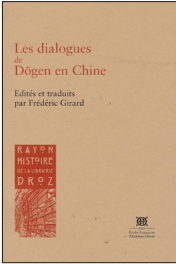


REVIEWS



Frédéric Girard, *Les dialogues de Dōgen en Chine*

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IT WOULD BE an understatement to say that the rediscovery of the work of Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253) at the beginning of the twentieth century has generated interest among researchers in the field of Buddhist studies. The amount of scholarship produced over the last century regarding these works is almost as overwhelming as the texts themselves. Roughly speaking, there are two approaches to the study of Dōgen. The first is a philosophical approach that treats him as a thinker whose reflections are universal, and, therefore, his ideas may be scrutinized by philosophical methods regardless of time or geographical context. Another approach seeks to understand the Buddhist monk and founder of the Sōtō school in Japan within his doctrinal and historical context.

These two approaches are not clearly distinct. Both share a primary focus on the *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏, a voluminous text written in vernacular Japanese, which was quite unusual at the time. In his equally voluminous *Les dialogues de Dōgen en Chine*, Frédéric Girard, researcher at the École française d'Extrême-Orient (the French School of Asian Studies), chose a different approach—or, more accurately, a different entry point to Dōgen's thought—and decided to tackle a lesser-known work by Dōgen, the *Hōkkyōki* 宝慶記.

The text is a posthumous compilation of notes taken by Dōgen during his trip to China and mainly a record of conversations with his Chinese master, Ruijing 如淨 (1163–1228). Dōgen apparently did not wish to publish it, and the text most likely remains without major modifications, although, as the author suspects, it is possible that some were made by his disciple who compiled and

copied it (223–46). Dōgen’s questions in the text constitute a valuable testimony of his conceptions, doubts, and points of interest during an early phase of his life. The answers of the master are also very instructive and sometimes offer surprising recommendations regarding food or the way to properly put on socks, which may add an unexpected touch of humor for the modern reader. However, the author investigates the meaning of these questions and suggests that, rather than answers, they reflect a confirmation of what Dōgen had already thought while in Japan prior to embarking on his journey (249). This position challenges the traditional conception that Dōgen went to China to resolve his fundamental doubts about the necessity of practice, which, if this is the case, strengthens the significance of the *Hōkkyōki* by making it the earliest record of Dōgen’s thought.

However, despite the inherent interest in the *Hōkkyōki*, it would be reductive, and no doubt misleading, to introduce Girard’s book as merely an annotated translation. First of all, the title should not be taken too literally; among the 752 pages of the book, the translation of the text fills just thirty-six pages (426–58). The first 414 pages (9–425) constitute what is perhaps improperly called an “introduction,” which is, in fact, a survey of the life and thought of Dōgen. If we consider, as has generally been believed, that Dōgen had more or less established his philosophical views by the time he returned to Japan, then the author’s choice to focus on the *Hōkkyōki* as a pivotal work in the development of his thought, from its emergence to its maturity, is sensible and judicious. The selection of this text also explains the scope of the book, which drastically exceeds the sole presentation of the text. Many pages of the book, including the numerous and long quotations, might be considered superfluous, and a distracted reader could lose sight of the main topic of the book. Yet, once the reader understands the author’s reason for selecting these passages, their significance for grasping Dōgen’s thought becomes apparent.

The structure of the book is both biographical and doctrinal as the author follows Dōgen from Japan to China, from his birth to his intellectual formation and the emergence of his intention to cross the sea. Numerous pages are dedicated not only to the life of Dōgen but also his historical and intellectual context, which provides the reader with insights into his actions. A good example is an extensive section (103–70) on the ideal of journeying to China based on the model of the famous Chinese monk Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664) (that is, the “Xuanzang paradigm”). Not only does Girard expose how Xuanzang became the ideal model of a monk traveling to a faraway country to bring back the Buddhist teachings, he also explains how this model evolved and influenced Japanese monks. For instance, he describes in detail—often through extensive translations—how the notion of Xuanzang as a pilgrim impacted major figures in Japanese Buddhism, such as Yōsai 榮西 (1141–1215), Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282) and his view of Buddhist history, and the Tendai monk Genshin 源信 (942–1017).

Xuanzang's Korean disciple Woncheuk 圓測 (613–696) also played a role in the Japanese imagination of the traveling monk, especially as a source for the doctrinal positions of the Indian monk Paramārtha (499–569) and the Chinese monk Lingrun 靈潤 (seventh century). Once again, the reader may be confused by such a luxury of detail and the width of the scope in Girard's study of Dōgen, but once the reader accepts this and “casts off body and mind” to allow the author to act as a guide through this material, this journey leads to a richer understanding of the life of Dōgen and the doctrinal landscapes that shaped his philosophical views.

As a bonus, the author also offers a translation of *Instructions to the Cook* (356–86), a short but famous text. Although it has already been translated into many languages, including French, the author's new translation is of an academically rigorous quality that is seldom achieved.

On the whole, the book is by no means an easy-to-read introduction, and the author does not shy away from detailed and highly specialized topics. These parts of the book are typically areas in which Dōgen specialists may not always agree. Nonetheless, the precision of Girard's argument is, without a doubt, a valuable contribution to the field. It goes without saying for a work of this magnitude that the abundant notes will be of interest even to the most critical scholars. It is inevitable that editorial errors can be found throughout the book, and if a second edition is made corrections would be welcomed. The appendices (527–645) contain the original text of the *Hōkkyōki* in Chinese along with several translations of Dōgen's texts (including two chapters of the *Shōbōgenzō* and the *Zazengi* 坐禪儀), detailed notes (Yōsai on the ordination certificate of Myōzen, or the bodhisattva precepts), a chronology of the life of Dōgen, a plan of the Tiantongshan monastery, and a map of the places visited by Dōgen. The bibliography (647–700) is, not surprisingly, comprehensive, and demonstrates the author's knowledge of the most recent research in Japan, Europe, and the English-speaking academic world. Lastly, the index (701–48) is an indispensable tool for extracting the valuable information enclosed in this monumental work.

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