

THE CLASSIC INTRODUCTION TO  
DŌGEN'S LIFE AND TEACHING

**EIHEI**  
**DŌGEN**  
MYSTICAL  
REALIST

**HEE-JIN KIM**

*foreword by* **TAIGEN DAN LEIGHTON**  
editor and co-translator of *Dōgen's Extensive Record*



EIHEI DŌGEN

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MYSTICAL REALIST

Hee-Jin Kim

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WISDOM PUBLICATIONS • BOSTON



Wisdom Publications  
199 Elm Street  
Somerville, MA 02144 USA  
[www.wisdompubs.org](http://www.wisdompubs.org)

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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available*

Kim, Hee-Jin.

Eihei Dōgen : mystical realist / Hee-Jin Kim ; foreword by Taigen  
Dan Leighton.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-86171-376-1

1. Dōgen, 1200-1253. 2. Sōtōshū—Doctrines. I. Leighton, Taigen  
Daniel. II. Title.

BQ9449.D657 K56 2004

294.3'927'092—dc22

2003021350


14 13 12 11 10

5 4 3 2

Cover design by Rick Snizik. Interior design by Gopa & Ted2, Inc. Set in Diacritical Garamond 10.75/13.5. Cover photo by Grego  
Palmer / [kinworks.net](http://kinworks.net)

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on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources.

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To those friends  
who helped me understand Dōg

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by Taigen Dan Leighton

Preface to the Wisdom Edition

Foreword to the Previous Edition by Robert Aitken

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# FOREWORD TO THE WISDOM EDITION

BY TAIGEN DAN LEIGHTON

**H**EE-JIN KIM'S LANDMARK BOOK *Eihei Dōgen: Mystical Realist* (formerly titled *Dōgen Kigen: Mystical Realist*) is a valuable, highly insightful commentary on the work of the thirteenth-century founder of the Sōtō branch of Japanese Zen. This book is an excellent comprehensive introduction to Dōgen's massive corpus of intricate writings as well as to his elegantly simple yet profound practice. Kim clarifies that Dōgen's philosophy was at the service of his spiritual guidance of his students, and reveals the way Dōgen incorporated study and philosophy into his religious practice.

Since this book was first published in 1975, and even more since the revised edition in 1987, a large volume of reliable English-language translations and commentaries on Dōgen have been published. And a widening circle of varied meditation communities dedicated to the practice espoused by Dōgen has developed in the West, with practitioners eager to study and absorb his teachings.

I have been privileged to contribute to the new body of Dōgen translations and scholarship. Other translators such as Shohaku Okumura, Kazuaki Tanahashi, Thomas Cleary, and Francis Cook have also made Dōgen's writings much more available to English readers, and now we even have a serviceable translation of the entirety of Dōgen's masterwork *Shōbōgenzō*, thanks to Gudo Nishijima and Chōjin Cross. These new translations supplement the excellent early translations of Norman Waddell and Masao Abe that predate Kim's book, but have only recently become more accessible in book form. Furthermore, excellent commentaries on specific areas of Dōgen's life and teaching by such fine scholars as Steven Heine, Carl Bielefeldt, William Bodiford, Griffith Foulk, and James Koder, to name a few, have created a thriving field of Dōgen studies in English. Nevertheless, after all this good work and a few years into the twenty-first century, this book by Hee-Jin Kim from the early years of English Dōgen studies easily still stands as the best overall general introduction to Dōgen's teaching both for students of Buddhist teachings and for Zen practitioners.

Even beyond the realm of Dōgen studies, this book remains a valuable contribution to all of modern Zen commentary, with Kim's accessible presentation of thorough scholarship that does not reduce itself to dry intellectual analysis of doctrines or historical argumentation. Kim provides a subtle and clear discussion of Dōgen's work as a practical religious thinker and guide, showing that Dōgen was not merely a promulgator of philosophy, and never considered his work in such terms.

Kim unerringly zeroes in on key principles in Dōgen's teaching. The organization of this book is extraordinarily astute. After first providing background on Dōgen's biography and historical context, Kim discusses with subtlety Dōgen's zazen (seated meditation) as a mode of activity and expression. Kim then focuses on the centrality of the teaching of Buddha-nature to Dōgen's teaching and practice. Finally, Kim elaborates the importance of monastic life to Dōgen's teaching and training of his



disciples.

In explicating the purpose of zazen for Dōgen, Kim enumerates the meaning and function of key terms that provide the texture of Dōgen's teaching and practice: the samādhi of self-fulfilling activity (*jijuyū-zammai*), the oneness of practice-enlightenment (*shushō-ittō*), casting off of body and mind (*shinjin-datsuraku*), non-thinking (*hishiryō*), total exertion (*gūjin*), and abiding in one's Dharmic position (*jū-hōi*).

With all the confusion about meditation in Zen, historically and today, we must be grateful at the acuity of the introduction to Dōgen's zazen that Kim has provided. Unlike other forms of Buddhism and even other Zen lineages, Dōgen emphatically does not see his meditation as a method aimed at achieving some future awakening or enlightenment. Zazen is not waiting for enlightenment. There is no enlightenment if it is not actualized in the present practice. And there is no true practice that is not an expression of underlying enlightenment and the mind of the Way. Certainly many of the kōans on which Dōgen frequently and extensively comments in his writings culminate in opening experiences for students in encounter with teachers. And the actuality of the zazen practice still carried on by followers of Dōgen may often include glimpses, sometimes deeply profound, of the awareness of awakening. But such experiences are just the crest of the waves of everyday practice, and attachment to or grasping for these experiences are a harmful Zen sickness. The Buddha's awakening was just the beginning of Buddhism, not its end. Dōgen frequently emphasizes sustaining a practice of ongoing awakening, which he describes as Buddha going beyond Buddha.

Although current meditators may appreciate the therapeutic and stress-reducing side-effects of zazen, for Dōgen, as Kim clarifies, zazen is primarily a creative mode of expression instead of a means to some personal benefit. In one of the *hōgo* (Dharma words) in *Dōgen's Extensive Record* (*Eihei Kōroku*), Dōgen speaks of the oneness not only of practice-enlightenment, but the deep oneness of practice-enlightenment-expression. Just as zazen is not waiting for enlightenment, expounding the Dharma—the expression of awareness—does not wait only until enlightenment's aftermath. There is no practice-enlightenment that is not expressed; there is no practice-expression of Buddha-dharma that is not informed with enlightenment; and there is no enlightenment-expression unless it is practiced. We might say that Dōgen's zazen is a performance art in which its upright posture and every gesture expresses one's present enlightenment-practice. Kim explicates how such creative practice-expression is not a matter of some refined understanding, but of deep trust in the activity of Buddha-nature: "Zazen-only cannot be fully understood apart from consideration of faith."

Kim skillfully describes how this unity of practice-enlightenment-expression is true not only for zazen, but also for Dōgen's study of the sutras and kōans as well: "Our philosophic and hermeneutic activities are no longer a means to enlightenment but identical with enlightenment, for to be is to understand, that is, one is what one understands. Thus the activity of philosophizing, like any other expressive activity, is restated in the context of our total participation in the self-creative process of Buddha-nature."

The expression of practice is a dynamic, creative activity. While Dōgen's teachings are complex, we can find his focus in untiring expression of the radical non-duality of Buddha-nature, as he emphasizes not fleeing or fearing the realm of everyday experience, but full-hearted creative engagement in it. As Kim states, "Dōgen's emphasis is not on how to transcend language but on how to radically use it."

Dōgen is extremely playful in freely overturning classic teachings to bring forth the inner dynamism of nondual liberation, in which forms are revealed as already empty and open from the outset. The

most famous example is when Dōgen transposes the sutra statement that “All beings without exception have Buddha-nature” to “All beings completely are Buddha-nature.” But again and again in diverse contexts, we see, as Kim says, “Dōgen’s creative and dynamic interpretation of the Buddhist doctrine of means in which the means in question is not transcendence of duality but realization of it.”

Kim’s work provides us with the background to enjoy and play along with Dōgen’s teachings for ourselves, in the light of the universal liberation of Buddha-nature.

Kim discusses how Dōgen enacted his practice-expression and trained a fine group of disciples at his monastic retreat, Eihei-ji, in the deep mountains far north of the capital during his last decade. Dōgen cannot be understood aside from his aesthetic sense of wonder as it informs communal practice in the world of nature amid the mountains and rivers. There in the mountains Dōgen trained an excellent group of monk disciples who, along with their successors in the next few generations, would spread the tradition of Sōtō Zen introduced by Dōgen throughout much of the Japanese countryside, so that it became one of the most popular sects of Japanese Buddhism. Paradoxically, Dōgen’s emphasis on care for everyday activities in the monastery provides a forum for practice that may readily be translated to predominately lay practice in the world, the primary mode of current Zen practice in the West. Kim conveys how Dōgen’s teaching serves as a basis for popular expression, stating: “However lowly one’s symbols and practices as we see in, say, a peasant’s religion, one is entitled to enlightenment if and when one uses them authentically. Here is the egalitarian basis for a claim that Dōgen’s religion is a religion of the people.”

I might quibble with Kim’s fine treatment of Dōgen only inasmuch as he does not bring into discussion the important later work *Eihei Kōroku* (Dōgen’s *Extensive Record*), which contains most of what we know about Dōgen’s later teachings at Eihei-ji, and his actual training of his great disciples. I have had the pleasure and privilege of recently completing a translation of this massive work together with Shohaku Okumura. Overshadowed by Dōgen’s more celebrated writing *Shōbōgenzō*, *Eihei Kōroku* has only recently received the attention it deserves. But impressively, Kim notes even the work, and its comparative neglect, in his excellent appendices, which include a very thorough account of Dōgen’s many writings, and a good chronology of his life.

Kim has given us not only an excellent and reliable reference for Dōgen’s writings, but also an entry into how to play with Dōgen in going beyond Buddha. Students of Dōgen’s teaching and thought must now be grateful to have this fine guidebook to Dōgen’s world again available in print.

TAIGEN DAN LEIGHTON *is a Zen priest and Dharma heir in the lineage of Suzuki Roshi. He has trained in Japan as well as America, and is the author of Faces of Compassion, and translator of numerous works by Dōgen, including Dōgen's Pure Standards for the Zen Community, The Wholehearted Way, Dōgen's Extensive Record, and Enlightenment Unfolds. He teaches at the Graduate Theological Union, and leads the Mountain Source Sangha meditation groups in the San Francisco Bay Area.*

THE PRESENT WORK was originally published in 1975 under the title *Dōgen Kigen—Mystical Realist* by the University of Arizona Press, as Monograph No. XXIX of the Association for Asian Studies. The book was reissued in 1987 as *Dōgen Kigen: Mystical Realist*, with Robert Aitken Roshi's foreward, and went out of print in the summer of 1999. The present edition has undergone a considerable amount of minor changes and corrections, largely in the translations of Dōgen's works. However, the fundamental thrust of my methodology and interpretation regarding Dōgen's Zen remains intact. Considering shortcomings in my reading of and approach to Dōgen, as well as enormous developments that have taken place in Dōgen studies for nearly thirty years since my book's original publication, I should have undertaken an extensive revision. In fact, the editor of Wisdom Publications kindly suggested some updating. But I chose not to for a variety of reasons—above all was my wish to retain the integrity of the original work, for better or worse. This wish has nothing to do with my imperviousness to recent advances in the field. Indeed, to fill this lacuna to a certain extent, I have opted to present a very brief sketch of some of the developments and issues in Dōgen scholarship, with a special emphasis on those in the United States.

Translating Dōgen's writings, especially his *Shōbōgenzō*, is a daunting task for any and all translators. Yet in the past three decades or so, there have appeared a spate of translations in Western languages, the overwhelming numbers of which are in English and are published in the United States. In his writings, Dōgen treated language with the utmost care; scrupulously constructed and crafted, his language was intimately entwined with the scope and precision of his thought. For this reason, even a translator of Dōgen must address questions not only on how to be attuned to the intricacies and subtleties of Dōgen's linguistic and religio-philosophical world, but furthermore how to render them cogently in his/her chosen language with full justice. From this perspective, of many translations Norman Waddell's and Masao Abe's *The Heart of Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō*;<sup>1</sup> Francis Dōjun H. Cook's *How to Raise an Ox: Zen Practice As Taught in Zen Master Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō, Including Ten Newly Translated Essays and Sounds of Valley Streams: Enlightenment in Dōgen's Zen, Translation of Nine Essays from Shōbōgenzō*;<sup>2</sup> Carl Bielefeldt's translations of the *Shōbōgenzō* "Sansuikyō" "Zazenshin" fascicles and others;<sup>3</sup> Kazuaki Tanahashi's *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen* and *Enlightenment Unfolds: The Essential Teachings of Zen Master Dōgen*;<sup>4</sup> Yūhō Yokoi (with Daizen Victoria) *Zen Master Dōgen: An Introduction with Selected Writings*;<sup>5</sup> and a few others are notable.<sup>6</sup> Although they are to be commended for their worthy contributions, there is still a long and treacherous road for translation in this field, in terms of quantity and quality alike. Just as Dōgen struggled eight centuries ago to find new expressions for his times with the Sino-Buddhist and medieval Japanese languages, so the translator today constantly seeks a new language for the present-day audience through his/her encounter and dialogue with Dōgen. Inasmuch as his thought is elusive

and his language difficult, Dōgen will never be an easy read, even with the help of those reliable translations.

Beyond the foundational work of translation, critical scholarship has also made substantial growth in diversified areas, subjects, issues, and methods. I would like to briefly review Dōgen scholarship in North America, and for the sake of convenience, despite the risk of oversimplification, I will approach this review in terms of three areas: textual-historical, comparative-philosophical, and methodological/hermeneutical. In the broadly textual-historical area, the following works are noteworthy: Takashi James Kodera's *Dōgen's Formative Years in China: An Historical Study and Annotated Translation of the Hōkyō-ki*;<sup>7</sup> William M. Bodiford's *Sōtō Zen in Medieval Japan*;<sup>8</sup> and Carl Bielefeldt's essay "Recarving the Dragon: History and Dogma in the Study of Dōgen" and his *Dōgen's Manuals of Zen Meditation*.<sup>9</sup> Bielefeldt, particularly in his essay, sets the tone of current textual-historical criticism well. He not only challenges the Sōtō Zen sect's hagiographic image of Dōgen as the sole legitimate inheritor in the transmission of Buddhism from the Buddha through Bodhidharma and Ju-chin to Dōgen's Chinese mentor, but also highlights shifts and contradictions within Dōgen's statements in his *Shōbōgenzō*, particularly between his writings in the early and later periods. In Bielefeldt's view, Dōgen's "new sectarianism" is manifested in his later-period writings, revealing "more about Zen in Japan than in China," e.g., Dōgen's relation to the Nihon Daruma-shū of Dainichibō Nōnin and his disciples, a large number of whom joined Dōgen's group after their master's demise. Charitable or not, Bielefeldt forcefully repudiates a sterilized image of Dōgen, as well as a single unified message in the *Shōbōgenzō*. This is salutary indeed, to the extent that Bielefeldt's revisionist historiography contributes to liberating Dōgen from orthodox captivity and leads us to a better understanding of Dōgen without obscuring other aspects of his multifaceted religion. It goes without saying that the nature and significance of discrepancies between the early and later Dōgen are still issues of intense debate among scholars.

In the comparative-philosophical area of Dōgen scholarship, Nishitani Keiji's *Religion and Nothingness*;<sup>10</sup> Masao Abe's *Zen and Western Thought* and *A Study of Dōgen: His Philosophy and Religion*;<sup>11</sup> T. P. Kasulis's *Zen Action/Zen Person*;<sup>12</sup> Joan Stambaugh's *Impermanence Is Buddha Nature: Dōgen's Understanding of Temporality*;<sup>13</sup> Steven Heine's *Existential and Ontological Dimensions of Time in Heidegger and Dōgen*;<sup>14</sup> and Carl Olson's *Zen and the Art of Postmodern Philosophy: Two Paths of Liberation from the Representational Mode of Thinking*<sup>15</sup> are representative works. Dōgen is compared particularly with Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida among Western philosophers; many comparativists' articles have appeared in *Philosophy East and West* and other philosophical journals. Affinity between Dōgen and postmodern thinkers has been highlighted in terms of their emphasis on the nonsubstantiality and radical relatedness of all things, the nonrepresentational view of language and thinking, self-subversion, and so on.

The discovery of Dōgen as a philosophical thinker, however, was strictly a modern phenomenon in Japan; although an unmistakable and captivating philosophical streak exists in his thought, to regard him as a dharmalogian in its full-fledged sense is problematic. This is precisely because his overriding concern is religious and soteriological. And yet, the comparative-philosophical approach, by and large, tends to lift Dōgen's thought from its religious and historical moorings. For this reason, Dōgen would have frowned upon any attempt to ahistoricize or atemporalize his religio-philosophical thought. Of those comparative-philosophical interpreters of Dōgen, Abe has been by far the most active and influential in the West by explicating a number of key notions, such as Buddha-nature, the oneness of practice and attainment, time and space, and death. He is also regarded as the leading

exponent of Zen in the West today, just as D. T. Suzuki was a generation ago, and has a philosophical inclination akin to Nishida Kataro's Kyoto school of Japanese philosophy. Thus, some critics point out a subtly veiled cultural/spiritual nationalism in his universalistic, suprahistorical interpretation of Zen, which he is said to harbor in his *Zen and Western Thought*.<sup>16</sup> This same critique holds true of Nishitani, as well as Abe's mentor Hisamatsu Shin'ichi. Even so, we should not forget that genuine critique is one in which critique of the other is always self-critique.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast to the textual-historical and comparative-philosophical approaches, my essay "The Reason of Words and Letters: Dōgen and Kōan Language"<sup>18</sup> further pursues what I extensively discuss in this book regarding how Dōgen *does* his religion, especially his way of appropriating language and symbols soteriologically. In this essay, I delineate Dōgen's method under the seven principles, demonstrating how he explores and experiments with semantic possibilities of Buddhist concepts and images, such as "dreams," "entwined vines," "the flowers of emptiness," and numerous others. Dōgen does this by shifting syntaxes, changing word order, appropriating polysemous potentialities of words, creating neologisms, resuscitating some forgotten symbols, and so forth. These hermeneutical moves demonstrate Dōgen's view of realization—that is, that language and thinking constitute the core of Zen praxis. In a similar methodological-hermeneutical vein, Steven Heine, in his *Dōgen and the Kōan Tradition: A Tale of Two Shōbōgenzō Texts*,<sup>19</sup> deftly interweaves recent textual-historical findings of Dōgen/Zen studies in Japan with the method that he calls "discourse analysis," which is heavily couched in postmodern literary criticism, and thus elucidates the historical and literary continuity between Dōgen's writings and the kōan tradition of China. The two key texts in his analysis are the *Mana Shōbōgenzō* (or *Shōbōgenzō sambyakusoku*, Dōgen's own collection of three hundred kōan cases in Chinese without commentary) and the *Kana Shōbōgenzō* (the one we usually refer to by the name *Shōbōgenzō*, written in Japanese). Although long considered apocryphal, the authenticity of the Chinese *Shōbōgenzō* has been established in recent studies. Dōgen seems to have used this kōan collection as the basis for his writings and presentation, especially in relation to the Japanese *Shōbōgenzō*. Heine locates these two texts in the context of the rich and complex kōan tradition of Chinese Zen and concludes that Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* was "an offshoot or subdivision of the kōan-collection genre" (which flourished in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries) that could be traced to "encounter dialogues," the root of all Zen literary genres. Dōgen's texts were thus firmly embedded in the Chinese kōan tradition; in turn, Dōgen enriched this tradition with his own innovative hermeneutical principles and religio-philosophical reflections. Heine, with Dale S. Wright, also coedited *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, a significant addition to the study of the kōan.<sup>20</sup> Speaking of the kōan in Dōgen's Zen, we should remember that Dōgen throughout his career, endeavored to revise and refine his meditation manuals such as the *Fukanzazengi*, as Bielefeldt presents in his aforementioned book. Dōgen's view of zazen, along with that of the kōan, evolved throughout the different periods of his life.

As the foregoing outline of the textual-historical, comparative-philosophical, and methodological-hermeneutical approaches/areas shows, all the issues, problems, and methods revolve around the central question: What was Dōgen's Zen (or religion)? To put it differently: What were the origins, evolution, and nature of Dōgen's Zen? All other questions radiate from this central concern in an open-ended, fluid fashion. What was the significance of discrepancies between Dōgen's early and late writings? Was there continuity and/or discontinuity between the early and later Dōgen? What was the relation between zazen and the kōan? Between meditation and thinking? How Japanese was Dōgen's Zen? What was the nature of his originality? A host of other questions arises—yet in the final

analysis, every question has to do with the identity of Dōgen.

Having said this, let me briefly touch upon the recent controversy of Critical Buddhism (Hihō Bukkyō) that originated in Japan but has stirred heated debates among scholars in Dōgen and Buddhist studies alike on both sides of the Pacific in the past two decades or so. Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shirō, two of the most vocal proponents at Komazawa University (Sōtō Zen), hold the Tendai *hongaku* (original enlightenment) thought—closely connected with the notions of *tathāgata-garbha* and Buddha-nature, and ubiquitous in Japanese history from medieval times to the present day—is heretical because of its substantialist view of an inherently pure mind/original enlightenment and its uncritical affirmation of the phenomenal world as absolute (including delusions, desires, and passions). From this perspective, the proponents of Critical Buddhism criticize the absolutization of the given world and the blind acceptance of the status quo as contrary to the original Buddhist philosophy that, according to them, espoused the critical spirit, nonself/emptiness, dependent co-arising/origination/causation, impermanence/time, difference, and so forth. More directly related to Dōgen studies is Hakamaya's controversial study of the ("old") seventy-five-fascicle text and the ("new") twelve-fascicle text—the two most important among many versions of the *Shōbōgenzō*—which contends that the latter be given normative status over the former. Reversing the conventional interpretation of the two texts, Hakamaya insists on the primacy of the twelve-fascicle text, reflecting Dōgen's "decisive viewpoint" of his anti-*hongaku* stance and his mature thinking regarding nonsubstantiality, causation, and impermanence. He contends that Dōgen's entire writings should be reexamined from this perspective. Critical Buddhism seems to have served some wholesome functions that (a) heightened Buddhist awareness in Japan of some pressing contemporary social issues, (b) intensified debates regarding the extent to which Dōgen's Zen is continuous and/or discontinuous with Tendai *hongaku* thought, (c) called scholarly attention to the relationship between the "old" and "new" texts of the *Shōbōgenzō* with renewed sensitivities, and (d) shook Sōtō Zen orthodoxy to its core.<sup>21</sup>

I would like to make the following comments on Critical Buddhism: (1) Dōgen was critical, if not directly and explicitly, of Tendai *hongaku* thought as both doctrine and ethos because of (a) the dangers of its latent substantialist interpretation and (b) the disastrous ethical implications of antinomianism, fideism, and skepticism that resulted from its potential misuses and abuses. Dōgen, however, did not reject *hongaku* thought entirely on the grounds that it was antithetical to Buddhism as the Critical Buddhists do; his praxis-orientation was inspired and informed by, as well as within, the *hongaku* doctrine/ethos. (2) From this standpoint, Dōgen deeply imbibed *hongaku* discourse and radical phenomenalism, which became the crux of his soteriological vision. In fact, his entire religious thought may be safely described as the exploration and explication of this radical phenomenalism in terms of its linguistic, rational, and temporal dimensions, as well as the endeavor to overcome its ever-threatening religio-ethical perils. And (3) in his religio-philosophical imagination and discourse, Dōgen boldly, yet judiciously, employed *hongaku*-related concepts and symbols in his search for "the reason of words and letters" (*monji no dori*). In doing so, he strove throughout his life to clarify and refine his expressions as consistent with his praxis-orientation and the critical spirit of emptiness.

In the auxiliary areas of Dōgen studies, the following works are significant: John R. McRae's *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism*;<sup>22</sup> Bernard Faure's *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism, Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition*, and *The Will to Orthodoxy: A Critical Genealogy of Northern Chan Buddhism*;<sup>23</sup> James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo, eds., *Rude Awakening: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*;<sup>24</sup> Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed., *Curators of the Buddha*

*The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*;<sup>25</sup> Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Steven Heine, eds., *Japan Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives*;<sup>26</sup> and Jacqueline I. Stone's *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism*.<sup>27</sup> McRae's book advances a view of the formation of early Chinese Zen that is far more complex than conventionally thought—one in which the ancestral transmission of Dharma from Bodhidharma to Hui-nêng, respectively the first and sixth ancestors of the orthodox Zen lineage, is now construed as largely the product of the Southern school's sudden enlightenment ideology and propaganda. Thus, McRae asserts that the old distinctions between gradual enlightenment and sudden enlightenment, between the Southern and Northern schools, and forth, must be fundamentally reassessed. Stone in her work presents Tendai *hongaku* thought as a "new paradigm of liberation" that affirmed the phenomenal world as the expression of inherent enlightenment, and as the "transsectarian" discourse that was shared by all the Buddhist schools of medieval Japan. Her investigation of *hongaku* discourse conclusively demonstrates the inadequacy of the traditional tension between the "old" ("decadent" Tendai) and the "new" (reformist Kamakura Buddhism that privileges the latter over the former, and thus calls for a reevaluation of the nature and significance of Kamakura Buddhism).<sup>28</sup> In view of Stone's study, Critical Buddhism's anti-*hongaku* thesis, especially in relation to Dōgen studies, seems reductionistic and elitist due to its failure to take the historical aspects of *hongaku* thought into consideration. Robert H. Sharf's article, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism" in Lopez's book,<sup>29</sup> exposes cultural biases in past Zen scholarship that were initially planted by Japanese Zen apologists in the West, such as D. T. Suzuki. These cultural biases subsequently influenced the Western view of Zen—namely, a view of Zen as "pure experience" that is unmediated and ahistorical, the quintessential expression of Japanese spirituality (through the way of the samurai, Japanese art, the tea ceremony, etc.), "the essence of Buddhism," and even the basis for the polemics of Japanese uniqueness (*nihonjinron*). This is contrary to the West's "orientalism" (Edward Said), or what Faure dubs "Zen orientalism" or "reverse orientalism."<sup>30</sup>

I would like to point out that Dōgen scholarship is constantly challenged by, and is in no way immune to, the competing realities of multiple orientalisms. Perhaps it is fair to say that scholars today are more acutely aware than ever before of the historical situatedness and conditionedness of not only the immediacy and purity of Zen experience but also of scholarly activity itself, with its hidden biases, limitations, needs, and vulnerabilities. For both practitioners who pride themselves on the *sui generis* character of their Zen spirituality and academics who are content with the alleged objectivity of their professional practice, it is sobering to think that practitioners and scholars alike are ultimately in the same boat with respect to "the loss of *our* innocence." Despite his insistence on nonduality, or precisely *because* of it, Dōgen would have welcomed such sensibilities and reflections.

That said, nothing is fixed; everything is temporary and temporal. For all the diversity and sophistication of methodologies and interpretations in recent Dōgen scholarship, everything still remains uncertain, and yet, this should not lead us to conclude that everything is arbitrary or absurd. Admittedly, although we have abandoned our search for the essential, rarefied Dōgen, only now can it possibly dawn upon us that we can at last genuinely encounter "the naked flesh-mass" (*shakunikuda*) of Dōgen which bares his whole being inside out, just as it is. That Dōgen, who continues to lure, intrigue, and challenge us to this day, is in constant making.

With respect to this new edition, I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to those authors and works cited in the text and notes of this new preface for challenging and stimulating my understanding of Dōgen, including many more not cited here because of a lack of space. My special thanks goes to the people at Wisdom Publications for their efforts to make this publication possible; especially to m



editor at Wisdom, Josh Bartok, who in 2002 initiated the project and guided me throughout its progress with his enthusiasm and kindness. I also thank my daughter, Pearl Kim-Kregel, for her editing and word processing work during her pregnancy, and her husband, Mark Kregel, for his computer expertise. And lastly, but not least, I am ever grateful to my wife Jung-Sun, for her support, care, and patience.

Hee-Jin Kim  
Eugene, Oregon  
Winter 2000

# FOREWORD TO THE PREVIOUS EDITION

BY ROBERT AITKEN  
THE WAY OF DŌGEN ZEN

**H**ee-Jin Kim's *Dōgen Kigen—Mystical Realist* [as the first edition was titled] was the first comprehensive study in English of Dōgen Zenji's writings, and for the past twelve years, it has served as the principal English language reference for those Dōgen scholars who work from his thirteenth-century Japanese, and for Western Zen students reading translations of his writings. This revised edition appears in a scholarly setting that now includes many new translations and studies of Dōgen, and thus it is most welcome.

Dōgen wrote at the outermost edge of human communication, touching with every sentence such mysteries as self and other, self and non-self, meditation and realization, the temporal and the timeless, forms and the void. He moved freely from the acceptance of a particular mode as complete in itself to an acknowledgment of its complementarity with others, to a presentation of its unity with all things—and back again. He wrote of the attitude necessary for understanding, of the practice required, of the various insights that emerge, and of the many pitfalls. He did not generally write for beginners—most of his points require very careful study, and a few of them elude almost everybody. These challenges are compounded by his creative use of the Japanese language of his time. It has been said that he wrote in “Dōgenese,” for he made verbs of nouns, nouns of verbs, created new metaphors, and manipulated old sayings to present his particular understanding.

Thus the writings of Dōgen are an immense challenge to anyone seeking to explicate them in English, but Dr. Kim does a masterful job. In this Foreword, I do not presume to explicate Dr. Kim's words, but offer a personal perspective of Dōgen in the hope that it might serve as access to Dr. Kim's incisive scholarship.

I choose as my theme a key passage in the “Genjō Kōan,” the essay that Dōgen placed at the head of his great collection of talks and essays, the *Shōbōgenzō*, using Dr. Kim's translation:

To study the Way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things of the universe. To be enlightened by all things of the universe is to cast off the body and mind of the self as well as those of others. Even the traces of enlightenment are wiped out, and life with traceless enlightenment goes on forever and ever.

*To study the Way is to study the self.* Asian languages offer the same options as English for the meaning of the word “study.” “A Study of Whitehead” would be the presentation of an understanding of Whitehead. Thus the first sentence of the passage quoted also means, “To understand the Way is to understand the self.”

The term “Way” is a translation of *Dō* in Japanese, *Tao* in Chinese. It is the ideograph used to identify the central doctrine of Taoism and its basic text, the *Tao te ching*. Kumarajiva and his colleagues in the early fifth century selected *Tao* as a translation of Dharma, a key Sanskrit Buddhist term meaning “law,” or “way of the universe and its phenomena,” or simply “phenomena.” In Dōgen’s view, all phenomena are the Buddha Dharma—the way of the universe as understood through Buddhist practice.

Indeed, for Dōgen, to study and understand the Buddha Way is to practice the Buddha Way, and to practice the Buddha Way is to have the self practice. It is important to understand that practice, like study, is both action and attainment. Modes of practice: zazen (Zen meditation), realization, and the careful works that transcend realization—all these are complete in themselves, and they are all means for further completion. They are aspects of a single act at any particular moment, and they are also stages that appear in the course of time.

As to the self, it has no abiding nature, and “kisses the joy as it flies.” It is the Buddha coming for now as a woman, now as a youth, now as a child, now as an old man, now as an animal, a plant, or a cloud. However, animals and plants and clouds cannot “study” in Dōgen’s sense, so in this context Dōgen intends the human being that can focus the self and make personal the vast and fathomless void, the infinitely varied beings, and their marvelous harmony.

*To study the self is to forget the self.* Here Dōgen sets forth the nature of practice. My teacher Yamada Kōun Rōshi, has said, “Zen practice is a matter of forgetting the self in the act of uniting with something.” To unite with something is to find it altogether vivid, like the thrush, say, singing in the guava grove. There is just that song, a point of no dimension—of cosmic dimension. The “sole self” is forgotten. This is something like the athlete who is completely involved in catching the ball, free of self-doubt and thoughts of attainment, at the same time aware of the other players and their positions. Using this same human ability on one’s meditation cushion is the great Way of realization. It must be distinguished from thinking *about* something. When you are occupied in thinking, you are shrouded by your thoughts, and the universe is shut out.

There are other analogies for gathering oneself in a single act of religious practice, freeing oneself of doubt and attainment. Simone Weil sets forth the academic analogy:

Contemplating an object fixedly with the mind, asking myself “What is it?” without thinking of any other object relating to it or to anything else, for hours on end.<sup>1</sup>

Dōgen often uses the phrase, “mustering the body and mind” to understand oneself and the world. Using Dr. Kim’s translation of a later passage in the “Genjō Kōan”:

Mustering our bodies and minds we see things, and mustering our bodies and minds we hear sounds; thereby we understand them intimately. However, it is not like a reflection dwelling in the mirror, nor is it like the moon and the water. As one side is illumined, the other is darkened.

This mustering is zazen—and also the activity of the Zen student who is grounded in zazen. Dr. Kim quotes Dōgen writing elsewhere in the *Shōbōgenzō*:

The Buddhas and Tathāgatas have an ancient way—unequaled and natural—to transmit the wondrous Dharma through personal encounter and to realize supreme enlightenment. As it is imparted

impeccably from Buddha to Buddha, its criterion is the samādhi of self-fulfilling activity.

For playing joyfully in such a samādhi, the upright sitting in meditation is the right gate.

With the practice of zazen, mustering body and mind, we understand a thing intimately by seeing and hearing, and the self is forgotten. This kind of understanding is not by simile, it is not a representation like the moon in the water, but is a brilliant presentation of the thing itself, and a complete personal acceptance. One side is illumined. There is only that thrush. At the same time, the universe is present in the shadow. The other players are still there.

*To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things of the universe.* The term “enlightened” is *shō*, the same *shō* found in *inka shōmei*, the document given to a senior student by a master confirming him or her as a teacher. The thrush confirms you, enlightens you, but be careful not to give “enlightenment” anything more than provisional status. It is likely to be just a peep into the nature of things. Nonetheless, “One impulse from a vernal wood” or the Morning Star shining over the Bodhi tree is a communication. It works the other way, from the self to the object, but the result is different as Dōgen makes clear earlier in the “Genjō Kōan”:

That the self advances and confirms the myriad things is called delusion; that the myriad things advance and confirm the self is enlightenment.<sup>2</sup>

The way of research and analysis is “called” delusion. Don’t condemn it, Dōgen is saying. By advancing and confirming and throwing light upon all things of the universe, you reach intellectual understanding. However, when you forget yourself in mustering body and mind in the act of practice, there is only that particular act, in that particular breath-moment. Then, as Dr. Kim says, the whole universe is created in and through that act. With this you experience the things of the universe. They are your confirmation, your enlightenment.

*To be enlightened by all things of the universe is to cast off the body and mind of the self as well as those of others.* When you focus body and mind with all your inquiring spirit upon a single matter, the self is forgotten. The myriad things communicate their wisdom with their forms and sounds, and the emptiness, harmony, and uniqueness of the ephemeral self and the world are understood clearly. This is reminiscent of Paul’s “putting off the old man”—not merely forgetting but dying to the self.

Casting off body and mind should not be confused with self-denial. Many people suppose that they must get rid of the self. The Buddha too went through a phase of asceticism, avoiding food and sleep in an effort to overcome his desires. Such a path has a dead end, as the Buddha and others have found. We need food and sleep in order to cast off body and mind. The Way is gnostic rather than ascetic.

Finally, as Dōgen says, when you cast off body and mind, all other beings have the same experience. One version of the Buddha’s exclamation under the Bodhi tree reads, “I and all beings have at this moment entered the Way!” This does not mean, “All beings can now come along.” Rather, at the Buddha’s experience, all beings simultaneously cast off body and mind.

When Hsüeh-fêng and Yen-t’ou were on pilgrimage together, they became snowbound in the village of Wushantien. This gave them time for an extended dialogue, during which Hsüeh-fêng recounted his various spiritual experiences. Yen-t’ou exclaimed, “Haven’t you heard the old saying, ‘What enters from the gate [that is, by intellection] cannot be the family treasure’?” Hsüeh-fêng suddenly had deep realization and exclaimed, “At this moment, Wushantien has become enlightened!”<sup>3</sup>

With his exclamation, Yen-t'ou cast off body and mind. Simultaneously, Hsüeh-fêng did the same. The whole village was likewise affected, proving Bell's theorem a thousand years and more before Bell.

*Even traces of enlightenment are wiped out, and life with traceless enlightenment goes on for ever and ever.* Wiping away the intimations of pride that come with a realization experience are the ultimate steps of Zen practice, steps that never end. They form the Way of the Bodhisattva, polishing the mind of compassion, engaging in the travail of the world, “entering the marketplace with bliss bestowing hands.” Over and over in kōan practice, the Zen student works through the lesson of casting off, casting off.

A monk said to Chao-chou, “I have just entered this monastery. Please teach me.”

Chao-chou said, “Have you eaten your rice gruel?”

The monk said, “Yes, I have.”

Chao-chou said, “Wash your bowl.”<sup>4</sup>

“Have you eaten your essential food?” “Yes, I have.” “If so, wipe that idea of attainment away!” For our limited purposes this would be an explication of Chao-chou's meaning. What is left after body and mind are cast off? Endlessly casting off—ongoing practice. The “Genjō Kōan” ends with the story:

When the Zen teacher Pao-chê of Ma-ku was fanning himself, a monk asked him, “The nature of wind is constant, and there is no place it does not reach. Why then do you fan yourself?”

Pao-chê said, “You only know that the nature of wind is constant. You don't yet know the meaning of its reaching every place.”

The monk asked, “What is the meaning of its reaching every place?”

Pao-chê only fanned himself. The monk bowed deeply.

The nature of the wind is Buddha nature, “pervading the whole universe.” The monk's question is an old one. If all beings by nature are Buddha, why should one strive for enlightenment? Dōgen himself asked such a question in his youth, and his doubts fueled his search for a true teacher. Pao-chê takes the monk's words “reaching every place” as a figure of speech for Zen Buddhist practice that brings forth what is already there. As Dōgen says in his comment to this story—the final words of the “Genjō Kōan”:

Confirmation of the Buddha Dharma, the correct transmission of the vital Way, is like this. If you say that one should not use a fan because the wind is constant, that there will be a wind even when one does not use a fan, then you fail to understand either constancy or the nature of the wind. It is because the nature of the wind is constant that the wind of the Buddha House brings forth the gold of the earth and ripens the kefir of the long river.

The wind of the Buddha house, the practice of zazen, realization, and going beyond realization, altogether in accord with the wind of the universe, the Buddha Mind. As Dōgen says elsewhere, “The Dharma wheel turns from the beginning. There is neither surplus nor lack. The whole universe moistened with nectar, and the truth is ready to harvest.”<sup>5</sup> The harvesting of truth, the practice of forgetting the self, the practice of realizing forms and sounds intimately, the practice of polishing off

mind of compassion—this is our joyous task.

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FOR NEARLY HALF A CENTURY since D. T. Suzuki published his first series of *Essays in Zen Buddhism* in 1927, Zen has been taking firm root in Western culture and has continued to grow steadily, both in its dissemination and its depth of understanding. Indeed Suzuki's introduction of Zen to the West was one of the epoch-making events in Western cultural history, and it rightfully became the beginning of a great experiment that has been ongoing ever since—although not without some whimsical and misguided by-products in the course of its evolutionary process.

If Zen has a universal element that transcends historical and cultural bounds, it should be nurtured here in the West with its own distinctive marks and imprints. Just as Zen has evolved differently in the different countries of East Asia and Vietnam, so has it transformed itself into “Western Zen,” (or “American Zen” for that matter) which is on the verge of emergence. Based on the sheer number of publications in this field, the mushrooming growth of meditation centers across Western countries, and its impact upon such fields as art, philosophy, psychology, religion, and folk culture, we can readily witness the intensity and fervor of this cultural experiment.

Despite all this, systematic study of Dōgen in the West today is virtually nonexistent. As a result, Western knowledge of Zen is painfully fragmentary, not only in quantity, but more important, in quality. In recent years, some sporadic attempts have been made to acquaint the West with Dōgen, but these cover only a tiny portion of the entire corpus of his religion and philosophy. It is my hope that the study of Dōgen's Zen will remedy the situation and will lead to a more complete understanding of Zen.

On the other hand, I am of the opinion that it is high time for Western students to deal with Zen as a historical religion in its concrete historical, philosophical, moral, and cultural context—not to isolate it from that context. After all, Zen is a cultural and historical product. I feel strongly that such an approach to Zen is imperative to the maturity of Western Zen (or any Zen for that matter), and my work endeavors to apply it seriously to the study of Dōgen. It might surprise many readers that such a historical consciousness is actually in accord with Dōgen's belief that maintaining a fidelity to history was the way to transcend it.

The present work draws heavily upon, and is greatly indebted to, Japanese scholarship in Dōgen studies, which has diversified so much in recent years that materials and findings are indeed bewildering to the beginning Dōgen student. With this book, I endeavor to add to this scholarship by systematically elucidating Dōgen's life and thought, while paying acute attention to those issues that are relevant and vital to current thinking in religion and philosophy. In this respect, Dōgen's thought sheds light on some vitally important issues in a surprisingly modern way. I am not implying here that Dōgen fully or completely anticipated what we now know. Yet, despite his remoteness from us in terms of time and culture, his messages are infinitely richer and more complex than we might at first think.

It has been my persistent conviction that we can avoid making either a strict philosopher or a pious religionist of Dōgen; rather, we can understand him totally in a humanistic context. Be that as it may, it is my sincere hope that the present work will stimulate students to delve further into Dōgen.

Throughout this study, I used *Dōgen zenji zenshū* (edited by Ōkubo Dōshū) as the basis of my research and translation. In view of the current Western acquaintance with Dōgen, I have attempted to render as many translations of his writings as possible. Most of these appear here for the first time in English. In an introductory work such as this, translations are by necessity highly selective and fragmentary, and one cannot avoid but lay primary, if not sole, emphasis upon the *Shōbōgenzō*.

The Japanese reading of Buddhist terms is extremely confusing, even among Buddhist scholars. In order to avoid unnecessary chaos, I adopted the customary Sōtō way of reading them, rather than the one suggested in Ōkubo's aforementioned *Zenshū*. Thus for example, I used *uji* instead of *yūjō*, *datsuraku* instead of *totsuraku*, *konshin* instead of *unjin*, *gato* instead of *wazu*, and so forth. I consulted frequently with *Shōbōgenzō yōgo sakuin* (edited by Katō Shūkō) and *Zengaku jiten* (edited by Jimbo Nyoten and Andō Bun'ei) for the reading of important terms used in this work.

I wish to extend my gratitude to John A. Hutchison for his unfailing assistance and encouragement; to Floyd H. Ross, Herbert W. Schneider, Margaret Dornish, and Katō Kazumitsu for their invaluable comments and suggestions; to Yamada Reirin, the former abbot of the Los Angeles Zenshūji temple, who initially guided me to Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*; and to Nakamura Hajime, Masunaga Reihō, and Akashi Masao in Japan for their kind assistance through correspondence.

The Blaisdell Institute, Claremont Graduate School, and the School of Theology were generous enough to invite me to Claremont to teach and do research on Dōgen from 1970 to 1972. I am deeply grateful to these three institutions for providing necessary funds. I should also mention the moral support I received from the members of the Department of Religious Studies and the Asian Studies Committee at the University of Oregon, when this work was in its final stage of preparation. My gratitude extends to them.

I wish to express my thanks to Dale Pryor for her editing work; to Dorothy Banker Turner and Ann Holmes for their assistance in various ways at different stages of this project; and to Mary Armes for typing the final copy for photo reproduction. I also thank the Association for Asian Studies at the University of Arizona and the University of Arizona Press for their cooperation and skill in the publication of this book.

Hee-Jin Kim

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