

Watsuji's Reading of Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*

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Watsuji's "Dōgen, the Monk" (*Shamon Dōgen* 「沙門道元」) is noteworthy for being one of the first attempts to take up a single author and his work as a pre-modern source of philosophy outside of the Western tradition. Perhaps without realizing it, Watsuji helped initiate a tradition of Japanese thought in which Dōgen is recognized as the cornerstone of medieval thought, opening up new horizons for philosophy and reconfirming the rich plurality of its resources.

RAMIFICATIONS OF WATSUJI'S DISCOVERY OF DŌGEN

Watsuji drew attention to a notion of language within Buddhist speculation that immediately affects our common understanding of philosophy inasmuch as the approach to language he presents does not seem to fit easily into views prevalent in mainstream Western philosophy. In seeing language as not just a tool for communicating thoughts but is a constitutive medium of philosophy, the impact of philosophy cannot but be profound. It is, of course, from Dōgen's writings that Watsuji lays down his challenge.

Moving closer to the subject at hand, if one takes language to be the constitutive medium of philosophy, then apologists of Zen would forth-

with rebuke all philosophical approaches to Zen, because, more often than not, those who criticize philosophical discussions from a Zen position disapprove of a positive relation between language and Zen. It is worth noting here that Watsuji takes up the matter of language and Zen in the specific context of a critique of the Rinzai school of Zen, where Western interpreters are most likely to turn in defense of the idea that enlightenment and its transmission transcend the domains of language.

Also supporting this idea is the popular Zen slogan *fūryū monji, kyōge betsuden* 不立文字、教外別伝, which, reduced to its literal rendering, means “a special transmission outside the scriptures, without relying on words and letters.” At least in part the Western reception of Zen has adhered to this skeptical and at times nihilistic stance with regard to language, dismissing in the process any attempt to approach Zen with the rational tools of philosophy or, if at all, with the only simplest tools of phenomenology. This is where Watsuji comes into the picture, showing how even the Zen Buddhist tradition admits of variations like Dōgen—or, more accurately, demonstrating the critical appropriation of language within the Zen tradition itself.

The Matter of Language in Zen Buddhism

It should be clear that a literal reading of the Zen saying cited above is inadequate. To refute this interpretation as a skeptical or even nihilistic stance, one need only point to its performative self-contradiction from a logical point of view. But things are more complex: both the literal and the logical reading of the verbal declaration of a non-linguistic transmission would fall prey to a “low-level” realization of Buddhist wisdom, where its positive rhetorical content would not stand up. To find out a “middle way” between a skeptical or nihilistic negation and a plain logical affirmation of language within the Zen-Buddhist tradition, one needs to elucidate the idea of language itself better, though at this point not in a conclusive manner.

For now I will assume that language is not confined to the kind of reductionism prevalent in propositional logic and that closer scrutiny is called for. What, then, is the main problem with language in Zen? Experience is frequently pointed to as being so rich, so unmediated, pure and

dynamic, that any expression of it in language “downgrades” it to derivative status, binding it hand and good to the chain of previous experiences. To be more precise, the raw phenomenality of experience in its living form is pitted against any linguistic approach that sees language as a necessary and constitutive medium of Zen and Zen experience. Reductionist approaches like the analytic construal of an ideal language seem at first blush to support such a position.

It is, however, possible to admit that experience has an irreducible phenomenal quality to it without at the same time denying a positive relation between language and Zen, since phenomenality is a characteristic of *all* human experience. The experience of enlightenment is no different, nor indeed are other forms of religious and mystical experience. The assumption of a “pure” experience, to put it bluntly, is little more than an analytic tool, a limnological abstraction of a far richer phenomenon. In any event, my aim here is only to lay out the broad outlines of my reading of Watsuji. These more basic questions will have to wait for another occasion.

The thesis I wish to propose discards from the outset the unquestioned assumption that Dōgen the Zen Buddhist, and possibly the entire Zen tradition, takes language to be no more than a necessary but ultimately limited means of communication. I mean to suggest rather that Dōgen offers an unrestrictedly positive reevaluation of language that leads to a critique of the tradition and culminates in a new notion of language as “perfect expression” (*dōtoku* 道得), a view to be found in the *Shōbōgenzō* fascicle of the same title. In this respect I agree in part with the results of Kim Hee-Jin’s ground-breaking reading of Dōgen’s conception of language and those authors who rely on his reconstruction, though my agreement rests on different grounds.¹

1. Many authors implicitly or explicitly follow the line of analysis of KIM Hee-Jin (2004) without questioning its presuppositions, deepening its systematic ramifications, or pointing to inconsistencies with subsequent approaches. See, for example, HEINE 1994, 93, 120, 121, 199; OLSON 2000, 47; and ELBERFELD 2004, 326–7. Kasulis presents the clearest alternative understanding of language within the Japanese tradition, though without arriving at a systematic standpoint that allows for a basis in an elaborated notion of the symbolic. See KASULIS 1991 for mention of two promising sources of a theory of the symbol: Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer.

More important to the present essay is the fact that Watsuji was the first to point out Dōgen's unreserved affirmation of language. He was also the first to tackle the question head on and address objections in direct and methodical fashion. He does so by giving an account of **how to complement the important role of religious experience with that of language**, which in turn gives him entrance into a philosophical exploration of Dōgen's thought. My own position is in accord with Watsuji's insofar as it recognizes the need to begin from language if we are to talk about Dōgen philosophically. My criticism will have to do with the way that Watsuji sets out to achieve this goal, more specifically with its tacit reductionist and metaphysical assumptions.

Dōgen's Appropriation of Language

Before presenting Watsuji's reading of Dōgen, we may briefly consider how Dōgen stands toward with the tradition with regard to the idea of "perfect expression." The only relevant reference in Buddhist texts to the term are to be found in an early Zen dialogue of the ninth century which reads as follows:

One day Po-Ling said to the Layman: "Whether you can speak or whether you can't, you cannot escape. Now tell me, what is it you can't escape?" The Layman winked.²

The intent of the dialogue seems to display a rather skeptical stance towards language: Does the proposed dilemma render all verbal expression unworkable? The way P'ang takes hold of the question and twists it around seems to effect a radical withdrawal from linguistic action.

For his part, Dōgen gives it a positive twist to the dilemma, declaring that "All the buddhas and patriarchs are able to perfectly express the truth." The fascicle's title, *Dōtoku*, can be translated literally as "The ability to talk" and its contents discuss the prerequisites for a perfect expression of the truth of the Buddhist way. For example, perfect expression depends on the encounter of two persons engaged in Buddhist practice,

2. PANG 1971, 56. The original Chinese sources reads as follows: 靈一日問居士、道得道不得俱未免、汝且道未免箇什麼、士以目瞬之。(ZZ, section 2, vol. 25/1, 29a).

typically an accomplished master and a disciple on the brink of realizing enlightenment. The particular mode of expression used by them will be as contingent as is their encounter. This means that expression is far removed from scholastic debate and independent of the confines of any particular positive or negative propositions that need to be refuted, falsified, or elaborated in detail.

The same holds for the narrower focus on verbal expressions said to exemplify perfect expression. Such expressions may appear to be linear in form because of occasionally discursive structure, but they are, in fact, “crooked,” in the sense that their meaning does not simply derive from their syntax. Perfect expression encompasses linguistic expressions of all kinds but resists clear translation into analogous terms. The *kōan* dialogues, displaying the give-and-take of perfect expression, are partly discursive, partly expressive, and partly symbolic in content. Dōgen says as much after introducing what approximates a definition of “perfect expression.” He concludes his rather theoretical and hermeneutical treatment with an ultimately open-ended praxis of expression in his treatment of two *kōan*-like stories.³

The idea of language in Dōgen’s work extends well beyond the single fascicle under discussion. The use of *dōtoku* extends over about one-fifth of the entire *Shōbōgenzō*. Taking into account its variants and other related words such as *gengo* 言語 and *kotoba* 言葉, it is clear that the theme of language pervades his thought both implicitly and explicitly.

A PHILOSOPHICAL VIEW OF DŌGEN ON LANGUAGE

Watsuji is not the first, or indeed the only, Japanese intellectual in the early twentieth century to consider Dōgen’s writings as an object of philosophical inquiry. But it is fair to say that his work had the greatest methodological impact on Dōgen studies both within sectarian studies of the Sōtō school (曹洞宗学) and without. At least outside Japan, little research has been done with regards to the validity of his reasoning or

3. HEINE 1994 lays the groundwork for a convincing analysis of Dōgen’s use of the *kōan* in rhetorical terms.

the importance of his rediscovery in both the short term and the long term. Similar lacunae persist in the careful scrutiny of his predecessors and successors, who often are not even mentioned by name.⁴

Watsuji's own path to Dōgen is difficult to discern. There had been a growing interest in Buddhism beginning around 1910, as we read in a "Memorandum" published posthumously by Yuasa Yasuo.⁵ In it Watsuji takes up terms from the Buddhist tradition—"nirvana," for instance"—under the inspiration of inspired by existentialist or vitalist thinkers like Nietzsche, Bergson, and Schopenhauer, to suggest their relevance to philosophy.⁶ Later, in 1917, Watsuji records in his diary a shift of interest to the Buddhist culture of Japanese antiquity. That was the year in which he traveled to Nara, culminating two years later in the book *Kōji junrei* 古寺巡礼. Furthermore, his 1918 book *Resurrection of the Idols* (*Gūzō saikō* 偶像再興) clarifies this renewed interest in Eastern culture and art. Finally, from 1920 to 1923 he published his essays on the Zen-Buddhist Dōgen in the journal *Shisō* 思想. These essays formed the foundation of "Dōgen, the Monk," published in 1926 in the pages of *Studies in the History of Ideas of Japan* (*Nihon shisōshi kenkyū* 日本思想史研究).

From that point on, at least to judge from Watsuji's published work, his interest in Dōgen receded into the background. Privately, however, he continued to read and study Dōgen writings, as we see from the glosses in a copy of the 1939 edition of the *Shōbōgenzō*. left behind in his

4. As an example one may point to the first review to appear of Watsuji's *Shamon Dōgen* (KIMURA 1937). Tanabe's explicit appreciation and indebtedness to Watsuji is no better known than is his implicit critique of the missing systematic point of view in *Shamon Dōgen* (see TANABE 1939). Finally, YAMAUCHI Shun'yū (2001) should be mentioned for analyzing out Watsuji's influence on the modernization of sectarian studies of Dōgen.

5. メモランダム (1913) has been included in the first supplement to Watsuji's *Collected Works*, I–II2.

6. Watsuji published *Nichie kenkyū* 『ニイチェ研究』 (*Nietzsche Studies*) in 1913, but he finished his academic education with a thesis on Schopenhauer. Two years later he published *Zēren Kierukegōru* ゼエレン・キエルケゴオル (*Søren Kierkegaard*). Soon, however, he lost his sympathy for Western philosophy and became more critical towards individualistic and existentialistic movements within philosophy. His *Resurrection of the Idols* of 1918 documents well his growing interests in Eastern culture, arts, and thought.

personal library. Nearly every page has something to say of philosophical significance.⁷ The last book in his library of Dōgen materials was published only a year before he died.⁸ And yet, for all his continued interest in Dōgen, he never overcame his own verdict of *Shamon Dōgen*, which he found immature and half-baked. Still, he was able to register satisfaction when his colleague Tanabe Hajime published a philosophical monograph in 1939 that upheld Dōgen's thought as of vital importance for the contemporary world.⁹ This seemed to relieve Watsuji himself of the responsibility for reformulate his own interpretation in more systematic fashion, since his book had achieved its primary aim: to stimulate interest in the general reader independently of denominational affiliation.

As mentioned above, Watsuji's articles of the 1920s are not the first attempt to read Dōgen philosophically. That honor goes to Inoue Enryō's outline of Zen philosophy published in 1893. Among other works that predate Watsuji's discovery, we can name a number of articles in the 1906 edition of the Sōtō-Zen Buddhist journal *Wayūshi* 和融誌, as well as Yodono Yōjun's 1911 article in *Eastern Philosophy* 東洋哲学 entitled "Dōgen's Religion and Philosophy." Yodono's contribution is, in fact, the first to pin down aspects of Dōgen's work as being explicitly philosophic in nature.

In all of these attempts to read Dōgen as a philosopher, the matter of language inevitably comes up in view of the fact that Zen is more of a practical undertaking than a theoretical endeavor to systematize the presupposed metaphysical framework it had inherited from Tendai Buddhism, Taoism, and so forth. Indeed, as we noted above, the systematic and scholastic use of language is reason enough for many to withdraw entirely from any rational approach to Zen and maintain a radical distinction between the two. In Tanabe's reading of Dōgen, for example, the distinction between, and negative reconciliation, of Zen and philosophy is argued on the basis of language, because as a function of the way

7. Cf. Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō*, edited by Etō Sokuō (1939), available from Watsuji's private library housed at Hōsei University.

8. The book was published in 1939; I assume that Watsuji himself bought or ordered the book before his death, but the Hōsei catalogue needs to be checked for proof.

9. Cf. his postscript in WATSUJI 1998, 356.

Tanabe defines the relation between religion and philosophy in terms of their ways of mediating verbal expression and non-expression. Paradoxically, he develops his systematic approach to the *Shōbōgenzō* against the backdrop of his attempt at a “philosophy that is not philosophy.”

Watsuji, who approach to Dōgen is a far side looser than Tanabe's, was nevertheless the first to treat **Dōgen's notion of language as the core of his writings.** His reading is built around a more accurate interpretation of the opening passage cited above. He interprets it bluntly as a relation of identity between the Buddha and language, associating “perfect expression” with the Greek term λόγος, which is also taken to mean the “expression of truth.” For Watsuji, the bond between enlightened being and the verbal articulation of truth is intrinsic and inseparable.

We should also note that Watsuji's interpretation amounts to nothing less than a reiteration of the dynamics of perfect expression in Hegelian terms. There is no gainsaying the fact that Watsuji reads Dōgen in a somewhat eclectic, sketchy and free-associative manner, picking and choosing from any number of currents of thought prevalent at the time. Yet what, from a philosophical point of view, may appear a weakness in Watsuji's book highlights what is most attractive and useful in it. **Perhaps the most promising approach is peel away all the existentialist-motivated metaphysical claims and relate them a methodology that Watsuji borrows from Dilthey's hermeneutics.** Giving an account of Dōgen's idea of language does not necessarily involve the heavy burden of these metaphysical claims, especially not if read in the mode of a cultural philosophy as Watsuji does to some extent.¹⁰

Objections to Reading Dōgen from a Non-Sectarian Point of View

Watsuji faces two main methodological objections, one of them more general, the other with a more specific concern. The first concerns his position as an “outsider” to Dōgen's Zen as a *mongekan* 門外漢, not

10. I would note that the question of Nishida's impact on Watsuji is debatable and that it is therefore particularly important to avoid drawing conclusions from the use of single terms, even though it seems clear that Watsuji's use of Fichte's “intellektuelle Anschauung” (*chiteki chokkan* 知的直観) in *Shamon Dōgen* falls into place with Nishida's *Intuition and Reflection in Self-Awareness* of 1917 (NKZ 2).

even a lay practitioner. This poses a problem: **How reconcile the inner perspective of a practitioner and believer with an objective, scientific approach?** The second objection involves the particular approach Watsuji takes from this vantage point of an outsider: **How is his cultural-hermeneutic method related to the inner perspective of Dōgen's thought?** In Watsuji's own words:

Firstly, is it possible that you, as someone who is foreign to Zen, understand Dōgen who emphasized particularly sitting meditation? In trying to get a grip on something sublime and profound, do you not debase and flatten out something that you have not grasped yourself? Secondly, even if you were capable of understanding this sublime and profound to a certain degree, of what use is it to put the personality of such a great and religious man and his manifesting truth in the service of a cultural-historical understanding? What does cultural-historical understanding mean if one accepts the truth of a religion...? Of what use at all is an understanding based on "secular wisdom"? (WATSUJI 1998, 237–8)

Watsuji's first step in answering these objections was simply to acknowledge that there is an insider's perspective. He has no intention of arguing against what he saw as an irrefutable fact. His defense of his own approach is to present it as no less irrefutable, but on different grounds. He points to the heavy volumes of Dōgen's works and asks why someone like him would leave such a body of writings behind when they are not simply writings of practical or instrumental concern such as orders or regulations. Why would he do so, if not for the fact that he puts trust in the functionality of language to mediate and express the Buddhist truth?

Why did Dōgen leave such a great quantity of records of his sermons behind, if his truth needs the purity of a direct transmission? Needless to say, he was confident of his ability to transmit his truth through them.... The great importance of intensive sitting does not contradict its linguistic expression. (WATSUJI 1998, 238)

Watsuji responds to the second objection regarding his cultural-hermeneutic method with two questions: Why does religion appear in a variety of unique forms instead of a single form? And why do these spe-

cific forms of religion evolve historically? Watsuji maintains that there are universal phenomena of human culture (religion, for example) religion that appear in the guise of local forms (244). From an intellectual point of view, the plurality of religious creeds obliges reason to favor a kind of secularized religion. And since Watsuji himself can only take a stance from the “outside,” he cannot believe anymore in the truth of a factual religion. Therefore he reads all signs as religious ways of expression and explanations “symbolically” (247), but never takes them as designating ontological facts. He cannot bring himself, he says, to anything more than an intuitive feel for the metaphysical, a sense of for a certain “presence of the eternal” within the empirical that cannot be explained in a rational way. The net result of his reasoning is a sympathetic skepticism, that shares in the religious concern but not in its factual beliefs. Each religion, for Watsuji, has a partial validity but is ultimately grounded in a universal striving for truth (245–6).

The Philosophical Quest for Truth and Prerequisites of Linguistic Truth

Watsuji turns religious motivation into a philosophic one by replacing the intuitive acquisition and inward manifestation of the Buddhist truth with the endless pursuit of truth. He leaves the “possession” of truth to a few religious geniuses like the Buddha, Nāgārjuna, or Dōgen, and criticizes contemporaneous groups of Zen Buddhists for their engagement in worldly affairs. He himself admits humbly that he is far from reaching any state of enlightenment, if only because he lacks the necessary resolve to practice intensively (214). At the same time he enlarges the scope of the practical path of religious practices like as *zazen* beyond institutionalized or communal engagement by professionals or lay practitioners.

Thus Watsuji's appropriation of Dōgen's Zen is a personalized one wrought in the individualistic perspective of daily life and activity. From such a standpoint, the personality of the master in question is all important. This is why Watsuji recalls a number of stories about Zen patriarchs such as Eisai 栄西, Myōzen 明全, and Nyojō 如浄, all of whom in one way or another were formative in Dōgen's realization of the Buddhist truth. Watsuji concludes that the basic aim exemplified by his teachers, and indeed in Dōgen himself is “the construction of a kingdom of truth”

(282) in the present life and in this world, based on a personal experience and realization of the truth. This practice is grounded in the everyday in the sense that “even if one does not know a single word,” there is an eternal drive in the human heart for truth.

But the twofold truth in Watsuji’s reinterpretation of Dōgen becomes clearest here as he differentiates the solution of the “one great matter” of life from its reduction to anything verbal. It is impossible to replace the practice of *zazen* and lived enlightenment with any explanation or articulation of its experiential content. But this does not mean that verbal expression as such is impossible. Quite to the contrary, every enlightened person is also capable of expressing the experience in symbolic fashion (264). That said, the final step for Dōgen, from the “peripheries” of truth to its “center,” entails elucidating the truth in his own conceptual terms (314). This is what Watsuji does in the ninth and final chapter of *Shamon Dōgen*, though he warns against expecting too much, since he has not studied the *Shōbōgenzō* in its entirety. Instead he presents Dōgen’s thinking through selected examples and chooses four fascicles and their related terms to give a sketch of Dōgen’s thinking.

The first theme he develops through a presentation of the fascicle “Attaining the Essence in Veneration.” The ultimate prerequisite to acquire the Buddhist truth is a teacher and the resolve to follow him (315). To devote oneself to the Buddha way under the tutelage of a teacher requires strong faith on the one hand, and letting go of one’s personal needs on the other. Here Watsuji points to the inter-subjective dimension of realizing the truth. Truth is not bound to a purely objective world of metaphysics, just as the Buddha is not a transcendent being. The truth is necessarily actualized and realized by worldly individuals in interaction (322). That is why the historical Buddha Shakyamuni is put at the very center of religious practice in Zen.

The second theme revolves around the concept of buddha-nature (*bussbō* 仏性) and its interpretation through generations of buddhas and patriarchs. Face to face transmission does not mean that there is a single and universal expression of truth. Devotion and veneration still demand a critical appropriation of the dharma in a creative and intellectual way, even though Dōgen defends the common truth of Buddhism against any kind of plurality and against arbitrary, personal belief. This is why Watsuji

goes on to maintain that Dōgen elucidates, in a nearly historical-critical manner, the exposition of buddha-nature handed down over fourteen generations.

Dōgen himself is not so overly preoccupied with the genealogy of the term and historical adequacy, but reinterprets it systematically in line with his own thought, which is situated in the ontological framework of Tendai Buddhism. It is the “*Bussbō*” fascicle in which Dōgen combines the reinterpretation of ontological assumptions with a linguistic challenge from the Chinese verses of the *Nirvana Sutra*. Watsuji takes Dōgen's notion of the buddha-nature as a “universal reality” (*fuhen teki jitsuzai* 普遍実在) and translates the respective neologism *shitsun* 悉有 into German as *All-sein* (325).

Watsuji's basic motivation, of course, is to overcome any hypostatizing of buddha-nature that would elevate it to the status of a transcendent substance. Buddha-nature is the plurality of existing things. It is not ontologically privileged over other particular instantiations of being. It encompasses both animate and inanimate things, that is, anything that is manifest in the world, where no essential potentiality is left unrealized. Nevertheless, all determinations of buddha-nature have only a relative validity, as indeed does the expression “whole-being” that Dōgen reiterates. For Watsuji the practice and practical realization of the meaning of buddha-nature a correlative of its intellectual dimension: it needs to be embodied and manifested.

Language and the Expression of Buddhist Truth

Although relating to buddha-nature as Buddhist truth is made possible through transmission from an authentic teacher, Watsuji holds that Dōgen's truth is contained in rational mode of expression that seeks to avoid any kind of mystical fallacy. As a quasi-monistic concept, *All-sein* becomes dynamic, Watsuji says, because Dōgen posits truth as a conceptual ingredient in the “dialogue between a buddha and a buddha” that takes place in the act of transmission. By crossing these two principles as a lived verbalisation of the truth, Dōgen aims at avoiding a sclerotic degeneration while at the same time holding on to a discursive, even logical form of truth (324).

This is the reason that the practice of *zazen* does not become superfluous. On the contrary, the practice unfolds in direct correspondence to a verbal articulation that is based both on reading traditional texts and expressing what has been understood from them. (Watsuji recalls Dōgen's demand to express the truth in one's own words in the *Shōbōgenzō zuimonki*.) This gives Dōgen a basis from which to criticize the Zen claim to *fūryū monji kyōge betsuden*. Moreover, he dismisses all names, "Zen" included, that separate any tradition from the Buddhist mainstream. There is no special transmission of any kind that could be reason enough to propose a new name within Buddhism as a whole. This one find explicitly stated in the *Shōbōgenzō*.¹¹

Watsuji points out that there is yet another condition for the verbal and even logical expression of truth to become authentic. It is not only the meeting of two buddhas at the right time, but also a right understanding that supersedes verbal expression. This condition is met by resolve and practice, but it also requires a special kind of internalization of truth. Watsuji sees intellectual intuition (*chiteki chokkan* 知的直観, translated from the German *intellektuelle Anschauung*) as more than just loose-limbed of fantasy totally detached from reality (341). It must encompass sense perception as well. Intellectual intuition begins from with empirical reality only to go beyond it. It is the capacity to grasp the meaning that is mediated in and through perception. This becomes clear in what Watsuji has to say about the encounter between the Buddha and Mahākāśyapa, interpreting the understanding of the latter as a recognition of the symbolic meaning contained in the simple gesture of holding up a flower (342). Of the many who looked on, only one understood through what he perceived.

As Watsuji stresses, Dōgen battles against traditional interpretations of the Rinzai school that try to lead language to its disappearance by playing on the borderlands of grammar and semantics. Theirs is basically a skeptical attitude as far as the means of language is concerned. For his part, Dōgen avoids pure philosophical speculation and delegates its expression to practice and progress in one's meetings with a teacher. But

11. See Dōgen's *Bukkyō* 仏教 fascicle, in which he develops an idea previously expressed by his master, as noted in his China diary.

he does not detach it from the writings, concepts, and means of expression embodied in the tradition. He adopts language and rational means as a whole (342–3). It is in particular his productive usage of language and traditional terminology that make Dōgen an accomplished thinker in the Buddhist tradition. All of his work is based on the reinterpretation of texts handed down over generations from the Chinese and Indian traditions. He works out their authentic and underlying sense.

Determinations of “Perfect Expression”

Consequently, Watsuji arrives at Dōgen's third and most central concept in order to perform a philosophical appropriation of his thought:

In talking about truth that is already be expressed in the teachings of the buddhas and patriarchs, Dōgen is, in the last analysis, deploying his own thinking. By face to face transmission he discovers himself in the teachings of the buddhas and patriarchs. More precisely, he transforms their teachings into his own system of thought. Transmission is important element, of course, but it does not disable intellectual expression. On the contrary, transmission is a prerequisite to expression. The Buddha dharma attained in transmission is, to use a term of Dōgen's, the truth of “perfect expression”: it is neither the truth of wordlessness and silence, nor is it a translogical truth. (343–4)

Next, Watsuji gives a brief explanation of the concept itself, based on its composite sinographs but going further than the literal meaning of the characters to relate *dōtoku* to the question of truth as such. He adopts the Greek term λόγος as a synonym so that, depending on the context of the term, it can be translated as “being able to express the truth” or “the perfect expression of truth.”¹² He goes so far as to maintain a strict identity between the Buddha and the expression of truth whereby the

12. “To begin with, *dō* means ‘to say.’ Therefore it is language as well as that which expresses the truth. The word was used to translate *bodai*, the Sanskrit term for awakening (what Japanese calls *satori*). I would surmise that Dōgen used the word in all these meanings. It is therefore comparable to λόγος. *Dōtoku* thus means ‘to be able to speak.’ Moreover, it means to be capable of expressing the way to awakening. Therefore it has the meaning of the ‘expression of truth’ as well as the ‘attaining of truth.’” (WATSUJI 1998, 344)

expression is to be taken as the verbal articulation of a logical form. To Watsuji, *dōtoku* means simply the ability to talk and to express the Buddhist truth.

In a more philosophically restrained perspective, removed from the soteriological framework of praxis, the expressing subject dwindles away whereas the expression manifests itself as an ongoing process. Based on his reading, Watsuji interprets the factual instantiation of the verbal expression as an ongoing self-expression of truth. The logical verbalisation of these expressions broadens out into the dynamics of a dialectical process involving proposition, negation, and synthesis. That is to say, irrational elements (*higōritekina keiki* 非合理的な契機, 349) are entailed in the constantly renewed effort to express the Buddha dharma perfectly. These elements necessitate and guarantee movement of the process. It is here that Watsuji's allusions to Hegel come to the fore. The relevant and final term for this dialectical movement is *kattō* 葛藤, signifying the intertwining of controversial debates (summary at 349, 352–3).

A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF LANGUAGE IN ZEN

The problematic crux of Watsuji's interpretation can now be clarified in the light of the foregoing pages. He takes into account a dialectical movement, but only insofar as the content of certain propositions is concerned. He does not, in fact, work out an external relationship between what is expressed and what is unexpressed. He interprets a passage from the “*Dōtoku*” fascicle that treats verbal and non-verbal expression, articulation and silence, but he interprets these oppositions by granting a privileged position to language that involves logical verbalization.

In his translations and commentaries, Ueda Shizuteru reminds us time and again that the core problem with reading Dōgen philosophically is the relationship between the spoken and the unspoken, the written and the unwritten, or, in more general terms, the expressed and the unexpressed (see UEDA 1995, 173–4). Watsuji himself ultimately makes use of a specific concept, namely that of the symbol, in the hopes that it might elucidate this relationship. To this end, he rather randomly relo-

cates verbal articulation in the realm of symbolic analysis. The concept of the symbol may well supply the cornerstone for a systematic interpretation of the external connections between expression and its unexpressed dimension, as well as of the inner distinctions needed for a richer notion of language as such.

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