important work in Dogen's corpus. This is because it expresses how he inherited from Rujing a view of meditation that was considered free

of the taint of original-enlightenment thought or of practice that divided sudden from gradual realization. In this way, Dogen declared the independence of Soto Zen from the established schools of Japanese Buddhism, even at the risk of antagonizing powerful religious rivals in the capital. He also began a concerted attempt to reform, retrospectively, an understanding of the contemporary Chinese Zen school in order to restore what he took to be the original character of the tradition, which was for the most part kept alive only in Rujing's approach.

The *Universal Recommendation* consists of three parts. The opening section indirectly relates Dogen's experience of the great doubt concerning original enlightenment to the grander history of Buddhist meditation. This history extends from Shakyamuni to Bodhidharma, the legendary first patriarch who brought Zen from India to China in the sixth century and was known for staring at the wall of a cave for nine years until his limbs withered away. The second portion details methods for performing zazen by rewording the standard three-part progression. Dogen begins with directions for bodily comportment and then discusses breath regulation before touching briefly on the positive effects of physical regimen for enhancing mental awareness. The concluding section speaks succinctly but rapturously of the benefits of seated meditation, which is said to foster bodily relaxation and an invigorated spirit based on calmness, peace, and joy.

In an accompanying essay, "On the Origin of the *Universal Recommendation for Zazen*" (*Fukanzazengi senjutsu yurai*), Dogen indicates that he was greatly influenced by the short Chinese text the "Principles of Zazen" (Ch. "Zuochan yi," Jp. "Zazengi"). That text was written in 1103 by the monk Zongze as part of the large compendium *Rules for Zen Monasteries* (Ch. *Chanyuan qinggui*, Jp. *Zen'en shingi*). Although the source text was recommended to him by Rujing, as noted in entry 45 of the *Private Conversations*, Dogen severely criticizes Zongze's view of meditation and proclaims that

this made it necessary for him to compose his own manual. Implicit in the passage is a warning that a full understanding of zazen practice is dependent on face-to-face consultation with an authentic Zen teacher, since meditation cannot be studied properly by reading books that only provide secondhand knowledge.

The *Universal Recommendation* was revised during the summer retreat of 1233 and again in 1243 for inclusion in the *Extensive Record*. Moreover, some of the contents are also included in the *Treasury* chapter “Principles of Zazen” (“Zazengi”) and closely resemble an essay included in the *Monastic Rules, Method of Discerning the Way* (*Bendoho*). The 1233 revision, known as the Tenpuku version for the Japanese era in which it was written, is the edition that is best known today. It was elaborately produced in a single scroll with seven sheets and was long held at Eihei-ji. It did not come to the attention of the scholarly community until 1922, when it was rediscovered and put on public display at Tokyo Imperial University. Kept in a remarkable state of preservation, this version is of particular interest for its elegant calligraphy, which is now a National Treasure. Its mounting, which appears to date from the late Edo period, bears a colophon identifying the manuscript as an authentic example of Dogen’s own handwriting (*shinpitsu*).

Given the quality of its calligraphy, done on lightly decorated paper thought to have been manufactured in China, it is possible that the Tenpuku version was presented to an aristocratic patron as part of a fundraising effort during construction of the new Koshō-ji temple, which still lacked some basic Zen buildings.¹⁹⁵ Dogen employs the easy-to-read regular script (*kaisho*) of characters that was common in the Song dynasty, and his overall presentation of the text conveys the embodied qualities of balance, alignment, and steadiness. According to an analysis by Charlotte Eubanks, “That is, the scroll *does* precisely what it asks its readers to do: it sits calmly, evenly, and at poised attention in a real-world field of objects (trees, grasses,

and so forth). The manuscript's brushstrokes and entire aesthetic layout enact seated meditation."¹⁹⁶

“Discerning the Way” (“Bendowa”), 1231

“Discerning the Way” is another significant early writing that has had an up-and-down history in terms of how its role has been understood and appreciated by Soto followers. For many readers studying Dogen’s thought today, “Discerning the Way” is known as the first section of the ninety-five-chapter version of the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* and serves as an ideal introduction to the whole work. It is considered part of a group of three major chapters, including “Realization Here and Now” (“Genjokoan”) and “Buddha-Nature” (“Bussho”). They are referred to mnemonically by the modern commentator Nishiyari Bokusan as “Ben-Gen-Butsu,” although the chapters are not published in that order. Like *Private Conversations*, however, “Discerning the Way” was apparently not read widely or perhaps even circulated at all during Dogen’s lifetime.¹⁹⁷ This may even have been true for many generations after his death, until a new sense of its importance began to develop in the seventeenth century.

Ejo kept four different editions of the *Treasury* that were tentatively approved by Dogen, but none of them contains “Discerning the Way.” During the next couple of centuries of the medieval period, various Soto monks produced additional versions of the *Treasury* that also did not include this chapter. Then, near the beginning of the Edo period, a copy of the text was found in the home of a Kyoto patron that may have belonged to a family related to Dogen’s Fujiwara background. After this, the monk Gesshu Soko, who led a major revival of interest in Dogen studies at Daijōji temple during the mid-1600s, advocated for including this chapter in the *Treasury*, primarily because it was written in vernacular rather than in the Chinese style.

In the 1700s the text was further analyzed and annotated by Menzan. By this time, “Discerning the Way” took its place introducing the ninety-five-chapter *Treasury* because it was the section written earliest, a couple of years before the next two chapters were composed after the opening of Koshoji in 1233. In the modern period, the status of “Discerning” was further emphasized in books published by two leading twentieth-century Soto intellectuals, Nishiari Bokusan and Eto Sokuo. In addition, at Shoboji temple in northeastern Japan, Okubo Doshu discovered a lost manuscript that features an extra nineteenth question-and-answer section, which brought the work additional attention. But despite its prominent role in the ninety-five-chapter edition that was first published in the early 1800s—from the time of the earliest editions of the *Treasury* when Dogen died nearly six centuries before—this chapter was never considered part of the seventy-five-chapter edition of the *Treasury*. Based on this analysis, since the 1970s, leading scholars in Japan have significantly revised their thinking about the structure of the *Treasury*, which they currently argue consists of seventy-five chapters plus twelve chapters. From this standpoint, “Discerning the Way” is now regarded as one of several supplemental chapters that is not a part of the main *Treasury* text. This reorganization by no means eliminates the importance of the essay that was one of Dogen’s first writings, but it does alter our understanding of its significance in relation to other chapters.

The edition of “Discerning the Way” currently used in Dogen’s complete works, where it is listed either as the first or as one of the supplementary chapters of the *Treasury*, includes an opening portion that primarily focuses on the notion of self-fulfilling samadhi (*jijyu zanmai*). This encompasses the holistic awareness or other-fulfilling samadhi (*tajiyu zanmai*) of all beings at all times and highlights the related notions of the oneness of practice-realization (*shusho itto*) and the unity of fundamental realization and marvelous practice (*honsho myoshu*). A brief concluding section indicates that

“Discerning the Way” is to be considered a commentary on the *Universal Recommendation*. The main or middle section of the chapter contains eighteen hypothetical questions with Dogen’s answers. These are designed to quell any doubts concerning the priority of sitting meditation on the part of skeptics, including members of the Daruma school. Dogen’s major point is an advocacy for zazen practice, which is not to be conflated with esoteric Buddhist views of meditation. He does not, however, endorse the notion of the “Zen school,” a term which he took to reflect an unproductive factionalism.

In “Discerning the Way,” Dogen argues that seated meditation has always been the essential component of Buddhism and that its practice does not depend on the superiority or inferiority of doctrine or intellect. Unfortunately, he says, the time was previously not suitable for this teaching to be introduced to Japan because of the intrusion of what he calls the “Senika heresy” (*Senni gedo*). This he saw as a throwback to Hindu eternalist notions of self (*atman*) that unfortunately resurfaced in some misleading Zen viewpoints, such as the Daruma school, indicating that the everyday mind equals enlightenment even without the need for self-control and self-cultivation. Dogen instead emphasizes—as genuine examples of how enlightenment is experienced in instantaneous flashes based on sensations—the stories of two prominent Tang-dynasty monks: Lingyun, who gained realization when he saw peach blossoms blooming after decades of training, and Xiangyan, whose sudden insight came when he heard the sound of a pebble striking a bamboo branch, also after years of frustration.^{[198](#)}

As a matter of diligence rather than intelligence, the authentic contemplative state is fully manifested in the four daily activities (*gyoju zaga*) of walking, standing, and reclining in addition to sitting. Zazen does not conflict with, but also does not rely on, the traditional Buddhist precepts or sutras. Because Dogen does not accept the theory of a degenerate age (*mappo*) plaguing the world, as endorsed

by the Pure Land and Nichiren schools, he argues here that female as well as nonclerical practitioners equally benefit from zazen practice, as he witnessed them do in China. Although they differed in their view of mappo, other forms of Kamakura Buddhism also embraced some of these attitudes for the reason that those were the people most in need of salvation.

The Early Koshoji Years (1233–1238)

This period was marked by a gradual shift in Dogen's overall approach to teaching. As he studied deeply and tried to integrate into his writings a detailed evocation of Sinitic sources, he began adopting a more technically oriented and rhetorically astute style. His writings therefore started to require a firm base of knowledge of Chinese on the part of disciples. Dogen compiled and commented on hundreds of koan cases culled from a wide variety of Song-dynasty texts that he learned on the mainland. This was done in a preliminary way, as he had yet to develop the distinctive interpretative method that would be characteristic of his writing style in both the *Treasury* and *Extensive Record* just a few years later. Additionally, as his target audience became narrow, he developed an emphasis on how all aspects of human behavior must reflect contemplative awareness based on the guidelines of the Soto lineage he had received from Rujing, and which he alone represented in Japan.

Essentials of Learning the Way (Gakudoyojinshu), 1234

Essentials of Learning the Way is a fairly short essay written in a rather straightforward fashion. Featuring a prose style that resembles the direct replies offered in "Discerning the Way," it has a thematic focus on awakening to the true meaning of impermanence

that resembles much of the content of the *Treasury of Miscellaneous Talks* compiled a few years later. A cautionary note in one of the opening passages of the text, addressing the impact of evanescence, recalls the episode of the Sirens in Homer's *Odyssey*. Dogen writes:

When you hear a song of praise sung by a rare god or an exotic bird, react like it is the evening breeze brushing against your ears, or if you see the exquisite faces of beautiful women, let this feel like the morning dewdrops coming into sight. Freedom from the attachments of sound and form naturally accords with the essence of the Way-seeking mind. If you learn about students of deficient learning or meet people with partial views, it is because they have fallen for the allure of reputation and profit and forever missed living the life of Buddha. This is a regrettable state that must be overcome.^{[199](#)}

In a modern edition, the ten sections of *Essentials of Learning the Way* continue with a series of successive, albeit somewhat repetitive, moral injunctions, which are used as headers: (1) You must awaken the bodhi-seeking mind; (2) it is necessary to practice if you want to experience the true dharma; (3) you should enter the Buddha gate through practice; (4) do not train in the buddha-dharma with a gain-seeking mind; (5) you must find a genuine teacher in order to practice Zen and learn the Way; (6) fundamental concerns about self-interest must be left out of one's mind while training in meditation; (7) to study the dharma and become liberated, you must continually practice zazen; (8) learn from the model behavior of Zen adepts; (9) always practice with the goal of attaining the Way; and (10) resolve the matter at hand right here!

Three Hundred Koan Case Collection (*Shobogenzo sanbyakusoku*), 1235

This text is also known as the *Chinese Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* (*Mana Shobogenzo*) in order to distinguish its contents from the *Vernacular Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* (*Kana Shobogenzo*; *kana* indicates the use of Japanese), or what is usually referred to, for short, as the *Treasury*. This *Chinese Treasury* represents the first time Dogen used the title “Treasury of the True Dharma Eye,” which was a term well known from Zen lore about the transmission Shakyamuni gave to Mahakasyapa. It had previously been used for naming other works, especially the twelfth-century master Dahui’s koan collection featuring 661 cases with occasional prose comments.

Dogen’s *Chinese Treasury* consists of three hundred koans that are listed in random order in three volumes, with one hundred cases each, but without any prose or poetic commentary. This was apparently a way for Dogen to organize his vast knowledge of koans as seeds for use in subsequent writings, as, for instance, when he elaborated on cases in the *Vernacular Treasury*, in which 172 koans from the *Chinese Treasury* are referred to in their entirety, with many others mentioned briefly. In some instances, the koans are employed as specific examples to clarify a point, but in various examples almost an entire chapter is dedicated to examining a particular case from varying perspectives. Also, in the *Extensive Record*, about one hundred koans are quoted entirely from this text and another one hundred cases are cited briefly. Numerous cases are also quoted or alluded to in many of Dogen’s other works.

The *Chinese Treasury* is another example in Dogen’s corpus about which typical views of the significance of the work have changed drastically based on breakthroughs in modern research. By the eighteenth century, only the middle section was known, and it had been notably commented on by just two scholar-monks,

Shigetsu Ein and Honko Katsudo. It was assumed that the rest of the material was lost and perhaps not relevant for understanding Dogen's approach to Zen, since he sometimes instructed followers not to pay attention to koans. But, in the early twentieth century, the entire manuscript was discovered and published for the first time. This publication highlighted the extent to which, by the mid-1230s, Dogen had developed a serious interest in koan cases that would shape his overall approach to Zen teaching.

Verse Comments on Ninety Koan Cases (Eiheijuko), 1236

Verse Comments on Ninety Koan Cases confirms the above point about Dogen's developing interest in teaching through koans. It contains verse commentaries on ninety koan cases, fifty-two of which are also used in the *Chinese Treasury*, with other examples from the ninety-case text also cited in the *Miscellaneous Talks* that was being compiled by Ejo around the same time. The *Verse Comments on Ninety Koan Cases* is included as volume 9 in the *Extensive Record*. Yet it is occasionally treated as an independent work by some modern interpreters to highlight its connections with earlier and subsequent Dogen's writings on the role of Zen dialogues. With 102 poems in all (since several cases feature two cases, or three in one instance), this work was originally edited by Dogen's disciple Senne, who also compiled the first and tenth volumes of the *Extensive Record*, with the latter containing Chinese poetry.^{[200](#)}

The verse commentary style (Ch. *songgu*, Jp. *juko*), which refers to an "ode" (*song/ju*) or expression of praise composed for an ancient (*gu/ko*) text, consists of four-line, seven-character (*shichigon-zekku*) poems, although on a couple of occasions there is a slight variation in the number of lines or characters. In the Chinese literary context, the style was governed by various rhetorical rules

concerning rhyming and tonal patterns, homophonic wordplay, seasonal allusions, natural imagery, and thematic progressions. Dogen was the first to import this verse style of commenting on koans into Japan. He also helped introduce numerous cases included in several famous Song-dynasty commentaries that used the verse style, especially the *Blue Cliff Record* and the *Gateless Gate* (published in 1229, two years after Dogen left China). In addition, Dogen highlighted some anecdotes and sayings, particularly prized in the Soto tradition, involving such prominent masters as Touzi, Danxia, Hongzhi, and, of course, Rujing.

Instructions for the Cook (Tenzokyokun), 1237

Instructions for the Cook is included as the first of six chapters of Dogen's *Monastic Rules*, but when he wrote it, Dogen had no idea it would eventually be assembled, along with other essays mostly written a decade later, into a collection. *Monastic Rules* was created in 1667 by an abbot of Eihei-ji. It is, therefore, justifiable to treat the *Instructions* as a stand-alone work. The text contains the initial instances in his corpus of some distinctive personal, historical, textual, and rhetorical features. Focusing on the role of the cook—one of six main stewards in a Zen monastery, who is not usually thought of as an important officer—he integrates observations based on his travels to China and experiences at Kennin-ji temple with citations from the standard *Rules for Zen Monasteries*. These are further linked to recommendations for practice through references to numerous poems, sayings, and koan dialogues that are commented on in creative ways, resembling some *Treasury* chapters.

Dogen points out that many renowned Zen masters in China—representing various schools and including Dongshan, the founder of the Soto lineage—once served as cooks and dealt with this menial task as if it were the main function in the monastery. These officers put aside any petty concerns in order to serve the assembly

effectively. They treated all the ingredients and utensils in addition to each person served, regardless of rank, with utmost respect and a sense of thoroughgoing appreciation. Acting in this way requires the cultivation of three levels of mind: the joyful spirit that is resilient concerning the fine details and grateful for the greater scope of any activity; the parental mind that loves unconditionally and acts with care and solicitation toward junior and senior colleagues; and the magnanimous mind (*daishin*, literally “great mind”) that rises above petty conflict and discord with an eye focused on true transcendence in every situation. In this way, no matter whether performing seated meditation or a monastic chore, such as preparing, cooking, serving, or cleaning up food,

by taking the backward step that enables the light to shine inward, you will effortlessly become completely integrated, which means you are no longer turned by external things but are now one who is able to turn those things. Harmonizing and purifying yourself in this way, you will sacrifice neither the one eye that is aware of absolute wisdom nor the two eyes that enact discriminating consciousness in the realm of the relative.^{[201](#)}

Treasury of Miscellaneous Talks (Shobogenzo zuimonki), 1236–1238

Miscellaneous Talks is a collection of about 120 evening or informal sermons (*shosan*), divided into six chapters. It was recorded by Ejo over a period of three to four years, during which Dogen responded to a variety of questions from his main disciple and other participants in the assembly, many of whom were presumably former members of the Daruma school. These meetings were mainly held in his chambers or in the monks’ hall after evening meditation sessions.

The *Miscellaneous Talks* seems to have long been a mainstream text, studied by monks and lay followers alike. But it was known only through manuscript form from the medieval period until the first woodblock printing, in 1651, as part of Gesshu's sectarian revival of Dogen studies. That edition, referred to as the popular version (*rufubon*), was again published in 1769 after considerable editing and the addition of a preface plus annotations by Menzan. Since the early twentieth century, it has frequently been reproduced by Watsuji Tetsuro, Okubo Doshu, and Ikeda Rosan, among many others. However, there is another version, discovered in 1941, at a temple in Aichi Prefecture. That version stems from 1380 and has been considered the original, and thus most accurate, edition of the text by some prominent commentators, including Mizuno Yaoko, who produced an influential modern edition.

There are countless minor discrepancies between the two versions in terms of wording and the numbering of subsections. The single main difference is that the first chapter of the popular edition deals mainly with the role of the precepts. This is likely because the Daruma school was accused of antinomianism for flouting traditional Buddhist regulations, a position that stood in contrast to Dogen's emphasis on the merits of zazen practice that does not conflict with yet does not depend on following rules. In the original edition, however, that section is switched with the final chapter of the popular edition. That chapter focuses on Dogen's observations in China, where he says he turned down the opportunity to become Rujing's assistant, and also at Kenninji, where he greatly admired Eisai's generosity and magnanimity.

Whichever chapter originally came first, the basic spiritual message of both versions of *Miscellaneous Talks* is consistent. The text provides a capstone for several themes of Dogen's first decade of teaching. It highlights the need, whether one functions as a Zen trainee, government official, or family patriarch, to come to terms with the effects of impermanence by relinquishing ego-based

attachments and partial views. As in the *Treasury* chapter written a few years later “Extensive Travels” (“Henzan”), which in conventional uses of the terms refers to itinerancy in pursuit of a true teacher, Dogen emphasizes the value of here-and-now training based on maintaining focus and cultivating concentration. Therefore, “it is not possible to obtain wide knowledge by traveling extensively. Make up your mind to give up trying to do so, and instead focus your attention entirely on one practice. Study the ideas you need to know and the traditional ways they have been exemplified in the practice techniques of your predecessors.”²⁰² This passage reinforces that selecting a single practice method was the foremost feature of Kamakura Buddhism. This perspective encompasses the path of just sitting for Dogen, koan investigation for Rinzai Zen, chanting Amida’s name for Honen, giving thanks to Buddha’s grace for Shinran, and reciting the title of the Lotus Sutra for Nichiren.

The Late Eiheiiji Years (1247–1253)

The period just before and after Dogen’s return from his apparently disappointing visit to the shogun in the garrison town of Kamakura was for a long time looked on as a relatively unproductive phase. It was thought that he continued to deliver formal sermons in the dharma hall but, for the most part, did not work on the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* or much else of great significance. That stereotype has, however, been seriously challenged in recent decades by new textual findings that helped spin revisionist theories, especially by Critical Buddhism, suggesting that the late-late, or final, portion of Dogen’s life was in its own way quite creative. This phase is now considered essential for understanding the entire trajectory of Dogen’s overcoming of his doubt about original enlightenment and how he in turn explicated a sense of authentic Zen realization vis-à-vis traditional Buddhist approaches.

Twelve-Chapter Treasury (Junikanbon Shobogenzo), mostly post-1248

The twelve-chapter edition was one of four versions of the *Treasury* held by Ejo when he was still finding and revising manuscripts in the summer of 1255. Apparently, in the years before his death, Dogen was in the process of constructing what he referred to as the New Draft (Shinso). This version contained mostly undated chapters written during the phase after returning from Kamakura. It therefore stands in contrast to the Old Draft (Kyuso), with seventy-five chapters (or an alternative version with sixty chapters), which was mainly completed by 1246. The twelve-chapter edition as an independent manuscript was discovered in 1930 at Yokoji temple (founded by Keizan in Noto peninsula). It is the single main reason for the dramatic swing in some scholars' thinking about the significance of the post-Kamakura period, as it gives evidence that Dogen was still writing and editing the *Treasury* until he became too ill to continue.

The New Draft chapters in many ways extend the themes Dogen stressed all along, including the importance of everyday diligent behavior. But several chapters are oriented in new directions, particularly the primacy of karmic retribution as the response to moral (or immoral) actions and repentance. Other sections focus on the salvific, supernatural, or noncausal powers of bodhisattvas to mitigate the impact of karma. Whether these notions are regarded as complementary or contradictory can be debated, but there is no doubt of the importance of their twin roles in shaping Dogen's later body of work.

Auspicious Signs of Spring (Risshun daikichimon), 1247

Auspicious Signs of Spring is a very short verse that Dogen brushed in fine calligraphy while his entourage watched and encouraged him. It was first published in Menzan's detailed biography of Dogen, the *Annotated Record of Kenzei*. The content rather simply praises the advent of spring, which in the Chinese lunar calendar is associated with New Year's Day. Yet it is significant for showing how the rotation of the seasons, in all its practical and symbolic implications, was a major concern for the abbot of a Zen mountain monastery. The piece recalls a sermon delivered on the tenth day of the sixth month in 1250 that is included as entry 5.379 in the *Extensive Record*, in which Dogen offers supplication for clear skies to occur following an unrelenting rainy season:

Last year and this year, through spring, summer, autumn, and winter, below the heavens the rains have fallen without cease. The whole populace laments this as the five grains do not ripen. Now, for the sake of saving our land from lamentation, I will make supplications by lifting up a prayer that was given one time by my late teacher, when all Buddhas of past, present, and future, the ancestral masters of six generations, and all nostrils and thousands of eyeballs of all teachers gave a sermon at the same time that could not have taken place an hour earlier or half an hour later.[203](#)

Dogen then reports that Rujing sneezed and said ironically, "Before one sneeze of this patch-robed monk is finished, the clouds will part, and the sun will appear." After that, Dogen raises his fly whisk and appeals to the mercy of Shakyamuni, Maitreya, and Kannon to create the sought-after miracle.

Twelve Waka (for the Shogun's Wife) (Junishu no waka), 1248

This group of Japanese-style poems, which are part of a larger collection to be discussed in the next chapter, constitutes the only available writing by Dogen that was produced during his visit to Kamakura. The annotation indicates that these waka were formally presented to Hojo Tokiyori's wife. This rings true, as poetry composed entirely in vernacular was considered at the time a feminine form of communication. On the other hand, it is likely that the poems were designed to appeal to the warlord, who was trying to absorb quickly and intuitively the ultimate significance of the contemplative standpoint for overcoming his sense of shame and doubt. Each waka has a title reflecting Zen doctrine. The following example epitomizes Dogen's view of the role of language in evoking meditative experience of the dharma:

"Furyu monji"	"No reliance on words or letters"
li suteshi	Not limited
Sono koto no ha no	By language,
Hoka nareba	It is ceaselessly expressed;
Fude ni mo ato o	So, too, the way of letters
Todome zari keru	Can display but not exhaust
	it. 204

Memorial for Arhats (Rakan koshiki), 1249

Memorial for Arhats, a short work, provides the textual basis for the performance of a memorial ritual (*koshiki*) to remember the manifestation or projection of light emanating from the Sixteen Arhats (Juroku Rakan). These were the saints that Dogen, accompanied by several members of his assembly, is said to have visualized around the time this text was written. Such visions were well known in China, but a special kind of commemorative ceremony, not found on the mainland, had been invented a few centuries before in Japan and had become common in almost all medieval Buddhist

schools. This development was largely because many lay practitioners could not understand the content of the Sinitic sutras chanted in typical recitations. The custom was initiated in Soto Zen by Dogen, who, in addition to his role as an avid practitioner of zazen, was also fully involved in the performance of numerous rites at Eihei-ji.

The year Dogen wrote this manuscript, he also recorded that heavenly flowers appeared during a ceremony for the arhats and said that this and other auspicious signs were proof that Eihei-ji was a sacred place. He even asserted it to be equal to Mount Tiantai, a holy site in China Dogen visited, which is located a couple hours by car from Mount Tiantong. Historical sources do not provide a sense of how often Dogen implemented the memorials. He was no doubt greatly influenced in this and other aspects of religiosity by both Eisai and Myoe, and it seems he may have borrowed heavily from the latter's ritual compositions. In later generations, Soto Zen began to celebrate memorial services recalling the life story of past patriarchs, including of course Dogen and Keizan. These ceremonies are still evident in temples throughout Japan, where new musical and performative innovations are frequently presented to attract a contemporary audience often uninformed in the classics.²⁰⁵

Final Instructions in the Master's Room (Eihei shitchu kikigaki), 1253

This text, also known as the *Record of Dogen's Will* (*Goyuigon kiroku*), was heard and compiled in Chinese by Dogen's disciple Gikai. It is based on conversations he had with Dogen and Ejo leading up to their final trip to seek medical attention in Kyoto, where Dogen passed away. In the text, Gikai, who was Ejo's disciple for a few years in the 1250s and became the third abbot of Eihei-ji for a short period beginning in 1267, is told that he would not be selected as Dogen's successor because he lacked a "grandmotherly heart."

He would instead be asked to stay at Eihei-ji during the time of the trip to oversee affairs there. Dogen also suggests that there were secret procedures for dharma transmission that he would eventually reveal to Gikai if he were able to return from the capital, so these remain unrecorded. A nun, who must have been highly regarded in Dogen's inner circle, overheard the conversation while standing behind a screen.

As a note about the aftermath of this work, it turned out that Dogen's instincts regarding his disciple were correct. Gikai gained his first awakening when he heard the capping phrase in sermon 1.91 of the *Extensive Record*, in which Dogen says that his school uses words and letters: "All dharmas dwell in their dharma positions; wild geese return to the woods and orioles appear in early spring."²⁰⁶ The disciple attained full enlightenment in the 1250s under Ejo through an experience of casting off body-mind and was then sent to China to learn more about continental Zen models and motifs for temple construction.²⁰⁷ Even though he was a brilliant and charismatic thinker, Gikai served an unsuccessful term as leader of Eihei-ji and apparently was forced out after six years—later going on to become the mentor of Keizan at Daijō-ji temple that Gikai founded.²⁰⁸

CHAPTER 6

Distinguishing between a Gem and an Ordinary Stone

Four Major Collections

FROM AMONG the large and diverse body of writings that have been introduced and translated in recent years, Dogen's major collections stand out as compilations that include addresses, dialogues, essays, homilies, instructions, lectures, letters, and poetry composed in Japanese or Chinese. Unlike the miscellaneous works discussed in the previous chapter, these collections reflect Dogen's thinking at multiple stages of his career, extending from his trip to China and teaching in Kyoto in the early 1230s until the end of his life at Eihei-ji in the 1250s, when his productivity started to wane as he fell ill. These collections are especially important for highlighting Dogen's prolific midcareer phase lasting from 1238 through 1246, when the vast majority of the materials were produced as he moved from Koshō-ji to settle at Eihei-ji.

The major collections were generally left in an incomplete state during Dogen's lifetime and were later assembled and further amended after his death by Ejo or other dedicated followers, in an ongoing editorial process that continued to unfold for many centuries. These texts feature varied literary styles and religious themes that articulate diverse and often contradictory viewpoints. They represent the inspirational yet perplexing ways that Dogen is

just speaking through words and letters how to awaken to the meaning of nonthinking based on *just sitting* in meditation. Each work has been the subject of different interpretations and vigorous debates concerning its origins, content, and structure, as well as overall significance for understanding Dogen's approach to Zen.

Assemblage and Abbreviation

For the great majority of practitioners and students of Dogen Zen, the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* remains the single most important text, for which there are now half a dozen complete and several dozen partial translations, plus numerous commentaries and related examinations of specific passages. Recent research on both sides of the Pacific, however, has demonstrated that the *Treasury* has a complicated textual history, primarily because Dogen did not leave behind an authoritative edition and apparently had the goal of rewriting at least some of the chapters for a version that was referred to as the New Draft. Furthermore, because the *Treasury* overlaps and is intertextually connected with the rest of his corpus, it should be read not in isolation but rather alongside the other compilations, in addition to the full range of Dogen's miscellaneous writings. Such an effort is necessary to gain a complete comprehension of the development and scope of his thought and the manner of articulation he was constantly reforming over the course of his entire teaching mission.

Since the major collections are rather difficult and demanding to decipher, especially for those who are not specialists familiar with reading Zen literary genres and knowledgeable about their intricate allusions to Chinese sources, each work has generated an abbreviated version for the benefit of a broader audience (as indicated in the table opposite). Two of these condensed versions were produced in the medieval period (for the *Extensive Record* and *Japanese Poetry Collection*), and the other two are from the

nineteenth century (for the *Treasury* and *Monastic Rules*). In Japan, the abridged editions have generally become even more popular and widely accessed than the original texts. There is considerable discussion, however, about whether the partial versions exemplify effective distillations or misleading distortions of what Dogen intended in his distinctive approach to disseminating Soto Zen theory and practice.

Four Major Collections with Abbreviated Editions

<i>Treasury of the True Dharma Eye (Shobogenzo)</i> , 1231–1253
Abridgement: <i>Principles of Practice-Realization (Shushogi)</i> , 1891
<i>Extensive Record (Eihei koroku)</i> , 1226–1252
Abridgement: <i>Recorded Sayings (Eihei goroku)</i> , 1358
<i>Monastic Rules (Eihei shingi)</i> , 1237–1249
Abridgement: <i>Condensed Monastic Rules (Eihei sho shingi)</i> , 1805
<i>Japanese Poetry Collection (Sanshodoei)</i> , 1230–1253
Abridgement: <i>Five Waka on the Lotus Sutra (Hokkekyo no goshu)</i> , 1472

Titles of the main compilations and their respective abbreviated versions.

All four collections showcase citations of koan cases that are interpreted by Dogen in unique ways. This is in accord with the Zen tradition's emphasis that each teacher must be able to creatively express alternative answers (*daigo*) or substitute responses (*betsugo*) for the standard replies used in the core dialogues. Throughout Dogen's works, there are many examples of sparkling and startling discourse, as he prods his audience with spirited questions and paradoxical comebacks or responds to the masters cited in the classic exchanges with zingers, put-downs, and the inventive recasting of their original wording. The collections thereby reveal Dogen's philosophical insight and rhetorical wit conveyed with

a droll sense of humor and spontaneous playfulness as well as frequent poignancy and deep sentiment.

It is important to consider some of the fundamental intertextual elements connecting the major collections by taking into account the sequence of Dogen's literary productivity outlined in the following table. This chart makes it evident that Dogen primarily focused on writing *Treasury* chapters during the initial half of his teaching career, especially in the last seven years at Koshoji (beginning in 1236) and in the transitional phase in Echizen Province when his assembly was awaiting the construction of Eihei-ji. The *Treasury* is recognized for epitomizing Dogen's vibrant rhetorical flair. Perhaps its foremost characteristic is the shattering of the boundaries of conventional grammatical constructions and vernacular pronunciations by cutting across two languages that share a script of multivalent characters but are quite distinct in terms of syntax and diction. Since about 85 percent of the chapters were completed by the fourth month of 1244, when the new temple opened in Echizen Province, the *Treasury* does not represent Dogen's main teaching method of his Eihei-ji period. It is ironic that he is best known as abbot of Eihei-ji, but his most revered text is mostly from an earlier stage. In the mountains, his writing was primarily concerned with other styles and areas of emphasis. Some attention to revising the *Treasury* was crucial, however, during the phase of late-late Dogen (after he returned from Kamakura).

Another key point revealed in the table refutes skeptics who argue that Dogen's creativity was greatly diminished during the last decade of his career. The numbers clearly show that he remained productive in various ways that should not be overlooked because of a preoccupation with the *Treasury*. Although Dogen continued some degree of composing and editing *Treasury* chapters in the late years, particularly the twelve-chapter edition, he mainly shifted his focus to working on the other collections. In fact, four-fifths of the *Extensive Record*, two-thirds of the *Monastic Rules*, and five-sixths of the

Japanese Poetry Collection were composed during this stage. We might deduce that Dogen preferred as a teaching method the style of sermon used in the *Extensive Record* because 405 of the entries included in volumes 2 through 7 played a crucial role in the teachings presented at Eihei-ji.

Sequence of Textual Productivity

	LOCATION	TR	ER	MR	JP
1227–1233	Kyoto	1	0	0	0
1233–1235	Koshōji 1	2	0	0	0
1236–mid-1243	Koshōji 2*	48	126	1	7
1243 (7th mo.)–1244 (4th mo.)	Mountains	29	0	1	0
1244–1247	Eihei-ji	6	124	3	6
fall 1247–spring 1248	Kamakura	0	0	0	12
1248–1253	Eihei-ji	95	281	1	38
	TOTALS	95**	531	6	63

When and where Dogen produced the main contents of the major collections: Tr: *Treasury*, ER: *Extensive Record*, MR: *Monastic Rules*, JP: *Japanese Poetry*; * the Koshōji years are subdivided to mark that the dharma hall and monks' hall opened in 1236; ** ninety-five chapters represents a total but does not indicate an endorsement of that edition.

Regarding the abridgements of the major collections, the *Treasury* is best known in the West for an edition containing ninety-five chapters, although that version is not necessarily definitive. In Japan today, the standard version is organized differently. It features a combination of the seventy-five chapters from the Old Draft and twelve chapters from the New Draft, which are regarded as discrete but linked textual entities, along with an additional eight supplemental chapters. The abridged edition of the *Treasury*,

however, contains only thirty-one paragraphs that were selected by modern interpreters from among passages in the entire text. Also, the main portion of the *Extensive Record* contains 531 formal sermons in the first seven of its ten volumes, many of which are similar in content if not delivery style to the *Treasury*. The remainder of the collection is comprised of additional discourses and poems. The digest of this record, designed by medieval followers, includes about one-fifth of the original text. In addition, the *Monastic Rules* consists of six essays that were written to edify Dogen's disciples regarding clerical behavior in the monastic setting, but its abridgement takes a very different structure by outlining the daily schedule of temple activities based on indications found in the essays. Finally, the *Japanese Poetry Collection* consists of sixty-three waka poems. Its abbreviated version includes a subgroup with just five verses on the topic of the Lotus Sutra, which was Dogen's most favored Mahayana scripture, with hundreds of mentions of it included in the *Treasury*.

A Tale of Two Dogen Texts

The *Treasury* has received by far the most attention in Dogen studies, perhaps deservedly so given its remarkable literary qualities. But the other collections, now also available in reliable translations, are increasingly being examined, especially the *Extensive Record*. Nevertheless, the relative lack of interest in this compendium is not a new phenomenon. It has a historical basis that is illustrated in a fascinating verse from the 1790s by the famous Soto monk-poet Ryokan titled "On Reading Dogen's *Extensive Record*" ("Eihei koroku o yomu").²⁰⁹ Ryokan highlights the significance of looking at both the *Treasury* and *Extensive Record* collections side by side based on a holistic outlook that can also be applied to Dogen's other compilations and miscellaneous writings.

The verse opens by indicating that one lonely and sleepless night,

Long after midnight, while listening
to pouring rain pelting the bamboo trees in the garden

Ryokan reached over to a bookshelf and happened to pick out an unused copy of the *Extensive Record*. Then,

Beneath the open window sitting at my desk,
I burned incense, lit a candle, and peacefully read the whole book.

Inspired by its righteous teachings, my body-mind were cast off.
In every single word, the jewel of a dragon is displayed.

and with each phrase, a tiger is captured in a cave.

As old master Dogen fully conveys the transmission of Buddhism
from India to Japan.

Ryokan goes on to comment that the book's wonderful nuggets of wisdom were essentially the same truths he once found in the *Treasury*, which he recalled previously studying and, more importantly, carrying out in his Zen practice. This inspires a profound sense of inner peace, yet Ryokan is also aware of how he feels out of place in relation to the rest of society, which has long ignored Dogen's teachings. Ryokan tearfully laments that none of his contemporaries, nor indeed anyone since Dogen's time, deeply understands these texts, and he wonders wistfully at such neglect:

Since nobody today is able to distinguish between a gem and an ordinary stone,

for over five hundred years the *Extensive Record* has been
buried in dust.

Because people are not able to read it with the Dharma eye,

Who benefits from its outpouring of words disclosing truth in every phrase?

The verse concludes with Ryokan remarking that he was absorbed in reading while

pinning for the long-forgotten past, so my tears not ceasing,
drenched the copy of master Dogen's book.

Sure enough, the next morning a neighbor comes by and, immediately noticing this, asks why the book is damp. Ryokan responds with irony and poignancy:

I wanted to tell him but, because it was embarrassing, I did not know how.

Feeling distraught that I could not come up with an explanation,

I bowed my head for a few moments until I found these words,
"Last night's heavy rain must have leaked in and soaked the bookshelf."

Ryokan's verse is a reminder that readers should explore intertextual connections linking the structure and contents of the *Treasury* and *Extensive Record*. One can appreciate differences in their respective approaches while seeing both volumes as important and interlinked expressions of Dogen's insight that blends kindness with authority and keenness with authenticity. As shown in table 6.3, the main contrast is that the two texts offer different types of sermons with disparate styles of delivery. Both styles, however, rely heavily on quoting and interpreting koan cases or related Zen sayings.

Comparison of Sermon Styles

	<i>TREASURY'S</i> INFORMAL	<i>EXTENSIVE RECORD'S</i> FORMAL
Text	95 chapters (or less)	7 volumes with 531 sermons
Language	vernacular (kana)	Chinese (kanbun)
Period	mainly prior to Eiheiiji	mainly at Eiheiiji
Location	monks' hall or abbot's quarters	only in dharma hall
Time	evening usually	daytime required
Audience	invited monks	full assembly with guests
Atmosphere	private, individual	public, communal
Behavior	casual, seated	teacher sits, audience stands
Expression	rhetorical, allusive	demonstrative, interactive
Length	detailed comments	usually brief and cryptic

Different styles of sermons used in Dogen's two main collections.

Throughout his career, Dogen sought to introduce Sinitic sources as rapidly and resourcefully as possible to his growing assembly of followers, who were learning of these innovative continental literary marvels for the first time in Japanese Buddhist history. With its use of the native alphabet along with Chinese characters, the *Treasury*, a collection of informal sermons (*jishu*), is generally considered the first vernacular writing in Japanese Buddhism. At that time, vernacular Japanese script without characters was used exclusively for secular literary works, including diaries, epics, and epistles, especially those composed by women. The *Treasury's* sermons are unique in providing lengthy discussions of specific doctrines based on citations of passages from Mahayana sutras or koan narratives. They were delivered at different times of the day, particularly at night, mainly as a special instruction for those who requested or required this in the intimate settings of the monks' hall, the abbot's quarters,

or some other place in the monastic compound, including in an outdoor courtyard in some instances. The sermons were often written out prior to delivery and then recorded and subsequently edited by Ejo. Several were presented on more than one occasion or were apparently rewritten several times over the years, showing Dogen's ongoing interest in polishing this craft.

The *Extensive Record* includes in its initial seven volumes a collection of formal sermons (*jodo*) that were compiled by Dogen's disciples, following the model of recorded sayings (*goroku* or *koroku*), or the assembled records of the Chinese masters of the Song dynasty. Dogen's text, which was the first main example of this genre produced in Japan, was particularly influenced by the famous record of Hongzhi, a leading Soto teacher two generations prior to Rujing who was considered one of the main Zen monk-poets of the era. Formal sermons were delivered exclusively in the dharma hall, generally according to a set schedule and at a fixed time of the day, often for a particular ceremonial or memorial occasion.

Despite the formal setting, this style as an oral method of instruction (even if based on prepared notes), contains many examples of spontaneous gestures and nonverbal utterances used in reacting to the audience's level of understanding. These feature the demonstrative use of staffs and fly whisks as symbols of the master's ability to express transcendent knowledge. Unlike the prolonged philosophical discussions in the *Treasury*, in the *Extensive Record* Dogen frequently explains his message by drawing circles in the air with his whisk or tossing it down, by pounding his staff emphatically on the wooden platform, or simply descending from his seat without fanfare. These efforts encourage followers to gain a realization expressed in, yet beyond, words and letters. For example, sermon 5.412 concludes when Dogen raises the whisk and says, "Look, look! The partial and the fulfilled aspects of the provisional and the ultimate inexhaustible Dharma-gates all exist on the tip of my whisk. I entrust my hand to hold this up and take the opportunity

to use it.” Then he calls out, “My fist lets loose a thunderbolt that covers the heavens, acting as a grandmother who bleeds drop by drop for your sake.”²¹⁰

Despite many discrepancies, both collections explicate views highlighting the power of language to express the intricacies of the dharma. In the *Treasury* chapter “Buddhist Sutras” (“Bukkyo”), Dogen emphasizes that discourse understood in the broadest sense accomplishes the goal of disclosing the whole world without any limitation or false division between absolute and relative levels of reality. He asserts, “What we mean by the sutras is the entire universe. There is no space and no time that are not the sutras. The sutras use the words and letters of ultimate truth and the words and letters of worldly truth, as well as the language of the gods and the speech of human beings.”²¹¹

In a passage from the *Treasury* chapter “Going beyond Buddha” (“Bukkojoji”) (this is from a variant version of the chapter), Dogen links the basis of human expression to the notion of nonthinking, framing it as a perpetual state of awakening that stands in contrast to calculative or ordinary conceptual thinking. He writes, “In studying the Way, if meditative training is perspicacious and observations of reality are crystal clear, then nothing is obstructed, but this cannot be comprehended through thinking that is engrossed in calculation. Still less is it seen, even in their dreams, by those who try to count up all the grains of sand. Only those who sit steadfast in the contemplative state of non-thinking can realize this.”

Dogen’s view in the last sentence is based largely on a famous dialogue in which master Yaoshan responds to a monk who asks, “How does someone sitting upright in meditation think of not thinking?” Yaoshan replies, “Non-thinking (*hishiryo*).”²¹² This standpoint is also influenced by the statement in the Lotus Sutra indicating that the Buddha teaches by using countless nonconceptual and nondiscriminative yet endlessly imaginative and associative literary techniques, such as allegories, analogies, and

anecdotes. These devices expound all aspects of reality by disclosing essential connections and disconnections that enable a trainee to read between the lines of any text or comprehend every existing circumstance.

Nonthinking—which is often referred to as “eight-sided” (*hachimien*) thinking, or a state of total clarity that functions like the tinkling sound of a brilliant, jeweled necklace gently swaying in the spring breeze—is not a separate realm that is opposed to or stands above and beyond the apparent dichotomy of thinking and not thinking. Instead, Dogen explains in the chapter “Lancet of Meditation,” we must realize that at all times we are “always already in the process of non-thinking,”²¹³ which too often gets blocked by calculation that prevents insightful self-reflection. Therefore, his approach to language can also be referred to as the act of nonspeaking (*higogen*) in the sense that words are evoked flexibly and with multifarious implications to disclose truth, whether the dharma is partially or completely exposed. Metaphors, parables, and similes are not just vehicles for communicating an immediate experience of reality but the bearers and workings of expressivity through language, which itself constitutes the substance of awakening.

One of many prominent examples of just speaking, or nonspeaking, occurs in the chapter “Tangled Vines” (“Katto”). There Dogen transforms the key term *katto* (Ch. *geteng*), which in Chinese culture traditionally had pejorative connotations associated with passions and desires that would lead to complicated and pretentious or overly convoluted writing. Using the term to refer to his inventive rhetorical method of rearranging the order of words to change their meaning based on contextual nuance, ambiguous pronunciations, or grammatical reconstructions, he turns the term’s typically critical implication into an eminently positive one. Dogen’s view of making the most of entangled creepers, which recalls his use of the term “making the right mistake” in the chapter “Mind Itself Is Buddha”

("Sokushin zebutsu"), also involves such techniques as using a verb as a noun (and vice versa) or reading a declarative sentence as a query (in that assertions dialectically equal denials but, in the end, result in reaffirmations in light of those disavowals). A prime example is when Dogen suggests that not thinking is not opposed to thinking so that the question, "What do you think?" really means, "This is what you think." Also, "What is cast off?" equals "Casting off what!" He further exploits multiple homophones and related instances of wordplay to interpret previous Zen phrasings based on the presumption that a nondual basis underlies all apparent dichotomies or contradictions.

Another illuminating example of Dogen's emphasis on the revelatory power of language is found in sermon 2.128 of the *Extensive Record*, one of the first homilies delivered at Eihei-ji. After praising Rujing's style of impromptu teaching and maintaining that the quantity of a teacher's followers must not be valued over the quality of training, Dogen mentions a passage attributed to the Song-dynasty Soto master Danxia Zichun, the teacher of Hongzhi. Danxia once commented on a famous saying by the Tang-dynasty master Deshan, not of Soto lineage, who told his assembly, "In my school there are no words or phrases, not a single Dharma to give to people." According to Danxia's evaluation, Deshan failed to fulfill the Zen mission of entering into the weeds or muddy waters, so to speak, in order to find, teach, and awaken ignorant people. Danxia says, "A careful inspection reveals that Deshan functioned with only one eye, but in my school, we use words and phrases that cannot be cut through even by a golden sword. The deeply mysterious and wondrous point is that a jade woman becomes pregnant at night."²¹⁴ This last image symbolizes how the inanimate realm comes alive through discourse.

In responding to Danxia's remarks, Dogen takes the emphasis on language one step further by pointing out that his lineal predecessor's standpoint is also insufficient. On the one hand, he

argues that “Danxia’s eyeball exposed the delusions of Deshan and his laughter slayed the indolent and worthless Buddhas and ancestors of past and present.” “Nonetheless,” Dogen continues, “I would not have spoken that way. In my school we use only words and phrases. Eyes and mouths race to open up and express the teaching for the sake of other people, thus giving birth to donkeys as well as horses.”²¹⁵ Unlike Danxia, Dogen does not put language on a pedestal beyond ordinary discourse by depicting it with an unrealistic metaphor but instead maintains that words and phrases communicate effectively for the sake of awakening both novices (donkeys) and advanced practitioners (horses).

Another important link between the two collections is that the *Extensive Record* expresses important doctrinal themes that are consistent with the *Treasury*. These pertain to the role of zazen meditation and the experience of casting off body-mind, in addition to many other topics. Another shared theme is an emphasis on the function of realization attained here and now, while coming to terms with the flux of impermanence by acknowledging the invariable workings of karmic causality affecting past and future. Despite occasional variations or deliberate turns in the style of his teaching, it seems that Dogen did not waver from the core principles of his approach to religious practice.

Some of the doctrines dealt with extensively in *Treasury* chapters that are also treated briefly or elliptically in the formal sermons of the *Extensive Record* include, among many other examples, “Suchness” (“Inmo”) in 1.38, “Tangled Vines” (“Katto”) in 1.46, “Total Activity” (“Zenki”) in 1. 52, “Realization Here and Now” (“Genjokoan”) in 1. 60, “One Bright Pearl” (“Ikka myoju”) in 1.107, “Flowers in the Sky” (“Kuge”) in 2.162, “A King Asks for Four Favors” (“Osaka sendaba”) in 3.254, and “Udambara Blossoms” (“Udonge”) in 4.308. Other instances are sermon 1.34, which echoes the chapter “Plum Blossoms” (“Baika”) by querying simply, “If this greatest cold does not penetrate into our bones, how will the fragrance of the plum

blossoms pervade the entire universe?”²¹⁶ Also, sermon 1.23 parallels “Mountains and Rivers Proclaim the Sutra” (“Sansuikyo”) by stating, “Deeply see the blue mountains constantly walking. By yourself know the white stone woman gives birth to a child at night.”²¹⁷ Both of those formal sermons conclude by stating that, after the brief verbal utterance, “Dogen abruptly descended from his seat.” In this and related instances, there was probably some discussion with the monks that was not recorded.

Furthermore, an *Extensive Record* sermon recalls the *Treasury*’s “Realization Here and Now” chapter when Dogen says, “Everybody should just wholeheartedly engage in this realization right now, which is none other than all Buddhas in the ten directions and all ancestors, ancient and present, fully manifesting themselves.”²¹⁸ Also, in sermons 1.62 and 9.77, among other passages, the *Extensive Record* treats the oft-cited koan case involving the story of master Baizhang encountering a wild fox, who was supposedly suffering punishment over five hundred lifetimes for trying to ignore the effects of karma. This narrative is the main theme of two *Treasury* chapters: “Great Cultivation” and “Deep Faith in Causality.”²¹⁹ Also, in sermon 3.205 Dogen comments ironically on the relation between two views of causality expressed in this case, with one affirming and the other denying the role of karma:

Because a former monk said lifetimes ago, “not falling into cause and effect,” he was transformed into a wild fox. Because of hearing Baizhang’s saying, “not ignoring cause and effect,” he was released from that transfiguration. [Dogen remarks], “Look at this wild fox spirit shaking its head and wagging its tail. Make it stop before it’s too late!”²²⁰

Another example of a koan examined carefully in the two collections involves the case of Zhaozhou saying, “The cypress tree in the garden,” in response to a question about the meaning of

Buddha. This dialogue is discussed by Dogen in a *Treasury* chapter with the key phrase used as the title (“Hakujushi”), in addition to a couple of *Extensive Record* sermons plus a talk in entry 8.9, which provides a detailed interlinear interpretation of the original narrative. In sermon 6.433, Dogen praises Zhaozhou and questions his assembly’s capacity for understanding. After a pause, he offers his own capping phrase, another traditional mode of responding innovatively to koans: “The ancient cypress stands in Zhaozhou’s garden. People today mistakenly call the same fruit ‘oranges,’ when they are grown north of the Huai River, and ‘tangerines,’ if they are from south of the Huai River.”²²¹ Then, in 7.488, Dogen sharply criticizes common misinterpretations of the story and suggests an indirect response that he would have given: “Crossing over the remote blue waves for three years.”²²² This homily ends with a four-line verse comment, thereby mixing modes of commentary to playfully reconfigure the original exchange and bring forth fresh teachings that enrich the awareness of disciples.

While the above examples showcase similar rhetorical methods in the two collections, there are contrasting instances as well. Take the one, for example, in which Dogen’s performative approach in the *Extensive Record* sermon 3.195 stands apart from the philosophical outlook in the *Treasury* chapter “Supernormal Powers” (“Jinzu”). In this passage, Dogen defines the role of the spectacular powers before drolly exemplifying them with his purposefully undramatic actions. Dogen says, “An adept is endowed with six supernormal powers. The first is the power to move anywhere; the second is to hear everything; the third is to read others’ minds; the fourth is to identify previous lives; the fifth is to see everywhere; and the sixth is to extinguish attachments.” The passage continues:

“Everyone, here is my understanding:

“Do you want to know the power to move anywhere?” Dogen raises his fist.

“Do you want to know the power to hear everything?” He snaps his fingers once.

“Do you want to know the power to read others’ minds?” He hangs his legs from his seat.

“Do you want to know the power to identify previous lives?” He raises his flywhisk.

“Do you want to see the power to see everywhere?” He draws a circle in the air.

“Do you want to see the power to extinguish attachments?” He draws “one” in the air.^{[223](#)}

After sketching a single horizontal line with his whisk, Dogen remarks: “Although this is so, ultimately, six times six is thirty-six.” That simple calculation seems to equate the six supernormal powers with everyday activities, and the number thirty-six used here also implies that there are countless powers, beyond any fixed amount, that are apparent in each and every deed.

The Four Collections

Next, let us examine, in order of importance, the textual structure and spiritual message of each of the major collections, including the significance of their respective abbreviated versions.

Treasury of the True Dharma Eye

The writings contained in the *Treasury* are based largely on Dogen’s ingenious adaptations of the theories and training techniques he learned while practicing to attain enlightenment in China. He sought to integrate these methods rapidly and innovatively into the early medieval Japanese Buddhist context by targeting the pedagogical needs of the practitioners who joined his expanding assembly. The *Treasury* is his main compendium based on extensive quoting, while

usually recasting and reinterpreting—that is, never taking at face value but instead insisting on creative appropriations of—a wide variety of Zen instructions, koans, poems, records, and sayings. These source materials come from Rujing and dozens of other continental masters. In addition, Dogen cites passages from sutras as well as other Buddhist and East Asian religious and literary sources.

STRUCTURE. The great majority of chapters were composed at Koshoji temple in Kyoto, between 1239 and 1243, or at small hermitages during the transitional year in Echizen that lasted from the summer of 1243 to the spring of 1244. Following the opening of Eihei-ji, Dogen wrote far less material for the *Treasury*, as the focus of his teaching shifted to crafting the other major collections, especially the formal sermons in the *Extensive Record*. Nevertheless, he continued at Eihei-ji to put a great effort into the project of organizing the disparate informal sermons into a single coherent volume with an overarching title. He also began to rethink and rewrite some of the older chapters in an effort to form the New Draft, which was, unfortunately, left incomplete at the time of his death.

By grouping the chapters he was editing toward the end of his life into two main divisions, the Old Draft and New Draft, Dogen made it clear that he did not consider the *Treasury* a fixed or finished textual entity. Rather, it is a fluid amalgamation of themes and outlooks that he continually adjusted to teaching circumstances that were unfolding at Eihei-ji, where disciples with different levels of understanding and commitment frequently came and went. After Dogen's passing, the editing process was left to Ejo, who in the mid-1250s copied or discovered and compiled manuscripts with the assistance of Gien, another former Daruma school follower, who later became the fourth patriarch of Eihei-ji.^{[224](#)}

At that stage, Ejo wrote several instructive postscripts for New Draft chapters included in the twelve-chapter edition. In the case of “Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels” (“Kie bupposobo”), he reflects on the limitations of his role in that “during the summer retreat of 1255, I made an amended copy from my late teacher’s draft, but I realized it was not a polished version as Dogen surely would have completed additions and deletions. Since that is no longer possible, I am leaving this version intact.”²²⁵ For “Eight Learnings of a Great Person” (“Hachidainingaku”), Ejo remarks that Dogen was planning to develop a one-hundred-chapter edition that did not come to pass. Elsewhere he wonders whether there were additional lost manuscripts that might eventually be found.

Because Dogen’s intentions were never made clear, and there has long been considerable debate about ways of organizing the text, it is important to consider two interrelated issues: (1) how the *Treasury* became known by the twentieth century for having ninety-five chapters in a version referred to as the Main Temple Edition (Honzan-hon) and (2) why, since the 1970s, Japanese scholars agree that the most authentic version contains seventy-five chapters, plus an additional twelve, which together compose the Original Edition (Kohon). This analysis starts with the fact that, at the time of Dogen’s death, the *Treasury* was extant in four separate assemblages held at Eihei-ji by Ejo, described below:

Seventy-five chapters. Also known as the Old Draft, this version contains nearly all the vernacular writings composed through 1245, with the primary exception of “Discerning the Way,” which is not included. This version was the subject of the *Distinguished Comments* (*Gosho*) written by Senne and Kyogo by 1308 and was studied extensively at Keizan’s two main temples in the Noto peninsula, Yokoji and Sojiji. Currently, in Japan, this version is considered authoritative when combined with the twelve-chapter text because those two editions represent a composite of the Old and New Drafts.

Sixty chapters. Although this version may have been designed by Dogen and is sometimes referred to as an alternate of the Old Draft, its creation as an independent text is usually attributed to Giun, the fifth abbot of Eihei-ji. Giun deleted two dozen chapters that were critical of various Chinese Zen masters, while including seven sections from the twelve-chapter edition plus two miscellaneous chapters. First published in the late 1300s, while Giun's *Verse Comments* on each chapter were written in 1329 but not widely distributed until 1421, the sixty-chapter version of the *Treasury* was considered mainstream in Soto Zen during the late medieval period.

Twenty-eight chapters. Apparently compiled in three divisions by Ejo in order to supplement the sixty-chapter edition, this version includes additional sermons that are also found in the seventy-five and twelve-chapter editions, although some of the contents may vary somewhat. Also known as the Private (*himitsu*, lit. "secret") Treasury,²²⁶ this designation does not have the usual esoteric connotations. It suggests the version was an accumulation of chapters stored at Eihei-ji that was probably shared in a limited way only with monks who practiced or visited there.

Twelve chapters. Also known as the New Draft, this includes nine essays composed after Dogen returned to Eihei-ji in spring 1248 from Kamakura, where he preached to the shogun and, seemingly in reaction to that experience, developed a new focus on ethical issues as well as the purity of ritual practices. This version, which also contains two sermons that were written in 1240 and 1244, was long rumored to exist but not identified as an independent text until it was found at Yokoji temple in 1930. The discovered manuscript includes one chapter that was previously unknown, "One Hundred and Eight Gates to Enlightenment" ("Ippyakuhachi homyomon").

During the late medieval period, dozens of copies of the *Treasury* were produced at various Soto temples throughout Japan, with several new editions proposed that contain eighty-three or eighty-four chapters. The next main stage in the editing process was the

early part of the Edo period when, in 1686, the eminent scholar-monk Manzan, abbot at Daijōji temple, where he succeeded the reformer Gesshū, created a version with eighty-nine chapters. Manzan was the first compiler to develop the idea of producing a comprehensive edition based on chronology. Following this breakthrough, the three main editions were developed.

Kozen's ninety-five chapters. During the 1690s, Kozen, then abbot of Eihei-ji temple, suggested a version with ninety-five chapters, but he died before it could be published. In the 1700s, many scholastics wrote extensive commentaries on this and other versions of the *Treasury*. That took place despite the fact that the Soto sect, with the support of the shōgunate, issued an official ban on publishing the text until the controversies concerning the masterwork's organization could be sorted out.

Main Temple Edition (Honzan) with ninety-five chapters. This comprehensive edition with ninety-five chapters was officially published by the Eihei-ji abbot Gento beginning in 1803 as a woodblock print in twenty bound volumes, but there remained numerous discrepancies and inconsistencies regarding content. The first modern typeset edition was officially released in 1906 and was still being discussed and modified in early publications of *Dogen's Complete Works* edited by Okubo Doshu in 1935, 1939, and 1944.

Original Edition (Kohon). Okubo's most recently corrected edition of the *Complete Works*, published in 1969–1970,^{[227](#)} includes an essay explaining in detail his extensive research on manuscripts discovered in the twentieth century. Since then, it has become standard to consider an edition with seventy-five chapters, with the supplemental twelve chapters (plus, in most cases, from one to sixteen additional chapters), as representative of what is closest to Dogen's authorial intention. Therefore, the ninety-five-chapter edition has been considered passé.

MESSAGE. Dogen, throughout all the *Treasury* versions, makes clear that Zen practice must be fully engaged with the particular temporal situations comprising causes and conditions. Being-time (*uji*) rejects any idea of an eternal realm by embracing the unity of living-dying and before-after each and every moment. Authentic time does not exist as an external, objective container because it is nothing other than the dynamic activity of contemplative awareness. Dogen sees everyday circumstances as fluid and moving in many directions simultaneously. This dynamism is not reducible to linear clock time, although the conventional level of understanding is not denied altogether because it, too, represents a manifestation of the depths of being-time.

This premodern seize-the-day (*carpe diem*) standpoint—enunciated so compellingly in the *Treasury* chapters “Realization Here and Now” (“Genjokoan”) and “Total Activity” (“Zenki”), among others—has found tremendous resonance with contemporary worldviews. Notably, it shows considerable overlap with current subjective attitudes toward interpreting the all-encompassing quality of temporality that embraces finitude and contingency. Some examples of modern understandings that highlight the temporal presence of existence, rather than eternity, range from the existential phenomenology of Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time* and the quantum mechanics represented in Albert Einstein’s relativity of space-time to the literary modernism of James Joyce’s ruminations on epiphany in the modernist stories in *Dubliners* or the Beat cadences of Jack Kerouac’s narrative in *On the Road*.

An ancient Buddhist proverb reads, “When the time is ripe, enlightenment will be attained.” But, according to the radical interpretation of this saying by Dogen in the *Treasury* chapter “Buddha-Nature” (“Bussho”), which is the longest and most detailed section in terms of philosophical content, “The time is already ripe, so enlightenment occurs right now.”²²⁸ The rhetorical sleight of hand in transforming a long-standing expression emphasizing potentiality

for the future into an affirmation of simultaneity in the present moment was created by virtue of a syntactical reassignment of the Sino-Japanese characters used in the original sentence. This deceptively simple discursive flourish enables the meaning to accord with Dogen's complex view. It suggests that, while living amid the everyday world characterized by incessant change and unsettling flux, an authentic Zen practitioner must be able to appropriate all moments as opportunities to actualize the true reality of the universal buddha-nature. "Not a moment is to be spent idly in twenty-four hours!" is an injunction used as the title of a waka that further reflects Dogen's focus on the unremitting dedication and determination to maintain discipline that is required of Zen adepts. This is because "negotiating life and death is the great matter of our being," yet we must become aware that "time does not fly like an arrow" or simply pass by in linear fashion.

The passages regarding momentary time are among many dozens of intriguing examples in which Dogen challenges those standpoints tending to deemphasize the role of language. Whereas such stances present language as a distraction that detracts from the quest to attain awakening, his focus is on the utility of various types of expression for spiritual attainment. Dogen illustrates this view by instances of purposefully puzzling sayings that reflect a fundamentally paradoxical view of reality. Some of the illuminating maxims include the following:

- " 'Mountains are mountains' does not mean 'mountains are mountains,' yet it does."
- "Only the painting of a rice cake can satisfy one's hunger; no other remedy applies."
- "To study the way is to study the self, and to study the self is to forget the self."
- "Life is a continuous mistake, or a series of misunderstandings one after another."

- “A full being-time half known is a half being-time fully known.”[229](#)

Such cryptic adages demonstrate the distinctive discursive style found throughout the *Treasury*. All chapters highlight difficulties and challenges to overcoming delusion and ignorance. A major part of this effort is showing that anywhere one turns usually reveals a sense of being trapped by partial perspectives, misleading assumptions, circular thinking, and the uncertainty of deception or blunder. Yet each of the dictums, if properly understood, also discloses a contrary standpoint. Dogen’s approach to realizing enlightenment surpasses illusion by embracing the comprehensive unity of all forms of existence as well as endless variability perpetually manifested in everyday life.

True reality is unified, but as soon as one tries to explain a particular thing, any utterance appears at first hopelessly misguided. From within the midst of a series of errors and fragmentations, however, a genuine understanding of wholeness can instantaneously emerge, even though any expression of this level of insight still needs to be continually clarified and modified depending on pedagogical circumstances. Carrying out that ongoing interpretative task requires an innovative way with words; language must be chosen carefully to articulate the fundamental contradictions embedded in human experience that leads from misunderstanding to genuine awareness.

Much light has been shed on the message of the *Treasury* by dozens of prose and poetic commentaries composed by Soto monks over the centuries. In one key example, Giun’s remarks on “Realization Here and Now” include the capping phrase “What is it?” which can be interpreted to indicate not an inquiry but the declaration “This very existence is really real reality.” His four-line verse comment reads,

Do not overlook what is right in front of you,
Endless spring appears with the early plum blossoms.
By using just a single word you enter the open gate,
Nine oxen pulling with all their might cannot lead you astray.²³⁰

Therefore, truth is readily apparent in all phenomena, but it is easily overlooked if one expects that it can only be found in a disconnected realm.

Furthermore, Giun's comment suggests that spring is not the abstraction of a date on the calendar, somehow separable from seasonal manifestations. Rather, it exists in and through concrete particulars whenever springlike conditions, such as the flowering of plum blossoms, become apparent. Despite conventional Zen strictures, Dogen strongly encouraged creative expressions. An appropriate saying functions as a turning word that releases obstructions and enables awakening. An ox symbolizes selfish desires and attachments that need to be tamed and controlled lest they discourage even determined practitioners. They must utilize the utmost single-minded concentration accompanied by minute attention to the finest details. However, nine oxen cannot distract a true adept from realizing the immediacy of each and every moment as it occurs.

ABBREVIATION. The *Principles of Practice-Realization* is a thirty-one-paragraph text presented in five sections. It consists of selections of brief passages extracted from the ninety-five-chapter edition of the *Treasury*, with an emphasis on passages from the twelve-chapter edition (which, at the time, was not considered a stand-alone version). This abridgement was created in the late 1880s by several editors, especially the lay leader Ouchi Seiran, one of the giant intellectual figures of Meiji-era Buddhism. It was published in 1890 by the Soto sect headquarters. The *Principles* outlines the Zen religious life based on the following standpoints (paraphrasing the

titles of the sections): understanding the problem of life-and-death (*hoji*) and the universality of karmic retribution; penitence leading to the eradication of evil karma (*zange metsuzai*); receiving the sixteen precepts (*jukai nyui*), according to Dogen's distinctive view of traditional Buddhist practice; benefiting others through a vow of benevolence (*hotsugan risho*); and expressing gratitude by means of constant compassionate practice (*gyoji hoon*).²³¹

The *Principles* was quickly declared the sect's primary manual for guiding lay devotion as well as many monastic ceremonies. The text is primarily used today in funeral liturgies, but its significance goes well beyond this role. The aim of the *Principles* is to foster peace of mind attained through the founder's ideas (*shui anjin*), which link theory and practice, ideals and ceremonies, and monastics and laity. Thus, this text serves as a centerpiece in the modern development of the sect. It does not, however, mention even a single time zazen or the need for meditation, which seems unusual, although its focus on the role of the precepts reflects key elements evident in Dogen's approach to Zen training. The passage cited below, culled from the twelve-chapter version of the *Treasury*, indicates that as a late nineteenth-century compilation influenced by Christian missionary preaching, the *Principles* puts a strong emphasis on repentance as a means of eliminating the effects of karma:

Although karmic retribution for evil actions invariably infiltrates all three stages of time, the act of repentance transforms and lessens the effects considerably, and results in the eradication of wrongdoing or sin and the attainment of purity. Therefore, let us confess before the Buddha in all sincerity, and realize that when we do this, the power of repentance not only saves and purifies us but stimulates the growth of doubt-free faith and earnest effort that changes others as well, with benefits encompassing all beings, animate and inanimate.²³²

Although such a focus may appear at odds with the mainstream of Dogen's thought, it clearly resembles how the universal power of zazen practice is depicted in "Discerning the Way."

Extensive Record

Dogen's second major collection was assembled by several of his closest disciples, including Ejo, Gien, and Senne, from writings based on oral presentations representing his entire career, starting in China. The text was compiled according to the model of the recorded sayings (Ch. yulu, Jp. goroku) or collected annals of Chinese masters, one of the main genres of Zen literature featured during the Song dynasty. Dogen's work was the first example of this literary genre produced in Japan. Reedited in the seventeenth century, after several hundred years of neglect, it was compiled into two versions that are still used today. Also, its abbreviated version, created in the 1260s, was printed in the 1350s as one of the earliest and, for a long time, the most popular of the official Soto Zen publications.

STRUCTURE. There are currently two main editions of the *Extensive Record*. One is the 1598 manuscript attributed to the monk Monkaku, which is generally considered the authentic version and appears in modern editions of the complete works of Dogen. Another manuscript, believed to be older than Monkaku's, is known as the patriarchal (*sozan*) version, but this is undated and does not vary in any significant way. The second main edition, known as the popular (*rufubon*) version, is from 1672 by Manzan, one of the leaders of the eighteenth-century revival of Soto scholastic studies who also had a tremendous impact on editing editions of the *Treasury*. Despite numerous, and at times important, discrepancies between the Monkaku/*sozan* and the Manzan/*rufubon* editions, (especially in the numbering of some passages, particularly in the first volume, and their exact wording, particularly in the tenth volume), the contents of

the *Extensive Record* editions follow the same basic structure. As shown in the table opposite, this consists of 531 formal sermons from Koshoji and Eiheiji in the first seven volumes, with the last three volumes containing various kinds of lectures and poems.

The first seven volumes are chronological records of Dogen's formal talks delivered to an assembly of almost entirely clerical followers. The 126 sermons in the first volume were presented at Koshoji between 1236 and the seventh month of 1243, just before Dogen left with his assembly for Echizen. The sermons in the second volume resumed in the fourth month of 1245, after the new dharma hall was opened at Eiheiji. The eighth volume contains a variety of materials, including evening talks (*shosan*) given to students in the abbot's quarters, followed by dharma words (*hogo*), or lengthier writings probably based on Dogen's letters to individual students, who sometimes are named in the selections. Volume eight concludes with a revised version of the *Universal Recommendation for the Practice of Zazen*.

Contents of the *Extensive Record*

1. Koshoji formal sermons 1–126, from 1236–1243, ed. Senne—a two-year hiatus during the transition to Echizen, with no dharma hall
2. Daibutsuji* formal sermons 127–184, 1245–1246, ed. Ejo
3. Eiheiji formal sermons 185–257, 1246–1248, ed. Ejo
4. Eiheiji formal sermons 258–345, 1248–1249, ed. Ejo
5. Eiheiji formal sermons 346–413, 1249–1251, ed. Gien
6. Eiheiji formal sermons 414–470, 1251, ed. Gien
7. Eiheiji formal sermons 471–531, 1251–1252, ed. Gien
8. Talks (20 evening talks, 14 dharma words, <i>Fukanzazengi</i>), 1233–1252, ed. Ejo
9. Koan commentary (90 cases with one or two verse comments), 1236, ed. Senne
10. Chinese poetry (25 eulogies, 125 lyrical verses), 1223–1253, ed. Senne

The contents and dates of composition for the *Extensive Record*; * denotes that the original temple name was changed to Eiheiji in 1246.

Volume nine consists of a collection of ninety koan cases with Dogen's Chinese-style verse remarks from 1236, a year after the *Three Hundred Koan Case Collection* was produced. Volume 10 consists of another compilation of Dogen's poetry written in Chinese. It contains 150 poems composed in the years from 1226, while he was in China, until 1252 at Eiheiji. The verses are divided into three sections: 5 are eulogies or encomia to be inscribed on portraits of great ancient masters (*shinsan*), with 2 for Shakyamuni "coming down from the mountain" and one each for Bodhidharma, Ananda, and Myozen. After this are 20 eulogies that were meant to be inscribed on portraits of Dogen (*jisan*), as a customary Zen poetic form often based on ironic, self-deprecatory wording. We can only be sure that two of these poems were used in paintings. The remainder

of the tenth volume consists of 125 lyrical verses on diverse topics involving reclusive practice. According to the recorder, Senne, the first 50 of these were composed at Mount Tiantong monastery, and verses 51–76 were written after Dogen’s return to Japan in Kyoto. Verse 77 was written at the end of the visit to Kamakura in 1248, and verses 78–125 were authored in Echizen.

MESSAGE. Dogen employed many basic thematic and stylistic approaches consistently throughout the *Extensive Record*. These include an emphasis on the role of the continuous practice of zazen as an essential component of the religious quest; the frequent use of the imagery of plum blossoms as a symbol of renewal and awakening; the demonstrative use of the Zen staff and fly whisk as indicators of the master’s genuine sense of authority; and an eagerness to critique many eminent Chinese Chan predecessors whose records he frequently cites and rewrites. Sermon 2.135, delivered for the winter solstice of 1245, evokes a combination of these symbols and attitudes in revising a passage from the record of Hongzhi, who said:

Yin reaches its fullness and yang arises, strength is exhausted and our state changes. A green dragon runs fleetly when his bones are exposed. A black panther is transformed when he is clothed in mist. Take the skulls of the buddhas of the three times, and thread them onto a single rosary. Do not speak of bright and dark heads, as truly they are sun-faced and moon-faced. Even if my measuring cup is full and the balance scale is level, in transactions I sell at a high price and buy when cheap. Zen worthies, do you understand? In a bowl the bright pearl rolls on its own without prodding.^{[233](#)}

In the original sermon, Hongzhi also quotes a dialogue in which master Xuefeng tells a monk to “go do your community work,” but

Hongzhi replies ironically, “Don’t dare go! If you move an inch, I’ll give you thirty blows. Why? If a luminous jewel without flaw has a pattern carved, its virtue is lost.” In response to this, Dogen says, “Although my venerable predecessors spoke their way, I do not agree. Great assembly, listen carefully and consider this well: If a luminous jewel without flaw is polished, its luster increases.” He then rewords the lengthy Hongzhi passage to strip its symbolism and concludes by asking rhetorically, “How could directly transcending the realm of emptiness have anything to do with the earthly seasons of spring, autumn, winter, or summer?”

The formal sermons of the *Extensive Record* reveal key aspects of Dogen’s decision at Eihei-ji to adhere strictly to the liturgy of monastic routine. He did so following the model of the Chinese patriarchs as delineated in the *Rules for Zen Monasteries* of 1103, which says the formal sermons are to be delivered at least six times a month, especially on the first, fifth, tenth, fifteenth, twentieth, and twenty-fifth days of the lunar month, in addition to other ceremonial occasions. Dogen adjusted the prescribed schedule that was implemented in China to fit the needs of Zen monasticism in Japan. It is clear that the Buddha’s birth, death, and enlightenment anniversaries, in addition to memorials for Dogen’s Japanese teacher Eisai and Chinese mentor Rujing, were favorite events in the yearly cycle. Dogen also presented sermons for seasonal celebrations, especially in the fall (new and full moons in the eighth, ninth, and tenth months). Many examples, including some sermons delivered for memorials, convey a sense of spontaneity through the use of verse commentary or demonstrative gestures that occurred at the end of the discourse.

It is interesting that the most frequently cited Chinese patriarch in the *Extensive Record* is not Rujing, whose recorded sayings are cited ten times, but Hongzhi, whose record is quoted verbatim forty-five times. Dogen quoted Hongzhi in several instances on the occasion of the Buddha’s birthday between 1246 and 1249 and in

other sermons during these years, such as for New Year's, the beginning and closing of the summer retreat, the Dragon Boat Festival, and the winter solstice, usually by employing his familiar strategy of combining citation with criticism. These passages are primarily from the section of the *Extensive Record* that was edited by Ejo. A reliance on Hongzhi did not continue in later sections edited by Gien, who later became the third abbot of Eihei-ji, but it is interesting that the recorded-sayings collection that Giun compiled and published in the mid-1300s as the fifth abbot of Eihei-ji greatly emphasizes the influence of Hongzhi's work on the formation of early Soto Zen practice.

Furthermore, in more than half a dozen sermons, Dogen's main emphasis is to proclaim the originality and priority of the distinctive style of Zen practice he single-handedly imported from China to his native country, as shown in the table opposite. In addition to these examples, there are at least fifteen times in volumes 2 through 7 when Dogen's sermon is dedicated to the appreciation or appointment of a temple administrator, including the cook, head monk, librarian, monastery director, receptionist, rector, or secretary.

Another component of the *Extensive Record* is that it serves as a repository for over four hundred fifty Chinese-style poems, if we include in the counting about two hundred verses that appear in the sections of formal sermons as stand-alone poems or capping phrases on the prior discussion of koans. Here, from entry 7.481 of 1251, is an example of a verse used as the entire sermon:

White reed flowers not stained by dust,
Belong to those who experience wind and light.
Each time plum blossoms bloom in late winter,
They announce the emerging of endless spring.²³⁴

Dogen's Proclamations in Formal Sermons

Refers to “the first evening sermon (<i>bansan</i>) delivered in Japan,” in 2.128 (1245)
Dogen says he is “the first to transmit rules for the cook in Japan,” in 2.138 (1245)
“I expound Zen discourse that is appropriate for the time and place,” in 3.244 (1247)
The monks’ hall (<i>sodo</i>) at Eiheiiji is “the first in Japan for zazen,” in 4.319 (1249)*
“Japanese monks listen to formal sermons (<i>jodo</i>) that I transmitted,” in 5.358 (1249)
Eiheiiji receives “a new edition of the Buddhist canon (<i>Daizokyo</i>),” in 5.361–362 (1250)
For Dogen, “the most extraordinary thing” is to preach sermons, in 5.378 (1250)
“I initiated celebrating the birth of Buddha (<i>Rohatsu</i>) in Japan,” in 5.406 (1250)

Eight sermons on the origins and impact of Zen rituals in Japan, according to Dogen; * note that Koshoji temple also had a monks’ hall, where clerics slept and sat.

ABBREVIATION. The abridged *Recorded Sayings* (*Eihei goroku*) was created in the 1260s, about a decade after Dogen’s death, when one of his leading disciples, the former Daruma school monk Giin, went to China to show the *Extensive Record* to Dogen’s former dharma brothers or their successors. At that time, one of the prestigious Chinese Rinzai teachers added a preface. He also suggested creating a more succinct volume by selecting passages representing about 15 percent of the longer text, as shown in the table on [this page](#), along with an added verse that was culled from the *Treasury*

chapter "Lancet of Zazen," which is a rewriting of a famous Hongzhi verse.

Comparison of the *Extensive Record* (ER) and the *Recorded Sayings* (RS)

	ER	RS
Sermons, vols. 1–7	531	75
from Koshoji, vol. 1	126	22
from Eiheiji, vols. 2–7	405	53
Talks, vol. 8	35	8
Evening sermons	20	4
Dharma words	14	2
<i>Fukanzazengi</i>	1	1
“Lancet of Zazen”	n/a	1
Koan comments, vol. 9	90	n/a
Verses, vol. 10	145	20
Eulogies for others	5	n/a
Eulogies for self	20	3
Lyrical poems	125	17
TOTALS	713	103

The contents of the *Recorded Sayings* extracted
from the *Extensive Record*.

In Japan, the *Recorded Sayings*, as a handy and accessible distillation, quickly became one of the most frequently cited works in the history of the medieval Soto sect. For many years it appears to have been in much heavier use than either the *Extensive Record* or the *Treasury*. An emphasis on this abbreviated text persisted until, during the Edo period, there arose a renewed concern with studying the original complete and undiluted writings of the founder. At that

point, interest in the full version of the *Extensive Record* became preeminent.

Monastic Rules

Dogen's *Monastic Rules* is a compilation of six separate writings composed in Chinese (kanbun) concerning various aspects of monastic practice.²³⁵ Unlike the *Treasury* and the *Extensive Record*, which were planned by Dogen in collaboration with close disciples, these essays were not originally intended to be grouped together. The first known attempts at compilation, with three or four selections, were made in 1502 by the fifteenth abbot of Eihei-ji, Koshu. The full collection as it stands today was originally published in its entirety in 1667 by the thirtieth abbot, Kosho Chido. An impetus for Chido's editorial efforts was that, during the seventeenth century, the Soto sect found itself in intense competition with the emerging Obaku Zen school, which had recently migrated from southeastern China and put a strong emphasis on disciplinary regulations imported from the mainland. Chido no doubt wanted to highlight the founder's interest and expertise concerning this important topic.

This text, like almost all Zen regulations, is based on the model of the *Rules for Zen Monasteries* from 1103. This work was in turn derived from numerous precursor writings. These East Asian writings exerted a lasting impact on various schools in China and Japan by supplementing the traditional Buddhist codes contained in the Vinaya with new clerical behavioral instructions. The very first example of Zen monastic rules is traditionally attributed to the Tang-dynasty master Baizhang, who is widely regarded as the founder of the Zen work ethic expressed in his influential dictum "A day without work is a day without eating," which inspired Dogen's view of the value of exerting oneself strenuously at all times.

STRUCTURE. The *Monastic Rules* by Dogen was significantly revised when it was republished in the early 1800s by the fiftieth Eiheiiji abbot, Gento, as part of the 550th anniversary of Dogen's death (an event that also triggered other important textual productions, including the first release of the Main Temple Edition of the *Treasury*). At that time, Gento also created an abridged version that is still used extensively at Soto training monasteries. As shown in the table opposite, the main text contains the much-admired essay on the role of the cook, which was written at Koshoji based largely on Dogen's personal reflections on his experiences at Kenninji and Tiantong. This is accompanied by five chapters composed at Eiheiiji concerning the functions of a host of temple managers and stewards, including the director, attendant, head monk, cook, work leader, gardener, tea manager, fire manager, rice manager, treasurer, recorder, maintenance chief, construction overseer, supervisors of the study hall and meditation hall, and prefects of the canon of scriptures, guest rooms, bathing facility, and more.

MESSAGE. Even though the text's origins are quite different than the *Treasury*, the message is somewhat consistent with Dogen's masterwork for two main reasons. First, the contents of the *Monastic Rules*, which provides practical instructions for procedures taking place "within the gates and gardens of the monastery" (often borrowed from the traditional Vinaya or previous Zen guidelines), dovetails with several *Treasury* chapters that focus specifically on the minutiae of priestly activities. These include "Washing the Face" ("Senmen") and "On Cleaning" ("Senjo"), in addition to "The Principles of Zazen" ("Zazengi"), "Merits of the Robe" ("Kesa kudoku"), "Conduct Appropriate for the Meditation Hall" ("Ju undo shiki"), and "Instructions for Monks in the Kitchen" ("Jikuin mon"). In fact, the latter two chapters have, in some editions of Dogen's complete works, been removed from the *Treasury* and included instead as an appendix of the *Monastic Rules*.

The second reason for comparing the two compilations is that much of Dogen's emphasis in dealing with disciplinary guidelines is to offer suggestions for beneficial attitudinal approaches over and above particular directives. This makes the *Monastic Rules* relevant to the application of meditative awareness in everyday endeavors in ways found in many *Treasury* chapters. Zen monastic regulations may appear to function as a framework for upholding ethical conduct, with consequences enforced through punishments, but this can be seen as a matter of coercing rigid proscriptions or restrictively hierarchical regulations. The essay *Enacting Dharma When Meeting Senior Instructors* is a short piece that consists entirely of sixty-two rules, without discussion, for proper etiquette when interacting with highly ranked monks.^{[236](#)}

Contents of the *Monastic Rules*

1. <i>Instructions for the Cook (Tenzokyokun)</i> , 1237
2. <i>Methods for Discerning the Way (Bendoho)</i> , 1246
3. <i>Enacting Dharma When Taking Food (Fushuku hanpo)</i> , 1246
4. <i>Regulations for the Study Hall (Shuryo shingi)</i> , 1249
5. <i>Enacting Dharma When Meeting Senior Instructors (Taitako gogejariho)</i> , 1244
6. <i>Rules for Temple Administrators (Chiji shingi)</i> , 1246

The chapters of the text that Dogen did not plan as a single work but was created in 1667.

In *Instructions for the Cook* and *Rules for Temple Administrators* (the lengthy final essay that takes up nearly half of the text of the *Monastic Rules*), however, Dogen examines more than two dozen koan cases and other sayings featuring exemplary figures from the history of Zen lore. These include numerous eminent Tang masters who, when they served in temple managerial roles early in their careers, were frequently involved in bending or breaking rules, as appropriate to circumstances, rather than merely obeying or imposing them—even if this sometimes resulted in their own temporary expulsion from the temple. Monastic regulations and precepts for Dogen are meant to be in the service of total dedication to the investigation of reality and a commitment to caring for the assembly's overall well-being. Each ordinary function, from cleaning the grounds to taking care of personal hygiene, is treated as a tool for enhancing mindful awareness of the moment-to-moment state of activity.

The Zen luminaries Dogen selects in citing these dialogues clarify that the training of true adepts cannot proceed simply by following a prescribed routine or program. Monastic procedures based on

regularity must serve as a catalyst to propel the practitioner toward actualizing the inner spirit that reflects spontaneous awareness. Yet Dogen also seeks to avoid the antinomian implication, for which the defunct Daruma school was criticized, that “anything goes,” by insisting that even a minor deviance or variation must not be done simply for the sake of showing iconoclasm. Instead, an alteration should reflect spiritual life steeped in genuine clerical training and decorum. Therefore, it is clear from the prototypes mentioned that Dogen sees the purpose of monastic training not as a rigid alignment with some artificial code but the development of compassionate concern guided by thoroughly sincere intentions and persistent inquiries into the deep mysteries of awakening.

ABBREVIATION. In creating an abridged version in 1805, Gento coined the title *Large Monastic Rules (Eihei dai shingi)* to refer to the original work in contrast to the abbreviated *Condensed Monastic Rules (Eihei sho shingi)*. The structure of the reduced text, however, is quite different because it consists primarily of a schedule of chores and activities, including meditation and recitations enacted on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis. The itinerary also covers ceremonies and celebrations, as well as vegetarian banquets and periods of fasting between eating only what is necessary and sufficient for sustenance as prepared and served by the cook and his assistants.

The details for eating meals require keeping four or five nesting bowls placed in a stand with cloths for wrapping, wiping, and covering one’s lap, in addition to having a place mat, utensil bag, spoon, chopsticks, and cleaning sticks. On entering the refectory each monk must walk carefully, step by step, to the sounds of drums, bells, or clappers, and then offer greetings to colleagues and beneficent spirits before setting out their bowls. This is followed by opening recitations, the humble serving of the food, eating quietly and appreciatively while showing gratitude for the workers, cleaning

up thoroughly, and exiting the hall silently. The actions are all carried out within the thoughtfully prescribed locus of sanctified monastic space. The taking of a meal is meant to reflect and cultivate the sincere attitude of ingesting just enough (*oryoki*) nourishment while using the exact amount of resources needed, so that all members of the assembly are satisfied and nobody is left wanting for a single grain of rice.

Japanese Poetry Collection

This collection, also referred to as *Verses on the Way from Sansho Peak* (*Sanshodoei*, indicating the original name of the mountain where Eihei-ji is located, which was renamed by Dogen as Mount Kichijō), is one of the most controversial in Dogen's corpus. There was no mention of the work until Japanese waka poems were included in the 1472 edition of his biography, the *Record of Kenzei*. Composed by the fourteenth abbot of Eihei-ji, this account reports that the compilation was assembled by a previous Soto temple abbot in 1420. It is certainly plausible that Dogen, as a well-educated Kyoto native with deep connections to the Fujiwara family, would have composed in this literary style to express an underlying Buddhist thematic element. Fujiwara members were involved in producing the main waka collections during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The most prominent figure, the famous poet and literary critic Fujiwara Teika, was apparently befriended by Dogen, according to a letter that he sent while teaching in Kyoto. It is also possible that Dogen participated in poetry contests (*renga*) regularly held in the capital. That said, critics have made credible claims that some of these poems were not actually authored by Dogen but were invented later by editors in the Soto tradition.

STRUCTURE. Since the earliest manuscripts of the *Record of Kenzei* are from the sixteenth century, there is a gap of more than three

hundred years between the time of Dogen and the editors who produced the extant versions of his waka collection. According to modern scholars, and as shown in this table, fifty-three verses in the collection are confirmed as authentic and another ten are considered very likely to be compositions by Dogen.

Contents of the Japanese Poetry Collection

2 verses on facing death, 1253
5 poems on the Lotus Sutra, at Eiheiiji
1 celebrating first snowfall in Echizen, 1244
12 doctrinal verses presented to the shogun, 1248 in Kamakura
33 poems written at a grass hut, near Eiheiiji
10 miscellaneous verses, unknown origin

The sixty-three waka included in the complete waka compilation.

MESSAGE. Dogen is generally considered to be more of a philosopher than a poet, in part because he sometimes disdained vain literary efforts, especially in the *Miscellaneous Talks*. Yet his verses are of great value for several reasons. First, as Hee-Jin Kim stresses, the “reason of the Way” (*dori*) is the basis of Dogen’s approach to language. This concept implies that “for all his admonitions against play with words, he was deeply poetic, and, as a medieval Japanese, he could not have been otherwise. To Dogen, to philosophize was not only to think but also to feel, not only to rationalize but also to poeticize.”²³⁷ A prominent example of literary eloquence is the waka on “true seeing received at birth” (*fubo shosho no manako*), a phrase borrowed from the Lotus Sutra. This verse makes wordplays relating home to enlightenment (*sato*) and also connecting deep mountains (*miyama*) with the capital (*miyako*), which implies true selfhood formed after childhood:

Tazune iru	Seeking the Way
Miyama no oku no	Amid the deepest mountain
	paths,
Sato nareba	The retreat I find
Moto sumi nareshi	Is none other than
Miyako nari keri	My primordial home: satori! ²³⁸

Moreover, the Japanese poems, most of which were composed at Eihei-ji, elegantly display Dogen's remarkable facility with language. Dogen's expressiveness reflects an indebtedness to the major rhetorical methods and conceits of the Japanese poetic tradition, such as the use of pivot words (*kakekotoba*), relational words (*engo*), and allusive variation (*honkadori*). These waka techniques, which sometimes go against ordinary grammatical structures, are methods of achieving a polyphonic plenitude of meanings, images, and ideas in a compressed number of syllables. In addition, Japanese poems illuminate key aspects of Dogen's life and thought not generally revealed in his prose writings, including his trip to Kamakura, feelings about Kyoto while residing in the northern provinces, views of nature in relation to temple rituals, and anticipation of death. Finally, Dogen's waka poetry, which was highlighted in Kawabata Yasunari's Nobel Prize acceptance speech of 1968, is important for understanding the connections between religion and the arts in medieval Buddhism and Japanese culture.

ABBREVIATION. The segment with five waka on the topic of the Lotus Sutra, which Dogen refers to in the *Treasury* as the "king of all the scriptures," is sometimes used as an abridgement for the collection. The first verse, recalling a motto displayed at some Soto temples, "How do we think about lotus blossoms emerging from the mud," suggests that ordinary life flows with the cadences of the sutra:

Yomo sugara	Day and night
-------------	---------------

Hinemosu ni nasu	Night and day,
Nori no michi	The way of Dharma as everyday life;
Mina kono kyo no	In each act our hearts
Koe to kokoro to	Resonate with the call of the sutra.

In the other four poems in this sequence, even the cries of monkeys express the sutra as it is perceived amid the majestic mountains and valley streams representing the voice and body of Shakyamuni. This vision is influenced by a poem written by Su Shi cited in the *Treasury* chapter “Sounds of Valley Streams, Colors of the Mountains.” The sutra is also apparent in the hustle and bustle of the marketplace. According to the last waka in the series, spiritual awakening caused by the sutra is evident at the moment a horse swiftly gallops by and teaches the lesson that the evanescence of all forms of existence causes suffering or liberation depending on one’s attitude.

Several of these verses, especially the one celebrating the manifestation of the spiritual presence of Shakyamuni in the physical realm, have been set to music by modern Soto priests. Beginning in the 1950s, the sect has encouraged regular choir activities, known as Baikaryu (“Plum Blossom Singing,” honoring the natural image featured in so many expressions by Dogen), at many temples throughout Japan. These usually feature singing by lay female practitioners, along with the ringing of handheld bells as an accompaniment, although the exact musical style tends to vary with location. Currently there are several dozen songs in the repertoire, many of which are based on Dogen’s various poems and other inspiring sayings. It is also notable that many of Dogen’s Chinese-style poems are memorized and recited with musical intonation by monks in a tradition that goes back to the seventeenth century.

CHAPTER 7

Dignified Demeanor in All Activities

The Legacy of Dogen Zen

A POPULAR MAXIM long proclaimed by the Soto and Rinzai sects reads, “Zen prevails throughout the world” (*tenka zenrin*, which literally means, “the Zen forest, or sangha, spreads under heaven”). This traditional saying could be expressed in modern idiom as, “Zen rules!” In that rendering, “rules” functions as a verb. But there is also a traditional adage, famously carved into a rock at a temple in ancient China, which uses the word as a noun to suggest, “Zen behavioral regulations [*shingī*] flourish everywhere [*tenka*].” Dogen appreciated this saying very much.

The aim of Dogen’s teaching mission was in effect to make Zen rules rule—that is, to disseminate effectively the contemplative worldview of zazen, with its strict yet flexible codes of conduct. This requires a bodhisattva-like commitment to instructing followers in the theoretical principles and practical methods composing traditional Zen practice.

Although Dogen oriented most of his teaching toward monastic life, for many enthusiasts today his approach seems applicable not only for clerical but also lay practitioners. Dogen has come to be seen as a religious figure able to help both monastics and laypeople find peace of mind through harmonious existence within the complex and deeply unsettled circumstances of modern society. Questions

remain, however, about the extent to which Dogen's teachings are relevant to broader communal concerns regarding social injustice and environmental degradation, among other issues of our day.

Buddhas in the World: The Cultural Applicability of Dogen Zen

Oroka naru	What can I accomplish?
Ware wa hotoke ni	Although not yet a Buddha,
Narazu tomo	Let this priest's body
Shujo o watasu	Be the raft that carries
So no mi naran	Sentient beings to the yonder shore. <u>239</u>

In this poem, one can see Dogen's subdued sense of humility and empathy about his teaching mission. Yet these qualities are coupled with an intense independence, which is in turn modulated by the steady obligation to fulfill the pledge of compassion conveyed in the waka.

Another verse in Dogen's collection further highlights his reverential outlook:

Kusa no iho ni	Each moment waking, sleeping
Nete mo samite mo	In my grass-thatched hut
Mosu koto	I offer this prayer:
Namu Shakamuni	Let Shakyamuni Buddha's
butsu	compassion
Kaerimi tamae	Envelop the world. <u>240</u>

In carrying out the effort to selflessly guide the salvation of all beings, Dogen was cognizant of his unique status and special role as the first prominent teacher to introduce Zen, in all of its philosophical and ritual implications, to his home country. This took

place during an unstable era when the previously unified Tendai sect was splintering into many new Buddhist factions that competed with, yet in some basic ways complemented, each other. Dogen occupied the vantage point of surveying critically the full range of Buddhist standpoints that stemmed from Indian sources and had been transformed into the ideologies of early Chinese schools. He took a broad and creative view of the vast sweep of the Buddhist tradition, which led eventually, in the East Asian context, to the prevalence of the Zen meditative method. Moreover, based on his firsthand knowledge of Song-dynasty institutions and procedures, to which only a small handful of pilgrims were privy, Dogen also cast his gaze constructively at the strengths and deficiencies of the full history and current state of Japanese religions. He hoped to change rapidly, and in many ways radically, the status quo of Buddhism in Japan, inventively integrating continental ideas and ideals with native language and customs.

Dogen's mindfulness of his pivotal position at a crucial turning point in both Buddhist and Japanese cultural history is clear in some of his boasts. Even if the bravado was meant to be somewhat tongue-in-cheek, it suggested that he was the initial master to establish so many different elements of Zen training. These included the priority of just sitting, delivering various kinds of sermons and writing Buddhist poetry, initiating celebrations of the Buddha's birthday that incorporated a week of intensive meditation (*sesshin*), and esteeming the roles of the cook and other monastic officers. Dogen was also the earliest master in Japan to wield or pound his staff dramatically and raise his fist emphatically. Such gestures were performed to persuade his audience at Eihei-ji, which included both long-term devotees and some casual followers, of the magnitude of his religious vision. He sought to assure them that the novel Zen techniques he was implementing would long endure.

For Dogen, the teaching mission is not a matter of bringing the Buddha down to earth, as the process is sometimes described,

implying top-down descent from a higher realm. Rather, he depicts the striving for authenticity that transcends yet is found fully within the framework of everyday life, or what Martin Heidegger refers to as human “being-in-the-world” (*in-der-Welt-sein*). This could be expressed in Zen as “buddhas-in the-world.” Dogen’s goal is to transform students’ understanding away from conceiving of practice methods as instruments for altering existence. Instead, he points toward a realization-based standpoint in which ongoing contemplative reflexivity attunes to the ever-present quality of buddhas becoming buddhas.

As part of this project, Dogen argues, sometimes heatedly, against certain tendencies that he considers hopelessly deficient and counterproductive to the religious quest. These trends, referred to in several fascicles of the *Treasury* as the Senika heresy (Senni gedo),^{[241](#)} are apparent in the typical Rinzai Zen view of sudden enlightenment, which supposes unrealistically that passions can be cut off all at once. The tendency is also evident in the Daruma school’s naive affirmation of ordinary behavior without full-fledged mental cultivation, which infers that following the precepts is not needed because one’s natural state in itself is sufficient for awakening.

Dogen Zen: The Rules of the Quest for Awakening

The bodhisattva undertaking has several distinctive components in Dogen’s method of teaching Zen. First, he emphasizes that it is crucial not to reminisce about realization as a remnant from the past, whether recent or distant—a view that reflects the fallacy of original-enlightenment thought. Nor is it appropriate to await or anticipate realization as a goal to be reached eventually in a faraway future, which represents the misjudgment of acquired enlightenment. Rather, we must know that enlightenment occurs right here and now. According to a Soto Zen proverb, “Impermanence is swift! Don’t lose

your footing!” Dogen adds that the locus of contemplative awareness is not remote but is just before us at this or that very place.

Attaining enlightenment anywhere or everywhere involves maintaining a clear, unperturbed, and comprehensive view of the effects of evanescence. On the one hand, according to the *Treasury* chapter “Suchness” (“Inmo”), we must heighten our sense of loss in recognizing that “the physical self is not who I really am. My life is carried along by the flow of years and months, which are hard to stop even for a moment. Where have those rosy cheeks of youth gone? When we search for them, there is no trace. The pure mind also does not stand still but is laid bare here and there, yet its truthfulness is not linked to the idea of a fixed self.”²⁴² We must also realize, however, that the time is always ripe for attaining truth. As expressed in “Sustained Exertion” (“Gyoji”), “Should a person live one hundred years without understanding the essential teaching of Buddhas, it would still not be anything like living just one day fully comprehending it. If we practice sustained exertion for a single day, that surpasses a hundred years of a life unfulfilled and is more valuable than vast kalpas of time.”²⁴³

Dogen’s view of the role of truth was greatly influenced by the eleventh-century Soto teacher Danxia, a student of Furong, praised in the *Treasury* for helping revive the lineage by having the courage to turn down imperial offers of support in favor of a life of solitary reclusion. Danxia became the teacher of Hongzhi, and both were known for advocating a style of meditation in which the mind is brought to a stage of supreme rest to be able to regenerate. This stepping back from routine is described as “occupying a void without letting it solidify, and illuminating while in a state of constant stillness,” or entering emptiness yet not becoming attached to it as an abstraction. According to Danxia’s instructions to his followers:

You should practice every day as if it is the last day of your life. You cannot prepare by studying sutras and teachings or

by reciting from notes about koans, nor can you prepare through the cleverness of your mind. Precisely at this time, just when you are in a hopeless state of confusion that forgets everything you previously remembered, you must establish yourself on the ground of truth. Right away and for every moment of the day, you should take a step back and completely let go of all worldly concerns while sitting still in the ancient hall. You must die a turn and then, from within this sense of death, rekindle everything throughout existence.^{[244](#)}

The second main factor of Dogen's bodhisattva task, in moving away from a vertical or instrumental model of religiosity, is to discern the contours of undivided and undefiled (*fuzenna*) Zen insight based on a horizontal or from-the-ground-up outlook. This immerses one in and yet redeems the world of delusion and ignorance based on enlightened awareness. Dogen repeatedly shows ways that this very moment is already an occasion for apprehension. Even in a world of errors compounding errors, and at any present moment rather than eventually down the road, we are able to make the right mistake. This breakthrough resuscitates everyday life by fully embracing each seemingly trivial or mundane function as eminently worthwhile and dignified. Even if we seem to be dwelling in a pitch-black cave on the far side of the mountain, Dogen writes, the one bright pearl still shines forth.

To realize such a luminous state, we must disentangle the knots of a mind normally stiffened by inflexibility. We must make a recovery through identifying and overcoming the roots of delusion:

Oroka naru	Following only the deluded path
Kokoro hitotsu no	In the six realms—
Yuku sue o	The futile meandering
Mutsu no michi to ya	Of a mind chasing after
Hito no fumuran	Its own deceptions. ^{245}

Dogen says in another poem, “I lose myself in the shadows the moon casts,”²⁴⁶ suggesting that through releasing a preoccupation with the self, one’s true identity is revealed. This is based on the capacity to hold steadfast by discriminating the false from the real, while sustaining the malleability to resist facile judgments rooted in a misleading view of duality.

Because of the emphasis on the importance of discernment and discrimination, the third corollary of Dogen’s bodhisattva standpoint is that language must play a crucial role in conveying the experience of awakening. And whatever is said needs to be constantly adjusted to the needs of pedagogical conditions. This view is derived in part from the powerful saying in Dongshan’s famous verse, “Song of the Jewel Mirror Samadhi” (Ch. “Baojing sanmei,” Jp. “Hokyo zanmai”): “Meaning does not abide in words themselves, but it arises in pivotal moments of activity whenever thoughts are expressed.”²⁴⁷ This practical admonition was expanded by a later Zen master to suggest that if you have not yet experienced enlightenment, you look for meaning but do not pay attention to specific words; but once you have experienced enlightenment—in that you are now the one teaching others instead of being taught—you look for words but do think much about meaning. In that vein, Dogen was ever involved in the process of discovering the appropriate words to shed light for his followers on the level of meaning relevant to their circumstances.

Because a true teacher realizes that the significance of any expression is relative to the learner’s capacity for apprehension, there is never only one connotation indicated by a set of words. Furthermore, as part of a highly competitive religious environment in which many of his trainees were schooled in other forms of Buddhism in addition to strands of Confucian, Daoist, or Shinto thought and were also engaged in the literary, visual, or musical arts among other intellectual pursuits, Dogen stayed purposefully ambiguous and open-ended. He knew that his teaching was somewhat like scattering sand in the eyes of the beholder or evoking

words as a useful but ultimately discardable distraction. Out of the experience of doubt evoked by the uncertainty underlying all forms of expression, a disciple is compelled to probe further so as to investigate matters more deeply. Out of this challenging context, the truth becomes clear, at an opportune occasion, in the experience of an epiphany.

Dogen is not averse to positing a thesis that can be digested. But more important is the goal of instigating self-reflection, which functions as a koan by investigating all basic premises, assumptions, and prejudices in a dialectic development that leads to the weeding out of mental defects. Doubting suppositions and stereotypes fosters a deeper level of awareness. This occurs not only through illumination but by casting shadows and tracing forms in darkness or in silhouette relief, such that one comes to know their true form only by inference or by realizing what they are not. Since the twinkling of momentary insight passes quickly, understanding must be cultivated by continuing to question one's own views through exploring all available options.

The fourth component of Dogen's teaching method is to suggest that, while maintaining a constancy of effort in all endeavors, one must also stay acclimated to making the most of spontaneous opportunities for enacting release from conventional thinking. This transpires when an adept demonstrates that being confronted by difficult questions or perplexing banter is exactly the time best suited to demonstrating flexibility, confidence, and versatility. According to the *Blue Cliff Record*, this ability represents the Zen pivot, or "turnaround experience." For instance, consider a commentary on the ironic comment proffered by Zhaozhou in replying "there is a cypress tree in the courtyard" to a question about the meaning of the Buddha. It reads, "Just when Zhaozhou gets to the ultimate point where he seems stuck and unable to make a move, it is then that he advantageously turns things around."²⁴⁸

This approach recalls the former comedy team of Carl Reiner, as the serious-minded announcer, and Mel Brooks, as an elderly European with a Yiddish accent, who for over half a century played the comedy skit known as the “Two-Thousand-Year-Old Man.” The routine was widely celebrated because of the way Reiner’s impromptu questioning, to paraphrase a commentator from an interview at the time Reiner died in 2020, was able to put all of the rhetorical pieces into play for Brooks to elevate his approach to the comedy stratosphere through improvisational genius.²⁴⁹ Reiner observed that the more his pointed queries and jabs challenged and cornered Brooks, who seemed to be backed against a wall with nowhere to escape, the more brilliant were his partner’s responses.

Nearly every passage in Dogen’s writings reveals his facility to enact such a turnaround through discursive savvy and rhetorical sleights of hand. One relatively minor but important example involves his interpretation, in sermon 5.355 in the *Extensive Record*, of a poem by the master Longya, a disciple of Dongshan.²⁵⁰ In the homily, Dogen cites Longya’s verse about the master-disciple relationship:

Studying the way is like rubbing sticks together to make fire,
When smoke arises don’t stop.
Just wait until the golden star appears.
Returning home is arriving at your destination.

After praising his predecessor, Dogen says, “I respectfully offer another verse using Longya’s rhyme”:

Study the way as if rubbing sticks to make fire.
Seeing smoke does not mean you should stop.
Right then and there the golden star appears.
This very world itself is the supreme destination.²⁵¹

The first two lines are quite similar to Longya's verse, while subtly altering the focus of the instructions regarding continuity. But in a deceptively simple alteration in the last two lines, Dogen's poem changes from emphasizing that the goal will be reached someday in the future to a realization at this very moment that is renewable and sustainable. Dogen's rewrite fulfills the Song-dynasty Zen method of providing a relevant alternate or substitute expression for the original utterance by evoking the outlook of "Others have spoken in their way, but now I express it in my own fashion." This also implies that the learner should not accept the point of view of their teacher and must continue to explore for themselves. There are several examples in which Dogen defies what was said by Rujing or Hongzhi, among other predecessors, yet often concludes by demanding of the audience, "What do you think?"

The fifth corollary to Dogen's teaching method involves his emphasis on the behavioral requirements for those practicing the dharma. This both encompasses and goes beyond an adherence to the rules of conduct by highlighting the underlying impact of embodying dignified demeanor based on the graceful performance of proper etiquette in all activities. According to a Soto saying derived from passages in the *Treasury*, Dignified demeanor is the Buddha Dharma [*iigi soku buppo*], and ritual etiquette [literally, "transacting the dharma"] is our sect's standpoint [*saho kore shushi*]. When Dogen went to China, he was perhaps most impressed by the way the monks presented themselves on every occasion. He took particular notice of the way they wore and cleaned their robes, how they swept the monastery floors regularly, and their demonstration of additional aspects of dedicated behavior that he had not seen before. He then referred to Japan as a remote country where people were still ignorant about genuine Buddhism, although he did find evidence of dignity at Kenninji under the guidance of Eisai and Myozen. The traditional style is still being practiced at Eihei-ji, as shown in the figure on [this page](#).



Monks at Eihei-ji during the ceremony of waving scrolls in the air to help distribute widely the beneficial karmic effects of the teachings of Buddhist sutras.

Another illustration of the principle of upholding dignified demeanor occurs when novice monks polish the floors of temple corridors daily by rushing along quickly on their hands and knees while holding a cloth. This is a simple exercise that reinforces external cleaning as a direct reflection of internal cleansing. It is said the wood becomes so smooth that visitors walking without shoes are likely to slip and fall. Everyone involved, including the clerics and visitors, takes part in an enriched and refined setting. According to Kaoru Nonomura in *Eat Sleep Sit*, the interfusion of meditation and housekeeping is complete throughout the year. “At Eihei-ji,” he writes, “along with sitting, which is done morning and night, collective manual labor is done twice daily by cleaning the Monks’ hall, the washroom, the walking corridor, the common quarters, the work

area, and its washroom and toilet.” Furthermore, “this isn’t done on special days or in special places, but takes place every single day, whether or not there is any dirt to speak of.”²⁵²

Dogen’s Continuation and Revision of the Zen Tradition

In endorsing an integrative approach to living authentic Zen insight, Dogen recommends applying a contemplative standpoint in every circumstance, ranging from the meticulous details of washing and cooking to a grander vision for adapting to personal and communal conflicts. In this way, Dogen Zen represents an ongoing revision rather than rejection or usurpation of core Buddhist methods. These include (1) practicing meditation, among other contemplative techniques; (2) ritualistic reciting of the sutras; (3) carrying out sets of precepts based on Hinayana and Mahayana customs; (4) performing devotions to powerful spirits, including buddhas, bodhisattvas, and gods; and (5) transmitting lineal affiliations connected to Buddhist history. All of these traditional observances are transformed by virtue of the twin notions of the unity of practice and realization and the inseparability of original awakening and wondrous practice. In sum, Dogen Zen occurs through an outlook that can be characterized by the term *just*, as in *just sitting*, which implies “exactly or only” that method.

In what follows, I evoke this adverb, *just*, for each practice method to indicate that it is understood not in an exclusive sense, disregarding or repudiating related activities. Rather, it conveys the notion of unimpeded single-minded concentration in which outer functions are emblematic of inner realization. A key aspect of Dogen’s view is that the interior, or subjective, and exterior, or objective, dimensions of human experience must completely complement and reinforce one another. Even a hair’s breadth of discrepancy between these realms ultimately reveals a cataclysmic

chasm of incongruity. Acting with this view firmly in mind during meditation and other spiritual endeavors ensures that the true form (*jisso*) based on decorum and integrity, which is embedded in all things (*shoho*), will be released to enhance particular modes of practice.

From Meditation as One Form of Practice to Just Sitting

Dogen argued throughout his career that, despite the focus that developed in numerous schools on other practice approaches, seated meditation was always, without exception, the one true training technique that was used by all Buddhists. It therefore must remain central, despite any superfluous consideration. In Zen generally, and for Dogen in particular, however, there is little analysis of the elevated states of mind attained during meditation, as is typical of reflections on this topic in Indian sources. The main discussion in the *Treasury* chapter “Lancet of Meditation” (“Zazenshin”) accentuates the role of nonthinking, which is a manner of introspection that is fully integrated with thinking and not thinking, which are no longer falsely polarized.

In his early writing on the meaning of zazen in “Discerning the Way,” Dogen describes the mutual response between meditators and the environment: “Because earth, grasses and trees, fences and walls, tiles and pebbles, and all things in the Dharma realm in ten directions enact the functions of Buddha, everyone receives the benefit in that all of us are imperceptibly helped by the marvelous and incomprehensible transcendent influence actualizing enlightenment here-and-now.”^{[253](#)} He thereby reinforces that contemplative training is not merely an individual exercise but an undertaking that fulfils the dynamic interconnections of all beings at all times.

Dogen insists that just sitting must be continuously sustained every day of the year so that special occasions, such as the summer retreat or the celebration of Buddha's birthday, would not require more or less emphasis on meditation. One event in the Chinese monastic calendar that Dogen observed at Eihei-ji was the first day of the ninth month. On the mainland, the meditation schedule was customarily lessened because of the summer heat for the three months prior to that time, when sitting cushions were brought out from storage as intensive sessions resumed. At Eihei-ji, however, Dogen decided not to decrease the summer zazen schedule, even though he used this date to offer further encouragement about ongoing practice.

Sermon 7.523 of the *Extensive Record*, delivered in 1252, was his last talk regarding that annual occasion. There, Dogen says, "Do not seek externally for the lotus that blooms in the last month of the year. Body-mind casting off right now is steadfast and immovable. Although the sitting cushions used are old, they show new impressions based on our current effort."²⁵⁴ Reinforcing rather than contradicting this theme, Dogen makes it abundantly clear that just sitting is not just a matter of sitting, in the first in a series of oxymorons that applies to every item on our list. This is because, whether a trainee is seated or takes part in some other deed in the daily routine, the contemplative state of nonthinking is ever present and continually renewed.

From Reciting Sutras as Ritual to Just Speaking

Despite typical Zen admonitions against the use of sutras, which were featured at almost all East Asian temples, Dogen incorporated into the Koshōji and Eihei-ji itinerary the ceremonial chanting of Mahayana scriptures in addition to the careful yet critical study of their doctrinal content by advanced practitioners. During the course of monastic activities, paying attention to the sutras occupies about

as much a part of the daily routine as practicing zazen. In the chapter “Reading Sutras” (“Kankin”), Dogen quotes extensively from traditional monastic instructions on the etiquette required for providing ritual recitations for the sake of temple donors. Yet in the same chapter, he mentions more than a dozen koan cases that poke fun at that exercise in wildly iconoclastic fashion. In the best-known instance, Zhaozhou responds to a female supporter’s request by getting up and walking around his seat one time, and the patron retorts playfully about being disappointed because she wanted to hear a complete reading rather than merely half.^{[255](#)}

As another indication of productive irreverence toward authoritative expressions of the dharma, Dogen cites or alludes to passages from the Lotus Sutra, among many other scriptures, at least several hundred times in the *Treasury*. Yet he often treats these words much like the way he freely reinterprets the grammar and syntax of koans. He relates to them according to his idiosyncratic understanding of their true meaning regardless of conventional views, including those suggested by lineal forerunners. In that sense, nothing that is said is ever sacred, not even—or especially—Dogen’s own open-ended standpoint.

An interesting example of the purposeful ambiguity in Dogen’s approach to just speaking is evident in a verse by Ryokan, who frequently acknowledged the extent to which reading the master’s major writings, five hundred years after they were written, reinvigorated his Zen practice and composition of poetry. According to Ryokan,

Who says my poems are poems?
My poems are not poems.
After you know my poems are not poems,
Then we can begin to talk about my poems!^{[256](#)}

As an eccentric, free-spirited practitioner, affectionately called “the Great Fool” (*daigu*) for his love of children, Ryokan stands in sharp contrast to the sometimes puritanical Dogen. Nevertheless, his verse sums up how both authors are far less interested in the dusty, stilted rules of poetics or the conventions of the literary traditions of China or Japan than in conveying the essence of an experience of awakening with a sense of intimacy, immediacy, and urgency. That outlook recalls Zhuangzi’s prominent Daoist saying about the notion of unlimited and invaluable “goblet words”: “Where is there a man of no-words, or one who has forgotten words, so I that may have a word with him?”^{[257](#)}

In a similar vein, Su Shi, the greatest poet of the Song dynasty, posits the unresolvable dilemma of trying to identify where music exists in a way that is parallel to the enigma of defining language. Indeed, language is often referred to in Zen as a tune or melody since its prosody borrows heavily from musical structures. Su’s verse on this topic raises two rhetorical questions:

Some say music lurks in the lyre;
Why, then, is it dumb when closed in its case?
Some say sounds come from the fingers of the player;
Why then on yours do we hear none?^{[258](#)}

He thereby indicates that we cannot bifurcate speaking, as an instrument of communication, from intentionality, or the motivation as well as realization of what expressions reveal.

From Precepts as Regulations to Just Doing

Dogen never wavered from an intense focus on the behavioral conduct of monks. As a pilgrim whose entry into China was delayed because he arrived without having received the Hinayana precepts, however, he was by no means a stickler for enforcing those

regulations in a rigid fashion. Instead, as presented in the *Treasury* chapter “Receiving Precepts” (“Jukai”), he arranged his own drastically streamlined list of sixteen essential guidelines, including the three treasures, the three pure precepts, and the ten grave precepts. Dogen also examined additional lists of codes to be followed by monks in the chapters “Four Exemplary Acts of a Bodhisattva” (“Bodaisatta shishobo”), “Eight Learnings of a Great Person” (“Hachidaningaku”), and “One Hundred and Eight Gates to the Light of Dharma” (“Ippyakuhachi homyomon”). Nevertheless, he makes it clear that he is not interested in memorizing a set of numbered rules when he says in “Thirty-Seven Methods of Training for Realizing Enlightenment” (“Sanjushichihon bodaibunpo”) that there are really 1,369 methods based on the squaring of the original figure, while also insisting that spiritual concerns are fully manifested in each item.

Dogen’s discussions of the significance of daily deportment were primarily inspired by the *Rules for Zen Monasteries* from 1103. But, despite following this text closely, he was often willing to toss aside any appearance of taking too seriously typical Zen customs. He did this by mentioning, especially in the essays in his *Monastic Rules*, irreverent dialogues that tend to undermine the notion of adhering to strict routines. In one koan narrative, the master Jiashan, then serving as a cook early in his career, answers the query of his teacher, Guishan, “What are we going to eat today in the refectory?” Jiashan says, “Every year, spring is the same.” When Guishan seems to approve of this indirect response, though perhaps without much enthusiasm, Jiashan counters, “A dragon resides in the phoenix nest.”²⁵⁹ Although the two mythical animals are often linked because of shared auspicious qualities, this image is usually reversed in that the phoenix flies far to be close to the protective power of the dragon, which does not budge from its lair. The point of Jiashan’s perplexing utterance is that disciple and master must be

able to challenge and learn from one another as equals rather than staying in a hierarchical relationship.

An interesting example of how Dogen views Buddhist teaching in terms of concrete corporeal, ritual, and material experiences, instead of recommending an abstract catalog of regulations, is a passage in “Taking Refuge in the Three Treasures” (“Kie bupposobo”). It says, “Of the three treasures, the Buddha means icons, relics, and stupas; the Dharma means yellow scrolls turned by spinning vermillion spindles; and the Sangha means taking the tonsure, dying robes, following precepts, and performing ceremonies.”²⁶⁰ In this vein, two *Treasury* chapters, “Transmitting the Robe” (“Den’e”) and “Merits of the Robe” (“Kesa kudoku”), are dedicated to exploring the notion of accepting safekeeping (*juji*) vestments by both receiving and caring for the garment through continually washing, repairing, and wearing it in a dignified manner.

For Dogen, the robe, in addition to other implements regularly used by monks, such as the bowl, staff, and fly whisk, is not something passively obtained from a superior monastic and stored away for occasional use. It should, instead, be regarded as an eminently worthy element of one’s everyday practice to be worn dutifully and upheld respectfully as an external embodiment of the internal verities of manifesting buddha-nature. Clerical garb is physical apparel that spiritually enrobes the trainee, who infuses its true form through dedicated effort.

This outlook applies not only to consecrated articles but also to the eighteen objects that are carried by monks during periods of transiency, including the willow twig for brushing teeth that Dogen found was missing among the items used by Chinese monks. At Eihei-ji, after brushing, he advised disciples to always recite the following prayer for purification, which is mentioned in the Flower Garland Sutra (Ch. Huayan jing, Jp. Kegonkyo):

In cleansing my mouth and teeth,

I pray that all sentient beings
Will reach the gate of purity
And ultimately gain liberation.^{[261](#)}

From Devotion as Otherness to Just Resonating

Despite Dogen's accent on actualizing self-power (*jiriki*), it is clear that he is not one-sided on the topic of the origins and impact of other-worldly forces. Throughout his writings, he consistently seeks to show a pathway that links an individual's abilities and efforts with the benefits of spiritual communion. Such communion encompasses a resonance with one's teachers and, indeed, all beings, including so-called supernatural ones, whether the relationship is direct or indirect. This holistic view is particularly connected to the invisible energies of seven primordial buddhas culminating in Shakyamuni, various benevolent bodhisattvas both revealed and concealed, the elusive presence of illuminative arhats and instructive patriarchs, as well as an awareness of indigenous ethereal entities or spirits that affect the dharma realm during sermons and ceremonies conducted on the temple compound. All of those energies help oversee and protect practitioners. They help them to regulate and moderate the functions of body and mind by bringing physical and conceptual realms into profound harmony rather than denying one for the sake of the other.

Soto Zen temples have long celebrated festivals, often rooted in continental Buddhist beliefs that take on unique local flavors, for appeasing the "hungry ghosts" (*segaki*) on a monthly basis or for venerating deceased family ancestors (*obon*) with annual memorial bonfires. Almost all the sect's sanctuaries include small shrines dedicated to Inari (fox) or another autochthonic deity, such as the Tengu (mountain goblin), and in some prominent cases the main focus of the entire temple is devoted to those spirits. Although Dogen does not specifically address these rites or customs in his works, he

did celebrate the appearance at Eihei-ji of colorful clouds, falling flowers, and resonant bell sounds, and he was also said to have been aided by several deities on his way back from China.

According to later commentators, Dogen's outlook suggests that the true meaning of devotion is not a matter of praying to deities or for the dead. Rather, it is about cultivating the consciousness of the living who practice the virtue of giving (Skr. *dana*, Jp. *fuse*) in a selfless manner, which represents and reminds clerical and lay followers alike of the importance of the bodhisattva vow. Like the bell blown in the breeze, according to the verse by Ru-jing that was among Dogen's favorites, the hollow of the instrument represents the insubstantiality of self and others. This emptiness is reinforced by mystical and mysterious powers emanating from different directions of the wind symbolizing the all-pervading buddha-nature.

Even though Dogen, in "Discerning the Way," clearly repudiates the chanting of nenbutsu as the "croaking of frogs," some interpreters point to several passages that seem to resemble Pure Land teaching, which is often referred to as the path of other power (*tariki*). For example, he concludes a waka by saying,

My plea is that I be veiled

By the compassion of the true lord (or Buddha).^{[262](#)}

In the *Treasury* chapter "Birth and Death" ("Shoji")—one of the shortest pieces in the collection, which is undated but may have originally been presented as a homily to Hatano and his entourage—Dogen says that for those who wish to get unstuck from attachments, "There is a very easy way to become a Buddha." Then he defines this easy process, usually associated with devotion, in a way that is compatible with the exertion of zazen: "Not to do any evil, not to have a mind that clings to birth and death, but to have profound compassion for all living beings by being respectful for those above us and with pity for those beneath us. Not to despise or

to yearn for anything, without worry or distress—this is called Buddhahood. Do not seek it elsewhere.”^{[263](#)}

Furthermore, in the chapter “Bodhisattva Kannon,” the compassion represented by her deeds has no limitation in its functioning. (As described above, Kannon is said to have come to the aid of Dogen during a terrible storm. Her figure is enshrined in many Soto temples, including a famous 1,900-ton statue built in the twentieth century as a peace symbol at a temple near Ofuna Station, just one stop north of Kita Kamakura Station, which also features an oversized, twenty-five-meter iconic head of the bodhisattva that seems to rise above the hills, as shown in the photo on [this page](#).) According to a dialogue between two monks, Yunyan and Daowu, Kannon has eyes that see everything and hands that offer help in every possible direction, even in the darkest or most troubled of times. However, after Daowu suggests her power is like “someone groping for a pillow in the dark,”^{[264](#)} Dogen highlights that the exchange partners conclude by agreeing that the majesty of Kannon’s capacities to reach out and offer assistance can hardly be put into words.



Author observing a statue of Kannon at a Soto Zen temple near Kamakura.

From Transmission of a Lineage to Just Circulating

One of the most basic functions of all Buddhist teachers is to perpetuate, while also advancing in their own way, the entire history of the tradition. They do so by selecting successors who inherit and carry forward their lineage's teaching mission. For Dogen, this task involved importing and refashioning Zen as the training method that best epitomizes the transmission of the dharma. As he says in the *Treasury* chapter "Inheritance Documents" ("Shisho"), "Without the dharma to transmit there is no Buddha to become, and without becoming Buddha there is no dharma to be transmitted."²⁶⁵ This

recalls an idea of Jean-Paul Sartre, who once said that a decree or command and obedience to it are ultimately one and the same function.

As with the theme of devotion, Dogen's approach to receiving and passing on the meaning of the dharma articulates a middle way that embraces the mutual reciprocity of self and other, now and then, and beings and buddhas. In the *Treasury* chapter "Sustained Exertion" ("Gyoji"), which depicts with admiration the reclusive lives of exemplary Chinese patriarchs, he writes that transmission is an ongoing process involving all forms of existence and levels of understanding at all times:

There is always unsurpassed sustained practice that is never defiled, so that the way circling round uninterruptedly (*gyoji dokan*) represents the unity of aspiration, practice, wisdom, and nirvana without the slightest interval. Therefore, this is not something we are compelled to do by ourselves or by others. Through our practice, everything generates and receives merit in the ten directions throughout the world and amid the heavens. This is so even if others are not aware of it and even though we may not realize it.^{[266](#)}

Although he remains loyal to the ancestral heritage passed on by Rujing—and some skeptics have argued that his devotion to this lineage is a bit overdone—for Dogen, on a deeper level, lineal belief is not necessarily a liminal gateway to realization. That is because it may not represent a genuinely boundary-crossing approach to understanding the dharma that overcomes deep-seated delusions. Authentic transmission must encompass not just one's own faction but a full communion that involves all buddhas and patriarchs throughout past, present, and future, coexisting contemporaneously.

Dogen's view of just circulating the flow of spiritual rapport as the primary mode of Buddhist transmission resembles in some ways the

view that the poet T. S. Eliot expressed in his essay from 1919 “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” “No poet, no artist of any art,” Eliot says, “has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence.”²⁶⁷ An important difference is that, whereas both thinkers posit the profound interaction of previous occurrences of insight with contemporary experience, Dogen does not overemphasize what has preceded in the tradition. He does not place the past over and above the importance of what currently transpires and will continue to have an impact of all future developments that, in turn, are inextricably linked to the previous occurrences.

What Would Dogen Do? Efforts to Bring Dogen into Modernity

Many contemporary Dogen aficionados ask how to apply Dogen’s view of transmission, which was intended for a premodern cloistral worldview, to the problems of everyday life in today’s unsettled society (*fuan no shakai*). Is it possible to cultivate the outlook of Dogen’s view of Zen to resolve personal concerns, which in his writing are oriented almost exclusively toward monastics? Can his teachings be applied to communal commitments, an area he treats only indirectly or by implication?

The question of Dogen’s relevance was perhaps first raised a couple of hundred years ago by Ryokan. The Zen movement was then burdened with inbred quarrels over theories of practice, which led to the dysfunction of its monastic institutions. Dogen’s thought alone, Ryokan felt, was able to rise above the rest of the pack. Ryokan argued that Dogen’s capacious words, causing wonder by revealing the pure light of self-realization based on just sitting, could

subdue even the proverbial encroachment of enraged elephants or threatening dragons.

During the twentieth century, a Soto monk named Kazumitsu Wako Kato carried on the effort to apply Dogen's perspective to contemporary life. Born in 1927, Kato spent much of his life in California leading zazen centers and teaching at universities. He told the story of how, after being trained in sectarian rites and procedures as a young man in Japan, he found that he only really understood Zen practice once he started carefully reading Dogen's *Treasury*.²⁶⁸ A few years following the end of the Second World War, Kato's mother gave him a rare early manuscript of the *Treasury*. It had been scribed by a former abbot of his temple, who had contributed to the first major publication of Dogen's masterwork in the early 1800s. Although he cherished this frail text, Kato found it nearly impossible to understand at first and was told that his mentor never managed to finish studying it. He then decided to recite it aloud slowly to take in the tone of Dogen's language, without worrying about the meaning of particular words. At other times he would skim the text quickly to absorb, as if by osmosis, Dogen's mastery of rhetoric.

This eventually led to a profound and sustained experience of spiritual release. Once he learned how to read the *Treasury* with both eyes, Kato saw the whole world as unified. Every phrase for him carried a clear and incisive critique of calculative thinking from the standpoint of creative ambiguity. Dogen's masterwork had a hypnotic influence on Kato, creating in him deep reassurance and unspeakable delight. He acknowledged, however, that there were periods when he felt overly attached to this work. It also took him a long time to apply its practical significance. But over time he came to feel that the reflective light of Dogen's teachings could be powerfully present in each situation, whether a mundane moment or an important turning point in his personal journey.

For example, when he first moved to San Francisco from a small village in Japan, Kato felt that Dogen's writing previewed and offered

insight into the urbane cosmopolitanism of the modern world. For instance, in the chapter “This Mind Is Buddha” (“Sokushin zebutsu”), Dogen writes, “Mind is just mountains, rivers, the great earth, it is the sun, moon, and stars, and the fences, walls, tiles, and pebbles.”²⁶⁹ The merit of that holistic view, Kato suggests, applies equally for men or women and for home leavers (*shukkesha*) or householders (*zaikesha*), whether they are just sitting, just standing, just walking, or just reclining. Dogen Zen, he finds, is a gift of true transmission that can and must be given back and forth to others as part of ongoing mystical resonance.

Kato furthermore emphasizes that service to a group through performing daily chores (*samu*) represents an attitude that is endlessly relevant so long as the effort is carried out to the fullest extent based on authentic realization. This represents a way of connecting individual zazen practice to a balanced and harmonized personal and professional life outside the meditation hall. That approach was also maintained by the famous Soto teacher Taisen Deshimaru, who spent decades establishing Zen retreats in France and elsewhere in Europe. “If you try to concentrate on two or more things at the same time, you will achieve nothing,” he said. “But if you concentrate a Zen mind on just one thing, with just enough exertion, you will be able to obtain all things.”²⁷⁰

Indeed, one way of applying the relevance of Dogen’s approach to Zen is based on the notion of *just enough*. As emphasized in the *Monastic Rules*, this term literally refers to the utensils that hold the proper amount of food, with portions allocated exactly to an amount that is neither overly abundant nor too meager. Many Japanese commentators argue for the wide applicability of this fundamental concept stressing constructive minimalism. They hold that it can be advanced beyond ritualistic Zen eating by developing an uncluttered yet eminently adaptable standpoint regarding all aspects of existence.

It is noteworthy, however, that the three people mentioned above—Ryokan, Kato, and Deshimaru—were all ordained monks. Lay readers of Dogen may wonder if it is realistic that the zazen mind he taught his students to carry into the daily monastic round of waking, sitting, chanting, wiping, eating, sweeping, and sleeping can truly be applied to activities in a secular setting. Is it possible to remain deeply unified and absorbed whether one is reading, writing, figuring, working, or playing? After all, according to Dogen, regulating one's body-mind in a way that circulates the dharma and resonates with all beings is an experience without boundary that can be recommended universally. Perhaps one way of overcoming the darkness of the deceptions that are apparent in the everyday life of both clerics and nonclerics is to look closely, as Dogen did, at the meaning of expressions in contemporary discourse.

Many sayings about the frustration and futility that people generally feel can ironically serve as indicators of an underlying paradoxical realization of the power of nonthinking. Examples include "I believe I understand, but the moment I try to say it the significance is lost," "Time flies, yet challenging moments seem like they go on forever," "The closer you get to reaching a destination, the further away it appears," or, a Japanese example, "The more the soup being prepared smells like miso, the less it will taste good as miso soup." A couple of other examples of insight incongruously gained through expressions of despondency are "When it rains, it pours," and, "The more I worry, the less I succeed." But giving up apprehension leads to accomplishment in that "less is more and more means using just enough."

No matter what is expressed, whether seemingly trivial or high-minded, the act of just speaking can lead to an awareness of fundamental emptiness: there is no separate speaker, voice, or listener. There is only, in effect, the ringing of Rujing's wind bell or the click-clacking of the pearl rolling in the bowl while being turned by its container. In that way we are able to relinquish and release

ordinary thoughts, whether of reality or illusion, truth or falsity. These come to be seen as ideations, coming and going like ripples after a pebble has been tossed in a pond. Through the ability to explore burdensome thoughts insightfully, and to forget them constructively, one can attain and apply a mind that is refreshed and agile.

This outlook helps resolve what one Dogen interpreter has called the “metabolic syndrome of the mind.”²⁷¹ Unfiltered exposure to our culture’s excessive influx of information and directives invariably leads to stress and anxiety, for which the remedy of relaxation and liberation remains elusive. As a recent Japanese self-help book based on applying the method of just sitting indicates, “Begin the day with purity! End the day with harmony!”²⁷² In between, there must be advanced levels of concentration as one engages single-mindedly in specific activities, ranging from mundane responsibilities like washing dishes or scrubbing floors to high-minded concerns such as communing with nature or trying one’s hand at drawing, crafting, or writing. All of these efforts are carried out in order to form and maintain constructive habits that synchronize the heart-mind throughout the day—morning, noon, and night. Whether or not one sits upright a set number of hours, genuine peace of mind (*anshin*) is realized by proverbially occupying a majestic mountain peak, so one’s demeanor is dignified and sublime in all attitudes and actions affecting self and other.

Those who seek to heighten their sustained attention toward a particular object and concept must be cautious, however, about overreacting to superficial understanding. As Dogen indicates, “When one side is illumined, the other side is dark.”²⁷³ In other words, too much concentration can be detrimental to overall perception of the surroundings. As demonstrated in modern neurological science,²⁷⁴ the innate partiality and insufficiency of human awareness will remain, at least prior to the attainment of Zen enlightenment that is devoid of limitation and encompasses multiple perspectives.

Dogen's Applicability to Contemporary Social and Ecological Concerns

The modern implications of Dogen's thought are not limited to the area of personal psychology but branch off into many possible intellectual and actional directions. Indeed, the modern social applications of Dogen's teachings could be the subject of its own chapter or even a whole book. While there is not space for such an extended treatment here, this subsection introduces a few of the major topics and questions regarding the application of Dogen Zen to social and environmental justice.

As Taigen Dan Leighton writes, "Although he was a medieval monk born eight centuries ago, Dogen's writings about time, space, Buddha nature, and the subtle character of spiritual pursuit and realization are now widely esteemed by contemporary philosophers, physicists, poets, environmentalists, and religious thinkers and practitioners. His writings can be baffling and intensely challenging but also inspiring and deeply comforting."²⁷⁵ A pressing concern in assessing Dogen's relationship to contemporary society is whether this degree of adaptability makes his thought pertinent for dealing with current issues of broad social and environmental concern. To what extent does Dogen's medieval philosophy of clerical reclusion constructively address the ethical dimensions of social issues outside the temple gates? For example, does Dogen Zen have something to say about problems of discrimination against outcasts, minorities, or other marginalized people? Does it suggest possible forms of resistance to authoritarian political trends? Can it help defeat the structural barriers that reinforce social inequality, including race-, class-, and gender-based injustices? And can it contribute to the conversation about ongoing threats to ecological integrity, fostered in part by environmental abuses that reduce sacred landscapes to instruments of commerce?

To respond to these questions, we must consider whether Dogen's premodern teachings offer pertinent ideas for the promotion of collective reform. Conversely, it is fair to ask, because of these teaching's ambiguity, indirection, and general disregard for nonmonastic concerns, if they might be more likely to reinforce the status quo. This would be in line, for instance, with the way Zen Buddhism has been accused of perpetrating conflict and subservience to corrupt authority in the analysis of *Zen at War*.²⁷⁶

On the one hand, Dogen's philosophy of the unity of all beings has been championed by the socially conscious causes of Engaged Buddhism, Critical Buddhism, and Green Buddhism, which seek to confront an array of contemporary problems affecting religion and public affairs.²⁷⁷ At the same time, some skeptics speculate that using a behavior model based on Dogen's practices at Eihei-ji could contribute to the passive acceptance of society's norms. This could occur, for instance, by reinforcing the subtle yet insidious blame-the-victim notion that, for those who suffer injustice, "you get what you deserve" (*jigo jitoku*, literally, "the karma you make is the karma you take"). Although this is not a phrase Dogen ever used, the cliché reflects an attitude that was long evoked in Buddhist circles and remains widely used in Japanese society today. It is not hard to imagine how this view could lead to smug complacency on the part of hierarchical authority figures or even an ideological justification of resistance to reform. And indeed, Critical Buddhists have argued that the saying is too often taken to justify the belief that victimized or marginalized people are not deserving of pity or of social policies that would help mitigate their predicament.

Yet there is certainly not consensus that Dogen Zen supports such a view. One recent interpreter finds that Dogen persuasively confronts the tendency, found in many forms of Buddhism, to promote a life of "licensed evil." This antinomian standpoint justifies committing forms of malevolence as a step that supposedly can lead to awakening, allowing the matter of virtue versus vice to be

determined by one's personal inclinations rather than the active realization and application of the oneness of buddha-nature in all situations. In contrast to approaches that condone licensed evil, Dogen constructively recommends a life based on committing no wicked acts and just performing good ones by perpetuating the dharma. Such a path abandons self-assertion and enables the flow of spiritual communion to surpass efforts rooted in personal gain or fame.^{[278](#)}

Moving from socioethical speculation to a concrete example, over the past couple of decades, the Soto sect, citing Dogen's exemplary writings as the main inspiration, has vigorously endorsed three main societal goals: (a) human rights, especially for women, minorities, outcasts, and marginalized people with special needs; (b) world peace, through resisting or protesting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or other sources of conflict and instability; and (c) environmental protection, by recommending efficient uses of energy and helping distribute limited but essential natural resources in fair and equitable fashion.^{[279](#)} Also, numerous Soto Zen priests became active in rehabilitation efforts after the Fukushima disaster of 2011 and in giving aid to the homeless, many of whom migrated from northeast Japan (Tohoku) to certain neighborhoods in Tokyo (such as San'ya, an area of the city already known for being populated by outcasts, itinerant workers, and the homeless).

To highlight the merit of this socially conscious standpoint, I refer to the analysis of Hee-Jin Kim, the scholar who in 1975 published the first substantial book in English on Dogen's life and thought. In a later work, Kim offers a remarkably insightful analysis of a passage in the *Treasury* chapter "Disclosing a Dream within a Dream" ("Muchu setsumu"). This chapter ingeniously uses a metaphor involving the common marketplace measuring device of a steelyard to advocate that fairness in human activities should be linked to attaining a natural state of balance and harmony. Reflecting on Dogen's intricate phrasing, Kim writes, "One determines the weight

of the object by moving the counterpoise along the scale of the longer arm in order to attain equilibrium of the object and the counterpoise. When in disequilibrium, the beam moves in a seesaw manner; when in equilibrium, it is completely still. In this way, an object's previously unknown weight can be found through the counterpoise's known weight."²⁸⁰

Kim then applies this analogy to a much broader context. He enumerates the beam of the device with its unequal arms, the object that is being weighed, the weight moving along the scale, the person doing the balancing, the force of gravity operative on the steelyard, and all other factors involved in the process of gauging weight, noting that they all must work delicately in concert with one another. In accord with the Buddhist principle of karmic causality, the deftly attuned measuring mechanism attains equilibrium, and it thus fosters impartiality and reasonableness in any exchange being transacted. Dogen's view, according to Kim's analysis, epitomizes an approach whereby everyone shares equally in the benefits and mutual reciprocity of there being just enough of any object or situation. To apply this savvy outlook would be to conserve and renew precious human relationships and natural materials. It stands in sharp contrast to a resource-depleting standpoint that abuses and uses up people and things through inequity and lack of consideration.

Dogen's holistic outlook pertaining to social justice can be compared to the immortal words of Martin Luther King Jr., who said in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," "In a real sense all life is interrelated. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be.... This is the inter-related structure of reality."²⁸¹ As Dogen suggests, such an attitude can always be carried out, since the time for doing so is already ripe.

APPENDIX 1

Dogen's Timeline

YEAR	EVENTS IN DOGEN'S LIFE
1200	Born in Kyoto to imperial, warrior, and aristocratic families*
1202	Father, a prominent Minamoto general, dies*
1204	Educated in Confucian classics and Japanese poetry*
1207	Mother, a Fujiwara mistress of father, dies; adopted by her family
1208	Studies the early Buddhist classic compendium the <i>Abhidharmakosa</i> *
1212	Declines court career to become a Tendai monk on Mount Hiei
1213	Ordains and begins reading entire Buddhist canon for the first of several times
1214	Experiences a great doubt about original enlightenment and leaves Hiei
1215	Visits Koin, abbot at Onjoji temple, and perhaps meets Eisai at Kenninji temple*
1217	Joins Kenninji, the first Zen temple in Japan, under abbot Myozen*
1223	Travels to China to seek with Myozen authentic teaching
1224	Visits various Five Mountains Zen temples but feels disappointed
1225	Experiences casting off body-mind under Rujing shortly after Myozen dies
1226	Composes Chinese poetry and receives detailed instructions from Rujing
1227	Returns with Rujing's transmission and begins to teach Soto Zen in

	Japan
1228	Meets Ejo but does not yet accept him as a disciple
1229	Other disciples, including Jakuen and Senne, join Dogen
1230	Stays in small hermitage in Fukakusa outside Kyoto
1231	Starts writing the <i>Treasury of the True Dharma Eye</i>
1232	A small assembly is formed that includes at least a few nuns
1233	Establishes Koshoji temple through receiving Fujiwara donations
1234	Ejo joins Koshoji and becomes a lifelong leader of Dogen's assembly
1235	Compiles the koan collection without comments, the <i>Three Hundred Koan Case Collection</i>
1236	Temple expands with Chinese-style dharma hall for delivering formal sermons
1237	Composes <i>Instructions for the Cook</i>
1238	Ejo completes collation of sermons included in <i>Miscellaneous Talks</i>
1239	Composes several <i>Treasury</i> fascicles on cleaning and washing
1240	Begins major phase of crafting the <i>Treasury</i>
1241	Assembly joined by monks from defunct Daruma school: Gikai, Giin, Gien, Gijun
1242	Receives a copy of Rujing's recorded sayings brought from China
1243	Lectures to samurai patron, Hatano, then leaves Kyoto for the Echizen Mountains
1244	After several months of itinerancy, settles into newly constructed Daibutsuji temple
1245	Completes writing the seventy-five-fascicle edition of the <i>Treasury</i>
1246	Temple is renamed Eihei-ji, and Dogen emphasizes monastic regulations
1247	Travels to Kamakura at request of shogun Hojo Tokiyori
1248	Returns to Eihei-ji after six months and newly focuses on karmic causality
1249	Exchanges letters with Rankei Doryu; composes verse on viewing the moon

1250	Receives copy of Tripitaka from Hatano; accepts third offer of imperial purple robe
1251	Reports viewing various auspicious signs perceived at Eiheiiji
1252	Editing of <i>Treasury</i> , still incomplete before falling ill
1253	Returns to Kyoto for medical care and dies sitting in zazen position
[1255]	Ejo compiles various versions of the <i>Treasury</i> and other major texts

* indicates that the timeline is not complete in covering every year since there is no traditional record available for the year(s) following the one marked with an asterisk.

APPENDIX 2

Selected Passages from Dogen's Extensive Record

Introduction

The *Extensive Record* consists of ten volumes, with the first seven containing a total of 531 formal sermons (jodo), or dharma hall discourses, that were originally delivered to his assembly of monks in Sino-Japanese rather than the vernacular style of writing used in the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*. This took place from 1236, when the first dharma hall was established at Koshoji temple, until 1252, when Dogen became too ill to continue the practice at Eiheiiji temple. The following selections are nine passages (sermons 5.357–364) that were presented at Eiheiiji during the late days of 1249 and the first month of 1250. These were chosen because they are representative of Dogen's overall approach and feature a variety of distinctive themes and topics, including monastic etiquette, the introduction of Zen to Japan, annual ceremonies and ritual implements, ancestral rites, the significance of the Buddhist canon, the meaning of koan cases, and the symbolism of plum blossoms and seasonal celebrations, among other matters, as expressed through both prose oration and four-line Chinese-style poetry.

357. Formal Sermon to Welcome the New Monastery Cook

A wooden ladle has now been received at this temple,
He will transmit our lineal style to the novice monks.
Fragrant aromas are attractive to heavenly nostrils,
True virtue is fully realized in the monastery kitchen.²⁸²

358. Formal Sermon

The term *formal sermon* [jodo] was heard for the first time by Japanese people when I established this practice.²⁸³ At the time of the imperial reign from 810 to 823, the empress Tachibana, also the wife of the previous emperor and mother of the future ruler Nimei, invited from Tang-dynasty China the Zen monk Huiyuan [actual name Yikung], a disciple of National Teacher Yanguan Qian, to stay at the Sai'in cloister of Toji temple in Kyoto. She inquired of him about the Way every morning and evening. The empress revered this teacher and frequently made generous offerings.

However, Huiyuan never gave formal sermons in the dharma hall; nor did he allow students to enter his private quarters for discussions with the teacher. (There was more discussion not recorded by the editor.)²⁸⁴ Body-mind casting off is a matter of neither form nor consciousness. Do not speak about delusion or enlightenment or try to define beings or buddhas. Ultimately, what is this? After a pause Dogen said, "If you want to know a person from the Jiangnan district in China, go to where partridges are singing."²⁸⁵

359. Formal Sermon

This patch-robed monk's staff is as black as lacquer.
It is not just a piece of ordinary wood,
Because it smashes delusions and realizes truth—

On the tip of a snowy branch a plum blossom suddenly unfurls.^{[286](#)}

360. Enlightenment Day Formal Sermon^{[287](#)}

The two wheels of practice and dharma are intimately connected and constantly turning.

Under the Bodhi tree, the flower of awakening shines bright.

Through an incalculable expanse encompassing tens of thousands of realms,

Bliss permeates all beings and their environment.

My original teacher, the World-Honored One, the Great Master Shakyamuni Buddha, on the morning of his enlightenment experience remained under the Bodhi tree while sitting in zazen on the diamond seat and realizing an unsurpassed sense of true awakening. When first expressing it, he said, “The first three-quarters of this night has passed; in the remaining quarter the brightness will dawn. All the types of conditioned and unconditioned beings are unmoving. At this time, the unsurpassed great sage extinguishes various afflictions, attains true insight, and becomes known as the one with wisdom about everything in the world.” What is the meaning of the World-Honored One speaking in this way? Great assembly, do you want to clearly understand this? After a pause Dogen said: “In the snow is a single branch of jeweled plum blossoms. Wondrous fragrance stimulating the nostrils heralds the arrival of spring.”

This was the initial instance of expounding of the dharma for the sake of human and heavenly beings at the time when the World-Honored One attained awakening. His dharma children and dharma descendants should always remember this. Having known about it for many years, how do you express it? This morning, for the sake of

the novice [*unsui*] monks, I will now explain the meaning. Do you want to hear this? After a pause Dogen said:

When the morning star initially appeared, [the Buddha] attained
the Way,
In the midst of snow, a single branch of plum blossoms.
Throughout the world, sentient beings are in harmony with
grasses and trees.
Feeling a sense of joy as if for the very first time.

361. Formal Sermon on the Arrival of a Letter from the Great Lord of Izumo Province, Hatano Yoshishige, about his Donation to Eihei-ji of a New Copy of the Buddhist Canon:[288](#)

Here is a case: A monk asked Touzi Datong, “Is there anything marvelous or special in the teachings expounded in the Buddhist canon?” Touzi said, “It is performing the teachings expounded in the canon.” The old master Touzi has spoken this way, which highlights how Lord Hatano’s donation brings great joy to this mountain gate at Eihei-ji. On this occasion, I have a verse to offer on behalf of the novice monks:

The performance of the teachings in the Buddhist canon—
You should know that great gentlemen,
Heavenly beings, and wise sages
Are fortunate to gain protection from this talisman.[289](#)

Right now, tell me what this means! After a pause Dogen said: “There are certainly sages in the world. What are good and evil other than the unfolding of karmic causes and effects?”

362. Formal Sermon on an Auspicious Letter from the Great Lord Hatano that Arrived in Response to Our Accepting the Donation of the Buddhist Canon Copied for This Temple

The Ocean Storehouse of the Great Illuminator Buddha (Vairocana) has been transmitted from ancient times to the present. This represents the threefold turning of the dharma wheel in the vast realms, where the thousands of summits and tens of thousands of peaks are the color of golden leaves. All sentient beings attain the Way at this time.

363. Formal Sermon, Memorial for Counselor of State Minamoto [Dogen's Nurturing Father]^{[290](#)}

My staff is a branch of plum blossoms that is from a seed planted in the Tenryaku era [947–967], but the fragrance of its five petals endures up to the present without diminishing. Its roots, stems, and fruit are truly extensive.

364. Formal Sermon^{[291](#)}

A time when the clouds are smiling and the snow is bright, far above the mountains and forests the spring wind and rain emerge. At this very moment, what is it like? After a pause Dogen said: “Do not say that people create their own designs, since the causes and conditions for attaining the Way stem from the roots of karma.”

365. Formal Sermon

“No-mind itself is Buddha” was expressed in India. The saying “This mind itself is Buddha” originated in China. If you understand in this way, you are as distant from enlightenment as the separation

between heaven and earth. If you do not understand in this way, your views are commonplace. Ultimately, which one is it? Throughout the spring, fruit is abundant on the Bodhi tree. One night a flower blossoms and the whole world becomes fragrant.

Notes

1. Thomas Cleary, trans., *The Blue Cliff Record* (Berkeley, CA: Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, 1998), 424 (modified). Another passage refers to “overturning the great ocean, kicking over Mount Sumeru [a mythical cosmic peak], scattering the white clouds, and breaking up empty space. Immediately, with just one rhetorical device or by examining a single object, the teacher cuts off the tongues of everyone on earth!”
2. Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed., *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen’s Shobo Genzo* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010), 451.
3. Kawabata Yasunari, *Japan, the Beautiful, and Myself*, trans. E. G. Seidensticker (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1969), 74; this is a bilingual edition (original on p. 10). See also Steven Heine, trans., *The Zen Poetry of Dogen: Verses from the Mountain of Eternal Peace* (Mount Tremper, NY: Dharma Communications, 2004).
4. E. G. Seidensticker, trans. *The Tale of Genji*, 2 vols. (New York: Knopf, 1976).
5. Note that Seidensticker leaves the fifth and final line untranslated or, rather, infelicitously integrates its meaning with the fourth line. This lapse will be explained in more detail below.
6. Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 114.
7. In his memoir on the translation process, Seidensticker acknowledges that, although he enjoyed working on the waka, he felt in retrospect that he had “forced” the texts into four lines. See Edward G. Seidensticker, *Genji Days* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1977).
8. Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 115.
9. Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 456.
10. In addition to Eisai, two other early (late twelfth century) but not particularly prominent Zen leaders were a monk named Kakua, who came back from China around 1170 and taught Zen by simply playing a flute for the emperor, and Dainichi Nonin, founder of the Daruma school a decade later, which died out by the 1230s, with many of the former members joining and

becoming leaders in Dogen's assembly. Also, some comparisons of Eisai and Dogen are made in chapter 3.

11. John R. McRae, *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), xix–xx.
12. Steve Bein, *Purifying Zen: Watsuji Tetsuro's Shamon Dogen* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011), 28–29.
13. Perhaps the most controversial event in the traditional Dogen narrative concerns his sudden midcareer move away from the capital, with the accompanying significant changes in the style and content of his teaching. This transition in Dogen's life and teaching has become the basis for ongoing debate among leading Japanese researchers. For better or worse, many scholars interpret what may (or may not) have taken place based as much on their respective appraisals of the overall meaning of Dogen's view of Zen, and whether they support or critique his approach, as on the meager and fragmented factual data concerning that period.

Because of this challenging interpretative situation, nearly opposite views have been promoted as to whether the dramatic transition to the provinces represented a conscious choice or a situation thrust on Dogen by powerful rivals in the capital, who it is said threatened to torch Koshoji temple. Therefore, depending on one's view, the move could be considered a triumph for the integrity of reclusion over compromise or a kind of defeat because the master could not help but succumb to external pressures. Needless to say, Soto sectarian proponents of Dogen's approach generally highlight positive explanations for the transition, whereas scholars affiliated with Rinzai Zen or alternative ideologies tend to view this event as a matter of Dogen reacting based on fear of reprisals from jealous adversaries.

14. At this time Dogen did not yet lead his own temple, but he later became known by the name Eihei Dogen after Eihei temple, which was established in 1244 in Echizen as Daibutsuji and renamed in 1246. Traditionally Zen leaders were identified with their monastery, such as Tiantong Rujing. When Dogen led Koshoji and Daibutsuji temples, he received that designation. Another common moniker is Dogen Zenji, which refers to his position as an eminent Zen teacher and is usually used in both official and scholarly publications. In writings that were compiled at Eihei temple and edited by his assistants, especially the main scribe Ejo, he is generally termed simply as "Eihei." In other instances, he is sometimes referred to as Dogen Kigen.
15. Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 4. Note that other passages refer to Dogen spending six or seven years practicing at Kenninji.

- [16.](#) By the time Dogen arrived in China, only the Caodong and Linji schools were active. The Yunmen school was the last of the other three to fade out by the end of the Southern Song dynasty in the mid-1120s.
- [17.](#) Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed., *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen* (New York: North Point, 1985), 58.
- [18.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 370–73.
- [19.](#) Taigen Dan Leighton and Shohaku Okumura, trans., *Dogen's Extensive Record* (Boston: Wisdom, 2010), 245.
- [20.](#) See Francis Dojun Cook, trans., *Transmitting the Light: Zen Master Keizan's Denkoroku* (Boston: Wisdom, 2003).
- [21.](#) Some of the names of important modern biographers in Japan include Okubo Doshu, Takeuchi Michio, Nakaseko Shodo, and Kawamura Kodo, who all try to sort out fact from fiction as best they can. In the West, some leading scholars are Carl Bielefeldt, William Bodiford, Hee-Jin Kim, and Takashi James Kōdera in addition to Shohaku Okumura and Kazuaki Tanahashi. See Carl Bielefeldt, "Recarving the Dragon: History and Dogma in the Study of Dogen," in *Dogen Studies*, ed. William R. LaFleur (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 21–53.
- [22.](#) Robert E. Buswell and Donald S. Lopez, eds., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 1940–41.
- [23.](#) See Bein, *Purifying Zen*.
- [24.](#) See Kosho Uchiyama and Shohaku Okumura, *The Zen Teachings of Homeless Kodo* (Boston: Wisdom, 2014).
- [25.](#) See Nakano Tozen, *Sunday Treasury [Nichiyobi Shobogenzo]* (Tokyo: Tokyodo shuppan, 2012).
- [26.](#) Reiho Masunaga, trans. *The Soto Approach to Zen* (Tokyo: Layman Buddhist Society, 1958).
- [27.](#) Reiho Masunaga, trans., *Record of Things Heard: A Translation of Dogen's Shobogenzo Zuimonki* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1971).
- [28.](#) Jiyu Kennett, trans., *Selling Water by the River: A Manual of Zen Training* (New York: Vintage, 1972).
- [29.](#) Yuho Yokoi, trans., with Daizen Victoria, *Zen Master Dogen: An Introduction with Selected Writings* (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1976).
- [30.](#) Norman Waddell and Masao Abe, trans., *The Heart of Dogen's Shobogenzo* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).
- [31.](#) Kosen Nishiyama and John Stevens, trans., *Shobogenzo: The Eye and Treasury of the True Law*, 4 vols. (Tokyo: Nakayama shobo, 1975–1983).
- [32.](#) Hee-Jin Kim, *Dogen Kigen—Mystical Realist* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1975), 262.
- [33.](#) Takashi James Kōdera, *Dogen's Formative Years in China: An Annotated Translation and Historical Study of the Hokyoki* (Boulder, CO: Prajna,

1980).

- [34.](#) Puqun Li, *A Guide to Asian Philosophy Classics* (New York: Broadway, 2012), 328.
- [35.](#) Heinrich Dumoulin, *Japan*, vol. 2, *Zen Buddhism: A History* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 51.
- [36.](#) Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Enlightenment: Origins and Meaning* (New York: Weatherhill, 1979), 90.
- [37.](#) Kaoru Nonomura, *Eat Sleep Sit*, trans. Juliet Winters Carpenter (New York: Kodansha USA, 2015). This is based on an original 1996 publication titled *Ku Neru Suwaru: Eiheiji shugyoki*.
- [38.](#) Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being* (New York: Penguin, 2013), 1, 30.
- [39.](#) According to Alan Stern, the principal investigator of NASA's landmark exploration of Pluto in the New Horizons mission that generated new maps and additional data.
- [40.](#) The discovery in Shiloh, West Bank, as reported by Maayan Jaffe-Hoffman, "Was the corner of God's altar found in Shiloh, West Bank?", *Jerusalem Post*, October 31, 2019.
- [41.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 111 (entry 1.48); "deceived" could also be rendered "disrespected."
- [42.](#) Leighton and Okumura, 163 (entry 2.135).
- [43.](#) Leighton and Okumura, 211 (entry 3.194).
- [44.](#) Leighton and Okumura, 604 (entry 10.6s). "Granny" was an ironic Zen term frequently used at the time, whereby a master refers to himself in a twofold way as a doting elder who may either express persuasively (in this case) or hopelessly confuse matters of the dharma.
- [45.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 296.
- [46.](#) Cleary, *Blue Cliff Record*, 9 (modified).
- [47.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 30.
- [48.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 478–79.
- [49.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 43.
- [50.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 449.
- [51.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 431.
- [52.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 308–9.
- [53.](#) A contemporary version of this fourfold model is expressed in the following phrasing that reverses the progressive order of Dogen's formulation: unconscious competence, conscious competence, conscious incompetence, unconscious incompetence.
- [54.](#) Cook, *Transmitting the Light*, 255–56.
- [55.](#) Cook, *Transmitting the Light*, 256.
- [56.](#) See Sekiryō Mokudo, ed., *Modern Translation of the Illustrated Record of Kenzei [Gendaigoyaku Kenzeiki zue]* (Tokyo: Kokusho inkokai, 2001).

- [57.](#) Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed., *Enlightenment Unfolds: The Essential Teachings of Zen Master Dogen* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999), 32.
- [58.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 3.
- [59.](#) *Mujo-kan* in the sense of contemplating impermanence can be contrasted with the less profound notion of “sensing impermanence” (also pronounced *mujo-kan* but with a different final character).
- [60.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 884.
- [61.](#) Masunaga, *Record of Things Heard*, 13 (entry 1.11).
- [62.](#) This phrase refers to the title of the famous koan collection the *Gateless Gate* (Ch. *Wumenguan*, Jp. *Mumonkan*).
- [63.](#) It is possible that Dogen’s early connection with Onjoji affected his decision in 1243 to relocate to Echizen Province, where Heisenji, a major branch temple of the Temporal Gate school, was situated close to the sacred mountain of Hakusan. This peak was the dominant Buddhist pilgrimage site of the entire northwestern region of the country. It quickly became, and has remained ever since Dogen’s era, a key practice location for Soto monks from Eihei-ji. Such monks perform austerities there, especially during summer retreats. Mount Hakusan also houses Tendai and other clerics, including austere practitioners from a local cult of mountain reverence (*yamabushi*).
- [64.](#) Sokuo Eto, *Zen Master Dogen as Founding Patriarch*, trans. Ichiumura Shohei (Washington, DC: North American Institute of Zen and Buddhist Studies, 2001), 451.
- [65.](#) See Gishin Tokiwa, trans., *A Treatise on Letting Zen Flourish to Protect the State (Taisho Volume 80, Number 2543)*, in *Zen Texts*, edited by BDK America (Berkeley, CA: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2005), 45–240.
- [66.](#) Masunaga, *Record of Things Heard*, 87 (entry 5.12).
- [67.](#) Kōdera, *Dogen’s Formative Years in China*, 117.
- [68.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 31.
- [69.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 31.
- [70.](#) Unfortunately, nothing is known about what happened to the other monks who accompanied Dogen on the boat, as they are only mentioned briefly in a couple of traditional sources, and there is no speculation that I am aware of by modern scholars.
- [71.](#) Dogen makes this comment in passing, in Masunaga, *Record of Things Heard*, 91 (5.16), in part to say that when a storm erupted, it took his mind off the illness, just like doing zazen vigorously can helpfully distract one who suffers from pain caused by hemorrhoids.
- [72.](#) Tanahashi, *Moon in a Dewdrop*, 60.
- [73.](#) Tanahashi, *Moon in a Dewdrop*, 60.

- [74.](#) See Gesshin Claire Greenwood, *Just Enough: Vegan Recipes and Stories from Japan's Buddhist Temples* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2019).
- [75.](#) Although Rujing was transferred to Tiantong in 1225, and Dogen would meet him there, in 1223 he was serving as abbot of Jingci temple, which overlooks the West Lake in the heart of Hangzhou, and his remains are still interred there.
- [76.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 171–72.
- [77.](#) The following anecdotes are in Cook, *Transmitting the Light*, 258.
- [78.](#) Cook, *Transmitting the Light*, 258.
- [79.](#) Cook, *Transmitting the Light*, 258.
- [80.](#) Cook, *Transmitting the Light*, 258.
- [81.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 249.
- [82.](#) Cook, *Transmitting the Light*, 258.
- [83.](#) Takashi James Koder, *Dogen's Formative Years in China: An Annotated Translation and Historical Study of the Hokyoki* (Boulder, CO: Prajna, 1980), 130–33 (entry 32).
- [84.](#) Koder, *Dogen's Formative Years in China*, 131.
- [85.](#) Cook, *Transmitting the Light*, 259.
- [86.](#) Koder, *Dogen's Formative Years*, 117 (entry 1).
- [87.](#) Cook, *Transmitting the Light*, 259.
- [88.](#) Koder, *Dogen's Formative Years*, 120 (entry 5).
- [89.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 377.
- [90.](#) There is only one brief reference to the role of nuns at Tiantong in Dogen's writings, and there he also refers to other marginal participants, as most foreign monks (from Japan or Korea) would not have been accepted into the mainstream assembly unless they had many years of experience. Otherwise, no details are known about nuns since Chinese temple records do not delve into this topic, which is so interesting from a modern perspective. On the other hand, we know it was not uncommon for nuns to be part of Chinese Buddhist temples of the period, and, in some cases, we learn that some became prominent Zen teachers. Also, it is clear that lay female practitioners were highly respected by monks when they demonstrated skill in meditation, although that context was applied by Dogen at his Japanese temples in only limited fashion. See Miriam L. Levering, "The Dragon Girl and the Abbess of Mo-Shan: Gender and Status in the Chan Buddhist Tradition," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 4, no. 1 (1982), 19–36.
- [91.](#) The *Record of Kenzei* exists in multiple manuscripts with varying versions of transcriptions recording interactions that took place between master Rujing and disciple Dogen.
- [92.](#) Cook, *Transmitting the Light*, 264.

- [93.](#) Cook, *Transmitting the Light*, 265.
- [94.](#) Cook, *Transmitting the Light*, 265.
- [95.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 7.
- [96.](#) Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 143.
- [97.](#) Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 146.
- [98.](#) Masunaga, *Record of Things Heard*, 34 (entry 2.9).
- [99.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 616 (entry 10.28).
- [100.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 621 (entry 10.45).
- [101.](#) Some decades later, several prominent temples were established in the region by Soto teachers. One was founded by Giin, a former member of the proscribed Daruma school, who studied with Dogen at Eihei-ji before traveling to China in the 1250s to have the founder's recorded sayings approved by continental teachers. Another temple was later opened in Kyushu by Giin's disciple, Daichi, a famous fourteenth-century poet-monk who spent more than a decade studying Zen literature on the mainland, something rare in the Soto sect. Both of these temples have endured, although Daichi's cloister suffered severe damage from the effects of a devastating earthquake that struck southern Kyushu in 2016.
- [102.](#) For Myoe's life and thought, see Mark Unno, *Shingon Refractions: Myoe and the Mantra of Light* (Boston: Wisdom, 1997).
- [103.](#) Some accounts suggest this was the grandmother of Keizan.
- [104.](#) See Yifa, trans., *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan Qinggui* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002). See also Carl Bielefeldt, *Dogen's Manuals of Zen Meditation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). Dogen created a revised version of the *Universal Recommendation* in 1233; featuring his exquisite calligraphy, it has become a National Treasure in Japan.
- [105.](#) Tanahashi, *Enlightenment Unfolds*, 32–34.
- [106.](#) Other historical sources confirm that there was a significant decline evident at Kennin-ji, which was later revived by the efforts of master Enni Ben'en, founder of Tofuku-ji temple in Kyoto.
- [107.](#) William M. Bodiford, *Soto Zen in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 33.
- [108.](#) Cook, *Transmitting the Light*, 267.
- [109.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 16.
- [110.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 72–84. Note that there is an expanded version of this chapter included in some editions of the *Treasury*.
- [111.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 625 (entry 10.61).
- [112.](#) Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 145. See also Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 627 (entry 10.69).

- [113.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 4.
- [114.](#) See Raji C. Steineck, “Enlightened Authorship: The Case of Dogen Kigen,” in *That Wonderful Composite Called Author: Authorship in East Asian Literatures from the Beginnings to the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Christian Schwermann and Raji C. Steineck (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 217–39.
- [115.](#) A prominent monk, Muju Ichi’en, in the late thirteenth century confirmed in his *Casual Digressions (Zotanshu)* that Koshoji was the first full-scale temple in Japan dedicated to the practice of zazen. Muju wrote: “Buddhist priest [Dogen] introduced into Japan a large Chinese-style meditation hall, and people from many walks of life, both ordained and lay, gathered there to practice zazen. It was a remarkable sight to behold.”
- [116.](#) Cook, *Transmitting the Light*, 268.
- [117.](#) Cook, *Transmitting the Light*, 273.
- [118.](#) Masunaga, *Record of Things Heard*, 110 (entry 6.15).
- [119.](#) The notion that this layout for Zen temples resembles the body of Buddha, or is anthropomorphic, was devised in the Edo period by the prominent Rinzai monk-scholar Mujaku Dochu. See Steven Heine, *From Chinese Chan to Japanese Zen: A Remarkable Century of Transmission and Transformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 185.
- [120.](#) Tanahashi, *Moon in a Dewdrop*, 63.
- [121.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen’s Extensive Record*, 510–11 (entry 8.6, composed in 1240).
- [122.](#) This highly imaginative hermeneutic trend began with the discussion of the case known as “killing the cat,” which appears in a passage in *Miscellaneous Talks*, and continued with the *Treasury* chapter “One Bright Pearl” (“Ikka myoju”), written a few years later.
- [123.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 18–19.
- [124.](#) Tanahashi, *Moon in a Dewdrop*, 41.
- [125.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen’s Extensive Record*, 507.
- [126.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 27.
- [127.](#) Koderu, *Dogen’s Formative Years*, 135–36 (entries 38 and 39). It is also noteworthy that similar poems were written by Kamakura-era nenbutsu (Buddha chant) practitioners. See Frederic Girard, *The Stanza of the Bell in the Wind: Zen and Nenbutsu in the Early Kamakura Period* (Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies, 2007).
- [128.](#) I am grateful to Frederic Girard for pointing out this connection in a conversation held at Komazawa University in Tokyo on May 21, 2019.
- [129.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen’s Extensive Record*, 575 (entry 9.58).

- [130.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 327–28. This story is similar, as Dogen points out in the next passage, to that of the sixth patriarch, Huineng, telling monks that neither the flag nor the wind is flapping but it is the mind that moves; however, Dogen's comments on the bell shift the focus to the action itself rather than mentation.
- [131.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 589 (entry 9.76). This is the second of two verses Dogen writes on the cat case.
- [132.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 623.
- [133.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 46.
- [134.](#) Masunaga, *Record of Things Heard*, 8 (entry 1.6).
- [135.](#) Masunaga, *Record of Things Heard* 8–9 (entry 1.6). In an addendum to the original story, Nanquan tells what happened to his disciple Zhaozhou, who abruptly puts his sandal on his head and leaves the room, and the teacher says, "If you had been there, you would have saved the cat."
- [136.](#) Masunaga, *Record of Things Heard* 9 (entry 1.6).
- [137.](#) Masunaga, *Record of Things Heard* 7 (entry 1.2).
- [138.](#) See Robert H. Brower and Earl Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1961). This term indicates that a writer should try to use as much of the content of a previous work as feasible and give his stamp by making a few minor but meaningful modifications in tone and emphasis.
- [139.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 36.
- [140.](#) Elsewhere, Dogen occasionally alludes to the Zen, saying, "humans that are calm do not speak, waters that are calm do not flow."
- [141.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 157.
- [142.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 87.
- [143.](#) See Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson, eds., *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997); and Steven Heine, "After the Storm: Matsumoto Shiro's Transition from 'Critical Buddhism' to 'Critical Theology,'" *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 28, no. 1–2 (2001): 133–46.
- [144.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 445 (entry 7.498). Here Dogen attributes the emphasis on meditation in deep mountains to a saying by the famous Indian Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna.
- [145.](#) Yoshiro Tamura, *Japanese Buddhism: A Cultural History* (Tokyo: Kosei, 2000), 110.
- [146.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 151.
- [147.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 164 (appears at the end of entry 2.135).
- [148.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 587.
- [149.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 587.

- [150.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 581.
- [151.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 583.
- [152.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 704.
- [153.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 702.
- [154.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 154 (entry 2.128). See also "True Form of All Dharmas" ("Shoho jisso") in Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 527–29.
- [155.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 154 (entry 2.128).
- [156.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 163 (entry 2.135).
- [157.](#) See Steven Heine, "'Thy Rod and Thy Staff They Discomfort Me': Zen Staffs as Implements of Instruction," in *Zen and Material Culture*, ed. Pamela D. Winfield and Steven Heine (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1–36.
- [158.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 205–6 (entry 3.185).
- [159.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 175 (entry 2.147).
- [160.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 331 (entry 5.378).
- [161.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 692–94; and Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 198–99.
- [162.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 724.
- [163.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 724–25.
- [164.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 725. This recalls Dogen's Chinese Soto predecessor Dongshan, who said, "Why not instead suggest that, once you go outside the gate, there is nothing but grass."
- [165.](#) Dogen was apparently not upset with the Rinzai leader appointed by the shogun, Rankei, as the two teachers exchanged letters concerning the philosophy and practice of zazen after Dogen returned to Eihei-ji.
- [166.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 320–21 (entries 5.361 and 5.362).
- [167.](#) Masunaga, *Record of Things Heard*, 33.
- [168.](#) Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 115.
- [169.](#) Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 146; and Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 630.
- [170.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 246 (entry 3.251).
- [171.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 246 (entry 3.251).
- [172.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 779. See also Kodera, *Dogen's Formative Years*, 125 (20), in which the master Changsha is called wrong by Rujing for saying karmic hindrance is originally void.
- [173.](#) This is also suggested by the remark in the *Gateless Gate* koan collection's verse comment on the fox koan: "Not falling, not ignoring, / two faces of the same die. / Not ignoring, not falling, / hundreds and thousands of mistakes." See Robert Aitken, trans., *The Gateless Barrier: The Wu-Men*

Kuan (Mumonkan) (New York: North Point, 1991), 21 (modified); according to the verse comment in another collection, the *Record of Serenity* (Ch. *Congronglu*, Jp. *Shoyoroku*), arguing over not falling and not ignoring causality is laughable.

[174.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 854.

[175.](#) Cook, *Transmitting the Light*, 262.

[176.](#) Bodiford, *Soto Zen*, 175.

[177.](#) Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 140; and Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 602 (entry 10.3j, a different version of the verse).

[178.](#) Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 147; and Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 638 (entry 10.99).

[179.](#) Tanahashi, *Enlightenment Unfolds*, 275–77.

[180.](#) Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 106.

[181.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 263.

[182.](#) Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 154.

[183.](#) Hee-Jin Kim, *Dogen on Meditation and Thinking: A Reflection on His View of Zen* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 59.

[184.](#) Masunaga, *Record of Things Heard*, 33 (entry 2.8).

[185.](#) Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 112.

[186.](#) Tanahashi and Looi, *True Dharma Eye*, 80. The phrase “nothing is concealed in the entire universe” is also used two times in the chapter “Buddha Nature” (“Bussho”) in Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 235.

[187.](#) Cleary, *Blue Cliff Record*, 424.

[188.](#) Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 119.

[189.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 628 (entry 10.71).

[190.](#) Hence the subtitle of Steven Heine, *Did Dogen Go to China? What He Wrote and When He Wrote It* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[191.](#) I am reminded that when Bob Dylan recorded several albums, including *Shadows in the Night* (2014), inspired by songs associated with Frank Sinatra, and the premier songwriter was asked how he felt about covering traditional material, he remarked that his real goal was to “uncover” the underlying meaning of the song relative to his own personal feelings and musical experiences.

[192.](#) Eto, *Zen Master Dogen as Founding Patriarch*, 21.

[193.](#) See Umehara Takeshi and Takasaki Jikido, *Learning from the Master [Kobutsu no maneb]* (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1969).

[194.](#) The numbering of passages, as in previous chapters, is based on Kodera, *Dogen's Formative Years*.

[195.](#) Pamela D. Winfield, “Materializing the Zen Monastery,” in *Zen and Material Culture*, ed. Pamela D. Winfield and Steven Heine (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 37–69.

- [196.](#) Charlotte Eubanks, “Performing Mind, Writing Meditation: Dogen’s *Fukan-zazengi* as Zen Calligraphy,” *Ars Orientalia* 46 (2016): 173.
- [197.](#) On a more technical issue, numerous researchers have pointed out that the character used for the word “discerning” (*ben*), which implies slicing an object in two with a sharp blade, has had its strokes changed somewhat over the centuries, although this variation does not necessarily affect our understanding of the meaning of the title.
- [198.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 19 (question 17). Note that the monks’ names are not given.
- [199.](#) Tanahashi, *Moon in a Dewdrop*, 31–32.
- [200.](#) A couple of decades later, Senne wrote the first major prose commentary on the *Vernacular Treasury* that remains highly valued.
- [201.](#) Tanahashi, *Moon in a Dewdrop*, 56.
- [202.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 610.
- [203.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen’s Extensive Record*, 332.
- [204.](#) Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 114.
- [205.](#) See Michaela Mross, *Memory, Music, Manuscripts: The Ritual Dynamics of Koshiki in Japanese Soto Zen Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2022).
- [206.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen’s Extensive Record*, 134.
- [207.](#) Bodiford, *Soto Zen*, 58–60.
- [208.](#) On the other hand, Gikai’s fortunes prospered in 1292 when he founded Daijōji temple, where Keizan became his main student. Keizan went on to forge a new branch of Soto Zen that became very popular throughout the northern countryside by following the path of just sitting, while also accommodating many additional religious practices associated with the Daruma school as well as esoteric Buddhism and indigenous rites linked to Shinto. Some strict followers argue that many aspects of the Gikai-Keizan approach were not strictly in accord with Dogen’s vision of monastic behavior.
- [209.](#) Modified from Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen’s Extensive Record*, 69–71.
- [210.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen’s Extensive Record*, 369.
- [211.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 538.
- [212.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 303.
- [213.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 303–4.
- [214.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen’s Extensive Record*, 154. “Jade woman,” which implies either a barren woman who cannot get pregnant or a woman of precious value, resonates with the expression of Danxia’s teacher, Furong Daokai, who said, “A stone woman gives birth at night.”
- [215.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen’s Extensive Record*, 155.
- [216.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen’s Extensive Record*, 103.

- [217.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 93.
- [218.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 117.
- [219.](#) See Steven Heine, *Shifting Shape, Shaping Text: Philosophy and Folklore in the Fox Koan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999).
- [220.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 218.
- [221.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 390. The same capping phrase is used in Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 193 (entry 2.168) and 385 (entry 6.430).
- [222.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 433–34. See also Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 566–67 (entry 9.45).
- [223.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 211. This topic is further discussed in Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 89–90 (entry 1.17), 212–13 (entry 2.196), and 553–54 (entry 9.27).
- [224.](#) Also, Giun took part in the editing process in 1279 and, when he was appointed the fifth Eiheiji patriarch in 1314 succeeding Gien, he promulgated the sixty-chapter edition of the *Treasury* along with his own verse commentary appended to it.
- [225.](#) This is also the case for “Deep Faith in Causality” (“Jinshin inga”).
- [226.](#) This name is also used as the title for a collection of ten koan cases that is said to have been compiled by Keizan.
- [227.](#) Okubo Doshu, ed., *Dogen's Complete Works [Dogen Zenji zenshu]* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobo, 1969–1970; reprint, Kyoto: Rinsen, 1989).
- [228.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 237.
- [229.](#) The five remarks are in Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 164, 449, 30, 43, 107. See also Steven Heine, *Readings of Dogen's Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 6–7.
- [230.](#) Steven Heine, *Flowers Blooming from a Withered Tree: Verse Comments on Dogen's Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 80.
- [231.](#) A translation of the *Principles of Practice-Realization* appears in Yuho Yokoi, trans., with Daizen Victoria, *Zen Master Dogen* (New York: Weatherhill, 1975), 58–63. For a thorough analysis of the text, see Tetsuzen Jason M. Wirth, Shudo Brian Schroeder, and Kanpu Bret W. Davis, eds., *Engaging Dogen's Zen: The Philosophy of Practice as Awakening* (Boston: Wisdom, 2017). An excellent Japanese commentary is by Yoshizu Yoshihide, *An Introduction to Buddhism through the Principles of Practice-Realization [Shushogi ni yoru Bukkyo nyomon]* (Tokyo: Daizo shuppan, 1999). However, the *Principles* is not popular in American Zen, which is dominated by non-Japanese, but it is used extensively in such immigrant communities as the Soto Zen sect in Sao Paulo, Brazil.
- [232.](#) Yokoi, *Zen Master Dogen*, 59.

- [233.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 162.
- [234.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 428.
- [235.](#) See Taigen Dan Leighton and Shohaku Okumura, trans., *Dogen's Pure Standards for the Zen Community: A Translation of Eihei Shingi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).
- [236.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Pure Standards*, 121–25.
- [237.](#) Hee-Jin Kim, “‘The Reason of Words and Letters’: Dogen and Koan Language,” in *Dogen Studies*, ed. William R. LaFleur (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 80n9.
- [238.](#) Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 113.
- [239.](#) Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 118.
- [240.](#) Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 118.
- [241.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 14 (“Discerning the Way”), 43–44 (“Mind Itself is Buddha”), 235–36 (“Buddha Nature”), and 875 (“Monk at the Fourth-Stage of Meditation”).
- [242.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 325.
- [243.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 347.
- [244.](#) Morten Schlutter, *How Zen Became Zen: The Dispute over Enlightenment and the Formation of Chan Buddhism in Song-Dynasty China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 164 (modified).
- [245.](#) Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 120.
- [246.](#) Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 121.
- [247.](#) Modified from William F. Powell, trans., *The Record of Tung-shan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 64.
- [248.](#) Cleary, *Blue Cliff Record*, 225.
- [249.](#) See Michael Hoffman, “Mel Brooks Pays Tribute to Carl Reiner,” Consequence of Sound, June 30, 2020; <https://consequenceofsound.net/2020/06/carl-reiner-tributes/>.
- [250.](#) Longya is also cited in case 196 of the *Three Hundred Koan Collection* for responding to a monk’s query, “When do teachers of old get stuck?” by saying, “When the thief slips into an empty room.” In Tanahashi and Looi, *True Dharma Eye*, 265.
- [251.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 315–16.
- [252.](#) Nonomura, *Eat Sleep Sit*.
- [253.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 7.
- [254.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 466.
- [255.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 226.
- [256.](#) Meng-hu, “Zen Poetics of Ryokan,” *Simply Haiku: A Quarterly Journal of Japanese Short Form Poetry* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2006): www.simplyhaiku.com.

- [257.](#) Andrew Wilson, ed. *How Can the Religions of the World Be Unified? Interdisciplinary Essays in Honor of David S. C. Kim* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1987), 25.
- [258.](#) Peter Harris, ed., *Zen Poems* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 107.
- [259.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Pure Standards*, 141–42.
- [260.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 841.
- [261.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 63.
- [262.](#) Heine, *Zen Poetry of Dogen*, 120.
- [263.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 885.
- [264.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 371.
- [265.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 168. Dogen sometimes emphasizes, as in the *Treasury* chapter “Face-to-Face” (“Menju”), the importance of direct in-person teaching, just as he experienced this with his mentor. Part of the reason is that he was being critical of Daruma school monks who had not traveled to the mainland and thus could not have received true knowledge since there were no authentic teachers in Japan at that time. In Dogen’s case, not only did he meet Rujing, but he had the unique opportunity to ask many complicated questions in the abbot’s quarters.
- [266.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 332.
- [267.](#) T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (New York: Knopf, 1921), <https://www.bartleby.com/200/sw4.html>.
- [268.](#) Kazumitsu Wako Kato, *Sky Flower on the Day Before: My Life Guided by Zen Buddhism* (self-published, 2019).
- [269.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 46.
- [270.](#) Zuzana Kubovcakova, “Soto Zen Buddhism in Europe and in Slovakia: Taisen Deshimaru, Sando Kaisen, and Pavol Rozložník” (n.p., 2020). This is the author’s unpublished translation of an article published in Slovak.
- [271.](#) Masao Hirai, *Learning the Heart of Monks by Developing Habits Morning, Noon, and Night* (*Obosan ni narau kokoro ga totono—Asa, hiru, yoru—No shu Skan*) (Tokyo: Discover Twenty-One, 2017).
- [272.](#) Hirai, *Learning the Heart of Monks*.
- [273.](#) Tanahashi, *Treasury*, 30.
- [274.](#) Sam Ling and Marisa Carrasco, “When Sustained Attention Impairs Perception,” *Nature Neuroscience* 9, no. 10 (October 2006): 1243–45.
- [275.](#) Leighton and Okumura, *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 1 (Leighton’s introduction).
- [276.](#) See Brian Victoria, *Zen at War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006). Victoria notes that some Soto priests, especially Uchiyama Gudo, who was executed in the High Treason Incident of 1911, resisted Japanese

imperialism, whereas many others capitulated to political pressures before and during World War II.

- [277.](#) One way of applying Dogen's medieval Buddhist thought to the environmental crisis following the 2011 Fukushima triple disaster is examined in Masato Ishida, "Non-Dualism after Fukushima? Tracing Dogen's Teaching vis-a-vis Nuclear Disaster," in *Japanese Environmental Philosophy*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and James McRae (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 243–70. Ishida links Dogen's discussion of the koan about cutting a cat in half in the *Treasury of Miscellaneous Talks* with his analysis in the "Buddha Nature" fascicle of another case about chopping a worm, since in that situation both halves survive.
- [278.](#) See Carl Alexander Leslie, "Zen Body, Zen Mind: Dogen and the Question of Licensed Evil" (MS thesis, McGill University, 2007).
- [279.](#) See Aldo Tollini, "Japanese Buddhism and Nature: Man and Natural Phenomena in the Quest for Enlightenment," in *Rethinking Nature in Contemporary Japan from Tradition to Modernity*, ed. Bonaventura Ruperti, Silvia Vesco, and Carolina Negri (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2017), 81–96.
- [280.](#) Kim, *Dogen on Meditation*, 43.
- [281.](#) See Jonathan Rieder, *Gospel of Freedom: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail and the Struggle that Changed a Nation* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).
- [282.](#) The "wooden ladle" refers to the immeasurably useful contributions of the new temple cook, and the reference to "heavenly nostrils" apparently alludes to a passage in the Vimalakirti Sutra.
- [283.](#) Dogen boasts, correctly, that he was the first Zen teacher to introduce the practice of delivering formal sermons as initiated in China to his native counterparts.
- [284.](#) Often, the length of the sermons was greater than what is evident in the transcriptions, but some portion was either left unrecorded or was not included by the editor.
- [285.](#) This is a famous saying about the auspicious quality of main areas of Zen temples in eastern China known as Jiangnan, located along the coast both above and below the Yangzi River (*jiang*)—even though *nan* specifically indicates "south."
- [286.](#) The entire sermon is a verse celebrating a Zen master's staff, which is purported to have extraordinary qualities symbolizing the enlightenment ("plum blossom") of the teacher.
- [287.](#) This lecture, abridged here, is from the eighth day of the twelfth month of 1249, which is the beginning of the anniversary of the Buddha's

enlightenment (Rohatsu) that is marked by an intensive weeklong round of meditation (*sesshin*). The lecture begins and ends with a four-line verse.

[288.](#) Dogen's benefactor, the samurai Hatano, who hailed from western Izumo Province but also owned land in Echizen Province, sent to Eihei-ji a new set of scrolls of the complete Buddhist canon, which apparently inspired Dogen late in his life to quote frequently from Indian scriptures. This and the next sermon are dedicated to celebrating the gift.

[289.](#) The reference to the Buddhist canon as a "talisman" may indicate that the handwritten scrolls themselves have a protective power, beyond the meaning of their words, over the sacred space of the temple.

[290.](#) Minamoto, who was probably Dogen's adoptive father, was a son of the boy's real father, Michichika, who descended from Emperor Murakami, the sovereign of Japan in the mid-tenth century.

[291.](#) This and the next sermon both mark in different ways the auspicious beginning of spring. In this year (1250), because of a leap year in the lunar calendar, there were two occasions commemorated.

Bibliography

- Abe, Masao. *A Study of Dogen: His Philosophy and Religion*. Edited by Steven Heine. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.
- Aitken, Robert, trans. *The Gateless Barrier: The Wu-Men Kuan (Mumonkan)*. New York: North Point, 1991.
- Bein, Steve, trans. *Purifying Zen: Watsuji Tetsuro's Shamon Dogen*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011.
- Bielefeldt, Carl. *Dogen's Manuals of Zen Meditation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- . "Recarving the Dragon: History and Dogma in the Study of Dogen." In *Dogen Studies*. Edited by William R. LaFleur, 21–53. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985.
- Bodiford, William M. *Soto Zen in Medieval Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993.
- Brower, Robert H., and Earl Miner. *Japanese Court Poetry*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1961.
- Buswell, Robert E., and Donald S. Lopez, eds. *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013.
- Cleary, Thomas, trans. *The Blue Cliff Record*. Berkeley, CA: Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, 1998.
- Cook, Francis Dojun, trans. *Transmitting the Light: Zen Master Keizan's Denkoroku*. Boston: Wisdom, 2003.
- Dumoulin, Heinrich. *Japan*. Vol. 2 of *Zen Buddhism: A History*. New York: Macmillan, 1988.
- . *Zen Enlightenment: Origins and Meaning*. New York: Weatherhill, 1979.
- Eliot, T. S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." In *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. New York: Knopf, 1921.
<https://www.bartleby.com/200/sw4.html>.
- Eto, Sokuo. *Zen Master Dogen as Founding Patriarch*. Translated by Ichiumura Shohei. Washington, DC: North American Institute of Zen and Buddhist Studies, 2001.

- Eubanks, Charlotte. "Performing Mind, Writing Meditation: Dogen's Fukanzazengi as Zen Calligraphy." *Ars Orientalia* 46 (2016): 173–97.
- Girard, Frederic. *The Stanza of the Bell in the Wind: Zen and Nenbutsu in the Early Kamakura Period*. Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies, 2007.
- Greenwood, Gesshin Claire. *Just Enough: Vegan Recipes and Stories from Japan's Buddhist Temples*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2019.
- Harris, Peter, ed. *Zen Poems*. New York: Knopf, 1999.
- Heine, Steven. "After the Storm: Matsumoto Shiro's Transition from 'Critical Buddhism' to 'Critical Theology.'" *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 28, no. 1–2 (2001): 133–46.
- . *Did Dogen Go to China? What He Wrote and When He Wrote It*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- , ed. *Dogen and Soto Zen*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- . *Dogen and the Koan Tradition: A Tale of Two Shobogenzo Texts*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.
- , ed. *Dogen: Textual and Historical Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- . *Flowers Blooming on a Withered Tree: Verse Comments on Dogen's Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- . *From Chinese Chan to Japanese Zen: A Remarkable Century of Transmission and Transformation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- . *Readings of Dogen's Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020.
- . *Shifting Shape, Shaping Text: Philosophy and Folklore in the Fox Koan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999.
- . "'Thy Rod and Thy Staff They Discomfort Me': Zen Staffs as Implements of Instruction." In *Zen and Material Culture*. Edited by Pamela D. Winfield and Steven Heine, 1–36. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- , trans. *The Zen Poetry of Dogen: Verses from the Mountain of Eternal Peace*. Mount Tremper, NY: Dharma Communications, 2004.
- Hirai, Masao. *Learning the Heart of Monks by Developing Habits Morning, Noon, and Night* [*Obosan ni narau kokoro ga totono—asa, hiru, yoru—no shukan*]. Tokyo: Discover Twenty-One, 2017.
- Hoffman, Michael. "Mel Brooks Pays Tribute to Carl Reiner," June 30, 2020. <https://consequenceofsound.net/2020/06/carl-reiner-tributes/>.
- Hubbard, Jamie, and Paul L. Swanson, eds. *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm over Critical Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997.
- Ishida, Masato. "Non-Dualism after Fukushima? Tracing Dogen's Teaching vis-à-vis Nuclear Disaster." In *Japanese Environmental Philosophy*. Edited by J. Baird Callicott and James McRae, 243–70. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

- Jaffe-Hoffman, Maayan, "Was the corner of God's altar found in Shiloh, West Bank?" *Jerusalem Post*, October 31, 2019.
- Kato, Kazumitsu Wako. *Sky Flower on the Day Before: My Life Guided by Zen Buddhism*. Self-published, 2019.
- Kawabata, Yasunari. *Japan, the Beautiful, and Myself*. Translated by E. G. Seidensticker. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1969.
- Kawamura, Kodo, Genryu Kagamishima, Kakuzen Suzuki, and Kiyu Kosaka, eds. *Dogen's Complete Works [Dogen Zenji zenshu]*. 7 vols. Tokyo: Shunjusha, 1988–1993.
- Kennett, Jiyu, trans. *Selling Water by the River: A Manual of Zen Training*. New York: Vintage, 1972.
- Kim, Hee-Jin. *Dogen Kigen—Mystical Realist*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1975.
- . *Dogen on Meditation and Thinking: A Reflection on His View of Zen*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007.
- . "‘The Reason of Words and Letters’: Dogen and Koan Language." In *Dogen Studies*. Edited by William R. LaFleur, 54–82. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985.
- Kodera, Takashi James. *Dogen's Formative Years in China: An Annotated Translation and Historical Study of the Hokyoki*. Boulder, CO: Prajna, 1980.
- Kubovcakova, Zuzana. "Soto Zen Buddhism in Europe and in Slovakia: Taisen Deshimaru, Sando Kaisen, and Pavol Rozložník." N.p., 2020.
- Leighton, Taigen Dan. "Introduction." In Taigen Dan Leighton and Shohaku Okumura, trans., *Dogen's Extensive Record*, 1–46. Boston: Wisdom, 2010.
- Leighton, Taigen Dan, and Shohaku Okumura, trans. *Dogen's Extensive Record*. Boston: Wisdom, 2010.
- , trans. *Dogen's Pure Standards for the Zen Community: A Translation of Eihei Shingi*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.
- Leslie, Carl Alexander. "Zen Body, Zen Mind: Dogen and the Question of Licensed Evil." MS thesis, McGill University, 2007.
- Levering, Miriam L. "The Dragon Girl and the Abbess of Mo-Shan: Gender and Status in the Chan Buddhist Tradition." *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 4, no. 1 (1982), 19–36.
- Li, Puqun. *A Guide to Asian Philosophy Classics*. New York: Broadway, 2012.
- Ling, Sam, and Marisa Carrasco. "When Sustained Attention Impairs Perception." *Nature Neuroscience* 9, no. 10 (October 2006): 1243–45.
- Masunaga, Reiho, trans. *Record of Things Heard: A Translation of Dogen's Shobogenzo Zuimonki*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1971.
- , trans. *The Soto Approach to Zen*. Tokyo: Layman Buddhist Society, 1958.
- McRae, John R. *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

- Meng-hu. "Zen Poetics of Ryokan," *Simply Haiku: A Quarterly Journal of Japanese Short Form Poetry* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2006).
- Mross, Michaela. *Memory, Music, Manuscripts: The Ritual Dynamics of Koshiki in Japanese Soto Zen Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2022.
- Nishiyama, Kosen, and John Stevens, trans. *Shobogenzo: The Eye and Treasury of the True Law*. 4 vols. Tokyo: Nakayama shobo, 1975–1983.
- Nakano, Tozen. *Sunday Treasury [Nichiyobi Shobogenzo]*. Tokyo: Tokyodo shuppan, 2012.
- Nonomura, Kaoru. *Eat Sleep Sit*. Translated by Juliet Winters Carpenter. New York: Kodansha USA, 2015.
- Okubo, Doshu, ed. *Dogen's Complete Works [Dogen Zenji zenshu]*. Tokyo: Chikuma shobo, 1969–1970. Reprint, Kyoto: Rinsen, 1989.
- Ozeki, Ruth. *A Tale for the Time Being*. New York: Penguin, 2013.
- Powell, William F., trans. *The Record of Tung-shan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986.
- Rieder, Jonathan. *Gospel of Freedom: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail and the Struggle that Changed a Nation*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014.
- Schlutter, Morten. *How Zen Became Zen: The Dispute over Enlightenment and the Formation of Chan Buddhism in Song-Dynasty China*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008.
- Seidensticker, Edward G. *Genji Days*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1977.
- , trans. *The Tale of Genji*. 2 vols. New York: Knopf, 1976.
- Sekiryo, Mokudo, ed. *Modern Translation of the Illustrated Record of Kenzei [Gendaigoyaku Kenzeiki zue]*. Tokyo: Kokusho inkokai, 2001.
- Sotoshu Zensho jokankokai, ed. *Soto Sect Collection [Sotoshu zensho]*. 18 vols. Tokyo: Soto shumucho, 1970–1973.
- Steineck, Raji C. "Enlightened Authorship: The Case of Dogen Kigen." In *That Wonderful Composite Called Author: Authorship in East Asian Literatures from the Beginnings to the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Christian Schwermann and Raji C. Steineck, 217–39. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2014.
- Takakusu, Juniro and Kaigyoku Watanabe, eds. *Buddhist Canon [Taisho shinshu daizokyo]*. 100 vols. Tokyo: Taisho issaikyo kankokai, 1924–1932.
- Tamura, Yoshiro. *Japanese Buddhism: A Cultural History*. Tokyo: Kosei, 2000.
- Tanahashi, Kazuaki, ed. *Enlightenment Unfolds: The Essential Teachings of Zen Master Dogen*. Boston: Shambhala, 1999.
- , ed. *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*. New York: North Point, 1985.
- , ed. *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen's Shobo Genzo*. Boston: Shambhala, 2010.

- Tanahashi, Kazuaki, and John Daido Looi, trans. *The True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen's Three Hundred Koans*. Boston: Shambhala, 2005.
- Tokiwa, Gishin, trans. *A Treatise on Letting Zen Flourish to Protect the State (Taisho Volume 80, Number 2543)*. In *Zen Texts*. Edited by BDK America, 45–240. Berkeley, CA: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2005.
- Tollini, Aldo. "Japanese Buddhism and Nature: Man and Natural Phenomena in the Quest for Enlightenment." In *Rethinking Nature in Contemporary Japan from Tradition to Modernity*. Edited by Bonaventura Ruperti, Silvia Vesco, and Carolina Negri, 81–96. Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2017.
- Uchiyama, Kosho, and Shohaku Okumura. *The Zen Teachings of Homeless Kodo*. Boston: Wisdom, 2014.
- Umehara, Takeshi and Jikido Takasaki. *Learning from the Master [Kobutsu no maneb]*. Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1969.
- Unno, Mark. *Shingon Refractions: Myoe and the Mantra of Light*. Boston: Wisdom, 1997.
- Victoria, Brian. *Zen at War*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006.
- Waddell, Norman, and Masao Abe, trans. *The Heart of Dogen's Shobogenzo*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.
- Wilson, Andrew, ed. *How Can the Religions of the World Be Unified?: Interdisciplinary Essays in Honor of David S. C. Kim*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1987.
- Winfield, Pamela D. "Materializing the Zen Monastery." In *Zen and Material Culture*. Edited by Pamela D. Winfield and Steven Heine, 37–69. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Wirth, Tetsuzen Jason M., Shudo Brian Schroeder, and Kanpu Bret W. Davis, eds. *Engaging Dogen's Zen: The Philosophy of Practice as Awakening*. Boston: Wisdom, 2017.
- Yifa, trans. *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan Qinggui*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002.
- Yokoi, Yuho, trans., with Daizen Victoria. *Zen Master Dogen: An Introduction with Selected Writings*. New York: Weatherhill, 1976.
- Yoshizu, Yoshihide. *An Introduction to Buddhism through the Principles of Practice-Realization [Shushogi ni yoru Bukkyo nyomon]*. Tokyo: Daizo shuppan, 1999.

Index

Note: Index entries from the print edition of this book have been included for use as search terms. They can be located by using the search feature of your e-book reader.

Abe, Masao

Account of My Hut (Chomei)

Aichi Prefecture

Amida Buddha. *See also* nenbutsu

Ananda

Annotated Record of Kenzei (Menzan)

Anyo'in hermitage

archaeology

Ashikaga clan

attachment

Auspicious Signs of Spring

awakening. *See* enlightenment

awakening, four phases of

Ayuwang temple

Baikaryu

Baizhang

being-time (*uji*)

biographies

disputed aspects of

- sectarian
- traditional Dogen narrative
- birth-and-death
- Blue Cliff Record*
 - influence of
 - on language
 - publication of
 - style of
 - on “turnaround experience,”
 - See also *One-Night Copy of the Blue Cliff Record*
- Bodhidharma
- bodhisattva precepts
- bodhisattva vow
- Brooks, Mel
- buddhahood
 - easy way to
 - four levels of understanding
 - See *also* enlightenment
- buddha-nature (*busscho*)
 - actualizing
 - as everyday truth
 - expressions of
 - universality of
 - See *also* original enlightenment (*hongaku*)
- Buddhist cannon
- calligraphy
- cast off dust from mind
- casting off body-mind (*shinjin datsuraku*)
- casting off casting off
- Chan, Chinese
 - critiques of
 - Five Houses of

influence of
language in
liberties with
propagation of
Changsha
Changzong
China
 after enlightenment experience
 contemporary, Buddhism in
 pilgrimage to
 reflections on
 sea voyage
 Tang dynasty
 timing of journey to
 wandering period
 See also monasticism, Chinese; *Record of Private
 Conversations*; Song dynasty; *Treasury of Miscellaneous
 Talks*
Chinese Poetry Collection
*Chinese Treasury of the True Dharma Eye. See Three Hundred
 Koan Case Collection*
Chomei
Christian missionaries
class equality
compassion
 constant practice of
 dignified behavior and
 of Kannon
 in monastic regulations
conceptual thinking
Condensed Monastic Rules
Confucianism
contemplative consciousness/awareness

in all behaviors
attuned to surroundings
Dogen's approach to
time and
cooks
encounters with
role of
court society
Critical Buddhism movement

Dahui
Daibutsuji temple
Daichi
Daigenshuri
Daijoji temple
Dainichi Nonin
Dairyuji temple
Dakini shinten
Damei temple
Danxia Zichun
Daoism
Daowu
Daruma school
absorption by Soto
critiques of
at Hajakuji
impact of
instilling loyalty in
in Keizan's school
degenerate age (*mappo*)
delusion
Dogen's
overcoming

and realization, relationship between
Deshan
devotion

critique of
Dogen's view of
performance of
value of
dignified demeanor (*iigi*)

"Discerning the Way,"

on devotion

on doubt

Eisai's influence in

on gender equality

koans in

on oneness of practice-realization

on return to Japan

on seated meditation

in Soto school, role of

on spiritual path

style of

in *Treasury*

Distinguished Comments (Senne and Kyogo)

Dogen

approach of

arrogance of

author's study of

career of

conflicting views in

contemporary scholarship on

death of

distinctions

as "granny,"

handwriting of

illness of

Japanese scholarship on

modern relevance of

names of

nonsectarianism of

positive outlook of

renown of

See also formative period; performative period; reformative period; transformative period

Dogen Zen

cultural applicability of

dignified demeanor in

effort and spontaneity in

ground-up outlook of

language's role in

modern worldviews and

as ongoing revision

polarized views about

realization in

social and environmental applications of

Dogen's Complete Works

Dogen's Moon (Kabuki)

Dogen's One-Night Copy of the Blue Cliff Record.

Dongling

Dongming

Dongshan. *See also* *Precious Mirror of Samadhi* (*Hokyo zanmai*)

doubt

constructive

Dogen's

resolving

significance of

See also great doubt (*taigi*)

Dumoulin, Heinrich

Dylan, Bob

East Asian Buddhism

Eastern Buddhist journal

Eat Sleep Sit (Nonomura)

Echizen Province

move to, variant views on

poetry written at

Treasury composition at

Edo period

ego

Eiheiji temple

abbots of

archives at

Chinese tourists at

construction of

contemporary upgrades to

dignified demeanor at

Dogen's relics at

festivals at

hierarchy at

legacy of

meditation schedule at

performative approach at

poetic compositions at

rites at

ritual austerities at

sermons at

success at

supernatural occurrences at

See also under miscellaneous writings

Einstein, Albert

Eisai

commemorating
on Daruma school
death of
dignity of
and Dogen, connections between
influence of
possible meeting with
on taking full set of precepts

See also *How to Stay Healthy by Drinking Tea; Propagation of
Zen for the Protection of the State*

Ejo

appointed as successor
arrival at Kenninji
discovery of manuscripts by
and Dogen, relationship between
as editor and scribe
Gikai and
on Nanquan
Treasury structure and

Eliot, T. S.

emptiness

Engaged Buddhism

enlightenment

aspiration for
capacity for, universal
consistency in
Dogen's
everyday mind as, refutation of
here and now
instantaneous
in instantaneous flashes
language and
nature and

sudden and gradual
verification of
Zen paradigm of
See also realization
enlightenment dialogue
Enni Ben'en
environmental issues
Essentials of Learning the Way
ethics. *See* morality and ethics
Eto Sokuo
Eubanks, Charlotte
exertion (*gyoji*)
*Existential and Ontological Dimensions of Time in Heidegger and
Dogen* (Heine)
Extensive Record
 abridgement (see *Recorded Sayings* (Giin))
 after trip to Kamakura
 compilation of
 composition of
 on contemplative reclusion
 contents of
 doctrinal themes in
 on Echizen environment
 on Enlightenment Day
 on gift of Buddhist cannon
 Gikai's awakening and
 interest in
 language use in
 on Longya's poem
 memorials in
 message of
 performative approach in
 on preaching to shogun

and *Recorded Sayings*, comparison of
on Rujing's wind bell verse
on Ryonen
seasonal imagery in
sermons in
structure of
style of
on summer zazen schedule
on welcoming new cook

See also under *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*

Final Instructions in the Master's Room

Five Mountains of Zen (China)

floating-world-style illustrations (*ukiyoe*)

Flower Garland Sutra

formal sermons

Dogen's introduction to Japan

at Eihei-ji

in *Extensive Record*

focus on

omissions in

proclamations in

purposes of

schedule for

formative period

birth

doubt and disillusionment

early childhood education

training at Mount Hiei

four daily activities

Fujiwara clan

connection to

decline of

divergence with
influence of
Rinzai, support for
support of
Fujiwara Teika
Fukakusa
Fukushima disaster
Furong Daokai

Gasán
Gateless Gate (Mumonkan)
Gemmyo
gender inclusivity
Genghis Khan
Gento
Gesshu Soko
Gien
Giin
Gikai
Giun
giving, virtue of
great doubt (*taigi*)
 breakthrough and
 Dogen's
 Eisai's response
 historical context for
 resolving
 Rujing's response
great matter (*daiji*)
Green Buddhism
Gudo, Uchiyama
Guishan

Hajakuji
Hakata port
Hakusan, Mount
Hatano Yoshishige
 gift from
 patronage of
 Tokiyori visit and
“Heart of Perfect Wisdom,”
Heart Sutra
Heian period
Heidegger, Martin
Heisenji temple
Hiei temple
Hinayana
Hojo clan
Hojo Tokiyori
 conversion of
 visit to
 wife of
Hokyoji temple
Honen
Honen’s Pure Land
Hongzhi
Honko Katsudo
How to Stay Healthy by Drinking Tea (Eisai)
Huike, second patriarch
Huineng, sixth patriarch
Huiyuan

Ikeda Rosan
Illustrated Annotated Record of Kenzei
imperial (Yamato) line
impermanence

accepting
contemplation of
effects of
emphasis on
of existence
personal experiences of
seasonal imagery and

Inari

Indian Buddhism

causality in
in Dogen's writings
studies of

individual salvation

inheritance documents/transmission certificates

Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University

Instructions for the Cook

interconnectivity

Ippen

Ishi (mother)

Jakuen

Japan

and China, exchange between

Chinese tourists in

Mongol invasion of

natural catastrophes in

pre-World War II militarism

return to

sociopolitical instability in

temple grouping in

Zen's transplantation to

See *also* Edo period; Kamakura period

Japanese Buddhism

and arts, connection between
breakdown and reconfiguration of
Dogen's role in
formal sermons in
innovations in
memorial rituals in
reformation in
rivalry in
sectarianism in
secular authority in
Sinitic sources of
traditional worldview of
vernacular writing in
zazen's emphasis in

See *also* New Kamakura Buddhism

Japanese Buddhist History (Kokan)

Japanese literary tradition

allusive variation in

nature symbolism in

Japanese Poetry Collection

abridgement

composition of

controversy over

message of

structure and contents of

Jiangnan district

Jiashan

Jingci temple

Jingshan monastery

Jizo

Jokyu disturbance

Joyce, James

Jufukuji cloister

just circulating
just doing
just enough
just resonating
just sitting (*shikan taza*)
 buddha nature and
 commitment to
 as core method
 divergence from
 in Dogen Zen
 emphasis on
 as essential to enlightenment
 in everyday life
 in Keizan's school
 koan practice and
 nonthinking and
 precepts and
 purposelessness of
 self-realization in
 spread of
just speaking

Kakua

Kakunen

Kamakura

 six-month visit to
 visit, variant views on
 writing during
Kamakura period
 émigré monks in
 samurai in
 spiritual trends in
 Tendai in

Kanadeva

Kannon

- in poetry

- salvific power of

- statue of

- visions of

karmic causality

- attaining the Way and

- denial of

- emphasis on

- equilibrium and

- nonduality and

- as originally void

- role of

- two views of

karmic retribution

Kato, Kazumitsu Wako

Kawabata, Yasunari

Kawamura Koda

Kegon school

Keizan (fourth Soto patriarch). See also *Transmission of Light*

Kenchoji temple

Kennett, Jiyu

Kenninji temple

- brief visit to

- cook at

- decline at

- dignity at

- new students at

- relics at

- second sojourn at

- syncretism at

- training at

Kerouac, Jack

Kichijo, Mount

Kim, Hee-Jin

King, Jr., Martin Luther

Kippoji hermitage

Kishizawa Ian

koan cases

Bodhidharma “from the west,”

Buddhas of past, present, future

capping phrases in

commentarial style, development of

Dongshan’s three pounds of flax

fox spirit

innovative interpretations of

introduction in Japan

in major collections

mixed feelings on

most extraordinary experience

mu

Nanquan killing cat

“nothing is concealed...,”

retreats and

Rinzai focus on

Rujing’s

study of

sutra study and

verse commentary style

See also *Three Hundred Koan Case Collection*; *Verse*

Comments on Ninety Koan Cases

Kodera, Takashi James

Koen

Koin

Kokan Shiren

Komazawa University

Kosen Nishiyama

Koshoji temple

- construction at

- destruction of

- final years at

- founding of

- sermons at

- See also under* miscellaneous writings

Koshu

Koshu Chido

Kozanji temple

Kublai Khan

Kujo Michiie

Kukai

Kyogo

Kyoto

- Five Mountains temples in

- journey to

- medical care in

- Tendai's influence in

Kyushu temple

laity

- activities for

- in Baikaryu

- in China, engagement with

- Dogen Zen for

- female

- in Japan

- poetry for

- Principles of Practice-Realization* for

- Rujing's relationship with

in Soto Zen
zazen for
language
defining
Dogen's view of
innovations with
power of
role of
uncertainty about
in Zen, role of
See *also* just speaking
Leighton, Taigen Dan
"Letter from Birmingham Jail" (King)
Lingyin temple
Lingyun
Longya
Lotus Sutra
free interpretation of
in Nichiren
poems on
in Tendai school
written on wall
in Zen

Mahakasyapa

Mahayana

Mahayana sutras

Maitreya

major collections

abbreviated editions

sequence of textual productivity

See also *Extensive Record*; *Japanese Poetry Collection*;
Monastic Rules; *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*

Manzan

martial arts

master-disciple relationships

- Dogen and Ejo

- equality in

- karma in

- in Longya's poem

- Rujing and Dogen

- vertical and horizontal methods in

Masunaga, Reiho

Mazar, Eilat

Mazu

McRae, John

meditation

- calming and contemplation (*samatha-vipassana*)

- and environment, awareness during

- in everyday endeavors

- housekeeping and

- intensive

- language invoking

- revision of

- solitary

- as supreme rest

- See also* zazen

Memorial for Arhats

memorial ritual (*koshiki*)

Menzan. *See also Annotated Record of Kenzei*

metaphors and symbols

- blade of grass

- boat, traveling in

- bright pearl

- dragon and phoenix

- fist

jade or stone woman
measuring device
monk's staff
natural
oxen
oyster and waves
pearl rolling in bowl
plum blossoms
Michichika (father)
Michitomo Minamoto
Minamoto (Genji) clan
mind
 as Buddha
 cast off dust from
 holistic view of
 metabolic syndrome of
 resting
 three levels of
 Zen view of
miracles. See supernatural occurrences
miscellaneous writings
 chronology of
 early Koshoji
 late Eiheiji
 pre-Koshoji
 as stand-alone works
Mizuno Yaoko
Momentous Pure Land
monastic discipline (*vinaya*)
Monastic Rules
 abridgement (see *Condensed Monastic Rules*)
 compilation of
 composition of

- contents of
 - Instructions for the Cook* in
 - irreverent dialogues in
 - on just enough
 - structure
- monasticism, Chinese
 - calendar in
 - conviction in
 - critiques of
 - dignified demeanor in
 - focus and governance of, differences in
 - precepts in
 - sectarian discrepancies in
 - seven-hall temple construction in
- monasticism, Japanese
 - activities of
 - calendar in
 - and Chinese, institutional connections between
 - disillusionment with
 - Dogen's development of
 - eighteen objects in
 - everyday tasks of
 - Gikai-Keizan approach in
 - meal customs
 - nuns in
 - physicality of
 - Song-dynasty models in
- Monju
- Monk Dogen* (Watsuji)
- Monkaku
- morality and ethics. *See also* karmic causality; karmic retribution
- Moroie
- Motofusa

Mount Tiantong. See Tiantong temple

Mujaku Dochu

Muju Ichi'en

Murakami

Myochi

Myoe

Myozen

- commemoration of
- death of
- on Dogen's meeting Eisai
- ordination by
- pilgrimage with
- separation from
- studies with
- transmissions from
- on travel to China

myths and legends

- in modern historiography
- in sectarian biographies
- in traditional Dogen narrative

Nagarjuna

Nakano Tozen

Nanquan

Nara

nenbutsu

New Kamakura Buddhism

Nichiren

Nichiren school

Ningbo

Nirvana Sutra

Nishiari Bokusan

no-mind

Nonomura, Kaoru
nonpersistence (*anitya*)
nonsectarianism
nonsubstantiality (*anatman*)
nonthinking (*hishiryo*)
nuns

 in Japanese Buddhism
 Myochi
 Ryonen
 at Tiantong

Obaku school
Odyssey (Homer)
Okubo Doshu
“On Reading Dogen’s *Extensive Record*” (Ryokan)
“On the Origin of the *Universal Recommendation for Zazen*,”
oneness
 all-encompassing
 incorporating variability
 of practice-realization
One-Night Copy of the Blue Cliff Record
Onjoji temple
oral instructions
original enlightenment (*hongaku*)
challenge to
 doubt about
 fallacy of
 and practice, unity of
original face
“Original Face,”
Oryu lineage
other-power (*tariki*)
Ouchi Seiran

Ozeki, Ruth

pedagogy

aims and goals of
Chinese-style
controversies about
defining
discursive methods
in early Koshoji years
and Kamakura visit, effect on
language used in
monastic discipline in, emphasis on
open-ended discourse
performative

performative period

Pluto

poetry

Chinese-style
Chinese-style death verse
contemplative
court, Japanese
haiku
on Potalaka, comparison of
“Snowy Evening in Spring,”
study of
vernacular language in
“Visiting a Pious Layman

Mourning the Death of His Son,”
wind bell verse

See also *Chinese Poetry Collection*; waka poetry

postrealization practices

Potalaka, Mount

precepts

in China, requirement for
importance of
Japan's defense and
role of
zazen and

Precious Mirror of Samadhi (Hokyo zanmai, Dongshan)

Principles of Practice-Realization

"Principles of Zazen" (Zongze)

Propagation of Zen for the Protection of the State (Eisai)

Pure Land schools

critique of
votive recitation in
women in

quantum mechanics

quantum physics

Rankei Doryu

realization

here and now (*genjokoan*)
and practice, unity of

Record of Dogen's Will. See Final Instructions in the Master's Room

Record of Kenzei

Record of Private Conversations

compilation of
on contemplative reclusion
contents of
discovery and rediscovery of
instructions on Dharma propagation
versions
on wind bell verse

Record of Serenity

Record of Things Heard (Masunaga)

Recorded Sayings (Giin)

recorded sayings genre

reformatory period

 founding of Koshoji

 Koshoji flourishing

 Kyoto, establishing assembly in

rhetorical innovations in

refuge

Reiner, Carl

relics

 Dogen's

 Myozen's

Relics of Myozen

repentance (*zange*)

rhetoric

 complexity of

 critiques of

 innovations in

katto, use of term

 in major collections

 partisan

 Sinitic

Rinzai Zen

 critiques of

 founding of

 koans in

 as New Kamakura Buddhism

 official favor of

 ordination in

 struggles of

 study of

 temples of

 variance with

ritualism

robes

Rujing

commemorating

death of

on Dharma propagation

dialogues with

fidelity to

influence of

on karma

liberties with methods of

meeting

ordination by

in *Private Conversations*

on reclusion

seal of verification from

studies with

teaching style of

veneration of

wind bell verse of

as Zen master, emphasis on

Rules for Zen Monasteries

Ruyan

Ryokan

Ryonen

Ryuzen

Saicho

samadhi, self-fulfilling and other-fulfilling

samurai

Sartre, Jean-Paul

Sawaki Kodo

seasonal imagery

in *Extensive Record*
in Japanese poetry
modern import of
transcendence and
secluded retreats
seeing things just as they are
Seidensticker, E. G.
Sekidozan, Mount
self (*atman*)
self-awareness
self-control
self-power (*jiriki*)
self-realization
Selling Water by the River (Kennett)
Senika heresy
Senne
sensations, realm of
sermons
 comparison of formal and informal
 impromptu
 informal
 See *also* formal sermons
Shakyamuni Buddha
 awakening of
 commemorating
 death of
 Mahakasyapa and
 spiritual communion with
 teaching style of
 in waka poetry
 in Zen lineage
shamans/shamanistic practices
Shigetsu Ein

Shingon school
Shinran
Shinto
Shoboji temple
Shofukuji temple
Shogaku
shoguns
sitting meditation. *See* zazen
six realms
six supernormal powers
Sixteen Arhats
Sizhuo
Sojiji temple
Song dynasty
 influences of
 and Japan, relationship between
 recorded sayings genre in
 script of
 Southern
 “velvet exile” of Zen priests during
Soto angels, vision of
Soto Approach to Zen (Masunaga)
Soto Zen
 Baikaryu in
 competitors to
 Daruma contributions to
 Dogen’s life story in
 Dogen’s role in
 Ejo’s ordination
 festivals in
 five ranks of
 founding of
 Hongzhi’s influence on

independence of
Kannon in
late medieval spreading of
loyalty to
memorial rituals in
as New Kamakura Buddhism
ordination in
oryoki in
patriarchs of
publications of
Recorded Sayings in
societal goals of
temples of
Treasury and

Soto Zen Translation Project (Stanford)

spiritual communion (*kanno doko*)

spiritual teachers. *See also* master-disciple relationships

Stevens, John

Su Shi

Sunday's Treasury (Nakano)

supernatural occurrences

sutras. *See also* Mahayana sutras

Suzuki, D. T.

symbolism

repudiation of

tantric

See also metaphors and symbols

Tachibana

Taisen Deshimaru

Tale for the Time Being (Ozeki)

Tale of Genji

Tale of Heike

Tamekane

Tamura, Yoshiro

tea, role of

Tendai Buddhism (Japanese)

- departure from

- Dogen's breakthrough in

- dominance of

- doubt in

- esoteric aspect of

- gender and class inequality in

- ordination in

- precepts in

- splintering of

Temporal and Mountain Gates

Thoreau, Henry David

Three Hundred Koan Case Collection

three teachings theory

Tiantai, Mount

Tiantai Buddhism (China)

Tiantong temple

- authority structure at

- continuing association with

- cooks at

- departure from

- disillusionment at

- Dogen's recorded sayings at

- poetry written at

- refurbishment of

- return to

time. See *also* being-time (*uji*)

Tofukuji temple

Toji temple

Tokyo Imperial University

Touzi Datong

training

- elements of

- interconnectedness in

- purpose of

- single method of

transformative period

- Kenninji training

- pre-enlightenment phase

- with Rujing

transmission. *See also* inheritance documents/transmission

- certificates

Transmission of Light (Keizan)

Treasury of Miscellaneous Talks

- on Chinese monasticism

- compilation of

- contents of

- on Nanquan killing cat

- on reading classics

- versions of

Treasury of the True Dharma Eye

- abridgement (see *Principles of Practice-Realization*)

- on all-encompassing oneness

- on awakening, consistency of

- on balance

- Ben-Gen-Butsu in

- on Buddha, embodiment of

- on buddhahood

- commentaries

- composition of

- difficulty of

- doctrinal themes in

- and *Extensive Record*, intertextual connections between

on female practitioners
on genjokoan
on impermanence
koan exploration in
Kozen's ninety-five chapters
language use in
last chapter
legacy of
Main Temple Edition
message of
modern relevance of
and *Monastic Rules*, connections
between
on "one bright pearl,"
Original Edition
and other writings, connection with
on precepts
on rice cake painting
on robes
on Rujing's commitment to zazen
Rujing's influence in
on Rujing's wind bell verse
sermons for Hantano in
in seventy-five chapters
in sixty chapters
structure of
style of
translations of
on transmission
in twenty-eight chapters (Private Treasury)
vernacular language of
versions of
on voyage to China

See also *Twelve-Chapter Treasury*
True Pure Land (Jodo Shin)
true reality

Daruma school view of
gateless gate of
language in expressing
and practice, relationship between
Twelve Waka (for the Shogun's Wife)
Twelve-Chapter Treasury

Umehara Takeshi
Universal Recommendation for Zazen
commentary on
contents of
importance of
influences on
on just sitting
versions

Vairocana
Verse Comments (Giun)
Verse Comments on Ninety Koan Cases
Verses on the Treasury of the Dharma (*Abhidharmakosa*,
Vasubandhu)
Verses on the Way from Sansho Peak. See *Japanese Poetry*
Collection

Vimalakirti Sutra

Vinaya

visions
of sage
of Sixteen Arhats

Waddell, Norman

waka poetry

Crimson leaves

The Dharma, like an oyster

Each moment waking, sleeping

“Everyday Practice,”

Following only the deluded path

in Kamakura

Like a blade of grass

“Not a moment is to be spent idly in the twenty-four hours of
each day!,”

positive outlook in

in *Tale of Genji*

techniques of

“Treasury of the True Dharma-Eye,”

What can I accomplish?

Will their gaze fall upon

See also *Japanese Poetry Collection; Twelve Waka (for the
Shogun's Wife)*

wandering holy men (*hijiri*)

Wannian temple

Watsuji Tetsuro

wheel of samsara

“When hungry I eat rice....,”

writings

aim of

contemporary readership

dating, uncertainty of

difficulty

in Echizen

innovations in

Japanese scholarship on

“late” and “early,” variant views on

late-late stage, variant views on

legacy of
list of titles with translation
methodological debates about
on moral causality
polemics of
preservation and revision of
variety in

See *also* major collections; miscellaneous writings; rhetoric

Wuji

Xiangyan

Xuansha

Xuedou

Xuefeng

Yamashibudera temple

Yanguan Qian

Yaoshan

Yokoji temple

Yoshitoki

Yoshizu Yoshihide Sensei

Yuanwu. See also *Blue Cliff Record*

Yunyan

zazen

as Buddha-realization

Dogen's method of

in East Asian Buddhism

emphasis on

esotericism integrated with

as essential to Buddhism

everyday actions and

face-to-face consultation in

purposeless

Rujing's commitment to
value of

See also just sitting (*shikan taza*)

Zen

American

dialogues in

dissemination of

experiential basis of

language's role in

martial arts and

methods of

and Mongol invasions, resistance to

natural environment as expressions of

paradigm of spontaneous insight in

as "special transmission outside doctrine,"

studies of

traditional Buddhism and

"turnaround experience" in

See also Dogen Zen

Zen (biopic)

Zen at War (Victoria)

Zen Master Dogen (Yokoi and Daizen)

Zhaozhou

Zhuangzi

Zongze

LIVES OF THE MASTERS

“Since the time of Buddha Shakyamuni himself, Buddhists have been accustomed to recollect the lives of great teachers and practitioners as a source of inspiration from which we may still learn. The Lives of the Masters series continues this noble tradition, recounting the stories, wisdom, and experience of many accomplished Buddhists over the last 2,500 years. I am sure readers will find the accounts in this series inspirational and encouraging.”

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA

“The lives of the most important Buddhist masters in history written by the very best of scholars in elegant and accessible prose—who could ask for more?”

JOSÉ CABEZÓN, *Professor of Tibetan Buddhist Studies, University of California Santa Barbara*

BOOKS IN THE SERIES

Atiśa Dīpaṃkara: Illuminator of the Awakened Mind
Dogen: Japan's Original Zen Teacher
Gendun Chopel: Tibet's Modern Visionary
Maitrīpa: India's Yogi of Nondual Bliss
S. N. Goenka: Emissary of Insight
The Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje: Master of Mahāmudrā
Tsongkhapa: A Buddha in the Land of Snows
Xuanzang: China's Legendary Pilgrim and Translator

*Please visit www.shambhala.com for more information on
forthcoming titles.*

Sign up to receive news and special offers from Shambhala Publications.



Or visit us online to sign up at shambhala.com/eshambhala.