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St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology

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First published: 28 March 2024

https://www.saet.ac.uk/Buddhism/Dogen

Citation

Raud, Rein. 2024. 'Dōgen (1200–1253)', *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*. Edited by Brendan N. Wolfe et al. https://www.saet.ac.uk/Buddhism/Dogen Accessed: 5 June 2026

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ISSN 2753-3492

Dōgen (1200–1253)

Rein Raud

Dōgen can without any doubt be considered one of the most important Japanese thinkers of all times. An aristocrat by birth, he entered the head monastery of the Tendai school favoured by the nobility at an early age, left it when he did not find satisfactory answers to his questions, later studied briefly with the first Japanese Zen monks and then left for China, where he studied with Tiantong Rujing (1163–1228) of the Caodong Chan tradition. This is the tradition Dōgen later inaugurated in Japan as Sōtō Zen, which has since become the most populous branch of Zen Buddhism. Trying, for a number of years, to establish himself in the capital, Dōgen was not very satisfied with the result of his activities and upon receiving an invitation from a provincial samurai leader, moved to the Echizen area, where one of the headquarters of the Sōtō school are still situated.

The idiosyncratic concept of practice articulated by Dōgen differs from the entire Buddhist tradition before him in two main respects. On the one hand, according to Dōgen, there is no gap between practice and enlightenment – in other words, ‘enlightenment’ is not a threshold the practitioner has to cross in order to attain an altered state of mind, but anyone can ever only be enlightened while practicing. On the other hand, however, ‘practice’ does not consist solely in the performance of certain psychotechnical exercises, such as seated meditation, but is primarily a state of the bodymind, here termed ‘praxis’, which can and should extend beyond actual practicing. Thus, any activity of the practitioner, such as washing oneself, cooking food or performing any other everyday task can constitute ‘praxis’. These views are grounded in a sophisticated philosophical worldview that Dōgen has expounded throughout his works and were also implemented by him as principles of monastic life, especially during the later years of his life.

Keywords: Dōgen, Sōtō Zen, Time, Non-dualism, Enlightenment, Praxis, Presence, Buddha-nature, Non-thinking

Table of contents

1 Dōgen’s life

Dōgen lived during the early years of the Kamakura period (1185–1333) when the Japanese state and society were going through changes of a fundamental nature. The devastating civil wars of the latter half of the twelfth century had demonstrated the weakness of court nobility as the holders of political power, which shifted into the hands of the samurai estate as a result. This brought with it also a reform of Buddhism, which had hitherto been a mostly elitist worldview. New reform movements rejected the complex metaphysical reasoning and the highly elaborate rituals of the dominant schools. Some of the innovators started to spread teachings that addressed the fears and hopes of the common people, claiming that the 'end times' had arrived and people were unable to free themselves from the predicament on their own, needing supernatural guidance. Others, including the importers of Chan/Zen, applied more to the ethos of the samurai estate by claiming that every individual possesses inborn resources, which can lead to enlightenment by cutting through the conceptual clutter that does not let us see our own nature directly. Nominally, Dōgen’s thought is a part of that latter effort, although his teaching diverges considerably from what finally established itself as mainstream Zen, and in his own times the complicated nature and philosophical depth of his writings did not do much to increase their popular appeal.

Unlike most Buddhist reformers of the Kamakura period, Dōgen was born in the epicentre of court culture. His mother was called Ishi, she was the daughter of Fujiwara no Motofusa (1144–1230), an influential court official. Ishi was reportedly also one of the most famous beauties of the time. She had had a sad fate, however, as she had been given as a wife to the samurai leader of an army that conquered and pillaged the capital, but later fell in disgrace himself with his overlords. Ishi had thus married below her status, to a man she detested, and her husband had been proclaimed a traitor in addition to that. Later, Ishi was married for the second time to Minamoto no Michichika (1149–1202), an elderly statesman and master of political intrigue. It is unclear whether Dōgen’s father is Michichika or his son Michitomo (1171–1227), a renowned poet, who was reportedly a more frequent visitor to Ishi’s house and helped to raise Dōgen after Michichika’s death (see Moriya 1995 for further discussion).

At her deathbed, Ishi told Dōgen to renounce the court career his relatives had been preparing him for, and he followed his mother’s advice, entering the Tendai school monastery of Yokawa on Mt Hiei in 1213. However, he was soon disappointed with the situation there, as Buddhist clergy had become increasingly involved with worldly affairs and learning was in decline. The doctrine of the Tendai school included the teaching about original enlightenment, or the idea that all beings are actually enlightened, just entangled in worldly affairs to the extent that this enlightenment has been buried under illusions. However, when Dōgen asked why it is necessary for him to practice in order to attain this

enlightenment if he is enlightened already, he did not receive a satisfactory answer from his teachers and eventually left the mountain.

His search finally led him to seek advice with Myōzen (1184–1225), the lead disciple of Eisai (Yōsai, 1141–1215), who is usually considered to be the first importer of the Chan/Zen school to Japan. At Myōzen's advice and together with him, Dōgen decided in 1223 to travel to China for further study. One of the first deep impressions he had in China was an encounter with a monastery cook, who had come to the harbour to purchase mushrooms Japanese ships usually carried, and during the dialogue Dōgen first encountered the idea that daily tasks can be of equal importance to goal-oriented Buddhist practice – an idea that later became one of the central tenets of his doctrines.

Dōgen studied in several main Chan monasteries of the present-day Zhejiang province, but remained unsatisfied with all of the teachers he met until 1225, when he visited the Qingdesi temple near the port of Ningbo. This is where Dōgen settled down, with Tiantong Rujing (1163–1228) of the Caodong Chan tradition, who became his teacher. Rujing is reported to have been an egalitarian and serious master, whose authority impressed Dōgen greatly. He was also the only Chan teacher outside the dominant Linji fraction who had been appointed the leader of such an eminent temple as Qingdesi (Bodiford 1993: 224).

After receiving the seal of approval from Rujing in 1227, Dōgen returned to Japan and started to look for sponsors, who could support him in establishing his own temple. Due to the rise of tensions within the Tendai community, to which the first Zen and Pure Land temples officially still belonged, in 1230 he left the Tendai temple, where he lived, and took up residence in a small chapel south of the capital. His first texts are traditionally thought to have been written in that period – a seated meditation manual *Fukan Zazengi* ('Universal principles of seated meditation') in 1227 and *Bendōwa* ('Telling the Way') a short summary of Dōgen's views in their form of that time, in 1231. The date of the first work is based on its mention in the second, however, the colophon of the earliest extant manuscript of *Fukan Zazengi* dates it to 1233 and the version in broader circulation, which differs from it significantly, is dated by Carl Bielefeldt to 1240s (1988: 39). The *Bendōwa*, which looks like a claim of superior understanding and a tacit call for support, did not enter wider circulation at that time, however, and was most probably only read by Dōgen's first disciples.

Soon, Dōgen secured enough support to begin building his own temple. By 1232, he had even attracted enough disciples of his own to conduct an intense Zen training period (Bodiford 1993: 24). The 1230s were the most productive and possibly happiest years of his life. In those years, he supervised the construction works of his temple, called Kōshōhōrinji (which has not survived), meant to become the first Chinese-style Zen temple in Japan. During that period, Dōgen also wrote the bulk of the essays that are

included in his most famous work, the *Shōbōgenzō* (hereinafter SBGZ), which takes its title from the foundational myth of the Chan school. *Shōbōgenzō*, or literally 'the storehouse of the eye of the true law', refers to the teaching that Buddha allegedly transmitted to Mahākāśyapa in private, after the latter had spontaneously smiled when the Buddha showed a flower to his disciples without any rationalizing comment. The smile is supposed to have demonstrated superior understanding, singling Mahākāśyapa out for the safekeeping of the most precious part of Buddhist teaching, on which the Chan school claims to rely. This is why the title of this work is often translated verbatim as 'Treasury of the True Dharma Eye', which is exoticizing, as Dōgen (and other authors who have borrowed the same title from this myth) presumably intended it to convey their claim to express the secret core of the Buddhist teaching.

Dōgen's community continued to grow as did his reputation, which soon caused tensions with the Tendai authorities. Dōgen had cut his ties with the institution, but had not been authorized to establish a new school. He himself did not consider his teaching to constitute a separate school – on the contrary, he regarded the very idea of the dividing the teaching into schools as a grievous mistake – but this was not how the Buddhist communities were seen by the institutions of the state. Certain other communities, for example the Darumashū consisting of the followers of Dainichibō Nōnin, who had tried to establish Chinese-style Chan/Zen in Japan in the 1190s, had attracted serious trouble as a result of non-compliance with the state authorities. Doctrinally, Dōgen was very critical of this school, but when the Tendai institutions cracked down on it, Dōgen accepted many of its former members into his own community, including Ejō, who became his main disciple and heir.

This, of course, did not endear him with the Tendai authorities at all. In 1242, as tensions continued to mount, Dōgen decided to accept the invitation of Hatano Yoshishige, a powerful samurai lord from the Echizen area, to move his headquarters there, a safe distance from the intrigues of the capital. A temple called Daibutsuji was built for him, and though the conditions were not comparable to those in the capital, his school now had a more secure footing. In 1246, the name of his temple was changed into Eiheiji, which it still bears today. Dōgen's manner of teaching changed in these later years, however, gradually leaving behind the philosophical style of his earlier years. While some scholars see his late work as the pinnacle of his teaching, others criticize it for its bitter tone and ever-growing obsession with discipline. Dōgen's health also deteriorated. In 1252, he gave up his position as the head of the temple and transferred his responsibilities to Ejō, soon thereafter travelled to the capital in search of better medical care, and died there in 1253.

2 Dōgen's works

The authority of Dōgen as a thinker is based on the SBGZ, of which there are several versions. Dōgen himself continued to edit and re-edit the collection over the years, additions were also made by his disciples, and the editing has continued over centuries so that the present versions include texts that Dōgen himself did – quite certainly – not consider to be a part of the collection. The currently canonical version only emerged in the early twentieth century. For example, a separate cycle of late period essays, called the 'twelve fascicle SBGZ' has now been included in the canonical, ninety-five fascicle version, but is absent from the seventy-five-fascicle version, which is the largest one dating back to Dōgen's own times.

Uncharacteristically for serious Buddhist works of the time, the SBGZ is written in Japanese rather than Chinese. On the one hand, this demonstrates the intent of Dōgen to address larger audiences, however, on the other, it is also the only possible way for him to expound his idiosyncratic views, which often derive from deliberate misinterpretations of quotations from Chinese sources. For example, one of his most famous innovative concepts, uji, 'the existential moment' or 'being-time', is a misreading of an ordinary, colloquial Chinese expression 'at a certain time'. (This and other linguistic strategies of Dōgen are discussed in detail in Kim 1985.)

Such conceptualizations abound in Dōgen's work and make it extremely hard to interpret, which is also why his philosophical legacy was not widely known outside Zen circles up to the twentieth century, when Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960) published a lengthy essay on Dōgen (1926) and 'single-handedly rescued Dōgen from obscurity' (Bein 2011: 9), so that many other philosophically oriented readers of the time also became interested in him.

In addition to the SBGZ, Dōgen has left behind many smaller essays that have not been included in the collection, as well as two more extensive works. The *Shōbōgenzō zuimonki* ('Notes of Transmission Talks') is a record of his conversations with Ejō over a few years in late 1230s, and *Eihei Kōroku* ('The Eihei Record') is a collection of formal and informal discourses as well as separate utterances, written in Chinese and following the generic pattern of 'recorded saying' (*yulu*) by Chinese Chan masters.

A final collection to be mentioned in the list of Dōgen's works is *Eihei shingi*, 'The Eiheiji Norms of Purity', which includes the celebrated essay 'Instructions for the Cook' (1237) and a few later texts written during the Eiheiji period, detailing the norms of comportment for the monks. In the presently available form, *Eihei shingi* has not been put together by Dōgen, however, but was compiled into a single text only in 1667.

3 The philosophical roots of Dōgen's theory of practice

One of the principal problems of Buddhism always has been the overcoming of dualism. On the one hand, Buddhism denies the validity of strict binary oppositions as a way to adequately describe reality, on the other, however, any discourse of 'non-dualism' has to be articulated in opposition to dualism, which makes it an example of what it tries to negate. This is why many Buddhist thinkers, including influential figures of the Chan/Zen school, have often been sceptical about the capability of language to say the essential.

The solution offered to this problem by Dōgen is a rather ingenious one. The Chan/Zen school before him had conceptualized the experience of enlightenment as an irreversible, momentarily reachable threshold that reorganized the entire experience of the practitioner, who would thereafter be liberated from the bondage of illusions and see reality for what it is. Dōgen, however, as argued by Yorizumi Mitsuko (2014: 120–129) and Tsujiguchi Yūichirō (2012: 60ff.), distinguished between two mutually incompatible registers of understanding. In the dualistic register, the non-dual and the dualist understanding of the world were indeed opposable to each other. In the non-dual register this was no longer the case – there was just ‘understanding’. ‘Enlightenment’ is, in this view, not a world-transforming experience, but a state of mind that can be entered and exited. The state of mind called 'enlightenment' is no more and no less than what a practitioner of Dōgen-style Zen experiences during practice.

The parallel between this distinction and the ‘two truths’ theory of the Mādhyamaka school suggests itself: according to Nāgārjuna, (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24.8, see also 1995: 296), there is the ‘ultimate truth’ that captures the being of reality as it actually is, in fleeting impermanence, and the 'shared truth' which can be affirmed or denied about linguistically articulated statements about that reality. The Tendai school, the doctrines of which Dōgen initially studied, added a third truth to this scheme, maintaining that the two truths of Nāgārjuna were fundamentally true in the same way. More than that: ‘The perfect threefold truth is that it is not only the Middle Path which completely includes the Buddha Dharma, but also the real and the mundane [truths]. This threefold truth is perfectly integrated; one-in-three and three-in-one’ (Zhiyi in *Fahuaxuanyi*, translated by Swanson 1989: 253). Based on this view, Brook Ziporyn argues that ‘for Tiantai Buddhists time simply is the continual “opening of the provisional to reveal the real”’ and thus

> each moment of time is the bringing forth of not only a new set of changing events but also a new set of ‘eternal principles’—omnipresent conditions, rules, requirements, regularities, coherences, laws, universals. Each moment is effectively the creation of a new space-time that determines anew the character of the everything in the universe and of all the past and future. (Ziporyn 2016: 171)

This view, the origins of which can be traced back to the Buddhist ontological revolution of Gandhāran abhidharma scholars (Bronkhorst 2016: 29–32) is closely related to the

theory of time in Dōgen's system, summarized in the *Uji* fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō*, which is perhaps its most thoroughly studied aspect of his thought. The traditional interpretation of the concept of *uji* has been that time, understood in the Aristotelian manner as measurable duration, has been equated by Dōgen to 'being'. On a closer look, however, this interpretation is not supported by textual material. There are two legitimate ways to interpret the key passages of the fascicle in question – either *uji* designates individual time-regimes of particular existents (Moriyama and Sakon 2020), or the term is interpretable as 'the existential moment' of the dimensionless now, in which all situations and existents are simply to be viewed as 'dharma-configurations', momentary patterns of elementary and dimensionless flashes of being (Raud 2012). The textual corpus of Dōgen offers a certain amount of support for both interpretations. However, given that the world can be apprehended both through the dualist and non-dualist register of understanding as outlined above, it is not necessary to oppose these two views to each other: the reading relying on particular time-regimes corresponds to the binary way of understanding things, the 'existential moment' is how reality appears from the non-dualist perspective.

4 Practice versus praxis

One term Dōgen frequently employs as a synonym for 'enlightenment' is *shinjin-datsuraku*, 'dropping off the bodymind', a phrase allegedly uttered by Rujing, hearing which Dōgen himself attained enlightenment. (Some scholars have cast doubt on the authenticity of this story.) This can be interpreted as the straying of the practitioner from the trajectory to which their bodily and mental determinations would otherwise confine them: when we consider the individual to be fully determined by the intersecting mental and physical causal chains reaching out into the past, we will end up thinking that the individual can only act, as determined, also at present and regarding the future. This would evidently make all practice superfluous – if we were to be engaged in it, and perhaps even gain something by it, this would only occur as a result of our being predetermined to practice in this particular manner. For an act of practice to be meaningful, it needs to originate in a breaking point, a moment of liberating oneself from the determinations, which are constitutive of the world as seen in the binary register of understanding.

In the 'Royal Concentration' (*Zammai ōzammai*) fascicle, Dōgen has made a distinction between two kinds of practice related to the two registers of understanding:

> There is the 'just-sitting' of the mind, which is different from the 'just-sitting' of the body. There is the 'just-sitting' of the body, which is different from the 'just-sitting' of the mind. (T2582.82.0243c29).

For the sake of clarity, the two forms of practice will be henceforth referred to as 'practice' and 'praxis': the word 'practice' will be used to mean any formalized activity the practitioner

undertakes as prescribed by religious discipline, such as *zazen*, seated meditation (or the recitation of mantras, worshipping images, etc.) while 'praxis' is any way of authentic enactment of the principles upon which this discipline is based. Praxis, in the view of Dōgen, is enlightenment; to distinguish them is a mistake, these two are the same thing (T2582.82.0018b26-28). The rule of thumb derived from this idea is that any enlightenment should not be sought outside praxis – whenever one ceases to practice with the entirety of one's bodymind, one cannot also claim to partake of enlightenment. This view of praxis has led to the downgrading of quite a few things traditionally considered essential parts of monastic life, such as rituals – sitting meditation was the primary form of practice a Zen adept needed. In 'Telling the Way' (*Bendōwa*) as well as in several fascicles of the SBGZ, Dōgen reproduces a statement by his teacher Rujing saying that there is no need for any other form of practice than sitting meditation. All other traditional practices in temples, such as prostrations, incense-burning, festive text recitals and so on are unnecessary (T2582.82.0015c27-0016a01). These can be used as 'skilful means' or social codes, as long as the adept remembers they are not essentially more meaningful than any other activity.

However, the equation of enlightenment and praxis also contained a deeper layer. It was thought to be possible for the practitioner to eventually transpose the inner disposition achievable during meditation also to other activities, so that the most ordinary daily tasks could also become praxis.

In sum, praxis is simply the complete presence of the mind in what is taking place, without a split occurring between the action performed and the mind that thinks about it:

> When a bird is flying through the sky, this is just the event of skyflying. The bird does not reflect on its activity of skyflying. This is because skyflying is the entire universe and the entire universe is skyflying (T2582.82.0120b24).

In other words, an activity performed as praxis is where the doer and the deed become one 'existential moment' and from the particular point of view within that moment, that event is everything that takes place at all. In the 'Washing the Face' (*Semmen*) fascicle, one that Dōgen presented to the assembly three times over the years to underscore its importance, he elaborates further on how a daily activity can turn into an act of praxis:

> How could water contain an original purity? Or impurity? Even if it were pure or impure essentially, it could not be said that any place it reaches would become pure or impure because of it. Only if you yourself hold on to the practice of the Buddhas and the ancestors, is the teaching contained in using water to wash yourself, getting clean through water transmitted to you. This is why, in praxis, you must rise above purity and penetrate through impurity and cast away both not-purity and not-impurity. In this way, both washing what is not yet defiled and washing what is greatly clean is a method maintained by the followers

> of the way of the Buddhas and ancestors only, something that remains unknown to all outsiders (T2582.82.0210b17–c01).

Washing yourself is praxis, if you do it as praxis. Even getting drunk may be done as praxis (T2582.82.0237b28). This is an idea Dōgen developed even further during his later years and which finally materialized in the set of strict monastic rules, *Eihei shingi*. These detail even minor aspects of behaviour, for example the proper way to take one's meals. Dōgen appeared to presuppose that such codification would make monks mindful, or enable them to see their entire life as praxis.

5 'Going beyond the buddha'

The Chan/Zen tradition has a long history of warning its practitioners about the dangers of unquestioning attachment to the signifiers of their teaching. Linji's phrase 'if you meet a buddha, kill him; if you meet an ancestor, kill him' (T1985.47.0500b22–23) is certainly not to be understood as an incitement to violence, but as an antinomian admonition not to recognize any blindly obeyed authorities. Dōgen, too, speaks about 'buddha-addiction' and 'dharma-addiction' (T2582.82.0101b08). Sometimes these terms are translated as 'buddha-demons' and 'dharma-demons', implying malevolent agency (Dōgen 2008a: II 43), however, the terms follow the same lexical pattern as 'wine-demons/addiction' (i.e. 'alcoholism'). It has occasionally been argued that Dōgen's position is not antinomian, and that he actually attributed considerable importance to rituals (Foulk 2012), but this may also be understood in the same way as seated meditation prepares the practitioner for learning to experience things in praxis.

The idea of what buddhahood means for Dōgen also differs considerably from the usual. He frequently refers to the authors he quotes as 'old buddhas' and to the tradition he considers himself to be the heir of, as 'buddhas and ancestors'. Any statement of value can be called 'a buddha-word' (*butsugon*). The longest fascicle of the SBGZ, and one of the philosophically most challenging, discusses 'buddha-nature', a concept inherited from the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine and prominently discussed in Tendai thought, which refers to the capacity of every sentient being to become enlightened. In Tendai philosophy, suchness is equated with buddhahood (Heisig, Kasulis and Maraldo 2011: 97–101). Dōgen develops that thought and states that all existents, including mountains and rivers for example, are sentient beings in the broadest meaning of the word, and therefore 'buddha-nature' pertains to everything that is (T2582.82.0093a21). In that sense, we can interpret 'buddha-nature' as the universal within the particular, including ourselves – it is what we share with all other existents. However, if we start to look for anything concrete that we share with everything and everyone else, we find nothing. And this 'nothing', the unfeasibility of any permanent ground or final point of reference, is precisely what 'buddha-nature' signifies (Raud 2015). Just as in set theory, every set contains an empty set, in

Dōgen's ontology, every existent is, in part, determined not only by the presence, but also by the absence of further determinations, which is what its 'buddha-nature' consists in. Were this not the case, we may infer, then we would be wholly determined by what has constituted us, physically and mentally, and therefore unable to 'drop off the bodymind'. However, as long as we continue to reify this nothing, or consider it to be an object that can be looked for, we remain in the binary register of understanding, as we see ourselves and 'buddha-nature' as ontologically separate.

The idea of 'going beyond the buddha' (*bukkō jōji*) is a term occasionally used by Dōgen for the designation of the dynamic and communicative nature of the non-dual register of relating to the world. In a fascicle with that same title, Dōgen quotes from Dongshan Liangjie (807–869), who has asserted that 'going beyond the buddha' is necessary for the somatic understanding of his teaching, and that it consists in what is heard when he does not speak (T1986A.47.0510a09). In Dōgen's explanation, this 'going beyond the buddha' is what is attained in somatic understanding – it is not explainable by causal chains, nor is it a manifestation of previous karmic determinations. However, it is the dynamic content of the somatic understanding that is being communicated in the act of a Zen transmission (T2582.82.0121a2–29). We again see a double layer of meaning: for the binary register of understanding, 'going beyond the buddha' signifies the need to de-reify the idea of buddhahood, to detach it from any particular person or achievement, and for the non-dual register of understanding, it means the need not to stop, not to consider any internal moment of realized transience to be that nothingness or 'buddha-nature' one knows to be the only characteristic of existence shared with all other entities. 'Buddha-nature' is necessarily dynamic, and can only be realized in going beyond it, in letting go.

6 Dōgen's manuals of meditation and 'Instructions for the Cook'

The psychotechnical exercise of seated meditation is one that has been traditionally stressed in the lineage of Dōgen as the main, if not the only, actually relevant form of Buddhist practice. It is therefore no wonder that Dōgen has, throughout his life, returned to the topic of its procedural form repeatedly. A meditation manual was among the earliest texts written by him after his return from China, and his later collections contain edited versions of what must have been the original text. In his classic study of the development of Dōgen's thought on the topic (1988), Carl Bielefeldt has highlighted the similarities and differences between Dōgen's versions of the treatise from various years and analysed the textual history on the topic. What should be noted is Dōgen's early reliance on a meditation manual by Changlu Zongze, composed probably around 1103 as a part of a monastic code, the earliest text of its kind (Bielefeldt 1986: 130–131). Gradually, however,

Dōgen moves on from this early perspective and introduces his own views, which differ considerably from those of his Chinese predecessor (Bielefeldt 1988: 133–134).

Perhaps the most mature form of Dōgen's theory of meditation is the one contained in the *Zazenshin* ('The Needle of Seated Meditation') fascicle of the SBGZ, which elaborates on the psychological aspects of the exercise. The discussion is set in motion by a quotation from Yaoshan:

> Great master Yaoshan Hongdao was sitting, when a monk asked: 'When [the mind is] at rest, what thought is there?'
> The master said: 'It is the thought [that occurs] during not-thinking'.
> The monk said: 'What kind of thoughts do you have during not-thinking?'
> The master said: 'Non-thoughts'. (T2582.82.0116b11–12, originally T2076.51.0311c26–28)

The original used two negations here in conjunction with the word '(rational) thinking/thought', *fu* and *hi*, which, in Chinese usage, normally signify the verbal and nominal meaning of the word respectively, but which Dōgen, in his usual manner, distinguishes in order to express conceptual differences, or two kinds of negativity: *fu* is the 'contrary' negative, to borrow terms from Greimas (1987: 49–50), stating that the action characterized by it does not take place, while *hi* represents a 'contradictory' negative, which opposes the word it characterizes to how we normally understand it. For example, when someone is intoxicated and decides not to use their car, this would be *fu*-driving, because the act of 'driving' does not take place. Sitting behind the wheel in the circumstances, on the other hand, would be *hi*-driving, because this act completely ignores the rules and regulations under which 'driving' normally happens. Similarly – as can also be inferred from the quoted story – *hi*-thinking is not the absence of any mental activity whatsoever, but something that does not correspond to the accepted definition of what 'thinking' means. Thus, we might interpret the word used here (*shiryō*) more appropriately invoking its entire dictionary meaning, that is, as 'thinking with measures', or 'thinking in quantities', while *fushiryō* would then be 'the unthinkable-unmeasurable' and *hishiryō* 'thinking not with measures, not in quantities'.

What makes the Chan/Zen position special is not specifically the separation of the two negatives, as this can be witnessed also in earlier writings, but the advocation of directing one of them toward the other. We also know that any Buddhist mediation exercise supposedly brings about the dissolution of the meditating subject – to speak of 'goals' in the context of Dōgen's theory of practice is inappropriate – which raises the additional question of whether *hi*-thinking is an activity of an agent at all. If not, then this would be a very natural reason for opposing it to *fu*-thinking, since the latter, like any other *fu*-action, can always be attributed to an identifiable subject.

Against this background, then, ‘non-thinking’ should not be seen as a mysterious intellectual activity beyond ‘thinking’ and ‘not-thinking’. It should be interpreted as the free flow of mental images that are not captured in categories and given verbalizable form, or even more precisely as the empowerment of the entire range of thought processes as opposed to the concentration on their highlighted content, the logically proceeding chain of thought operations performed on a particular object. In ‘non-thinking’, the rest of the mental faculties are not bracketed away from the thinking consciousness. In ‘non-thinking’, one can have thought-moments that one cannot fully conceptualize and does not have to immediately relate any emerging thought-element to a place in the ongoing chain. The thinking of an artist or a composer, in colours and sounds rather than categories, or an athlete, with the entire body rather than with the central avenue of the intellect alone, is ‘non-thinking’ as, indeed, the fruitful interaction between Zen and the arts (including martial arts) in Japan suggests. This aspect of the term also comprises the freedom embodied in ‘non-thinking’, the freedom of associations, the freedom from the rules of conventional logic and language – a freedom of which the interpretational practices of the SBGZ are themselves a good example.

‘Non-thinking’ should thus be understood as the mental element of the more holistic idea of *praxis*, which is somatically embedded in reality and participates in the dynamic process of existence as a particular. From early on, Dōgen has stressed the compatibility of the non-dual state of mind with any activity that can be undertaken on the daily basis, with the engagement of the whole bodymind. One of the most widely circulated texts where this view has been stressed is *Tenzo Kyōkun*, ‘Instructions for the Cook’. This short essay, written in 1237 and later included in the *Eihei shingi* collection, is noteworthy for the way in which it conceptualizes of praxis as transferable to the daily activities of the monastery, showing that the chores and tasks monks have to do, if conducted with the proper mind of praxis, amount to the same as practice in seated meditation.

7 The reception of Dōgen’s thought

Dōgen’s position at the head of the Sōtō school was inherited by Ejō (1198–1280), his chief disciple and interlocutor in the *Shōbōgenzō zuimonki* (‘Notes of Transmission Talks’), but soon afterwards, and not without heated succession debates, the school took a completely different direction under the guidance of Keizan Jōkin (1268–1325). Keizan integrated popular religious beliefs in the spirit world and shamanistic practices into the teachings of the school, building his reputation on miraculous stories about himself (Bodiford 1993: 88–92) so that its connections to Dōgen became merely formal. Thus, in spite of the early commentaries of the SBGZ composed by Sen’e and Kyōgo, which might have inaugurated a serious scholarly tradition, Dōgen’s work remained out of circulation for a long time, except for a small number of intellectually curious Sōtō masters such as

Nishiari Bokusan (1821–1910), whose work was instrumental in raising awareness of Dōgen's work within the Sōtō community itself.

Virtually hidden from the rest of the world by the Zen circles of the Sōtō school for almost seven centuries, Dōgen's thought thus emerged onto the broader intellectual scene only after the Meiji restauration of 1868. During this period, Japan renewed its communications with the outside world and started to re-evaluate its own cultural tradition, which included introspection to identify aspects of Japanese culture that would make it a cultural equal of the Western powers. Watsuji Tetsurō's *Nihon seishinshi kenkyū*, 'A Study of the History of the Japanese Spirit', published between 1925 and 1935, contained the first introduction of Dōgen and his thought to the general public, though several articles had been previously published in specialized philosophical journals. Ralf Müller has shown how Dōgen has even influenced the formation of the concept of philosophy in Japan in a thorough overview of his early Japanese reception (2019: 174–199). In Japan, the reception of Dōgen's thought can presently be divided into four main areas, which have a certain amount of overlap. First, there are the Sōtō school priests, who comment on Dōgen's work for the purposes of spiritual activity. Second, there are denominational scholars, who practice and study Zen at the same time, and bring the insights of their spiritual experience to the field of academic attention. Third, there are lay academics, who study Dōgen's work for its intellectual merit, some of them are also lay practitioners of Zen, while others are not. Finally, there are lay popularizers, who use Dōgen's ideas in the context, and for the purposes, of other spheres of life, such as Murayama Yukinori in his book *Shōbōgenzō no keieiryoku* (The Shōbōgenzō as a Resource for Management, 2010).

Dōgen has certainly also established a reputation in the West. Certain motifs in Dōgen's thought, notably the similarity between one of his key concepts, *uji*, and the title of Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927), first attracted students of Heidegger to Dōgen's work, especially since the connections between Heidegger and the Japanese philosophy of the Kyōto school, also strongly influenced by Dōgen and Zen thought in general, have come to be more widely known. The first philosophical studies of Dōgen to appear in Western languages were mostly comparisons with Heidegger's thought (Abe 1992; Heine 1985), or authored by Heideggerians (Stambaugh 1990). This helped to advance the study of Dōgen considerably, and up to this time he remains one of the authors most discussed in the circles of comparative philosophy.

The first serious translations of Dōgen's work were selections of key essays, produced as collaborations of Japanese and Western researchers (1985; 2002), and full translations of the SBGZ were soon to follow. Currently there are four full English translations of the work in circulation (Dōgen 1975; 2008a; 2010b; 2023), as well as two in French (Dōgen 2014; 2022) and one in German (Dōgen 2008b). There are also translations of other works, notably a full English rendering of the *Eihei kōroku* (Dōgen 2010a). New scholarly work is

being produced constantly. However, the discussion of Dōgen's thought outside Japan has not remained limited to the domain of specialist studies, particularly after the Zen school of Buddhism has started to attract attention among Westerners. His wider appeal is also certainly enhanced by the appearance of such popularizations as Warner and Dōgen 2016 as well as translations of works on him by Japanese Sōtō priests (Okumura 2010; Uchiyama 2018; Yasutani 1996). In 2016, the astrophysicist Adam Frank called Dōgen 'the greatest philosopher you have never heard of' (Frank 2016), but while his evaluation of Dōgen's greatness still stands, the chance that anyone intellectually curious has actually heard of Dōgen has grown exponentially in the meantime.

It is nonetheless the case that there are very few aspects in Dōgen's work about which there is a scholarly consensus, and even translations can differ from each other occasionally to the point of unrecognizability. This article, too, is based primarily on my own idiosyncratic interpretations of Dōgen, and many scholars would very likely find themselves in disagreement with some of its interpretations. Given the nature of Dōgen's philosophizing, this cannot be escaped, however, so it is likely that a vigorous debate will go on concerning his thought well into the future.

8 Conclusions: the relevance of Dōgen's teaching for the world of today

Dōgen lived and worked in a historical setting very different from ours, therefore it is legitimate to ask if his thought could actually be relevant for us in some context or other, in the present world. It is also true that most of Dōgen's writing is directed to an audience of spiritual professionals or at least ardent lay practitioners of Zen, and there are quite a few fascicles in his work that extol the virtues of monastic life. However, there are certain key aspects of Dōgen's thought that can be said to exceed the limits of his era and context. The first of these is raising the potential of any being to partake of 'buddhahood' to the status of a core aspect of existence itself, thereby proclaiming the equality of all beings on a very basic level. This has become especially relevant in the context of the climate crisis, for which the human-centred approach to nature has been responsible. What Dōgen has posited is a fundamental lack of hierarchical, qualitative difference between all entities, even sentient and insentient ones (which, to be noted, certainly does not nullify relative, domain-bound hierarchical differences, for example between criminals and law-abiding citizens). The fact that I can walk more quickly than a snail, however, does not make me intrinsically better than the snail. The second point in Dōgen's thought that could be helpful to anyone is the central duo of his practice-related views – there is no gap between praxis and enlightenment, and any activity, conducted in the appropriate state of mind, equals praxis. This latter claim certainly also includes the study of Dōgen's work.

Attributions

East Asian Buddhist texts are quoted according to the Taishō Daizōkyō edition, available online at https://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT2018/master30.php (interface in Japanese). All translations are the author's if not otherwise indicated.

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