



**A Study of
DŌGEN**

*His Philosophy
and Religion*

Masao Abe

*Edited by
Steven Heine*

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Notes on Abbreviations

Citations from Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* [hereafter SG] are taken from volume 1 of the two-volume *Dōgen zenji zenshū* [hereafter DZZ], edited by Ōkubo Dōshū (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1969 and 1970), unless otherwise noted.

Citations from some SG fascicles are from translations in *The Eastern Buddhist* [hereafter EB] by N. A. Waddell and Masao Abe, including:

- SG "Bendōwa" EB 4 (1): 124–157;
- SG "Busshō" (1) EB 8 (2): 94–112
- (2) EB 9 (1): 87–105
- (3) EB 9 (2): 71–87;
- SG "Genjōkōan" EB 5 (2): 129–140
- SG "Shōji" EB 5 (1): 70–80;
- SG "Uji" (tr. Waddell) EB 12 (1): 114–129
- SG "Zenki" EB 5 (1): 70–80.

Occasionally minor changes in terminology are made for the sake of consistency.

Additional EB translations:

- Fukanzazengi* (tr. Waddell and Abe) EB 6 (2): 115-28;
- Hōkyōki* (tr. Waddell) (1) EB 10 (2): 102-39
- (2) 11 (1): 66-84.

Editor's Introduction

One testimony to the greatness of an original thinker is the greatness of his or her commentators. In recent Western thought, for example, Heidegger's two-volume reading of Nietzsche's notions of will to power and eternal recurrence (entitled *Nietzsche*) and Ricoeur's lectures on Freudian analysis from the standpoint of hermeneutics (*Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*) stand out as unique expositions that disclose as much about the views of the commentators as about the source material.¹ In twentieth-century Japan, Dōgen has proven to be one of the major sources or texts taken up for interpretation by leading Japanese philosophers and scholars. The value and significance of Dōgen's thought is evident in the important role it has played in generating discussion and analysis by such key modern figures as Watsuji Tetsurō, Tanabe Hajime, Nishitani Keiji, Ienaga Saburō, Kasaki Junzō, and Tamaki Kōshirō in addition to Masao Abe, who for several decades has been helping to disseminate Dōgen's approach to Zen theory and practice in the West. The tremendous interest in Dōgen today has led the "way back" to the original thinker in a manner that will continue to influence the future of Asian and comparative thought. Yet this has been a surprising development, because for centuries after his death in 1253 Dōgen was generally known only as the founder of Sōtō Zen who required strict adherence to zazen practice in contrast to the Rinzai Zen emphasis on kōan exercises, and his works were unfamiliar to those outside the sect. Watsuji's crucial 1926 monograph, "Shamon Dōgen" (Monk Dōgen), part of a series on the foundations of Japanese spirituality, is credited with singlehandedly rescuing Dōgen from sectarian oblivion and appropriating his life and works for their universal relevance in a contemporary,

comparative philosophical setting. Watsuji sought to discover the "truth" (*shinri*) of Dōgen as a "person" (*hito*) who is not just a cult figure but belongs to all humanity.) For Watsuji, the true meaning of Dōgen is discovered by grasping the universalizable philosophical, religious, and moral implications of his major work, the *Shōbōgenzō*, rather than following the precepts of the sect founded in his name.

Since Watsuji's monumental initial commentary, Dōgen studies have progressed in two seemingly opposite but complementary directions: speculative, comparative examination by thinkers either in or, like Watsuji, associated with the Kyoto school of Japanese philosophy (also known as the Nishida-Tanabe philosophical tradition); and Tokyo-based scholarship focusing on textual and biographical issues. Nishida Kitarō, founder of the Kyoto school, cited Dōgen in his writings from time to time. Some of Nishida's philosophical notions, such as the "continuity of discontinuity" (*hirenzoku no renzoku*), seemed to be influenced by Dōgen's understanding of time expressed in the doctrine of the "abiding dharma-stage" (*jū-hōi*) encompassing the immediacy of "right-now" (*nikon*) and the continuity of "passageless-passage" (*kyōryaku*). Perhaps the most illuminating early philosophical study is the 1939 essay by Tanabe, Nishida's foremost follower (and critic), entitled *Shōbōgenzō no tetsugaku shikan* (My Philosophical View of Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*). Tanabe analyzed Dōgen's views on language, time, and history in terms of his own understanding of absolute reality, and he situated the original thinker as an important figure not only in Japanese intellectual history but at the forefront of international philosophy. A series of lectures on Dōgen ("*Shōbōgenzō kōwa*") by Nishitani, former "dean" (d. 1990) of the Kyoto school, was published in the journal *Kyōdai* over several years beginning in 1966, and in book form in 1988. Nishitani examined Dōgen's approach to metaphysics, mysticism, meditation, and morality in comparative light with Western thought from the pre-Socratics through medieval theology to existential phenomenology. Karaki's 1967 essay "Mujō no keijijōgaku—Dōgen" (Dōgen's Metaphysics of Impermanence), the concluding section of his monograph *Mujō* (Impermanence), evaluated the Zen master's radical affirmation of impermanence in relation to death and dying, and being and time, as the culminative point in the typically Japanese contemplative view of transient reality. Also, Inaga's 1955 essay "Dōgen no shūkyō no rekishiteki seikaku" (The Historical Character of Dōgen's Religion) examined

Dōgen's approach to spirituality in terms of the ideological unfolding of medieval Japanese Buddhism.

Tokyo-based studies have been conducted primarily by scholars at Komazawa University, formerly the Sōtō-sect University and now a leading center of Buddhist studies in Japan. These include Etō Sokuō's commentaries on the *Shōbōgenzō* and interpretation of Dōgen as "founder of the sect" (*Shūso to shitenō Dōgen zenji*, 1944), and Kagamishima Genryū's analysis of Dōgen's citations of Mahayana Buddhist scriptures and Zen recorded sayings (*Dōgen zenji to in'yō kyōten-goroku no kenkyū*, 1965). To cite a couple of other prominent examples from amongst the dozens of outstanding works, Ōkubo Dōshū of Tohoku University has collected the definitive version of Dōgen's complete works (*Dōgen zenji zenshū*, 1970) that is cited throughout this volume, and Tamaki Kōshirō of Tokyo University published a challenging philosophical translation of selected portions of the *Shōbōgenzō* in modern Japanese (*Dōgen sho*, 1969).

Masao Abe's method of studying Dōgen is a combination of Kyoto-school speculation and Tokyo-based textual scholarship. In order to assess Abe's contribution to this field, we must take into account his considerable background and wide-ranging interests in Zen and Western thought. A close associate of Nishida, Tanabe, and Nishitani, Abe ranks as one of the leading representatives of the Kyoto school. Like his colleagues, his main philosophical concern is to construct a dynamic synthesis of Western philosophy and religion and the Mahayana tradition. Abe has also been strongly influenced by D. T. Suzuki and Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, and he shares their commitment to Zen as a form of religious praxis over and above philosophical theory. Abe was a visiting professor of Buddhism and Japanese philosophy for over twenty years at major American colleges and universities, and since Suzuki's death he has become the leader in interpreting Zen thought based on traditional sources in comparative light with the West. In addition, he is deeply involved in promoting Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Abe's award-winning first book, *Zen and Western Thought* (1985), a collection of his most important essays, deals with four main areas concerning the origins and contemporary relevance of Zen: a philosophical clarification of Zen awakening against charges of anti-intellectualism or intuitionism; an explication of the Zen approach to negation, nonbeing, and nothingness; a focus on Buddhism as a compassionate way of life; and the proposal of a Zen-oriented new cosmology, rather than humanism, as a