



WISDOM ACADEMY

Buddhist Philosophy in Depth, Part 3

JAY GARFIELD

Lessons 5:
Dogen and the Formation of Soto Zen

Reading:
Eihei Dogen: Mystical Realist
“Dogen’s Life,” pages 13 - 49

THE CLASSIC INTRODUCTION TO
DŌGEN'S LIFE AND TEACHING

EIHEI
DŌGEN
MYSTICAL
REALIST

HEE-JIN KIM

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



2 DŌGEN'S LIFE

RELIGION IS A SYMBOLIC MODEL with symbols, values, beliefs, and practices that enable us, individually and collectively, to attain spiritual liberation and to grasp the meaning of existence. These elements of religion, in turn, are intricately interwoven with the conditions of our biological and psychological makeup, as well as with socio-cultural and historical conditions. Thus, the net result is a unique fabric of an individual's symbolic reality.

Dōgen inherited the symbolic model of Buddhism through his upbringing, studies, and training in Japan and China, and accordingly his thought moved within the framework of this model. Some basic values of Buddhism, especially of Zen, were evident in his life and thought, yet were modified by his personal life as well as by the social and cultural conditions of the early Kamakura period of Japan in which he lived. In what follows, I shall attempt to review and understand some significant features of Dōgen's life so as to pave the way to understanding his thought.¹

Dōgen's life can be studied according to the following periods: early childhood (1200–1212); apprenticeship in Buddhism (1212–27), which may be subdivided into his spiritual struggle at Hiei and Kenninji (1212–23) and his study in China (1223–27); and the creative period in Japan, which began after his return from China in 1227 and lasted until his death in 1253, and that can be divided into the Yamashiro and Echizen periods. Before we embark on the account of Dōgen's spiritual pilgrimage, we shall briefly observe the social background of the age in which Dōgen's life and thought occurred.

THE HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF EARLY KAMAKURA JAPAN

The first half of the thirteenth century, namely the early Kamakura period in which Dōgen lived and died, and its immediately preceding phase of the Heian period, had several important features relevant to our investigation of Dōgen's life and thought. They can be explained in terms of the nobility-warrior power struggle, the corrupted state of Buddhism, and the traditional folk movements of the masses.

There were two opposing social forces in Japan in those days: the court nobility in Kyoto and the military class in Kamakura. The court aristocracy (the imperial-Fujiwara complex) had already been advancing toward its breakdown by the end of the Heian period. Far removed from the erstwhile “glory and splendor” (*eiga*) of Fujiwara no Michinaga, they desperately clung to whatever vestiges were left of their declining power, which was formally ended by their demise in the Jōkyū War of 1221. Their life was very similar to that of the Heian aristocracy described in *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*). Their activities centered exclusively around political pursuits, amorous adventures, and poetic and artistic indulgences—contingent on the wealth derived from enormous holdings of tax-free estates (*shōen*). Perhaps no society in human history emphasized aesthetic refinement and sensibility more than the Japanese court nobility in those days. As Ivan Morris aptly observes, “Upper-class Heian life was punctuated with poetry from beginning to end, and no important event was complete without it.”² With this aestheticism were associated two fundamentally related sentiments of the age—the sense of the affective quality of life and the world (*mono no aware*), and the sense of impermanence (*mujō*). Despite its outward pomposity, the aristocratic way of life was permeated by an awareness of beauty shadowed by a sense of sorrow due to beauty's inherently ephemeral character. The court nobles grasped something religious in the beautiful and vice versa. Beauty inspired in them a religious feeling, a sense of the ultimate limits of life, of impermanence and death. Religion, likewise, appealed to them for aesthetic, rather than ethical, reasons.³ The aristocratic lot in life was interpreted as resulting from karma or fate (*sukuse* or *suguse*) to which they resigned themselves. They were indifferent to the masses, as if their ethical sensibilities were incompatible with their aesthetic sensibilities.⁴ Dōgen's life and thought can be adequately understood only against this decadent, overly refined aristocratic tradition into which he was born.

After a decisive victory over the Tairas at the battle of Dannoura in 1185, the Minamoto family established hegemony over Japan with the creation of its feudal government (*bakufu*) in 1192. This set the stage for the rise of the samurai class and its gradually emerging way of life known as “the way of warriors” (*bushidō*). (In its early stage, “the way of warriors” centered strictly on greedy, predatory, and calculating business dealings with little or no sense of loyalty or sacrifice—it was a far cry from the romanticized way of life that later developed in the Tokugawa period.)⁵ Although warriors were culturally “provincial” and looked down upon by aristocrats, their economic, military, and political powers steadily grew and consolidated—they were gradually emerging as a class separate from the aristocrats, farmers, merchants, and artisans. The martial arts were their profession, and they were acutely aware of the ultimate meaning of their profession—the destruction of human lives.⁶

The Minamotos operated basically within the old political framework; they enforced powers delegated to them by the imperial house but were the de facto rulers of Japan without attempting to displace the imperial house. In this respect, they followed precedents that had been set by the Fujiwaras, who had created an incredibly complex political situation in which both aristocratic and military classes were helplessly enmeshed. A historian aptly described it as follows:

One finds in thirteenth-century Japan an emperor who was a mere puppet in the hands of a retired emperor and a great court family, the Fujiwaras, who together controlled a government, completely dominated by the private government of the Shōgun—who in turn was a puppet in the hands of the Hōjō regent. The man behind the throne had become a series of men, each in turn controlled by the man behind himself.⁷

In addition to this chaotic political situation were the infinitely complicated transactions involving tax-free estates—perhaps the most significant economic institution to mold Japanese life from the latter part of the eighth century to the end of the sixteenth century.⁸ By the end of the Heian era, some 80 percent of rice-producing lands in the country belonged to the manorial system,⁹ which was fought over by court nobles and samurai warriors.

Conspicuous in this power struggle were also the religious orders. During the Heian period, religious institutions accumulated huge tax-free estates that had to be protected by an oxymoronic Japanese institution, the armed monastics (*sōhei*). Since the middle of the tenth century, major Buddhist

monasteries such as the Enryakuji temple on Mt. Hiei, the Onjōji temple in Miidera, and the Tōdaiji and Kōfukuji temples in Nara had standing armies to solve their conflicts with other religious institutions and with the government. They destroyed rival monasteries, demonstrated in the streets of the capital, presented petitions to the imperial court by force (*gōso*), and engaged in many other flagrant militant actions.¹⁰ Although the wealth, prestige, and power of some established monasteries undoubtedly increased, their moral, intellectual, and religious life was dangerously disintegrating. Armed monastics were very active during Dōgen's lifetime, and their entanglements in this grim situation had many sordid psychological and social ramifications.

Another characteristic of Buddhism in this period was its inseparable association with the Heian aristocracy. One of the most conspicuous examples of this was the monopolization of important posts in the monastic centers by members of the imperial house and the Fujiwara family. This resulted in the formation of clerical cliques (*monzeki*) that excluded non-Fujiwara aspirants. As political careers at court became exceedingly elusive due to the growing numbers of the Fujiwara clan, some saw the monastic profession as the next surest way to wealth and power, regardless of their religious motivation. In addition, the activities at many monastic centers revolved around magico-religious rites and prayers (*kaji-kitō*) of esoteric Buddhism that were designed for the protection of the nation and the welfare of the court aristocracy. The complete secularization (i.e., aristocratization) of Buddhism, with no distinction between Buddha-law (*buppō*) and secular law (*ōbō*), was firmly established when Dōgen entered Mt. Hiei for study in his youth.¹¹

In this period, the Buddhist doctrine of the Three Ages (*shō-zō-matsu no sanjissetsu*) was widely accepted. The Three Ages were the Age of Right Law (*shōbō*) in which the genuinely authentic Dharma (universal truth and righteousness) prevailed, the Age of Imitative Law (*zōbō*) in which mere forms of Dharma dominated, and the Age of Degenerate Law (*mappō*) in which Dharma was entirely decayed. In the first age, teaching, practice, and attainment of enlightenment prevailed; in the second, teaching and practice alone; and in the third, there was only teaching. The Age of Degenerate Law, as interpreted by some circles of Buddhism in Japan, was believed to have begun in 1052.¹² This calculation was accepted by both the aristocrats and the general populace; the Buddhist leaders of the time based their diagnosis of the current religious situation upon this doctrine.¹³ This belief was reinforced by incessant earthquakes, fires, murders, epidemics, and famines in the late Heian and early Kamakura periods. Thus, a historical

consciousness developed that was based on a sense of “apocalyptic crisis” and a conviction in the utter wretchedness and helplessness of humankind, along with a concomitant spiritual exigency that led to faith in the unflinching compassion and grace of Amida Buddha.¹⁴

Dōgen, while utilizing the scheme of the Three Ages, rejected such romantic pessimism toward human nature and history, for to him human nature possessed the elements of both greatness and wretchedness, regardless of time and place. Thus he remarked:

The ancient sages were not necessarily of sturdy build, nor were all the forebears richly endowed. It had not been long since the death of Śākyamuni Buddha, and when we consider Buddha's lifetime, not all people were superior: there were both sheep and goats. Among monastics some were unimaginable villains and others were of the lowest character.¹⁵

Whether human beings were great or wretched was determined not by external conditions, but by our manner of dealing with one another.¹⁶ This doctrine was relevant to Dōgen to the extent that it diagnosed the mass spiritual crisis of his time and aided individuals in confronting this crisis. Otherwise, it was nothing but a symptom of human failure to deal with life and the world.¹⁷

As we turn our attention from the affairs of nobles, warriors, and religionists to those of the masses, we see that the farmers, merchants, and artisans at that time were in a downtrodden state, though they had gained social and economic power. The corruption and indifference of the ruling classes, chaotic social and political conditions, and omnipresent sufferings and miseries led these disinherited people toward something radically new that promised to revitalize their spiritual life. Their primitive yearnings had been, more often than not, associated with various folk-traditional undercurrents that were deeper than Buddhist and Confucian religious ideologies.¹⁸ In particular, the so-called holy men (*hijiri*)—with shamanistic, magico-religious practices and beliefs—were active among the masses from the latter part of the tenth century on, disseminating “the essential importance of individual faith and unworldliness”¹⁹ that was at odds with institutional Buddhism. As Hori emphasizes, the *hijiri* movement was essentially folk-traditional, anti-authoritarian, and anti-secular; it paved the way for a new Kamakura Buddhism, particularly Pure Realm Buddhism. Lay monastics (*shami*) also increased in number and quietly engaged in a spiritual revitalization of the common people.²⁰ In a very real sense, these holy men and

lay monastics were the predecessors of Kamakura Buddhism, which could be regarded as the cultic and intellectual purification and crystallization of the passionate personal faith that they advocated.

Dōgen's Zen Buddhism was no exception in that it also was a part of this general movement taking place in medieval Japan.²¹ In addition, the folk tradition of Japan had many other features relevant to our subject matter—especially the tradition of *dōzoku* (a kind of kinship system) in the social structure of Japan, and the tradition of mountain asceticism and purification that was deeply rooted in the Japanese folk mentality.²² Perhaps no Kamakura Buddhist would appear more remote from folk tradition than Dōgen—anti-magical, elitist, eremitic—and yet, his was a religion of the people that came into being and sustained itself by drawing its creativity and vitality from a source deeper and more indigenous than the enfeebled ideologies and adventures of the aristocratic tradition.

EARLY CHILDHOOD: INITIATION INTO IMPERMANENCE

Dōgen was born in Kyoto in the first month of 1200, perhaps as an illegitimate son of Koga Michichika and the daughter of Fujiwara Motofusa. He was among eleven sons and three daughters of Michichika. The Koga (or Minamoto) family was descended from Prince Tomohira, son of Emperor Murakami (r. 946–57). During the lifetime of Michichika, then the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, the family was at the height of its power and prosperity and controlled both the dominating power of the Fujiwara family and the pro-shōgun force within the courtly circle in Kyoto. In addition, Michichika stood unparalleled in the literary circle (the Murakami Genji's literary fame was well known) and was unfailingly devoted to the imperial family (the Murakami Genji had the tradition of fighting for the restoration of the imperial rule). His mother was a beautiful, yet ill-fated woman who, according to one account, was married to and separated from Kiso Yoshinaka and subsequently married to Koga Michichika.²³

Michichika died suddenly in 1202, when Dōgen was only two years of age. After the death of his father, Dōgen was raised by his mother and half-brother, Michitomo, in a culturally over-refined atmosphere. Many of his brothers and sisters occupied eminent positions in the imperial court and were well versed in poetry and the classics. It is not difficult to imagine that Dōgen must have been systematically educated in the Chinese and Japanese

classics, and well trained in literary skills and techniques that were the *sine qua non* of aristocratic life. Dōgen recalled later: "In my boyhood I studied history and literature enthusiastically."²⁴ He also wrote:

As a result of my predilection for study from childhood, I am prone even now to examine the rhetorical expressions of non-Buddhist classics and to consult the *Wên-hsüan* [an anthology of classical proses and verses]. But I believe that such a thing is irrelevant and should be discarded once and for all.²⁵

Dōgen urged his disciples to pay attention not so much to the rhetoric, however notable it might be, as to the content of the writing under study. However, his sensitivity to language was cultivated in a refined literary environment, as evidenced by his poetic excellence, his fondness of the use of a flowing medieval Japanese style rather than a Chinese style, his instruction on "loving speech" (*aigo*), and his deep insight into the nature of language and symbols in human thought. Dōgen eschewed vainglorious aestheticism, but never relinquished his poetic sensibility.

At the age of seven, in 1207, Dōgen lost his mother, who at her death earnestly requested him to become a monastic to seek the truth of Buddhism and strive to relieve the tragic sufferings of humanity.²⁶ Unlike his father's death, which took place when he was only two, his mother's death must have been a serious blow to Dōgen's fragile and sensitive mind. We are told that in the midst of profound grief, Dōgen experienced the impermanence of all things as he watched the ascending incense at his mother's funeral service.²⁷

This experience left an indelible impression upon Dōgen, which no doubt determined the direction of his subsequent spiritual journey. Later, Dōgen would emphasize, time and again, the intimate relationship between the desire for enlightenment (*bodaishin*) and the awareness of impermanence (*mujō*) and death.²⁸ To Dōgen, the lucid understanding of life and the thorough penetration of death (*ryōshō-tasshi*), that is a total understanding of the meaning (*dōri*) of impermanence and death, were the alpha and omega of religion. Dōgen understood the impermanent character of life in religious and metaphysical terms rather than in psychological or aesthetic ones, and he lived out this understanding in his monastic life. Dōgen's way of life was not a sentimental flight from, but a compassionate understanding of, the intolerable reality of existence.

Five years after his mother's death, Dōgen was confronted by another crisis. After he was orphaned, Dōgen was adopted by Fujiwara Moroie, his mother's younger brother, who at over forty years of age did not yet have an heir and consequently wanted to train Dōgen for this honor.²⁹ This meant the promise of a brilliant career for Dōgen in the tradition of the Fujiwara hegemony, even though the Fujiwara hegemony was in decline during this time. In the spring of 1212, Moroie planned to have a *gempuku* ceremony for Dōgen to mark his initiation into aristocratic manhood. At this juncture, Dōgen was forced to choose either to become a monastic or follow his uncle's desire. Dōgen decided to become a monastic, and visited Ryōkan,³⁰ another uncle on his mother's side, in the Onjōji temple at the foot of Mt. Hiei, for an intelligent discussion of the matter. Deeply moved by Dōgen's determination and motivation, Ryōkan recommended that he study at the Senkōbō at Yokawa-Hannyadani on Mt. Hiei, one of the most renowned centers of Buddhist studies at that time. Upon hearing the news of Dōgen's decision to become a monastic, Moroie was greatly disappointed.

To Dōgen there was no conflict between his decision and his filial piety to Moroie. As he saw it, to study Buddhism was to fulfill his duty to Moroie. He wrote that filial piety should not be limited to one's parents alone but extended to all sentient beings, and further said: "To follow the Way obediently in our living from day to day and in our study from moment to moment—that is the truest filial piety."³¹ In a more revealing statement indicative of his unique style of Zen, Dōgen wrote:

Even the Buddhas and ancestors are not without tender feelings and affections (*on'ai*) but they have thrown them away. The Buddhas and ancestors, too, are not lacking various bonds, yet they have renounced them. Even though you hold them dear, the direct and indirect conditions of self and other are not to be clung to; therefore, if you do not forsake the bonds of affection, they in turn shall desert you. If you must care for tender feelings, treat them with compassion; to treat them with compassion means to resolutely relinquish them.³²

Thus: "The students of Buddhism should not study Dharma for their own profit but only for the sake of Dharma."³³ The Way, for the sake of the Way, heartless as it may have sounded, was the core of Dōgen's spiritual search from beginning to end.

APPRENTICESHIP IN BUDDHISM

In the fourth month of 1213, Dōgen's ordination ceremony was administered by Kōen, abbot of the Enryakuji temple on Mt. Hiei.³⁴ Thereafter Dōgen delved deeply into a systematic study of Buddhist sūtras at the Senkōbō. A more favorable educational environment could not have been found in those days than at Hiei. Dōgen devoured these studies with his gifted mind. His earnest search for truth at that time and thereafter can be seen in the emphasis he placed on the need to live seriously. Some twenty years later, Dōgen repeatedly maintained in his *Shōbōgenzō zuimonki*: "The arising and decaying of all things occur swiftly; birth-and-death is gravely important" (*mujō-jinsoku shōji-jidai*). The impermanence of existence did not lead him to fatalism or to the pessimism that pervaded the age; on the contrary it led him to heightened vitality in the search for the Way. Dōgen admonished: "Having a transient life, you should not engage in anything other than the Way."³⁵ He further wrote:

In a Chinese classic it is said: "I shall be content even to die in the evening if only I hear the Way in the morning." Even if you were to die by starvation or by cold, you ought to follow the Way even a day or even an hour. How many times might we be born again and die again in an infinitude of aeons and rebirths? Such a hope is nothing but a blind attachment to worldly conditions. Die of starvation in following the Way once and for all in this very life, and you shall attain eternal peace and tranquility....If you do not seek enlightenment here and now on the pretext of the Age of Degenerate Law or wretchedness, in what birth are you to attain it?³⁶

And: "At each moment do not rely upon tomorrow. Think of this day and this hour only, and of being faithful to the Way while given a life even just for today, for the next moment is uncertain and unknown."³⁷ Elsewhere Dōgen stated:

The student of Buddhism should think of the inevitability of dying. While the truth is too obvious to be thought in those words, you should not waste your precious time by doing useless things, but instead do worthwhile things. Of many worthwhile things, just one—indeed all else is futile—is vitally important: the way of life of the Buddhas and ancestors (*busso no anri*).³⁸

“Today’s life does not guarantee tomorrow’s. The possibility and danger of dying are always at hand.”³⁹ These statements, though written much later in his life, unmistakably reflected the seriousness of the religious enterprise Dōgen undertook at the Senkōbō after his initiation into Buddhism.

While he was studying the sūtras at the Senkōbō, Dōgen was confronted with an apparently insoluble question that, according to the biographies of Dōgen,⁴⁰ was as follows:

As I study both the exoteric and the esoteric schools of Buddhism, they maintain that human beings are endowed with Dharma-nature by birth. If this is the case, why did the Buddhas of all ages—undoubtedly in possession of enlightenment—find it necessary to seek enlightenment and engage in spiritual practice?

No one on Mt. Hiei could give a satisfactory answer to this spiritual problem. The question itself, however, was of such magnitude in Dōgen’s religious struggle that he was thereafter restless until he finally found an answer in 1225 from Ju-ching at the T’ien-t’ung monastery.

Dōgen’s question was concerned with the time-honored Mahāyāna doctrines of original enlightenment (*hongaku*) and acquired enlightenment (*shikaku*). The doctrine of original enlightenment was propounded primarily by Tendai Buddhism, which was responsible for the synthesis of diverse currents of Buddhist thought, such as Tendai, Kegon, Shingon, and Zen. Although the doctrine itself was as old as the early history of Mahāyāna Buddhism,⁴¹ its most radical interpretation was formulated in Japan during the Heian and Kamakura periods, for the most part by Tendai thinkers, who pressed the doctrine to its logical extremity.⁴² Several aspects of the doctrine were as follows: Original enlightenment was eternal in that it was not a temporal occurrence that had a beginning and an end in time. Opposites, such as enlightenment and delusion, life and death, being and nonbeing, one and many, were dialectically negated and in turn affirmed, without minimizing their respective absolute status. Related to this was the unity of enlightenment and practice, in which emphasis was placed not so much on special forms of religious discipline as it was on activities of daily life. The metaphysical status of phenomenon (*ji*) was now construed as primary, in contrast to that of principle (*ri*); accordingly, the existential actualities of a given situation acquired supreme importance. Things, events, and values as they existed in actuality were eternalized not as the manifestations of principle,

but precisely by virtue of the intrinsic status of the phenomena themselves. Doctrinal studies were held in disrepute, and instead, an instantaneous liberation here and now through faith in original enlightenment was assured.⁴³

In addition, the doctrine of original enlightenment was accompanied by a cognate doctrine of “this body itself is Buddha” (*sokushin-jōbutsu*), which was likewise radicalized by Japanese Buddhism. This tenet accepted the immediate enlightenment of the psycho-physical existence with all its particularities, which were not, as Zen Buddhists would say, “a finger pointing to the moon,” but the moon itself, or to put it differently, not the accommodative manifestations of the Body of Law (*dharmakāya*; *hosshin*), but the Body of Law itself. This doctrine of esoteric Buddhism, both the Shingon and Tendai versions, influenced the ethos of the time. Mundane existence was sanctified, as it was by the doctrine of original enlightenment.⁴⁴

The doctrines of original enlightenment and of “this-body-itself-is-Buddha” went hand-in-hand in reinforcing the efficacy of faith, the absolutization of phenomena, and the instantaneous attainment of liberation. When one denied any metaphysical hiatus between principle and phenomenon, however, even the profoundest Mahāyāna doctrines became dangerously indistinguishable from a crude and irresponsible acceptance of whatever existed in the world, at the sacrifice of spiritual exertions. In fact, a number of dangerous misinterpretations of these doctrines were rampant toward the close of the Heian period, and were especially flagrant among worldly minded Buddhist monastics who attempted to rationalize the pursuit of their selfish interests. Furthermore, an exclusive claim of faith, which required no strenuous religious or moral exertion, became readily associated with the antinomian cynicism inspired by the Age of Degenerate Law.

It is worth noting that this moral, intellectual, and religious crisis coincided with the popularity of the doctrines of original enlightenment and “this-body-itself-is-Buddha.” The latter unwittingly served to rationalize the apathetic state of affairs. The significance of Dōgen’s original question at Mt. Hiei and his endeavors thereafter can only be properly understood in light of his acute sense of this crisis of the age in which he lived.

If we are primordially enlightened and consequently liberated here and now within this body-mind existence, then why do we have to exert ourselves at all? What is the significance of intellectual, moral, cultic, and religious activities and endeavors? Dōgen did not question the truth of original enlightenment, but believed it with his whole heart and mind. However, he did question the significance of the activities that constituted

human existence, which amounted to asking, “What is the meaning of existence?”

With his question unanswered, Dōgen finally left Hiei when Kōen resigned as abbot.⁴⁵ He brought the question to Kōin (1145–1216) at the Onjōji temple in Mii-dera in the province of Ōmi. However, Kōin was unable to answer his question; instead, the latter referred the young man to Eisai (1141–1215), who had returned from China to found Rinzai Zen and who resided at the Kenninji temple in Kyoto.⁴⁶ Dōgen later wrote:

As a result of the desire for enlightenment which was first aroused in my mind through the awareness of the impermanence of existence, I traveled extensively to various places and, finally having descended Mt. Hiei to practice the Way, settled at the Kenninji temple. Until then I had met neither a right teacher nor a good friend and consequently had gone astray and had erroneous thoughts.⁴⁷

Dōgen apparently visited Eisai at the Kenninji temple in 1214.⁴⁸ Founded by Eisai in 1202, the Kenninji temple was at the time not only the center of Zen, but was also the center of studies for Tendai, Shingon, and other schools of Buddhism. Indeed, Kenninji was a rival of Hiei and visiting Eisai under such circumstances was a bold venture for a young man of only fourteen. At any rate, “Dōgen entered Eisai’s school and heard Rinzai Zen Buddhism for the first time.”⁴⁹ Despite the fact that there was an extremely short length of time between Dōgen’s visit in 1214 and Eisai’s death in 1215, and that Dōgen probably could not have had frequent and intimate personal contact with Eisai, given the latter’s constant travel between Kyoto and Kamakura to propagate Zen, Eisai’s lasting influence on Dōgen cannot be denied.⁵⁰ However, the Kenninji visit was only one stop among many in Dōgen’s extensive traveling.⁵¹ His willingness to learn from a variety of sources was indicative of his moral courage and intellectual openness, and revealed his “intersecular” approach to Buddhism, which would later revitalize the religion in his time.

After three years’ wandering, Dōgen again settled at the Kenninji temple in 1217 to receive the instructions of Myōzen (1184–1225) and stayed there until 1223, when he left to study in China. During this period, Dōgen studied Rinzai Zen systematically; at the same time a warm relationship between Myōzen and Dōgen developed as they studied together as teacher and disciple. It may be fair to say that Dōgen’s knowledge about Zen Buddhism was

acquired from Myōzen, who was the highest-ranking disciple of Eisai and his successor. Some ten years later, Dōgen wrote about Myōzen with respect and affection: “Myōzen Zenji, the chief disciple of the founder Eisai—he alone transmitted the supreme Dharma rightly. None of the others could equal him in this respect.”⁵² Undoubtedly, Dōgen’s six years of study under Myōzen, during which he was constantly encouraged and assisted by his teacher, must have been as momentous as the study he had had at Hiei.

Yet still, Dōgen could not erase a feeling of dissatisfaction. He reminisced later:

Although my teachers were just as distinguished as any others in the world of Buddhist scholarship, they taught me to become famous in the nation and to bring honor to the whole country. Thus in my study of Buddhism, I thought, above all, to become equal to ancient wise ones of this country and to those who held the title of Great Teacher (*daishi*). As I read in this connection [Hui-chao’s] *Kao-sêng ch’uan* (*Biographies of Eminent Buddhist Monastics*) and [Tao-hsüan’s] *Hsü kao-sêng ch’uan* (*Further Biographies of Eminent Buddhist Monastics*) and others, and studied eminent Buddhist monastics and scholars of the great T’ang dynasty, I came to realize that they differed from what my teachers taught. What is more, I realized that thoughts such as mine, according to their treatises and biographies, were loathed by these people. Having contemplated the nature of the matter at last, I thought to myself I should have rather felt humbled by ancient sages and future good men and women instead of elated by the praise of despicable contemporaries. As for an aspiration for greatness, I wished to emulate the greatness of Indian and Chinese monastics and scholars rather than my country-folk. Also I should have aspired to be equal to the gods of heavens and invisible worlds, Buddhas and bodhisattvas. In view of such a realization, the holders of the title of Great Teacher in this country seemed to me worthless, like earthen tiles, and my whole life was changed completely.⁵³

This passage summarized Dōgen’s ten-plus years of spiritual struggle at Hiei and Kenninji. His original question remained unanswered; he could not find a right teacher, and the general circumstances of Japanese Buddhism at the time were unfavorable to him. Regarding his failure to find a right teacher (*shōshi*), Dōgen wrote:

Right teachers have not appeared in our country since olden times. How can we tell this? Observe their utterances. They are like those who try to fathom the source of a stream by scooping up a handful of water. Although the ancient teachers of this country wrote books, taught disciples, and expounded teachings to humans and gods, their speeches were green and their expression yet immature. They did not attain the summit of an intellectual grasp of doctrines, much less the neighborhood of enlightenment. They merely transmitted words and letters, while their disciples recited names and sounds. Day and night they counted others' riches for nothing. Herein lies my charge against the ancient teachers. Some led people to seek enlightenment outside the conditions of mind, while still others led them to desire rebirth in other lands. Confusions arise from and delusions originate in this.... Alas, Buddhism has not yet been disseminated in this tiny remote country, and right teachers have not yet appeared. If you want to study the best of Buddhism, you should consult the scholarship of China far away and reflect thoroughly on the living path that transcends the deluded mind. When you don't meet a right teacher, it is better not to study Buddhism at all.⁵⁴

Uttered by a man with an essentially conservative frame of mind, these words were a startling attack on the immaturity of contemporary Japanese Buddhism.

Perhaps as a result of this disillusionment, the possibility (or more appropriately the necessity) of study in China, which had been originally suggested by Kōin, might have emerged in Dōgen's mind as the next step necessary for the fulfillment of his search for truth. Or as Takeuchi surmises, the Jōkyū (or Shōkyū) War in 1221 with all its miseries and sufferings—especially the banishment of three ex-emperors (all of whom were related to Dōgen's family), countless bloody executions, and the involvement of armed monastics—may have prompted Dōgen's decision to study in China.⁵⁵ Dōgen brought the matter to Myōzen, and both began preparing to study abroad immediately after the Jōkyū War.⁵⁶ In the second month of 1223, after due formalities, a party of Myōzen, Dōgen, and others left the Kenninji temple and toward the end of the third month set sail for China from Hakata in Chikuzen.

The group's voyage on the East China Sea was not always smooth. Particularly for Dōgen—a man of frail physical frame who probably had not

had any previous experience on a ship, the voyage must have been a tough one.⁵⁷ Early in the fourth month, the ship arrived at Ch'ing-yüan-fu in Ming-chou (now the province of Chekiang). While Myōzen immediately entered the Ching-tê-ssü temple on Mt. T'ien-t'ung, Dōgen lived on the ship, visited various other temples, and observed the Chinese customs until early in the seventh month, when he was able to enroll at the Ching-tê-ssü temple.⁵⁸

While Dōgen was living on the ship, an old Chinese monk who was sixty-one years of age came on board to get Japanese *shiitake* (a kind of mushroom for soup). He was the chief cook at the monastery on Mt. A-yü-wang (Yü-wang), situated some eighty-five miles from where the ship was anchored. In the course of a lively conversation, Dōgen, paying courtesy to the old man, asked him to stay overnight and talk some more. The old man, however, declined and insisted on returning to the monastery immediately after he bought the *shiitake*. Dōgen apparently could not understand why this man had to return in such a hurry, despite the fact that the monastic food, in Dōgen's view, could readily be prepared by other cooks without him. In response to Dōgen's puzzlement, the old man said: "The reason for my being the chief cook at such an old age is that I regard this duty as the practice of the Way (*bendō*) for the rest of my life. How can I leave my practice to other persons? Besides I did not obtain permission for staying out." Then Dōgen asked: "Why are you, a person of advanced age, engaged in such a troublesome task as the chief cook rather than in practicing zazen or reading the kōans of old masters? Is there any worthwhile thing in your work?" To this question, the old monk laughed loudly and said: "You, a good man from a foreign country, perhaps do not understand what the practice of the Way is, nor what words and letters (*monji*) are." Upon hearing this old man's remark, Dōgen was "all of a sudden shocked and ashamed profoundly." Promising Dōgen that he would discuss the matter some day in the future, the old man disappeared hurriedly into the gathering dusk.⁵⁹

In the seventh month of 1223, Dōgen at last left the ship and enrolled at the Ching-tê-ssü temple on Mt. T'ien-t'ung where Wu-chi Liao-p'ai (d. 1224) was abbot. This was the same temple where Eisai had studied and as one of the "Five Mountains," was a leading center of Zen Buddhism in China. It was supported by the Chinese royal court and had a population of monastics that was reportedly never fewer than one thousand.⁶⁰

One day in the seventh month, soon after Dōgen's enrollment at the Ching-tê-ssü temple, a second meeting took place between Dōgen and the old chief cook.⁶¹ The old man was about to retire from his post at the A-yü-wang

monastery and was going to leave for his native village. The two picked up their discussion where they had left off previously. Dōgen asked: “What are words and letters?” The answer came: “One, two, three, four, five.” “What is the practice of the Way, then?” asked Dōgen. “Nothing throughout the entire universe is concealed” (*henkai-fuzōzō*) was the old man’s reply. Their lively discussion continued without their knowing where to end it. Dōgen wrote later:

Just as the words and letters I have seen thus far are one, two, three, four, and five, so the words and letters I see now are also six, seven, eight, nine, and ten. The monastics of future generations will be able to understand a nondiscriminative Zen (*ichimizen*) based on words and letters, if they devote efforts to spiritual practice by seeing the universe through words and letters, and words and letters through the universe.⁶²

Dōgen’s encounters with the old chief cook on these two occasions were decisive events in his subsequent life and thought. It was during these discussions that he realized he had been pondering the relationship between practice and language, between deeds and words, between activities and expressions—specifically with respect to the place of words and letters (*monji*) in the scheme of things. Unlike other Zen Buddhists of the time, Dōgen recognized the limits and dangers of language as well as, and more important, the possibility of using it for spiritual liberation by understanding the “reason of words and letters” (*monji no dōri*). To him, language and symbols held the potential of opening, rather than circumscribing, reality; consequently, they needed to be reinstated in their legitimate place within the total context of human spiritual endeavors.

At this juncture it is worthwhile to review the place of Buddhism in general, and Zen (Ch’an) in particular, during the Sung period. When Dōgen visited China, it was nearly a century after the establishment of Southern Sung (1127–1279) with its capital in Hangchow (Lin-an), which governed central and southern China. (Northern China was controlled by the Chin.) China suffered constant threats of foreign invasion, internal political factionalism, and military weakness, while at the same time it enjoyed unprecedented economic, technological, and cultural advances. Neo-Confucianism was the predominant ideology of the day and was destined to become the official learning of China. Buddhism had been steadily declining in those days in contrast to its golden age during the Sui-T’ang period (581–907).

This was due to several factors, as observed by Ch'en:⁶³ (1) the moral degeneration of monastic communities due to the sale of monasterial certificates and honorary clerical titles by the Chinese government in order to cope with its severe financial difficulties; (2) the rise of Neo-Confucianism to intellectual eminence; (3) the civil service examination system that lured many able men to the study of the Confucian classics for prestige and power; (4) the popularity of the Zen and Pure Realm schools of Buddhism, which tended to be anti-textual and anti-scholastic and did not produce great thinkers comparable to those of the T'ang period; and (5) the decline of Buddhism in India during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, which resulted in the end of cultural exchange between Indian and Chinese Buddhists. Despite all this, the Zen and Pure Realm schools were still active, and Zen in particular was held in the highest esteem.⁶⁴ Although Neo-Confucianists rejected Zen, their thought contained Buddhist and Zen elements, and the culture of the period owed as much to Zen Buddhism as to Neo-Confucianism.⁶⁵ Yet although Zen communities were expanding physically and their economic activities were vigorous, Zen lacked the rigor, authenticity, and brilliance it had had in the previous period and showed its inner impoverishment and decay.⁶⁶ Moreover, Zen teachers began to meddle with politics, and Zen monasteries soon became centers of social and political life.⁶⁷

On various occasions, Dōgen himself wrote about the state of affairs of Zen Buddhism, which he witnessed during his stay in China. For example:

Those who allegedly study vinaya today in the great country of Sung drink heavily and are intoxicated, in contradiction to the name of śrāvaka—yet they neither are ashamed of, nor have regret for, nor are aware of, the fact that they are transmitting a family heritage entirely foreign to their own tradition.⁶⁸

Although there are in China a great number of those who proclaim themselves to be the descendants of the Buddhas and ancestors, there are few who study the truth and accordingly there are few who teach the truth.... Thus those people who have not the slightest idea of what the great Way of the Buddhas and ancestors is now become the teachers of monastics.⁶⁹

...In the country of Sung lately there are those who call themselves Zen teachers. However, they do not understand the wealth and depth

of Dharma and are inexperienced. Reciting a few words of Lin-chi and Yün-mên, they take them for the whole truth of Buddhism. If Buddhism had been exhausted by a few words of Lin-chi and Yün-mên, it would not have survived until today.... These people, stupid and foolish, cannot comprehend the spirit of the sūtras, slander them arbitrarily, and neglect to study them. They are truly a group of non-Buddhists.⁷⁰

These forthright criticisms were made as a result of Dōgen's keen observations of Zen Buddhism in China. As these quotations amply show, the religious situation in China was not too far from what Dōgen had experienced in his own country.

Another aspect of contemporary Buddhism and Zen criticized by Dōgen was a theory of "the unity of three religions" (*sankyō-itchi*) of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. This theory was advocated not only outside, but even within, the Buddhist circle, probably because the survival of Buddhism was guaranteed only by its coming to terms with Confucianism and Taoism under extremely unfavorable conditions. Dōgen witnessed a number of those who held this popular view:

Lately, a number of the shallow-minded in the country of Sung do not understand the purport and substance [of the doctrine of "All things themselves are ultimate reality" (*shohō-jissō*)] and regard the statements of ultimate reality (*jissō*) as false. Furthermore, they study the doctrines of Lao-tzŭ and Chuang-tzŭ, maintaining that they are the same as the Way of the Buddhas and ancestors. Also, there is a view of the unity of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Some say that the three are just like the three legs of a tripod kettle which cannot stand upright if it lacks even one leg. There is nothing comparable to the foolishness of such a view.⁷¹

Apart from the general state of Buddhism and Zen, Dōgen's criticism was directed primarily at the Lin-chi (Rinzai) sect popular at the time. As Dōgen wrote, "In the country of Sung today the Lin-chi sect alone prevails everywhere."⁷² Of the two separate lines of transmission in the sect, the line of Huang-lung Hui-nan (1002–1069) and the line of Yang-ch'i Fang-hui (992–1049), the latter brought forth the highest development in Chinese Zen Buddhism. Although Dōgen was already familiar with the Huang-lung line transmitted by Eisai, which he had studied at the Kenninji temple, what he encountered in China was the Yang-ch'i tradition, whose best-known

representative was Ta-hui Tsung-kao (1089–1163). Dōgen denounced him and his followers relentlessly; he may have been prejudiced to some degree, yet his primary reason seems to have been their involvement with political and other secular interests and concerns, and their transcendentalistic interpretation of Zen which we shall have an occasion to investigate later.⁷³

It is easy to understand Dōgen's great disappointment with the general condition of Buddhism and especially that of Zen in China. Although he stayed at the Ching-tê-ssū temple for nearly two years under Wu-chi Liao-p'ai, Dōgen's spiritual needs were not fully satisfied. Thus, while he was at the Ching-tê-ssū temple, Dōgen seems to have visited various nearby Zen monasteries.⁷⁴ Upon Wu-chi's death toward the end of 1224, Dōgen left Mt. T'ien-t'ung and began traveling extensively, visiting the various temples and monasteries of the "Five Mountains" and studying the characteristics of the "Five Houses" of Chinese Zen Buddhism. As a result of this wandering, Dōgen gained firsthand acquaintance with Chinese Buddhism but still did not find a right teacher.⁷⁵

With a thoroughly discontented heart, Dōgen decided to return home after realizing the futility of staying in China any longer, and set out to pay his last visit to Mt. T'ien-t'ung where Myōzen had been ill for some time.⁷⁶ On the way to T'ien-t'ung, Dōgen learned of the death of his former teacher, Wu-chi Liao-p'ai, and his heart was greatly saddened. While revisiting the Ching-shan Wan-shou-ssū temple, Dōgen met an old monk who informed him of Ju-ching (1163–1228), well known as a peerless master in Zen Buddhism, who had been appointed abbot of the Mt. T'ien-t'ung monastery by the Chinese royal court and whom the old monk urged Dōgen to see as soon as possible.

It was early in the fifth month of 1225 when Dōgen met Ju-ching at long last at Miao-kao-t'ai, the latter's private quarters.⁷⁷ "I met Master Ju-ching face to face. This was an encounter between a man and a man," Dōgen later wrote.⁷⁸ Ju-ching's warm reception of Dōgen was that of a loving father welcoming his beloved son; he told Dōgen to visit him and freely ask questions at his own private quarters at any time without the slightest ceremony. This availability of the great teacher rekindled in the young inquiring mind a burning desire for truth.⁷⁹ How earnestly Dōgen had longed for such a meeting! As we have observed before, Dōgen once went so far as to say: "When you don't meet a right teacher, it is better not to study Buddhism at all."⁸⁰ He also wrote: "Without meeting a right teacher, you do not hear the right Dharma."⁸¹ Dōgen was convinced that the actualization or perfection of

Dharma largely depended upon the ability and competence of a teacher to shape the disciple as an artisan shapes raw material.⁸²

More important, however, the personal encounter was absolutely necessary in Dōgen's view, for Dharma did not emerge in a vacuum, but invariably emerged in a concrete social context, in which persons were significantly related to one another.⁸³ "When a person meets a person, intimate words are heard and deciphered."⁸⁴ The season was ripe for the mystery of Dharma to decisively unfold itself in the meeting between Ju-ching and Dōgen on Mt. T'ien-t'ung.

Let me digress a little at this point. Ju-ching, a native of Yüeh-chou, left there at the age of nineteen, traveled all over China, visited Zen temples and monasteries, and studied Buddhism under various teachers. Later he became a disciple of Tsu-an (or Chih-chien) on Mt. Hsüeh-t'ou and attained enlightenment. Then he went on a pilgrimage throughout the country for nearly forty years and presided over various famous monasteries such as Ch'ing-liang in Chien-k'ang, Shui-yen in T'ai-chou, Ching-tz'ü in Lin-an, Shui-yen in Ming-chou, Ching-tz'ü again, and lastly T'ien-t'ung. Although the T'ien-t'ung monastery was traditionally presided over by abbots of the Lin-chi sect, Ju-ching belonged to the tradition of the Ts'ao-tung (Sōtō) sect, and more specifically, to the Chen-hsieh line of that sect in China.⁸⁵

We are told that during this period, Ju-ching never failed, even for a single day, to practice zazen, the traditional form of Buddhist meditation that emphasized the upright lotus posture, steady breathing, and mental freedom from all attachments, desires, concepts, and judgments. Ju-ching devoted so much time to zazen that the flesh of his buttocks repeatedly broke out in sores; yet when this happened, he would practice it more earnestly.⁸⁶ Ju-ching's educational method reflected this disciplinary rigorism and monastic asceticism. As Dōgen wrote:

When I stayed once at the T'ien-t'ung monastery, I saw that Ju-ching, accompanied by other elders in the monastics' hall, used to practice zazen until eleven o'clock in the evening and begin at dawn as early as two-thirty or three; he never failed to practice this even a single night.⁸⁷

This uncompromising rigor, whether toward himself or his disciples, was combined with utter sincerity and personal warmth. Dōgen recounted the following moving episode:

Ju-ching, my former teacher and abbot of the T'ien-t'ung monastery, admonished those who had fallen asleep during zazen practice in the monastics' hall, striking them with his shoe and scolding them with harsh words. Nevertheless monks rejoiced in being struck by the teacher and admired him.

Once he spoke to the congregation in the hall: "At such an advanced age, I should now retire from the monastic community, seclude myself in a cottage, and care for my remaining days. However, I am in the office of abbot as your leader in order to help each of you break delusions and find the Way. For this reason I sometimes utter scolding words and strike with a bamboo rod, although I do this very carefully. It is a method to educate people in the place of Buddha. So brothers, forgive me with compassion." Thereupon all the monks wept.⁸⁸

Thus, Dōgen had an unreservedly high regard for his teacher who advocated "zazen-only" (*shikan-taza*), which later became the heart of Dōgen's religion and philosophy:

There are throughout the country of great Sung not merely a hundred or two, but thousands, of those who allegedly advocate the practice of meditation and thereby profess to be remote descendants of the ancestors. However, I hear of none who exhort zazen-only. Throughout China, only Master Ju-ching [is an exception].⁸⁹

The central religious and philosophical idea of Ju-ching's zazen-only was the "body-mind cast off" (*shinjin-datsuraku*)—the phrase repeated tirelessly by Dōgen throughout his works.

Ju-ching was also famous for his rare uninterest in worldly fame and gain, which had corrupted Buddhism of the time to the marrow. Dōgen observed:

My former teacher neither approached an emperor nor met one. No intimate acquaintance with ministers and governmental officials was made. Not only did he decline the purple robe and the title of Great Teacher but he also did not wear colorful robes—instead, he always wore a black robe or a simple one-piece gown, whether during lectures or private sessions.⁹⁰

Ju-ching was utterly indifferent to pecuniary gains; Dōgen professed to witness this quality in his teacher alone and in no one else.⁹¹

During the Sung period, the so-called Five Houses of Zen were feuding, although the Lin-chi sect dominated over all others. Ju-ching, although nurtured in the Ts'ao-tung tradition, detested sectarian biases and divisions and even disliked using the name of Zen, as opposed to other Buddhist sects and schools. He aimed at the catholicity of Buddhism at large. We can glimpse Ju-ching's thought from the following descriptions of Dōgen:

My former teacher, Ju-ching, once gave a sermon to monastics: "In recent times people assert seriously that there are distinct traditions of Yün-mên, Fa-yen, Wei-yang, Lin-chi, and Ts'ao-tung. This is neither Buddhism, nor the teaching of the Buddhas and ancestors.

Such a realization of the Way can be found not even once in a millennium, but Teacher alone comprehends it. Nor is it heard in the ten directions of the universe, but Teacher alone hears it."⁹²

And then:

It ought to be clear that nothing could be more seriously mistaken than to call it "a school of Zen." Foolish persons lament as if they failed in Buddhist scholarship on account of not having the designation of a school or a sect after the fashion of the "school of realism," the "school of nihilism," etc. Such is not the Way of Buddhism. No one ever called it "the school of Zen."

Nevertheless, mediocre persons in recent times are foolish enough to disregard the old tradition and, having no instructions from Buddhas, maintain erroneously that there are five distinct traditions in [Zen] Buddhism. This shows its natural decline. And no one has yet come to save this situation except my teacher, Ju-ching, who was the first one to be greatly concerned with it. Thus humanity has been fortunate; Dharma has deepened.⁹³

Ju-ching also opposed the popular view of the unity of three religions. Its syncretistic tendencies must have been quite unpalatable to his purist religious principles.⁹⁴

What emerges from our examination of Dōgen's *Hōkyōki*, *Shōbōgenzō*, and other works concerning Ju-ching's character and thought is clear. He was

a strong, dynamic, charismatic personality who had an uncompromising passion for the monastic asceticism of *zazen*-only as the *sine qua non* of Buddhism. For him, Buddhism was subservient to neither worldly power nor glory; it was content with the virtue of poverty and lived quietly deep in the mountains. Dharma was sought for the sake of Dharma. He strongly opposed the prevalent sectarianism of Buddhism in general and Zen in particular. Ju-ching sought a catholic Buddhism free from sectarian divisions. In brief, he was the embodiment of the idealism and purity of Zen monasticism that was the rightly transmitted Buddha-dharma (*shōden no buppō*). These tenets (though no doubt selected and emphasized by Dōgen) were very likely Ju-ching's, and Dōgen enthusiastically accepted and faithfully transmitted them, transforming them through his own distinctively Japanese ethos.⁹⁵

Dōgen deemed Ju-ching the right teacher he had been seeking. According to Dōgen, a right teacher was described as follows:

A right teacher is one who, regardless of old age or stature, comprehends the right Dharma clearly and receives the certification of a true teacher. He/she gives no precedence to words and letters or to intellectual understanding. With an unusual ability and an extraordinary will power, he/she neither clings to selfishness nor indulges in sentimentality. He/she is the individual in whom living and understanding complement one another (*gyōge-sōō*).⁹⁶

Dōgen must have recollected his mentor's character and thought as he wrote these statements some ten years later. True, Ju-ching fitted the foregoing criteria for the right teacher, or perhaps vice versa. In any case, Dōgen exalted and adored his teacher—with tears of gratitude and joy—so much so that his rhetoric may have superseded any factual descriptions of Ju-ching.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, we cannot but acknowledge the picture of a towering personality who decisively shaped the destiny of Dōgen's subsequent life.

What is significant is Dōgen's absolute devotion to the person whom he considered the right teacher, and consequently the authority and tradition the teacher represented. Such was the case in spite of Dōgen's equally indomitable defiance of political power and authority, and his respect for intellectual independence.⁹⁸

In turn, Ju-ching admired his Japanese disciple and once asked him to become his assistant, saying: "In spite of being a foreigner, you, Dōgen, are a man of superior character." Dōgen, however, "positively declined the offer."⁹⁹

As such, the teacher and disciple studied and practiced together for two years (1225–27) in almost ideal rapport. This, however, should not suggest that there was a complete absence of conflicts between them. Dōgen later acknowledged that conflicts between teacher and disciple were a necessary condition for the right transmission of Dharma. He wrote: “The common endeavor of teacher and disciple in practice and understanding constitute the entwined vines of the Buddhas and ancestors (*busso no kattō*), that is, the life force of the skin–flesh–bones–marrow of Dharma (*hiniku-kotsuzui no meimyaku*).”¹⁰⁰ “Entwined vines” in the traditional Zen parlance referred to doctrinal sophistries, intellectual entanglements, and conflicts. Dōgen saw, contrary to the Zen tradition, the positive values of such conflicts in the personal encounter of teacher and disciple. Both teacher and disciple grew together through such entwined vines.

Under Ju-ching, Dōgen studied and practiced meditation without sparing himself. Dōgen later recalled:

After hearing this truth [the sole importance of zazen] from the instruction of my former teacher of T’ien-t’ung, I practiced zazen day and night. When other monastics gave up zazen temporarily for fear that they might fall ill at the time of extreme heat or cold, I thought to myself: “I should still devote myself to zazen even to the point of death from disease. If I do not practice zazen even without illness, what is the use of taking care of my body? I shall be quite satisfied to die of a disease. What good fortune it is to practice zazen under such a great teacher of the great country of Sung, to end my life, and to be disposed by good monastics . . .” Thinking thus continually, I resolutely sat in zazen day and night, and no illness came at all.¹⁰¹

Dōgen’s apprenticeship matured daily in such an uncompromising asceticism.

In 1225, a decisive moment of enlightenment in Dōgen’s life came at long last during an early morning zazen session at *geango* (i.e., the three-month intensive meditational retreat).¹⁰² In the course of meditation, a monk next to Dōgen inadvertently had fallen asleep. Upon noticing the monk, Ju-ching thundered at him: “In zazen it is imperative to cast off the body and mind. How could you indulge in sleeping?” This remark shook Dōgen’s whole being to its very core, and then an inexpressible, ecstatic joy engulfed his heart. In Ju-ching’s private quarters that same morning, Dōgen offered incense and worshiped Buddha. This unusual action of Dōgen prompted

Ju-ching to ask: "What is the incense-burning for?" The disciple exuberantly answered: "My body and mind are cast off!" "The body and mind are cast off" (*shinjin-datsuraku*), joined the teacher, "cast off are the body and mind" (*datsuraku-shinjin*). Thus, Ju-ching acknowledged the authenticity of Dōgen's enlightenment.¹⁰³

This event, sudden and transformative, was not an isolated one but the necessary fruition of Dōgen's long spiritual struggle. What Dōgen's mind had consciously and unconsciously groped for and reflected upon finally took shape dramatically in these unique circumstances. It was at this moment that Dōgen's question, with which he had lived since his residence on Mt. Hiei, was finally resolved.¹⁰⁴ The significance of the key notion of "casting off the body-mind" in the context of Dōgen's life and thought was that zazen-only, as the mythic-cultic archetype, symbolized the totality of the self and the world and represented that in which Buddha-nature became embodied. To cast off the body-mind did not nullify historical and social existence so much as to put it into action so that it could be the self-creative and self-expressive embodiment of Buddha-nature. In being "cast off," however, concrete human existence was fashioned in the mode of radical freedom—purposeless, goalless, objectless, and meaningless. Buddha-nature was not to be enfolded in, but was to unfold through, human activities and expressions. The meaning of existence was finally freed from and authenticated by its all-too-human conditions only if, and when, it lived co-eternally with ultimate meaninglessness.

What was taking place then in Dōgen's mind was a radical demythologizing and in turn, remythologizing of the whole Buddhist symbol-complex of original enlightenment, Buddha-nature, emptiness, and other related ideas and practices. The crux of his vision lay in a realistic affirmation and transformation of what was relative, finite, and temporal in a nondualistic vision of the self and the world. To understand duality lucidly and to penetrate it thoroughly within a nondualistic mode of existence was Dōgen's final solution. His remaining life consisted of his intellectual, moral, and cultic efforts to enact and elucidate this vision in the specific historical and social conditions of his time.

In the ninth month of 1225, Ju-ching conferred upon Dōgen the official certificate of the ancestral succession to the Chen-hsieh line of the Ts'ao-tung sect. On this day, the sect saw the succession of a Japanese monk for the first time in the history of Chinese Buddhism.

One day in 1227, Dōgen told Ju-ching his intention to return to Japan;

the latter gave him the sacerdotal robe transmitted from the time of Fu-yung Tao-chiai (1043–1118), the genealogical document of ancestral succession,¹⁰⁵ his own portrait,¹⁰⁶ and other precious objects. Except for these objects that he received from Ju-ching, Dōgen returned to Japan “empty handed” (*kūshu-genkyō*). Unlike other Buddhists who had previously studied in China, Dōgen brought home with him no sūtras, images, or documents. His sole “souvenir” presented to his countrymen was his body, mind, and total existence, now completely liberated and transformed. He himself was the surest evidence of Dharma and as such, Dōgen transmitted the Chen-hsieh line of Sōtō Zen to Japan. The date of Dōgen’s return to Japan was probably sometime in the fall of 1227. Ju-ching died a year later in 1228.

Meanwhile, Myōzen, who had been studying at the T’ien-t’ung monastery ever since his arrival in China, died in 1225, soon after Dōgen met Ju-ching. Dōgen brought Myōzen’s remains to Japan with him and very soon thereafter wrote the *Sharisōdenki* (*Account of the Death of Myōzen Zenji*).

Dōgen concluded the period of his apprenticeship with the following:

Further, I went to great Sung, visited good teachers throughout the province of Chekiang, and investigated the various traditions of the Five Houses. Finally, I became the disciple of Ju-ching on T’ai-pai fêng [the Ching-tê-ssū temple on Mt. T’ien-t’ung], and the great matter of my entire life (*issbō sangaku no daiji*) was thus resolved.¹⁰⁷

TRANSMISSION AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE WAY IN JAPAN

Upon his arrival in Japan, Dōgen immediately returned to the Kenninji temple after a four-year absence. The chaotic situation he had witnessed before had not changed much. In fact, it had worsened in every respect.¹⁰⁸ Dōgen, however, expressed his sense of mission this way: “In the first year of the Shao-ting era [1228–1233] of the Sung dynasty I returned to my native place [Kyoto] and vowed to propagate Dharma and save all beings of the world. I felt then that a heavy load was on my shoulders.”¹⁰⁹ In the fall of the same year, Dōgen wrote the *Fukan zazengi* (*General Advice on the Principles of Zazen*), which might have been regarded as the manifesto of Dōgen’s “new” Buddhism vis-à-vis the established Buddhism of Japan. At the beginning of the book, Dōgen proclaimed:

If the Way is originally perfect and ubiquitous, why do we distinguish between practice and enlightenment? If the supreme Dharma is free, why do we need our efforts to attain it? Inasmuch as the whole truth has nothing to do with the world's dust, why do we believe in the means of wiping it away? The Way is not separate from here and now; so what is the use of getting a foothold in practice? However, when there is even the slightest gap between two opposites, they are poles asunder like heaven and earth. When "for" and "against" are differentiated, even unconsciously, we are doomed to lose the Buddha-mind. It should be perfectly clear that infinite recurrences of rebirth is due to our mental discrimination, while delusions of this world arise from an incessant persistence of selfish deliberation. If you wish to surpass even the pinnacle of spiritual advancement, you should understand clearly the here-and-now as it is (*jikige no jōtō*). Even if you boast of your understanding of Dharma and are richly gifted in enlightenment, even if you attain the Way and illuminate your mind, even if you are about to enter the realm of enlightenment with a soaring spirit, you are still short of the total freedom in which enlightenment itself is transcended (*shushin no ro*). Although Buddha was endowed with natural knowledge, he sat in *zazen* for six years. Bodhidharma bequeathed us the legacy of the Buddha-mind, yet still sat facing a wall for nine years. Such were the ancient sages. Why can we not practice like them? Therefore, desist from pursuing words and letters intellectually and reflect upon your self inwardly (*ekō-henshō*). Thus your body and mind shall be cast off naturally and your original nature (*honrai no memmoku*) shall be realized. If you wish to attain it, be diligent in *zazen* at once.¹¹⁰

The above statement indicated the direction and character of Dōgen's thought and activity in the subsequent period of his life. In the simplest and purest form of *zazen*-only, Dōgen found the essence and prototype of Buddhist *cultus* as well as *mythos*, and the crystallization of practice and enlightenment.

Dōgen stayed at the Kenninji temple for three years. In the meantime, as the peculiarities of his Zen manifested themselves in his teaching and education of disciples, and his name became evermore famous, enmity from both Hiei and Kenninji seems to have been aggravated. It was perhaps this antagonism that led Dōgen eventually to move in 1230 to an abandoned temple called An'yōin in Fukakusa.¹¹¹ While at An'yōin, Dōgen wrote the

Shōbōgenzō, “Bendōwa,” which expounded his basic tenets in the form of eighteen questions and answers. Expanding the basic thought of the *Fukan zazengi*, Dōgen clarified the purpose of writing this chapter, which also applied to all his subsequent writings:

In our country, principles of *zazen* practice have not yet been transmitted. This is a sad situation for those who try to understand *zazen*. For this reason I have endeavored to organize what I learned in China, to transcribe some wise teachers’ teachings, and thereby to impart them to those who wish to practice and understand *zazen*.¹¹²

Thus with the *Fukan zazengi* and the “Bendōwa” chapter, Dōgen laid the cornerstone of his religious and philosophical citadel. Upon this foundation Dōgen’s Zen Buddhism, though initially transplanted from China, gradually developed into a distinctively Japanese form that was the product of the symbolic model Dōgen had inherited from Buddhist traditions (which will be greatly elaborated later on), his own idiosyncracies, and the social and historical peculiarities of thirteenth-century Japan. The Way was transmitted and transformed.

As the number of his followers had increased steadily, Dōgen moved again in 1233, this time to the Kannon-dōriin temple in Fukakusa which had been built as the Gokurakuji temple and maintained by the Fujiwara family for generations. Dōgen’s life at Kannon-dōriin for the following ten years (1233–43) was his most creative period, literarily and otherwise: he expanded the original Kannon-dōriin into the Kōshō-hōrinji temple, accepted Koun Ejō (1198–1280) as his disciple and the head monk (*shuso*) of the temple,¹¹³ and wrote forty-four chapters of the *Shōbōgenzō*, including such crucially important chapters as “Genjō-kōan” and “Busshō,” and the *Eihei shoso gakudō yōjin-shū*, and the *Tenzo kyōkun*. These events were intimately interconnected with one another.

In the winter of 1234, Ejō became a disciple of Dōgen. From the age of seventeen Ejō had studied such schools of Buddhism as Tendai, Shingon, Kusha (Abhidharmakośa), Jōjitsu (Satyasiddhi), and Hossō (Yogācāra), on Mt. Hiei, and later the Pure Realm school from Shōkū (1147–1247),¹¹⁴ and Zen Buddhism from Kakuan of Tōnomine. Thus Ejō was already well versed in Buddhism in general. He probably met Dōgen for the first time immediately after the latter returned from China. Although Ejō was two years older than Dōgen, he must have been impressed by Dōgen’s fresh interpretation of

Buddhism in general and Zen in particular. Two years after this first meeting, Ejō became Dōgen's disciple. For nearly twenty years thereafter, until Dōgen's death, teacher and disciple worked together to found Sōtō Zen in Japan. The timing of Ejō's discipleship was crucially important as Dōgen needed an able co-worker for the education of disciples, administration of the temple, and also for the impending founding of the Kōshōji temple.

In the twelfth month of 1235, Dōgen started a fund-raising campaign for the building of a new monastics' hall (*sōdō*), the center of monastic activities. In light of the calamitous circumstances of the time, this drive must have been far from easy; yet the completion of the monastics' hall was accomplished in the fall of the following year. In the *Shōbōgenzō zuimonki*, Ejō reported the following remarks made by Dōgen:

It should not be thought to be necessarily for the growth of Buddhism that we now campaign for the building fund of the monastics' hall and take pains with that project. At present the number of students is still small, so, instead of doing nothing and wasting time, I want to offer an opportunity for those who have gone astray to get acquainted with Buddhism and, at the same time, to provide a place for monastics to practice zazen. Also there should be no regret even if the original project is not completed. I will not be distressed even if people in the future, seeing just one pillar built, think that despite my intentions, I failed to finish it.¹¹⁵

In the tenth month of 1236, the opening ceremony of the monastics' hall was successfully held and the temple was officially named Kōshō-hōrinji temple. As we shall see, this was an epoch-making event in the history of Japanese Zen Buddhism, because it was the realization of Po-chang's envisionment in which the monastics' hall was the center of Zen monastic life. In the twelfth month, Dōgen appointed Ejō as head monk whose function was to assist the abbot in all educational and religious matters in the monastic community. At the same time, Ejō delivered his first sermon in place of Dōgen.¹¹⁶ About a year later, the Dharma hall (*hattō*) was added to the temple through the efforts of Shōgaku Zenni. This, combined with the Buddha hall (*butsuden*) that had existed from the beginning, marked the realization of Dōgen's dream in which the monastics' hall, the Dharma hall, and the Buddha hall became the three most important buildings of a monastic community.¹¹⁷ The Kōshō-hōrinji temple was gradually shaping up as one of the most powerful centers of Buddhism in Japan.

Dōgen opened his monastic community for everyone, regardless of intelligence, social status, sex, or profession. His religion was through and through the religion of the people, as were other “new” Kamakura Buddhist sects. His logic of universalism was thorough, if not always consistent. Dōgen wrote: “In their excess of mercy the Buddhas and ancestors have opened the boundless gate of compassion (*kōdai no jimon*) so that all sentient beings may be led into enlightenment. Who in the heavens and on earth cannot enter it?”¹¹⁸ Dōgen, like Shinran, proclaimed: “There is a very easy way to become a Buddha,”¹¹⁹ and “Zazen-only is of the foremost importance for the growth of a Zen monastic. Through the practice of zazen, irrespective of intelligence, one will mature naturally.”¹²⁰ He also said:

The true learning of the Way is not dependent on one’s native intelligence or acquired learning, nor on cleverness or quickness. This should not be construed as an exhortation to become like the blind, the deaf, or the fool. Truth does not employ erudition and high intelligence; so do not despair of being endowed with slowness and inferior intelligence. For the true learning of the Way should be easy.¹²¹

Similar statements are replete in Dōgen’s works. Despite his aristocratic origin and philosophical erudition, nothing was more alien to his thought than social condescension or intellectual arrogance.

Dōgen’s religion abolished the separation between monastics and lay persons. “Those who regard mundane activity as an obstacle to the Buddha-dharma know only that there is no Buddha-dharma in the mundane life; they do not yet know that there is no mundane life in the Buddha-dharma.”¹²² Monastics and laity are in essence one and the same. “It [enlightenment] depends,” wrote Dōgen, “solely upon whether you have a sincere desire to seek it, not upon whether you live in a monastery or in the secular world.”¹²³

Nevertheless Dōgen also stated:

Of all the Buddhas in the three periods and ten directions, not a single Buddha attained Buddhahood through the secular life. Because of those Buddhas of the past, monasticism and ordination have their merits. Sentient beings’ attainment of the Way necessarily depends upon entering into the monastic’s life and receiving the precepts. Indeed the monastic’s life and the vow to observe the precepts, being the unchanging law of Buddhas, are possessed of boundless merits. Although in the holy

teachings there is the view that advocates the attainment of Buddhahood through the secular life, it is not the rightly transmitted teaching.... What the Buddhas and ancestors have rightly transmitted is to become a Buddha through the monastic's life.¹²⁴

Dōgen went so far as to say that “even if a monastic violates the precepts, he/she is superior to a lay person who does not break his/her precepts.”¹²⁵ Herein lies one of the thorniest problems in Dōgen studies—his view on monasticism and laity. However, as we shall see in more detail later, Dōgen held from beginning to end that “homelessness” was the ideal possibility or model of rightly transmitted Buddhism and transcended both the monastic's and the layperson's lives in their ordinary senses. Dōgen's universalism was envisioned in terms of this monastic elitism,¹²⁶ that is to say, Dōgen held up the monastic life as a challenge to his Buddhist contemporaries as well as to the secularists of the time. The monastic life was not a withdrawal from the world, but a protest, an invitation, a recommendation to the world. It is in this light that we understand Dōgen's idealization of monasticism and his relentless demand that his disciples pursue the Way for the sake of the Way, without accommodating themselves to worldly interests and concerns. Fundamentally speaking, the ideal of monasticism was the ideal of every human being—to be born was one's initiation into monastic life. He wrote:

Therefore, whether you are a heavenly being, human, ruler, or public official, whether you are a layperson, monastic, servant, or brute, you should uphold the Buddhist precepts and rightly transmit the monastics' robes in order to become a child of Buddha. Indeed this is the shortest way to rightly enter the rank of Buddha.¹²⁷

This was quite different from approaches taken by his contemporaries such as Shinran and Nichiren, who while equally anti-secular and anti-authoritarian, approached the matter of liberation by adapting the Way to the levels of the common people (*taiki-seppō*) who were living in the Age of Degenerate Law. The easy path (*igyō*), which called for the recitation of “Namu-Amida-Butsu” (*myōgō*) and “Namu-Myōhō-Rengekyō” (*daimoku*), was “superior” to other methods precisely because it was superlatively adapted to the religious situation of the age. It was the means by which these leaders involved themselves in human existence.

On the other hand, accommodating himself to inferior and mediocre minds appealed little to Dōgen. In this respect, Dōgen retained his aristocratic elitism while at the same time detesting any flattering association with power and authority. It must be remembered that at this time incessant earthquakes, epidemics, fires, famines, social unrest, and so forth, had brought incalculable suffering upon the entire populace. Yet, unlike Shinran and Nichiren, Dōgen seems to have been impervious to this, not because he lacked compassion but because his compassion was modulated in a different key, although some may undoubtedly interpret it as misplaced and inhumane.

Dōgen repudiated, at least in principle, religious discrimination between the sexes. Regarding the question of whether zazen can be practiced by men and women in the secular life or only practiced by monks, Dōgen answered: “The understanding of Dharma, as the ancestors taught, does not depend on differences in sex and in rank.”¹²⁸ His case for the equality of sexes was most eloquently stated in the following:

Some people, foolish to the extreme, think of a woman as nothing but the object of sensual pleasures, and see her in this way without ever correcting their view. A Buddhist should not do so. If a man detests a woman as a sexual object, she must detest him for the same reason. Both man and woman become objects, and thus become equally involved in defilement.¹²⁹

Dōgen continues:

What charge is there against woman? What virtue is there in man? There are wicked men in the world; there are virtuous women in the world. The desire to hear Dharma and the search for enlightenment do not necessarily rely on the difference in sex.¹³⁰

Thus, Dōgen ridicules the Buddhist practice of “no admittance to women” (*nyonin-kinzei*) as “a laughable matter in Japan.”¹³¹

The rapid expansion of Dōgen’s Buddhism can be seen in the fact that an annex (*jūundō*) soon had to be added to the monastics’ hall in 1239. In commemoration of this event, Dōgen wrote twenty-one instructions on life in the annex in his *Kannon-dōri Kōshō-gokokuji jūundōshiki*, which begins with the statement: “Those who have believing minds and give up desire for worldly fame and gain shall enter. Those who lack sincerity shall not join;

entering mistakenly, they shall depart after due deliberation.” And: “The congregation in the hall should be in harmony with one another just like milk and water, and endeavor to live by the Way.” The book ends with this remark: “The foregoing instructions are the body and mind of the Buddhas and ancestors: revere and follow them.”¹³²

In 1241, such able disciples as Ekan, Gikai (1219–1309), Giin, Gien, Gijun, and others (who had been the disciples of Dainichibō Nōnin) joined Dōgen's community. It is significant to note that Dainichibō Nōnin was the favorite among Japanese Buddhists to establish a “pure Zen” (*junsui-zen*) in the country over the traditional “mixed Zen” (*kenju-zen*)—this task, however, came to be fulfilled by Dōgen and his disciples.

Thus the primitive order of the Sōtō sect in Japan was formed with a deep commitment to pure Zen. As we shall see, Dōgen wished to establish an unadulterated, full-fledged Zen Buddhism that was clearly distinguished from all non-Zen schools of Buddhism as well as from those Zen schools that had blended with esoteric Buddhism. Dōgen, like Dainichibō Nōnin, was passionately puristic in this respect and indomitably independent of all Buddhist schools.

We should also note that Hatano Yoshishige, a well-known member of the supreme court of the shogunate in Rokuhara, became a devout follower of Dōgen and himself entered into monkhood eventually. Hatano would play an important role in the future development of Dōgen's religion.

The founding of the Kōshō-hōrinji temple and Ejō's assistance gave Dōgen a favorable opportunity for the unfolding of his creative literary activity, which I referred to previously. The core of Dōgen's thought matured during this period.

As time went on, Dōgen himself felt compelled to articulate his position more definitively, in order to distinguish it from other schools of Buddhism. As I have noted already, he criticized both established and new Buddhism unflinchingly. Early in his career, he criticized Pure Realm Buddhism in the following:

Do you know the merits attained by the reading of the sūtras and the practice of nembutsu? It is most pitiful that some believe in the virtue of just moving the tongue or of raising the voice. Taking them for Dharma, they become more and more remote from it. . . . To try to realize the Way by way of nembutsu—moving the mouth foolishly ten million times—can be compared to the attempt to leave for Yüeh [south]

by orienting the wheel of your cart towards the north.... Lifting the voice incessantly is just like a frog croaking day and night in a rice pad in the springtime. It is, after all, futile.¹³³

In the context of his criticism of such schools as Hokke, Kegon, and Shingon, Dōgen wrote: “A Buddhist should neither argue superiority or inferiority of doctrines, nor settle disputes over depth or shallowness of teachings, but only know authenticity or inauthenticity of practice.”¹³⁴ Dōgen relentlessly criticized the Buddhists of these schools, calling them “the scholars who count words and letters” (*monji o kazouru gakusha*). Dōgen sharply set himself apart from scholastically oriented Buddhism by characterizing his own religion as intent on the authenticity of practice, for which he had a burning sense of mission and a stubborn purism.

Coupled with his rising popularity, this stubbornness and sense of mission did not fail to irritate the traditionally-minded Buddhists, especially those on Mt. Hiei. Dōgen’s position at the Kōshō-hōrinji temple became increasingly threatened by these traditionalists. At the same time, however, Dōgen was offered an attractive invitation by Hōjō Yasutoki to visit Kamakura although he flatly refused it, perhaps because his anti-authoritarian spirit would not allow him to accept.¹³⁵

Despite this, Dōgen dedicated the *Gokoku shōbōgi* (*Significance of the Right Dharma for the Protection of the Nation*) to the imperial authority, which sparked Hiei’s furies against him. In doing so, Dōgen followed the footsteps of other Japanese Buddhists and/or the loyal family tradition of the Murakami Genji, which revealed his deep involvement with other religionists, nobles, and warriors—the well-known tripartite camps of the upper echelon of Kamakura Japan.

A proposal to move the monastic headquarters to the province of Echizen was made by Hatano Yoshishige, who offered his own property in the province for the site of a new monastery. Dōgen’s acceptance of this offer seems to have been hastened by several factors: (1) As we have seen, the pressures of established Buddhism led Dōgen to the realization that the original vision of his monastic ideal was insurmountably difficult to carry out in his current surroundings.¹³⁶ (2) As Furuta contends, his sense of rivalry with the Rinzai sect, particularly with Enni Ben’en (1202–1280) of the Tōfukuji temple—Dōgen’s most powerful contemporary—might have driven him to a more self-conscious effort to establish Sōtō Zen, as opposed to Rinzai Zen, despite his advocacy of a catholic Buddhism. Significantly enough, his anti-Rinzai remarks

became especially frequent around 1243 and thereafter.¹³⁷ (3) Dōgen was increasingly mindful of Ju-ching's instruction: "Do not stay in the center of cities or towns. Do not be friendly with rulers and state ministers. Dwell in the deep mountains and valleys to realize the true nature of humanity."¹³⁸ (4) Dōgen's unquenchable yearnings for nature rather than urban commotion grew in this period as expressed in his exaltation of mountains and waters (*sansui*): "From the timeless beginning have mountains been the habitat of great sages. Wise ones and sages have all made mountains their secret chambers and their bodies and minds; by them mountains are realized."¹³⁹ And finally: (5) These circumstances and factors reinforced his original belief in monastic Buddhism (*shukke-Bukkyō*), rather than lay Buddhism (*zaike-Bukkyō*). Monastic Buddhism had consistently been the model of Buddhism for Dōgen from the very beginning. Sadly, Dōgen must have realized the impracticability of his ideal of universal monasticism in the mundane world. Perhaps a bit pessimistically, he was increasingly attracted to the community of a select few in order to achieve his utopian vision.

This shift in emphasis, although not in principle, contrasted significantly with his earlier position, namely the widest possible dissemination and popularization of *zazen* in Japan. Nevertheless, his new stress on elitism, rather than universalism, did not imply in the slightest the abandonment of his mission to change the world as much as the self. We must not minimize the social significance of monastic asceticism in this respect.

In the seventh month of 1243, Dōgen left the care of the Kōshōji temple to his disciple Gijun and arrived in the province of Echizen. He immediately entered a small temple called Kippōji, which had long been in a state of disrepair. Dōgen stayed at Kippōji and occasionally went to Yamashibu to preach. Although the Kippōji period lasted only about a year, Dōgen, secluded from the world by heavy snow, preached and worked as energetically as ever and produced twenty-nine chapters of the *Shōbōgenzō*. He was unquestionably still at the height of his literary productivity.

In the meantime, Hatano Yoshishige and other lay disciples had been engaged in the construction of the Daibutsuji temple, to which Dōgen moved in the seventh month of 1244. The Dharma hall and the monastics' hall were built in rapid succession, and in 1245, Dōgen announced the observance of the *geango* period for the first time in the history of the new headquarters.

In 1246, Dōgen changed the name of the Daibutsuji to the Eiheiji temple. "Eihei" means "eternal peace" and was the name of the era in the Later Han dynasty during which Buddhism was said to have been introduced to

China. With this naming, Dōgen signaled the introduction of the eternal peace of Buddhism in Japan. He had finally realized his long-cherished dream—the establishment of an ideal monastic community, as envisioned by Po-chang Huai-hai (720–814), in the bosom of the mountains and waters. Echizen was an ideal place for such a community, for it was physically remote from Kyoto and Kamakura and therefore free from the established Buddhism, the imperial-Fujiwara power complex, and the warrior class. The Eiheiji temple became the symbol of the “center of the world” (*axis mundi*) in the religion of Dōgen and his followers.¹⁴⁰

In the Daibutsuji-Eiheiji period (1244–53), Dōgen wrote only eight chapters of the *Shōbōgenzō*. He directed his efforts primarily to the formulation and guidance of moral precepts and disciplinary rules for the monastic community, rather than the exposition of his thought. This period was characterized by his concentration on the ritualization of every aspect of monastic life. He wrote, for example, the *Taidaiko goge jarihō* (1244), which established the sixty-two rules of behavior for junior members of the monastic community (as opposed to senior members who received training for five years or more); the *Nihonkoku Echizen Eiheiji chiji shingi* (1246), in which the six administrative leaders were instructed in their treatment of inferiors (in contrast to the *Taidaiko goge jarihō*, which was written for monastic leaders); the *Bendōhō* (circa 1244–46), containing minute instructions on early morning, morning, early evening, and evening zazen, all aspects of daily life in the monastics’ hall such as washing the face, wearing the robe, and sleeping; the *Eiheiji jikuimmon* (1246), in which Dōgen exalted the spiritual significance of preparing and taking a meal (his instructions were permeated by his belief that eating itself was a spiritual matter); the *Fushuku hampō* (circa 1246–53), which specified in minute detail mealtime manners and rules following Dōgen’s metaphysics of eating, in which food and Dharma were non-dually one; the *Kichijōzan Eiheiji shuryō shingi* (1249), in which Dōgen formulated the code of conduct for the monastic library, which he regarded as the center of intellectual life;¹⁴¹ and the *Eiheiji jūryō seiki* (1249) in which he admonished disciples to not involve themselves in or cater to political and religious powers. Such moral and cultic formulations were derived directly from his conception of the sanctity of every aspect of life; they were regarded as free expressions of Buddha-nature and not just rules and codes that bound the lives of ordinary monastics.

Thus the Eiheiji monastery was an exclusive religious and educational community of the very best seekers who had an unflinching determination

to grow in the wisdom and compassion of the bodhisattva way and therein become members of the family tradition of the Buddhas and ancestors (*busso no kafū*).¹⁴² This community was also designated as the community of truth (*shinjitsu-sō*), the community of peace and harmony (*wagō-sō*), and the community of purity (*shōjō-sō*).

For about seven months between the eighth month of 1247 and the third month of 1248, Dōgen preached before Hōjō Tokiyori of the Kamakura government, but declined his offer of property in the Echizen province.¹⁴³ In light of his rejection of Yasutoki's invitation, Dōgen's Kamakura visit could have been construed as self-contradictory; his compliance was most likely due to a request from Hatano Yoshishige.¹⁴⁴ There are different speculations as to what Dōgen recommended to or discussed with Tokiyori during his stay in Kamakura; the question is still open to further investigation.¹⁴⁵

In 1250, the ex-emperor Gosaga sent an offer to Dōgen to bestow a purple robe upon him. Dōgen declined more than once, but finally accepted on imperial insistence. However, Dōgen did not wear the robe until the end of his life.¹⁴⁶ From about 1250 on, he suffered from ill health, and his participation in monastic activities was greatly hampered. His condition worsened around the summer of 1252. Nevertheless in the first month of 1253, Dōgen wrote the *Shōbōgenzō*, "Hachi-dainingaku," which was his last message to his disciples in anticipation of his approaching death. According to remarks by Gien and Ejō, inserted at the end of this chapter, Dōgen wanted to compose a total of one hundred chapters for the *Shōbōgenzō*, but was unable to. Ejō wrote: "Unfortunately we cannot see a one-hundred-chapter version. This is a matter for deep regret."¹⁴⁷

In the seventh month, Dōgen appointed Ejō his successor as the head of the Eiheiji monastery. Following Hatano Yoshishige's advice, Dōgen reluctantly left Echizen for Kyoto in the following month to seek medical care, accompanied by Ejō and several other disciples. He was treated at the home of his lay disciple Kakunen in Kyoto; however, his illness, perhaps aggravated by the journey, was already too advanced to be cured by any medical treatment.

In the eighth month of 1253, Dōgen bade farewell to his grieving disciples and died in the posture of *zazen*.