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Meditation for Laymen and Laywomen: The *Buddha Samādhi (Jijuyū Zanmai)* of Menzan Zuihō

David E. Riggs

Some of the best scholarship in the West regarding the Sōtō school of Japanese Zen Buddhism has been about the teachings of meditation, and in this aspect we in the West are much like the Chinese, who in the first years of their contact with Buddhism were very interested in finding out all they could about the techniques of meditation.¹ The Chinese were looking for new mental techniques that might be of practical as well as spiritual use, and in the West the interest in meditation has, at least in part, been due to the hope that it is a powerful practice that has a multitude of benefits. The Zen school itself has long been at pains to impress upon its followers that it is not a meditation school and that its teachings are not limited to this domain. This insistence has had little popular effect, apparently, and today one can hear on any popular tour of Kyoto temples that the Zen school is a meditation school.

The text discussed in this chapter is about meditative practice and it confronts this misunderstanding in its very title, which emphasizes the ultimate realm of the awakening of the Buddha, not the details of meditation technique. The *Buddha Samādhi (Jijuyū zanmai)* is an informal piece written by Menzan Zuihō (1683–1769) during the early years of his teaching career at the request of laymen and laywomen, and it was published some twenty years later in 1737.² Menzan was a learned monk and a leading figure in the comprehensive reforms which were sweeping the Sōtō schools during the eighteenth century. The expressed intention of the text is to help

ordinary people practice meditation, but the text is in fact an extended sermon in praise of the teaching of Dōgen (1200–1255), who is now regarded as both the founder and the source of all teachings for the Sōtō school.

Dōgen returned from his extended visit to China carrying the approval of a Chinese master and began what has become by far the largest of the contemporary Japanese Zen schools. Menzan's long career of devoted research and teaching was an attempt to focus the Sōtō clerics on the texts of Dōgen, which had not been read as a source of doctrine for many centuries. In the *Buddha Samādhi* he presents Dōgen's way as the highest teaching of Buddhism, far beyond any ordinary practices or understanding. However, Menzan also includes quite detailed and useful summaries of basic Buddhist doctrines, such as causation and the three poisons of greed, anger, and confusion. There is not a single word of practical advice about meditation, certainly nothing that either a contemporary Californian or a fourth-century Chinese would recognize as meditation techniques, or advice about concrete details of posture or breathing. Nonetheless, the text has clear explanations of problems and misunderstandings that can arise in meditation and accessible discussions of some of Dōgen's abstruse teachings that underlie meditation practice. In that sense it is practical. Menzan added to the printed version an appendix which presents passages gleaned from Dōgen's writings that deal with meditation, and at the end of the appendix there is finally some concrete physical advice about meditation posture and environment. It seems as if Menzan was doing everything he could to emphasize that Zen is not meditation in the sense of a particular technique, leaving such details to the very last page of the appendix.

The Changing Role of Dōgen in Sōtō Zen

The *Buddha Samādhi* needs to be read as a single part of Menzan's deep involvement in the Tokugawa era (1603–1867), which was a movement working toward major changes in Zen practice and a wide range of creative reevaluation of Buddhist doctrine. Menzan is remembered as one of the most meticulous in detail as well as the most prolific of all the Sōtō Zen figures of that time, but his creativity was hardly recognized.³ His approach to learning and his emphasis on historical sources established a precedent of careful scholarship that to this day continues to be characteristic of the Sōtō school. Many of Menzan's doctrine and practice reforms have become so thoroughly incorporated into the contemporary school that they seem to be the way things have always been since the time of Dōgen. Despite his accomplishments, Menzan is not remembered in Sōtō Zen circles as an innovative figure, and in the Tokugawa era, Buddhism in general was for many years regarded as a backward embarrassment by scholars. Among contemporary Sōtō Zen followers and

scholars, Dōgen is taken as the source of all authority, and today, as if to emphasize that attitude, the school often refers to itself as Dōgen Zen.

Menzan's writings, although highly respected, are regarded as merely helpful notes and background information with which to gain access to the great insight and awakening of the founder. Not only did Menzan read Dōgen with the greatest attention to textual detail and painstakingly research Dōgen's sources, he used his knowledge of those texts and attempted to put his new understandings into daily practice in a way that Dōgen would have done. In this campaign Menzan was willing to go against both the practices of the established powers of Dōgen's own temple of Eiheiji and what he had been taught by his own teachers, whom he nonetheless held in the greatest respect. Menzan's detailed command of the works of Dōgen is widely remarked on, but it is important to understand that his efforts did not stop there. He filled in areas that Dōgen had left blank, and he attempted to clarify the ambiguities in Dōgen's work by interpreting the texts that Dōgen himself had access to. Menzan certainly used ancient materials to justify his attempts to reform Sōtō practice and doctrine, but the selection and interpretation were very much his own. Although he hid his creativity by presenting his work as merely research and editing, in many ways he was as much a revolutionary as a conservator.

To appreciate how radical Menzan's ideas really were, one needs to revise some stock ideas about Sōtō Zen. Dōgen is present in almost every study of Sōtō Zen, but why is it that he occupies such a dominant position? From the perspective of the modern Sōtō school it is not surprising that Menzan should have devoted his life to the study of Dōgen. Indeed in the last century the vast majority of Sōtō-related studies, both in Japan and in the West, have been focused on some aspect of Dōgen.⁴ Dōgen was responsible for the introduction of the Sōtō Zen lineage to Japan, and his writings are now the font of orthodoxy for Sōtō Zen. It is all too easy to assume that this should obviously be the case and that he has always been regarded in this way. Before the Tokugawa era reforms, however, the writings of Dōgen were not the center of Sōtō doctrine and practice. They involved years of painstaking textual scholarship and even more years of often acrimonious discussion about what to do with the results of that work. This era has been meticulously researched by the contemporary scholar-monks of the Sōtō school, but the fact that the focus on Dōgen is a relatively recent development is not something that the contemporary teachers of the school are particularly eager to emphasize. I use their scholarship extensively in my own research, but my conclusions are my own and should not be taken as representative of the mainstream Sōtō view.

In the medieval era Dōgen's role was limited. His writings, especially the collection of essays that is now called the *Shōbōgenzō*, were treated as secret treasures, but there was no commonly accepted version and no commentaries were written about them from about the end of the thirteenth until the sev-

enteenth century.⁵ Although Sōtō monks traced their lineage to Dōgen, the content of Sōtō practice and doctrine was determined by teachings passed down from teacher to disciple. Religious authority (and indeed authority in general) relied on this kind of relationship of master and student, and texts and other paraphernalia were used to certify this handing down of authority. In the case of Sōtō Zen, it was the possession of a Dōgen text, not the understanding of its contents, that authenticated the possessor's religious practices and teachings.

In the medieval era merely possessing a text may have been enough, but in the Tokugawa era Sōtō Zen needed something more respectable than secret oral lore for its doctrinal underpinnings. Some of Dōgen's more conventional works had long been available, but it was only in the seventeenth century that the *Shōbōgenzō* and his writings about monastic practice became more widely circulated in manuscript form and were printed for the first time. It gradually became apparent that there were serious discrepancies between Dōgen's writings and contemporary Sōtō customs. Even before Menzan's time there had been attempts to reform customary practices to bring them more into line with the texts of Dōgen. These attempts used the slogan of *fukko*, which means to return to the old [ways], but with the implication that the old ways were the only correct ways. The most prominent attempt was led by Manzan Dōhaku (1636–1741), who succeeded in reforming dharma transmission, the ceremonial authentication of the status of a Zen teacher.⁶ Dōhaku, as I will refer to him henceforth to avoid confusion with Menzan, made a creative leap by reinterpreting a 1615 government decree which specified that the house rules of Eihei-ji, the temple founded by Dōgen, should also be the rules for all temples of the lineage. Dōhaku made the startling claim that this rather specific legalistic decree meant that the writings of Dōgen should be the source of authority for the entire Sōtō school. Dōhaku then used the “Shisho” and “Menju” fascicles of the *Shōbōgenzō* to justify his campaign to reform dharma transmission.⁷ His case for a sweeping transformation was thus based on a text by Dōgen that had been ignored for hundreds of years. Whether or not that was the intent of the 1615 government ruling, Dōhaku's interpretation carried the day and resulted in an enormous expansion of interest in the writings of Dōgen. He succeeded in publishing his own version of the *Shōbōgenzō* in 1686 but, because of the problems arising from disputes about the *Shōbōgenzō*, in 1722 the Sōtō hierarchy requested that the government prohibit its publication, a prohibition that was not lifted until 1796, though manuscript copies continued to be available.⁸

Menzan worked to push the movement far beyond Dōhaku's dharma transmission reform and to focus on just one chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō*. He sought different manuscript versions of the chapters of the *Shōbōgenzō* and investigated the various traditions of organizing them. He also worked on Dōgen's other writings, such as his separate essays in Chinese about monastic

regulations as well as a variety of independent pieces. He used these texts as his basis for authority, but he also read extensively in the sources that Dōgen himself relied upon and used these sources to fill in questions that Dōgen had not addressed. On this broader basis, Menzan advocated a much more radical overhaul of Sōtō affairs, including the rollback of some of Dōhaku's reforms that did not actually rely on Dōgen. For example, Dōhaku had created a set of monastic regulations that he claimed were based on Dōgen and Chinese practices of Dōgen's time. Menzan exposed Dōhaku's regulations as being based on the contemporary Chinese practices of the temples that had originally been set up for the Chinese merchant community in the trading port of Nagasaki.

These temples had become very popular in Japan, and many Japanese monks came to Nagasaki to see for themselves this newly imported Chinese Buddhism, which came to be referred to as Ōbaku.⁹ Many were strongly impressed by the Ōbaku monks and returned to their own temples inspired by new ideas and practices. Although Menzan had extensive contacts with Ōbaku in his younger days in Kyushu, he came to be a staunch opponent of its practices. His position was that the only true sources of authority were in the writings of Dōgen and the texts on which he drew, and he strenuously objected to contemporary practice (either Chinese or Japanese) as a model. Menzan emphasized that one should read old texts directly and should use texts that were contemporaneous with or earlier than the old text only to support one's reading. He did not rely on the views of living teachers and avoided commentaries. Of course Menzan studied with a variety of teachers and revered his own lineage master, Sonnō Shōeki (1649–1705). Nonetheless, when Menzan attempted to establish authority, he relied neither on customary practice nor on orally transmitted knowledge. Although Menzan and the other reformers insisted that they were merely transmitting the teachings of Dōgen, they can be seen as the founders of a new tradition which derived its authority from textual commentary and scholarship, not from long-established customs and rituals. Although tradition can be thought of as a gradual accumulation of teachings or an organically developing system of practices, it can also be a deliberate construct that is used to bring about change to long-established customary practices.¹⁰ Thanks in great part to the textual work of Menzan, the Edo reform of Sōtō Zen is an example of a well-crafted tradition, that is, a tradition that presents a surface of great authority and antiquity which skillfully conceals the seams and supports used to construct that surface.

Menzan was profoundly influenced by the works of Dōgen, but he was also very much a man of his times in that he used the textual tools and promoted the values of the contemporary trend of returning to the old ways and to the earliest texts. His approach paralleled movements in literature and Chinese studies of this period, in which there was a new interest in the unmediated use of ancient texts. In the Ancient Learning school of Confucian studies, contemporary teachers and their Neo-Confucianism were rejected in favor of

reading the texts of Confucius directly.¹¹ Although the medieval tendency to favor secret lineages in many trades and skills continued, one of the most important intellectual developments in Japan at the time was an emphasis on open discussion within prescribed boundaries of permissible topics. Increasingly, authority based on textual analysis and commentary replaced reliance on secret initiations. The Sōtō reforms have been depicted in sectarian histories as simply a purging of impurities acquired during centuries of degenerate practice, but they can also be seen as a creative application of this new trend in Japanese thought toward emphasizing original texts, adapted to contemporary Sōtō Zen politics and doctrine.

There can be no doubt that Menzan's work promoted a Sōtō Zen that had its own distinct teachings and practices, and one might expect to find that Menzan also practiced the same kind of rigorous separation between Rinzaï and Sōtō Zen that is so often noted in modern Japan. In fact, however, he often studied with teachers from outside his Sōtō lineage and, as will be discussed, wrote long commentaries on kōan texts that are now not considered part of the Sōtō sphere of interest. He spent much of his later years as a guest at Rinzaï temples and received at least one Shingon lineage ordination. It is true that he was against certain kinds of Zen practice, but there is nothing to suggest a general rejection of Rinzaï Zen and there is much evidence of frequent and intimate contact with his brother monks of the Rinzaï lineage throughout his life.

Menzan is certainly not alone in his enthusiasm for Dōgen and reforms, but his output is so large and varied that he can hardly be compared to other Sōtō writers. There are over a hundred titles to his credit, including several very large collections of detailed scholarship and philology. One of his works on monastic rules is over 300 pages in the modern typeset edition. He had fifty-five of these titles printed during his lifetime and the number of those included in the standard modern Sōtō Zen collections is greater than those of all other prominent Sōtō authors combined. Although this aspect of his scholarship is not apparent in the *Buddha Samādhi*, in many other works Menzan argued the case for what he characterized as authentic Dōgen Zen with painstaking attention to textual detail and a comprehensive use of materials that set a new level of scholarship.

The History of the Text and Circumstances of Its Composition

Unfortunately, the *Buddha Samādhi* has not been the subject of a scholarly study nor has it been translated into modern Japanese. However, copies of the woodblock edition are still being printed from blocks that date to Menzan's time by the bookstore Baiyu Shoin in Kyoto. The blocks are somewhat worn, but the text is still completely readable, and this inexpensive edition is still used

in classes at Komazawa University. The Komazawa library has a photocopy of the manuscript from which the woodblocks were made, in Menzan's very clear hand, and I have yet to find any significant difference between the manuscript and this printed version of the *Zoku Sōtōshū zensho*, which I will use for my citations.¹² The *Buddha Samādhi* is included in collections of Menzan's works as well as in many smaller collections of Sōtō texts, and there has even been an English translation which was privately published in Tokyo.¹³

According to Menzan's afterword, he wrote the *Buddha Samādhi* when he was teaching in Kyushu, because there were laymen and laywomen who were serious students of Zen and practitioners of seated meditation. They could not read Chinese, so in order to provide something in Japanese for them, Menzan searched everywhere in the texts of Japanese Zen teachers. Failing to find anything that followed Dōgen's way, he wrote this *Buddha Samādhi* himself in Japanese. The *Buddha Samādhi* is helpful to people interested in meditation, but at the same time, even in this early stage of his career, Menzan was trying to move Sōtō practice toward total reliance on Dōgen. This intent helps to explain why he devotes so much space to discussing what proper Sōtō practice is not and why he is always bringing the reader back to the teachings of Dōgen. Apparently the text was not really what the laity had in mind, and it seems to have attracted little attention and languished in Menzan's personal library. Nearly twenty years later two Zen teachers came to assist Menzan in his new summer retreat temple north of Kyoto and became very interested in his discussion of Dōgen's practice as taught in the *Bendōwa*. Somehow, they happened upon an old manuscript of the *Buddha Samādhi*, which he had written many years earlier, and they noticed how much it resonated with what Menzan was teaching about Dōgen. Their interest in the text after so many years of neglect may be due to the advances in the knowledge of Dōgen's teaching that had occurred over the previous twenty years. This growing understanding of Dōgen seems to have made Menzan's writings more accessible and important to them. Also they were advanced practitioners, who had come to fill positions of responsibility in Menzan's training period. They thought so much of the *Buddha Samādhi* that they copied it by hand and studied it during the ninety-day retreat period. At the end they received permission from Menzan to have it printed that autumn of 1737. Menzan had done much textual research since those earlier days in Kyushu, and he collected the passages from Dōgen's writings that we are now appended to the text. The two teachers returned to Menzan's temple and presented him with twenty woodblock printed copies as a token of their gratitude.

Although Menzan approved the printing of the text, the content was somewhat of a distraction from the focus of his work. He had been abbot of Kōinji for nearly ten years, and during this time he held regular training sessions and did most of his path-breaking research in monastic rules. For the first time during this period there were records of his lecturing about different chapters

of the *Shōbōgenzō*. Earlier in Kyushu, when he spent most of his time traveling and restoring old temples, his talks were on universally admired texts, such as the *Lotus Sūtra* or the *Record of Lin-chi*, that were the standard texts of Zen lecturers of any school. The emphasis of the *Buddha Samādhi* on Dōgen was the exception. At Kōinji, Menzan's talks and monastic style became much more focused on Dōgen. He learned about monastic life in Dōgen's teachings and put what he had learned into practice at his own temple as much as possible, and Taikyo Katsugen (d. 1736), the new abbot of Eiheiji, praised his research on monastic rules. Katsugen brought Menzan to Eiheiji for three weeks in 1732 to look at the manuscripts and edit the abbot's own work on the precepts. Menzan had high hopes of implementing the same reforms at Eiheiji, but Katsugen passed away before anything could be done and his successor at Eiheiji did not seem interested in monastic reform. Menzan's dream of changing Eiheiji practice, which would have been a major step toward changing the standard for Sōtō practice, generally was not realized during his lifetime. It took years of discussion culminating in a bitter dispute that nearly paralyzed major monastic centers before Menzan's vision of the reformed rules became the official standard in 1804.¹⁴

In contrast to his preoccupation at this time with details of the monk life in a training monastery, the *Buddha Samādhi* is appropriate for almost anyone interested in Dōgen's teaching. As Menzan points out in the last sentence of his opening comments, Dōgen writes in the *Bendōwa* that laypeople too should do this [seated meditation] practice and that attaining the way has nothing to do with being a monk. The texts that Menzan appended to his essay do include pertinent excerpts from the relatively readable *Bendōwa* and the *Shōbōgenzō zuimonki*, which were appropriate for the lay audience. There are, however, also long selections from the "Zanmai ōzanmai" chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō*, including Chinese passages of significant length. These passages praise the practice in the same way that Menzan does in his own *Buddha Samādhi*, and similarly they offer no concrete advice. For the final selection, however, Menzan quotes the entire *Shōbōgenzō* "Zazenshin," which contains detailed instructions on how to select an appropriately quiet place and how to place your legs, hands, and so forth. Thus only at the very end is there a single word that could be concretely helpful for someone who actually wanted to try to do seated meditation. This kind of detail is not mentioned in the *Buddha Samādhi* itself. Originally written without these appended materials, the text may have been inspiring, but it was certainly nothing like a handbook for taking up the practice of seated meditation.

What the *Buddha Samādhi* does provide is a ringing endorsement of the awakened mind. Menzan presents this awakening as the core of Dōgen's teaching, which is also for Menzan the core of Zen, and indeed of Buddhism itself. Unlike the more didactic and down-to-earth writings for which Menzan is well known, most of this work is simply an affirmation of the glorious nature of

the ultimate. Often the text is little more than a series of provisional names and epithets for what is beyond all words and names. These passages are similar to the style of Dōgen, though Menzan certainly cannot claim Dōgen's poetic gifts. Between these panegyrics to the ultimate, however, Menzan weaves a series of explanations about core Buddhist teachings that are not beyond words, and warnings about what traps to avoid when one is thinking about Buddhism. Combining these two worlds of discourse gives the *Buddha Samādhi* (*Jijuyū zanmai*) its particular flavor.

The Foreword: Definition and Direction

The Chinese-language foreword begins with an elliptical explanation of *jijuyū*, the key term from which the text takes its name. Menzan says the word derives from the Sanskrit word *vairocana*, which is translated into Chinese using the characters that mean the brilliant light that shines everywhere. As Menzan's audience would have been well aware, this same Sanskrit word is also used to refer to the cosmic Buddha Vairocana, a Buddha that has been important to Japan from its earliest days and that is also an important figure in esoteric Buddhism. Here Menzan indicates *vairocana* in the more fundamental sense of the ultimate manifestation of the Buddha as his awakened teaching, as distinguished, for instance, from his other aspects, including his appearance as the historical Buddha. The term *jijuyū* comes from the first of two meanings of *vairocana*, which is from the internal point of view. It refers to the light of wisdom which illuminates the realm of the truth. The word *jijuyū* is composed of the three characters for self, receive, and activity and is thus self-referential; this wisdom does not depend on others, nor is it for the sake of others. It is used to refer to the ultimate state of the Buddha, as distinct from the way he presents himself to others as a teacher.

Menzan's explanation continues with the second meaning of *vairocana*, which is from the external point of view and refers to the light that shines out from the body of the awakened one and teaches others. This is called the *tajiyū*, and it differs from the first meaning in that it is written using the character for "other" instead of "self." These are the fundamental pair of meanings, but Menzan (following Dōgen) immediately goes beyond the opposition and insists that to split them up in this way is a scholarly mistake. From his point of view, splitting these aspects into internal and external is like "a scholar hesitatingly going over the details, and mired in the gradations between Buddhas and sentient beings. The essential workings of the Buddhas and Patriarchs is surely not like this."¹⁵ He emphasizes the ultimate unity of self and others and the crucial role of this light of wisdom. He does not delve further into this definition in the preface, but the first text in his appendix is a passage from the *Bendōwa*, where Dōgen uses *Buddha Samādhi* (*Jijuyū zanmai*) as an equivalent

for the ultimate state of the Buddha and says that *zazen* is the manifestation of this state. Thus for Menzan, *Buddha Samādhi (Jijuyū zanmai)* is a way of referring to seated meditation without being trapped by a limited idea of a particular posture practiced at a particular time and place. It is rather surprising that this crucial term is not treated to a fuller discussion in the body of the text.

Menzan concludes the preface with two quotes from Zen literature affirming his interpretation of the relationship between light and this *samādhi* and then laments: “How sad it is that because of the bedazzlement of the heterodox practice of observing the phrase [of the *kōan*] [*kanna*] of the medieval period, the practice of our school completely changed and the essential working was lost” (463a). Menzan says that only Dōgen kept to the true way of this *Buddha Samādhi (Jijuyū zanmai)* and avoided the trap of incorrect *kanna* practices. One of the characteristic features of modern Rinzai Zen is this *kanna* practice that focuses great effort on breaking through to the understanding of a single phrase culled from the *kōan*. Menzan’s text has been linked to the Sōtō school’s opposition to this kind of practice, and I will have much more to say about the relationship between *kanna* and Menzan later. The theme of light as the equivalent of awakening appears repeatedly throughout the text. Another central theme, the unity of practice and awakening, is alluded to indirectly in the quotation just cited when Menzan disparages the limited view that there are gradations between the awakened Buddhas and the rest of the world. The unity of practice and awakening is a key topic for Dōgen as well as for Japanese Buddhism in general, but Dōgen emphasizes the practice aspect of the unity, which I interpret as the claim that there can be no awakening except in practice. In this text Menzan frequently uses the term “practice-awakening” (*shushō*) without explaining directly what it means. I prefer to stay with that infelicitous English translation rather than use a more readable English which would force a particular interpretation where Menzan has not given one.¹⁶ These two themes of light and practice-awakening appear repeatedly throughout the text.

What Our School Is Not: Sōtō Zen, Meditation, and *Kanna* Zen

After this brief foreword in Chinese, the body of the text (in Japanese) emphasizes the primacy of awakening and then repeats the standard Zen claim for the authentic transmission from the historical Buddha down through the patriarchs of the school, in this case including Dōgen, who brought the *Buddha Samādhi* to Japan. Then Menzan lists a series of equivalences:

The practice-awakening of this *samādhi* is the present sitting in full cross-legged posture, which is provisionally termed *zazen* [seated meditation]. This so-called *zazen* was introduced to China

from India by Bodhidharma, who sat facing the wall at Shaolin Temple of Mount Sung. The teachers of sūtra and commentary, fellows who do not understand the marvelous mind of nirvāṇa nor the *Buddha Samādhi*, saw that the appearance was similar to the eight stages of *dhyaṇa* and thought that it was the seated meditation (*zazen*) of the Brahmans. And so they called it *zazen*. (464b)

Menzan insists that the passage of the practice-awakening was only provisionally tagged with the name of Zen by outsiders. It is true that in his school this practice-awakening is expressed in the cross-legged posture, but it is the practice-awakening, not the posture that was brought to China by Bodhidharma and by Dōgen to Japan. Despite the fact that the root of the word “Zen” comes from a Chinese transliteration of *dhyaṇa*, which is one of several words for “meditation,” in fact meditation in this sense is not a characteristic of the school, nor even of Buddhism, but a common property of religious life in India. The people who merely read Buddhist texts do not understand this distinction, so they made the mistaken correspondence between the posture and the teaching of the school.

Menzan continues more explicitly:

If Zen indicated nothing but doing *dhyaṇa*, it would be the *dhyaṇa* of the six *pāramitā*, or the *samādhi* of the three studies. All bodhisattvas practice these, and since they all practice *zazen*, they would not select just one of those practices and give it the special name of marvelous mind of nirvāṇa, the eye of the storehouse of true dharma, and pass it down. (465)

Menzan is reiterating the distinction between those meditation practices that are the common property of all Buddhist groups, and the practice-awakening of Zen, which he will call *zazen*. Rather than translating *zazen* into English as “seated meditation,” I have retained the Japanese term because in this text it becomes one of the key phrases which are repeatedly pushed beyond their fundamental meaning. As is already clear, for Menzan the word *zen* is definitely not meditation alone, and so neither is *zazen* simply seated meditation.

In this beginning section, before Menzan has given the reader any idea of what this practice-awakening might be, he goes into considerable detail about what it is not. He continues with a condemnation of a certain kind of practice involving *kōans*:

Even though there are many people who are said to be doing *zazen*, all of them are apparently doing the practice of the ordinary deluded followers of the two vehicles or following the provisional bodhisattva [way]. Those who know the *Buddha Samādhi*, the realm of the original awakening of the Buddhas, are rare. Because of this

[misunderstanding] people concentrate on a kōan to hasten awakening. They labor the mind to find the subject who sees and hears [*kenmon no shujinkō*]. They sweep clear the distracted mind [*mōnen*] and think that no-mind [*munen*] is good. In addition to these two there are many other kinds of techniques for seated meditation in the Sung, Yüan, and Ming dynasties, but there was not one [teacher] in a hundred who knew the true character of the *Samādhi*, or the true transmission of the buddhas and ancestors. This so-called working on [*teizei*] kōan started in the Sung. It was never heard of by the ancestors in India or by the Chinese ancestors up to Hui-Neng, nor is it to be found in the old teachings of Ch'ing-yüan and Nan-yüeh. It is merely one kind of thinking of some teachers of the Sung. According to some, it began with Huang-po Hsi-yüan, but actually it was after his death, in the story of Chao-chou and the dog. It is a tiresome thing to say that Huang-po, who had already passed away, would be promoting this kind of working with kōans as Zen practice. Furthermore, not all kōans were originally made for the purpose of encouraging people to practice *zazen*. [In cases such as] inquiring about the one who hears and sees or the one who asks and the one who is asking, inasmuch as there are not two people, it is of no use to make more hardship by just asking and asking. You should know that this is truly nothing but trying to see the eye with the eye. Or trying to stop the arising of the distracted mind with the arising of the mind that wipes it clean is like trying to extinguish the burning fire by pouring oil on it. The fire will only burn more and more. (465a)

The crucial word here for describing the kind of kōan practice under discussion is *teizei*, which literally means “to take up.” It occurs in Wu-men’s comments on the first case of the *Checkpoint of Wu-men* (C. *Wu-men kuan*; J. *Mumonkan*), one of the most widely used collections of kōans.¹⁷ Wu-men tells his student to concentrate on the single word *wu* (J. *mu*) from the case and to carry it (*teizei*) day and night. *Teizei* later came to have the same meaning as the more common word *teishō*, which refers to the lecture of a Zen teacher on a kōan case.¹⁸ In its older usage, however, it means to guide a student, which is the way Hirata glosses it in his annotated edition of the *Checkpoint of Wu-men*.¹⁹ From the context of the quoted passage, I take the phrase to mean using a kōan to (improperly and forcefully) direct a student’s practice. Menzan’s teacher Sonnō used *teizei* in a similar way in the *Kenmon hōeiki*.²⁰ It seems that it is used here in place of *kanna*, a term never used in the body of the *Buddha Samādhi*.

It is rather surprising to find that the brief entry on the *Buddha Samādhi* in the encyclopedia *Zengaku daijiten* characterizes the text as an attack on the

Rinzai practice of *kanna*.²¹ Menzan never mentions Rinzai Zen, and as we have seen, the word *kanna* occurs only in the preface. The brief passage quoted here is the only place where an attack on something like *kanna* is found in the text. This example highlights both the importance of rejecting *kanna* for contemporary Sōtō Zen and the strong tendency to assume that the contemporary linkage of *kanna* with Rinzai Zen is found in earlier texts. Even relatively recent texts like this one of Menzan's can be easily misconstrued. It is important to note that the quoted *Zengaku daijiten* is a publication of Komazawa University, which is both a training school for Sōtō priests and a center for textual Buddhist scholarship, especially as it relates to Dōgen.

The practice of *kanna* in modern Rinzai is rooted in the teaching of Hakuin Ekaku (1686–1769), who is regarded as the reviver of Rinzai Zen and the champion of *kanna* Zen by the contemporary members of that lineage. This practice is typically opposed by modern Sōtō Zen teachers, who believe that Dōgen himself opposed it.²² Hence the interest in finding a premodern text such as the *Buddha Samādhi* is to provide historical background for this position of modern teachers. Since Menzan and Hakuin were contemporaries, it is tempting to assume that Menzan played a role in developments that led to the contemporary disapproval of *kanna* and to the hardening of the separation between Rinzai and Sōtō.

Before saying more about whether or not this assumption might be justified, I need to say a little more about the background of both *kanna* practice and *kōans* generally. Because the term *kanna* is so laden with sectarian overtones, one needs to be especially careful to specify the time and context of its usage. One should not assume just because the word *kanna* is used that Menzan is referring to the same thing as is meant in modern Rinzai, or for that matter that Menzan's usage is the same as Dōgen's. The Chinese origins of this practice, championed by Ta-hui Tsung-kao (1089–1163), and its importance for the Zen tradition in China, Korea, and Japan have been the subject of much excellent research. There is no need to review these studies here, because my interest is limited to this period in Japan and the relationship between this time and contemporary Japanese Zen thinking about *kōans* in general and *kanna* in particular.

Kōans are discussed and used throughout the Zen tradition in many different ways; for some time now Western scholars have abandoned the notion that *kōans* are for Rinzai only, and it is now widely understood that Dōgen and his students made use of *kōans*. Carl Bielefeldt sees much of Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* as a *kōan* commentary, and Steven Heine has developed an extended analysis of Dōgen's use of *kōans* and how it contrasts with Ta-hui's style, including a concise system for distinguishing the various kinds of *kōan* literature.²³ Bielefeldt also points out that in spite of Dōgen's attack on Ta-Hui, the champion of *kanna* practice, the writings of Dōgen contain no direct attack on *kanna* Zen.²⁴ Bielefeldt makes the case that, however much the *kōan*, Ta-Hui,

and *kanna* are linked in modern polemics, in Dōgen's own writings they are separate topics and one need not imply the other. After Dōgen's time, in the medieval era there was a widespread use of *kōans* by Sōtō monks in many different ways.²⁵ When Menzan was writing the *Buddha Samādhi*, Sōtō monks were most definitely involved in the study of the *kōan*, although nowadays those studies do not attract the attention they probably deserve.

Menzan's own positive attitude toward this area of Zen is clearly seen in the extensive work he did in the last years of his life, when he began to work on the classic Chinese collections of commentaries about *kōans*. In 1758 he composed and put into print his *Explanations of the Old Cases Presented by the Old Buddha of Hsi Province* (*Shisshō kobutsu juko shōtei*), a commentary on the collection of 100 old cases by Hung-chih Cheng-chüeh (1091–1157), which is excerpted from Hung-chih's record.²⁶ Hung-chih was the teacher of the Sōtō lineage in China who played a crucial part in the revival of the lineage and has been held in the highest regard by the lineage in Japan. These cases of Hung-chih form the core of the famous compendium of *kōan* cases and commentary, the *Book of Serenity*, published in 1224.²⁷ There are a number of commentaries on this work, but Menzan's is apparently the only one to be printed in pre-modern times.

Menzan continued this new line of work in spite of his advancing years, and at age eighty-two he published a similar commentary on the 100 *kōan* cases of Hsüeh-tou Ch'ung-hsien (980–1052), which was the basic text for the *Blue Cliff Record* (*C. Pi-yen lu*; *J. Hekiganroku*) commentary printed in 1128.²⁸ Hsüeh-tou was one of the most celebrated poets of Chinese Zen, and the *Blue Cliff Record* is regarded as perhaps the greatest of the elaborate works of literary *kōan* commentaries. This was the model for Hung-chih's later work about which Menzan had just written. The *Blue Cliff Record*, in modern Japan at least, has tended to be identified more closely with the Rinzai lineage of its authors. Menzan's commentary, the *Explanations of the One Hundred Old Cases of Zen Teacher Hsüeh-tou Hsien* (*Hsüeh-tou po-tse sung-ku*), was printed in 1788 and reprinted in 1833, 1859, and several times in the late nineteenth century by the Baiyū bookstore in Kyoto.²⁹ This commentary is apparently the most frequently reprinted premodern commentary on the *kōans* of Hsüeh-tou. This kind of work was clearly much in demand, and it appears that there was no expectation that Menzan would confine himself to Dōgen or even to the *kōan* collection more closely linked to Sōtō. The modern Sōtō school editors decided not to include these two major works in their collections of Sōtō writings. Since they have not been studied, and there is no modern edition, it is very easy to overlook the fact that they exist at all. It is clear that contemporary sectarian thinking makes a much sharper divide between Rinzai and Sōtō Zen than was seen in the Tokugawa era even by Menzan, the champion of Dōgen.

If the case is rather unclear in Dōgen's time, can perhaps the opposition

to *kanna*, like so many other details of modern Sōtō Zen, be traced to the Tokugawa-era reforms and Menzan? One of the reasons that this link between Menzan and *kanna* is plausible is that he was a contemporary of Hakuin and it is tempting to think of Tokugawa Zen as some kind of polarity between Hakuin and Menzan. It has been suggested that the modern polemic can be traced back to an opposition between these two, and Steven Heine refers to a “debate” (presumably only figuratively speaking) between Hakuin and Menzan.³⁰ If one uses the categories of contemporary Rinzai versus Sōtō polemics, *kanna* practice would be an obvious pivot. In this schema Hakuin would be the champion of *kanna* practice and Menzan would be the promoter of the way of Dōgen, which focuses on practice-awakening.

As has been mentioned, Heine suggests this possibility, and Bielefeldt points out (without going into any further detail) that it seems that the anti-*kanna* rhetoric became orthodox only after Menzan.³¹ Menzan’s contempt for unruly practice is beyond doubt, and there is evidence for this kind of behavior among the people who were associated with the kind of kōan practice championed by Hakuin. This is not, of course, a sufficient basis upon which to argue that Menzan was opposed to Hakuin and *kanna* practice. I can find no evidence for any debate either in person or in writing, nor is there any evidence of which I am aware that Hakuin and Menzan knew of each other in any way. When Menzan was in Kyushu writing this text, Hakuin was utterly unknown (as was Menzan) and was living nearly at the opposite end of the country, not far from present-day Tokyo. Even if they did meet later, Menzan’s comments in this early text can scarcely be taken as referring to Hakuin. Indeed, despite some clear attacks on *kanna* Zen, it is difficult to find explicit Rinzai versus Sōtō positions in this period. Hakuin does attack silent illumination (*mokushō*) Zen (a term often used by outsiders to characterize Sōtō practice) and particular Sōtō priests, but he does not attack Sōtō Zen and shows great respect for Dōgen.³² In the same way, as will be discussed soon, Menzan’s apparent opposition to *kanna* does not seem to be directed to Rinzai monks or to *kanna* practice as such, but to particular individuals and their quite outrageous behavior.

It is true that there is some similarity between the behavior that Menzan was objecting to (more examples of which will be given later) and what we know of Hakuin’s own life. He was a wild and unruly person in his younger days, with all manner of outrageous behavior associated with his awakening experiences.³³ His story is clear evidence that the picture of the crazy Zen monk is not just a bohemian fantasy of Western lovers of Zen lore. Menzan, in very sharp contrast to Hakuin, was the epitome of probity and order. Much of his writings are concerned with maintaining moral and practical order in the Zen community and, in the passages to be cited here, with keeping order among certain wild monks (whose identity is never entirely clear). If the kind of be-

havior that is seen in these passages in Menzan and in the record of Hakuin's early days was at all common, then there was good reason for Menzan's emphasis on order.

Although it is unclear in the previously quoted passage from the *Buddha Samādhi* whether or not Menzan was directly attacking *kanna zen*, he is much more explicit in some passages in the collection of talks published in 1765 entitled *Sermons of [the Abbot of the Temple of Mount] Kenkō (Kenkō fusetsu)*.³⁴ The following passage comes from a talk given on the first day of the monastic retreat. He uses the word *watō*, which is an alternate phrase indicating the same practice of *kanna*. After some opening remarks about the transmission from India of the practice of sitting, Menzan launches a sustained attack against

narrow minded zealots who hold up the flower, blink, smile, laugh, stare at walls, do bows from their place, and mistakenly rely on the wordless teaching. This is a deluded understanding of the mind-to-mind transmission. When I see this, it seems like the vulgar arguing over a puzzle: when they solve it they are satisfied with their accomplishment. This evil has continued so long that they cannot return to the old ways. From the end of the Sung to the Yüan and Ming, many masters affirm this to be the secret essence of the separate transmission outside the teachings. They sweep away the *sūtra* and the commentaries like old-fashioned calendars that they will never use again. This evil has overflowed [China] and entered Japan, piling evil upon evil. It continues and gets worse and worse. Recently one sees so-called "people of good mind" who have taken up a practice of Zen that entails being given just one word [*watō*] from an old [*kōan*] case. These tyros are urged on by being told: 'Make it your constant theme: walking, standing, sitting, lying down. Awake now! Wake up now! If you can't achieve awakening, kill yourself. Just stick your neck out and come forward: hear one word and [there are] a thousand awakenings.' I have no space for the rest [of that kind of talk], but concerning the ways of physically driving on students [I can mention that] they bind hands or feet, they force people to sit for long periods, and there is painful sleepiness. The students are hit with the fist, slapped, stepped on, and kicked, even whipped. Really this is nothing but corporal punishment, in some places done by the teachers and in some places by the students to each other. (T 82, no. 2604:723c)

Menzan does not think much of the technique as such, but he is upbraiding these teachers mostly for promoting unruly behavior, for ignoring *sūtra* and commentaries, and for using rather crude physical and psychological

means to force something to happen in a dramatic flash. Menzan did not directly say that this treatment would produce a false awakening, but it is clear that he certainly would not have given his approval. Furthermore, this effort to attain awakening resulted in outrageous behavior toward elders by young monks who ignored precepts and flaunted the wisdom of their elders. There is no hint that these people were followers of Hakuin or were in any way associated with the Rinzai lineage. To Menzan they were not true followers of Dōgen's way of Buddhism, whether they were in the Sōtō lineage or not.

In another section of the same text Menzan makes it even clearer that although this practice may have started with Ta-hui, it is also practiced in the Sōtō lineage:

After all, the way of *kanna* is easy to enter, and it makes the awakening of the personal self [*korei*] easy, does it not! Of old, when Ta-hui entered the territory of Fukien accompanied by only fifty-three students, before fifty days had passed, thirty of them had attained the way. Since that time, of those in China that have imitated this practice, in the Sōtō lineage there have been seven cases of this sort where there has been something like a great awakening. In Japan these days, before a single summer retreat is finished there are twenty or thirty cases of great awakening. How productive! (T 82, no. 2604:731C)

The crucial term *korei* is used here to disparage *kanna* practice by putting it on the level of what might nowadays be called self-development, as opposed to the true awakening, which transcends any category such as “self” or “development.” It is an infrequently seen term even in Zen literature, but it carries a similar meaning in the Zen transmission chronicles, for example in fascicle 5 of the *Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu*.³⁵ Menzan is not denying that *kanna* practice may have some kind of result, it is just that the results are at a low level.

Although it is true that these are passages in which Menzan clearly disapproves of *kanna* or *watō*, he is condemning mostly the emphasis on productivity of practice retreats, or ridiculing the disruptive behavior, whether it be painful kicking and slapping or noisy “Great Awakenings,” not the *kanna* way of meditation practice. By revealing what he claimed to be the true nature of such antics, Menzan encouraged people to embrace Dōgen's quiet way of *za-zen*. Menzan himself, like most Zen teachers, used *kōans* constantly in his texts to illustrate his points and to prompt students to think carefully, and the *Buddha Samādhi* is no exception. His criticism of *kanna* was directed not toward the technique of considering just the critical phrase, but rather at the style of life and the grasping for awakening of people who link themselves to that practice.

The Light of Wisdom and the Mind of Distinctions

Let us now return to the text at hand and its focus on practice-awakening. Menzan concludes his dismissal of incorrect practices with a rejection of the *Tso-ch'an i*, the *Ts'o-ch'an chen*, and the *Ts'o-ch'an ming*, Chinese texts about seated meditation that Dōgen explicitly rejected. Dōgen's reading of these texts has been discussed by Carl Bielefeldt, who provides a full translation of the passage that Menzan is referring to from Dōgen's "Zazenshin" fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō*:³⁶

Dōgen saw that this was not part of the old way of Pai-chang and that it was an error which had sunk the teachings of the patriarchs into darkness. The *Tso-chan i* that we now see appears at the end of the *Shiburoku*.³⁷ However much truth there is in it, it is not the correct understanding from the ancient masters of the lineage. From the middle ages we have all been deluded sentient beings, believing that we must put our strength into *zazen* and attain awakening, and then there is no need to do *zazen*. (466a)

For Menzan, the problem with these important Chinese texts is that they make distinctions between the present state and the state one wishes to attain. Dōgen was not trapped by the dichotomy, but between Dōgen and Menzan's time, "we all have been deluded." This section concludes with another long panegyric to *zazen*, that is, directly entering into the realm of the Tathāgata.

Immediately following this affirmation that the teaching of this *Samādhi* is unique, Menzan then breaks out of this realm where there are no distinctions and says:

And now I will teach in detail about the truth of the clear faith in this *samādhi*. It is nothing more than not hiding one's own wisdom light. When your own wisdom light shines clearly, you are freed both from being sunk in depression and from excess of excited confusion. (467b)

In a stroke he raises the hope of finally getting some detailed explanation, and then immediately returns into the realm of the absolute. He has, however, given us one crucial point: this practice-awakening is a kind of middle way between depression and excitement (though he does not use the term "middle way"). Menzan continues to explain that this is a situation in which a frontal attack results in only a temporary retreat. Striving is always accompanied by discriminative thinking, and hence the harder we charge, the more distant the goal becomes. We are already at the goal and it is only our insistence on thinking otherwise that keeps it distant.

Next Menzan discusses the contrast between the light of *samādhi* and the

ordinary mind, which clings to making discriminations. He says that this ordinary mind in its focus on discrimination is like hard frozen ice, but just like ice it can also simply melt away of its own accord. All one has to do is stop the process of constantly making discriminations. The problem with this discrimination, which is our fundamental ignorance, is explained with two sets of examples. The first set shows how the notion of good and bad is situational rather than absolute. The bird needs the air to fly through just as much as the fish needs water to swim in, but for either to switch environments means a quick death. What we must do is grasp that all of our ideas of good and bad, and even existence and nonexistence are similarly rooted in our own habits:

We think the bird flies through the air without being hindered, but a fish cannot move if he is in the air. The fish swims freely in the water, but the bird will die if it enters the water. Maggots do not see the dung as filth, and the bug that lives off a hot pepper plant knows nothing of its hot taste. The fire mouse can live in the midst of the flames, and there is a crab that lives in the middle of the boiling hot springs. Our own accustomed way of thinking is just one particular way, but we are stuck in taking it to be the way things are. This is the fundamental root of delusion, what is called discriminating consciousness. The suffering of one world may well be the pleasure of another, just as the upholding of precepts for the *śrāvaka* may be the breaking of precepts for the bodhisattva. The opinions of people of all the realms come from contact with countless different things; how could they be the same? You should be very clear about the fact that originally the countless real things of the world are outside of the discriminating mind, which is certainly nothing more than calculations and categorizations. (468b)

This teaching is further driven home by the second set of examples drawn from the well-known story of how blind men touching various parts of the elephant never realize the nature of the magnificent beast that is actually present. This example shows that not only is our consciousness relative to our own situation, it is also very limited. The crux of all of these examples is that the wisdom light, this *vairocana* with which the text begins, is not something that can be arrived at by discrimination any more than it can be arrived at by striving. Furthermore, texts in themselves are merely like the printed menu of a meal, and arguing about the menu will never relieve hunger, which is why Bodhidharma came to China empty-handed, unlike earlier travelers, who brought many texts.

Having explained in detail why such discrimination is the root of the dilemma, Menzan begins his next section as follows: “One should begin with a careful and detailed thinking about the truth of what we consider to be the human mind” (470a). Clearly, the discrimination that is the problem here is

not something to be overcome by mere faith or by some kind of fuzzy-headed jumping into the unknown. Discrimination is to be confronted by careful thinking about what is involved in discrimination, not by just rejecting it without knowing what is being rejected. The central image that Menzan uses here is the mirror, with particular attention paid to its mysterious nature of being bright while reflecting equally the good and the bad without discrimination. The mirror is a favorite model for the problem of getting caught up in the arising of thoughts and how one must realize that the images that come and go (like our thoughts) is not the most important thing about the mirror. What is important rather is its bright nature, which is to say the fundamental nature of our mind.

The mirror image is also a bridge to Menzan's next major topic: the problem of clinging to having no thoughts. Menzan does not say so here, but Sōtō Zen has been criticized for inactivity and for being caught in a kind of quiescence, which is correlated with this state of no-thought.³⁸ Menzan's response to this unspoken challenge is that clinging to no-thought is just as bad as clinging to the arising of thoughts, and furthermore it is equivalent to being sunk in the state of mind where one regards everything as neither good nor evil:

This practice-awakening, which goes beyond having thoughts and having no thoughts, is the face of a mirror, which reflects the beautiful and the ugly. It is the proper functioning of the mirror to be bright. The reflected beauty or ugliness is not, however, in the mirror itself but is the reflection of that form in the mirror. In the same way, we take as our real mind this discrimination of bad and good which we apply to having thoughts or having no thoughts. This is just like when we become confused and take the shape in the mirror for the thing itself, which is a cautionary example of clinging to the confusion of having thoughts. Now consider what happens when we take having no thoughts for the thing itself, which is what happens when we remain in the state of not-the-least-arising of either good or bad thoughts. This is like when we think that the mirror itself is the state when the mirror is not reflecting anything at all, which is like loving the back of the mirror. But of course a mirror that does not reflect the light becomes the same as rocks or tiles. This is the truth of the problem of being sunk in that which is neither good nor evil. However, just as the true light of the brilliant mirror is neither in reflection nor in the back of the mirror, you should clearly know that the truth of the great perfect mirror wisdom of the Buddha-wisdom vision is beyond having thoughts or having no thoughts. For example, when one is sitting in meditation, in the state of no-thought in which there is neither good nor bad,

neither seeing forms nor hearing sounds, so that you are unaware even of being very ill, you are then stuck in this state of neither-good-nor-bad and the emptiness of suffering. On the other hand, if you just see forms and think they are forms, or hear sounds and think they are sounds, and you are fully aware of being very ill, you are still stuck in the confusion of this connectedness. Both of these are discriminating consciousness. (471a–b)

This state of having no thoughts may be quite different from ordinary mind, but it is stuck in a one-sided understanding, just as is ordinary mind. Both are equally far from the true way, like the mirror that is bright but in no way interfering with what it is reflecting.

Thus far, Menzan has followed conventional Buddhist examples making use of the mirror metaphor, but he goes on to explain further in his characteristic, straightforward style. The mirror is only an example, and people have long been confused because not all the details of this example are appropriate to explain the mind. In particular, he says, the images come from outside the mirror: they are two things. But the thoughts of the mind do not come from outside: thoughts of good and bad and so forth; all arise from one's own mind. So, to try to keep the mind free of thoughts makes no sense. It is not like the case of the mirror, which is apart from the images seen in the mirror:

Since long ago commentators have accepted the metaphor literally and taken the arising of thoughts as external afflictions, as being things that came alongside and have clung to us. So they take our original mind as merely no thoughts and no mind, and try forcibly to extinguish the arising of thoughts. This is because they did not fully understand the metaphor and so they did not apply it properly to the teaching of the Buddha. (472a)

What is the proper understanding? Menzan's answer is by way of an explanation of the celebrated kōan case in which a monk asks Master Chao-chou whether or not a dog has Buddha-nature. Menzan does not stop with the usual reply of "No" (C. *Wu*; J. *Mu*), which is the way this case is often used as an example to work on in *kanna* practice. He continues with the text of the case and quotes Chao-chou's explanation that the reason for his "No" response is that the dog has the nature of ordinary deluded mind. Menzan explains that this means there is no Buddha-nature apart from the ordinary deluded mind, which is called Buddha-nature when it is in thusness:

The reference to a dog means that apart from this realm of deluded consciousness, which is the world of a body and mind at one time, there is no Buddha-nature. This same deluded mind of the dog, when it is in thusness, is called Buddha-nature. And so, seen from the confusion of ordinary thinking, the realm of the countless

virtues of the Tathāgata seems like the [ordinary] round of birth and rebirth of living beings are the ever-abiding truth body of the Tathāgata. It is said that the afflictions are awakening, birth and death are *nirvāṇa*, and that is the truth. As Dōgen says, “In all the realms there are no afflictions, right here there is no one else.” If you do not study under a true teacher, you will think that cutting off the arising of thoughts is the true path of the Buddha’s teaching. Among ancient and medieval Zen teachers, as well as among recent monks of high repute, in both China and Japan, there are countless ones like this. This is because they explain the meaning based simply on the literal words, and rely on their own personal slanted views. Though it is true that the arising of a thought unfolds into the three poisons and that those turn into the six paths of good and evil, nonetheless, all of these are the changes of our own mind and it is not right to try to get rid of them. At the time of the good thought, if you fix upon only the good thought and the result of the three good paths opens up, you will darken the light that transcends the good. At the time of the bad thought, if you fix only upon the bad thought, you are drawn into the results of the bad realms. You receive the body of the world of suffering and do not know the light that goes beyond evil. At the time of having no thoughts, at the time of indeterminacy, if you stop there with the thought that it is a good place, then you fall into the way of the two vehicles and the heterodox path and will for a long time not attain the realm of the Buddha. You will not know the light that surpasses indeterminacy. (473a)

This theme is continued with many examples of the importance of not being stuck in the stage of indeterminacy and of no-thought, which is at best a trance state belonging to a lower form of Buddhism and at worst a heterodox view. Next Menzan returns to the theme of light, this time as a springboard to a discussion of causation. This light is the second kind of light referred to in the preface: the light that streams from the body of the awakened one, bringing awakening to all creatures in all conditions. He describes the variety of these creatures in great detail before coming to the point that this light is the realm where cause and result are not two. Menzan uses this negation of the view that cause is different from effect to begin his presentation of the details of causation, which continues through the remainder of the text. Having described this awakening as being beyond the usual ideas of cause and effect, Menzan goes on to stress that there is no difference between our *samādhi* and the *samādhi* of the Tathāgata. Amid the elaborate praises of this *samādhi*, the details of causation are further developed with a discussion of how the rebirths through the six paths in the classical teachings of mainstream Buddhism are

caused by the thoughts of an individual. With this fundamental position clearly set out, he adds his own point:

However, the thoughts are just illusions. When you clearly realize that being as well as not being does not go beyond discriminative thinking, thought is not cut off, and there is no more rebirth. Simply do not add discriminative thinking, and you will see clearly. (476a)

In particular, this is not a matter of forcing the mind to stop (what I translate as “thought is not cut off”), because that would be clinging to just one aspect of the mind, the quietist practice that Menzan is so adamantly opposed to, just as he is opposed to the activist forcing of some teachers of *kanna* practice.

Basic Buddhism: Precepts and Causation

From this highly abstract level about cause and effect Menzan jumps without warning into the topic of the three groups of pure precepts of the bodhisattva: to do all good, to not do any evil, and to help all sentient beings to awakening. This is an example of causation which is very pertinent to his thread: following the precepts leads to a good result. Menzan stresses, however, that precepts all need to be understood as a doing away with discrimination, and that to hate evil and love the good, or to cling to the indeterminate state, means to fall to the level of where buddhahood will never be attained. The real way of following the precepts is similar to the way that a bitter persimmon becomes wonderfully sweet as it is dried. If there had never been any astringent flavor, the sweetness would never have emerged:

This is like the astringent persimmon when it is dried: a splendidly sweet flavor emerges. If you had somehow squeezed out the astringent part at the beginning, then the sweet flavor would never have emerged. The bitter flavor of the three poisons changes in just this way into the sweet flavor of the three virtues. So when the followers of the two vehicles squeeze out the bitter flavor of the three poisons, they also get rid of the sweetness of the three virtues. We must get to the real bottom of this truth about this world of our body and mind: if we but let go of our discriminating consciousness, then there is no separation, not even as much as the tip of a hair, between body and mind and the world. It is the dharma world of original unity of all aspects. The ancients said, “With the slightest bit of speculative thinking, something extra arises.” (477b)

In the same way, following the precepts is not a matter of ensuring that there is never any evil, but of letting go of discrimination, of realizing that there is no separation between good and evil.

The final section returns to the basic teaching of causation, stressing that it is found in no other religion or philosophy and that Buddha's insight was to see both cause and its result as two aspects of one process:

In addition to all this, you should believe in what is called cause and result. Cause means the seed. Result means the fruit. Just as when you plant a melon you do not get an eggplant, good causes certainly produce good results and bad causes produce bad results. There is absolutely no difference between these two. One can say that this is the primary difference between the teaching of the Buddha and the heterodox ways. Only the Tathāgata clearly explained cause and effect. It is unknown in the various ways of religion, and it does not come up in the teachings of Confucius because he is concerned only with teachings that deal with the world of ordinary men. Cause and effect do not come from outside, they are all made by us. And so you should not stop with seeing cause and effect as two things.

When you see cause, there is doubtless effect. For example, suppose you go to a country where there are no poppies and you show people a poppy seed. If you tell them that this seed contains a thousand large flowers in colors as varied as a brocade and also has millions of seeds, not a single person will believe you. If you were to break it open there would be nothing inside, so of course they would doubt you and refuse to believe. But in a country that has poppies, everyone sees this phenomenon for himself every year, and someone who does not believe is just laughed at as a fool. The ignorance of cause and effect in the heterodox philosophies of Indian and the Chinese teachers Confucius and Lao-tsu is like doubting the flowers of the poppy seed. The Buddha taught cause and effect because he looked at the flower and the seeds together and saw the relationship for himself. (479a)

Menzan goes over all the different kinds of causes and their effects in the present life, the next life, or future lives. He gives many examples, mostly textbook examples from Chinese history of either heroes or villains. Throughout all these examples however, there is a continuing background note: this is only a limited understanding. This attitude is expressed most fully at the beginning of the section when he is explaining the importance of not doing evil, and the widespread effect of doing evil:

This is not to say that we should hate people who do evil and throw them out [of society]. If you cut them off by hating them and

shunning them, then you cannot help the people who are in the three evil rebirths. Evil is as insubstantial as a bubble, and the proper understanding is that it is merely the product of discrimination and thinking, and therefore it should not be despised, but certainly it should not be liked. This is called, not being seen as merely a thing of discriminative thinking, which is not to be liked and clung to. It should not be liked even slightly, and even more it should not be hated. This is called doing [all good]. If we can only separate ourselves from both good and evil, from the discrimination of thinking and classifying, we will just drop evil and practice only good. If we attain this kind of mind and stop doing evil, this attainment is the bodhisattva precept of following all rules and ceremonies; it is the dharma body of the Tathāgata, the virtue of the Tathāgata which cuts off all afflictions. (479b)

These examples, however, are all cases of ordinary limited causes and limited effects. Menzan explains that this is why the cycle of rebirth continues, unlike the case of the limitless abiding in awakening of the Tathāgata, which is the same as the practice-awakening of his (Sōtō) school.

Conclusion

Menzan ends his text with the admonition that one must have the greatest respect and faith in this teaching of cause and effect, and that one should study very carefully the passages from Dōgen that he has appended. The contrast with the opening words of the preface could hardly be greater. From the highest level of the most exalted awakening, understood as being the special property of the Zen school, he has come full circle to the most fundamental teaching of Buddhism, something accepted as central in all Buddhist schools. Never has there been the slightest hint of any mundane advice that the beginning practitioner of this way might follow. The only way is to stop discrimination. Beginning with the ultimate light which is nothing less than the wisdom of the Buddha, Menzan has cycled through explanations of the mind and precepts and causation, each time framing the discussion with affirmations of *samādhi*, which is far beyond such explanations. No sooner does he give the reader something to hold on to than he decisively takes it away.

The *Buddha Samādhi* never relents in its emphasis on the present realization of the ultimate, the practice-realization of Dōgen's way in this very moment. Much of the text, the parts that I have not translated and not much discussed, praises the practice of this realization and often simply lists its transcendent virtues. And yet Menzan continually returns from that level to offer step-by-step explanations and point-by-point arguments that are pertinent

to the state of mind of the practitioner. He rejects any limited idea of meditation as a particular technique, and yet his criticism of *kanna* practice is carefully nuanced and emphasizes the problems of the kind of Zen practitioner who is seeking for something outside of himself and is pushing to bring practice to a successful conclusion. Many contemporary Sōtō doctrines have been influenced by Menzan, but the blanket opposition to the Rinzai *kanna* practice cannot be attributed to him. His explanations of the problems of using the mirror as a metaphor for the mind are strikingly clear, a fact that helps explain why woodblock prints of the *Buddha Samādhi* are still being made nearly 300 years after it was written. The discussion he offers of how to understand precepts and causation from the standpoint of nondiscrimination seems to me to be more helpful to people struggling to understand the workings of their own mind than are some of the poetic flights of more renowned writers.

Despite the countless concrete examples and carefully graded explanations, he does not use his skills of detailed explanation to deal with the physical and environmental details of meditation practice. For Menzan there can be no doubt that Zen is not the meditation school and *zazen* is not just seated meditation. *Zazen* is nothing less than the practice-awakening of the Buddha as taught by Dōgen.

ABBREVIATIONS

ZS Zoku Sōtōshū zensho kankōkai, ed. *Zoku Sōtōshū zensho*. 10 vols. Tokyo: Sōtōshū shūmuchiō, 1974–1977.

NOTES

1. The work for this essay began under the kind and patient tutelage of Professor Kosaka Kiyū of Komazawa University and was completed with the generous support of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science and the International Center for Japanese Studies, Kyoto. For the role of meditation in Sōtō Zen see Carl Bielefeldt, *Dōgen's Manuals of Zen Meditation* (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1988). For the early interest in meditation in China, see Eric Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, rpt., 1972 [1959]), p. 33.

2. ZS-Hōgo: 463–488.

3. See David E. Riggs, “The Rekindling of a Tradition: Menzan Zuihō and the Reform of Japanese Sōtō Zen in the Tokugawa Era” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 2002).

4. Carl Bielefeldt, “Recarving the Dragon: History and Dogma in the Study of Dōgen,” in William R. LaFleur, ed., *Dōgen Studies* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), pp. 21–24.

5. William M. Bodiford, *Sōtō Zen in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), pp. 44–50.

6. William M. Bodiford, "Dharma Transmission in Sōtō Zen: Manzan Dōhaku's Reform Movement," *Monumenta Nipponica* 46/4 (1991).
7. S-Shūgen 2, pp. 130–137, 399–404 (SZ Sōtōshū zensho kankōkai, ed. Sōtōshū zensho. rev. and enlarged ed. 18 vols. Tokyo: Sōtōshū shūmuchiō, 1970–1973).
8. Kawamura Kōdō, *Shōbōgenzō no seiritsushiteki kenkyū* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1987), pp. 396–397.
9. Helen J. Baroni, *Ōbaku Zen: The Emergence of the Third Sect of Zen in Tokugawa, Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000); Jian Wu, "Orthodoxy, Controversy and the Transformation of Chan Buddhism in Seventeenth-Century China" (Ph. D. diss., Harvard University, 2002).
10. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
11. Maruyama Masao, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa, Japan*, trans. M. Hane (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 39–51; Peter Nosco, "Man'yōshū Studies in Tokugawa, Japan," *The Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, Fourth Series, no. 1 (1986): 109–147.
12. Komazawa University Library (Tokyo) mss. 180-W359.
13. Nagahisa Gakusui, Kawamura Kōdō, and Kosaka Kiyū, eds., *Eifuku Menzan Zenji senshō* (Tokyo: Eifukukai, 1968); Okumura Shōhaku, *Dōgen Zen* (Kyoto: Kyoto Sōtō Zen Center, 1988).
14. Ōkubo Dōshū, *Dōgen zenji shingi* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, [1941] rpt., 1987), p. 284.
15. ZS-Hōgo, p. 463a. Subsequent references to the *Buddha Samādhi* will be simply to the page in this edition.
16. For the use of practice-awakening see Stone's concise survey of the background to Dōgen's use of the term and to the contemporary scholarship on the subject. Jacqueline I. Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), pp. 73–74, 88–89.
17. T 48, no. 2005.
18. Nakamura Hajime, *Bukkyōgo daijiten* (Tokyo: Tokyosho, 1982), p. 976.
19. Hirata Takashi, *Mumonkan* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1969), p. 19; Iriya Yoshitaka and Koga Hidehiko, *Zengo jiten* (Tokyo: Shibunkan, 1991), p. 320.
20. Z-Hōgo: 413.
21. Komazawa Daigakunai Zengaku Dai Jiten Hensanjo, ed., *Zengaku daijiten* (Tokyo: Taishukan shoten, 1978), p. 434.
22. Kurebayashi Kōdō, *Dōgen zenji no honryū* (Tokyo: Daihōrinkaku, 1980), p. 27.
23. Bielefeldt, "Recarving the Dragon"; Steven Heine, *Dōgen and the Kōan Tradition: A Tale of Two Shōbōgenzō Texts* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994).
24. Bielefeldt, "Recarving the Dragon," pp. 36–38. Carl Bielefeldt, "Ch'ang-lu Tsung-tse's Tso-ch'an i and the 'Secret' of Zen Meditation," in *Traditions of Meditation in Chinese Buddhism*, ed. Peter N. Gregory (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), p. 154.
25. Bodiford, *Sōtō Zen in Medieval Japan*, pp. 143–162; Bernard Faure, *Visions of Power: Imagining Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 218–219.

26. Komazawa University Library mss. 142–143; T 48, no. 2001.
27. T 48, no. 2004.
28. T 48, no. 2003.
29. Komazawa University Library mss. 141–145.
30. Heine, *Dōgen and the Kōan Tradition*, p. 134.
31. Bielefeldt, “Recarving the Dragon,” p. 48.
32. Norman Waddell, *Wild Ivy: The Spiritual Autobiography of Zen Master Hakuin* (Boston: Shambala, 1999), p. xxvi; Philip B. Yampolsky, *Zen Master Hakuin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 26.
33. Waddell, *Wild Ivy: The Spiritual Autobiography of Zen Master Hakuin*, p. 33.
34. ZS-Goroku vol. 2. T 82, no. 2604. Kagamishima Genryū, *Manzan, Menzan* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1988).
35. T 51, no. 2076:240b21; Iriya and Koga, *Zengo jiten*, p. 401.
36. Bielefeldt, *Dōgen’s Manuals of Zen Meditation*, p. 198.
37. The *Shiburoku* is a set of short Chinese Zen texts collected and widely circulated among Zen monks in Japan (Z 2–18, 19). Even though Menzan is addressing a more popular audience, he cannot refrain from a bibliographic comment now and then. In other writings he often provides detailed references in a nearly modern style, something quite extraordinary at the time.
38. Morton Schlütter, “Silent Illumination, Kung-an Introspection, and the Competition for Lay Patronage in Sung Dynasty Ch’an,” in *Buddhism in the Sung*, ed. Peter N. Gregory and Daniel A. Getz, Jr. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999).

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