

The Buddha-nature in Dōgen's

Shōbōgenzō

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It has come to be acknowledged in the present century that Dōgen is one of the most seminal thinkers of Japanese Buddhism. For nearly seven centuries, however, he has been buried in oblivion, except within the Sōtō School of Zen that reveres Dōgen as its founder. Even the Sōtō School contributed to the obscurity of their founder by prohibiting the publication of Dōgen's major work, *Shōbōgenzō*, until the end of the eighteenth century.

Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960) brought Dōgen out of this long period of obscurity with his treatise *Shamon Dōgen*, written between 1919 and 1921.¹ Watsuji's contribution, however, is not limited to his introduction of Dōgen to public attention. Instead of treating Dōgen as the founder of the Sōtō School, he presents him as a human being, a person, a man (*hito*):

...it may be justifiable to assert that I opened a gate to a new interpretation of Dōgen. He thereby becomes not the Dōgen of a sect but of mankind; not the founder Dōgen but rather our Dōgen. The reason why I claim it so daringly is due to my realization that his truth was killed by sheer sectarian treatments (Watsuji 1925, p. 160).

This realization grew out of Watsuji's effort to solve the problem of how a layman like himself could attempt to understand Dōgen's "truth" without engaging in the rigorous training prescribed by the Zen tradition (Watsuji 1925, p. 156). A sectarian would claim that the "truth" must be experienced immediately and that any attempt to verbalize or conceptualize

1. The treatise was originally contributed in parts to two scholarly journals, *Shin shōsetsu* and *Shisō*. They were later compiled and published as part of Watsuji, *Nihon seishinshi kenkyū* [A study of the spiritual history of Japan] (1925). The references in this paper are from the book.

it constitutes falsification. If the immediate experience is the only gateway to the “truth,” as the sectarian would claim, why did Dōgen himself write so much? Dōgen believed that it was through writing that his truth was to be transmitted to others. For his own religious training, he singlemindedly concentrated on sitting in meditation; yet he saw no intrinsic conflict between sitting and writing. This is why Dōgen started writing *Shōbōgenzō* in 1231: so that he might be able to “transmit the Buddha’s authentic Dharma to those who are misguided by false teachers” (Watsuji 1925, p. 157). Watsuji further quotes from Dōgen: “Although it (*Shōbōgenzō*) might appear to be a mere ‘theory,’ it still bears indispensable importance for the sake of Dharma” (1925, p. 157). Thus Watsuji claims that his approach, which relies on words and concepts, is a valid alternative to the monk’s subjective pursuit.

According to Dōgen, enlightenment is possible only through rigorous sitting in meditation (*kufū zazen*) and through the study of Dharma under a master (*sanshi monpō*). One can encounter Dōgen as a master through his writings, for he answers one’s questions in his works. But one still must practice sitting in meditation. Watsuji insists that meditation can be done in an office or a study as well as in a meditation hall; he even goes so far as to say that perhaps a study may be a more congenial place for this purpose than a meditation hall when many monasteries are no longer concerned with the transmission of the truth but are immersed in secular concerns (1925, p. 158). Therefore, for Watsuji, meditation does not necessarily require the act of entering a monastery.

Of the two prerequisites for the realization of the truth, sitting in meditation is left to the individual. But the other, the pursuit of Dharma under a master, is Watsuji’s principle concern. *Shamon Dōgen* is an account of Watsuji’s personal encounter with the person of Dōgen as he speaks in his writings, primarily *Shōbōgenzō* and *Shōbōgenzō zuimonki*, the latter of which was compiled by Ejō, Dōgen’s closest disciple. In Watsuji’s treatise, we en-

counter not only Watsuji as he faced Dōgen but Dōgen himself.

Watsuji's new methodology considers it central to discover and encounter the person (*hito*) of Dōgen in his works.² Many people have followed Watsuji's methodology. Professor Tamaki Kōshirō of the University of Tokyo, for instance, remarks that not only was he first exposed to Dōgen through Watsuji, but also that he encountered the living Dōgen in Watsuji's treatise.³

This writer finds Watsuji's methodology to be particularly applicable to the study of Dōgen. Dōgen himself saw the truth fully embodied in the personhood of his Chinese master, Ju-ching. Dōgen's encounter with this individual was the single most decisive experience in his life, as is abundantly attested in his writings. Furthermore, Dōgen repeatedly discouraged his disciples from associating with institutionalized Zen. This paper, therefore, is the result of the writer's attempt to encounter the personhood of Dōgen.

While this writer uses Watsuji's methodology, the main body of literature that is examined in this paper is the chapter of Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* devoted to the *bushō* or Buddha-nature. The reasons for this choice are three. The question that tormented the young monk Dōgen concerned the Buddha-nature. Dōgen's search for the answer to this question took him to the eminent

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2. Watsuji's emphasis on encountering a person stems from his study of Martin Heidegger. While Heidegger stressed the "temporality" of *Dasein* in a phenomenological and existential manner, Watsuji ingeniously detected the incompleteness of Heidegger's temporal treatment of man. Watsuji thus focused on the spatial dimension of the phenomenological and existential "analytic" of man. The spatiality of man was then further formulated in Watsuji's own system, which first appeared in his *Fūdo*, which was rendered into English by Geoffrey Bownas as *Climate and culture* (1961). Watsuji's own system is commonly referred to as *ningengaku* ("the study of man"), in which he attempted to elucidate *hito to hito to no aidagara* ("the betweenness of persons"). It is apparent that Watsuji's emphasis upon *hito* is traceable to his spatial critique of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* [Being and time].
 3. See "Dōgen no sekai" [Dōgen's world], a colloquium between Tamaki Kōshirō and Terai Tōru, p. 2. This colloquium is printed in the form of a pamphlet to accompany *Dōgen shū* [Selected writings of Dōgen], edited by Tamaki (1969).

monks of his time: Kōen of Mt. Hiei; Kōin of Miidera temple; Yōsai of Kenninji temple; Myōzen, who succeeded Yōsai at this first Rinzai Zen monastery in Japan; Wu-chi Liao-pai and finally T'ien-t'ung Ju-ching in Southern Sung China. This pilgrimage spanned a period of over ten years ending in 1225 when he attained enlightenment under Ju-ching's instruction and solved his question. Thus it is possible to look at Dōgen's formative years as a continuing struggle with the fundamental question he first raised on Mt. Hiei. Secondly, the Buddha-nature chapter is one of the longest of the ninety-two chapters in the *Shōbōgenzō*, which may suggest Dōgen's particular concern for the subject matter. Lastly, the original manuscript of this chapter, now preserved in Eihei-ji temple, bears witness to the fact that Dōgen laboriously revised the chapter a number of times. Study of the Buddha-nature chapter, therefore, can reasonably be taken as central to understanding Dōgen's life and thought.

A CHARACTERIZATION

Dōgen (1200?–1253) may be described not as a man of many answers, as perhaps was Nichiren, but as a man of many questions. He was a man whose life was an ongoing and indefatigable quest for the ultimate truth. He became a *śramaṇa*⁴ at the age of twelve and, as many of his predecessors and contemporaries had done, went to Mt. Hiei to seek traditional religious training. Soon after he began the rigorous Tendai monastic life and the study of the sacred writings, he encountered a tormenting and seemingly insoluble problem. He was then four-

4. *Śramaṇa* (Jps., *shamon*; Chin., *sha-men*) originally meant a non-brahmanic ascetic in the general Indian religious context, as contrasted with the *sannyāsīn* who was from either the *brāhmaṇ* or *kṣatriya* background, and also with the *brahmacārin* who came from the same background but who only temporarily renounced the secular life. A *śramaṇa* usually shaved his head and devoted his whole life to the attainment of a particular religious objective. Later, the term assumed a narrower definition, referring primarily to Buddhists who renounced the secular life to engage in ascetic practices.

teen years old. The problem concerned the interpretation of the Buddha-nature:

Both the exoteric and the esoteric doctrines teach the primal Buddha-nature of all sentient beings. If this is so, why then do all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas arouse the longing for enlightenment and engage in ascetic practices? (*Kenzeiki: Sōtōshū zensho*, vol. 17, p. 16a)

This "Great Doubt" stems from the Mahayana ontological presupposition that all beings in the universe have the Buddha-nature and therefore possess the potential for enlightenment. This assumption began in India and became systematized in China. It can be asserted that Chinese and Japanese Buddhism after the eighth century stand on this basic Mahayana tenet.

Dōgen challenged this ontology as inherently problematic. If all sentient beings have the Buddha-nature, they are all potentially Buddhas. This ontology logically leads to a form of pantheism, affirming everything in the world as it is and calling for no discipline. Dōgen, therefore, saw in this Mahayana tenet an inherent contradiction between the pantheistic ontology of the Buddha-nature and the discipline for buddhahood, or between innate and acquired enlightenment. This question was not resolved to Dōgen's satisfaction by Kōen, abbot of Mt. Hiei, the center of Buddhist learning in Japan, and Dōgen's long quest for the "authentic teacher" (*shōshi*) was thus launched.

Dōgen departed from Mt. Hiei and sought instruction from Kōin of Miidera temple, another Tendai monastic establishment. Though unable to answer the question, Kōin immediately sensed the sincerity of this young inquirer and directed him to Yōsai. Whether Dōgen actually met Yōsai is historically uncertain.⁵ It is certain, however, that Myōzen, Yōsai's immediate successor at the first Rinzaï Zen monastery in Japan, not only suggested that Dōgen go to China but also decided later to ac-

5. It is commonly assumed that Dōgen went to Yōsai (also known as Eisai) at Kenninji temple, but there is no extant record testifying to this common belief among the biographers of Dōgen.

company the earnest religious aspirant on the journey. In China, Dōgen's question remained unresolved and became even more tormenting to him. After a period of searching at T'ien-t'ung Mountain under Wu-chi Liao-pai, he was so disillusioned at not having found the answer that he decided to embark on the homeward journey to Japan. Just before his departure, however, Dōgen learned of the death of Wu-chi and that a new master, named Ju-ching, was to be Wu-chi's successor. He promptly returned to T'ien-t'ung Mountain for another attempt to find the authentic teacher.

Dōgen's encounter with Ju-ching became the most decisive moment in his life. The encounter was later described by Dōgen himself as an event which "had not been possible even in my dreams" (*Shōbōgenzō, Menju: Ōkubo, ed. Dōgen zenji zenshū*, vol. 1, p. 446). He wrote, "I saw the great master, indeed. I finally came upon the person" (*Shōbōgenzō, Gyōji*, p. 157). Dōgen experienced his enlightenment under Ju-ching, and it was from him that Dōgen transmitted the Ts'ao-tung (Jps., Sōtō) School of Zen to Japan. The personhood (*hito*) in the *Shōbōgenzō* is the Dōgen who encountered master Ju-ching and who grew from that decisive encounter.

The third of the ninety-two chapters in the *Shōbōgenzō* consists of fourteen well-known anecdotes⁶ concerning the meaning of the Buddha-nature. Dōgen's motivation in referring to these

6. The original text of the Buddha-nature chapter is not divided into fourteen sections. It is possible, however, to do so in terms of fourteen different topics which Dōgen extrapolates:

- 1) Śākyamuni on the Buddha-nature as recorded in the *Mahāparinirvāna sūtra*: Ōkubo, ed., *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, vol. 1, pp. 14-16
- 2) Śākyamuni on "tōkan" and "jissetsu nyakushi": pp. 16-17
- 3) The twelfth Indian patriarch, Aśvaghōṣa: p. 17
- 4) The fourth and fifth patriarchs: pp. 17-19
- 5) The fifth and sixth patriarchs: pp. 19-21
- 6) The sixth patriarch and Hsing-ch'ang: pp. 21-22
- 7) Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva: pp. 22-26
- 8) Yen-kuan: p. 27
- 9) Ta-wei: pp. 27-28

fourteen stories, many of which are dialogues, is not to elucidate what the stories say, but rather to provide them with his own interpretations. He uses the fourteen stories to support his own position on the Buddha-nature. What, then, is the understanding of the Buddha-nature by which Dōgen interprets the masters of antiquity in India and China? What is the answer to the question the fourteen-year old Dōgen asked on Mt. Hiei, the question which tormented him for many years and which motivated him to make the long journey across the China Sea? What is the answer which had been veiled from Dōgen until he encountered his master, Ju-ching?

WHAT THE BUDDHA-NATURE IS: DŌGEN'S ORIGINALITY

The basis for Dōgen's understanding of the Buddha-nature is given in the first section of the Buddha-nature chapter that starts with a question from the Chinese translation of the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa sūtra*, the original Sanskrit of which is now lost (*Ta-pen nieh-p'an ching*: *Taishō shinshū dai zōkyō* 12, no. 374, p. 522c; quoted in *Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, p. 14). The passage was customarily read as: "The sentient beings (一切衆生) all (悉) possess (有) the Buddha-nature (佛性); the Tathagata (如來) abides constantly (常住), and is without change (無有變易)." This passage can be paraphrased as: the Buddha-nature is the essence of all sentient beings, and it is changeless. Dōgen gave a crucial twist to it, reading it as: "*All are (一切) sentient beings (衆生), all things are (悉有) the Buddha-nature (佛性); the Tathagata (如來) abides constantly (常住), is non-existent (無) yet existent (有), and is change (變易).*" (The italics, supplied by this writer, indicate the changes made by Dōgen.)

By reading the Chinese passage differently, Dōgen gives it a

10) Pai-chang: p. 29

11) Huang-p'i and Nan-ch'uan: pp. 29-30

12) Kuei-shan and Yang-shan: pp. 30-31

13) Chao-chou: pp. 31-33

14) Chang-sha and Shang-shu: pp. 33-34

new meaning. Whereas in the conventional reading the Buddha-nature is understood as a permanent essence inherent in all sentient beings, Dōgen contends that all things are the Buddha-nature. In the former reading, the Buddha-nature is a changeless potential, but in the latter, it is the eternally arising and perishing actuality of all things in the world. Although the grammatical twist given by Dōgen may be slight, the difference in meaning thereby created is immense.

Dōgen's new reading of the passage in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra* illustrates how Dōgen resolved his "Great Doubt." If monastic practice is directed toward bringing the potential Buddha-nature to its full manifestation, then it constitutes a form of dependency. The Buddha's teaching was to the contrary, for the Four Aryan Truths are directed toward the elimination of all forms of dependency. Dōgen's ingenuity, therefore, extends beyond his new reading of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra* and restores the fundamental principle of Buddhism.

It is important to notice Dōgen's interpretation of the last four characters of the above passage. Whereas the conventional reading was "without change" or "change exists not," Dōgen reads the characters to mean "[the Buddha-nature is] non-existent yet existent, and is change." He claims, further, that the Buddha-nature itself is neither existent nor non-existent:

Bear it well in mind that the "existent" as in the Buddha-nature existent in all things is not the either/or kind of "existent." "All things" is the word of the Buddha and the tongue of the Buddha. It is the eye and the nose of all the buddhas and patriarchs. The word "all things" is neither the primordial nor the original "existent" nor the miraculous "existent." How much less is it the "existent" that is caused by dependent origination or blindness? Neither is it restricted to the mind or its object, to its original nature or its appearance. Therefore, it is caused neither by past deeds, by confusion, by spontaneity nor by supernatural acts.... In the entire universe there is not even a speck of dust apart from the "all things" (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Bussō*, pp. 14–15).

This "existent" and "non-existent" do not make for an either/or proposition. They do not constitute a polarity. They are not relative to each other. "All things" and the "Buddha-nature" belong to the realm of the absolute. The "Buddha-nature" is "all things" and "all things" are the "Tathagata." These are three different names for that which is absolute.

Another characteristic of the Buddha-nature is that it is restricted neither by dependent origination nor by time nor again by the law of discrimination. It is unaffected by them. Furthermore, it is restricted neither to the subject nor to the object. It transcends that distinction. Therefore one cannot say, "I recognize 'all things'" or "I experience the Buddha-nature." All these categories are mental constructs invented for the sake of convenience, and they are all relative. The Buddha-nature transcends all differentiations. "All things" has nothing outside of itself with which to be compared or contrasted, for "all things" belongs to the absolute realm. Since "all things" is the Buddha-nature and is the Tathagata, Dōgen states, "If 'all things' is construed in such a way, [the realization of] 'all things,' all by itself, is the perfect *nirvāṇa*" (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, p. 15).

Yet Yen-kuan said, "All things are sentient beings, and they have the Buddha-nature" (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, p. 27). It seems that Yen-kuan is contradicting Dōgen. Dōgen, however, discusses in the eighth section how Yen-kuan's statement can be read as consistent with his own position. Dōgen interprets Yen-kuan's Buddha-nature as the "mind" which all sentient beings possess:

...What "all things are sentient beings" means, according to the Way of the Buddha, is that all things that possess the "mind" are sentient beings; this is because the "mind" is the mark of sentient beings. Those [said to be] without the "mind" must also be sentient beings; this is because "all sentient beings" are the "mind." Therefore, all that possess the "mind" are the sentient beings, and the sentient beings all have the Buddha-nature. Grass, trees, land ... are all "mind." Since they are the "mind," they are sentient beings;

since they are all sentient beings, they have the Buddha-nature. This is what the National Master [Yen-kuan] means by the existence of the Buddha-nature. If it were not meant in this way, it would not be the Buddha-nature that is meant by the Way of the Buddha (*Shōbōgenzō*, p. 27).

Dōgen chose Yen-kuan's teaching as one of the fourteen sections in the Buddha-nature chapter in order to reiterate that the Buddha-nature is not something enduring that is to be contrasted with impermanent sentient beings. The affirmative word, *wu*, as in "have (*wu*) the Buddha-nature," does not imply the existence of the Buddha-nature as a permanent substance of something, a substance that is to be contrasted with its negation, *mu*, as in "not have (*mu*) the Buddha-nature." *Wu* means, instead, that all things are sentient beings in constant change, dictated by the law of dependent origination. The "mind," which is the mark of all sentient beings, is also subject to constant change. Dōgen's contention is that the Buddha-nature is none other than this "mind."

WHAT THE BUDDHA-NATURE IS NOT

In the Buddha-nature chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō*, Dōgen warns against two prevalent misunderstandings of the Buddha-nature. First, the Buddha-nature must not be understood as the *ātman* or permanent self of the *Upanishads*. Dōgen writes:

When people hear the word "Buddha-nature," many scholars misunderstand it as akin to the *ātman* of the heretics. It is because they do not meet the true person, nor do they see the real nature of their own selves, and furthermore it is because they do not encounter an authentic teacher. They unknowingly identify the function of human mind with the consciousness of the Buddha-nature (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, p. 15).

Although Buddhism began as a radical denial of *ātman* and the whole Mahayana teaching is said to stand on that ground, the *ātman* idea was brought into Buddhist thought as time progressed. The storehouse consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) of the

Vijñaptimātratā School, for example, could be criticized, as it was by the Mādhyamika School, for resembling the *ātman*. This tendency toward construing the Buddha-nature as *ātman* seems particularly pronounced in the Chinese transformation of Mahayana.⁷ The tendency is latent in the conventional reading of the Chinese translation of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*. Dōgen's reinterpretation may appear so unique as to distort the meaning of the sutra, but his concern is with the restoration of the authentic Buddhist teaching. For this purpose, Dōgen felt that he had to challenge even the Tendai Mahayana orthodoxy, which insisted on a teaching that he regarded as erroneously advocating the interpretation of the Buddha-nature as akin to *ātman*. The temptation to bring *ātman* into Buddhism in a search for the imperishable and the eternal is a violation of a fundamental tenet of Buddhism. Dōgen contended that the Buddha-nature is none other than the very perishability and the impermanence of "all things." Nothing eternal is hidden underneath or within "all things." For Dōgen, Buddhism stands in contrast to the speculative *Upanishads* that affirm the enduring entity, *ātman*. In Dōgen's view, the following passage from the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra* is clearly mistaken:

In the milk, there is cream; in sentient beings, there is the Buddha-nature....If you have a desire to seek, you will find it" (*Ta-pan nieh-p'an ching: Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 12, no. 374, p. 531b).

The dialectical understanding of the Buddha-nature is the second common misunderstanding. According to Dōgen, it is a mistake to think that the Buddha-nature is like a seed that grows with time:

Some people say, "The Buddha-nature is like the seed of plants and trees. When the rain of Dharma falls, a new bud comes

7. Because of the widespread practice of *ko-yi* ("extension of [Taoist] meanings"), the earliest Chinese Buddhists misconstrued the theory of transmigration as involving an enduring self. See, for example, Derk Bodde's footnote in Fung Yu-lan (1953, p. 286).

out, a stem next and branches, leaves, flowers and then even fruits will follow. And a fruit contains another new seed in it (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, p. 16).

Dōgen, on the other hand, says that seeds, stems, branches, leaves, flowers, and all other things live to their fullest. Each moment of their lives is an end in and of itself. Seeds do not exist in order to transform themselves into stems, branches do not exist for the sake of leaves, and so on.

The dialectical view which Dōgen repudiates often involves a teleological outlook which claims that all things point to a particular end, this end being the reason for their existence. Dōgen rejects, as a form of escapism, the teleological view that the now is for the future. The future of things is uncertain. His emphasis is on the present moment. The existence of seeds, flowers and all other things is not for the "future," but just for the now, and for Dōgen the now is the absolute now. Things are not means but ends, in and of themselves.

In order to illustrate his own response to these two common misunderstandings of the Buddha-nature, in the second section of the Buddha-nature chapter of his *Shōbōgenzō* Dōgen supplies a new reading of another passage in the Chinese translation of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*. The passage was conventionally interpreted: "If you wish to know the meaning of the Buddha-nature, observe properly the dependent origination in time. When the time comes, the Buddha-nature will be fully manifest."⁸ Dōgen's new reading is: "If you wish to know the meaning of the Buddha-nature, *proper observation is the dependent origination in time. The time has already come,*⁹ and the Buddha-nature is fully manifest (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, p. 17; the italics, supplied by the present writer, indicate Dōgen's new reading).

There are a number of significant innovations in Dōgen's

8. The passage quoted from *Ta-pan nieh-p'an ching* is: 欲知佛性義，當觀時節因緣，時節若至，佛性現前 (*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 12, no. 374, p. 532a).

9. Dōgen claims that *nyakushi* (若至) or "if arrived" is synonymous with *kishi* (既至) or "already arrived." *Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, p. 17.

new reading which illumine his interpretation of the Buddha-nature. In the imperative sentence of the conventional reading, "Observe properly the dependent origination in time," there is an implicit differentiation between the observer and the observed, mediated by the act of observing. In Dōgen's new reading, there is only observation, where the duality between the observer and the observed is transcended.¹⁰ Secondly, whereas the conventional reading places the full manifestation of the Buddha-nature in the future, for Dōgen the Buddha-nature is manifested in the present moment.

Jisetsu nyakushi is often interpreted by people of past and present as "waiting for a time in the future when the Buddha-nature will be fully manifest." They say, furthermore, "During the course of discipline, such a time will eventually come. There is no use in studying Dharma under a master; until the time comes, there is no manifestation of the Buddha-nature" (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, p. 16).

The Buddha-nature is not hidden now to be manifest in the future as part of the world of dependent origination. The Buddha-nature is fully manifest at the present moment, at any moment, and identical with the actuality of the dependent origination of all things. Therefore, the "time" in "the time has already come" is, for Dōgen, all time and absolute time, as the Buddha-nature is absolute. Dōgen asserts, "After all, there

10. This is consistent with Nishida Kitarō's position. Though Husserl and Heidegger claimed the inseparability of *noesis-noema*, they are epistemologically still distinct from each other. Nishida, however, not only claimed the inseparability of the two, but also emphasized that they constitute one "act." Therefore, for Nishida, *noesis-noema* is not merely an aggregate of two inseparables, but two phases of a single act. The significance of Nishida's position is that the subject is transcended, whereas the subject still remains in the *noesis* part of Husserl's and Heidegger's *noesis-noema* relationship. In other words, Nishida's act is without the underlying actor. It seems that Nishida is consistent with Dōgen in that "all things" is the Buddha-nature where "all things" is no longer the object for the self but the self is all things. "Proper observation" as distinguished from the act of observing, which necessarily presupposes that which is observed, must be understood in such a manner.

was no time when the time had not already come. There is no Buddha-nature that does not fully manifest the Buddha-nature” (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, p. 17).

OBJECTIVE UNDERSTANDING VS. SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE

In the chapter on “the concept of time and change” in his *A history of the development of Japanese thought*, vol. 1, Professor Nakamura Hajime describes a uniquely Japanese way of thinking: the “acceptance of actuality in the phenomenal world as the absolute” (1969, p. 92). For example, he shows how the interpretation of a word in the *Mahāyāna-śraddhotpāda-śāstra* (Chin., *Ta-ch’eng ch’i-hsin lun*; Jps., *Daijō kishinron*) changed when Buddhism took root in Japan. “Original awakening” (*hongaku*) in the shastra meant in India “the ultimate comprehension of what is beyond the phenomenal world, whereas in Japan the same word was brought down to refer to what is within the phenomenal world” (Nakamura 1969, p. 94). This alteration of meaning, Nakamura argues, was first introduced by the Japanese Tendai School.

The same Japanization process took place, according to Nakamura, in the interpretation of *dharmatā*.¹¹ The Chinese translated this Sanskrit term as “the real aspect [of all things] (*shih-hsiang*).” The Chinese interpretation refers to “the real aspect of all kinds of phenomena in our experience, and is composed of two distinct, contradictory elements, ‘all things’ and ‘the real aspect’” (Nakamura 1969, p. 94). The Japanese Tendai School interpreted it as “all things are the real aspect” and equated the phenomena with “reality.” Dōgen went even further in the Japanization process, according to Nakamura, when he said “the real aspect is all things” (Nakamura 1969, p. 95). Dōgen writes in the *Shohō jissō* chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō*:

The real aspect is all things. All things are the aspect, this

11. See Kumārajīva, transl. *Chung-lun* (Skt., *Mādhyamika kārikās*), ch. 18, 7th *gāthā*; *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra*, ed. by Ogiwara Unrai, p. 251, I, 25; *Asta-sāhasrikā*, ed. by Ogiwara Unrai, p. 51; p. 572, II, 2-3; p. 666, I, 7; etc.

character, this body, this mind, this wind and this rain, this sequence of daily going, living, sitting, and lying down, this series of melancholy, joy, action and inaction, this stick and wand, this Buddha's smile, this transmission and reception of the doctrine, this study and practice, this evergreen pine and ever unbreakable bamboo (p. 365).

The significance of Dōgen's Japanization of Buddhism lies in his interpretation of the "real aspect." In the Tendai assertion that "all things are the real aspect," the real aspect could be something more than "all things," whereas, in Dōgen's "the real aspect is all things," the real aspect is exhaustively explained.

Nakamura thus suggests that the Japanization of Buddhism was started by the Japanese Tendai School and culminated in the thought of Dōgen. Dōgen's position is consistent with what Nakamura regards as the characteristic Japanese tendency to "lay a greater emphasis upon sensible, concrete events, intuitively apprehended, than upon universals" (Nakamura 1969, p. 93). Dōgen's thought must not be interpreted, however, only as a case of the Japanization of Buddhism. His mind was firmly fixed on what he regarded as the authentic Buddhist teaching, traceable directly to the historical Buddha through a continuous line of patriarchs. Indeed, Dōgen saw this authentic teaching of the Buddha concretely embodied by his own Chinese master, Ju-ching. After his return to Japan, Dōgen endeavored to transmit his Chinese master's teaching to Japan and thereby to promote true Buddhism in Japan. Dōgen's Japanization of Buddhism must therefore be regarded as merely a concomitant result of this endeavor.

The reason cross-cultural interpretations of Dōgen's thought are limited is that they undermine the fundamental religious dimension that can be apprehended only in one's subjective experience. Any verbal discourse, of which this paper is one, cannot avoid this fundamental limitation. Consider a conversation between the fifth and sixth patriarchs:

The fifth patriarch asked, "Where did you come from?" "I came from Ling-nan, sir," answered the sixth. The fifth asked again, "What is the purpose of your coming here?" The sixth, "I wish to perfect my Buddha-nature." Then the fifth said to him, "A man from Ling-nan, no Buddha-nature. How do you dare perfect the Buddha-nature?" (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, p. 19; also see Yampolsky 1967, pp. 127–128).

Dōgen points out that the fifth patriarch's words, "A man from Ling-nan, no Buddha-nature," must not be taken as a response to the question: "Is there or is there not a Buddha-nature?" Dōgen asserts that the Buddha-nature is fundamentally a religious issue: "After all, there are no predecessors of ours who clarified the logic of the Buddha-nature. It is not to be known to the teachers of Hinayana and of scriptures" (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, pp. 19–20). The "logic" of the Buddha-nature is never clarified prior to the enlightenment experience. The Buddha-nature is grasped only by the enlightened mind of the "descendants" (*jison*) of Śākyamuni Buddha and it is transmitted only by them. The precondition for the apprehension of the Buddha-nature is, therefore, a rigorous religious discipline. Dōgen writes: "You must attentively discipline yourselves; discipline for twenty, thirty years!" (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, p. 20).

ABSOLUTE NOTHINGNESS

In the rest of the Buddha-nature chapter, Dōgen does not point out what else the Buddha-nature is but elucidates it in a different manner. In the thirteenth section, Dōgen deals with the well-known question posed by Chao-chou, "Does a dog have the Buddha-nature?" which is traditionally answered in the negative, *mu* (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, p. 31). In this section, however, Dōgen is no longer concerned with the question of whether the Buddha-nature exists, for this has already been dealt with. According to Dōgen, Chao-chou's question concerns whether the Buddha-nature has a place or not. Since "all things" as in "all things are the Buddha-nature" covers the

entirety of the universe, they are everywhere. Similarly, the Buddha-nature is everywhere, yet nowhere in particular. Therefore, Chao-chou's negative answer, *mu*, must be understood as "nowhere" in the sense of nowhere in particular. Yet "nowhere" is the same as everywhere, for the Buddha-nature is absolute, transcending all specificity.¹²

Chao-chou's *mu* is also to be understood as "Nothingness." This Nothingness is not relative but absolute. The absolute Nothingness is not negated by something other than itself. The negating and the negated are both inherent in the absolute Nothingness. Dōgen asserts that the Buddha-nature is this self-negating absolute Nothingness; it is indeed the self-negation itself. All particulars (*kobutsu*) are the products of the self-negation of the absolute Nothingness. It is not that the particulars are separate from the absolute Nothingness, but that the absolute Nothingness negates itself into particulars. Because the action is negation, it is called Nothingness; and because the negating act of the Nothingness is done to itself, where the subject (the negator) and the predicate (the negated) are one and the

12. This understanding of Chao-chou's *mu* is akin to the "nothing that is not there and the nothing that is" in Wallace Stevens' poem, "The Snow Man":

One must have a mind of winter
 To regard the frost and the boughs
 Of the pinetrees crusted with snow;
 And have been cold a long time
 To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
 The spruces rough in the distant glitter
 Of the January sun; and not to think
 Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
 In the sound of a few leaves,
 Which is the sound of the land
 Full of the same wind
 That is blowing in the same bare place
 For the listener, who listens in the snow,
 And, nothing himself, beholds
 Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is."
 (Wallace Stevens, *Poems*, 1947, p. 23).

same, it is called the absolute Nothingness.¹³ Dōgen finds the best expression of this absolute Nothingness in *mujō* or “impermanence.”

IMPERMANENCE

The sixth section begins with the sixth patriarch’s teaching, “Impermanence is the Buddha-nature” (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, p. 21). For Dōgen, to experience the impermanence of all things is to understand the Buddha-nature and to attain enlightenment. Not only are all objects in nature impermanent, but so are the enlightened people:

It is not that the enlightened are always enlightened; neither is it that the unenlightened are always unenlightened. If such were possible, there would be no Buddha-nature (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, p. 21).

Just as the unenlightened ones are in constant change, impermanent, so are the enlightened ones, both of whom, together with the rest of “all things,” constitute the impermanence that is the Buddha-nature.

Dōgen’s “impermanence” cannot be understood apart from the law of dependent origination. Impermanence describes “all things” that are dependently originated, therefore impermanence includes both the cause (*saṃskāra*) and the caused (*saṃskṛta*). There is nothing that is not one or the other. Yet the cause and the caused are ultimately the same, for the caused will eventually become the cause for the subsequent “caused.”

It must be pointed out that, for Dōgen, impermanence can be apprehended, in the final analysis, only in religious experience. As he did in the fifth section, Dōgen emphasizes in the seventh that only the enlightened can understand that the impermanence

13. Much of the insight in this paragraph was drawn from *Bashōteki ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan* [The logic of topos and a religious world view] in *Nishida Kitarō zenshū* [Complete works of Nishida Kitarō], 1932, vol. 11, pp. 371–464. In Nishida’s language, the self-negation of the absolute Nothingness is called the “self-identity of the absolute contradiction” (*zettai mujun no jiko dōitsu*).

of "all things" is the Buddha-nature. The full realization of the Buddha-nature came to Dōgen at the moment of enlightenment, which he recollected in the *Hōkyōki*¹⁴ as "dropping the body and mind" (*shinjin datsuraku*). For Dōgen, to attain enlightenment is to abandon the totality of the self. It is not that the self drops the body and mind but rather that the self, the agent of clinging, drops itself. The "dropping the body and mind" is without the underlying self who performs the act of dropping. When the body and mind are dropped off, the self is totally immersed in the impermanence of "all things." Therefore, the "dropping the body and mind" is to realize that the totality of the self is a part of "all things" that are at once impermanent and the Buddha-nature. In the sense that impermanence is not simply an object to be realized by a bystander who is outside the reality of impermanence but that the observing self is also impermanent, the full realization of the Buddha-nature lies in the subjective experience of the enlightened.

Dōgen's emphasis on all-inclusive impermanence differentiates his "dropping the body and mind" from the "eliminating the dust from the mind," the latter of which is said to have been an expression used by his Chinese master, Ju-ching.¹⁵ Because of the identical Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese characters used in these two expressions, it has even been suggested that Dōgen misunderstood his master's instruction.¹⁶ It is, however, highly improbable that such a vast difference in meaning was caused by misunderstanding. One must see Dōgen's conscious effort to diverge from his master in the interpretation of the Buddha-nature. In "eliminating the dust from the mind,"

14. The *Hōkyōki* is the journal Dōgen kept while studying under Ju-ching. It was posthumously discovered by his disciple, Ejō, who subsequently edited it. See Ōkubo, ed., *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, vol. 2, pp. 371-388.

15. It appears once in *Ju-ching ho-shang yü-lu*: *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 48, no 2002, p. 130c: 心塵脫落開岩洞, 自性圓通, 儼紺容.

16. Takasaki and Umehara (1969, pp. 43-52). In Chinese, however, "dropping the body and mind" is *shen-hsin t'o-lo*, while "eliminating the dust from the mind" is *hsin-ch'en t'o-lo*.

it is implied that enlightenment results from the removal of defilements¹⁷ from the mind. The soteriological objective is the restoration of the undefiled mind which sees the Buddha-nature. In Dōgen's "dropping the body and mind," on the other hand, it is the mind, together with the rest of the self, that is removed, for it is not just the "dust" that accumulates on the originally pure mind but the totality of the self that causes clinging and hinders enlightenment. While in the former there remains a residual self, the undefiled original mind, in the latter the self is exhaustively abandoned. "Eliminating the dust from the mind," therefore, corresponds to the misunderstanding of the Buddha-nature as akin to the Upanishadic *ātman* against which Dōgen cautioned. "Dropping the body and mind," on the other hand, emphasizes the utter impermanence of "all things" which is the Buddha-nature. For Dōgen, there is no enlightenment apart from impermanence. Enlightenment is not an escape from impermanence; on the contrary, it is the realization of all-inclusive impermanence.

For those who seek security in enlightenment by construing a pure state of the mind as the Buddha-nature, Dōgen said:

From the beginningless past, many foolish people identified consciousness and spirituality as the Buddha-nature. How laughable it is that they were called the enlightened people! If I were to explain the Buddha-nature without getting too involved, [I would say that it is like] fences, walls, roof tiles, and pebbles. If I were to explain it in another way, the Buddha-nature is a creature with three heads and eight arms! (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, p. 34).

In this passage, with which Dōgen ends the Buddha-nature chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō*, he enumerates the least conceivable items so that his listeners would stop looking for similes of the Buddha-nature. He claims that the Buddha-nature is as mundane as "fences, walls, roof tiles, and pebbles" and that it is as

17. Traditionally, there are six defilements (Skt. *kleśa*): desire, detestation, delusion, pride, doubt, and evil views.

unimaginable as a "creature with three heads and eight arms." Far from being identical with the enduring consciousness or spirituality, the Buddha-nature is none other than the mundane and ordinary "all things" that are subject to dependent origination and are therefore impermanent. Only for those who abandon all attachments who drop away body and mind alike, are "all things" impermanent, there remaining nothing that is not impermanent. Apart from this impermanence, there is no Buddha-nature.

BEHOLD THE MAN!

Dōgen was consistent with one of the fundamental tenets of Zen in his insistence that the enlightenment experience is possible only under the direction of an enlightened master. The experiential nature of the full realization of the Buddha-nature cannot be divorced from one's encounter with a master. Dōgen's doubt concerning the meaning of the Buddha-nature was not resolved until he met Ju-ching in the fifth and final year of his study in China, over a decade after he raised this doubt as a young monk on Mt. Hiei in Japan. Indeed, Dōgen's relentless search for the answer to his question was synonymous with his quest for the "authentic teacher." Dōgen saw in the personhood, the enlightened personhood, of Ju-ching the concrete embodiment of the Buddha-nature. Dōgen's realization of the Buddha-nature in the experience of his "dropping the body and mind" was simultaneous with his encounter with the personhood of Ju-ching.

In order to illustrate the personal embodiment of the Buddha-nature, Dōgen refers in the seventh section of the Buddha-nature chapter to the following anecdote concerning Nāgārjuna. One day, the crowd asked Nāgārjuna, "The accumulation of good deeds is the most important in the world. You always talk about the Buddha-nature, but who on earth can see it?" Nāgārjuna replied, "If you wish to see the Buddha-nature, first you must abandon your ego." He proceeded to remark that "the Buddha-

nature is neither large nor small, neither wide nor narrow; it has neither good fortune nor bad retribution; it is subject neither to death nor birth" (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, p. 22). Another day, Nāgārjuna manifested himself as the full moon above his seat. The crowd was so intent on listening to his sermon that it failed to see this manifestation of Nāgārjuna. Thereupon, Āryadeva, who was among the crowd, said, "Do you see this manifestation?" The crowd responded, "We have never seen it with our eyes, never heard it with our ears, never perceived it in our mind, and never experienced it with our body." Āryadeva continued, "Now the Venerable One is manifesting himself as the Buddha-nature to us. The reason I can see it is that the formless *samādhi* is now like the full moon. The meaning of the Buddha-nature is clear and lucid" (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, p. 22). When Nāgārjuna's sermon was over, the full moon disappeared and he was back in his seat. Then he delivered the following verse: "The body manifested itself as the full moon. The buddhas manifest their bodies without form and without voice" (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Busshō*, p. 22).

Dōgen follows this story with his own commentary:

A fool would think, "The Venerable One arbitrarily metamorphosed himself as the full moon." This is the heretical thought of those who do not transmit the Way of the Buddha. When and where could he have revealed himself as something other than himself? You must understand that the Venerable One was simply sitting at his seat. When he manifested his body, he was sitting just like everyone else. His body was the full moon itself. The manifestation of his body was neither square nor round, neither existent nor non-existent; it neither appeared nor disappeared. It did not have an infinite number of metamorphoses apart from his own body. His body, as it was, could have been seen as a narrow moon or as a full moon. The body that manifested itself was originally devoid of ego. Therefore it was not Nāgārjuna's, but the body of the buddhas. Because the buddhas are devoid of ego, they penetrate the body and they are not confined to particular manifestations. Although the Buddha-nature is as clear and lucid

as the full moon, it is not confined to the full moon (*Shōbōgenzō*, *Bussō*, p. 23).

Although this is a rather free interpretation of the anecdote associated with Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva, Dōgen's intention is readily evident. For Dōgen, Āryadeva's greatness lies in his ability to see the Buddha-nature concretely embodied in the egoless and therefore enlightened personhood of Nāgārjuna.

It must not be thought that Dōgen is equating the Buddha-nature with the personhood of Nāgārjuna in Āryadeva's case and that of Ju-ching in his own.¹⁸ Dōgen is claiming, rather, that through the act of abandoning the ego, or "dropping the body and mind" in Dōgen's own words, the Buddha-nature becomes concretely embodied in a person. Yet the self-emptying person is not a mediator in the sense of one who stands between the Buddha-nature and one who seeks to experience it. The seeker experiences "all things" directly and immediately. Nāgārjuna did not stand between Āryadeva and the Buddha-nature. On the contrary, Nāgārjuna removed himself by emptying his ego, and thereby the Buddha-nature freely radiated before Āryadeva.

When Dōgen transcended simple affirmation and negation of the Buddha-nature, or the Buddha-nature as existent and non-existent, and characterized it as absolute Nothingness, he was utilizing the language of the *via negativa*. Absolute Nothingness defies all specificity. In his emphasis on the personhood of an enlightened master, however, he departs from *via negativa* language and talks in the language of *via positiva*. An enlightened personhood is not an exception to "all things" that are impermanent, but exemplifies the self-negation of the absolute Nothingness which is the Buddha-nature. Therefore, in the personhood of the self-emptying master is the concrete

18. Umehara criticises Watsuji for this equation at several places in the second half of *Kobutsu no manabi* by Takasaki and Umehara (1969). It is most pronounced on p. 259. Umehara's accusation cannot, however, be easily verified in this writer's own reading of Watsuji's treatise on Dōgen.

presence of the Buddha-nature. As Watsuji asserts, such personhood (*hito*) is the “direct point of contact” between the Buddha-nature and the seeker (Watsuji 1925, p. 231). Just as Nāgārjuna was for Āryadeva and Ju-ching for Dōgen (Dōgen recollected Ju-ching as the “old Buddha” or *kobutsu*),¹⁹ Dōgen’s personhood can be the “direct point of contact” for those of us who encounter him in his writings.

GLOSSARY

bashoteki ronri to shūkyōteki sekaikan
場所的論理と宗教の世界観
busshō 佛性
Chang-sha 長沙
Chao-chou 趙州
Dōgen 道元
Eiheiji 永平寺
Ejō 懷弁
Gyōji 行持
Hiei 比叡
hito 人
hito to hito to no aidagara
人と人との間柄
hongaku 本覺
Huang-p’i 黃蘗
Hsing-ch’ang 行昌
jisetsu nyakushi 時節若至
jison 見孫
Ju-ching 如淨
Kenninji 建仁寺
kobutsu (particulars) 個物

kobutsu (old Buddha) 古佛
Kōen 公圓
Kōin 公胤
ko-yi 格義
Kuei-shan 滙山
kufū zazen 工夫坐禪
Ling-nan 嶺南
Menju 面授
Miidera 三井寺
mu 無
mujō 無常
Myōzen 明全
Nan-ch’uan 南泉
ningengaku 人間学
Pai-chang 百丈
Rinzai 臨濟
sanshi monpō 參師問法
Shang-shu 尚書
shih-hsiang 實相
shinjin datsuraku (dropping the body and mind) 身心脱落
shinjin datsuraku (eliminating the

19. Ōkubo, ed., *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, vol. 1, pp. 12, 271, 331, 342, etc. *Kobutsu* is an honorific word usually reserved only for Śākyamuni Buddha. For Dōgen, to encounter the historical Buddha was to encounter Ju-ching, because Ju-ching embodied the unbroken lineage of the teaching transmitted from Śākyamuni.

dust from the mind) 心塵脱落	<i>wu</i> 有
<i>Shohō jissō</i> 諸法實相	Wu-chi Liao-pai 無際了派
<i>shōshi</i> 正師	Yang-shan 仰山
Sōtō 曹洞	Yen-kuan 鹽官
Sung 宋	Yōsai (also Eisai) 榮西
Ta-wei 大滙	Zen 禪
Tendai 天台	<i>zettai mujun no jiko dōitsu</i>
T'ien-t'ung 天童	絕對矛盾の自己同一
<i>tōkan</i> 當觀	

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