



Hee-Jin Kim, *Dōgen on Meditation and Thinking: A Reflection on His View of Zen*

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007. xi + 169 pp. Paperback, \$22.95. ISBN-10: 0-7914-6926-2; ISBN-13: 978-0791469262.

SUMMARIZING his earlier book (KIM 1975), the author of this stimulating set of essays says that Dōgen “restored language, thinking and reason—the familiar tools of duality—to their fully deserved legitimacy in his Zen” (x). He continues here his exploration of “the dynamics of duality as they relate to nonduality in the temporality of existence-time” (x).

In Chapter 1, “A Shattered Mirror, a Fallen Flower,” Kim presents delusion and enlightenment as “orientational and perspectival foci within the structure and dynamics of realization (*genjō*).... Enlightenment consists not so much in replacing as in dealing with or ‘negotiating’ delusion” (4). Throughout his book he proposes the model of supplementary foci as a corrective to such dualisms as that between “things as they really are” and “things as they appear to be,” which have led to the situation that the “pre- or extradiscriminative state of mind is privileged in such a way that creative tensions between delusion and enlightenment are all but lost” (1). This model is applied to several other dualities, such as that between the conventional and the ultimate. Perhaps a danger of this model is that it is too flexible and might end up leaving us with nothing concrete to say about how the two supplementary realities are related.

As one grows more enlightened, one also grows more aware of one’s enmeshment in “the vast and giddy karmic consciousness” (*gosshiki bōbō; bōbō gosshiki*) and of one’s condition of being “originally deluded” (5). This “underlines the fundamental limitations and ambiguities in our moral and religious *overcoming*, namely, enlightenment. This is also the ultimate limitation of Zen as a religion” (8). Zen does not promise any condition that transcends this-worldly reality. I do not know if the author has some *arrière-pensée* here about Christianity as going beyond this limitation, for good or ill. He certainly wants to deflate claims made for Zen by D. T. Suzuki and other “intuitionists,” and he welcomes, perhaps too eagerly, the “rude awakenings” Zen has faced at the hands of Robert Sharf, Bernard Faure, Brian Victoria, and Critical Buddhism.

Kim most vividly conveys his sense of how the interface between delusion and enlightenment is lived in a fresh translation of Dōgen’s poem: *Yo no naka wa/ nani ni tatoen/ mizutori no/ hashi furu tsuyu ni/ yadoru tsukikage*, 世中は何にたとへん水鳥の、はしふる露にやどる月影 “To what can I liken the human condition in which I live in the here and now? I say: ‘The moon’s *shaken* reflections in dewdrops” (11).

In temporal existence we cannot enjoy a pure, immune beatitude. “There is nothing but the shaken reflection in which shakiness and reflection are never statically/reductively fused, but dialectically/dialogally interactive” (11). Delusion itself, consciously assumed in all its fragility, is enlightenment, and enlightenment partakes of the fragility of delusion. One may certainly feel dizzy and shaken when reading Dōgen (one student had to stop to preserve her sanity), but this interpretation risks leaving us caught in a loop between “impermanence is Buddha-nature” and “Buddha-nature is impermanence.” Is there nothing that in any way transcends radical impermanence?

Beyond, or deep within, the interplay of enlightenment and delusion, light and darkness, lies a third factor, the very nub of Dōgen’s thought, introduced rather unobtrusively on p. 16: “Dōgen now deeply probes the subtle workings of emptiness itself with respect to illusion and reality, delusion and enlightenment,” in a passage claimed to overcome the idea that truth is a correspondence between mind and reality (a point not sufficiently developed). We are told that “without frontally taking on the doctrinal issue of the ultimate truth and worldly truth of Mādhyamika thought, and even bypassing the doctrine as such, Dōgen elucidates the interior workings of emptiness itself” (17).

The entry of emptiness as a third factor, not above or beyond but right in the middle among the other two, is structurally identical with the role of the “middle” in the three-truth theory of T’ien-t’ai (Tendai) Buddhism, as Brook Ziporyn noted (at the Tokyo Buddhist Discussion Group, May 2008). The earliest commentators on Dōgen explicate his thought according to this structure, conveniently imposed on confusing texts that do not seem to offer it any clear support. It is rather difficult to pin down what emptiness concretely adds to the interplay of the foci and one may suspect that its appearance is motivated more by the Tendai structure than by a phenomenology of the spiritual path.

Chapter 2, “Negotiating the Way,” turns to the implications of this vision for practice. “There is no path or linkage whatsoever from practice to enlightenment, and vice versa. In fact, they have nothing to do with each other so far as they are seen in logical, causal, teleological, epistemological, ontological, and similar frameworks... The collapse of all sequential, teleological, hierarchical, and central-peripheral frameworks is complete and final. Dōgen’s Zen arises in the ruins of such a collapse” (24). In such a radical situation, one is tempted to ask, how can Dōgen’s Zen have any structure at all, much less the rather elaborate structure it retains here?

Dōgen, who revered the Lotus Sutra, encouraged the use of skillful means, but “The traditional dualism of the means and the end is recast as a pair of foci in place of opposites” (32). But can one not find a non-duality of means and end, overcoming the alleged dualism, in the Lotus Sutra itself? Dōgen also criticized the *kyōhan* classification of teachings, the three ages of the Dharma, the threefold buddha-body, and Zen’s “finger pointing at the moon” since “all these notions drew, in one way or another, upon the conventional view of skillful means” (32). Nor is Dōgen

impressed by Vimalakīrti's silence as an expression of nonduality; "nonduality is not privileged or transcendentalized metaphysically any more than duality. It is simply one of the soteric foci within the process of realization.... Nonduality functions within, with, and through *duality*. The non in nonduality signifies dynamicity" (33–4). Again, I suspect that some equivalent of such thinking can be found in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*, as Vimalakīrti redescends from nondual wisdom to duality as a skillful means. Perhaps the Tendai doctrine of the middle should be seen not as correcting dualisms in the Mahāyāna sūtras but as bringing out the full richness of the nonduality they proclaim. Tendai, Zen, and Dōgen are less radical departures from prior tradition than renewed apprehensions of it.

Duality and nonduality "govern all pairs of foci in Dōgen's Zen," and can be called "the *root foci*" (35). Again, I see a danger of an abstract system-building here. The author then strikes a note which fits oddly in this context, when he says that a unitive awareness of nonduality "is in essence a valuational notion of a specific worldview. As such it should not usurp the claim of universality over other worldviews and religions in the pluralist world" (35). Nonduality, and perhaps emptiness itself, are here historicized and seen as pragmatic notions of limited scope, which makes for ecumenical modesty. But would Dōgen agree? Would he see the rootedness of his Zen "in a specific time and place as a dharma-situation (*hōi*)" (35) as something opposed to and incompatible with the idea of Zen as a *philosophia perennis*?

Dōgen's dynamic Zen never comes to rest in a goal attained. "The vision of 'things as they are' is never of a fixed reality/truth; the power for self-subversion and self-renewal is inherent in the vision itself. Thus 'things' seen as they are are transformable. Every practitioner's task is to *change* them by seeing through them" (38). In contrast to the intellectual humility of the delusion/enlightenment relation, the thrust of the complementary practice/enlightenment relation is toward "vigor and boldness... As one side is illumined, the other is darkened" (38). They are different ways of situating oneself in the Zen world. Perhaps, against this, there is something to be said for the ordinary idea that we see through things as they appear to be and discover (not make) things as they are.

Chapter 3, "Weighing Emptiness," meditates on emptiness as the horizon of all our thinking and acting: "The situation of being left high up in midair is indeed terrifying and maddening existentially, for knowing that things, ideas, and values have no self-nature and that there is nothing whatsoever to cling to is an unbearable threat to our whole way of life" (44). A pragmatic attitude to this situation allows emptiness to exert soteric efficacy. In the state envisaged by Dōgen, "things and beings, activities and relations of worldly truth are seen in light of ultimate truth in such a way that they no longer hold the power to sway practitioners' lives, and the practitioners in turn attain the capacity to use them in salvifically wholesome ways" (52).

Chapter 4, "The Reason of Words and Letters" (adapted from the author's chapter in LAFLEUR 1985, which was reprinted with slight revisions as the "Introductory Essay" in KIM 1985), expounds Dōgen's linguistic perspectivism: A deanthropocentrized view

of language and reality leads to “a complete changeover of humanity’s collective delusion and self-centeredness with respect to the nature and function of language” (62). “Dōgen offers a ‘realizational’ view of language, in contrast to the ‘instrumental’ view that is epitomized in the Zen adage ‘the finger pointing to the moon’” (62–63). Dōgen’s modulations of Chinese expressions require to be “appreciated visually and aurally as they are, like the surrealist images of a dream” (66).

Chapter 5, “Meditation as Authentic Thinking,” sights the position of the meditator as one of non-thinking (*hi-shiryō*) which lies beyond both discriminative thinking and non-discriminative not-thinking (*fu-shiryō*) and has recourse to both of them as and when appropriate. Thinking and not-thinking are “a pair of soteric foci free of substantialist moorings whose bifurcation is to be overcome” (82). But we must avoid an absolutization of non-thinking that loses “the *dialectical dynamicity* of their salvific functions” (82)—non-thinking itself must be seen in dynamic interaction with thinking and not-thinking. Again, I wonder about the stability of the three categories Kim or Dōgen has distinguished.

Dōgen’s high-handed way with Chinese sources allows him to translate *sōmu funbetsu* (“ever without discriminative thinking”) into *isō funbetsu* (“ever already discriminative thinking”), “thus identifying discriminative thinking with original realization” (84). “If the cause for the arising of our predicament lies within discrimination, then the cause for the eradication of such a predicament also lies within that discrimination itself, not “ever without” (84). Yet Dōgen adds “a biting cautionary note” (119), suggesting that fighting discrimination with discrimination and renouncing discrimination altogether “are indispensable to one another in their shared soteriological enterprise and by virtue of the potency of emptiness” (120). What Dōgen achieves by all this may seem to be simply a return to the most obvious common sense: “Thinking is now free to be responsible, disciplined, fair, and compassionate in one’s personal morality and social ethical thought, and, furthermore, is even free to roam playfully throughout the universe in its mythopoeic imagination” (86).

“Not-thinking is coextensive and coeternal with thinking. Not-thinking *is* thinking, and vice versa” (89). What seems to be involved is adroitness in handling categorical discriminations and in stepping back from them to a non-categorizing contemplative encounter with the real. This stepping back is “a radical critique of thinking. . . a window to new horizons of thinking”; it is “simply a focus—a conceptual construct” (88). That last phrase throws me—how can not-thinking (or non-thinking for that matter) be a conceptual construct?

Chapter 6, “Radical Reason: *Dōri*,” looks at Dōgen’s comprehensive and integrated understanding of rationality. The phrase *dōri* combines “path” (*dao*) and “principle” (*li*), evoking all their Daoist and Confucian overtones. “The Way is never extricated from the processes of phenomena themselves” (101). In Medieval Japan, “the notion of reason as the true nature of things, by and large, advocated that state of spiritual freedom which transcended the law of dependent origination (*engi*), and thus

rejected cause and effect, arising and perishing, and other cognate notions” (109). Dōgen’s thought refuses to transcendentalize itself above and beyond practice and temporal existence in the here and now, but he also rejects “naturalness in the sense of spontaneous generation of things without the workings of causes and conditions, which amounts to a flat disavowal of moral endeavors” (110), drawing on the general Buddhist critique of Daoism.

Kim’s sophisticated forays into Dōgen’s enigmatic texts are sustained by a feel for the dynamics of Dōgen’s Zen practice, and they certainly convey the sense of closing in on the essence of this thought. The full value of Kim’s insights will be discovered when they are drawn on to clarify Dōgen’s relationship to his Chan and Tendai sources.

REFERENCES

KIM, Hee-Jin

1975 *Eihei Dōgen: Mystical Realist, Revised*. Wisdom Publications, 2004.

1985 *Flowers of Emptiness: Selections from Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press.

LAFLEUR, William R., ed.

1985 *Dōgen Studies*. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press.

Joseph S. O’Leary
Sophia University