Review

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He Yansheng: *Dōgen and Chinese Zen Thought*

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Within the constellation of Buddhist masters from the Kamakura period, Dōgen's intellectual legacy continues to command profound respect. From a scholarly perspective, despite the proliferation of numerous works of marginal significance, the publication of two seminal volumes within the current year [2000] marks a commendable advancement in Dōgen studies. These volumes include *Dōgen and Chinese Zen*[1] *Thought* by He Yansheng and Matsumoto Shirō's *A Treatise on the Thought of Dōgen* (道元思想論, jpn. *Dōgen-Shisō-Ron*) (Daizō-Shuppan). Matsumoto's contribution, characterized by its fervent advocacy for "critical Buddhism" from within the Sōtō School's (曹洞宗, jpn. *sōtō-shū*) framework, endeavors to challenge the infallibility of the founding patriarch. In contrast, He Yansheng's monograph emerges as a scholarly endeavor that seeks to redefine Dōgen's intellectual position

1 Translator's Note: The Japanese term "Zen" (禅) corresponds to the Chinese word "Chan" (禅).

Translator's Note: This article was originally published in the *Journal of Religious Studies*, the official journal of the Japanese Association for Religious Studies (Volume 74, Number 2, September 2000). The author, Sueki Fumihiko (末木文美士), is professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo and is widely recognized for his significant contributions to the field of Buddhist studies.

Translator's Note: The translation of this paper was conducted in two stages. Initially, Zhang Hong (张竑) undertook the task of translating the manuscript from Japanese to Chinese. This was followed by Zhai Zheng (翟峥), who, while consistently referring to the original Japanese manuscript, translated the work from Chinese into English.

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by transcending sectarian affiliations and leveraging the author's Chinese heritage to offer new insights. Although these works diverge in their investigative trajectories, their foundation in rigorous literature review, their departure from conventional wisdom, and their commitment to fostering critical scholarship collectively signal a pivotal moment in the academic investigation of Dōgen.

Dr. He Yansheng, born in 1962 in Hubei Province, China, and an alumnus of Tohoku University in Japan, has grounded this book in his doctoral research. The scholarly ambition of this work is succinctly articulated in an excerpt from its introduction:

> The author argues that Dōgen's Zen philosophy is deeply rooted in the tradition of Chinese Zen thought. An accurate comprehension and evaluation of Dōgen's contributions are contingent upon a foundation in Chinese Zen literature. This entails illuminating Dōgen's philosophy through the lens of Chinese Zen and situating his contributions within an accurate historical and intellectual context to unearth the distinctiveness of his thought (p. 15).

Historically, examinations of Dōgen have often been constrained by a narrow focus on Japanese intellectual traditions or by an undue emphasis on his uniqueness, largely neglecting his broader historical and intellectual milieu. The burgeoning scholarship on the doctrine of original enlightenment (本覚思想, jpn. *hongaku shisō*) and Daruma School (達磨宗, jpn. *Daruma-shū*) in Japan underscores the necessity of engaging with Chinese Zen thought to elucidate these connections. Addressing the prevailing ambiguities surrounding the Rinzai School (臨済宗, jpn. *Rinzai-shū*) in Japan necessitates an in-depth exploration of contemporary Chinese Zen practices. Given the relative paucity of research on Song Dynasty Zen compared to Tang Dynasty Zen, prioritizing the former emerges as an urgent academic endeavor. It is within this context that Dr. He's scholarly contributions merit particular attention.

The monograph is structured into two principal sections, beyond its introductory and concluding remarks. The first section, titled "Dōgen: The Man and His Works", comprises three chapters, while the second section, "Dōgen's Understanding of Chinese Zen Thought," unfolds over seven chapters. The initial segment delves into Dōgen's biographical background, his literary contributions, and related discussions. Although the author provides a detailed account of Dōgen based on historical records, the section offers few new insights into the academic discourse. The latter section, comprising two-thirds of the work, is positioned as the monograph's core, warranting special scholarly focus.

In the second section, chapters one through three, under the heading Nyojō (如浄, chn. *Rujing*), meticulously explore the intricate relationship between Dōgen and his

mentor, Nyojō. The initial two chapters focus on Nyojō's life and his literary legacy, encapsulated in the *Collected Sayings of Nyojō* (如净语录, chn. *Rujing yulu*) and its continuation (如净续语录, chn. *Rujing xu yulu*). Despite Nyojō's profound influence on Dōgen, he remains a relatively obscure figure within the annals of Chinese Zen Buddhism. The correlation between the extant sayings of Nyojō and the originality of Dōgen's philosophy is tenuous, raising complex questions about Nyojō's character and his influence on Dōgen's thought.

Dr. He's meticulous examination of the *Collected Sayings of Nyojō* and its continuation, coupled with the revelation of the latter being a forgery and the authenticity issues surrounding the former, casts a new light on the reliability of these texts as faithful records of Nyojō's teachings. This scrutiny leads to a nuanced understanding: even though Dōgen's *Hōkyōki* (宝慶記) and other texts may present content that seems contradictory to what is found in the *Collected Sayings of Nyojō* and its continuation, the value of *Hōkyōki* and similar texts cannot be outright dismissed. Chapter three then delves into the pivotal teaching of *shinjin datsuraku*.[2] This profound teaching, which represents the zenith of Dōgen's learning under Nyojō's tutelage, is documented in *Hōkyōki* but notably absent from the *Collected Sayings of Nyojō*. The interpretation of *shinjin datsuraku* has sparked considerable debate, particularly around whether it might have been a misinterpretation by Dōgen of the phrase.[3] This hypothesis, proposed by Takasaki Jikidō and discussed in *Imitation of Ancient Buddhas – Dōgen* (古仏のまねび – 道元, jpn. *Kobutsu no Manebi – Dōgen*) (Kadokawa-Shoten, 1969), has fueled ongoing discussions. The key issue in this debate is whether it's phonetically plausible to confuse *shinjin* (心塵, chn. *xinchen*) with *shinjin* (身心, chn. *shenxin*). Although it might seem unlikely that these terms could be confused based on their pronunciation, we cannot completely rule out this possibility without a more thorough understanding of the regional pronunciation differences of that time period.

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2 Translator's Note: *Shinjin datsuraku* (身心脱落) refers to the state of "casting off of body-mind" that Dōgen experienced after intensive Zen practice under the guidance of his Chinese master, Nyojō. This term signifies shedding the self and body-minds of others, emphasizing the unity and interconnectedness of all things.

3 Translator's Note: Takasaki has speculated, based on textual, linguistic, and ideological evidence, that Nyojō may not originally have said "cast off body-mind" (身心脱落, chn. *shenxin tuoluo*). Instead, he suggests Nyojō might have said "cast off the dust from the mind" (心尘脱落, chn. *xinchen tuoluo*), a phrase that, while phonetically identical in Japanese, carries a different meaning in Chinese. This alternative phrase introduces a dichotomy between subject and object, purity and defilement, potentially indicating an attachment to substantialism that does not align with the concept of *shinjin datsuraku* as typically understood in Dōgen's philosophy. Takasaki proposes that Dōgen might either have misheard or intentionally misconstrued Nyojō's expression to correct it, aligning with Dōgen's known tendency to creatively reinterpret Buddhist scriptures and teachings.

Dr. He provides a compelling argument that significantly undermines the theory of misinterpretation regarding the phrase. His first point of contention addresses the occurrence and context of the so-called *shinjin* (心塵) *datsuraku* within the *Collected Sayings of Nyojō*. Upon examination, it becomes evident that this phrase is mentioned only once, and its placement within a verse praising the Buddha – specifically, in a section lauding the qualities of the "mind" in relation to the virtues of Guanyin Bodhisattva – suggests its use as a form of commendation rather than a reflection of Nyojō's philosophical stance. This singular mention, framed within a context of admiration rather than doctrinal exposition, cannot be taken as a definitive articulation of Nyojō's views (p. 175).

Furthermore, Dr. He questions the purported incompatibility of the concept of *shinjin* (身心) *datsuraku* with Nyojō's teachings. By referencing two or three instances in the *Collected Sayings of Nyojō* where expressions akin to the idea of *shinjin* (身心) *datsuraku* are employed, alongside evidence of similar notions in Zen literature dating back to the late Tang and the Five Dynasties period, he suggests that the notion, rather than being a unique misinterpretation by Dōgen, aligns with the broader spectrum of Nyojō's teachings. However, the examples (pp. 183–186) Dr. He provides to support this argument are noted to be somewhat broad, lacking the specificity needed to be fully persuasive. Instead, *datsuraku* could have been studied with more scrutiny – it should not be understood merely as physical detachment, as implied by *shinjin* (心塵) *datsuraku*, but rather, *shinjin* (身心) *datsuraku* should be interpreted within the context of a religious experience. This interpretation is supported by a comparison to a line from the *Poems of Han Shan* (寒山诗, chn. *Hanshan shi*), which echoes a similar sentiment: "The skin sheds completely, only one truth remains" (Yositaka Iriya's annotation of *Han Shan*, Iwanami Shoten, 1958, p. 161). Through this analysis, Dr. He effectively disputes the notion that Dōgen's understanding of *shinjin datsuraku* was a misinterpretation.

In the subsequent chapter, Dr. He turns his attention to the relationship between Dōgen and Hongzhi Zhengjue (宏智正覚). Contrary to Ishii Shūdō's assertion in *A Study of the History of Zen in the Song Dynasty* (宋代禅宗史の研究, jpn. *Sōdai Zenshūshi no Kenkyū*) (Daito Publishing House, 1987) that Dōgen did not acknowledge Hongzhi, Dr. He's thorough investigation reveals that Dōgen indeed held Hongzhi in high esteem, challenging previous interpretations of their connection.

In chapters five through seven, the discussion shifts to a focused examination of the core elements within Dōgen's philosophy, specifically addressing the concept of Buddha-nature, the critique of Shinjō Sōmetsu Ron,[4] and the critique of Sangyō

4 Translator's Note: Shinjō Sōmetsu Ron (心常相滅論), is the theory that "the body perishes but the mind is immortal".

Itchi.[5] These topics, which have been extensively explored by previous scholars, are central to understanding Dōgen's thought. In chapter five, Dr. He delves into the nuanced interpretations of Buddha-nature, contrasting the views of the Rinzai School with those of Dōgen. "The concept of Buddha-nature of Rinzai School's Kōan Zen[6] … emphasizes 'Emptiness of Buddha-nature' and especially regards 'emptiness' as absolute". In contrast, "for Dōgen, merely acknowledging the 'Emptiness of Buddha-nature' is insufficient. He argues that one must also recognize that 'Buddha-nature is inherent' to fully comprehend its true essence" (p. 253). This distinction, however, is not entirely novel to Dōgen, as Dr. He notes. The tradition of the Hongzhi School already incorporates the notion of "inherentness" in its interpretation of the *kōan* "Does a dog have Buddha-nature?" Moreover, Dr. He observes that "the way Dōgen conceptualizes 'inherentness' bears a striking resemblance to the Rinzai School's emphasis on 'emptiness'. This similarity suggests that Dōgen might be intentionally positioning his interpretation in opposition to the Rinzai School's focus on 'emptiness'" (p. 254). Dr. He posits that Dōgen's nuanced understanding of "inherentness" is closely aligned with the prevalent "emptiness" *kōan* of the Rinzai School during that era. Despite the extensive scholarly work already conducted on Buddha-nature, Dr. He's analysis opens up fresh avenues for exploration, indicating substantial potential for further research in understanding the complexities of these Buddhist concepts.

Chapter six focuses on Dōgen's critique of Shinjō Sōmetsu Ron, which proposes that while the external world is transient, the mind remains eternally unchanged. Dōgen's strong objections to this idea are evident in his works, such as *The Treatise on Negotiating the Way* (弁道話, jpn. *Bendōwa*) and *Your Very Mind Is Buddha* (即心是仏, jpn. *Sokushinzebutsu*). The question of why Dōgen was so critical as well as the historical context that necessitated such a critique has been a significant topic in Dōgen scholarship. A prevalent theory, supported by scholars like Hazama Jikō and further developed by Tamura Yoshirō, Yamauchi Shun'yū, among others, posits that Dōgen's critique was aimed at the doctrine of original enlightenment of the Tendai School (天台宗, jpn. *Tendai-shū*) in Japan. This perspective has become widely accepted, with Hakamaya Noriaki's interpretation also aligning with this view. However, Dr. He challenges this consensus, arguing that:

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5 Translator's Note: Sangyō Itchi (三教一致說), or the "Theory of the Unity of the Three Teachings", refers to the idea that Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism are fundamentally harmonious and can be integrated into a single, coherent philosophical system.

6 Translator's Note: Kōan Zen (公案禅) is a form of Zen meditation that utilizes *kōans* (公案) as focal points for practice. *Kōans* are paradoxical anecdotes, dialogues, statements, or questions used in Zen Buddhism to provoke deep questioning and to test a student's progress in Zen practice.

> Dōgen's critique targets Shinjō Sōmetsu Ron, a fundamental belief held by the Hongzhou (洪州宗, chn. *Hongzhou zong*) and Heze Schools (荷泽宗, chn. *Heze zong*), which are branches of the Nanzong Zen School (南宗禅, chn. *Nanzong chan*) in China. This critique is directed at the teachings of Mazu Daoyi (马祖道一) and, more specifically, those of his disciples Fenzhou Wuye (汾州无业) and Yuanzhou Zhenshu (袁州甄叔), along with the scholar Zongmi (宗密). The terminology and the philosophical content of their teachings bear a striking resemblance to the concept of Shinjō Sōmetsu Ron that Dōgen challenges. It is plausible to suggest that Dōgen's exposure to these ideas came through his study of texts like the *The Jingde Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* (景德传灯录, chn. *Jingde chuandeng lu*) among others. His critiques, whether explicit or implicit, are found in his writings, notably in the *Dōgen's Extensive Record* (永平広録, jpn. *Eihei Kōroku*) (p. 274).

Dr. He elucidates that Dōgen's critique was not directed at the Tendai School based on Mount Hiei, but rather at a specific sect within Chinese Zen. This leads to the inquiry of why Dōgen specifically targeted a Chinese Zen school with his critiques. According to Dr. He, there are two main reasons for this. The first reason is Dōgen's advocacy for *shinjin ichinyo*,[7] which made the notion of separating mind and body (as adovcated by Shinjō Sōmetsu Ron) particularly objectionable to him, thus becoming focal points of his criticism. The second reason is the significant influence of the Mazu School's Zen teachings on the Rinzai Zen of the Song Dynasty, which also spread to Japan, notably within the Daruma School. This influence necessitated Dōgen's critique of the Mazu School as the source of these teachings. Despite some members of the Daruma School later becoming Dōgen's disciples, it's conceivable that remnants of Shinjō Sōmetsu Ron concept persisted. This trend was also observable in the Japanese Rinzai School, exemplified by figures such as Shoichi (Enni) [聖一 (円爾)]. In this context, Dr. He suggests that Dōgen's strategy of "tracing back to and critiquing the Nanzong Zen School's ideology was an effective way to counter the prevalent notions of the futility of practice and the 'indestructibility of spiritual knowledge' at the time" (pp. 281–282).

When the foundational arguments of this chapter were first published as a paper, I expressed agreement with Dr. He's stance while also offering additional comments and suggestions for consideration, as detailed in my work *The Formation of Kamakura Buddhism* (鎌倉仏教形成論, jpn. *Kamakura Bukkyō Keisei Ron*) (Hōzōkan, 1998). In his current work, Dr. He has taken these suggestions into account, leading to conclusions that are more nuanced and well-reasoned. However, this does not imply that the issues surrounding the doctrine of original enlightenment are entirely resolved. Given the historical connections between both the Daruma and

7 Translator's Note: *Shinjin ichinyo* (身心一如) translates to "body and mind are one" or "unity of body and mind". For Dōgen, the distinction between body and mind is a false dichotomy that arises from dualistic thinking. Instead, he posits that our lived experience does not separate the physical from the mental or spiritual; they are intrinsically interconnected and interdependent.

Rinzai Schools with the Tendai School from Mount Hiei, it seems reasonable to suggest that these schools' concepts of Shinjō Sōmetsu Ron and the futility of practice bear some relation to the Tendai doctrine of original enlightenment.

In the discourse on this matter, Matsumoto Shirō advocates for employing the "Buddha-nature Manifestation theory" (仏性顕在論, jpn. *busshō-kenzairon*) as a critical lens through which to analyze and challenge the "Buddha-nature Immanence theory" (仏性内在論, jpn. *busshō-naizairon*). This approach is detailed in his work *A Treatise on the Thought of Dōgen* (p. 30), and further discussed in my own book previously mentioned (p. 71). Matsumoto's argument is framed not merely in terms of specific doctrinal details, but rather as a comparison between two distinct philosophical paradigms within Buddhist thought. Despite the broad strokes of this discussion, I believe that the pivotal concept of Matsumoto's critique, the "Buddha-nature Manifestation theory," merits a deeper exploration. I plan to dedicate further analysis to this topic in the future.

Let us turn our attention back to Dr. He's work. Chapter seven scrutinizes Dōgen's critique of Sankyō Itchi Setsu, as discussed in texts like *All Dharmas are Real Form* (諸法実相, jpn. *Shohō Jissō*). Central to Dōgen's critique is his profound reverence for the *Lotus Sutra* (法华经, chn. *Fahua jing*), a point often highlighted by scholars. This deep connection with the *Lotus Sutra* is typically linked to the influence of the Tendai School from Mount Hiei. Dr. He, however, offers a different perspective:

> Dōgen's admiration for the *Lotus Sutra* originates from his reflection on Huineng's (慧能) teachings, as captured in the latter's perspective on the Buddhist scriptures (经典观, chn. *jingdian guan*). This argument is set against the backdrop of a period when some advocated for a synthesis of the Three Teachings, promoting texts like the *Surangama Sutra* (楞严经, chn. *Lengyan jing*) and the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* (圆觉经, chn. *Yuanjue jing*) as 'Zen's foundational scriptures'. Dōgen's emphasis on the *Lotus Sutra* was a deliberate response to counter these contemporary views. Thus, it is hypothesizes that Dōgen's alignment with the *Lotus Sutra* might not directly stem from his practice at Mount Hiei (p. 313).

While Sankyō Itchi Setsu is traced back to Zongmi and others, it gained significant momentum during the Song Dynasty, presenting a contemporary issue for Dōgen. This ideological trend was not unique to Dōgen's context; it was also prevalent within the Daruma and Rinzai Schools in Japan of the time, suggesting that Dōgen's critiques were likely directed at those schools. Additionally, "the compilation of Zen monks' sayings from the Song Dynasty frequently references the *Lotus Sutra*" (p. 314), indicating that the association of the *Lotus Sutra* with the Tendai School of Mount Hiei warrant further scrutiny.

In this chapter as well as the previous one, Dr. He shifts the focus of Dōgen's critiques towards Chinese Zen and the Japanese Zen thought influenced by it, while minimizing the connection with the Tendai School of Mount Hiei. This approach contrasts with the traditional emphasis on Dōgen's ties to the Tendai School and introduces a novel perspective. Specifically, the interplay between the Daruma School, the early Japanese Rinzai School, and Chinese Zen of the Song Dynasty emerges as a significant area for future research. However, it raises the question: Is it entirely accurate to say that Dōgen's thoughts were completely disconnected from the Tendai School of Mount Hiei? On this matter, a definitive conclusion cannot be drawn. It remains plausible that Dōgen's critiques were part of a broader intellectual movement of the era, potentially including influences from the Tendai School of Mount Hiei.

The review above primarily focuses on the second section of the book, detailing its contents, evaluating its findings, and raising some questions. The book's title indicates a specific exploration of the relationship between Dōgen and Chinese Zen thought, marking a novel direction in the study of Dōgen's philosophy, especially when contrasted with previous research that heavily emphasized his connections to the Tendai School of Mount Hiei. The book leans on empirical evidence from Chinese Zen literature and utilizes a broad spectrum of Zen sayings to construct a compelling argument. Despite this, it leaves room for further development in analyzing the core structure of Dōgen's philosophy, a task reserved for future exploration. However, in the latter part of the final chapter, titled "Characteristics of Dōgen's Zen Thought," Dr. He outlines potential directions for a deeper understanding of Dōgen's philosophy based on the book's findings.

In this section, the author's assertion that the essence of Dōgen's Zen philosophy "is deeply rooted in the tradition of Kōan Zen" (p. 325) is both accurate and fitting. Previous scholars may have drawn too sharp a distinction between Dōgen and the Rinzai School's Kōan Zen, largely overlooking the significant influences Dōgen absorbed from his Song Dynasty contemporaries within Kōan Zen. Notably, a substantial portion of Dōgen's *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* (正法眼蔵, jpn. *Shōbōgenzō*) comprises *kōan* explanations, suggesting a connection to Dahui's (大慧) similarly titled *kōan* collection. Specifically, the Chinese version of Dōgen's *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* shares characteristics with a *kōan* collection, highlighting a clear intellectual link to Dahui and underscoring the influence of Kōan Zen on Dōgen's thought.

What, then, distinguishes the Rinzai School's Kōan Zen from Dōgen's approach? Dr. He elucidates:

> Kōan Zen actively challenges a static interpretation of the language of Zen, aiming to reveal a deeper significance by rendering the language ostensibly devoid of meaning … Dōgen, however, … took this process a step further by not only questioning the conventional meaning of words but also dismantling the Chinese characters that form the language. He then imbues these characters with new meanings to probe the profound essence underlying the linguistic expression (p. 325).

This interpretation closely mirrors my own viewpoint. However, I argue that Dōgen's objective was not simply to "dismantle the Chinese characters that form the language". As I elaborate in my book, *A Guide to the Blue Cliff Record* (『碧巌錄』を読む, jpn. *Hekiganroku wo Yomu*) (Iwanami-Shoten, 1998), this stance is supported by an analysis of Dōgen's critique found in a section of his *Mountains and Waters Sutra* (山水経, jpn. *Sansuikyō*) (pp. 108–113). In this passage, Dōgen denounces what he perceives as trivial *kōans*, such as "Eastern Mountain Walking on Water" (東山水上行, jpn. *Tozan Suijoko*), labeling them as "nonsense talk." For Dōgen, language is fundamentally a "thought statement," imbued with reflective thought and significance. Dōgen endeavored to "transcend conventional linguistic usage by attaining a comprehensive understanding of its underlying significance", in contrast to the practice within Kōan Zen, which advocates for "navigating beyond conventional linguistic expressions in a manner that appears fundamentally antithetical". Despite the divergence in these methodologies, both strategies seem to be unified in their pursuit to elucidate the core tenets of Zen Buddhism (p. 123).

However, despite these considerations, as Dr. He articulates, "Dōgen developed his own Zen thought by skillfully utilizing the differences between Japanese and Chinese, which have different linguistic structures, to understand previous Zen thought in Japanese literally" (p. 326). I wholeheartedly concur with Dr. He's assessment. Dōgen's approach, characterized by his immersion in the nuances of different languages, his meticulous attention to the structural variances in conceptual frameworks, and his relentless pursuit of original thought amidst challenges, places him in a league akin to the modern philosopher Nishida Kitaro. Thus, comprehending Dōgen's philosophy necessitates an appreciation of its intellectual backdrop within the annals of thought history, as well as a close reading of the texts themselves.

With the release of this book, Dr. He has made a significant contribution to Zen scholarship. I fervently hope that the author will extend his exploration to the doctrinal nuances of the Daruma and Rinzai Schools beyond Dōgen, while also deepening the analysis of Zen during the Song Dynasty. Regarding the study of Dōgen in particular, I am eager for further interpretations of the *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* that promise to unveil novel insights, challenging and surpassing the conventional interpretations held by previous scholars.

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