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Nature in Dōgen's Philosophy and Poetry

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I. Introduction

References to the natural world abound in the writings of Dōgen Kigen Zenshi (1200–1253). He drew examples from natural phenomena to illustrate philosophical points and specified how his key philosophical positions applied to natural phenomena.[1] Dōgen's views on nature can be placed in the context of a Buddhist debate that began in China in the sixth century, namely, the controversy surrounding the status of nonsentient beings in Mahāyāna Buddhist soteriology. This was a burning theological issue in East Asia for many centuries. Dōgen is not usually discussed as a participant in this debate, although his career fell within its geographical and temporal parameters and he clearly participated in it. After a brief summary of this debate up to the eve of Dōgen's career, a presentation of the Zen master's views on Buddha-nature insofar as they relate to this debate will clarify his attitudes toward nature.[2] The distinctiveness of his philosophical stance can better be understood when viewed against this background of a range of positions that were articulated. In order to explore some concrete expressions of his views about nature and to introduce some of Dōgen's poetry, the body of this article is a philosophical exegesis of four of Dōgen's thirty-one syllable poems (*waka*[a]) in terms of what they reveal about his attitudes toward and experiences of nature.[3]

II. Controversy Surrounding the Religious Status of Plants and Trees

A brief summary of the debate on whether natural

phenomena like plants and trees possess Buddha-nature (*bus-shō*[b]) should be helpful in showing where Dōgen falls on the spectrum of theories that were advanced. The general origin of the debate is the conflict posed by two of the central claims of Mahāyāna Buddhism: the expansive promise of enlightenment to all sentient beings and the doctrine of the universality of Buddha-nature. If Buddha-nature represents the potential for enlightenment, then what special relationship does it bear to the category of "sentient beings" earmarked for enlightenment? Did the Mahāyāna texts consider "sentient being" to refer to transmigration in the six realms of rebirth, or could it be extended to include natural phenomena or even to include all phenomena?

A. The Debate in China

The motive spurring the debate in China was a desire for logical consistency. The three main contributors to the debate on Chinese soil were Chi-t'sang, Fa-ts'ang, and Chan-jan. Chi-t'sang (549–623) of the San-lun school was the first to use the phrase "attainment of Buddhahood by plants and trees."[4] On the basis of the premise that Buddha-nature resides in non-sentient beings (like plants and trees) as well as in sentient beings, he concluded that non-sentient beings theoretically can attain enlightenment. However, this was a theoretical possibility only; in actuality non-sentient beings do not have a mind with which to experience Buddhahood.[5] Fa-ts'ang (643–712) criticized Chi-t'sang from the standpoint of Hua-yen metaphysics. He felt that the vision of universal interdependence and mutual identity of all phenomena in the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* necessitated the conclusion that Buddha-nature, and therefore potential enlightenment, is held in common by all things, even land.[6] The possibilities of this line of argumentation were not explored until Kūkai took it up again in ninth-century Japan.

The thought of Chan-jan (711–782), a T'ien-t'ai patriarch, represents the culmination of this line of thought in China. While some before him had excluded non-sentient beings from the sphere of enlightenment because of a belief that they lack the requisite mind with which to experience it, Chan-jan offered a classically idealist solution. He contended that all things mani-

fest the immutable mind-nature of the Buddhas. Because all things without exception possess Buddha-nature, there is no basis for a distinction between animate and inanimate entities:

> Therefore we may know that the single mind of a single particle of dust comprises the mind-nature of all sentient beings and Buddhas. . . . Therefore when we speak of all things, why should exception be made in the case of a tiny particle of dust? Why should the substance of the *Bhūtatathatā* pertain exclusively to "us" rather than to "others"? . . . there is only one undifferentiated nature.[7] (*Chin-kang Pi*)

For Chan-jan, Buddha-nature is the immutable mind at the base of all phenomena. To say that it is present in some things but not in others is a logical contradiction. Therefore, one can only conclude that all things possess the prerequisite for enlightenment:

> Within the Assembly of the Lotus, all are present without division. In the case of grass, trees, and the soil (from which they grow), what difference is there between the four kinds of atoms? [The minutest components of things, perceptible by sight, smell, taste, and touch] By snapping their fingers and joining their palms, they will all achieve the causation for Buddhahood. . . . How can it still be said today that inanimate things are devoid (of the Buddha-nature)?[8]

The preceding quotations show that Chan-jan was concerned with the logical implications of the universality of Buddha-nature. Further, he was concerned with the mundane world as a whole, not just vegetation per se. He wanted to demonstrate that Buddha-nature is present in the tiniest mote of dust, as well as in plants and trees.

B. The Debate in Japan

In their continuation of this controversy, Japanese scholars were concerned almost exclusively with the religious status of nature in Buddhist soteriology. A reverent regard for nature as the locus of religious meaning had been part of Japan's indigenous worldview since prehistoric times. While the Chinese were

motivated by a desire to establish an absolutistic metaphysics, the Japanese were prompted to discover whether "plants and trees" (*sōmuku*[c]) could attain Buddhahood (*jōbutsu*[d]). The debate took several interesting turns on Japanese soil. Kūkai (774–835) was the first to enter into the debate. However, I would like to discuss his views last in order to compare them with Dōgen's.

Annen (841–884) held a view similar to that of Chan-jan: since Buddha-nature is common to all beings, it follows that both sentient and non-sentient beings can attain Buddhahood.[9] Ryōgen (912–985), a Tendai scholar, retained the distinction between sentient and non-sentient beings, but brought the discussion to a new level by arguing for the inclusion of vegetation in the category of the sentient. He likened the organic growth-cycle of a plant to the stages of Buddhist practice:

budding	—	aspiration
growing	—	training
fruiting	—	enlightenment
dying	—	nirvāṇa

According to his theory, the completion of a plant's natural life-cycle constituted its attainment of Buddhahood. Implicitly excluded were natural phenomena without such a life-cycle, like mountains and rivers.[10]

A slightly later Tendai scholar, Chūjin (1065–1138), broke yet new ground by putting forth a theory of the innate enlightenment of plants and trees, in accordance with the increasing emphasis of the Tendai sect upon "original enlightenment" (*hongaku*[e]):

> Trees and plants are in possession of Buddha-nature (*busshō* or *Buddhatā*). "Buddha" means "enlightenment." The inner (or mysterious) principle of the Buddha-nature is a purity of original enlightenment (*hongaku*) . . .. This is something which plants and trees are in possession of.
>
> . . . .
>
> As for trees and plants, there is no need for them to have or show the thirty-two marks (of Buddhahood); in their present form—that is, by having roots, stems, branches, and leaves, each in its own way has Buddhahood.[11]

Chūjin went a step further than Ryōgen by dispensing with an anthropocentric model of Buddhahood. For him, the enlightenment of the natural world is an actuality, not just a potentiality, and it manifests this enlightenment in its own unique way.[12]

Despite these advances, the issue was not laid to rest in the twelfth century. Echoing the seventh-century sentiments of Chi-t'sang, Shōshin (1189–1204) put forth reasons why plants and trees, like other non-sentient beings, cannot attain Buddhahood:

> Trees and plants cannot be transformed into sentient beings, or transmigrate into other worlds. Therefore, they have no chance of attaining Buddhahood. Trees and plants cannot train themselves, because they have no mind. Therefore, they cannot attain Buddhahood. If they had a mind, we would be unable to differentiate them from sentient beings. . . . Trees and plants do not possess the external conditions necessary for attaining Buddhahood.[13]

Further, Shōshin conservatively pointed out that no sūtra or śāstra specifies that plants and trees can attain enlightenment.[14] Naturally, other scholars found his view to be inconsistent with Tendai doctrines, but his expression of it stands witness to the fact that the religious status of the plant world was still highly controversial and a matter of deep concern for twelfth-century Japanese Buddhists on the eve of Dōgen's career.

Kūkai (774–835), the founder of the Shingon sect in Japan, figures last in this brief chronicle because in many ways his views were the most radical and therefore closest to those of Dōgen. Utilizing the categories provided by his esoteric metaphysics and Hua-yen philosophy, Kūkai found a way to forge an identity between the phenomenal world and the Absolute, the Absolute for Kūkai being Mahāvairocana. He expressed this identity as "the eternal harmony of the six great elements," i.e. earth, water, fire, wind, space, and mind or consciousness, the elements that comprise all Buddhas, sentient beings, and material worlds.[15] Therefore, plants, trees, and even non-sentient beings have a mind, the prerequisite for Buddhahood. While retaining the categories of sentient and non-sentient, Kūkai effectively dissolved the basis of distinction between them.

In the Shingon master's scheme, like many Chinese formulations, there are two distinct types of phenomena: conditioned and unconditioned. "The objects of sight—colors, forms, and movements—[i.e. sentient and non-sentient beings] . . . are the products of the unconditioned; in other words, they are the manifestations of the Body and Mind of the Dharmakāya Buddha."[16] The undifferentiated Dharmakāya manifests itself in the form of four mandalas ("spheres" of physical extension and communication). The body-, speech-, mind-, and action-mandalas form the realms of phenomena and experience.[17] Non-sentient beings are regarded as the mind-mandala. Since the four mandalas interpenetrate one another, there is in fact no distinction between the creating principle (Dharmakāya or Mahāvairocana) and the created phenomena.[18]

Kūkai's concept of identity was embedded in the metaphysical categories of his *mikkyō*[f] doctrines. His equation of Buddha-nature and phenomena was virtually lost amidst the elaborate theories he constructed around it. In addition, he upheld the dualities of phenomenal/noumenal, conditioned/unconditioned, and sentient/non-sentient in the structure of his arguments. Nonetheless, Kūkai formulated a strong argument for the full Buddhahood of plants, trees, and all phenomena that foreshadowed Dōgen's conception in its radicalness, although he preceded the Sōtō master by four centuries.

III. Dōgen's Views on Buddha-Nature and Sentience

The diachronic discussion of the previous section was included in order to highlight and to contextualize the importance and uniqueness of Dōgen's contribution to the debate. All the views described therein share a dualistic and absolutistic view of Buddha-nature, albeit with varying degrees of explicitness. That is, they share the ontological presupposition that Buddha-nature is an eternal, unchanging essence underlying all permutations and immanent in some or all phenomena. Mahāyāna scriptural sources like the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* had left no doubt that Buddha-nature is present in all beings and that, by virtue of their possession of it, all sentient beings will attain enlightenment. Therefore, the

ensuing discussion focused on establishing the parameters of the category "sentient beings" and on whether potential Buddhahood in each case was merely theoretically possible or practically realizable. The two most radical opinions were Ryōgen's and Kūkai's. Ryōgen, who had argued for the innate enlightenment of plants and trees, had maintained that Buddha-nature was something that they possessed. Even Kūkai's identification of Dharmakāya and concrete phenomena achieved a formal identity at best. In his own words, the transcendent Dharmakāya Buddha "is analogous to great space; he is eternal, being unobstructed, and embraces in himself all phenomena."[19] Therefore, Kūkai's concept of identity was one of "eternal harmony" between two distinct orders of reality.

The Kamakura reformer went beyond the transcendental and immanental viewpoints that bound these Buddhist scholars to varying degrees of idealism. His understanding of the relationship between Buddha-nature and concrete phenomena was thoroughgoingly nondualistic. In Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*, Buddha-nature is not an eternal or invisible essence hidden within, possessed by, or manifested by perceptible phenomena:

> From the beginningless past, many foolish people identified consciousness and spirituality as the Buddha-nature. How laughable it is that they were called the enlightened people! If I were to explain the Buddha-nature without getting too involved, [I would say that it is] fences, walls, roof tiles, and pebbles.[20] (*Shōb.-Busshō*)

Here, Dōgen directly contradicts a statement that occurs in the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*: "Those which have not the Buddha-nature are fences, walls, tiles, stones, and other non-sentient beings."[21] This positing of an ontological hierarchy was anathema to his philosophy.

Dōgen's fundamental ontological premise was that Buddha-nature is none other than concrete phenomena. That is to say, "all things," i.e. concrete phenomena, provides an exhaustive definition of Buddha-nature. "In the entire universe there is not even a single object alien from Buddha-nature, nor is there any second existence other than this universe here and now."[22] (*Shōb.-Busshō*) Even to speak of a relationship between Buddha-nature and phenomena is incorrect, because they are not two

separate entities that can interrelate, however close one conceives their relationship to be. Rather, Buddha-nature and "all things" are identical. This is not a mere formal, logical identity, like the identity between "the one" and "the many" or between "essence" and "manifestation" posited by idealistic metaphysics. "The principle of dharmatā is not like that. It completely goes beyond ideas of difference and identity, separation and unity between this phenomenal world and dharmatā."[23] (*Shōb.-Hosshō*) This identity is simple, uncompounded equivalence; not A = B, but A = A:

> We do not say "all sentient beings are the Buddha-nature" (*issai-shujō soku busshō*) [for even "are" smacks of a dualistic thinking], but instead "all-sentient-beings-the-Buddha-nature-of-existence" (*issai-shujō-u-busshō*).[24] (*Shōb.-Busshō*)

Clearly, Dōgen believed that to draw even the minutest distinction was to fall into the snare of dualism.

The distinction between sentient and non-sentient beings had become irrelevant. Since Buddha-nature is the temporal flux of reality, from which nothing is excluded, Dōgen upheld the equivalence of all existences, sentient beings, and Buddha-nature:

> "The word 'all existences' refers to sentient beings or all things. That is, all existences are the Buddha-nature, and the totality of all existences is called sentient beings."[25] (*Shōb.-Busshō*)

For Dōgen there is no differentiation between living and non-living beings or between beings with and without mind. These categories had been invoked by other philosophers in order to define the sphere of potential enlightenment, and it usually resulted in a hierarchy of beings, as seen in the thought of Ryōgen and Shōshin. Dōgen rejected this line of thinking when he rejected absolutistic metaphysics and reasserted the universality of impermanence and dependent origination.

Dōgen used the term "Buddha-nature" interchangeably with "impermanence" (*mujō*[g]), *śūnyatā* (*ku*[h]), *tathatā* (*shinnyo*[i]), and *dharmatā* (*hosshō*[j]). He had sought for an understanding of Buddha-nature in the Buddhist doctrines of impermanence (*anitya*), universal conditionality (*saṃskṛta*), and non-self (*anāt-*

man), all three of which converge at the conclusion that there is no permanent, unchanging entity anywhere in the universe. From these premises, Dōgen inferred that Buddha-nature itself cannot be exempt from universal impermanence. He concluded that Buddha-nature is nothing other than the impermanence of all things, inseparable either logically or concretely from the momentary arising and perishing of evanescent phenomenality:

> The impermanence of grass, trees, and forests is verily the Buddha-nature. The impermanence of the person's body and mind is verily the Buddha-nature. The impermanence of the land, country, and scenery is verily the Buddha-nature.[26] (*Shōb.-Busshō*)

Because Buddha-nature is impermanence, one should not look anywhere else for it except in concrete reality. "Thus to see mountains and rivers is tantamount to experiencing the Buddha-nature. To behold the Buddha-nature is to observe a donkey's jaw and a horse's mouth."[27] (*Shōb.-Busshō*) Dōgen sometimes stated his definition of Buddha-nature as an abstract proposition, such as "All things themselves are ultimate reality,"[28] or "Impermanence is Buddha-nature."[29] (*Shōb.-Shōji*) However, because Buddha-nature is equivalent to concrete particulars, more often he listed concrete examples to demonstrate the principle:

> The real aspect [*dharmatā*] is all things. . .this wind and this rain, this sequence of daily living. . .this study and practice, this evergreen pine and ever unbreakable bamboo."[30] (*Shōb.-Shohō-jissō*)

Impermanence, for Dōgen, was the key concept. To express the idea that nothing is static or immutable, Dōgen sometimes used phrases like "the blue mountain always walks" or "the eastern mountain floats on water."[31] (*Shōb.-Sansuikyō*) In other words, even things that appear to be immovable or nonliving display the creative dynamism of impermanence/Buddha-nature. Within this conceptual framework, enlightenment could never be portrayed as an escape from impermanence or as a permanent attainment. "Since supreme enlightenment is the Buddha-nature, it is impermanent. The perfect quietude of nirvāṇa is momentary and thereby the Buddha-nature."[32] (*Shōb.-Busshō*) Dōgen conceived enlightenment to be the experience

of all-inclusive impermanence and the realization that the impermanence of "all things," including oneself, is Buddha-nature.

IV. Dōgen's Views on Nature: Four Waka

The frequent references to nature throughout Dōgen's philosophical writings show that nature and its religious value were never far from his mind. As a way to focus more closely on the Zen master's views on nature, I would like to analyze some of his poems in terms of how they express his philosophy, by applying a thematic rather than a literary mode of analysis.

In both prose and poetry, Dōgen used the nature images that recur in Japanese literature (mountains, the moon, rain, bamboo, etc.), but, according to Hee-Jin Kim, used "these quite common words or metaphors in a unique way, so that their ordinary meanings are not extended or expanded to describe extraordinary events other than themselves, but instead their ordinary meanings are radicalized."[33] In this sense, he wrote about nature without sentimentality. Dōgen felt that one should not apply human standards to natural phenomena, so his valorization of the natural world was an affirmation of nature *qua* nature and as Buddha-nature:

> The Buddha's way consists in the form that exists and the conditions that exist. The bloom of flowers and the fall of leaves are the conditions that exist. And yet unwise people think that in the world of essence there should be no bloom of flowers and no fall of leaves.[34] (*Shōb.-Hosshō*)

Hajime Nakamura points out that Dōgen displays two indigenously Japanese ways of thinking in his "acceptance of actuality in the phenomenal world as absolute" and in his close involvement with the landscape as the focal point of religious and poetic imagination.[35] Throughout history, there have been a diversity of ways in which the Japanese have viewed nature as soteric.[36] In Dōgen's case, the basis of his affirmation of the full-fledged ontological and religious status of nature was the reappropriation of what he regarded as Buddhism's original, radical mes-

sage. Thus, it represents a confluence of his Japanese cultural background and his Buddhist philosophy.

Since the Sōtō master's sensitivity to nature was coupled with his nondualistic Buddhist ontology, his poems are quite different in tone from earlier and contemporaneous works. He wrote without the romanticism, anthropomorphism, and sense of pathos that one often finds in the poetry of preceding eras. In addition, he rarely evoked the popular poetic moods, like desolate solitude (*wabi*[k]).[37] A brief comparison with the poetry of Saigyō (1118-1190), a slightly earlier Buddhist poet who became extremely renowned as a classical bard of Japanese sensibilities, may help to highlight what is distinctive in Dōgen's verse. Saigyō's poetry was infused with Kūkai's metaphysics, and William LaFleur claims that he portrays nature as if it itself is the Tathāgata.[38] However, when one examines Saigyō's poetry, one finds that the soteric value of nature portrayed therein is its roles as companion and teacher. Personified nature grieves, has a healing "power" (*iryoku*[l]), and yields a sense of peace and consolation. The predominant tone is the lamentation of impermanence. For example:[39]

> Gazing at them,
> these blossoms have grown
> so much a part of me,
> to part with them when they fall
> seems bitter indeed!

Nowhere does one find the one-to-one correspondence between natural phenomena and "the Absolute" (per Kūkai's ontology) or Buddha-nature that one finds in Dōgen's poetry.

In light of the preceding introduction, one can predict that Dōgen did not exalt or venerate nature in the same way as did his predecessors. He had his own way of expressing the religious value of nature. This is evident in a *waka* that was inspired by a Chinese enlightenment poem:[40]

Mine no iro	Mountain colors,
Tani no hibiki mo	Valley echoes,
Mina nagara	Everything as it is—
Waga Shakamuni	The voice and body
Koe to sugata to	Of my beloved Śākyamuni.

Here, Dōgen expresses his conviction that the forms of nature do not manifest Buddha-nature; they *are* Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is expressed as a concrete particular, "Sākyamuni's voice and body," in keeping with Dōgen's predilection for concrete imagery. Since the essential feature of a Buddha is enlightenment, which is actualized at all times and places, "the universe is proclaiming the actual body of Buddha."[41] (*Shōb.-Keiseisanshoku*) This directly opposes Kūkai's dualistic view that phenomena are "the manifestations of the Body and Mind of the Dharmakāya Buddha."[42] Dōgen denied the dualism of essence and manifestation. He maintained that "there is no expression (*setsu*) that is not essence (*shō*)."[43] (*Shōb.-Sesshin-sesshō*)

The central line of the *waka* is the conceptual focal point, providing a pivotal link between the other pairs of lines. *Nagara* signifies the continuation of an action or a state of being. When it refers to a state of being, it can mean "remaining thus" or "as it is," conveying the Buddhist notion of thusness (*tathatā*). This affirms that the value of nature is intrinsic and not predicated upon its ability to point to something beyond itself. At the same time, this intrinsic value is not simply the appearance or experience of nature. "It is regrettable that many only appreciate the superficial aspects of sound and color. They can neither perceive nor experience Buddha's shape, form and voice in a landscape."[44] (*Shōb.-Keis.*)

Therefore, Dōgen is affirming the specifically religious value of nature, which is its very emptiness or impermanence. This emptiness is realizable by the enlightened. "The real form of mountains, rivers, and the green earth is rooted in enlightened vision. . ."[45] (*Shōb.-Ganzei*) Thus, it is enlightened vision, the "wisdom eye," that reveals the nondual oneness of oneself, the landscape, and Śākyamuni. This is the underlying theme of Dōgen's visionary poem. When one casts off mind and body, one meets the Buddha everywhere, and one "can hear the 84,000 hymns of praise coming from the valley streams and the mountains. . . . (These) will never hold back their teaching of the Buddhist Way."[46] (*Shōb.-Keis.*)

This points to another of Dōgen's views on nature, namely, his belief in nature's ability to preach the Buddhist Dharma, i.e., to be the "voice of Śākyamuni." Dōgen called this enlighten-

ing communication "the discourse of non-sentient beings" (*mujō-seppō*[m]). This concept was one of the concrete illustrations he used to eliminate the distinction between sentient and non-sentient beings. If one can think only in terms of human characteristics, it is easy to conclude that various entities of nature like animals and plants, much less so-called non-living entities like mountains and rivers, cannot preach the Dharma. Dōgen insisted that "non-sentient beings" do expound Buddhist truths:

> The way insentient beings expound Dharma should not be understood to be necessarily like the way sentient beings expound Dharma. . . .it is contrary to the Buddha-way to usurp the voices of the living and conjecture about those of the non-living in terms of them. . .[47] (*Shōb.-Mujō-seppō*)

"Non-sentient beings" may not communicate in the same way human beings do, but they do possess the ability to give voice to the Buddhist Way (*dōtoku*[n]).

Illustrative of Dōgen's conviction in this matter is the following *waka:*[48]

Tani ni hibiki	Monkey's cries from the
Mine ni naku saru	mountaintops,
Tae dae ni	Echoing mysteriously in the
Tada kono kyō o	valley:
Toku tokoso kike	I listen only
	to the preaching of this *sūtra.*

Dōgen equates the monkey's cries with a discourse on Dharma. One can find a clue to the content of this *sūtra* in the third line of the *waka,* which is a play on words. *Tae dae*[o] means "mysteriously," suggesting the haunting quality of the monkey's cries. One imagines that they are piercing the night air. The mysteriousness could also be the ineffable "thusness" of momentary events, which must be experienced in order to be fathomed. However, the pronunciation of *tae dae* means "intermittently." If the monkey cries out at intervals, the intermittent sound would serve to remind one that Buddha-nature is eternally rising and perishing, moment-by-moment. The concept of emptiness is also evoked by the poetic image of the echo. An echo is explicitly empty in-and-of-itself, for it is dependent upon a cer-

tain conjunction of sound, surface, and ear. To listen to an echo is to be reminded of the dependent co-arising of all phenomena. Therefore, metaphorically and literally, the monkey is delivering a profound discourse on impermanence and dependent origination.

As in the previous *waka,* Dōgen writes from the standpoint of enlightened vision. When one is awakened, everything reveals the true meaning of the sūtras.

> This sūtra is the sūtra of the entire universe—mountains, rivers, earth, grass, trees, self, and others. . . .When we study the way based on those respective sūtras, countless sūtras are revealed.[49] (*Shōb.-Jishōzammai*)

If one is to be illumined by the monkey's sūtra, one must "drop body and mind" (*shinjin datsuraku*[P]) and become one with it. Dōgen felt that nondual awareness is the key to the liberating and liberated vision that allows one to discover the true meaning of the sūtras in all things. He taught that the way to achieve nondual awareness is to focus completely on one thing at a time. That is why he listens "only to this sūtra."

Nondual awareness is beautifully expressed in the following poem:[50]

Kiku mama ni	As I listened,
Mata kokoro naki	I became
Ma ni shi areba	The sound of rain
Onore narikeri	On the eaves.
Noki no mizu.	

The listener in the first line and the rain in the fifth line are bridged by three lines expressing their oneness. *Kokoro na ki,* literally "without my heart," is a Japanese expression for an experience of harmony with nature. Taken together, the fourth and fifth lines mean "I myself became the rain." The profundity of experience he describes is more than deep aesthetic appreciation, and it goes beyond the definition of an object in terms of any or all possible intellectual categories, including "Buddha-nature." It is to experience its thusness. To fathom the sound of the rain is to experience rain-ness, is to become rain. In the

same way, to fathom the impermanence of Buddha-nature is to meet the Buddha, is to become enlightened.

The image of raindrops is highly evocative of impermanence and emptiness, for it is the spaces between them that create the pattern of sound, just as it is emptiness that makes form possible. Similarly, it is the "gaps" in the self, the lack of fixed boundaries between "self" and "other," that make this unitary awareness attainable. Thus, nondual awareness presupposes selflessness (*anātman*) and dependent origination. Because of dependent origination, each phenomenon (such as a human being) is coextensive with the entire situation of which it is a part at each moment (in this case, rainfall). Clearly, impermanence/emptiness has a positive value for Dōgen. It underlies this liberative visionary mode, making enlightenment possible.

A poem by Saigyō on the subject of rain provides an interesting contrast:[51]

> Who lives here
> Must know what sadness means—
> mountain village,
> rain drenching down
> from the evening sky.

Here, the rapport between man and environment is a different kind of concord. The rainfall is an occasion for sadness. A sense of impermanence is conveyed by the image of a small mountain village dwarfed by the mountainside and pitiably drenched by a downpour. The realization of its impermanence causes the poet to lament the fragility of humankind's creations and the transience of life itself. In Saigyō's *waka*, nature symbolizes his mood in a subtle humanization. In contrast, Dōgen allows nature to be just what it is. He portrays its impermanence as liberative rather than pathetic. Hee-Jin Kim explains that Dōgen's interest in impermanence is in part a cultural trait, while his philosophical—and, by extension, aesthetic—rendition of it is unique:

> As he probed into the ethos of impermanence, thoroughly indigenized by the medieval Japanese mind, Dōgen did not indulge in aesthetic dilettantism and sentimentalism as a way to escape from the fleeting fates of life, but, instead, examined the nature

> of impermanence and its ultimate companion, death, unflinchingly, and attempted to realize liberation in and through this inexorable scheme of things.[52]

Therefore, in Dōgen's poem, the rain doesn't mirror his mood; Dōgen harmonizes his mind with the rain, accepts its impermanence, and experiences it as it is, in its thusness.

The Sōtō master accomplished this nondualistic mode of awareness by focusing his mind on a particular event or object, a process that he called "the total exertion of a single thing" (*ippō-gūjin*[q]). "This total exertion is the choosing of one thing at a time to live it in its total thusness."[53] The following *waka* epitomizes "total exertion" and its metaphysical underpinnings:[54]

Haru wa hana	Spring is a flower
Natsu hototogisu	Summer is a cuckoo
Aki wa tsuki	Autumn is the moon
Fuyuyuki saete	And in winter the snow
Suzushi karikeri	is cold and clear.

Dōgen appropriates a traditional set of images and presents them in a new light, a practice common among Japanese poets. An earlier Chinese poem serves to contrast Dōgen's treatment of the theme:[55]

> Various flowers bloom in the spring,
> the moon shines in autumn,
> cool wind blows in summer
> and snow falls in winter.
> How nice and pleasant the seasons
> are for man!

The Chinese poem lists the beauties of nature associated with each season and extols their ornamental enhancement of humankind's existence. Each image—flowers, the moon, etc.—had come to symbolize a particular season in the course of literary history. On the other hand, in Dōgen's poem, these objects don't symbolize their respective seasons; they *are* the seasons. Since spring *is* a flower, one can experience the whole of spring by totally experiencing a single flower. Since winter

is snow, one can experience the totality of winter by total exertion upon snow's utter coldness.

Philosophically, this series of images expresses Dōgen's conviction that one can realize the totality of the universe in a single event or moment of thusness. In his own words, "He who knows a single object comprehends the entire universe; he who penetrates a single dharma exhausts all dharmas."[56] (*Shōb.-Shoakumakusa*) On this point, Dōgen's philosophy partook of Hua-yen metaphysics,[57] according to which all universes and times are present in a single moment of thought, due to the mutual interpenetration and nonobstruction of all phenomena. In the words of Fa-ts'ang, the Chinese Hua-yen patriarch:

> Since a single moment has no substance of its own, it becomes interchangeable with the great aeons. Because the great aeons have no substance, they also embrace the single moment. . . . Hence all the universes that are far away or near by, all the Buddhas and sentient beings, and all things and events in the three times [past, present, and future] vividly appear within one moment.[58]

Similarly, the Zen master concluded that "Entire being, the entire world, exists in the time of each and every now."[59] (*Shōb.-Uji*)

This concept is inextricably linked with Dōgen's philosophy of time, a subject that he explored at great length. Rejecting the normative conception of time as a linear flow, Dōgen understood time to be a succession of discrete moments. Each moment is spatial as well as temporal, because time is inseparable from concrete, momentary events. That is, "activity is time, and time is activity."[60] Therefore, a flower, a minute spatial and temporal component of spring, *is* the spring. Spring cannot be found apart from the momentary events that comprise it. It is not an eternal essence underlying the blossoming of flowers and budding of trees, any more than Buddha-nature is an eternal essence underlying all things. Spring, then, becomes the matrix or configuration of dependent origination in which a flower appears. The flower, in turn, is a full expression and actualization of the situation of which it is a part. When a flower appears, "the world unfolds itself with the flowering."[61] (*Shōb.-Baika*)

The existential dimension of this complex of ideas subsumed by "total exertion" is that one should focus one's attention

upon the present moment, upon each "here-now" (*genjōkōan*[r]). "Unless [one] puts forth the utmost exertion and lives time now, not a single thing will be realized."[62] (*Shōb.-Uji*) By applying oneself with total exertion, one will fully experience a flower, the sound of raindrops, snow's utter coldness, the reality of birth and death, and the universality of impermanence—in a word, enlightenment.

V. Conclusion

Dōgen's view of the radical non-duality of phenomena and Buddha-nature lends itself to reflection upon the parameters of two terms that pervade religious-historical writings: "transcendence" and "immanence." The usefulness of these terms as cross-cultural categories rightfully has been called into question.[63] The applicability of either term within a given system of thought must be narrowly specified and broadly contextualized, and once this has been accomplished, it becomes clear that that exact use of the term would not apply in any other context.[64]

My discussion of Dōgen highlights a specific dimension of the concept of transcendence that rarely is invoked and that therefore may enlarge our understanding of the potential applications of the term. It amply has been demonstrated that transcendence has no place in Dōgen's ontology. He rejected any attempt to place Buddha-nature and enlightenment beyond the sphere of momentary, concrete phenomena. One may therefore be tempted to label Dōgen as a "radical immanentalist," and one imagines that he would have been pleased with the term. However, transcendence is present in his thought as an experiential category. In order to experience an event in its thusness, one has to experience a breakthrough of awareness. One has to transcend the illusory boundaries of one's ego, "dropping body and mind," in order to attain the unitary mode of vision described in Dōgen's poetry and sermons.

Therefore, in addition to the *vertical transcendence* derived from western monotheism, in which an entity who is above and beyond the world created and rules the world, there may be said to be a *horizontal transcendence,* in which one moves beyond the limits of a former situation and attains a new perspective

or understanding, perhaps even on a universal scale. It is the difference between an *ontological transcendent* and *experiential transcendence*. This latter type of transcendence rarely is cited as a form of religious transcendence or a metaphysical category, but hopefully it increasingly will be, as scholars cease to measure eastern religion against pre-established definitions and instead allow eastern examples to expand our concepts and categories and, in the process, our understanding of what it means to be human.

NOTES

1. Insightful discussions of Dōgen's use of nature imagery in his philosophical writings occur in Hee-Jin Kim, *Dōgen Kigen—Mystical Realist* (The Association for Asian Studies Monograph No. XXIX. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980), pp. 97ff., 147ff., and 253ff.

2. For lengthy articles devoted solely to Dōgen's philosophical stance regarding Buddha-nature, see Abe Masao, "Dōgen on Buddha-Nature," *Eastern Buddhist* Vol. 4, No. 1 (May 1971): 28–71 and Takashi James Kodera, "The Buddha-nature in Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* Vol. 4, No. 4 (Dec. 1977):267–292.

3. In the organization of this paper, I am indebted to William R. LeFleur, who used a similar format for his lucid study of Saigyō's poetry, "Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature," *History of Religions* Vol. 13, No. 2 (Nov. 1973): 93–128 and Vol. 13, No. 3 (Feb. 1974): 227–248.

4. LaFleur, 1973, p. 95. My summary of this debate, except of the positions of Kūkai and Dōgen, relies on those which occur in LaFleur, 1973, and Yukio Sakamoto, "On the 'Attainment of Buddhahood by Trees and Plant'," *Proceedings of the IXth International Congress for the History of Religions* (1958) (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1960): 415-422.

5. Sakamoto, 1960, pp. 415-416. Hui Yuan (523-592) put forth a similar argument, saying that there are two types of Buddha-nature: the "known" or theoretical Buddha-nature, possessed by sentient and non-sentient beings alike, and the "knowing" or practical Buddha-nature, possessed by sentient beings who have a mind with which to aspire for enlightenment.

6. Sakamoto, 1960, p. 416.

7. Chan-jan's *Chin-kang Pi* (TT no. 1932, p. 782), quoted by Yu-lan Fung in *A History of Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), p. 385.

8. TT no. 1932, p. 786, quoted by Yu-lan Fung, 1953, p. 386.

9. Sakamoto, 1960, p. 417.

10. LaFleur, 1973, pp. 102, 104.

11. Ryōgen's *Kankō Ruijo (Dai Nihon Bukkyō Zensho*, 40: 68–69), translated and quoted by LaFleur, 1973, pp. 105, 107.

12. LaFleur, 1973, p. 110.

13. Shōshin's *Shikan-shiki*, translated and quoted by Sakamoto, 1960, pp. 418–419.

14. Sakamoto, 1960, pp. 418–419.

15. Yukio S. Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), p. 89.

16. Kūkai's *Shōji jissō gi*, translated by Hakeda, 1972, p. 245.

17. Hakeda, 1972, pp. 96–97.

18. Hakeda, 1972, pp. 229–230.

19. Kūkai's *Sokushin jōbutso gi*, translated by Hakeda, 1972, p. 226.

20. Cited and translated by Kodera, 1977, p. 286.

21. Translated and cited in another context by Sakamoto, 1960, p. 419.

22. Translated and quoted by Kim, 1980, p. 163.

23. Translated by Kosen Nishima and John Stevens, *Shōbōgenzō* (Sendai, Japan: Daihokkaikaku Pub. Co., 1975), Vol. 2, p. 64.

24. Cited and translated by Kim, 1980, p. 169.

25. Cited and translated by Kim, 1980, p. 165. Cf. also p. 257.

26. Translated by Hajime Nakamura in *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1964), p. 352.

27. Translated and quoted by Kim, 1980, pp. 162–163.

28. Translated and quoted by Kim, 1980, p. 167.

29. Translated by Nakamura, 1964, p. 352.

30. Translated by Kodera, 1977, pp. 280–281.

31. Translated by Kim, 1980, p. 182.

32. Translated by Kim, 1980, pp. 181–182.

33. Kim, 1980, p. 256. One of the unifying characteristics of Japanese poetry, from the earliest anthology (the *Manyōshū*, 8th c.) down to the present day, is the depiction of some aspect of nature and the emotion or insight which it inspired. What varies in each case is the response or insight. Often there are veiled references to previous Chinese or Japanese poems about the same subject, and each image has its own literary history and evokes a particular season and/or time of day. Therefore, what distinguishes Dōgen's *waka* is not the images contained therein, but the attitudes which they express.

34. Translated in Hajime Nakamura, *A History of the Development of Japanese Thought From 592 to 1868* (Tokyo: Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, 1967), p. 97.

35. Nakamura, 1967, p. 92.

36. On this topic, LaFleur cites an important monograph by Ienaga Saburō entitled *Nihon Shishōshi ni okeru Shūkyōteki no Tenkai* [The Development of a Religious View of Nature in the History of Japanese Thought] (Tokyo, 1944). Cf. LaFleur, p. 228, n. 2. La Fleur provides a helpful summary of Ienaga's conclusions on pp. 228–233.

37. Aside from a lack of exposure, this may explain in part why Dōgen's poetry has not attained much popularity in Japan. Even Koryū Ōyama, who published a critical edition of Dōgen's *waka* in 1971 (see my n. 40), apologizes that the poetry isn't very good.

38. LaFleur, 1973, p. 236.

39. Translated by Hiroaki Sato and Burton Watson, *From the Country of Eight Islands* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1981), p. 171.

40. Dōgen's *waka* occur in the fortieth chapter of *Dōgen Zenshi Zenshū*, Vol. 2 (Ōkubo Dōshū, ed., Tokyo, 1969). My translations are from the anthology compiled by Koryū Ōyama, *Kusa no Ha: Dōgen Zenshi Waka Shu*[5] (Tokyo: Sotōshu Shumucho, 1971). This one is on p. 27. I would like to thank Prof. Edwin Cranston for his helpful suggestions regarding the translation of these poems. Any remaining infelicities are my own.

41. Translated by Nishiyama and Stevens, Vol. 1, p. 92.

42. Hakeda, 1972, p. 245, translated Kūkai's *Shōji jissō gi*.

43. Translated and quoted by Kim, 1980, p. 177.

44. Translated by Nishiyama and Stevens, Vol. 1, p. 92. Like another great Buddhist reformer, Nāgārjuna, Dōgen upheld the equivalence of nirvāṇa and saṃsāra:

> As for mountains and rivers, then, though we say they are samsāra, it is not so easy to say what this means. For samsāra cannot be pinned down to birth and death. It is this, yet it is free from birth and death. All dharmas are conditioned being, but a conditioned being has no nature of its own. . . . it is empty. Being empty it is free from itself and free from birth and death. Therefore, these very mountains and rivers of the present are the mountains and rivers of nirvāna. (Trans. and quoted in Bellah, pp. 6–7)

45. Trans. by Nishiyama and Stevens, Vol. 2, p. 99.

46. Trans. by Nishiyama and Stevens, Vol. 1, pp. 98–99.

47. Trans. and quoted by Kim, 1980, pp. 253–254.

48. My translation, from Ōyama's anthology, *waka* no. 4, p. 25.

49. Trans. by Nishiyama and Stevens, Vol. 2, p. 104.

50. My translation from Ōyama's anthology, *waka* no. 56, p. 112.

51. Translated by Sato, p. 176.

52. Kim, 1980, p. 183.

53. Kim, 1980, p. 257.

54. Ōyama's anthology, *waka* no. 14, p. 42. Dr. Masatoshi Nagatomi's class lecture on this poem was helpful in forming this analysis and, in addition, suggested the idea for this paper. (Course on "Buddhism in East Asia" taught at Harvard Univ., Spring Semester 1981/82)

55. Trans. by Nakamura in *Ways*, p. 280. From *Wu-men-kuan*, Ch. 1.

56. Trans. by Kim, 1980, p. 201.

57. Kim, 1980, p. 201.

58. Trans. by Garma C.C. Chang, in *Buddhist Teaching of Totality* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1974), p. 160. From the *Hua-yen i-hai pai-men*.

59. Trans. by Nishiyama and Stevens, Vol. 1, p. 118.

60. Trans. by Kim, 1980, p. 212.

61. Trans. by Kim, 1980, p. 260.

62. Trans. by Kim, 1980, p. 197.

63. Ninian Smart, *The Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Random House, 1970), pp. 30–31.

64. Part of the obstacle to tidy categorization of these terms and of systems in light of them is the complementarity of the concepts themselves. Something that is totally transcendent becomes irrelevant to human life and ungraspable by human minds or experience. Some degree of immanence must be posited in order for the so-called transcendent to be given a realm of potency and to be accessible to reverence and reason. Therefore, a definition of a transcendent entity becomes in effect a specification of the nature and degree of its immanence.

Japanese Terms

a. 和歌 歌
b. 佛性
c. 草木
d. 伐佛
e. 本覺
f. 密教
g. 無常
h. 空
i. 真如
j. 法性
k. 佗
l. 僧
m. 無常說法
n. 道得
o. 妙妙
p. 身心脫落
q. 法窮盡
r. 現成公案
s. 道元禪師和歌集