



He Yansheng 何燕生, trans., 正法眼藏 *Zheng fa yan zang* [*Shōbōgenzō*]

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THE BOOK UNDER REVIEW is a translation into Chinese of the classic work *Shōbōgenzō* by Dōgen, the famous Japanese Buddhist monk. There are two famous treatises with the same name—*Zheng fa yan zang/Shōbōgenzō*—in the history of Chan/Zen Buddhism. One is by Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163), an eminent Chinese monk of Linji tradition in the Song period, and the second is by Kigen Dōgen 希玄道元 (1200–1253), the founder of the Japanese Sōtō tradition in the Kamakura period. Of these two great Zen masters, one was Chinese and the other Japanese. Their lives were separated by about a hundred years, and they belonged to different branches of Zen, but these two treatises with the same name both appeared on the scene as outstanding treatises in the history of Buddhism in China and Japan. This, of course, is not just a matter of historical coincidence; there are significant intellectual inter-relationships between the two works.

Zen master Dahui was an important figure in the Yangqi 楊岐 branch of the Linji school, known for his eloquence and his efforts in disseminating the use of koans in Chan/Zen Buddhism, and his method is known as Kanhua-Chan/Zen 看話禪. This method is often contrasted with the silent Mozhao-Chan/Zen 默照禪 of the eminent Zen master Hongzhi Zhengjue 宏智正覺 of the Caodong/Sōtō 曹洞 school. These methods and activities reflected the popularity of the Chan/Zen tradition in the Song period.

Japan at this time was in the Heian period, and the Chan/Zen tradition had still not been officially recognized as an independent school. However, many meditation masters from Japan had visited Tang and Song China, studied Chan teachings, and acquired expertise in Chan practices. After returning to Japan, they transmitted the Chan traditions of various schools in China to Japan. They laid the foundation for Eisai/Yōsai and Dōgen to found the Rinzai and Sōtō traditions in the Kamakura period. Among these was Dainichi Nōnin 大日能忍, who traveled to Song China along with two disciples in 1189 and studied and received transmission 印可 under Dahui, the author of the Chinese *Zheng fa yan zang* 正法眼藏. Upon his return to Japan Nōnin founded the Japanese Darumashū 日本達磨宗. This transmission influenced Dōgen through his reading of the *Shin'yō teiji* 心要提示, a text written by Dainichi Nōnin's disciple Kakuan 覺晏. Thus it can be said that there is some sort of “connection” between Dahui and Dōgen.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that Dahui was a representative of the kōan-type 看話 of Chan, and Dōgen transmitted the “silent” type 默照 of Chan/Zen, which

were the two competing types of Chan/Zen in the Song period. Thus we cannot simply say that the Chan/Zen of Dahui and Dōgen are the same, though they share the distinction of having composed important treatises with the same title. The Japanese version, the *Shōbōgenzō*, was the first treatise on Buddhist philosophy written in “colloquial” Japanese, and is lauded as the finest philosophical work ever written by a Japanese. It is, of course, the most important text in the Japanese Sōtō tradition, and continues to hold an important place in the history of Japanese Buddhism and is the key to understanding Dōgen’s Zen thought.

It goes without saying that the *Shōbōgenzō* has been studied extensively in Japan, and it has also received much attention in the West, with numerous translations into European languages. Despite the value it holds for Chinese scholars, however, until now it has not been introduced in China. Dōgen studied and experienced the Chan/Zen tradition in China, and on this basis developed his own unique Zen philosophy. The *Shōbōgenzō* is the key to Dōgen’s Zen, which cannot be understood apart from this treatise. Although the text has been translated into English, French, German, Russian, and other European languages, it had not yet been rendered into modern Chinese. As a result, studies of Dōgen have yet to make much progress in China. This unfortunate situation has now been rectified by the translation of the *Shōbōgenzō* by He Yansheng. He completed this translation over the course of about six years, and this has been made public by a publisher in China. This is a most welcome contribution to the community of scholars in China. Let us now note our impressions of the translation, and discuss three of its characteristics.

1. The translation attempts to retain the distinct “flavor” of Dōgen’s original prose: The translator has chosen a very literal style of translation. The *Shōbōgenzō* is written in Japanese, but the style is very close to Chinese. Thus He does not translate the text into contemporary Chinese, but into more of a “classical” Chinese text. As a result, the translation not only shows respect for and retains the style of Dōgen’s original text, but also, to a certain extent, embodies the “flavor” of Zen. For difficult passages, the translator has provided supplementary text in parentheses, thus making it easier to understand. In this way the style of the original is retained, and can be appreciated by the reader. Also, this text contains many colloquial expressions from Dōgen’s era, and Dōgen himself created quite a number of new expressions; in these cases the translator left the expressions in their original form, without attempting to translate them. This is a way to preserve Dōgen’s particular sense of language, and shows a respect for the spirit of the text.
2. The translation includes detailed annotation: The *Shōbōgenzō* is Dōgen’s great lifetime work, written over a long timespan, and with many versions extant. He has focused on the basic 75-fascicle *Shōbōgenzō*, which is considered to best reflect Dōgen’s own thought, as well as a translation of the 12-fascicle *Shōbōgenzō*. Five miscellaneous fascicles are also appended. The content of this work is very wide-ranging, and from a distant era, making it very difficult to understand

even for modern Japanese. It certainly is even more difficult to grasp by modern Chinese readers. To assist these readers, the translator provides numerous annotations on historical figures, Chan/Zen traditions, Buddhist terminology, particular Chan/Zen words and kōans, Chinese and Japanese historical details, and so forth. In addition, the translator takes a very empirical stance, so if there are matters that cannot be explained, he will add a note to that effect, such as “this person cannot be identified,” or “this is unknown.” These sorts of detailed notes are very useful for the Chinese reader. It is clear that the translator is not only highly competent in Buddhist and religious studies, but is also a widely learned academic who has worked hard to provide these detailed notes and explanations.

3. The translation is of a very high quality: He Yansheng first came to Japan in 1983. He was one of the first group of elite exchange students sent abroad after the reforms and the opening of China to outside contact in the early 1980s. He studied Japanese from when he was still young, and is fluent in both Chinese and Japanese. After studying for a while at Bukkyō University and Tōhoku University, he received his PhD from Tōhoku University in 1997, with a major in religious studies and the history of religion. His main area of expertise is in Buddhism. He has studied Dōgen’s Zen philosophy for many years, and published his PhD dissertation on “Dōgen and Chinese Zen Thought” in Japanese in 2000. This publication was awarded the “Book of the Year” 日本宗教学会賞 award by the Japanese Association for Religious Studies. Recently he has published new theories about Dōgen’s philosophy which have stimulated much discussion among academic circles in Japan. This expertise is reflected in the high quality of his translation of the *Shōbōgenzō* into Chinese, for which he relies on his knowledge of the vast amount of research materials on Dōgen in Japanese.

There is no doubt that the publication of this translation of Dōgen’s *Shōbōgenzō* is a very important event. As the author points out in his Postscript (p. 721), Kadowaki Ingen 門脇允元 (former head priest of the Sōtō temple Rinkōin 林香院), extols this event as signaling the fact that Dōgen’s philosophy is finally “returning home” to China for the first time in 700 years. In this sense Dr. He’s translation of the *Shōbōgenzō* is an important landmark, and a valuable key for research on Dōgen and Japanese Buddhism for Chinese scholars in the future.

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