

# From Uji to Being-Time (and Back): Translating Dōgen into Philosophy



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## 1 Dōgen and Philosophy: A Case for Cautious Appropriation

Philosophical reception of Dōgen has to start from the premise that his project was different from philosophy as we understand it today and as it is practised in this book. The dominant understanding of philosophy that, to repeat, is in operation in all contributions to this book, is defined by the critical and open-ended exploration of questions of fundamental human concern<sup>1</sup> – even if some contributions may

<sup>1</sup>For extensive discussions of this concept of philosophy in the context of a global perspective on philosophy and its history, and in application to Japanese philosophical traditions see *Begriff und Bild der modernen japanischen Philosophie*, edited by Steineck, Lange and Kaufmann (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2014); *Concepts of Philosophy in Asia and the Islamic World, Vol. 1: China and Japan*, edited by Steineck, Weber, Gassmann, and Lange (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2018); Kaufmann and Steineck, ‘Another Discourse on the Method: Understanding Philosophy through Rhetorical Analysis’. *European Journal of Japanese Philosophy* 3 (2018): 59–86.

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thematically argue for a re-formulation of the project of philosophy. Dōgen was not participating in such an open-ended discourse, and expressly rejected such participation. His declared aim was to instruct his addressees about the correct understanding of the Buddha's teaching.<sup>2</sup> From his first doctrinal exposition, he claimed to do so from a position of equal insight with all Buddhas and enlightened beings.<sup>3</sup> Acknowledging the difference of Dōgen's project to that of philosophy as it is practiced today has important consequences for the reading of his work, and for his philosophical reception. When Dōgen's texts are read in a straightforward manner as expressions of philosophy, they are transposed inadvertently from one field of discourse (authoritative instruction about the Buddha's teaching) into another (philosophy). Such transposition is not illegitimate, but it needs to be made in a conscious manner to preserve the full meaning of the ideas that Dōgen's texts might offer to philosophy. As this paper shall illustrate, the theory of translation can help to understand what the consequences of such a transposition are; and this goes a long way in enabling a better-informed use of Dōgen's work for philosophy.

Two clarifications are in order. First, the general notion of philosophy on which my argument is based does not exclude *praxis* as an important element of philosophy, as Laurentiu Andrei insinuates in his contribution to this volume. Indeed, I would argue that spending time to argue about theoretical issues is also a form of *praxis*. Furthermore, if philosophy is to be conducted as an open-ended exploration of issues of fundamental human concern, this requires a readiness to consider opposing standpoints, which is, once more, a *practical* and *ethical* attitude. Last but not least, I am fully aware that philosophers of earlier times have often argued that a certain way of life is essential in order to be able to think in this manner, and, as Andrei aptly demonstrates, have created institutions that would train their members accordingly. Such claims and endeavors may no longer be a part of academic philosophy today. Still, I do not argue that taking such a position and following up on it in life should exclude anyone from being called a philosopher. The point of distinction relevant for my argument is therefore not that Dōgen emphasized religious practice and especially, seated meditation. The point is that he repudiated engagement in theory and open-ended arguments and that he instructed his disciples about the necessity to do the same, in other words, to dissociate themselves from philosophical theorizing and reflection. One may argue, in philosophy, about the relative weight to be given to critical argument and whatever *praxis* is deemed necessary to sustain it. Academic philosophy today is based on the premise that no specific practice beyond that of philosophical argumentation is necessary in order to do philosophy. That has, as I will demonstrate below, strongly influenced contemporary philosophical readings of Dōgen as well. One may want to dispute this premise and

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<sup>2</sup>Steineck, 'A Zen Philosopher? – Notes on the Philosophical Reading of Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō', *Concepts of Philosophy in Asia and the Islamic World, Vol. 1: China and Japan* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2018), 577–606.

<sup>3</sup>Steineck, 'Enlightened Authorship: The Case of Dōgen Kigen'. In *That Wonderful Composite Called Author*, edited by Schwermann and Steineck (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 195–219.

change the course of philosophy. But that is different from refusing, as Dōgen did, to engage in open-ended dispute altogether and requiring others to do the same.

Second, I do not want to argue that philosophers should not read Dōgen, or that his thought is irrelevant to philosophy. What I do want to argue is that philosophers, at least as far as they consider themselves to be scholars, should be aware of what they are doing in the process, namely, that they are transposing his texts into a different genre, or, to speak with Cassirer, a different symbolic form altogether. Symbolic forms determine to some degree expectations as to the content that is communicated, the aim of the communication, the form of communication, and the relation between addresser and addressees involved.<sup>4</sup> A change of symbolic form therefore of necessity entails a high degree of semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic *productivity*. Reading Dōgen's texts *as philosophy* involves their transposition from the symbolic form of religion to that of theory or knowledge. This entails productive investments on the side of the philosophical recipients, whether they be authors or a readers. The theory of translation provides the means to become aware of these investments, the dimensions of the texts they affect, and the consequences they may have for the interpretation of Dōgen.

In the main part of the ensuing argument, I will first demonstrate to what extent different philosophical readings of Dōgen's seminal text on time, *Uji*, have made creative investments in its meaning. I will then briefly summarize a paradigm of translational equivalences that can be used to analyze and calibrate the transformations made when reading Dōgen as a philosopher. But before going into these topics, some words are in place to explain why I believe that we should better not speak of Dōgen as a philosopher, as I myself have done previously.<sup>5</sup>

The detailed analysis of the rhetorical structure of Dōgen's *Shōbō genzō*, plus a conceptual analysis of his use of all the terms that might represent "philosophy" in his writings, such as *dō* 道 ("the way"; "sayings"), *kyō* 教 ("teachings"), or *ken* 見 ("doctrines, views") has convinced me otherwise.<sup>6</sup> To summarize, in terms of conceptual analysis, a survey of the semantic fields and usages of *dō* 道 ("way", also translation of skt. *marga*), *kyō* 教 and *ken* 見 in 15 fascicles of the *Shōbō genzō* that have been received as philosophical texts showed that Dōgen consistently uses these terms in a strongly evaluative fashion. That is, none of them functions as a neutral hyperonym, as a general name identifying all reasoned reflection on fundamental

<sup>4</sup>Cassirer, 'Das Symbolproblem und seine Stellung im System der Philosophie' *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 17: *Aufsätze und kleine Schriften (1927–1931)* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2004, 257–58.

<sup>5</sup>Steineck, 'Kommentar: Philosophische Perspektiven von Dōgen: Genjōkōan und Busshō'. In *Dōgen als Philosoph*, edited by Steineck, Rappe, and Arifuku (Studies in Oriental Religions 51. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), 119–51.

<sup>6</sup>See Steineck, 'Das Bendōwa von Dogen: Narratologische Analyse eines doktrinären Textes'. *Asiatische Studien*, 63 (3) (2009): 571; idem., 'Zen in der Kunst der Persuasion: Zur Rhetorik einer mittelalterlichen Lehrschrift', *Rhetorik im Vormodernen Japan*, edited by Buck-Albulet (München: Iudicium, 2015), 127–49; 'A Zen Philosopher? – Notes on the Philosophical Reading of Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*', in *Concepts of Philosophy in Asia and the Islamic World, Vol. 1: China and Japan*, 577–606; idem., "'Religion" and the Concept of the Buddha Way: Semantics of the Religious in Dōgen'. *Asiatische Studien* 72 (1) (2018): 177–206.

questions of human life. To the contrary, the “way” and “teaching” are either Buddhist, then they are appreciated as correct and true, or they are “extraneous” (*gedō* 外道). The critical issue here is that texts and ideas considered as “extraneous” are judged by Dōgen to be not even worthy of consideration; not once does attempt to appreciate arguments in their favor. *Ken*, which is also the translation term for Sanskrit *darshana*, a word that comes very close to what we call “philosophy”, is almost always combined with derogatory qualifications. To sum up, in Dōgen’s view, should one happen to be engaged in something like “philosophy”, the one thing to do is to cease that engagement immediately. What one should do instead is enter the Buddhist path and model one’s life and thoughts after that of the Buddhas and patriarchs – without ever considering any alternatives. Dōgen’s rhetoric matches this conceptual outlook: Throughout, he speaks as the enlightened master, whose aim is to convey the correct teaching and insight to his disciples. There is no room for open-ended argumentation – to the contrary, that would defy the whole purpose of communication, which is to lead the addressees on the correct path of the Buddhist teaching.

So what, one may argue, still, his thought is complex and consistent enough to be philosophically interesting. Why not read him as a philosopher?

Indeed, why not. We, as philosophers, may want to read Dōgen. My point is not that we shouldn’t do that. My point is that if we do it thinking Dōgen was a philosopher himself, we will probably not be fully aware of the productive investments we make in your readings. These investments may have their rewards. But all production is also, as Marx once observed, a form of creative destruction. As philosophers and scholars, we should be aware of what we produce and what we destroy.

In the following paragraph, I will therefore analyse four prominent examples of straightforward philosophical readings of Dōgen to see what is created and what is lost by this mode of interpretation.

## 2 Translating Dōgen into Philosophy: Semantic Shifts in Prominent Examples

All four readings relate to the following famous passage from Uji:

いはゆる有時は、時すでにこれ有なり、有はみな時なり。丈六金身これ時なり、時なるがゆゑに時の莊嚴光明あり。いまの十二時に學すべし。三頭八臂これ時なり、時なるがゆゑにいまの十二時に一如なるべし。十二時の長遠短促、いまだ度量せずといへども、これを十二時といふ。去來の方跡あきらかなるによりて、人これを疑著せず、疑著せざれどもしれるにあらず。衆生もとよりしらざる毎物毎事を疑著すること一定せざるがゆゑに、疑著する前程、かならずしもいまの疑著に符合することなし。ただ疑著しばらく時なるのみなり。<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ōkubo, ed. ‘Uji 有時’, in *Dōgen Zenji Zenshū I* (Tōkyō: Chikuma shobō, 1969), 189.

The following is a tentative translation<sup>8</sup> that leaves open as much as necessary and warranted:

Said [word] *uji* means that time is already what is real, and that whatever is real is [also] time. The golden body of one *jō* six is time, and because it is time, there is the sublime light of time. One can[or: should] study this in[or: with respect to the occasion of] the present twelve [zodiacal] hours. The three heads and eight arms [either a demon (*asura*) or a guardian deity (*myōō*)] are time, and because they are time, they are one and the same with the twelve hours. Even without having measured the length and shortness of the twelve hours, we call this the twelve hours. Since the traces of passing and coming are obvious, people don't doubt them, but even though they don't doubt them, that doesn't mean that they know them. Since doubting what the various living beings originally don't know is not well-defined, the earlier instances of doubting do not necessarily match with the present one. For the time being, doubting is simply [a] time."

To briefly name some points of contention in the literature, the *u* of *uji* is often translated as "being". Based on Rolf Elberfeld's discussion of the passage,<sup>9</sup> I have opted here for "what is real" to match the original meaning of Chinese *you*, which designates the facticity (Kant's "Dasein") of something that has specific properties (Kant's "reality"), as visible in the conventional usage of the term *uji* or *aru toki*: "there was/is a time when". The quoted passage accords with this understanding, because *u* here clearly refers to specific objects or states of affairs, not to abstract *being* as such. It is further an open question whether in *Uji*, *u* was meant to denote the abstract notion of *being* at all.

*Ji* or *toki* in Japanese is indefinite in terms of number, so it might refer to "time", "a time" or "many times". The phrase *ji wa mina*, "every time", "all times", in the passage quoted above is a clear case of usage indicating a plural sense of the term.<sup>10</sup>

"*Jūniji ni gaku su beshi*" can be "one can[or: should] study this within the twelve zodiacal hours" or "according to/on the occasion of the twelve hours". Two things are important about this passage: first, in terms of pragmatics, it indicates that Dōgen wants to incite his recipients to do something – namely study and practice. *Uji* is a conative text, a text that is intended to impact the practical actions of its recipients. Second, whatever is meant with *uji* is apparently not detached from or opposed to quantified time, although time's quantification clearly should, in Dōgen's eyes, not be taken for granted.

That said, let us take a look at what can happen when *Uji* is read in a straightforward manner as a philosophical text. My first example is somewhat extreme in that it is taken from a philosopher who does not intend to deeply engage with Dōgen, but merely adduces him as an authority to connect his own thought to Japanese tradition. Ōmori Shōzō is known as one of the most eminent Japanese philosophers in

<sup>8</sup> Here and in the following, all translations without references are mine.

<sup>9</sup> Elberfeld, *Phänomenologie der Zeit im Buddhismus: Methoden interkulturellen Philosophierens* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2004), 230–33.

<sup>10</sup> See Elberfeld on why to read *ji*, not *toki*: Elberfeld, *Phänomenologie der Zeit im Buddhismus* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2004), 231–32

the ordinary language approach of the analytical tradition.<sup>11</sup> As such, he is certainly not the most likely candidate to reference Dōgen, but he does so in his explication of *tokimeki* 時めき – the quick of time. The following paragraph is a good example for the transformations that can occur when Dōgen’s texts are transposed from the symbolic form of religion to that of theory.

身のまわりにある何でもない平凡な事物、例えば机や椅子、台所用品がそれぞれの場所に「存在する」のを見るときにその存在とは持続的存在をいみしていることほ確かである。机でも鍋でもそこに「ずーっと存在し続けている」といういみでそこに在る。その鍋は突然そこに出現したのではなくしばらく前から存在し続けている。ここで「しばらく前から」とは当然「過去」を意味しているのだから、鍋の存在の意味が過去の意味が含まれていることは明白にある。…こうして平凡な日用品の存在の中に、すでに過去現在未来という時間の三様態が意味的に含まれているのである。多少の誇張と強弁を加えれば、存在とは既に時間であり、時間は既に存在に含まれている、と言えよう。…この含まれている意味をあらわにとり出すことを「存在の時めき」と呼びたい。この「存在の時めき」は道元がその『正法眼蔵』第二十『有時』で「有時」と読んだものに他ならないと私には思われる。

いはゆる有事は、時すでにこれ有なり、有はみな時なり。丈六金身これ時なり、時なるがゆへに時の莊嚴光明あり。…三頭八臂これ時なり。

道元はその生活環境からして鍋などの代わりに丈六その他の仏像を例にとっているが、それらの物体の存在の時めきを説いている、と見て差支えないだろう。<sup>12</sup>

When we see ordinary, inconspicuous things that surround us, like a desk, a chair, or kitchen tools, “being” at their place, it is certain that this being means a durational being. It means that a desk or a pot “continues to be there all the while”. This pot hasn’t suddenly appeared, but has continued to exist for a while. Because this “continued all the while” evidently refers to the past, the meaning of the being of the pot clearly comprises that of past [existence]. ... In this manner, the being of ordinary everyday tools already comprises the three temporal dimensions of past, present, and future. Taking this slightly further, one may go as far as to say that being is already time and that time is inherent in being. ... To make this inherent meaning explicit, I choose to call it “being’s quick of time”. I believe that this “being’s quick of time” is what Dōgen called *uji* in the 20th chapter *Uji* of the *Shōbō genzō*: “The expression *uji* means that time is already being, and every being is time. The golden body of one *jō* six is time, and because it is time, there is the sublime light of time. ... The three heads and eight arms are time.” In accord with his own environment, Dōgen takes Buddha statues of one *jō* six instead of a pot as an example, but it is still safe to say that he teaches the quick of time in material being.

Ōmori appropriates Dōgen’s words for an analysis of the temporal implications of ordinary language. In the process, Dōgen’s discourse is thoroughly normalized in

<sup>11</sup> Kobayashi, ‘The Komaba Quartet’, *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Philosophy* (Online edition 2019).

<sup>12</sup> Ōmori, *Jikan to sonzai* 時間と存在 (Tōkyō: Seidosha, 1994), 19–21.

terms of modern philosophy. The transformation is evident: the more exotic constituents of his speech, such as references to the golden body of the Buddha, or the figure of a non-human being with three heads and eight arms, are reduced to “ordinary, inconspicuous” human artifacts on a par with kitchen tools. Their sacral aspects and soteriological meanings vanish in the process, as do the specifics of religious behaviour and attitudes. This includes the temporal implications of such behaviour and attitudes. One wouldn’t normally bow to a pot in hope of receiving its support on a spiritual path – but making obeisances is exactly the expected form of behaviour to the sacred figures in Dōgen’s monasteries, as evident from his guidelines for behaviour in the monks’ hall.

Ōmori’s Dōgen is perfectly accessible to the contemporary secularized reader. He doesn’t challenge one to change one’s behaviour in accord with a vision of salvation.

Another transformation is less conspicuous, but equally important in the conceptual interpretation of Dōgen: in Ōmori’s quote the *u* of *uji* has, without much ado, become “being”, an abstract noun indicating a universal. Dōgen’s *uji* has been integrated into the philosophical discourse of ontology, of theoretical reflection on the concept of being as such. I do not want to argue that one cannot relate Dōgen’s propositions on *uji* to ontological discourse. My point is that one should be more careful when doing so. As I said earlier, the context of the source passage indicates that *u* does not refer to abstract universal “being”, but to something real with distinct properties. To equate *u* with being is in danger of conceptually misreading Dōgen, to say the least. Such a reading therefore needs to be argued for and reconciled with conflicting evidence. It cannot be simply taken for granted.

Before I leave Ōmori Shōzō let me state that, even if his use of Dōgen is spurious, his philosophy deserves more attention than he has been getting in the West so far. The text that entails the above-quoted paragraph, for example, convincingly argues against the idea of a moment without duration<sup>13</sup> – an idea that has been identified with Dōgen’s thought by Rein Raud in an interpretation to be discussed below. Furthermore, his way of appropriating Dōgen is certainly not without precedent. At least the second, conceptual transition evident in his quotation of Dōgen is pervasive in the literature that reads Dōgen as a philosopher.

We find it already in Akiyama Hanji’s seminal *Study of Dōgen*, published in 1935. Akiyama paraphrases 「時すでにこれ有なり、有はみな時なり」 much like Ōmori to say that “Time is identical with being, and being is immediately time.” 「時間とは存在のこと、存在は直ちに時間である」.<sup>14</sup> He is careful to acknowledge that in the context of our passage from *Uji* the term refers to individual objects and their respective times. But to him, this is only one side of the term’s meaning. The other side relates to Buddha nature as “absolute nothingness” (絶対

<sup>13</sup> Ōmori, *Jikan to sonzai* 時間と存在 (Tōkyō: Seidosha, 1994), 27–46; idem., ‘Die Produktion der linearen Zeit’ *European Journal of Japanese Philosophy* 6 (2021): 125–36.

<sup>14</sup> Akiyama, *Dōgen no Kenkyū* 道元の研究 (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1935), 127.

無), and this “nothingness”, he says, limits or determines itself into these individual *uji* “without reason and in an irrational fashion.”<sup>15</sup>

*Uji* thus indicates the self-determination of nothingness into discrete, individual, temporal instances of what he nevertheless calls “absolute being” (絶対の存在).<sup>16</sup> It is no mere coincidence that this sounds conspicuously like Nishida Kitarō’s “self-aware determination of nothingness” (無の自覚的限定),<sup>17</sup> because we know that Akiyama had studied with Nishida in the late 1920s.<sup>18</sup>

Again, my point here is primarily that this interpretation with all its investments into speculative dialectics is introduced by Akiyama without further discussion, as a mere paraphrase of what Dōgen is saying. Yet, I don’t see any talk of “self-determination” or “irrationality” in the passages quoted from *Uji*. Moreover, to say that objects and situations occur “without reason” is an interpolation that needs to be reconciled with Dōgen’s, or indeed Buddhism’s, insistence on conditioned occurrence. Akiyama is aware of this latter problem. He attempts to solve it with another interpolation, by way of an analogy to Husserl’s distinction between the “natural” stance and that of phenomenological reduction<sup>19</sup>: The “natural stance”, he says, is immersed in the world of consciousness, where events are connected by causal chains. Enlightened insight is aware that each conscious instant, however, occurs spontaneously and without reason. In Akiyama’s words, which take their key terms from Husserl (or, perhaps, Nishida’s reading of Husserl):

不昧因果とは勝義に於いては正に此のノエシスの非連続なる現前の一瞬中に撰せられたるノエマ的に過去未来共にわたて連続的なる因果の認識をいふのである。<sup>20</sup>

Not obscuring cause and effect in the higher sense actually refers to the noematic knowledge of continuous causation that spans the eternal past, present, and future, which is contained in the noetic, discontinuous present moment.

This attempt to reconcile the idea of an absolute, discontinuous reality with that of dependent origination is certainly worthy of consideration – but its relation to Dōgen’s texts is far from self-evident. To distinguish both sides as belonging to “noematic” and “noetic” reality, respectively, remains an interpolation for which Akiyama fails to adduce direct supporting evidence.

A similar “phenomenological turn” can also be found in another seminal philosophical reading of Dōgen, Tanabe Hajime’s “My view on the philosophy of the

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 131: 無の自己限定の起るはただ忽然として起るのみ、無理由にして非合理的である。

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>17</sup> Nishida, *Mu no Jikakuteki Gentei* 無の自覚的限定, Nishida Kitarō Zenshū 西田幾多郎全集 6 (Tōkyō: Iwanamishoten, 1965).

<sup>18</sup> Wakatsuki, Zenki ni okeru Shūgaku Kenkyū no “Shūhen” (1): Akiyama Hanji Cho “Dōgen No Kenkyū” ni tsuite 昭和前期における宗学研究の「周辺」 *Komazawa University Journal of Buddhist Studies* 8 (October 1977): 130. [Do you mean p. 30? Or is that another source?]

<sup>19</sup> Akiyama, *Dōgen no Kenkyū* 道元の研究 (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1935), 172.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.



Shōbō genzō”, 田邊元『正法眼蔵の哲學私観』.<sup>21</sup> Tanabe again refers to the quoted passage from *Uji*, saying:

彼(道元)はもと單に「時間有つて」即ち「有る時」「ある時」従つて「或時」の意味を有するに過ぎないと思はれる有時の語を解釋して、「いはゆる有事は、時すでにこれ有なり、有はみな時なり」と説いて、今日ハイデッガーの説く如きいはゆる存在即時間の時間的存在論を主張する。而しも人此の如き存在即時間を「疑着せざれども之をしれるにあらず、…疑着ししばらく時なるのみなり」といつて、人間の直接的日常現存在と其自覺存在との相關を示して居る。<sup>22</sup>

In interpreting the word *uji*, which originally is taken to simply mean “there is a time”, therefore “at a given time”, therefore “some time”, he [Dōgen] explains, “what is called *uji* means that time is already being, and beings are all time”, positing like today Heidegger a temporal ontology that states the identity of being and time. In further saying about this identity of being and time that “while not being doubted, it is not known as such, ... doubting is none other than time”, he points to the relation of people’s immediate, everyday Dasein and its self-aware being.

(Just to be clear about what I have done in my own translation of Tanabe’s: First, I have translated his quotes from Dōgen in the way that his own interpretation suggests. Second, I have turned what is in the Japanese original a nominalized phrase, i.e., 存在即時間, “being is time”, into the compound nominal expression “the identity of being and time”).

Independent of translation problems, at first sight the passage looks innocent enough in its dense use of citations from the original. Note, however, that Tanabe takes the second quotation out of its immediate context, where it refers to clock time, and relates it to time in general. Further, Tanabe turns Dōgen into an existential philosopher *avant la lettre* – a Japanese medieval Heidegger. As stated in the preface to his book, part of his project is to reaffirm the value of pre-modern Japanese thought vis-à-vis what he considers to be the questions of contemporary avantgarde Western philosophy.<sup>23</sup> By reading Dōgen as an existentialist philosopher, Tanabe demonstrates that what was most worthwhile in the modern Western mind had already been there in Japan at a much earlier time – a figure of thought that was already present in Watsuji’s *Shamon Dōgen*.<sup>24</sup>

Leaving the political aspect aside, Dōgen’s topic is arguably the relation between the views of the unenlightened (*shujō* 衆生), who are bound to transmigration in the cycle of existences, and the liberating insight and practice of the Buddhas and Patriarchs. Tanabe turns this into the difference between “immediate, everyday Dasein” and “self-aware being”: it is awareness of the structure of existence that distinguishes the one from the other, not realization of the Buddha Way. The

<sup>21</sup> Tanabe, *Shōbō Genzō no Tetsugaku Shikan* 正法眼蔵の哲學私観 (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1939); see also Müller, ‘Getting Back to Premodern Japan: Tanabe’s Reading of Dōgen’ (*Frontiers in Japanese Philosophy* Vol. 1. Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Tanabe, *Shōbō Genzō no Tetsugaku Shikan* 正法眼蔵の哲學私観 (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1939), 62–63.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Watsuji, *Nihon Seishinshi Kenkyū* 日本精神史研究 (Tōkyō: Iwanami shoten, 1992).

productive element lies in this universalistic, but also scholastic turn. It allows Tanabe to read Dōgen as an analyst of the structure of human existence, and to create links to contemporary philosophical issues. What gets lost is the specifics of Dōgen's own questioning of time, which is inextricably linked to Buddhist soteriology. If this were a painting, you might still recognize a similarity of structure, and a shared theme, but the atmosphere, the appeal, and the message would have decidedly changed.

To finally turn to a recent and thorough engagement with Dōgen, the 2012 article by Rein Raud on "The existential moment" intends to "reinterpret the concept of time in Dōgen's theory from a different position, with stress on the momentary rather than the durational, and to offer an alternative reading of the *Uji* fascicle as well as certain other key passages in Dōgen's work that, ... will enable a less complicated and more lucid understanding of his ideas."<sup>25</sup>

In the course of the article, Raud gives the following translation of the above-quoted passage from *Uji*:

The so-called 'existential moment' means that each moment is in itself an existence and that all existences are momentary. The 'golden body of the Buddha' is a moment, and because it is momentary it has its moment of ethereal glow. You should study this in the context of the twelve hours of the present. The 'three heads and eight shoulders of an asura' are just a moment and because of this momentariness, they are such during the twelve hours of the present. The twelve hours have length and distance, shortness and proximity, and even if you are not conscious of their measure, you still call this system 'the twelve hours'. Because the marks of their going and coming are clear, people do not doubt them, but even if they do not doubt them, it is not the same as understanding them. Even if sentient beings do not make it a general principle to doubt every thing and every event that they do not initially understand, it does not follow that they necessarily agree with everything before they start doubting it. Their doubts are no more than fleeting moments as well.<sup>26</sup>

He continues to explain:

The first difference in reading between the momentary and durational modes emerges in establishing the relation of *uji* with the measurable time-system. The durational translations allow it to be merged with the 'twelve hours of the present' ...; the momentary version separates them because time has duration, but moments do not.<sup>27</sup>

As is evident from the passages quoted, Raud's project is to read Dōgen as the proponent of a theory of momentariness and *Uji* as an exposition of that theory, and his contribution to the current volume further develops that interpretation.<sup>28</sup> In this sense, he is following up on one side of Akiyama's interpretation, without, however,

<sup>25</sup> Raud, 'The Existential Moment: Rereading Dōgen's Theory of Time'. *Philosophy East and West* 62 (2) (2012): 153.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 159–60.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>28</sup> See Raud, in this volume, where he states that *Uji* "leads them [the readers] through the 'holistic' understanding of the phenomenological present to the ontological understanding of existence as essentially momentary."

mentioning Akiyama. His above translation may be seen as an experiment in that regard.

To briefly assess the gains and losses of this approach in the passage in question, the translation has a high degree of terminological and conceptual consistency. It reads like a fairly straightforward argument about the relation of the “existential moment” – which is Raud’s translation of *uji* – and measurable time, the time of the “twelve hours”. Raud’s argument is based on the idea that Dōgen is a momentarist who holds that immeasurable moments are true and real but measurable time is secondary at best. He therefore wants us to separate *uji* and the *twelve hours* and gives “The ‘three heads and eight shoulders of an asura’ are just a moment and because of this momentariness, they are such during the twelve hours of the present.” for what is in the original 「三頭八臂これ時なり、時なるがゆゑにいまの十二時に一如なるべし。」 – more literally: “Three heads, eight arms are *ji*, and because they are *ji* they have to/should be (*narubeshi*) the same (*ichinyo*) as the twelve hours now.”

Raud has managed to give his translated sentence a meaning that is consistent with his fundamental idea, but this came with several creative investments into the text. His identification of the “three heads, eight arms” with an asura is in line with part of the tradition.<sup>29</sup> But other than Arifuku Kōgaku, for example, he takes the expression out of its soteriological context, which is about the relation between different phases of realization on the Buddha Way, such as bringing forth the bodhi-mind, practicing, achieving highest insight or enlightenment, and returning to the world to save sentient beings. Arifuku, in contrast, explicitly connects the expression to the passage in the Kannon chapter of the Lotus sutra, where Kannon promises to appear in this shape to convert sentient beings, if necessary.<sup>30</sup>

Semantically, Raud has created an abstractive translation for the second instance of *ji* (“momentariness”), and has severed the link between *ji* and the “twelve hours” that Dōgen ties both with his injunctions to study and understand *uji* within present measured time and his statement that the three heads and eight arms are “one with the twelve hours”.

All of this, or so I would argue, hinges on Raud’s interpretation of *ji* as *moment* in an Aristotelian sense:

*Time* thus has, by definition, measurements and is analogous to a *line* in space, as opposed to *the now* (*to nyn*), which relates to *time* as a point relates to a *line* – it is in/on it, but not a part of it ... Analogically, a *moment* appears to us in a different register of being than *time*. Moments are without duration, just as points are without measurements.<sup>31</sup>

I beg to differ on two points. First, it is debatable whether the *ji* in Dōgen’s *uji* is really designating “moments” at all. Since he relates the term to meta-stable states

<sup>29</sup> Others, such as Yorizumi Mitsuko, identify it with the guardian deity Fudō myōō. See Yorizumi, *Dōgen: Jiko, Jikan, Sekai wa dono yōni Seiritsu suru no ka* 道元: 自己・時間・世界はどのように成立するのか (Tōkyō: Nihon Hōsō Shuppan Kyōkai, 2009), 87.

<sup>30</sup> Arifuku, *Dōgen no Sekai* 道元の世界 (Ōsaka: Ōsaka Shoseki, 1985), 233; Kato and Soothill, *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*. New York: Weatherhill, 1975), 322.

<sup>31</sup> Raud, ‘The Existential Moment: Rereading Dōgen’s Theory of Time’. *Philosophy East and West* 62 (2) (2012): 153.

such as bamboos, pine trees, Buddhas, and Wisdom kings, and uses the image of the season to elucidate his notion of *kyōryaku*, I tend to follow Kawamura Kōdō, who equated *ji* with *jisetsu* 時節 (a limited phase or period of time). In this reading, which was continued by Ishii Kiyozumi, *ji* is less about moments without duration and more about phenomena of limited duration without underlying substance.<sup>32</sup>

That said, as Akiyama and others have pointed out, there is clear evidence that Dōgen works from an underlying ontology of momentariness. However – and that would be my second point of contention – the “moments” in question are not “points”, but, if we need an analogy from modern science, temporal “quanta”, that is, discrete units of minimal temporal duration. This is evident in passages where Dōgen talks about instantaneous arising and cessation. Here is a pertinent passage from *Shōbō genzō Shukke kudoku*:

しるべし、今生の人身は、四大五蘊、因和合してかりになせり、八苦つねにあり。いはんや刹那刹那に生滅してさらにとどまらず、いはんや一彈指のあひだに六十五の刹那生滅すといへども、みづからくらきによりて、いまだしらざるなり。すべて一日夜があひだに、六十四億九万九千九百八十の刹那ありて五蘊生滅すといへども、しらざるなり。あはれむべし、われ生滅すといへども、みづからしらざること。この刹那生滅の量、ただ佛世尊ならびに舍利弗とのみしらせたまふ。<sup>33</sup>

You should know that the human body of this life has provisionally come to be by the meeting of the four elements and five skandha as well as of causes and conditions, and it is continually beset by the eight forms of suffering. Not to mention that even though it ceaselessly arises and perishes from instant to instant, it is blind to this fact and therefore does not know it. In the course of one day and night, there are 6 billion 400 million 99 thousand 980 instants, and the five skandhas arise and perish on that rate without knowing. It is deplorable that we arise and perish without being aware of it ourselves. The rate of this arising and perishing something we know only from the Buddha, the World-Honored One and Shaributsu.

In other words, the *setsuna* or “moment” that Dōgen talks about here does have a measure (*ryō* 量) which one can easily calculate using his words – it comes down to 0.0000135 modern seconds. The *setsuna*-moment comprises arising and perishing, and it is part and parcel of larger units of time, such as “one day and night”. I would therefore concur with Rein Raud that Dōgen’s view on time in *Shōbō genzō* included a momentarist element, but deny that in Dōgen’s own idea, the moments are somehow separate from larger aggregates of measured time, or that any aggregation of moments to the meta-stable state of “something”, be it bamboo or Buddha, is “illusory by definition”.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Kawamura, ‘*Shōbōgenzō* “Uji” ni tsuite –Busshō no Mondai to no Kanren ni oite’, *Journal of Soto Zen Studies*, no. 3 (March 1961), 117–118; Ishii “‘Zengo saidan’ ni tsuite”, *Journal of Soto Zen studies*, no. 40 (March 1998), 47.

<sup>33</sup> Ōkubo, ‘*Shukke Kudoku*’, *Dōgen Zenji Zenshū I*, 603–18. (Tōkyō: Chikuma shobō, 1969), 607.

<sup>34</sup> Raud, in this volume; note, by the way, that Raud on the other hand posits that the ordinary view, which allows for temporal measurement and duration, forms an indispensable part of the complementary duality of “provisional” and “holistic” truth, each of which is incomplete and “neither of them self-sufficient”.

Now, the relation between *Shukke kudoku*, which belongs to the new, 12 fascicle *Shōbō genzō*, and the *Uji* fascicle has been a topic of much debate. So, I am not going here into the question of whether and, if yes, how, we can construe a consistent theory of time from the sum total of Dōgen's writings. It may still be that the *ji* of *Uji* points to a dimension beyond measured time. What that "beyond" means, and how it relates to measured time, is a topic for further discussion.<sup>35</sup>

### 3 Transposition: The Problem of Equivalence

In this paper, my topic is the transformations that are taking place when Dōgen's texts are transposed into philosophy. I hope I have been able to show by way of my four examples that reading and translating Dōgen as a philosopher tends to create certain shifts in the mode and style of discourse, the reading of his syntax, the semantic of key terms, and in the pragmatics, the constellation of addresser and addressees that is envisaged in the text.

Let me be clear. I do not believe that such shifts are entirely illegitimate. My argument is in favour of making *conscious* shifts. I also believe that the reading of texts such as the *Shōbō genzō*, much as the reading of, say, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, becomes more relevant when we follow the original as far as we can – because, to use a thought exposed by Dōgen in *Kattō* and *Dōtoku*, it is by running into obstacles and falling into traps that we are made to move beyond our current understanding. In the following, I therefore want to propose a model from translation studies as a kind of checklist to prevent *inadvertent shifting*.

A useful template in this regard are the "frames of equivalence" (*Bezugsrahmen der Äquivalenz*) proposed by Werner Koller.<sup>36</sup>

Koller identifies five such frames:

1. denotative equivalence: relating to extralinguistic facts and issues
2. connotative equivalence: relating to the way a meaning is verbalized, associations, expectations of style etc.
3. text-normative equivalence: relating to normative expectations concerning content, organization, style, lexis, syntax
4. formal-aesthetic equivalence: relating to the level of *elocutio*, the individual choices made by an author in expressing his message
5. pragmatic equivalence: relating to the addressees of a source text and the translation/transposition, the relation between addresser/addressee, as well as the agency of the text.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup>This question is discussed extensively in my forthcoming book on Dōgen and time: Steineck, *Zen Time: Dōgen in Context*.

<sup>36</sup>Koller, *Einführung in die Übersetzungswissenschaft* (Heidelberg: UTB Quelle & Meyer, 1979), 214–72.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 216.

The translation of a text into another language may involve shifts in any and several of these frames. A scholarly translation of a *Shōbō genzō* text into a European language, for example, may preserve a high degree of equivalence in the denotative frame, but will not achieve the same degree in the connotative frame, because of differences in the lexicon of the target language and the cognitive repertoire associated with it. By way of being a scholarly translation, it will of necessity fail to achieve pragmatic equivalence, as it involves an attitude of the translator towards the recipients of the translation and vice versa that is different from those at play between Dōgen and the addressees of his *Shōbō genzō* texts. Translations that aim at pragmatic equivalence, on the other hand, may sacrifice certain denotative equivalences (typically, for example, in references to the hours of the clock or the dates of the calendar) in order to not burden the reading of the text with obstacles to understanding that have only a quaint relation to its central message.

Readings that transpose a *Shōbō genzō* text into philosophy inevitably involve even greater shifts, most of all concerning the frames of the pragmatic and of text normativity. In the following, I will briefly elaborate on these shifts and how they relate to shifts within the dimension of the semantic (frames 1 and 2). Within the frame of pragmatic relations, philosophy comes with the expectation of free reasoned discourse, in which the addresser is expected to convince the addressee by way of argument and reason. Conversely, the addressee is allowed to challenge the addresser as well as their sources on the same grounds. In philosophy, it is a legitimate endeavor to prove Kant, Heidegger, Nishida, or Dōgen wrong, although it is more valuable if you do so by also appreciating where they were right. In Dōgen's Buddha Way, one cannot prove the Buddha-patriarchs wrong, and one may not try to do so, even if one is allowed to move "beyond" them, whatever that means. As far as addresser and addressees are concerned, most of the *Shōbō genzō* texts were initially *jishū*, informal teachings to the inner circle of monastic disciples. They were intended to guide a group of dedicated adepts on a shared path. In terms of pragmatics, this implied the superior authority of the addresser ("master Dōgen") and the inferior status of his recipients ("the assembly"). Instead of offering propositions for critical scrutiny, the texts are presented as expressions of enlightened insight; recipients are exhorted to contemplate these expressions in order to deepen their own appreciation of the Buddha Way. This has important implications for the denotative and connotative frames. In the context of the *Shōbō genzō*, and of *kōan* literature in general, apparent contradictions for example do not present logical conundrums to be resolved in order to achieve a theoretical synthesis. They provide opportunities to consider aspects of the authoritative sayings in different perspectives. Validity is not a problem, as it is considered a given – and, as T.G. Foulk has insightfully pointed out, much of *kōan* literature would be meaningless if it were not accepted as such.<sup>38</sup>

For centuries, the texts were treated as secret teachings; access was proof of belonging to the inner circle. That of course changed with the integration of the

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<sup>38</sup> Foulk, '1: The Form and Function of Koan Literature', *The Koan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, ed. by St. Heine and D. S. Wright, 15–45 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

*Shōbō genzō* into the canons of “Japanese thought” and “Japanese literature”. Dōgen’s texts are today presented in modern editions, readily available for purchase by individuals and public or academic libraries, and often supplemented with explanatory notes that would, in the more distant past, have been provided orally by a competent teacher, ideally one standing in the direct line of transmission. Such notes, obviously, impact on the connotational and denotational levels of meaning. One should therefore keep in mind that even the “original” texts we are reading today are, on the level of pragmatics, far removed from what they were at the time of their writing, and that this impacts also on their semantics.

Modern editing also engenders changes within the frame of formal-aesthetic equivalence. Characters are often standardized, and many editions use the modern instead of the older form. Some editions also collate texts from various manuscripts. A further formal-aesthetic change that has direct impact on the connotational and denotational levels is the insertion of line breaks to create paragraphs where there are none in the manuscripts.<sup>39</sup> On the recipient side, modern editions are for a large part used for individual silent reading, which then may translate in public discussion. Access rules for such discussion are academic rather than religious. The fact that in this book, non-clerical professional scholars present arguments on Dōgen to readers who are also for the most part neither monastics nor formally members of the Zen School or any other Buddhist denomination is a pragmatic sea change. Its implications still need to be accounted for in interpretation. And even where Dōgen is translated and explained for use in Zen Training (as in the Sōtō School Translation Project, or in the translations edited by Kazuaki Tanahashi), the social organization, the environment, and the conditions of training have changed to a large degree in comparison to Dōgen’s own time. Furthermore, to secure “pragmatic equivalence”, one has to account for the cognitive repertoire of the audience, which is very different between a contemporary European or American Zen community and the assembly in Dōgen’s monasteries. Again, changes concerning the pragmatic dimension of necessity reflect on the semantic dimension of what is being said, and how it is being understood.

As for the frame of text-normative expectations, philosophical texts – the texts of this book, for example – are expected to proffer and possibly discuss concepts and theories. Different textual traditions have their respective conventional text forms catering to this end, and these have changed over time. Still, all of them are meant to clarify and elucidate certain ideas pertaining to questions of fundamental importance to all humankind. Only very few texts from the *Shōbō genzō* conform to these expectations, if measured against indigenous Japanese or East Asian formats such as *ron* or *gi*. This is clear from direct comparison between Dōgen and other Japanese Buddhist authors such as Kūkai.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Bodiford has recently published an insightful article outlining the scope of changes that have been made to Dōgen’s texts due to modern editorial demands and decisions. See Bodiford, ‘Rewriting Dōgen’, *Kokusai Zen Kenkyū* 国際禅研究 4 (2019): 219–302.

<sup>40</sup>Kaufmann and Steineck, ‘Another Discourse on the Method: Understanding Philosophy through Rhetorical Analysis’, *European Journal of Japanese Philosophy* 3 (2018): 59–86.

## 4 Conclusion

The point to keep in mind is that, as already stated by Kawamura some decades ago, and recently reiterated by Tsujiguchi Yōichirō, *Uji* was not intended as a philosophical treatise on the concept of time,<sup>41</sup> and *mutatis mutandis* the same is true for other *Shōbō genzō* texts that have been received into modern philosophical discourse. These texts provide guidance on how to deal with certain terms and concepts when negotiating the Way of the Buddhas and Patriarchs. To transform them into expositions of theory means to transpose them into a different kind of text altogether. As the examples given above have shown, this has important consequences for the meaning attributed to them. One needs, in other words, to keep track of how the said transposition affects Koller's frames of equivalence 1 and 2 – the levels of denotation and connotation, or, generally, the dimension of the semantic. As I have demonstrated above, there is a tendency to make inadvertent denotative and connotative changes. Dōgen's *u* is not Heidegger's *Sein/Being*, and his *ji* is not an Aristotelian *nyn*, an infinitesimally small point in time. The “golden body of a Buddha” is a soteriological figure and an object of reverence, not an “inconspicuous, ordinary thing” like a kitchen pot. Such shifts have consequences for the conceptual interpretation of Dōgen's texts. They may be productive, but the danger is to lose precisely what makes Dōgen's thought special and poses a challenge to our own preconceptions. If we read Dōgen as Hegel, Heidegger, or Nishida *avant la lettre*, why read him anyway, if we are not committed to the extra-philosophical project of upping the value of historic Japanese culture for whatever political ends? We are free to enter into a philosophical dialogue with his writings – let us make sure to let him state his points in his own way and according to his own agenda.

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<sup>41</sup> Kawamura, ‘*Shōbōgenzō* “Uji” ni tsuite – Busshō no Mondai to no Kanren ni oite. *Journal of Soto Zen Studies*, no. 3 (March 1961): 119; and Tsujiguchi, *Shōbōgenzō No Shisōteki Kenkyū* (Tōkyō: Hokuju shuppan, 2012), 172.



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