

Chapter 15

Zen Master Dōgen: Philosopher and Poet of Impermanence



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1 Overview

Zen master Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253), the founder of the Sōtō sect in medieval Japan, is often referred to as the leading classical philosopher in Japanese history and one of the foremost exponents of Mahayana Buddhist thought. His essays and sermons on numerous Buddhist topics included in his main text, the *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏 (*Treasury of the True Dharma-Eye*), reflect an approach to religious experience based on a more philosophical analysis of topics such as time and temporality, impermanence and momentariness, the universality of Buddha-nature and naturalism, and the role of language and emotions in the experience of enlightenment, as well as practical matters such as ethics and the precepts or meditation and daily activity, than is generally found in the writings of most thinkers in the Japanese Zen school.

Zen is known for celebrating itself as a “special transmission outside the scriptures/without reliance on words and letters” (*J. kyōge betsuden/furyū monji* 教外別傳/不立文字), which steers clear of engaging in theoretical commentary. In addition to writing the *Shōbōgenzō* in vernacular Japanese while commenting on Chinese Zen texts, Dōgen also expressed his views through traditional Japanese five-line, 31-syllable *waka* 和歌 poetry as well as “Chinese verse” (*J. kanshi* 漢詩) and other kinds of writings in “Sino-Japanese” (*J. kanbun* 漢文).¹ The vantage point of working in several different genres straddling Chinese and Japanese languages and sources gave Dōgen an incomparable philosophical perspective by which to mount his arguments and surmount various viewpoints with which he disagreed.

¹ This material can be found in DZZ (7: 152–179). Translations used in this essay are all from my *A Blade of Grass* (Heine 1989: 85–125).

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Dōgen's works are frequently cited by some of the preeminent philosophers of modern Japan, especially representatives of the Kyoto School, including NISHIDA Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1845), TANABE Hajime 田辺元 (1889–1962), KARAKI Junzō 唐木順三 (1904–1980), WATSUJI Tetsurō 和辻哲郎 (1889–1969), NISHITANI Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900–1990), and MASAO Abe 阿部正雄 (1915–2006), all of whom cite Dōgen extensively in their works. His thought has also been frequently compared to a variety of the leading figures in modern western philosophy, including Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and Henri Bergson (1859–1941) on time, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) on human freedom, Alfred North Whitehead (181–1947) on holistic metaphysics, or Thomas Merton (1915–1968) on mystical contemplation.

The single main element in Dōgen's unique approach to Buddhist theory and practice is his emphasis on the multiple meanings of “impermanence” (J. *mujō* 無常) in personal experience and as the basis for Buddhist metaphysics. In particular, he emphasizes the radical impermanence of each and every phenomenon and the need to attain spiritual realization by acknowledging and identifying, rather than resisting or denying, the ephemeral nature of reality. The notion of impermanence or the transiency of all aspects of human and natural existence has always been a fundamental feature of the Buddhist teaching since the sermons of the Buddha dealing with the doctrines of *anātman* (“non-self”) and *anitya* (“impermanence”) regarding the insubstantial, selfless nature of things. However, Dōgen repeatedly cautions against any subtle tendency to view ultimate reality—*nirvāṇa* or the universal “Buddha-nature” (J. *busshō* 仏性)—as an eternal realm separable from, or independent of, impermanence. Instead, he stresses that a full, unimpeded, and perpetually renewed experience of impermanence and of the unity of “being-time” (J. *uji* 有時) is the touchstone and framework of every aspect of Buddhist meditative training and spiritual realization. Other key doctrines related to this are the “spontaneous here-and-now manifestation of Zen enlightenment” (J. *genjōkōan* 現成公案), the “eternal moment of meditation” (J. *gyōji no ima* 行事の今), the “immediacy of awakening” (J. *nikon* 而今), and “impermanence-Buddha-nature” (J. *mujō-busshō* 無常仏性). In addition to looking at Dōgen's poetic writings on aesthetic experience, later writings on karma and supernaturalism will be briefly examined for their contributions to his philosophical discussions of mystical awareness and the issues of commitment and responsibility involved in authentic religious practice.

2 Dōgen's Philosophical Development

Much of Dōgen's emphasis on impermanence is based on his own personal experiences as recorded in his traditional biographies. Although many of the details of these records have been called into question by recent historiographical studies, the symbolism of the main events is still important for understanding the meaning of his philosophy of Zen. According to the traditional accounts, Dōgen was born into an

aristocratic family at a time when Japan was beginning to be plagued by ongoing civil warfare at the dawn of the Kamakura era. Dōgen experienced profound sorrow and tragedy even at an early age; his father who was a powerful figure in a government in transition died when he was two, and his beautiful mother, a mistress of the father, died when he was seven. It is said that when Dōgen saw the smoke from incense rising and vanishing during his mother's funeral, he was deeply moved by an awareness of the inevitability of death and the pervasiveness of ephemerality.

The orphaned Dōgen had the opportunity through members of his noble family to be trained for a court career. However, he decided to renounce secular life in pursuit of the Buddhist *Dharma*. At first, he studied on Mount Hiei outside the capital city of Kyoto in the dominant Japanese Tendai sect, in which the central doctrine was an affirmation of "original enlightenment" (J. *hongaku* 本覚) or the inherent potentiality of all beings to attain the universal, primordial Buddha-nature. However, at the age of 13 Dōgen had a fundamental "doubt" about the doctrine of original enlightenment: If everyone is already enlightened in that they possess the Buddha-nature as a natural endowment, he wondered, then why is there a need for sustained meditative practice as required by the Buddha's teaching? In other words, if the eternal truth exists, then what is the basis for actualizing this over the course of time?

Unable to resolve this doubt during his studies with the early stage of the Japanese Rinzai Zen sect at Kenninji temple in Kyoto, Dōgen traveled to China, where the contemplative path of Zen had long become the dominant sect. In his initial stay on the mainland, Dōgen was disappointed by the apparent laxity of the Chinese Zen monks, who failed to inspire him to resolve his doubt. Then, on the verge of returning to Japan unfulfilled after two years of itinerancy, he met the Sōtō (C. Caodong) 曹洞 teacher, Rujing (J. Nyojō) 如淨 (1162–1228), who insisted on an unrelenting approach to meditation. Under the guidance of his new mentor, Dōgen attained an awakening experience of the "casting off of body-mind" (J. *shinjin datsuraku* 身心脱落), or a continuing process of liberation from all intellectual and volitional attachments, which signified the resolution of his doubt about the necessity of sustained practice.

Once he returned to Japan, Dōgen founded the Sōtō Sect in the Kyoto area in the early 1230s, but because of the sectarian disputes with Tendai and other Zen factions, he moved about a decade later to the remote, pristine mountains of Echizen (now Fukui) Province where he established Eiheiji temple, the center of the Sōtō sect today. Throughout his career, he was known for being a stern and strict, yet compassionate and caring, abbot and mentor for dozens of disciples who carried on the legacy of his teachings. Generally, his philosophy in Kyoto puts a great emphasis on impermanence and naturalism, while his later writings at Eiheiji tend to stress the ethics of enlightenment, yet in both stages he bases spiritual attainment on ongoing, unrelenting "sitting meditation" (J. *zazen* 坐禪). Dōgen's Japanese *waka* poems and Chinese *kanshi* poems were for the most part written during periods of transition, such as when he returned to Japan after traveling in China in the late 1220s or the year he moved from Kyoto to Echizen in 1243, and therefore are particularly instructive for the way they express his distinctive approach to Buddhist philosophy.

3 The Temporal Basis for Zen Theory and Practice

The resolution of Dōgen's doubt about original enlightenment was based on his new understanding of the meaning of a fully unified conception of time in relation to enlightenment. Prior to his breakthrough experience, Dōgen apparently presumed the conventional dichotomies between past, present, and future, now and then, life and death, impermanence and nirvana, time and eternity, and finitude and Buddha-nature. He thought that human beings were bound to the realms of death and impermanence and that enlightenment was beyond these limits. However, in casting off of body-mind, he realized that a single moment encompasses the unity of practice and attainment, so that practice is not prior to – nor does it lead up to – enlightenment, and enlightenment is not a teleological goal reached only at the end of practice. Rather, Dōgen writes in the *Shōbōgenzō* “Bendōwa” (“Discourse on Practicing the Way”) fascicle:

Practice and realization are identical. Because one's present practice is practice in realization, one's initial negotiation of the Way in itself is the whole of original realization...As it is already realization in practice, realization is endless; as it is practice in realization, practice is beginningless. (DZZ 2: 470)

The identity of time and eternity, and of practice and realization, is also the key to Dōgen's resolution of another dilemma concerning Zen theory. Prior to Dōgen's arrival in China, Zen was divided on the issue of the relation between *zazen* meditation and interpreting *kōans* or philosophical enigmas. The Sōtō sect tended to favor a gradualist approach to *zazen* known as “silent illumination” (J. *mokushō zen*), whereas the Rinzai sect favored the Sudden Path based on “*kōan* introspection” (J. *kanna zen*). For Rinzai Zen, the quixotic *kōan* riddles or puzzles represented barriers to language and thought that catapulted the practitioner into a subitaneous awakening to nonconceptuality and silence.

Although Dōgen emphasized the priority of “*zazen*-only” or “just sitting” (J. *shikan taza* 只管打坐), he also stressed the importance of analyzing and interpreting multiple perspectives embedded in paradoxical *kōans* as an exercise fully identical with sustained *zazen* traditions. For example, the Rinzai approach to the *kōan*, “Does the dog have Buddha-nature?”, which is the first case in the famous *Mumonkan* (*Gateless Gate*, C. *Wumenguan*, J. *Mumonkan* 無門関) collection, emphasizes that the answer, *mu* (literally “no,” which can imply non-being, negation, or nothingness), puts an end to discourse and cognition. Dōgen, however, interprets *mu* as suggesting many implications, including the ontological significance of emptiness or nothingness in addition to the skeptical epistemology implied by a silent response to all inquiries.

Dōgen's main discussion of the *Mu kōan* case is in the “Busshō” fascicle, in which he examines the notion of Buddha-nature in relation to negation and nothingness from nearly every imaginable angle. Here is a list of the various doctrines Dōgen enumerates, some of which are complementary while others are contradictory, but each plays off and reinforces, yet at the same time undermines, all of the

other possibilities, so that they should be considered part of an inseparable hermeneutic package rather than as discrete doctrinal items:

being-Buddha-nature	<i>u-busshō</i> 有仏性
whole-being Buddha-nature	<i>shitsuu-busshō</i> 悉有仏性
Buddha-nature manifest here-and-now	<i>busshō-genzen</i> 仏性現前
impermanence-Buddha-nature	<i>mujō-busshō</i> 無常仏性
nothingness-Buddha-nature	<i>mu-busshō</i> 無仏性
emptiness-Buddha-nature	<i>kū-busshō</i> 空仏性
denial of Buddha-nature	<i>busshō-mu</i> 仏性無

While emphasizing the parity of affirmation and negation, Dōgen does not overlook the critical and subversive aspect of language, whose foundation is the insubstantiality of nothingness-Buddha-nature, a notion he prefers to the denial of Buddha-nature or the termination of discussion regarding the implications of doctrine. Yet, every time Dōgen speaks of the merits of *mu*, he quickly reverses himself and relativizes this with an emphasis on the fact that in some versions of the case the answer is “yes” (J. *u* 有).

In his discussions of the *Mu kōan* and many other cases in his writings, Dōgen’s method departs from other Zen thinkers and is quite distinctive in that he consistently challenges and intrudes upon the dialogues he discusses to create inversions and reversals of conventional readings and interpretations, such as by justifying the truth expressed by apparent losers in dialogues or questioning the merit of the apparent winners. Therefore, I refer to his view as the “hermeneutics of intrusion” in that, after going through preliminary stages of offering a comprehensive sweep of approaches to the topic of Buddha-nature, along with an atomized investigation of particular phrasings from the standpoint of multi-perspectivism that fosters the inversion of conventional readings, he takes license to alter the course of the dialogue in the *kōan* record. Dōgen changes the way the exchange transpires and makes suggestions and counter-suggestions in the spirit of the early Chinese Zen masters’ irreverent creativity that is aimed at enhancing the contemporaneous significance of the case for disciples in training.

4 The Multidimensional Nature of Temporality

Dōgen, as first and foremost a Zen master, was primarily concerned with attaining and expressing enlightenment. His philosophy of time was aimed not at developing a speculative or abstract metaphysical theory but at clarifying and refining his existential experience of the casting off of body-mind. According to Dōgen, the unity of temporality harbors a complex, multidimensional experiential structure. First, Dōgen asserts the absolute identity of “being” (J. *u* 有), or all forms of existence, with time in that whatever exists is a “temporal manifestation” (J. *ji* 時).

Nothing – including the ultimate reality of Buddha-nature – exists apart from the temporal domain that is actualized by sustained religious practice. According to *Shōbōgenzō* “Busshō,” “the Buddha-nature is not incorporated prior to attaining Buddhahood; it is incorporated upon the attainment of Buddhahood. The Buddha-nature is always manifested with the attainment of Buddhahood” (DZZ 1: 18).

That is, the Buddha-nature is neither an innate potentiality nor an attainable end-point but is fully integrated with the continuing dynamism of impermanent reality. But, Dōgen stresses, it is also important to clarify the meaning of the impermanence of being-time encompassing Buddha-nature so that it is realized in a way that is free of delusions or misconception. Impermanence for Dōgen should not be conflated with the mere passing away of time in the sense that “time flies like an arrow,” which implies that time is separable from existence, a fleeting yet substantive movement passing from the past through the present and inexorably into the future towards a specific goal. Rather, impermanence is a dynamic, comprehensive non-substantive process that is coordinated with the dimension of continuity embracing the identity of all three tenses.

The unity of being-time can be provisionally distinguished in terms of two inseparable levels. The first level of spontaneity, suddenness, or immediacy that occurs in each and every holistic moment right here and now, that is, in the eternal now that is beyond relativity in terms of dividing before and after, now and then, or life and death. However, this level of spontaneity should not be understood as mere quickness or rapidity in the conventional sense that time is flying by. Rather, spontaneity is supported by the second level of “continuity” (*J. kyōryaku* 經歷), which includes the irreversible sequence of past, present, and future in addition to the reversibility and mutual interrelation of the three tenses. In one of the most paradoxical passages in Buddhist philosophy Dōgen writes, “There is continuity from today to tomorrow, from today to yesterday, from yesterday to today, from today to today, and from tomorrow to tomorrow” (DZZ 1: 242). In other words, time is ever moving backwards as well as forwards so that spontaneity is sustained by a multidimensional continuity. The fullness of the moment realized in the casting off of body-mind is not passing away, but instead it harbors the unity of the tenses.

Dōgen repeatedly stresses that the unity of being-time does not function in the human or anthropocentric dimension alone, but it is fully trans-anthropocentric in encompassing all forms of existence, and it is especially evident through a contemplation of the beauty of nature and the cyclicity of seasonal rotation. Like many Zen masters in China and Japan, as well as other East Asian mystics in the Daoist and Shintō traditions, Dōgen seemed most content after he moved from the secular, highly politicized strife in Kyoto to the splendor of the Echizen mountains, where he experienced a constant state of communion with the natural environment. In his writings he frequently equates the Buddha-nature with phenomena such as mountains, rivers, and the moon, and he eloquently expresses an aesthetic naturalist rapture in which the rushing stream is experienced as the voice of the living Buddha, while the mountain peak synesthetically becomes Buddha’s face.

A central feature of aesthetic realization is Dōgen's use of poetic language, especially elaborate metaphor and philosophical wordplay, to convey a sense of emotional fulfillment that enhances rather than opposes the enlightenment experience of detachment from worldly, materialistic concerns. One of Dōgen's most eloquent poems was written near the end of his life as he returned from Echizen to the capital city for medical care. Marking the journey to Kyoto for the first time in 10 years, but for what would prove to be the last time, Dōgen wrote the following *waka*:

<i>Kusa no ha ni</i>	Like a blade of grass,
<i>Kadodesuru mi no</i>	My frail body
<i>Kinobe yama</i>	Treading the path to Kyoto
<i>Kumo obi oka aru</i>	Seeming to wander
<i>Kokochi koso sure.</i>	Amid the cloudy mist on the mountain path. (DZZ 7: 175)

Here, the phrase “a blade of grass” expresses a convergence of departure and return, of feeling and detachment, and of the particularity of an individual sense of frailty with the universal insubstantiality and impermanence of phenomena.

5 Philosophical Implications in Dōgen's Doctrinal Poems

In this section, I cite additional examples of Dōgen's Japanese and Chinese poetry, as seen in the context of medieval East Asian society from comparative literary and philosophical perspectives, in order to further comment on his doctrines of impermanence, in relation to (a) nature, which deals with the realm beyond and encompassing yet not necessarily transcending humanity; (b) emotions, which refers to the realm of human interiority or subjectivity; and (c) language, which is the vehicle for expression that can be considered in Zen either to distort and disrupt or to convey and enhance the multiple dimensions of truth and reality. The doctrinal poems can be analyzed for the way in which they suggest key aspects of Dōgen's overall philosophy of religion as expressed in the *Shōbōgenzō* and other writings, as well as for their affinities with the religious-aesthetic tradition of medieval Japan, in which leading intellectuals, straddling Buddhism and Court aesthetic pursuits, fused spiritual goals with artistic and literary ideals.

Dōgen's *waka* often make an interesting use of poetic imagery and stylistic conventions but are noteworthy mainly for their didacticism. For example, the following *waka* seems to be an allusive variation on a famous love poem attributed to KAKINOMOTO no Hitomaro 柿本人麻呂 (662–708) and included in several noted anthologies such as *Hyakunin isshū* 百人一首 by the famous poet FUJIWARA Teika 藤原定家 (1162–1241), who also integrated contemplation into his theory of composition and the *Kindai shōka*. The original poem conveys the nightlong torment of unrequited love that leaves one unable to sleep. It uses the pillow-word “*ashihiki*” to modify “*mountain*,” in that “pheasant” is literally a “mountain bird” (J.

yamadori), in the first three lines, which provide the setting for the evocation of loneliness and despair in the last two lines:

<i>Ashihiki no</i>	Long night,
<i>Yamadori no o no</i>	Long as the
<i>Shidario no</i>	Long tail of the pheasant:
<i>Naganagashi yo o</i>	I find myself here
<i>Hitorikamonen.</i>	Resting alone. (DZZ 7: 166)

Borrowing the opening lines of this poem so that some of the implications of the original are suggested, Dōgen turns the verse into an expression of the doctrine of the identity of “original enlightenment and marvelous sustained practice” (J. *honshō myōshū* 本証妙修):

<i>Ashihiki no</i>	Long night,
<i>Yamadori no o no</i>	Long as the
<i>Shidario no</i>	Long tail of the pheasant:
<i>Naganagashi yo mo</i>	The light of dawn
<i>Akete keru kana.</i>	Breaking through. (quoted in Heine 1989: 47)

The image of imminent daybreak is implied in the source poem in the traditional sense of suggesting the sad parting of lovers, or more poignantly here, in a heightened awareness of the partner’s absence. In Dōgen’s version, however, the dawn explicitly and positively connotes the sudden appearance of self-illumination, an effective metaphor for Zen awakening, evoking the event of Śākyamuni’s enlightenment after his nightly vigils. The new poem conveys the interplay of delusion (night) and realization (dawn), and meditation (the “long” night of practice) and awakening (the disclosure of light), to show the unity underlying the different phases and the gradual unfolding of the enlightenment experience. Yet this *waka* can be criticized from a literary standpoint for using too much of the original verse; the device of variation tends to be more effective if the echoing is somewhat more concealed by the syntax.

6 Impermanence

The background theme for the majority of doctrinal poems in Dōgen’s collections is the meaning of impermanence, which, as we have seen, is the fundamental concern in his life and thought. This issue, central to all forms of Buddhist philosophy, also marks the basic point of convergence between Dōgen and the East Asian literary tradition. According to biographical sources, Dōgen’s understanding of impermanence was based on a childhood feeling of anguish and abandonment because of the death of his parents, symbolized by the smoke drifting from the incense at his

mother's funeral. Although the traditional account may be exaggerated, it is clear that the deep sense of sorrow Dōgen experienced lies at the root of his philosophy of the unity of practice and realization. Inspired by his grief, Dōgen stresses the need for continuous meditation renewed each and every moment right here and now.

In *Shōbōgenzō zuimonki* 正法眼藏隨聞記, Dōgen argues repeatedly that “the first and foremost thing to be concerned with is detachment from the ego through the contemplation of impermanence” (DZZ 7: 57). The notion that coming to terms with impermanence is crucial to the abandonment of egocentrism is also stressed in the following passage in *Gakudōyōjinshū* 学道用心集, which Kyoto School philosopher and intellectual historian KARAKI Junzō cites as exemplifying Japanese lyrical eloquence about transiency. Here Dōgen emphasizes that the aspiration to attain enlightenment and the transformation of the self occur only when impermanence is authentically understood:

When you contemplate impermanence genuinely, the ordinary selfish mind does not arise, and you do not seek fame or fortune because you realize that nothing prevents the swift flow of time. You must practice the Way as though you were trying to keep your head from being consumed by fire... If you hear the flattering call of the god Kimnara or the kalavinka bird, regard them as merely the breeze blowing in your ears. Even though you see the beautiful face of Maoqing or Xishi, consider that they are the morning dew obstructing your vision. (DZZ 5: 15–16)

Dōgen distinguishes between two perspectives: the inauthentic or selfish view, which negates or overlooks impermanence and presumes the stability of worldly concerns; and the enlightened standpoint of non-ego, in which a person's awareness of the fleeting quality of time transmutes into a resolve for perpetual training. An authentic view of impermanence, according to Dōgen, leads one to identify practice and realization with the holistic moment that encompasses self and other, as well as the three tenses of time. Transiency is seen not as a barrier or obstacle to attainment but as the vehicle by which enlightenment is realized and renewed.

In *Shōbōgenzō* “Bendōwa” he maintains, “Even if practiced by only a single person at one time, *zazen* imperceptibly reverberates throughout every dharma at all times. Therefore, it ceaselessly transmits the Buddha's teaching in the past, present and future of the entire unlimited universe” (DZZ 2: 540). Impermanence as the very structure of reality must not be resisted but embraced through a sustained awareness of the formlessness of all forms. The theme of time and impermanence has long been dominant in Japanese literature. Poems from the era of the *Manyōshū* 万葉集 collection in the Nara period, including Hitomaro's “long verse” (J. *chōka*) on the discovery of a body washed up on shore and Okura's long verse, “On the Instability of Human Life,” explore the issues of grief and sadness about the transiency of life and the inevitability of death in a way that probably already reflects a Buddhist sensitivity. Okura's poem concludes by contrasting the apparent stability of nature (which is “immovable as a rock”) with the unstopability of the passing of time in the world of human concerns.

The poets in the Heian era contributing to the *Kokinshū* 古今集 explore the meaning of time on a whole new level by describing the fading blossoms and evaporating dew as symbolic of the metaphysical reality of impermanence encompassing

humans and nature. Poets such as ONO no Komachi 小野小町 (825–900) and ARIWARA no Narihara 在原業平 (825–880) no longer presuppose that there is a distinction between the human and natural worlds. Since both realms are governed by an inalterable flux, nature's evanescence perfectly mirrors the emotional responses of affirmation and acceptance, of remorse and regret, generated in the self over time. In this period of poetry, time, according to Robert Brower and Earl Miner, is the fundamental theme "since it is the ground and being of almost all the literature of the age. The poets often wrote of time, but it is less a subject than a condition of reality that involves poet and subject matter, poet and other men, theme, and attitude" (Brower and Miner 1961: 216).

The *monogatari* 物語 literature of the Heian period also features time as the basis and framework for creating thematic unity. *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語, for example, uses poignant images associated with the changing of the seasons to convey the ideal of *mono no aware* 物の哀れ, which is the feeling of longing and sorrow based on the recognition that all beautiful things and emotions, especially love, must soon pass away. Throughout the tale there runs a preoccupation with evanescence and death. One after another, the characters sicken and die, leaving the survivors with an ever-deeper sense of the transience of worldly things. In the Kamakura period, the opening lines of *Heike monogatari* 平家物語 as well as the *Hōjōki* 方丈記 by KAMO no Chōmei 鴨長明 evoke the impermanence underlying human struggles and passions through the imagery of the dying of flowers that once flourished, the brevity of springtime dreams, and the dust that is cast about by the winds of destiny.

Medieval Japanese literature goes beyond mere sentimentality in capturing the more subtle and refined emotions at the ground of the experience of impermanence. But it is the *yūgen* literature of the poets and critics who contributed to the *Shinkokinshū* 新古今集 in the Kamakura period that reaches a new level, particularly with some of Dōgen's contemporaries, including FUJIWARA Shunzei (1162–1241), Teika, SAIGYŌ Hōshi 西行法師 (1118–1190), and Chōmei. Largely based on the meditative practice of "cessation-contemplation" (J. *shikan*), impermanence is experienced by *yūgen* writers in terms of the attainment of the true mind (J. *ushin*) unbound by artifice and distraction. Teika recommends that *waka* should be composed only when "one is fully immersed in the unique realm of the serene composure and concentration of the mind."

The serenity of the *yūgen* ideal does not bemoan or resist time. Time is the key not to the problems but to the resolution of existence. *Yūgen* poetry views nature as redemptive because the state of solitude or desolation in the midst of natural surroundings purifies and liberates ordinary feelings about change. The supreme value of loneliness is expressed in Jakuren's *waka*, "Loneliness/The essential color of a beauty/Not to be defined:/Over the dark evergreens, the dusk/That gathers on far autumn hills" (quoted in Brower and Miner 1961: 261). Here, the notion of "loneliness" or "solitude" (J. *sabi*) becomes a healing experience that embraces impermanence in its most fundamental meaning, rather than viewing it as a pessimistic aspect of human existence.

Impermanence for both Dōgen, as reflected in the majority of his verses on the transition of the seasons, and the literary tradition is intimately related to the emotions and the issue of illusion. Impermanence necessarily elicits a personal response

because change and variability affect self-identity. The attitude that is generated in the person or subject concerning the evanescence of the natural or objective world may be based either on sensing transiency because of experiences of sadness and loss, or introspectively reflecting on its significance through contemplation. As the contemplative stance develops, ordinary emotions are surpassed by means of an impersonal and holistic insight into the non-substantive structure of reality.

Yet contemplation does not negate the emotions altogether, and the relation between the contemplative and emotional perspectives is variable and complex. Understanding the instability that coexists with impermanence also leads to a concern with illusion since the status of self and things is fundamentally challenged. In this world of floating dreams and evaporating dew, the question becomes: Is there anything enduring and “really real”? Yoshida Kenkō writes, “The world is a place of such uncertainty and change that what we imagine we see before our eyes really does not exist.... External things are all illusions. Does anything remain unaltered even for the shortest time?” (Yoshida 1981: 77) The degree to which the question of illusion is resolved depends on the level of subjectivity attained in reflecting on the meaning of impermanence.

The following *kanshi* verse, which accompanies one of two famous portraits of Dōgen, uses an intricate wordplay involving the word “real” to make a statement about the inseparability of truth and illusion:

If you take this portrait of me to be real,
Then what am I, really?
But why hang it there,
If not to anticipate people getting to know me?
Looking at this portrait,
Can you say that what is hanging there
Is really me?
In that case your mind will never be
Fully united with the wall (as in Bodhidharma’s
wall-gazing meditation cave). (DZZ 4: 250)

The last line alludes to Bodhidharma’s (the first Zen patriarch) practice of *zazen* while gazing at the wall of a cave for nine years. There is a delightful, self-deprecatory irony in this verse, given the important ritual role portraits play in Zen monastic life as objects of veneration, substituting for a deceased master on ceremonial occasions, a convention Dōgen obviously questions but does not necessarily reject.

7 Nature

Dōgen stresses in “Bendōwa” that the instantaneous practice of *zazen* at once spreads to and is illuminated by the “Buddha activity in which earth, grass, trees, walls, tiles, and pebbles are all involved” (DZZ 2: 464). Thus *zazen* engages and completes the realization of each and every phenomenon. The mind, therefore, must heed and identify with the mountains and rivers that embody and reveal the Buddha-nature. This results in the authentication of the mind, or the realization of the

universal mind, which experiences the synesthesia of “mountains flowing” or the phantasm of “mountains walking in the sky or on water”; the paradox of the “flowing and non-flowing of the water”; the irony of asking “not whether the observer is enlightened by the mountain but whether the mountain is enlightened by the observer”; and the holistic vision of seeing “a single plum blossom initiating the arrival of spring” (the image of blossoms is particularly emphasized in quite a few *kanshi* verses). Yet Dōgen is not trying to highlight the attainment of an altered state of consciousness or extraordinary perception; he wants to point to the awareness of nature as it is in its naked or unadorned form.

In his creative rewriting of the traditional saying that the originally empty Buddha takes on form “thus or like [*nyo*] the moon is reflected in water,” Dōgen maintains in Shōbōgenzō “Tsuki” (The Image of the Moon), “‘Thus’ is [nothing other than] the ‘moon in water.’ It is water-thus, moon-thus, thus-thus, in-thus. ‘Thus’ is not ‘like’ [in the sense of similarity, resemblance, or analogy]. ‘Thus’ is ‘as it is’ (*ze*) [or ‘nothing other than’].” He stresses that beyond the question of whether water does or does not flow is the realization that “water is only thus-itself-the-true-form [*nyoze-jissō*] of water” (DZZ 1: 262).

In the following Chinese *kanshi*, Dōgen evokes the directness and immediacy of primordial nature through a deceptively simple description. Any reference to individual response has been eliminated, and the poem expresses a full, unimpeded subjective realization by means of harmony with nature:

Every morning, the sun rises in the east;
Every night, the moon sets in the west;
Clouds gathering over the foggy peaks;
Rain passes through the surrounding hills and plains. (DZZ 3: 34)

This Chinese verse has an affinity with Japanese poetry, in which nature is generally seen as either a mirror or a model for people. In the first sense, nature reflects human experience and attitudes. Since both humans and nature are bound by the law of incessant change, nature becomes the perfect symbol to represent the way that a human’s state of mind is affected by time. For example, the sorrow of lost or unrequited love is seen as resembling fading blossoms, or loneliness is felt like a chilling autumn wind. Yet nature is also depicted as a mystery of transcendental oneness that encompasses and reconciles the transiency that humanity experiences. In the early stages of poetry, such as Okura’s “Lament on Instability,” nature is seen as enduring and stable in a way that contrasts with, and may either console or mock, humanity’s travails and sense of uncertainty. In the *yūgen* poetry of the period of the *Shinkokinshū waka* collection from the early Kamakura era, an experience of full immersion in nature comes to have a healing or soteriological quality when viewed from the contemplative gaze of meditation.

Yūgen poetry is known for its emphasis on pure nature description as the dominant mode of expression. The depiction of nature is, at times, so simple and direct that it appears to border on realism, as if striving for a vivid and realistic presentation of intriguing aspects of nature experienced by a distant subject. Yet the intended effect is nearly opposite to realism in that nature depicted in its primordial state is

meant to completely mirror the realization of authentic subjectivity with mind. The aim of *yūgen* poetry is to overcome the gap between poet or subject and poetic object or topic in order to encounter and capture the essentially unified experience of primordial reality. As literary critic KONISHI Jin'ichi suggests, "The contemplative expressive approach involves the bracketing of a poet's individual impressions and drawing near to the very essence of the subject. Once the essence has been regained, the poet will recommence grasping forms manifested on a more superficial level of awareness...[leaving the reader with] a sense of profound mystery and difficulty" (Konishi 1981: 204). Thus nature is no longer anything external but rather a contemplative field coterminous with the subjective realization of the mind. The poetic description of nature becomes a spontaneous expression of the attainment of subjective realization. For example, the *waka*, "About the mountain crest/A brush of cloud floating, Wild geese fly in files passing/As the moon is hiding behind/A pine tree on the ridge, carries the headnote/At no time are delusory thoughts to arise in the mind." The subjectivity referred to in the title is deliberately hidden by the depiction of nature in the verse. In fact, there may not appear to be any connection between title and verse (as in Dōgen's verse, "Original Face," which deals with the turning of the four seasons rather than human subjectivity), thereby setting up the paradox that the greater the realization, the less direct or more veiled the expression, so that the latter does not interfere with but allows the complete and unimpeded unfolding of the former.

A famous *waka* by Teika, which culminates in the image of "descending autumn dusk" (J. *aki no yūgure*), also used by Saigyō 西行 (1118–1190) and others, conveys the process of liberating subjectivity through an evocation of a transpersonal atmosphere of "supreme desolation" (J. *sabi*):

<i>Miwataseba</i>	Looking out
<i>Hana mo monuji mo</i>	Past where there are
<i>Nakarikeri</i>	Cherry blossoms or crimson leaves,
<i>Ura no tomaya no</i>	To the grass-thatched huts by the bay
<i>Aki no yūgure.</i>	Clustered in the descending autumn dusk.
	(quoted in Heine 1989: 63)

The first three lines imply a contemplative flight beyond delimiting horizons that are historical and perceptual in character. The author seeks a path transcending both the poetic tradition, which has relied so heavily on the conventional seasonal images of blossoms and leaves for interpreting transiency, and the ordinary arena of perception, in which the colorful yet fading natural forms seems so irresistibly attractive. The subject thus becomes directly involved in a transcendental experience of nature in its primordial state, unclouded by preconceptions, and the dreary landscape ironically serves as the source of the highest affirmation.

The desolation in Teika's verse may seem at odds with Dōgen's apparent celebration of the anthropomorphized mountains and rivers, yet both poems are concerned

with the attainment of a holistic vision in which the vitality and dynamism of nature may redeem or purify the subject. The structure consists of a negation of the subject through an affirmation of the object of perception. This paradoxical affirmation/negation is based on a realization of the unity of the contemplative field not bound by distinctions. The aim of any attitude is to point beyond personal response to the realm containing and transcending particular perspectives.

The quest for both Dōgen and the poets was to express the depths of experience while using the fewest words so as not to obfuscate the true vision. The expression must be a direct manifestation of the mind's profundity, bypassing false objectification, which reflects an inauthentic personal response to nature. It thereby creates a linguistic field of associations and multiple nuances that manifests the contemplative field of authentic subjectivity. The optimal means of conveying this contemplative stance is a pure description of "water-thusness," "the sun rising in the east," "the autumn dusk descending," or "rice in the bowl, water in the bucket." These are deceptively simple linguistic devices for spontaneously disclosing the ultimate realization.

8 Emotions

Emotion, or subjectivity, is a key to interpreting the main similarities and differences between Dōgen the religious seeker and medieval literature based on *yūgen*. According to KARAKI Junzo's analysis, the high point in the development of the view of impermanence in Japanese intellectual history is the overcoming of any trace of emotionalism in Dōgen's religious thought. Dōgen casts off inauthentic deceptions and fixations through a complete acceptance of impermanence in its fundamental state. He asserts, for example, that the identity of "birth-death, and arising-desistance, is itself [nothing other than] *nirvana*." In contrast, Japanese poetry, as Robert Brower and Earl Miner suggest, considers that "the great enemy of nature and human affairs is time... [for time] is a force over which man has no control at all" (Cited in Brower and Miner 1961: 310, 375). Yet to dispute Karaki's conclusion, at least in part, Dōgen's poetry does resemble literary expressions in that it shows a remarkable range of emotions, from the celebration of moments of ephemeral beauty to the expression of loneliness, longing, and regret. At the same time, *yūgen* poetry expressing *sabi* completes the emotional cycle in emphasizing melancholic resignation or desolation.

Transiency for Dōgen and the Japanese religious-aesthetic tradition can be interpreted either "negatively" as a source of suffering, grief, despair, and desolation, or "positively," as a source of celebration of the promise of renewal and as a symbol of awakening. Although transiency ultimately discloses nonsubstantiality, the subjective attitudes it evokes serve as a kind of necessary illusion or an illusion surpassing illusion in the quest for a transcendental standpoint. The "negative" view of impermanence includes Dōgen's personal lament for the loss of his parents as well as the

poignant sorrow at the passing of things represented by the fading spring light and the cicada's melancholy call. The next poem recalls the *Kokinshū* era with its use of the pivot-word *higurashi*, meaning "cicada," but also suggesting the "setting sun" (J. *higure*), the message the insect's sound conveys:

<i>Yama fukami</i>	Rising, as the mountain
<i>Mine ni mo tani ni mo</i>	Peaks and valleys deepen –
<i>Koe tatete</i>	The twilight sound of the cicada
<i>Kyō mo kurenu</i>	Singing of a day
<i>Higurashi zo naku.</i>	Already gone by. (DZZ 7: 164)

Yet a deeper "negative" aspect is the sense of ontological anguish at the universality and inevitability of loss, symbolized by the evaporating dew and the withering of plants and trees in other *waka*. The "positive" interpretation of transiency is based on the possibilities for renewal and continuity associated with the spring blossoms as well as the moral imperative for sustained practice at every moment. Several poems go beyond the relativity of celebration and desolation to suggest the non-substantive moment of transition without substratum or duration as the metaphysical ground of interpenetrating or overlapping seasonal manifestations. These poems express the original face of primordial time in a way that resembles celebration but reveals a more fundamental affirmation of impermanence "as it is" (J. *arinomama*).

In his interpretation of such doctrines as *sangai-yuishin* ("triple world is mind only"), *sokushin-zebutsu* ("this very mind is itself the Buddha"), and *shinjingakudō* ("learning the Way through the mind"), Dōgen argues that the universal mind as the ground of phenomenal reality is neither an independent possession nor an entity that views the world as a spectator from a distance. Rather, it is indistinguishable from "walls, fences, tiles, and stones," "mountains, rivers, and earth," or "sun, moon, and sky."

The aim of religious experience is to purify and liberate the individual mind to reach an attunement with the holistic, formless truth of concrete reality. Therefore, the perspective of impermanence is determined by the condition of the mind, or the level of authentic subjectivity attained through a realization of the universal mind through observing transiency. The observer must cast off his or her status as spectator and become fully immersed in the unfolding of impermanence. Since the incescancy of change is inalterable, it is incumbent on the mind of the beholder to transform the negative impression on the individual mind into, first, a positive outlook, and, ultimately, a transcendental awareness so that the limited, negative view is converted into a lyrical, holistic standpoint.

Emotions play a complex and potentially productive role in the process of awakening the authentic mind. The poem highlights the underlying connection between a personal attraction to form and color and the development of a spiritual realization of formlessness by focusing on the word *medekeri* (lit. "love" or "attraction") in the final line, *iro ni medekeri* (lit. "attracted to form"). This phrase reinforces Dōgen's emphasis on the role of an emotional attunement to natural beauty. The word *mede-*

keri (also pronounced *ai*), which also appears in the final sentence of the first paragraph of the *Shōbōgenzō* “Genjōkōan” (“Spontaneous Realization of Zen Enlightenment”) fascicle as part of the compound word *aijaku* (“sadness”) suggests either desirous or compassionate love, depending on the context; both meanings seem implicit here. The following *waka* plays off the image of the full moon, a symbol in the Buddhist tradition for the universality of Buddha-nature, and in Court poetry a symbol for longing and consolation:

<i>Ōzora ni</i>	Contemplating a clear moon
<i>Kokoro no tsuki o</i>	Reflecting a mind as empty as the open sky
<i>Nagamuru mo</i>	Drawn by its beauty,
<i>Yami ni mayoite</i>	I lose myself
<i>Iro ni medekeri.</i>	In the shadows it casts. (DZZ 7: 168)

This poem contains other terms highly suggestive from a Buddhist standpoint: *iro* (form, the first of the five aggregates that constitute human existence, and the objects of desire); *ōzora* (the “open sky,” symbolizing emptiness or nonsubstantiality); and *mayou* (to “lose myself” in the ensnarements of self-imposed ignorance, a concept that is paradoxically identified with enlightenment in Mahayana thought). Through this imagery, the poem asserts the productive interplay between moon and mind, light and dark, and delusion and awakening. To be drawn by the moon for the beauty of its form and color (J. *iro*) is a self-surpassing experience because it eventually leads to an understanding that the moonlight as the source of illumination mirrors the enlightened mind free of distractions.

In responding to the light, however, even a mind originally or “potentially clear” (J. *ōzora*) invariably becomes lost (J. *mayou*) in the shadows. Yet just as the shadow is a reflection of the true source, interaction with concealed brightness is also edifying. Thus emotions represent both turmoil and the inspiration to awaken from the bondage they cause. The self must continually lose itself in the shadowy world of impermanence to ultimately realize itself liberated from, yet involved in, the unceasing process of continual change. This recalls the doctrine of *ippō-gūjin* (“total exertion of a single dharma”) expressed in “Genjōkōan,” which also uses the moon as a metaphor to disclose the interplay of delusion and enlightenment: “Through the unity of body-mind, forms are seen and voices are heard. Although they are realized intimately, it is not like shadows reflected in a mirror, or the moon in water. When one side is illuminated, the other side is concealed” (DZZ 1: 3).

In a similar vein, Teika argues that the value of poetic composition is a reflection of the ability of the mind to be actively involved with time and nature, so that “mind and words function harmoniously like the right and left wings of a bird.” In the following *waka* Teika examines the role of the mind, “Why blame the moon?/For whether gazing on its beauty/Summons tears,/Or whether it brings consolation,/Depends upon the mind alone.” Teika and Dōgen concur that the mind can be either mired in deception or rectified and liberated from distraction and vacillation based on the realization of the mind’s capacity to overcome its self-imposed attachments. They see the authentic mind arising from a discipline or cultivation of contempla-

tive awareness, which requires the proper physical posture (just-sitting) and scrupulous concentration, but culminates in a spontaneous or effortless experience. As indicated in the poems of both Dōgen and Teika, the genuine subjectivity of the mind can be understood only in terms of a holistic view of nature symbolized by the moon. It is the experience and description of nature by the authentic subject that seizes on and determines the relativity of the illusion and the truth of impermanent phenomena.

9 Language

In contrast to some approaches in Zen, which regard verbal (oral and written) communication as unnecessary or inherently misleading, Dōgen does not reject or seek to abandon language. Rather, he views words and letters as an inexhaustible reservoir of meaningful ambiguities, all of which are embedded and at times concealed in the expressions of everyday speech. In *Tenzōkyōkun* 典座教訓, Dōgen recounts how he was instructed in the role of language in the practice of Dharma by an elderly monk he met at the beginning of his trip to China. According to “Tenzōkyōkun,” when Dōgen asked the significance of “words and letters,” the monk responded, “One, two, three, four, five... Nothing is concealed throughout the entire universe!” (DZZ 6: 14). This is echoed in “Bendōwa,” which asserts, “Let it go and it fills your hand – it is unbound by singularity or multiplicity. Speak and it has already filled your mouth – it is not restricted by lesser or greater” (DZZ 2: 460).

In *Shōbōgenzō* “Sesshin sesshō” (“Disclosing Mind, Disclosing Nature”) Dōgen stresses the role of “disclosing,” “preaching,” or “explaining” (“*setsu*” or “*toku*”) the Dharma: “The essential function of all Buddhas and patriarchs is disclosing mind, disclosing nature. Their everyday life is disclosing mind, disclosing nature; walls, tiles and stone are disclosing mind, disclosing nature.... There is no disclosing without nature, and there is no mind without [the function of] disclosing” (DZZ 1: 450). Thus, all forms of oral and written communication – sūtras, epistles, sermons, sayings, poetry, and philosophy – are part of the continual unfolding of the awakened mind. Therefore, Dōgen’s view is that language is essential to the transmission of enlightenment. Not only does he deny the view that language is inherently misleading, but he insists that the experience of awakening can and must be symbolically disclosed.

Conversely, if the expression of Dharma appears to be incorrect, Dōgen suggests that the mistake involves a problematic understanding and not the deficient nature of symbols. Language neither restricts nor conflicts with reality but is an infinite resource for conveying the unlimited meanings of the mind awakened to the multiple aspects of impermanence embodied by nature. Nor is discourse to be understood simply as a discardable “skillful means” (J. *hōben* 方便) that is used to gain enlightenment and then abandoned once the goal is attained. Discourse is an activity wholly in keeping with true realization, which must be interpreted and discovered continually through language or as an event of expression.

This standpoint seems quite close to the poetic ideal of *yojō*, the aesthetic plenitude of overtones of feeling that is intimately connected with *yūgen*. “*Yojō*” implies that the brevity and simplicity of poetic depictions of nature is based on having too much to say or reveal about the mind, so that, writes Chōmei, “many meanings are compressed into a single word, [and] the depths of feeling are exhausted yet not expressed” (quoted in Brower and Miner 1961: 269). According to Teika, the “poetic masterpiece must have... a profundity and sublimity of mind and creativity of expression allowing an eminently graceful poetic configuration to emerge with an aesthetic plenitude that overflows [or is outside of] words” (Karaki 1967, 320). The notion of a plenitude overflowing words is expressed by Dōgen that rethink the motto “A special transmission outside the teachings (*kyōge betsuden*)/No reliance on words and letters (*furyū monji*),” an apocryphal saying attributed to Bodhidharma and long associated with the Rinzai Zen approach that Dōgen criticizes. Dōgen reads the motto not as an assertion of the priority of silence over speech, as practiced by many of the followers of Rinzai, but as a sign that verbal expression is a creative resource that reflects and enhances the multifaceted perspective of realization. In so doing, Dōgen seems to draw inspiration not only from Chinese Zen dialogues and poetry, but from *waka* techniques that exploit various kinds of wordplay to plumb the depths of language from the standpoint of a spiritualized, aesthetic intentionality.

In the following *waka*, both of which were delivered during his trip to the Rinzai center in Kamakura at the request of the shogun in 1247–1248, Dōgen critiques the Rinzai approach of the Zen motto. One verse comments on the first part of the motto regarding a special transmission, which is usually said to see enlightenment as outside of the world of conceptual discourse and to support the use of absurd utterances in *kōan* cases in order to create an impasse with language and thought that requires a breakthrough to a nonconceptual and nondiscursive understanding. The Rinzai view, Dōgen feels, fosters subtle dichotomies between language and Dharma, thought and attainment, and thus the relative and the absolute. Dōgen’s verse uses several types of wordplay to reinterpret the motto so that it suggests a profound and paradoxical interplay or creative tension between the realms of language and enlightenment:

<i>Araiso no</i>	The Dharma, like an oyster
<i>Nami mo eyosenu</i>	Washed atop a high cliff:
<i>Takayowa ni</i>	Even waves crashing against
<i>Kaki mo tsukubeki</i>	The reefy coast, like words,
<i>Nori naraba koso.</i>	May be reached but cannot wash it away. (DZZ 7: 155)

On first reading, this poem seems to support the conventional Zen view. The “Dharma” (J. *nori*) resides on a lofty “peak” (J. *takayowa*), above and aloof from the controversy and disputation of the world of discourse, symbolized by the “crashing waves” (J. *nami*) of the “reefy [Echizen] coast” (J. *araiso*). Thus the Dharma is located “outside the scriptures” and is not accessible to the written word of the sūtras or the recorded sayings. But the full meaning of the *waka* rests on the use of

pivot-words and a relational word whose connotations are so complex and interwoven that they cannot be translated easily. The pivot-words involve the phrase *kaki mo tsukubeki*, which has at least three implications. First, “*kaki*” can mean “oyster,” which implies that the Dharma is not a remote entity above the waves but finds its place beyond the water precisely because of the perpetual motion of the waves. This image plays off the traditional Mahāyāna analogy of ocean and waves representing universality (absolute) and particularity (relative). Thus the oyster has been cast out of the universal background by the movement of a particular wave but must return to its source for sustenance.

In addition, *kaki* means “writing,” suggesting the total phenomenon of “language and communication” (J. *kotoba*), modified by the verb “*tsukubeki*,” which itself is a pivot-word meaning both “must reach” and “must exhaust.” The twofold significance of the phrase “language must reach/must exhaust” heightens the importance of the role of words and accentuates the creative tension between language and Dharma. The Dharma must be expressed. It cannot escape the necessity of discourse, yet the affirmation of the role of language contains the admonition not to use up or exhaust the Dharma through unedifying discussion. The effect of this phrase is enhanced by the relational word “*nori*,” which means “seaweed” in addition to “Dharma.” Seaweed makes an association with waves and, like *kaki* as oyster, highlights the intimate connection between the conceptual discourse of scripture and the realization of Dharma.

The following *waka* uses the second part of the motto on non-reliance on words to stress the priority of language over silence:

<i>Ii suteshi</i>	Not limited
<i>Sono koto no ha no</i>	By language,
<i>Hoka nareba</i>	It is ceaselessly expressed;
<i>Fude ni mo ato o</i>	So, too, the way of letters
<i>Todome zari keri.</i>	Can display but not exhaust it. (DZZ 7: 159)

The subject of the poem is not explicitly identified, but the context suggests that it refers to the Dharma. Like the *waka* just mentioned, this one can be interpreted in at least two ways. One view, based on the title and the opening line, *ii suteshi* (lit. “renounce or cast off speech”), is that the *waka* asserts the conventional Zen negation of language. A literal rendering that supports this understanding would be “Because the Dharma is outside of language, words are renounced, and the way of letters also leaves no trace on it.” In a second, aesthetic interpretation, “nonreliance” is transformed into a positive approach to language because the Dharma is expressed in, but is not exhausted by, words. Every form of speech and writing is Dharma. Dharma is not limited to any particular aspect of expression, so all possibilities for communication must be explored, and there is no risk of exhausting their source.

“*Ii suteshi*” now means that words are cast off precisely as they are employed; their utility is identical to the act of renouncing them. Similarly, the “way of letters” (J. *fude*), a term associated with literary and scriptural texts as well as calligraphy,

“leaves no trace” (*J. ato o todome*). It does not interfere with or impede but perpetually reveals the multifaceted significance of experience, which, whether enlightened or unenlightened, is a manifestation of the Dharma. “*Fude*” displays the Dharma without using it up. Silence, in the special *yojō* sense of mysterious depths overflowing words, is advocated by Dōgen not out of an inability to express, but because the Dharma has too many levels of meaning, all of which cannot be held by any particular oral or written discourse. Dōgen’s poetic and philosophical works are characterized by a continual effort to express the inexpressible by perfecting imperfectable speech through the creative use of wordplay, neologism, and lyricism, as well as the recasting of traditional expressions.

According to Dōgen’s view of the multiple levels of the aesthetics of language, the symbol is real, and reality, in turn, is symbolic. On one level, the symbolism of language – its logic and ambiguities, conventions and deliberate distortions, grammatical structure, and fantastic imagery – is considered real inasmuch as it is a direct emanation of an enlightened perspective of reality.

A second level indicates that the phenomena and events, beings and circumstances that constitute the so-called reality of existence are symbolic, and, if truly understood, they express a scriptural discourse on the meanings of impermanence. Dōgen argues that the true nature of language is not limited to words but encompasses the full range of human and natural phenomena. In its daily activity each and every aspect of the universe is a manifestation of impermanence, and, as such, each and every aspect of the universe is perpetually uttering the inner meaning of the sūtras. “When committed to the study of the sūtras,” Dōgen writes in *Shōbōgenzō* “*Jishō-zammai*” (“Self-realized Samadhi”), “they truly appear. The sūtras are fully manifested throughout the ten directions of the entire universe as mountains, rivers, the whole earth, grass, trees, self, and others” (DZZ 2, 197).

As Dōgen also indicates in a group of five *waka* on the *Lotus of the Wondrous Dharma Sūtra* (*S. Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra*), the Mahāyāna scripture should not be understood merely as a transcribed text. Rather, the changing colors of the mountain peak and the murmuring valley streams, the cacophony and echoes of the bustling marketplace, even the monkey’s cry reverberating in the hills all resonate with the call of the sūtra. Furthermore, the sūtra is beyond sound; the fleeting image of a horse galloping past the streaming sunlight lyrically evokes the multiple perspectives of impermanence that are the central message of the scripture.

On the third and fundamental level of language, unreality is seen as real precisely because it is symbolic. The third level suggests that the apparently unreal or illusory is basically real in that it, too, represents a symbolic manifestation of impermanence. In that light, Dōgen transmutes a number of Zen terms that conventionally indicate the false or fantastic, such as a “dream within a dream” (*J. muchū-setsumu*), “painted rice-cake” (*J. gabyō*), “flower in the sky” (*J. kūge*), or “entangling vines” (*J. kattō*), into expressions of transcendental reality that lie beyond the distinctions of truth and untruth. As he writes in *Shōbōgenzō* “*Gabyō*” (“Painted Rice-cake”), “If there is no painted rice-cake, there is no remedy to satisfy hunger. Furthermore, satisfying hunger, satisfying no-hunger, not satisfying hunger, and not satisfying no-hunger can be neither attained nor expressed without painted hunger”

(DZZ 1: 273). Thus the painting of the rice-cake and hunger, or symbolic expression, is more fulfilling than the tangible cake or physical feeling.

The third level goes beyond the assertion of the efficacy and universality of discourse in the first two levels to stress the underlying non-differentiation whereby reality and unreality merge as symbol. Dōgen also affirms the power of symbolism in citing his master Rujing's verse, "The original face has no birth and death/Spring is in plum blossoms and enters into a painting." According to Dōgen's commentary, spring is not to be identified with the particular image of the flower. Rather, the atmosphere surrounding the entire painting creates and fulfills the experience of spring. According to *Shōbōgenzō* "Muchū-setsumu," having a dream is not a metaphor, but "the reality of the Buddha Dharma." Thus any subtle gap or distance is fully eliminated by means of an unimpeded, reciprocal identity. Dreams, painting, and art are not "like" reality: they do not stand for the real or represent it in either a conceptual or nonconceptual way; they truly and completely manifest its form.

There is no "symbol" in the sense of an idea standing for reality, because reality and idea are "thus the moon-reflected-in-water." Dōgen's standpoint on the complete fusion of polarities in concrete imagery is expressed in the following waka, which intertwines the images of moon and dewdrops that are so crucial to Buddhist and poetic expressions of impermanence and nature:

<i>Yo no naka wa</i>	To what shall
<i>Nani ni tatoen</i>	I liken the world?
<i>Mizudori no</i>	Moonlight, reflected
<i>Hashi furu tsuyu ni</i>	In dewdrops,
<i>Yadoru tsukikage.</i>	Shaken from a crane's bill. (DZZ 7: 179)

According to this verse, the entire world is fully contained in each and every one of the innumerable dewdrops, each one symbolic of the inexhaustible contents of all impermanent moments. Here the dewdrops no longer suggest illusion in contrast to reality because they are liberated by their reflection of the moon's glow. Conversely, the moon as a symbol of Buddha-nature is not an aloof realm since it is fully merged in the finite and individuated manifestations of the dew. Just as the moon is one with the dewdrops, the poem itself becomes one with the setting it depicts. For Dōgen, all expressions spontaneously and completely realize the authentic mind, which is one with the totality of transient reality. The poem is not a metaphorical pointer to a metaphysical doctrine but an evocative religious-aesthetic embodiment of the experiential depths of the mind attuned to the impermanence of nature.

10 Ethics, Karma, and Supernaturalism in the Late Dōgen

In the last 10 years before his death, when he was primarily residing at Eihei-ji in the countryside, Dōgen shifted his philosophical concerns from an emphasis on the metaphysics of the temporality of Buddha-nature to more concrete ethical questions of the rewards and punishments for one's deeds and intentions (Heine 2006).

Perhaps because he was primarily occupied at this stage of his career with initiating new monks from the region who were relatively unschooled in the subtleties of Buddhist doctrine, Dōgen stressed a literal interpretation of the notion of karma or moral causality. According to Dōgen's writings of this period, every action generates a retributive consequence, and only authentic repentance and acknowledgment of one's guilt can offset the effects of evil karma. Yet, by emphasizing the moment-to-moment cause-and-effect process of karmic retribution – which is inseparable from nirvana as part of the Bodhisattva's commitment to compassion – Dōgen is consistent with his earlier philosophy, which stressed impermanence and being-time.

Although to some extent Dōgen's interest in this topic was apparent from the time of his first temple in Kyoto in the 1230s, the writings of the late period are particularly intent on establishing ritual precedents and are very much emulative of Song Chinese Zen sources. Dōgen's concern with formulating the policies and customs of monastic life is reflected in the *Eihei shingi* 永平清規 materials, particularly the *Chiji shingi* 知事清規, composed in 1246 shortly after the naming of Eihei-ji; it provides instructions on the functions for four main leaders of the temple: director (J. *kan'in*), rector (J. *ino*), chief cook (J. *tenzo*) and supervisor (J. *shissui*). In each of the four sections on these positions, Dōgen quotes the *Chanyuan qing-gui* 禪苑清規 verbatim, or close to it, as is also the case in a number of his *shingi* writings from the *Shōbōgenzō* and elsewhere. It is significant that Dōgen introduces the sets of instructions with various examples of *kōan* cases about the role of leadership in Zen temples. The *kōans* show Tang masters standing in disregard and defiance of rules and regulations. Assimilating the regulations of institutional structure with an emphasis of radical individuality or anti-structure is a rather remarkable innovation in itself.

Although Dōgen is sometimes known for a “clergy for clergy's sake” (J. *shukke shijo shugi*) approach, his rules texts indicate not only his thoughts on practice but also his plans for integrating the lay community into the structures of monastic life. On several occasions where Dōgen subtly alters Zen sources in the instructional sections of the text, he does so in order to make a point about the importance of the secular community of donors and lay followers. As the list of titles of the *Chiji shingi* sections shows, even though these are not instructions preached directly to laypersons, they instruct monks on how members of the lay community should be treated. According to the section on the role of the director, if donors make a donation (or offering) with a clear mind, they will gain the result of being respected or of attaining the same level of buddhahood as monks. Similar sentiments are expressed in the other sections.

Another text from this period is known as the 12-fascicle *Shōbōgenzō* represents additional fascicles that were intended for inclusion in the *Shōbōgenzō* (which can have 75 or more fascicles depending on the edition). This text expresses a view of karma that seems to reflect an interface with popular religious conceptions of retribution and repentance. Although there are strong refutations of the value of folk religious views expressed in the “Kesa kudoku” 袈裟功德 and “Kie sanbō” 帰依三

宝 fascicles, it is clear from a careful reading of these and other fascicles that Dōgen was influenced by supernatural elements in early Buddhist *Jātaka* tales that were often translated or integrated into East Asian morality tale literature known as “*set-suwa bungaku*.” In fact, many of the fascicles are concerned primarily with the ritual efficacy and ability to create miraculous transformations by reversing karma of key Buddhist symbols, especially the robe, bowl, and stupas. To a large extent, the 12-fascicle *Shōbōgenzō* is a text about rituals, yet it cannot be reduced to this single dimension because it contains numerous original enlightenment-like passages that resonate with the main *Shōbōgenzō*; for example, in expressing the notion that a single instant of wearing the Buddhist robe will provide spiritual protection and bring about an experience of enlightenment for those who wear or otherwise come in contact with it.

The emphasis on ritualism in the late period is also seen in sermon 388 of the *Eihei kōroku* 永平広録 (DZZ 3: 258), which tells a story of a repentance involving demons and celestial spirits; and sermon 379 deals with the use of a master’s supra-normal spiritual power in fertility rites. Here Dōgen states that his intention is to invoke a clear sky, and he says that “last year rain fell ceaselessly but now I wish for fine weather like my [Chinese] master who went to the Dharma Hall to wish for fine weather. When he did not go to the Dharma Hall, the Buddhas and patriarchs did not either. Today I am in the Dharma Hall, just like my former teacher” (DZZ 3: 242). Dōgen concludes with an ironic, iconoclastic commentary by pausing, sneezing, and saying, “Once I sneeze, clouds break and the sun appears.” Then he raises the fly-whisk and remarks, “Monks! Look at this. The cloudless sky swallows the eight directions.” The fly-whisk is a ceremonial object that symbolizes the authority of the Zen master, derived from pre-Buddhist shamanistic purification devices as well as imperial scepters. Many sermons express its power to beat up a pack of wild foxes, turn into a dragon or snake, or perform other miraculous functions.

Furthermore, Dōgen wrote a couple of very short texts, the *Jūroku rakan gen-zuiki* and *Rakan kuyō shikibun*, celebrating the miraculous appearance on New Year’s day of supernatural arhats which protect Buddhism, while celestial blossoms rain down on the beholders of the visions (DZZ 7: 286). Dōgen states that such visions had been known previously only at Mount Tiantai in China, but the popular religious element expressed here also has affinities with mountain worship. In the brief essay known as the *Eiheiji sankareizuiki* (DZZ 7: 224), he recounts the three miracles that occurred at Eiheiiji over the course of several years: (1) the sounding of a heavenly bell for 200 strokes, something that occurred multiple times, but on one particular occasion in 1251 the sound was so clear and vibrant that even a visiting minister (representing a nonbeliever) was able to hear it; (2) the appearance of five-colored clouds over Eiheiiji, again something that had happened at Mount Tiantai but not, according to Dōgen, in Japan; and (3) a mysterious fragrance that seemed to be a blessing that encompassed the temple. Whether Dōgen himself believed or took seriously these accounts or offered them up as a kind of skillful means to inspire his flock is something about which we can only speculate.

11 Conclusion

The impact of Dōgen's philosophical works remains strong for several reasons. As the founder and author of the main text of the Sōtō Sect, his writings are continually studied and interpreted by Buddhist practitioners and scholars. As an expression of a view of impermanence that seems to capture the essence of Buddhist teaching in the context of the medieval Japanese religious-aesthetic tradition and also anticipates the emphasis on temporality, death, and finitude in modern Western philosophy, the *Shōbōgenzō* stands at the forefront of international comparative philosophy. While there has been much debate about whether Dōgen's philosophy may have moved in a new direction in the later period, toward a more straightforward view of karmic retribution while also embracing supernaturalism, there seems to be no question that he remained consistent throughout his career in emphasizing the priority of *zazen* meditative practice as a means of recognizing and reconciling with the fundamental temporality characterized by the incessant ephemerality of all aspects of human and natural existence.

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