“When Mountains Can No Longer Be Seen”: A Critical History of Interpretations of an Ambiguous Shōbōgenzō Sentence

Steven Heine
Professor, Florida International University, Miami, FL, USA
heines@fiu.edu

Abstract

This paper critically examines the various ways a particularly puzzling line in Dōgen’s 道元 “Genjōkōan” 現成公案 fascicle has been interpreted by premodern sources, especially the Goshō commentary by Senne 詮慧 and Kyōgō 經豪, as well as modern commentators, including sectarian figures such as Nishiari Bokusan 西有穆山 and Kurebayashi Kōdō 博林皓堂 seen in relation to non-sectarian philosophers such as Watsurji Tetsurō 和辻哲郎. The key passage on “riding a boat out to sea, where mountains can no longer be seen (yamanaki kaichū 山なき海中),” raises crucial issues concerning Dōgen’s approach to multi-perspectivism that have been generally been construed in terms of absolutist and relativist standpoints. My analysis of the scholastic debates also sheds light on the full history of commentaries on Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō 正法眼蔵 encompassing the late medieval and early modern periods.

Keywords


***

There is no permanent existence in our being or in objects. We, our faculty of judgment, and all mortal things are rushing and rolling ceaselessly: nothing certain can ever be established about one or the other, since both judged and judging are constantly shifting and changing.

MONTAIGNE, Essays
The Question of Going Out to Sea

What hermeneutic methods should be summoned to interpret critically an intriguing yet endlessly puzzling sentence in the “Genjōkōan” 現成公案 fascicle of Sōtō sect founder Dōgen's 道元 (1200–1253) Shōbōgenzō 正法眼蔵 which deals with the way perspectives shift dramatically “when riding a boat out to sea, where mountains can no longer be seen (yamanaki kaichū 山なき海中)”?1

The analogy of sailing past the horizon, so that any trace of land is not visible and one feels temporarily encircled by the ocean with no other frame of reference available, raises key phenomenological issues regarding the innate partiality or insufficiency of human perception in connection to the Zen goal of awakening to a holistic standpoint that is devoid of divisibility but incorporates an array of standpoints.

According to the colophon, “Genjōkōan” was composed in 1233 as an epistle to a layman, Yō Kōshū 楊光秀 from Kyushu, which makes it unique in a text that otherwise includes discourses originally delivered for the sake of monastic practitioners.2 Dōgen continued to edit the fascicle until the year before his death, and it eventually became the opening section of the 75-fascicle and 60-fascicle editions of the Shōbōgenzō, while taking third position in the 95-fascicle edition. “Genjōkōan” has often been referred to by commentators as a fascicle that epitomizes all of the primary themes so that its title could well serve as the name of the entire work. How can the various philological implications and philosophical nuances of the particular passage get sorted out? The first main step is to clarify the hermeneutic context through surveying the history of premodern and modern commentaries in light of the overt intentions as well as likely hidden agendas that guide their respective approaches. Many of the medieval and early modern sources, in addition to Meiji era and post-Meiji academic studies as well as teishō 提唱-oriented homilies that treat the Shōbōgenzō, highlight the significance of Dōgen’s rhetoric in illuminating and

---

1 For the full text of Shōbōgenzō “Genjōkōan” see: DZZ 1.2–7; SZ, 1.3–9; and T no. 2582, 82.23b27-25a9. Citations from this and other passages by Dōgen are from DZZ. For a discussion of some similar themes see also Heine, “What is on the Other Side?”

2 Other exceptions are “Zenki” 全機 and “Kobusshin” 古佛心 which were both presented to Dōgen’s samurai patron, Hatano Yoshishige 波多野義重, and his entourage off-site from Dōgen’s Kōshōji temple in Kyoto in the early 1240s. “Shōji” 生死 is probably another example but no information is available about its origins.
productive ways that sometimes reinforce but also help uncover and unravel stereotypical interpretations regarding his view of perceptivity.

The image of the moving boat reflects Dōgen’s intricate approach to expressing what I refer to as “creative ambiguity” (sōzōtekina aimaisa) concerning the way delusions, which reflect an incomplete and inconclusive level of understanding, invariably shape the quest to attain and disclose the meaning of authentic realization. This term, therefore, refers to a series of misapprehensions in that we tend to commit “mistakes compounded on mistakes” (shōshaku jushaku), a term Dōgen mentions in several fascicles. These blunders can paradoxically lead to a state of turning an error into one’s advantage by making the right mistake, which is how the double-edged idiom is often interpreted. The standpoint of creative ambiguity therefore refuses to close off options and, because it acknowledges limitations that can lead to deficiency and duplicity, it remains open to ongoing possibilities that are often imaginative and inventive means of disclosing truth not disconnected from untruth. That is, one can either add error to error until a standpoint is hopelessly counterproductive or use an error to enhance understanding, like the act of sharpening a sword. Being fearful of mistakes may lead to injudicious attempts to suppress or eliminate their impact in a way that only makes the situation worse. However, by recognizing the value of mistakes, we discover that uncertainty and conflict constitute an essential stage in developing and refining genuine insight.

2 Reorienting a Stereotypical Debate

A careful analysis of the “Genjōkōan” passage helps reorient an important though misleading area of debate that often preoccupies current reflections on the status of Dōgen’s thought yet fails to facilitate an appropriation of a broad

---

3 I am influenced by Ōe Kenzaburo’s Nobel Prize lecture in 1994, “Aimai na Nihon no watakushi,” in which the term “aimai na” (ambiguous) replaces utsukushii (beautiful) in Kawabata Yasunari’s 1968 Nobel lecture, “Utsukushii Nihon no watakushi” from 1968; it is included in Ōe, Aimai na Nihon no watakushi, 1–17. Yet Ōe’s notion recalls, from a different perspective, Kawabata citation from the traditional Ryōjin hishō, “Although the Buddha is always present, because in the soundless dawn he does not appear, it seems like nothing but a dream” (仏は常にいませども，現ならぬぞあわれなる，人の音せぬ暁に，ほのかに夢に見えたもう).

4 The phrase appears in “Sokushin zebutsu” 即心是佛, “Gyōbutsu iigi” 行佛威儀, “Hakujushi” 柏樹子, and “Daishugyō” 大修行. For an example of its use in the Biyanlu that impacted Dōgen’s rhetoric, see Cleary and Cleary, Blue Cliff Record, especially cases 8, 16, 28, 32, 36, 38, 39, 50, 55, 64, 85, 89, 91, 96.
range of commentaries. The infelicitous dispute I seek to eclipse involves assessing the value of Dōgen’s prolific writings on Buddhist theory and practice in relation to his apparently dual roles as a sectarian trailblazer or an autonomous philosopher. The Kamakura-era Zen teacher, who spent four years during the 1220s studying in China before “returning home empty-handed” (kushū genkyō 空手還郷), is often regarded in binary fashion that features sharp ideological clashes among participants in the debate who frequently engage in contentious polemics. Discussions of the core polarity are generally attributed to the contrast between two prominent books that gained international attention in the first half of the twentieth century and were written by a denominational and a non-denominational author.

The debate these books foster considers whether Dōgen is primarily seen as a truth-seeker, whose teachings bear contemporary resonances not necessarily linked to the training techniques of a specific Buddhist school by at once epitomizing premodern Japanese thought influenced by Song-dynasty sources and foreshadowing recent developments in epistemology, ethics, environmentalism, existentialism, and cross-cultural linguistics. Was Dōgen an incipient modern philosopher? This view was proposed by Kyoto School thinker Watsuji Tetsurō 和辻哲郎 (1889–1960) who stressed Dōgen’s self-determining philosophy in Shamon Dōgen 沙門道元 published in 1926. Or, it can be asked if Dōgen should be defined as the monk who established the Sōtō sect by transmitting to his native country the lineal tradition based on zazen 坐禅 practice as propagated by his continental mentor Rujing 如淨 (1163–1227). This approach was articulated in Shūso toshite no Dōgen Zenji 宗祖としての道元禅師 published in 1944 by sectarian leader Etō Sokuō 衛藤即応 (1888–1958), who emphasized Dōgen’s religious vision inextricably tied to his denominational functions.

This discrepancy continues to influence studies of the Shōbōgenzō on both sides of the Pacific. For example, Ralf Müller recently remarked on behalf of the Dōgen-as-philosopher position, “The dispute was caused by the pretensions of non-denominational intellectuals to pave the way for an authentic apprenticeship independent of the practice of ‘sitting-only’ (J. shikan taza 只管打坐), which was taught by the Sōtō school as the core of Dōgen’s Zen. However, the predominance of a ‘practical’ interpretation of Dōgen covers up
the linguistic complexities of Dōgen’s writings.” Müller suggests going beyond a strictly religious standpoint to open the door to a more comprehensive clarification of the complexities of Dōgen’s theoretical implications, but he adjusts that assertion by pointing out that, “It seems wrong to maintain that Dōgen was (re-)discovered in modernity by non-denominational intellectuals [such as Watsuji] ... Rather, more than a momentary event, the discovery of the modern Dōgen is a process, which spans most of the Meiji-period.”

Although this clarifying remark challenges the typical sectarian versus non-sectarian paradigm, it still supports an opposition of binary factors based on the notion that there is a so-called modern Dōgen that is philosophical, even if that trend started a few decades before Watsuji. Müller’s approach, therefore, does not necessarily leave room to evaluate how the legacy of voluminous premodern commentaries, mostly but not entirely generated by Sōtō scholar-monks, has greatly influenced nearly all recent Japanese scholarship concerning Dōgen’s work, including varying methodologies used in the postwar period both within and outside of the sect.

My aim is to build on Müller’s observation that pre-Watsuji discussions are important by arguing that it is crucial to provide a more thorough historical explanation of earlier Sōtō Zen elucidations of Dōgen, beginning with the monumental Shōbōgenzō kikigakishō 正法眼蔵聞書抄. This eminent treatise, completed in 1308 after four decades of writing, was the initial substantial prose commentary covering the entire 75-fascicle Shōbōgenzō that combines remarks by Senne 詮慧 (n.d.), a direct disciple of Dōgen, that were augmented by his disciple Kyōgō 經豪 (n.d.). The collective work is often known by the abbreviated title, the Goshō 御鈔. Although lost for several centuries, the Goshō was recovered in the early Edo period and cited extensively as authoritative by most of the major Sōtō scholastics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who examined Dōgen’s masterwork. This list includes the mainstream faction of Manzan Dōhaku 卍山道白 (1635–1715), Menzan Zuihō 面山瑞方 (1683–1769), and Banjin Dōtan 萬仞道坦 (1698–1775), in addition to several dozen lesser known monk-scholars of the era, many of whose views were challenged by the rival clique of Tenkei Denson 天桂傳尊 (1648–1735) and his followers.

It is clear that the Goshō’s detailed interlinear comments explicating nearly every sentence of the Shōbōgenzō, along with numerous early modern annotations derived from or related to the Senne-Kyōgō compendium, were crucial


10 This text is included in sz, volumes 10–11; the specific “Genjōkōan” passage is discussed in 10.12–14. See also Jinbō and Andō, Shōbōgenzō chūkai zensho for additional commentaries.

11 See Heine, Flowers Blooming on a Withered Tree.
6

Heine

in setting the stage for most of the important modern interpretative developments. Viewing the hermeneutic situation in terms of the historical context reveals that the major sectarian voice in the twentieth century was probably not Etō’s but that of Nishiari Bokusan 西有穆山 (1821–1910), another Sōtō luminary, in his pioneering three-volume Shōbōgenzō keiteki 正法眼蔵啓迪 that was based on a series of lectures he delivered in the first decade of the 1900s.12 Etō, whose work is remarkable in its own way, was less impactful no doubt because his apologetic method in reacting to Watsuji did not lead to an open-ended investigation of the Shōbōgenzō. In discussing “Genjōkōan” and other selections, Nishiari’s approach relies but offers an innovative twist on the Goshō commentary that, in turn, influenced important members of his lineage, particularly Kurebayashi Kōdō 柏林皓堂 (1893–1988), who edited the main reprint of the Shōbōgenzō keiteki in 1965. Kurebayashi also published posthumously in 1991 a noteworthy monograph, Genjōkōan wo kataru: ima wo ikiru, Shōbōgenzō kōsan 現成公案を語る 今を生きる正法眼蔵講讃 based on a set of lectures he had given twenty years earlier.13 In the aftermath of Kurebayashi’s provocative and controversial approach to Dōgen’s opening fascicle, which extends some of the implications of Nishiari’s argument beyond what might be expected of a sectarian commentator, several Sōtō scholars representing diverging standpoints have made innovative interpretative contributions, including Yoshizu Yoshihide 吉津宜英 (1944–2014), Matsumoto Shirō 松本史郎 (1950–), and Ishii Seijun 石井清純 (1958–).

In parallel fashion, it becomes clear from an historical analysis that the most comprehensive and probing modern non-sectarian interpretation is not found in Watsuji’s rather brief and deliberately incendiary discussion of a few key topics culled from the Shōbōgenzō. Instead, more systematic philosophical examinations were produced by other Kyoto School figures, who were influenced at least indirectly by the Goshō and related commentaries, including Nishiari’s work. These studies include Akiyama Hanji’s 秋山範二 (1893–1980) Dōgen no kenkyū 道元の研究 published in 1935, Tanabe Hajime’s 田辺元 (1885–1962) Shōbōgenzō no tetsugaku shikan 正法眼蔵の哲学私観 from 1939, and Nishitani Keiji’s 西谷啓治 (1900–1990) lecture series Shōbōgenzō kōwa 正法眼蔵講話 delivered in the late 1990s and published in four volumes in 1987–1989, shortly before he died.14 In addition, in 1939 the University of Tokyo

---

12 See Nishiari, Shōbōgenzō keiteki; and Nishiari, Dōgen’s Genjo Koan.
13 See Kurebayashi, Genjōkōan wo kataru.
14 See Akiyama, Dōgen no kenkyū; Tanabe, Shōbōgenzō no tetsugaku shikan; and Nishitani, Shōbōgenzō kōwa, which is also published in Nishitani keiji chosakushū, vol. 23.
physiologist Hashida Kunihiko 橋田邦彦 (1882–1945) published the fruits of several decades of philosophical studies in the *Shōbōgenzō shakui* 正法眼蔵釋意.15

By investigating the meaning of the “Genjōkōan” passage in a way that is cognizant of a broad range of *Shōbōgenzō* interpretations stemming from the premodern to Meiji and subsequent reflections by scholars and Zen teachers, whether or not affiliated with the Sōtō sect, the debate about religion versus philosophy starts to appear artificial and unproductive. A careful reading of the relevant sources demonstrates a diverse discourse that cuts across and redefines denominational and conceptual boundaries by emphasizing a more fundamental and revealing question: What is Dōgen’s view, regardless of ideological labels, of the relation between perception and reality, or subjectivity and objectivity? That is, how are everyday sensations and impressions linked to knowledge of one’s surroundings that can be cultivated through contemplative awareness?

At first, this topic may seem to foster a new polarity because some interpretations maintain that Dōgen endorses the standpoint of absolutism (*zettaishugi* 絶対主義), for want of a better term, as suggested by the *Goshō*’s emphasis on the idea expressed in “Genjōkōan” of the “complete unimpeded penetration of a single dharma” (*ippō gūjin* 一法究盡). Supporters of the notion of undivided truth point to related doctrines in the *Shōbōgenzō*, such as “total activity” (*zenki* 全機), “triple world is mind-only” (*sangai yuishin* 三界唯心), the oneness of “birth-death” (*shoji* 生死), or “the moon” (*tsuki* 都機). The absolutist interpretation, introduced by the *Goshō* commentary that is echoed yet also somewhat revised by Nishiari, suggests that apparent partiality is actually intended to indicate limitless capacity. That is, the image of sailing past the horizon is linked to a sentence that comes a little later in the fascicle, “To obtain one dharma is to penetrate one dharma, and to receive one practice is to cultivate one practice” (*toku ippō tsū ippō nari gū ichigyō shu ichigyō nari* 得一法通一法なり, 遇一行修一行なり).

Other commentators stress the notion of relativism (*sōtaishugi* 相対主義), which is occasionally linked to postmodern theoretical standpoints that sometimes claim Dōgen as a compelling precursor based on the view of the “impossibility of complete unimpeded self-awareness” (*jiko zentai ninshiki dewanai koto* 自己全体認識ではないこと).16 Proponents of fallibilism highlight the *Shōbōgenzō* doctrines of “impermanence-as-Buddha-nature” (*mujō-busshō* 無常佛性), “disentangling entangled vines” (*kattō* 葛藤, Ch. geteng) “dreaming

---

15 See Hashida, *Shōbōgenzō shakui*; this was in the first of 5 volumes, with nearly a dozen other works on Dōgen or Zen thought published by Hashida.

16 See Morimoto, *Derrida kara Dōgen e*. 

JOURNAL OF CHAN BUDDHISM 2 (2021) 1–38
within a dream” (*muchū setsumu* 夢中説夢), or “making mistake after mistake.”17

The view that there is a fundamental deficiency or gap in understanding, even for the enlightened, which must be accepted and penetrated instead of dismissed or blocked, is associated with a saying often used in Chinese Chan kōan 公案 (Ch. *gong'an*) commentaries that refers sarcastically to a “board-carrying fellow (*檐板漢*),” that is, someone who by indulging a blind spot since they metaphorically lug a plank across their shoulder is unable to be aware of other perspectives beyond any horizon.18

However, I will show that the categories of absolutism vis-à-vis relativism do not always constitute one more binary evoking standard oppositions, whereby sectarian orthodoxy would support the absolutist view in contrast to non-sectarian philosophy backing the relativist view since, when the diversity of interpretations is taken into account, the lines of demarcation quickly and even radically change. It becomes apparent, for example, that the strongest proponents of the absolutist view indicating, “one in all, and all in one,” are modern secular philosophers such as Akiyama, Tanabe, and Nishitani, who use speculative methodology to provide an ontological foundation for holism, even though they are not wedded to a denominational standpoint. At the same time, the most nuanced exponents of relativism, for whom indefiniteness and indecision must be taken into account, include Kurebayashi, who draws inspiration from Nishiari and several other denominational figures he influenced, even though their view seems to defy the strictures of traditional Sōtō theology (*dentō shūgaku* 伝統宗学).

3 Unraveling the Debate by Revisiting Textual and Historical Contexts

In order to disentangle and refashion the debate regarding religious as opposed to philosophical interpretations of Dōgen, it is helpful to clarify some of the basic goals of Watsuji Tetsurō and Etō Sokuō that undergird and possibly link their respective views, while also exploring how the “Genjōkōan” passage about perceptions that shift when sailing out to sea provides a basis for new investigations of the meanings and methods of the *Shōbōgenzō*. The analysis offered here addresses the need to go beyond the framework of the core binary dispute between philosophical and religious approaches through taking into account

---

17 See Odagiri, “Dōgen’s Fallibilism.”

18 See *Blue Cliff Record*, cases 4, 10, 16.
a wider range of commentaries dealing with Dōgen's masterwork, including premodern and modern in addition to sectarian and non-sectarian sources.

A fundamental observation is that Watsuji and Etō are perhaps not so far apart as they may seem based on an initial reading of their works. Comparing biographies, they crossed paths in that the scholars each spent time during the 1920s studying in Europe, where they gained a sense of the inescapable expectation, whether appreciated or repudiated, that traditional Japanese thought should be presented in light of contemporary Western views and values. Both resisted the impetus to let East Asian Buddhism be subsumed by foreign intellectual classifications or research techniques and, despite absorbing some influences, they instead sought to explicate the ultimate basis of native spirituality on its own terms. Furthermore, Watsuji earned his doctorate at Tokyo University and later taught there for many years after lecturing on ethics at Kyoto University. This position was based on an invitation from famed philosopher Nishida Kitārō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945), who similarly evoked elements of Dōgen’s thought in explicating his notion of “absolute nothingness” (zettai mu 绝对無). Also, Etō’s book was completed as a doctoral dissertation at Kyoto University and he became professor and president of Komazawa University in Tokyo for a term beginning in 1953. That institution was founded as the Sōtōshū Daigaku in the 1880s as part of a Meiji era initiative to support higher education by transforming a couple of longstanding Edo period Sōtō seminars, especially Kichijōji 吉祥寺 (aka. Sendarin 旃檀林), which was known as the site where Menzan and many other teachers had lectured extensively, sometimes for weeks at a time, on the contents of the Shōbōgenzō.19

Watsuji’s short treatise, consisting of about seventy pages in the original publication, was contained as a section of his Nihon seisihinshi kenkyū 日本精神史研究, a wide-ranging series of cultural studies seeking to situate Japan on a par with Western intellectual history by showing, for example, that Dōgen could be ranked as a world-class philosopher or that Nara Buddhist temples lived up to ancient Greek models of architecture. It is an exaggeration to say, as many have, that Watsuji single-handedly brought Dōgen’s work out of nearly total obscurity, given that several non-sectarian philosophers, especially Inoue Enryō 井上円了 (1858–1919) in 1893 but also including Yamagami Shōfū 山上嘯風 in 1906 and Yodono Yōjun 淀野耀淳 in 1911, all attempted systematic examinations of the Shōbōgenzō.20 However, Watsuji was the first to suggest rather forcefully that denominational considerations of Dōgen’s writings

---

19 See Riggs, “The Life of Menzan Zuīhō, Founder of Dōgen Zen.”
20 See Inoue, Zenshū tetsugaku joron; Yamagami, Shōfū “Dōgen zenji no uchūkan,”; and Yodono Yōjun, “Dōgen no shūkyō oyobi tetsugaku.”
should be tossed aside altogether for being terribly uninformed and corrupted by extraneous sociopolitical demands and commercial interests in that religion had become a kind of commodity functioning under the auspices of the state.

According to Watsuji’s decidedly anti-sectarian stance, “To enter a Zen temple is to distance oneself from Dōgen. This is because the sect that takes Dōgen as founder is no longer solely concerned with the establishment of the realm of truth but concentrates on building massive halls and pagodas and on the prestige of the position of abbot.”21 Furthermore, Watsuji is anti-hagiographical in calling legendary accounts an “insult” to the integrity of Dōgen: “The more I appreciate Dōgen’s work, the more I cannot help but feel resentment toward senseless biographies. They ignore Dōgen’s noble lifestyle of authenticity, focusing instead on all the mundane values and nonsensical miracles piled up to create an artifice of nobility.”22 Therefore, Watsuji embraces the role of being an outsider (mongekan 門外漢) and harsh critic of the Sōtō sect, who is thereby able to provide an objective assessment, without bias or misjudgment, of the importance of Dōgen’s legacy in light of both Kamakura-era Buddhist developments and current global or comparative philosophical perspectives.

While he was writing his dissertation, Etō spent several years editing a four-volume paperback edition of the 95-fascicle Shōbōgenzō published by Iwanami bunko from 1939 to 1943,23 which was at first acclaimed as the new standard version but was later discredited and eventually taken out of circulation and replaced by the press.24 For Etō and many others then associated with Sōtō orthodoxy, Dōgen’s greatness derived from an untiring commitment to just sitting and the rigors of clerical discipline in a way that defies characterization in terms of any philosophical argot that seems to fill the pages of the Shōbōgenzō.

That explains why Dōgen’s approach culminates in deceptively commonplace evocations of true suchness (Skt. tathatā Jp. inmo 恒常), as evoked in the kanbun sermons of the Eihei Kōroku 永平広録, such as “my eyes are horizontal and nose is vertical” (鼻与臍対, 耳対肩) or “every single day the sun rises in the east, and every single night the moon sets in the west (朝朝日東出, 夜夜月落西).”25 According to Etō, Dōgen’s standpoint is based on “personal authentication” rather than abstract speculation or even experiential corroboration, which implies a subtle yet devastating gap between interior awareness and

21 Bein, Purifying Zen, 26.
22 Ibid., 28–29.
23 See Etō, Shōbōgenzō.
24 Etō was criticized by a research associate for apparent errors included in the published text and, eventually, the 95-fascicle on which he relied was discredited and replaced in the early 1990s by the 4 – volume edition edited in Mizuno, Shōbōgenzō.
25 DZZ 4.22 (entry 6.432), and DZZ 3. 34 (entry 148).
exterior existence. Etō refers to Buddhist sūtras and śāstras as “ladles” dipping into the fountainhead of the Dharma, but maintains that “Dōgen alone discarded all ladles and himself, body and mind together ... to actualize the entirety of Śākyamuni's spirituality in the oneness of his body and mind.”

Furthermore, Etō argues against methods that default to a “bean-counting” approach to textual studies by trying to look even-handedly at all forms of Buddhism in light of the complex relation of religion and social history while lacking an appropriate understanding of Dōgen's distinctive spiritual qualities. As Dōgen suggests in the "Bendōwa" fascicle written in 1231, about which Etō later published a monograph, sustained contemplative training rises over and above intellectual prowess so that people are equal in their ability to attain the way, whether sharp or dull, intelligent or not, in that everyone is endowed with the true seeds of prajñā, although they rarely realize this.

Focusing on the conflict between Watsuji and Etō about whether Dōgen's approach lies beyond sectarian boundaries or is situated only within the confines of Sōtō Zen conceals important ideological similarities linking these scholars. The main endeavor for both was to revive an interest in the Shōbōgenzō that previously, outside of a small circle of specialists familiar with Dōgen's obscure allusions and confounding grammatical constructions crossing Sinitic syntax with vernacular pronunciations, was considered an archaic and impenetrable text primarily read in a drastically compressed abridgement, the Shushōgi which was created in 1891. The views of Watsuji and Etō are based on being able to read the text with “two eyes,” as Nishiari's main follower Kishizawa Ian 岸澤惟安 (1865–1955) was known to say, in order to disclose its essential meaning not limited by the conventions of text-historical studies. Furthermore, Watsuji acknowledges that Dōgen's particular sense of drive and determination is key to his greatness, whereas Etō recognizes that in some passages such as the “Bukkyō” (Buddhist Teachings) fascicle, Dōgen emphasizes the role of genuine Buddhism without endorsing nomenclature that proclaims the independence of the Zen sect.

More significantly, the scholars share an evaluation that Dōgen's articulation of religious insight is eminently successful and neither one voices a degree of skepticism about his style of argumentation or the conclusions drawn. Indeed, Watsuji's interpretation dealing with Dōgen's “perfect expression of

26 Etō, Zen Master Dōgen as Founding Patriarch, xxiii.
27 Ibid, 59. Furthermore, “No matter how profound Dōgen's insight may have been, if we view it simply as philosophical thought, we will fail to uncover the fundamental aspect of the Zen master,” 19.
28 DZZ 2.480. See Etō, Shōbōgenzō jōsetsu.
truth (dōtoku 道得) amounts to nothing less than a reiteration of the dynamics of perfect expression in Hegelian terms.”29 This is not far from Etō’s assessment that is derived from the notion that Dōgen achieves transcendence-through-sublimation (kōjō 向上) in a way comparable to the German philosophical notion of aufgehoben. Therefore, the main polarity separating the scholars is not really a matter of religion versus philosophy. Rather, it concerns the question of whether, for Dōgen, truth itself must be accessed through face-to-face (menju 面授) transmission directly received from a venerated teacher, such as his Chinese mentor Rujing, as argued by the Manzan lineage and propagated in Etō’s orthodoxy.30 Or is truth instead available to anyone through the universal capacity to disclose the Way, according to the outlook of Tenkei’s heterodox faction that is cited briefly by Watsuji, who sees Dōgen “attaining freedom in the midst of a thorny forest” of deceptions?31

Probing further, there is yet another level of polarity that becomes evident from construing the intentions of Watsuji and Etō which evokes the parameters of an early modern dispute involving the relation between truth and untruth. This debate took place mainly among Sōtō scholastics but was also influenced by the denunciations of some of the rhetoric used in the Shōbōgenzō by the Rinzai monk Mujaku Dōchū 無著道忠 (1653–1745), who agreed with Tenkei’s claims that Dōgen often misunderstands and misrepresents Sinitic sources.32 Therefore, rather than being hailed as a “genius of misreading”33 for his interpretative innovations, according to the Tenkei-Mujaku standpoint, Dōgen is sorely in need of a significant amount of editing or rewriting. Disagreements about the function of transmission dovetailed with a parallel debate concerning how to prioritize the various editions of the Shōbōgenzō, with Manzan supporting the 75-fascicle version commented on by Senne and Tenkei favoring the 60-fascicle version that was commented on in 1329 by Giun, fifth abbot of Eiheiji, because that edition apparently deleted those controversial sections that displayed Dōgen’s problematic treatment of Chinese language and teachers.

Considering these premodern schisms helps make it clear that underlying all of the differences between Watsuji and Etō stands a basic agreement that, since the perfection of truth prevails for Dōgen, there is no imperative to explore the notion that untruth and deception continue to impact perception

31 Bein, Purifying Zen, 17.
32 See Jorgensen, “Zen Scholarship: Mujaku Dōchū and His Contemporaries.”
33 He, Dōgen to Chūgoku Zen no shisō, viii.
even within the midst of truth, or vice-versa. Although the development of
the standpoint suggesting that the Shōbōgenzō is not flawless and should be
the subject of textual criticism or in some cases a degree of refutation that
might be expected of a non-sectarian commentator, much like Etō’s approach
Watsuji does not seriously consider the objections that were raised by Tenkei
despite the ample component of fallibilism in many examples of Dōgen’s dis-
course. It seems clear that Watsuji and Etō are not really in discord regarding
the foundational matter of truth. That is why it is so important that an investi-
gation of whether Dōgen’s thought can or should be reevaluated and possibly
corrected is evident in the studies of several modern sectarian interpreters,
including Kurebayashi and those he influenced, rather than secular philoso-
phers, who remain committed to perfectionism.

The relevance of surveying an array of interpretations of the enigmatic
“Genjōkōan” boat analogy in the context of discussing truth in relation to
untruth, while tracing the history of the revisionist outlook that has impacted
some prominent contemporary commentators, is that this passage offers an
important case study of Dōgen’s own view of the issue of inadequate percep-
tivity in relation to the possibility of fully disclosive awareness. He indicates
that when traveling out to sea, “all we seem to view is a circle” (tada maru ni
nomi miyu ただまるにのみみゆ), even though we know better than to accept
that sensation. This metaphor, which follows an intriguing chiasmic statement
about challenges to attaining spiritual realization because a sense of lack per-
vades an awareness of the Dharma, highlights the partiality of comprehension
while recognizing on some level the unboundedness of perspectives. Are the
outlooks of partiality and fullness to stand in one more binary set, or is there a
sense of balance and harmony that can be attained?

Let us look more closely at a translation of the “Genjōkōan” paragraph:

When the Dharma has not yet been studied fully with body-mind, it
seems adequate; but if the Dharma is amply realized with body-mind,
one has a feeling of lack. For example, when riding a boat out to sea,
where mountains can no longer be seen, we look around in four direc-
tions and all we seem to view is a circle. We do not see any other shapes.
Nevertheless, the great ocean is not round, nor is it square, and the
remaining features of the ocean are altogether inexhaustible, so that [to
a fish] it is like a palace or [to a deva] it is like a jeweled necklace. But, for
that particular moment, all our eyes can take in appears round. (身心に,
法いまだ参飽せざるには, 法すでにたれりとおぼゆ. 法もし身心に充足すれば, ひとかたはたらずとおぼゆるなり. たとへば, 船にのりて山なき海中にいでて四
方をみるに, ただまろにのみみゆ. さらにことなる相, みゆることなし. しかあれ
ど、この大海、まろなるにあらず、方なるにあらず、のこのれ海徳、つくすべからざるなり。宮殿のごとし、瓔珞のごとし、ただわがまなこのおよぶところ、しばらくまろにみゆるのみなり).

In this and the next paragraph of the fascicle Dōgen maintains that people are riddled by the conundrum that the more they know, the more they realize they do not know. This condition is crucial for the attainment of Zen awakening, if properly cultivated, and is comparable to Confucius’ view that, “To know that you know something and [acknowledge] that you do not know something that you do not know, that is knowing” (知之為知之,不知為不知,是知也).

The image of riding a boat out to sea captures the moment one can tell that there are unlimited possibilities for additional perceptions, while understanding we are invariably bound to a partial and thus misleading standpoint. As we are unsure of what the eye is capable of seeing, on some level we realize there are innumerable other shapes besides circles and squares that can be observed by different beings. According to the “the four views of water” (issui shiken 一水四見) in Yogācāra Buddhist literature, which is also evoked the “Sansuikyō” 山水経 fascicle, in addition to the perceptions of fish and deva, humans see water as liquid and hungry ghosts see it as pus and blood.34 Dōgen further suggests we should realize that the various virtues of oceans and mountains are unlimited, which is true “not only for what surrounds us, since vastness exists right under our feet or even within a single drop of water.”

It is also interesting to note several passages related to the question of shifting perspectives caused by the act of sailing that are included in various fascicles. For example, in “Tsuki” 都機 Dōgen evokes a boat analogy to symbolize the relativity of the movement of the vessel vis-à-vis the shoreline that leads one to ask, even if for just an instant, which object remains steady: “When people ride in a boat, if they turn their eyes and gaze at the shore, they make the mistake of thinking that the shore is moving. But if they fix their eyes more closely on the vessel, they understand that it is the boat advancing.”35 In a similar vein in “Genjōkōan,” Dōgen says of fish swimming in water and birds flying in the air that “they do not fail to be aware of the limits of their environs, but do not stop overturning each particular location” (頭頭に邊際をつくさずといふことなく處處に踏飜せずといふことなし).36

34 DZZ 1.324.
35 In other texts Dōgen often refers to two Tang Chan masters: the Boatman Monk Chuanzi Decheng 船子德誠 (820–858), who for decades rode in a boat without ever landing; and Xuansha 玄沙 (835–908), who before becoming a monk used a fishing boat.
36 The verb tōhon 踏飜, rendered here as “overturning,” as in tipping over a boat, is used in Chan texts to express an adept’s ability “to toss topsy-turvy the great ocean or leap beyond Mount Sumeru” (踏翻大海趯倒須彌).
In a sardonic remark cited in “Shunjū” 春秋, Dōgen comments on a verse by Song Chan master Foxing 佛性 (n.d.): “The place where there is no cold or heat is penetrated, / The withered tree blooms once again. / Those who notch the boat to find a sword are laughable / Even so they now occupy a state of cold ashes” (無寒暑處為君通 一枯木華生又一重 堪笑刻舟求劍者 至今猶在冷灰中).37

Here the phrase, “notch the boat to find the sword” (刻舟求劍), refers to the folly based on a story from the Chinese classic Chunqiu 春秋 of a senseless man who dropped his sword from a vessel and marked the spot by marking the side of the boat. On the other hand, in “Zenkī” 全機 Dōgen evokes the eminently positive image of poling a boat to represent the completely realized present moment that is at once cut off from and encompassing of past and future events, whereby “I do not exist apart from the boat and the boat functions as a vehicle because I am riding in it. You must make the effort to study such a moment as this.” (われふねにのりて このふねをもふねならしむ この正當恁麼時を功夫參學すべし).38

4 Situating Traditional Commentaries

The main reason for delving into an explanation of premodern Sōtō commentaries is to highlight the role of Nishiari Bokusan, who initiates the modern approach to relativism by focusing on the existential aspect of Dōgen’s journey to China. Nishiari set the stage for important interpretative developments by at once channeling and evaluating medieval and Edo period commentaries to reveal the complex hermeneutic background impacting nearly all current methods, even though this is only rarely discussed by either Watsuji or Etō. As Ralf Müller points out, “Nishiari Bokusan [represents] the beginning of a critical reading” in the early twentieth century, and this is largely because he “tries to revive the tradition of the Genzō-ka 眼蔵家 [Shōbōgenzō aficionado] by appealing to the commentary in the Goshō of Senne as the [authoritative] one that remains the most substantial.”39 However, while Nishiari assesses

37 DZZ 1.413.
38 DZZ 1.260.
39 Müller, “The Philosophical Reception of Japanese Buddhism After 1868,” 176. A discussion of Nishiari’s view of “Genjōkōan” should acknowledge the harsh criticism leveled by Hakuun Yasutani, who was influenced by Goshō but more so by Tenkei’s disciple Roran, in Flowers Fall, xxii–xxiii and 3–4. In the final analysis, however, Yasutani does not seem to deviate from Nishiari’s view of perfection and is perhaps even less of a relativist. His book was published in Japanese before Kurebayashi’s lectures; see Yasutani, Shōbōgenzō sankyū.
various commentaries, he is not skeptical of Dōgen’s view of truth and attacks Tenkei’s approach.

To explain some of the main historical developments, Table 1 provides a flowchart showing the role of the Goshō and the only other major medieval commentary, the Shōbōgenzō honmokuju, a series of four-line verse comments (juko 頌古, Ch. songgu) along with capping phrases (jakugo 著語) on the 60-fascicle edition produced by Giun. Both texts are situated in the chart in relation to the versions of the Shōbōgenzō most frequently cited by five Sōtō factions that splintered following the death of Dōgen. The Goshō was composed by Senne and Kyogō after they left Eiheiji to establish Yōkōji temple in Kyoto, which was an out of the way location and their commentary quickly fell into disuse until it was revived nearly three hundred years later. Then it became prized as the most prestigious analysis of the 75-fascicle edition because it was initiated by the only direct disciple who had attended all of the original sermons delivered by Dōgen at Kōshōji and Eiheiji temples and also edited several of his other important writings.40

40 Senne edited Eihei kōroku volumes 1 (sermons presented at Kōshōji temple), 9 (verse comments on 90 kōan cases), and 10 (kanshi 漢詩 poems).
From the time of its composition Giun’s *Honmokuju*, which eulogized the 60-fascicle edition without offering specific annotations, became the most widely read commentary throughout the Muromachi era but was eventually reduced to secondary status by the revival of the *Goshō*. Although a couple of Edo commentaries on the *Honmokuju* were composed, including ones by Menzan and Honkō Katsudō 風外本光 (1719–1773), many observers have felt Giun’s poetic remarks were designed to inspire spirituality while discouraging the kind of detailed interlinear analysis that questions some of Dōgen’s assumptions as found in the *Goshō*. Nevertheless, Giun’s verse comments are useful for understanding how the *Shōbōgenzō* was appropriated in the religious and literary context of medieval Japan. The following is the capping phrase with verse on “Genjōkōan” (“Realization Here and Now”) plus the capping phrase provided by Honkō:

Giun’s capping phrase: What is it? (是什麼).
Do not overlook what is right in front of you,
Endless spring appears with the early plum blossoms.
By using just a single word you enter the open gate,
Nine oxen pulling with all their might cannot lead you astray.
(面前一著莫蹉過 / 空劫春容此早梅 / 一字入公門內了 / 九牛盡力挽無迴).

Honkō’s phrase: Already engaged in studying the fascicle (既參本卷).

Giun’s opening remark reads as an interrogative in kanbun grammar but he was well aware that Dōgen often interpreted apparent queries as declarative statements to show the “what-ness” or quiddity of reality. Therefore, the phrase could be rendered as, “This is what it is” or “This is it!” The verse suggests that truth is ever present, without delay or obstruction, and can be appreciated through any and all manner of expression that opens the gates to the Dharma. Honkō highlights the imperative of ongoing practice based on realization occurring this moment, regardless of whether one is consciously aware of progressive stages of the training process.

The primary aim of the *Goshō*, on the other hand, is to anticipate possible objections to some of Dōgen’s bewildering assertions and explicate the intentions of the author in light of or by identifying some of his Sinitic sources while critiquing, whether directly or indirectly, the standpoints of rival Zen figures such as Dainichi Nōnin, founder of the Daruma school in the late 1100s, and the Rinzai school émigré monk, Rankei Dōryū 蘭渓道隆 (Ch. Lanxi Daolong 1213–1278) who became abbot of Kenchōji temple in 1253. Both Nōnin and Rankei

---

41 Heine, *Flowers Blooming on a Withered Tree*, 80.
endorsed the suddenness of enlightenment in ways that Dōgen explicitly refuted. A former Tendai monk no doubt accustomed to the subtleties of dialectical reasoning, Senne recognized that Dōgen’s persistent use of paradoxes and rhetorical reversals could be misconstrued for lacking clarity or seen as inconsistencies. The Goshō often refers to a particular word or phrase “sounding rather odd” or “seeming unclear,” and tries to address rather than bypass or suppress those concerns by providing an overall vision of Dōgen’s underlying consistency. The authors mainly seek solutions to the enigmas from other passages expressed within the discourse of the Shōbōgenzō, instead of looking for answers outside of the masterwork, but they occasionally draw from examples of Tendai thought or Zen records. The lack of objective reasoning in favor of a kind of circular logic committed to endorsing Dōgen’s standpoint caused the Goshō to later become a target of criticism by the Tenkei faction.

Although written separately as coequal comments in that Kyōgō’s glosses composed in paragraphs are independent and not necessarily an extension of Senne’s explanations, which consist of a series of bulleted remarks, the two sets of annotations are usually treated as a unified work with the comments by Kyōgō appearing first in the modern edition. I will briefly summarize some of the main points in regard to how the Goshō portrays the boat analogy as exemplary of the chiasmic sentence about insufficiency by highlighting the relativity of human perceptions while in the end putting forth an absolutist interpretation of Dōgen’s thought. The key question is whether and to what extent Senne-Kyōgō address Dōgen’s apparent introduction of the notion of fallibilism in a way that opens the door to relativist interpretations articulated by several modern commentators while preserving their emphasis on the perfection of truth.

The Goshō’s interpretation of Dōgen’s passage dealing with partiality and limitation is based on distinguishing between a false sense of insufficiency, which is bound to delusion, and a true sense, which does not impede Zen realization. The text starts by referring to an earlier paradoxical sentence in the fascicle, “People, when they first seek the Dharma, assume they are far removed from its environs; the Dharma, once it has been authentically transmitted, is immediately realized by one’s true self” (人，はじめて法をもとむるとき，はるかに法の邊際を離却せり;法，すでにおのれに正傳するとき，すみやかに本分人なり). Kyōgō then explains the sailing metaphor in connection with the positive view of insufficiency through commonsense analogies showing that even adepts must learn to try harder because, “If we practice the Way with sincerity,
[when cutting a tree], the more one cuts the harder it becomes; and [when climbing a mountain], the more one looks up the higher it appears.”

Senne’s approach to the question of lack affirms the unity of singularity and particularity symbolized by Dōgen’s notion that one drop of water in complete in itself, but he also uses the rhetoric of via negativa in noting, “When we are filled with zazen, this means we are killing Buddha,” thus evoking an injunction associated with Linji臨濟 (d. 866). He also suggests that, “The triple world is only one mind, for there is nothing outside the mind,” and further clarifies that the phrases, “There is nothing (mu)” and “outside,” actually have the same meaning because we can know the limitless virtues of the sea through the specific form of a square or a circle.

Senne probes the matter of inconsistency by highlighting a seemingly innocuous phrase that appears in the follow-up paragraph of the fascicle: “If we wish to perceive the traits of the myriad phenomena, in addition to seeing the rectangular and the circular, we should realize that there are worlds in the four directions in which the remaining features of the seas and mountains are numerous and unbounded.” Senne admits that the phrase “in addition to” (nokoreru kaitoku のこれる海徳), which implies “other than” (hoka ni ほかに), is unclear and he asks whether it is part of realization to view the sea as a square or a circle while also knowing the features of the ocean beside those characteristics. Or does the phrase mean that to view the sea as a square or a circle is a deluded view? Since “in addition to” being seen as a square or a circle seems incomplete, it sounds like the sea is neither a square nor a circle and, thus, it is only obvious what the seas and mountains are not.

That tentativeness is resolved when Senne connects the idea of being unable to see beyond the horizon while riding a boat to a previous “Genjōkōan” passage, “When we see forms or hear sounds with body and mind, although we understand them intimately, it is not like the reflection in a mirror or like the water and the moon. When one side is illumined, the other side is dark” (身心を擧して色を見取し, 身心を擧して聲を聴取するに, したしく會取すれども, かがみにかげをやどすがごとくにあらず, 水と月とのごとくにあらず. 一方を證するときは, 一方向是くらし). According to the Goshō, the word ippō (一方) translated here as “one side” is understood as having the identical meaning as ippō (一法) or “one dharma.”

This deliberate conflation seems to represent the kind of philosophical pun Dōgen frequently uses and implies that the passage dealing with seemingly faulty perception at sea also evokes the doctrine of ippō gūjin. From the standpoint of that interpretation, there is neither limit nor partiality in human perception in that Dōgen expresses the concept of the oneness of the person and the object, and thereby denies the separate status of either aspect. Moreover,
“When one side is illumined, the other side is dark [or: concealed, obscure]” suggests that all things have become aligned with one whole Dharma because if a person intimately perceives things by engaging the whole body and mind, he or she will realize the meaning of the Dharma-as-truth infusing each and every dharma-as-object. Senne concludes, “Nothing outside the mind’ refers to the mind-ground. This means that the ‘triple world is only one mind.’ At this time, nothingness is the mind-ground.” Therefore, we must know that there are inexhaustible characteristics in either seas or mountains besides a circle or a square, which means that their features are neither one nor more than one.

Next, the reason for taking into account some of the voluminous early modern commentaries is that Nishiari recognizes these are essential ingredients of the traditional approach that continues to condition modern appropriations of the *Shōbōgenzō*. The Edo period saw the revival of both of the medieval commentaries, especially the *Goshō*, which was itself examined in detail in ways that helped trigger the development of dozens of new annotations and edited versions. In these writings, Dōgen's masterwork was sometimes revised in terms of the number of fascicles included as well as the exact content of each edition, which can mean that what we are reading today likely varies from some of the Edo renditions. Nishiari also provides his own evaluations, to be discussed below, of a half dozen of the main examples while recognizing that there were several dozen additional commentaries he does not mention in detail.

Nishiari's assessment appropriately groups the broad range of Edo annotations into three main camps, as shown in Table 2's flowchart of commentarial lineages. The two main factions were both offshoots of Gesshū Sōko 月舟宗胡 (1618–1696), the renowned twenty-sixth abbot of Daijōji temple that was founded by Gikai 義介 (1219–1309) in 1293 and ever since had a history of upholding studies of Dōgen's writings. Gesshū helped spearhead a revival of interest in textual hermeneutics of the *Shōbōgenzō*, along with many other sectarian reforms *shūtō fukkō* 宗統復古, that gave rise to the opposing factions of Manzan, Menzan, and Banjin, who represented the Sōtō mainstream, and the heretical line of Tenkei and Fuyō Roran 父幼老卵 (1724–1805). The third faction derived from the Eiheiji lineage included Shigetsu Ein 指月慧印 (d. 1764), Honkō Katsudō, and Zakka Zōkai 雑華蔵海 (1730–1788), who were sympathetic to the Manzan-Menzan standpoint. They considered the clique of Tenkei to be unworthy “worms” betraying the founder's teachings and eating away at the substance of denominational doctrine.

The main ideological conflicts emerged because the monk-scholars of this era were familiar enough with the Chinese sources cited by Dōgen, after several centuries during which that degree of expertise was not available, and they
were also aware of new methods of hermeneutics introduced by Confucian thinkers. Because they believed in a basic unity underlying all schools of Zen, including Sōtō and Rinzai, Tenkei along with Mujaku were uncomfortable with Dōgen’s disapproval of famous Tang and Song masters, especially when this was often based on an apparent misreading of the original materials. Tenkei therefore proposed an edition of the *Shōbōgenzō* with 78 fascicles that included his “corrections” based largely on a reading of the 60-fascicle edition which, he felt, had appropriately deleted many sections containing Dōgen’s harsh attacks on Linji and other rival Chinese leaders and lineages. That view was further propagated by Tenkei’s main follower, Roran. Numerous disciples of Manzan, who inherited Gesshū’s abbacy of Daijōji, espoused the opposing standpoint that was sympathetic and supportive of Dōgen’s handling of explicating continental sources. However, the Manzan faction did not question the authority or truth claims in the *Shōbōgenzō*, whereas Tenkei took license in the name of Dōgen’s own sense of inventiveness to employ that outlook against some of his arguments.

During this time, there was a parallel debate between Tenkei and Manzan over whether the transmission and succession of temple abbacies should
be based on Dōgen’s guidelines or on current and variable custom. Another topic of discord based on interpreting Dōgen’s often ambiguous instructions about sectarian rules (kakun 家訓) involved the significance of traditional precepts in relation to authentic zazen practice for training novices. With regard to the masterwork, Tenkei’s main point was that a revision of the founder’s ideas based on amending the questionable Chinese usage in many passages was acceptable because, ultimately, it took part in the freewheeling spirit that Dōgen espoused, which was preferable to an uncritical emulation of the Shōbōgenzō. Even though all the Sōtō leaders shared an interest in commenting on Chinese Zen classics, for the Manzan faction, the standpoint of Tenkei, who also wrote a massive commentary on the Rinzai-associated kōan collection, the Biyanlu (Jp. Hekiganroku 碧巖錄), that resembled Hakuin’s annotation, was not permissible. The third faction that included Shigetsu and Honkō also strongly disagreed with Tenkei but tried to be more objective in their analysis than the Manzan group. Yet another clique included Tenkei’s lineal offshoots, Genrō Ōryū 玄楼奥龍 (1720–1813) and Fugai Honkō 風外本光 (1779–1847), who jointly composed a major kōan collection, the Tetteki tōsui 鐵笛倒吹 that resembles the prose and poetic structure of a Song-style work.

Therefore, the main theme underlying controversies about lineal succession and Shōbōgenzō interpretation was a typical discord between approaches based on the continuity of institutional identity, for Manzan, and an emphasis on individuality and difference, for Tenkei. Their question was, do the teachings of the founder represent an orthodox model that should be adhered to as closely as possible, or do his views instead legitimate developing novel views based on the spirit rather than the letter of the law? Many of the same emerging hermeneutic techniques were used to defend nearly opposite conclusions, with Menzan and followers accepting the Goshō’s absolutist interpretation of the boat analogy and Tenkei’s camp disregarding or rejecting it in favor of a (relatively) relativist approach.

5 Nishiari and His Predecessors and Followers

During the late Meiji era, the scholarly mission of Nishiari was primarily based on putting forward in a modern denominational context a critical presentation of many aspects of the analysis and arguments first offered in the Goshō as seen in light of Edo period annotations. Sometimes called the “father of modern Sōtō Zen,” whose Shōbōgenzō commentary was the first and unquestionably most influential twentieth-century sectarian work on Dōgen, Nishiari
spearheaded this movement in response to three major trends.\textsuperscript{44} One was the tendency of “New Buddhism” (\textit{Shin Bukkyō} 新仏教) to offer, in response to various powerful sociopolitical pressures, a rationalized and communally committed interpretation of traditional doctrine stripped of ritual or mythology and cast, in ways evident in Watsuji’s approach, as an indigenous alternative to Western philosophy and Protestant Christianity. Nishiari was also well aware that Japanese Buddhist studies at the turn of the century needed to raise its level of erudition by incorporating some components of the text-historical methods of Western religious scholarship. The third trend was an emphasis on making accessible vernacular writings for lay practitioners, as in the publication of the \textit{Shushōgi}, which compressed the entire contents of Dōgen’s masterwork to just 31 paragraphs of selected passages that emphasize karmic causality rather than zazen. This text was primarily used for ceremonial activities instead of serving as the basis for philosophical interpretations.\textsuperscript{45}

Although incomplete in that it includes lectures on only twenty-nine fascicles transcribed by disciple Tomiyama Soei 富山祖父英 (d. 1929) that were begun in 1897 and concluded with Nishiari’s death in 1910, the \textit{Keiteki} was republished in three volumes in 1965 edited by Kurebayashi Kōdō, a student of Kishizawa Ian who taught for many years at Komazawa University. This work represents an elongated \textit{teishō} that often relies on anecdotes and allusions as well as occasional ironic references to monastic practice and everyday life in order to epitomize the vast corpus of Kamakura and Edo commentaries. It is noteworthy that in 1905, just a year before the Honzan 本山 Edition of the 95-fascicle \textit{Shōbōgenzō} was published by the Sōtō sect for the first time in a typeset publication designed for a wider distribution than monastic readers, Nishiari helped initiate along with his disciple Oka Sōtan 大潤宗潭 (1860–1921) the custom of holding annual summer study sessions (\textit{Genzō-e} 眼蔵会) at Eiheiji and other temples based on Edo period precedents. Although primarily for practitioners, these meetings also helped stimulate new scholarly trends taken up by several generations of prominent researchers (\textit{Genzō-kenkyūka} 眼蔵研究家).

Before Nishiari’s efforts, Chinese Zen sources were usually evoked to form the core of clerical sermons but Japanese works, including the \textit{Shōbōgenzō}, were seen mainly in terms of temple treasures amassed as talismanic possessions conferring religious authority but not as the basis of persuasive exegesis used during public discourses. Although highly specialized studies of

\textsuperscript{44} See Rutschman-Byler, “Sōtō Zen in Meiji Japan; and Snodgrass, \textit{Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West}.  
\textsuperscript{45} See Wirth, \textit{Engaging Dōgen’s Zen}. 
Dōgen’s masterwork had been carried out by a handful of leading monks for a couple of centuries, it was a novel development for a sectarian leader to disseminate his vast knowledge in a relatively popular format. After the Keiteki, the trend was reversed with the flourishing of Shōbōgenzō investigations that included the production of numerous modern translations 現代語訳 along with chronologies, concordances, critical editions, dictionaries, glossaries, explanations, grammars, historical narratives, indexes, maps, and timelines. Even so, some individual passages continued to assume an unfathomable depth and remain elusive to interpreters seeking to determine their essential meaning.

A follower of the Sōtō lineage that traced to Manzan, Nishiari’s commentary was the culmination of his lifelong studies of Dōgen’s text. He drew on many decades of his intensive readings of the entire Shōbōgenzō, first as a novice at Kichijōji temple, and later under eminent teachers such as Daitotsu 大訥 (1786–1859) at Shinshūji temple in the Echigo district and, for twelve years, Gettan 月潭 (d. 1865), who lectured twice daily on Dōgen’s text at Kaizōji temple in Odawara. Nishiari also felt a special sense of communion (kannō dōkō 感応道交) with Dōgen’s spirituality when in the 1880s he came to possess a rare relic that emitted a mysterious (fushigi 不思議) radiant light. His significant literary output increased near the end of his life. In the late 1890s he published a volume of notes on the Shōbōgenzō, new editions of commentaries by Menzan, Zōkai, and others, plus revised versions of prominent Edo elucidations of the doctrine of Five Ranks (goi 五位) that was articulated by many Sōtō masters.

Nishiari shows that the standpoint of the Goshō is best understood not in isolation but with reference to early modern interpretative disputes. In assessing a representative group of major Shōbōgenzō commentaries Nishiari placed them in order of relevance instead of chronology as part of a ranking that helped solidify sectarian perspectives, for better or worse, prior to the initiation of postwar historical examinations of Zen literature in light of current linguistic

---

46 According to Bodiford, before Nishiari lectured regularly there was a dearth of attention given to Dōgen’s masterwork, but since his publication there is practically no modern commentator unable to make a direct link to Nishiari in tracking their intellectual heritage. Nishiari’s remarks continue to influence Dōgen interpreters, including academic researchers, and even today nearly every important Sōtō Zen teacher gives addresses on the Shōbōgenzō. See Bodiford, “Textual Genealogies of Dōgen.”

47 According to one of several versions of Nishiari’s enlightenment experience (daigo) during the 1850s he uttered, “Grabbing the snow and throwing it into the water, / Heaven and earth are cast off and Mount Sumeru collapses. / I do not know what season it is! / Laughing all at once, I kick over the silver dish.” In another version, his awakening was attributed to the saying, “Seeing through knowing is not seeing.”
methods, including the study of colloquial Chinese and ancient Japanese literature. The list of commentaries includes: 1) *Goshō* by Senne and Kyōgō; 2) *Monge* by Menzan and his disciple Fuzan Gentotsu (d. 1789); 3) *Sanchū* (or *Kyakutai ichijisann* by Honkō; 4) *Shiki* by Zōkai; 5) *Zokugen kogi* by Otsubō; 6) *Na’ippō* by Roran; and 7) *Benchū* by Tenkei.

Nishiari praises the painstakingly detailed remarks of *Monge*, which demonstrates grandmotherly solicitude by explaining literal connotations for novices, although he feels Menzan allows sermonizing to intrude on interpretations of Dōgen's basic teaching. Zōkai’s *Shiki* receives a similar evaluation. Nishiari admires *Sanchū* by Honkō as the most thorough annotation that provides an impeccable outline of the *Shōbōgenzō*’s contents which is also helpful with regard to discerning its spiritual significance. Unsurprisingly, Nishiari sharply criticizes *Benchū* by Tenkei as extreme, destructive, heretical, and unscrupulous and he indicates that Roran’s *Na’ippō* shows some improvement over the teacher’s work but is still deficient, whereas he appreciates Otsubō Kanchū (d. 1760) contentious but skillful rebuttal to Tenkei’s standpoint in *Zokugen kōgi*. Nevertheless, I suggest that Nishiari offers a view that begins to capture Dōgen’s standpoint of constructive ambiguity because he was to some extent influenced by Tenkei’s skeptical attitude that was in some ways an outgrowth of the modest degree of questioning already found in the *Goshō* of some examples of Dōgen’s puzzling phrasings.

As the last great proponent of traditional Sōtō Zen whose discursive techniques, although not philosophical, were suited to a new era of open-ended investigations, Nishiari provides a fresh understanding of the venerated medieval commentary. In amplifying Kyōgō’s comments regarding the chiasmic opening sentence of the “Genjōkan” paragraph about insufficiency or lack Nishiari writes, “The more deeply you study, the more things you find that you don’t understand. A scholar said, ‘It’s a real problem to be an expert.’ Usually it’s easy to get away with not claiming expertise in a certain field, but an expert cannot do this.”48 That is, a specialist knows better than to utter triumphalist boasts even if this leads to disappointing expectations. Suzuki Shunryū (1904–1971), who studied the *Shōbōgenzō* with Kishizawa Ian, adds that the famous Japanese author Fumiko Hayashi frequently said, “This work is not all my ability... People say she is good, but she says, ‘I am not a good writer. I cannot express my feelings yet. There is more I want to express.’ ‘Something is missing’ in this sense... When she says, ‘This is exactly what I wanted to say,’ she may not be such a good writer.”49

49 Ibid., 117.
Perhaps Nishiari’s single main contribution to a relativist interpretation of the boat analogy is to underscore the role of the voyage itself in term of the personal or existential implications of Dōgen’s travels to China from 1223 to 1227 to conquer his great doubt about original enlightenment thought (hongaku shisō 本覺思想). “When Dōgen Zenji went to Great Song,” the Keiteki maintains, “he had an actual experience of crossing the ocean. He comments on this from the viewpoint of practice. This represents a teaching based on his personal sense of memory. When one goes out in the ocean, there is no mountain, land, or anything that obstructs the eyes. Then, does it only look circular?"50 Uchiyama Kōshō 内山興正 (1912–1998) supplements Nishiari’s remarks connecting the sailing metaphor to Dōgen’s travels: “It must have been scary to cross the ocean in a small boat like a leaf. Once at sea, he could only see the horizon. Actually, there were islands and ports on the other side of the ocean, but they could not be seen.” Suzuki further notes, “Dōgen had a pretty hard voyage when he went across the ocean to China.”

The map in Figure 1 and the drawing of Dōgen riding a vessel in Figure 2 are also presented in light of the fact that the original recipient of the “Genjōkōan” missive was likely the boatman from Kyushu who had transported him to and from the mainland.51 The significance of considering the passage by personalizing the significance of the journey to China is that Nishiari, who was aware that Dōgen did not write an autobiography, highlights how the master served as his own best narrator through offering diverse reflections and ruminations regarding his odyssey that fill the pages of the Hōkyōki, the Shōbōgenzō zui-monki, the Tenzokyōkun, and other works regarding his experiences of continental Chan life. In the opening paragraph of Hōkyōki, for example, Dōgen says, “Crossing the sea in a boat for many miles, I entrusted my ephemeral existence to the roaring waves before landing in Song China ... and enrolling in Tiantong temple to study with Rujing.”52

This trip took place while Dōgen was still in a state of delusion before he resolved this doubt through the enlightenment experience (daigo 大悟) of dropping off body-mind (shinjin datsuraku 身心脱落). We must also take into account the risk of sailing in deep waters in the early thirteenth century. Dōgen embarked with Myōzen 明全 (1184–1225) and two other companions from the

50 Ibid., 81.
51 Based on conversations with Frédéric Girard at Komazawa University (May 18, 2019); see Girard, “Le bouddhisme médiéval japonais en question.”
52 In traditional accounts, during a threatening storm on his return trip Dōgen encountered a mysterious manifestation of One-Leaf Kannon (一葉の観音), who quieted the waves.
port of Hakata in the northwestern region of Kyushu, near where Eisai 枚西 (1141–1215) established Shofukuji as the first Zen temple in Japan when he returned from China in the early 1190s. The group probably reached this harbor after leaving the capital by navigating inland waterways in smaller boats. However, the trip across the Sea of Japan would have felt like a tremendous
challenge in that Dōgen was cast out into the ocean, where storms and piracy were so common in this era that it is estimated over half of those who ventured to the continent did not return.

Moreover, Nishiari indicates the journey created a dramatic transition with profound theoretical implications from Dōgen’s previously landlocked outlook to the awakening of a more comprehensive, multi-perspectival approach for understanding the complexity of reality in relation to human perception. There marked an abrupt and irreversible sense of shifting away from a physical connection with the shore to an incomparable feeling of solitude and the inescapability of realizing just how much one cannot possibly know while taking in the seemingly limitless four corners. Therefore, fallibilism implicit in the inseparability of self-deception and self-realization is revealed in a way that can be considered Dōgen’s initial major spiritual breakthrough before he disembarked in China, where he would soon be told by an anonymous monastery cook that “nothing is concealed in the entire universe” (*henkai fuzōzō* 扁界不會藏).
5.1 Various Modern Sectarian and Non-Sectarian Interpreters

To appreciate the interpretative contributions made by Kurebayashi’s monograph on “Genjōkōan” published eight decades after the Keiteki lectures were first delivered, it is necessary to consider briefly the outlook of some prominent non-secular philosophers who commented on the Shōbōgenzō in the aftermath of Watsuji. These thinkers were under the sway of Nishida Kitārō’s philosophy of absolute nothingness but were likely also exposed to Nishiari’s denominational commentaries, although probably not to the vast corpus of premodern annotations. The main point that becomes evident is that they all enthusiastically embrace absolutism and seek ways of providing an ontological structure for Dōgen’s view of the perfection of truth and yet in some ways acknowledge the value of the relativist position.

Akiyama Hanji’s study was the initial non-sectarian book-length attempt to articulate a logical and objective examination of the philosophical component of Dōgen’s writings that remains an important work because of its comprehensive scope. The approach in Dōgen no kenkyū to constructing a systematic metaphysical analysis is divided into two parts by using headings that reflect the Western philosophical categories of “ontology” (sonzairon 存在論) and “praxeology” (jissenron 実践論). Despite focusing on how Dōgen emphasizes the notion of sustained practice (gyōji 行持), Akiyama does not offer his own reflections on the significance subjective experience, as is found to some extent in Tanabe Hajime’s “personal view” (shikan 私観) of Dōgen’s philosophy.

Akiyama interprets almost every part of Dōgen’s teaching through the lens of a core concept by pointing out that, in the fascicle on “Sangai yuishin” (Triple World is Mind-Only), Dōgen views the holistic sense of “one mind” or the unity of Buddha-nature with all beings as the ground that brings every particular element into existence. Yet Akiyama stresses that Dōgen seeks to avoid an idealist sense of unidirectional causation through prioritizing the role of praxis. In dealing with the image of the boat, he makes the point that sailing out to sea is connected to the beginning of meditative training, which must be continually renewed. Thus, the role of just sitting as key to the formation of Dōgen’s thought is emphasized not only by sectarian advocates but also by this philosophical interpreter.

Tanabe opens his slim monograph, which was inspired as well as appreciated by Watsuji, by conceding that Dōgen is primarily a religious thinker but

---

53 Although Akiyama’s initial readership was limited to a Japanese wartime audience, he offered an intellectual template for interpreting the Shōbōgenzō that many others have applied and further developed in examining Dōgen.
he argues that religion and philosophy are not opposed since, ultimately, they mutually interact and are reconciled with one another. The same ongoing interplay of contraries applies to the relation between the absolute and relative, yet for Tanabe the former clearly supersedes and encompasses its apparent opposite. According to his application of Nishida’s Kyoto School principle of his application of the “principle of absolute mediation” (zettai baikaisei 絶対媒介性) to reading the Shōbōgenzō, Dōgen’s orientation towards a unity with philosophy is evident since he understands that the only way to avoid the absolute ending up as no more than the opposite of the relative – hence, collapsing itself into the relative – is to value the relative and transform it through mediation based on the mutual negation of particulars that facilitates a return to their source through absolute negation-in-affirmation. Although Nishitani Keiji does not employ the intricate terminology of absolute nothingness in interpreting “Genjōkōan,” his brief synopsis of the key passage highlights the overcoming of all distinctions as illusory and thus supports Tanabe’s view that Dōgen’s “absolute reality” (zettai genjitsu 絶対現実) represents an historical manifestation of here-and-now realization (genjōkōan).

While Tanabe subsumes but does not totally neglect the role of relative particulars, Kurebashai Kōdō offers an extended commentary on the boat analogy that helps redraw the lines of ideological discrepancy from a focus on religion versus philosophy, or absolutism versus relativism, toward an understanding of Dōgen’s approach to creative ambiguity. His monograph was based on a series of lectures that were given in his home only after he retired from teaching and were later edited by his wife, also a well-known figure at Komazawa University who recognized that her spouse’s standpoint would be considered controversial for the way it broke with orthodoxy. Genjōkōan wo kataru was published in 1991, three years after Kurebayashi’s death, with a preface explaining the origins of the work by the eminent Dōgen scholar, Kagamishima Genryū, who also helped introduce a translation of Etō’s book. Two decades before this, in Dōgen Zen no honryū 道元禅の本流, Kurebayashi began to challenge much of sectarian doctrine by proposing that Sōtō Zen scholarship, despite respecting as supreme the outlook constructed by Senne and Kyōgō, should include interpretations of the many citations of kōan cases in Dōgen’s writings.54

By focusing on the kōan-based, rather than zazen-related, aspects of “Genjōkōan,” Kurebayashi goes beyond some of the relativist implications that were hinted at by Nishiari. On the matter of personalizing Dōgen’s journey, he emphasizes that even though the distance to China does not appear great on a contemporary map, at that time it must have seemed like a vast and uncertain

54 See Kurebayashi, Dōgen Zen no honryū.
voyage over a barely crossable obstacle that gave rise to a profound sense of anxiety. Dōgen understood that, during such a boat ride, one sees only the limitless water but recalls other occasions when the opposite was the case. At sea, however, one who is also not able to view other kinds of water, like rivers or lakes cannot help but become fixated on the impression of circularity. This recalls a Chinese proverb, “Does a frog in a well really know water,” since any other kind has not been experienced. More importantly, the new perspective at sea heightened Dōgen’s concerns since he felt overwhelmed by uncertainty about what to expect once the trip was completed. In that vein it is notable that Dōgen was unable to disembark for a couple of months due to a combination of illness and the official denial access since he had never received the Hinayana precepts required for all incoming monks. Meanwhile, Myōzen died after just two years of traveling, ironically because of the stress of having to adjust too quickly to various cultural, linguistic, and religious barriers in China.55

Yoshizu Yoshihide, best known for his research on the relation between Huayan thought and the formation of early Chan, helps clarify the notion of creative ambiguity as the first scholar in the early 1990s to take up Kurebayashi’s suggestion that the term genjōkōan should be considered an example of a kōan, or a series of cases to be solved rather than a call for meditation.56 Yoshizu argues that perceiving only the externality of phenomena disables an awareness of alternative options that are left unexamined.57 Therefore, the image of mountains remaining out of view is representative of how self-consciousness is suppressed or forgotten, a condition that can be overcome but never eradicated by the experience of genuine realization.

Matsumoto Shirō was one of the two main scholars who promoted Critical Buddhism (Hihan Bukkyō 批判仏教) beginning in the late 1980s as a means of protesting against examples of social discrimination (sabetsu mondai 差別問題) evident in the behavior of Sōtō Zen and other Japanese Buddhist institutions.58 He used Dōgen’s late-career emphasis on karmic causality in

---

55 This view is similar to a comic strip in which two climbers stand on opposite sides of a mountain. One asks, “How do I get to the other side?” and the other replies, “You are on the other side!” A caption reads, “The sun shines on both sides.” My comment is that occasionally darkness also occurs on every side. On the other hand, I do not wish to create the impression that sectarian commentators highlighting relativism are, overall, more than a minority standpoint.

56 Yoshizu, “Ippō wo shōsuru toki wa ippō’ wakurashi’ no ikku no kaishaku nitsuite.”

57 See, for example, the study by Ling and Carrasco, “When sustained attention impairs perception.”

58 Matsumoto Dōgen shisōron, 191–258.
the 12-fascicle edition of the *Shōbōgenzō* as an ethical template for a reform movement based on coming to terms with the relativism of moral perspectives in a way that surpasses what he considers a false sense of absolutism in the traditional notion of *ippō gūjin*. According to Matsumoto’s account in a chapter written during the early stages of his career, “Genjōkōan” shows Dōgen still struggling to break free from a strict adherence to the absolute that he inherited from Tendai original enlightenment thought. In undertaking that effort, the passage’s emphasis on an awareness of insufficiency reflects a more productive form of understanding than presuming that any single sensation constitutes complete, unobstructed knowledge.

As with Kurebayashi, Yoshizu, and Matsumoto, Ishii Seijun seeks to relativize traditional views of absolutism by differentiating two levels of understanding symbolized by the boat floating so that the shoreline recedes from view and even the tallest mountains are not seen. On the first level, a deluded person tends to misrepresent the context of any given situation and assume that his perception occupies the sole viable vantage point. However, someone who realizes the Dharma does not recognize only his own sensations in relation to objects in the immediate, visible surroundings because he knows mountains are indeed present beyond the horizon that, for the time being, delimits perception but without eliminating awareness of recognizable elements of existence.

Ishii points out that, in another passage near the end of the fascicle similarly dealing with the limitations of perception, Dōgen maintains, “Since this is the very place where the unfolding of the Way occurs, the limits of knowability cannot be determined because the arising and practice of knowing is simultaneous with the thorough investigation of the Buddha Dharma” (これにところあり，みち通達せりによりて，しらるるきはのしるからざるは，このしることの，佛法の究盡と同生し，同参するゆゑ にしかあるなり). Therefore, Ishii argues for creative ambiguity in that Dōgen highlights the insufficiency of human knowledge, or delusion, as intrinsic to realization. Engaging phenomena with one’s body-mind often has the effect of creating a cloud of deception that represents a potential setback for contemplative awareness but at the same time viewing a circle or square can lead to the renewal of authentic realization that encompasses all possibilities without necessarily perceiving them at a particular moment.

---

59 See Ishii, “*Shōbōgenzō* ‘Genjōkōan’ no maki no shudai ni tsuite.”
6 Features of Creative Ambiguity

Extending from the Nishiari- and Kurebayashi-influenced approaches to “Genjōkōan” that are seen in light of a variety of sectarian and non-sectarian interpretations regarding the subjectivity of perceptions in relation to objective reality, I suggest that Dōgen’s standpoint of creative ambiguity represents a purposeful reversal of the Buddhist notion of two truths. Conventional truth for Dōgen is paradoxically reflected by absolutism, which is evoked as a skillful means for overcoming pessimism or nihilism but is not advocated as either an inconclusive or conclusive standpoint. Much as Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263) reverses conventional doctrinal hierarchy by asserting that all teachings other than those proclaiming Amida Buddha’s vows are provisional, ultimate truth for Dōgen is disclosed as a higher level of insight embracing uncertainty and doubt as appropriate to the level of understanding of advanced practitioners who continually cast aside false assumptions without expecting a closure to that process. Dōgen suggests that perception is necessarily delimited by the boundary of yamanaki kaichū, but this border is ever shifting when someone is traveling from land to sea and back, first locating partially with the eyes, then losing sight for a while, and finally observing land once again as each leg of the journey is tentatively completed yet segues into a new initiative.

As an addendum to the analysis of how the history of Japanese commentaries continues to be relevant for understanding contemporary interpretations of Dōgen, it is necessary to emphasize the crucial role played by Song dynasty sources that shape much of his innovative rhetoric and conceptual outlook in expressing creative ambiguity. So many of the terms and ideas that influenced Shōbōgenzō discourse are based on Dōgen’s distinctive reading of Chinese texts, in which the capacity for a Chan adept to avoid ontological commitment by flexibly exploring multiple perspectives is a recurring theme. The recognition of the limits of the horizon allows for transcendent moments of seemingly ordinary yet remarkable perceptual experiences, such as the accounts of Lingyun 靈雲 (n.d.) viewing peach blossoms blooming or Xiangyan 香巖 (d. 898) hearing the sound of a stone striking bamboo, two anecdotes about masters’ concrete sensations leading to awakening that Dōgen frequently celebrates. These momentary perceptions, which cross over gaps between partiality and wholeness, or possibility and impossibility, enable a level of spiritual awareness that leaps past, without denying, the inevitable presence of insufficiency.

Another main example involves the way Dōgen reorients the term for entanglement (kattō), which usually has negative connotations in indicating confusion caused by overly complicated verbiage. For Dōgen, influenced by
the innovative rhetoric of the *Biyanlu*, it suggests the inextricable relationship between master and disciple who lead each other from the depths of darkness and obfuscation to the heights of clarity and brightness, but without ever settling on a fixed method or a final goal since the process is ongoing and must be constantly reinvigorated. Dōgen suggests that if there are hundreds of thousands of disciples, then a master’s ideas must be expressed in a corresponding number of ways because “there is no completion” (窮盡あるべからず) to the power of expression.60 Rather than cutting off a learner’s entanglement, the point is precisely the opposite in that it is productive to be caught up in “entanglements entangled within entanglement” (葛藤をもて葛藤をまつふ),61 which means that since there is no essential nature of delusion or realization an adept understands that enlightenment is never separate from insufficiency.

Another Chan saying that Dōgen cites on numerous occasions in both the *Shōbōgenzō* and the *Eihei kōroku* involves the eccentric practitioner Puhua (n.d.) who, according to the *Linji lu* (Jp. *Rinzai roku* 臨済録), frequently went around the streets of the local town ringing a small bell and calling out, “When encountering brightness, I strike brightness; / When encountering darkness, I strike darkness; / When encountering four quarters and eight directions, I become a whirlwind; / When encountering empty space, I flail the whip” (明頭來明頭打, 暗頭來暗頭打, 四方八面來旋風打, 虛空來連架打).62 Linji comments in consummate double-edged fashion, “I’ve always had my doubts about this fellow” (我從來疑著這漢), with the term for doubt (疑) also implying a sense of wonderment at Puhua’s capacity for displaying discernment at the pivot between allowing oneself to feel ensnared and extricating from all entrapments.63

In the “Kaiin Zanmai” fascicle Dōgen remarks, “When it is said, ‘I’ve always had my doubts about this fellow,” it just means he had a meeting with “this guy I’ve always had my doubts about” (從來疑著這漢なるときは, 從來疑著這漢に相見するのみなり). Dōgen further comments that, during this exchange, there is no judgment to be made about supposedly mistaken or non-mistaken questions or answers stemming from either person engaged in dialogue since each and every utterance is a matter of, “That is what you’re thinking!” (是什

---

60 *DZZ* 1.418.
61 *DZZ* 1.416.
62 *DZZ* 1.125.
Understood from the standpoint Dōgen expresses here, the “Genjōkōan” passage about traveling in a boat at once affirms and undermines the priority of momentary yet incomplete perception that discloses how creative ambiguity characterizes the experience of awakening.

Bibliography

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


64 DZZ 1.126.


JOURNAL OF CHAN BUDDHISM 2 (2021) 1–38


Yoshizu Yoshihide 吉津宜英. “Ippō wo shōsuru toki wa ippō wa kurashi no ikku no kaishaku nitsuite” 「一方を証するときは一方はくらし」の一句 [Comments on the phrase, “When one side is illumined, the other side is dark”] Shūgaku kenkyū 宗学研究 35 (1993): 12–17.