Dôgen’s Change of Attitude toward
the Laity’s Attainment of Enlightenment
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Dôgen Kigen (1200-1253), a Japanese Zen priest and thinker of the Kamakura period, later in his life drastically changed his attitude toward the possibility of laity’s attainment of enlightenment. We know that upon returning to Japan in the summer of 1227, at the age of 27, Dôgen began teaching what he had learned in China, claiming that everyone could attain enlightenment. Later, however, he addressed himself only to monks, maintaining that only by entering the priesthood could one attain enlightenment. In reading his magnum opus, the Shôbôgenzô (Eye-Storehouse of the Right Dharma) written over a twenty-year period, we are able to see that, while he was concerned with spreading his ideas to both monks and lay followers alike, in later chapters he directed his message only to monks who had totally committed themselves to the Buddhist path. The issue is controversial.

This essay, after making a chronological presentation of the events and biographical details regarding Dôgen’s shift from universal access to enlightenment to exclusive access to enlightenment by monks, will present and discuss some different positions and interpretations on the issue. It will start with a traditional or sectarian position which maintains that Dôgen’s teaching always included everyone. It will next review a position which claims that Dôgen was always concerned about only the monkhood. Another interpretation is a theory that portrays Dôgen as writing for different audiences—writing early in his life for everyone and then later in his life for only the monks. It will then suggest a different approach to this problem, by looking historically at some of the events and accounts that influenced Dôgen’s life in relation to the Rinzai school.

(I)

Early biographies of Dôgen differ in the exact date of his return to Japan, and there has long been a dispute regarding this issue. Today, however, most scholars agree that Dôgen returned to Japan in the summer of 1227, although it is not certain yet where Dôgen stayed. It has been traditionally held that Dôgen first returned to Kenninji, a monastery in Kyoto,
where he had studied just before his trip.

It is believed that it was at Kenninji that he wrote the original version of *Fukan-zazengi* (*Universal Recommendation of the Principles of Seated-Meditation*). The existing version of *Fukan-zazengi* is called the Tempuku manuscript, which now belongs to Eiheiji, the head monastery of the Sôtô school. The original version called the Karoku Zazengi is no longer extant and a subject of dispute as to its actual date and place of completion.\(^1\) Traditionally, this original version is believed to have been composed at Kenninji sometimes during the latter half of 1227, because 1) a passage in the *Bendôwa* (*Discourse on Practicing the Way*) states that the *Fukan-zazengi* was composed during the Karoku era (1225-1228),\(^2\) 2) Dôgen is believed to have returned to Japan in the summer of 1227, and then 3) the era name was changed from Karoku to Antei on January 18th, 1228.\(^3\)

The existing version of *Fukan-zazengi*, the Tempuku manuscript, was written by Dôgen on August 21st, 1233 at the Kannon-dôrîin in Fukakusa, six years after he returned from China.\(^4\) Therefore regardless of the existence of the original version, Dôgen at latest expressed his view of *zazen* within six years after he returned from China. In this *Fukan-zazengi*, Dôgen expounded the basic principle of *zazen* and encouraged it widely. Dôgen also instructed practicers about the rules and manners of *zazen*. He then explicated the universality of the practice of *zazen*, saying that as for practicing *zazen* “it should not be argued whether one is a great sage or a great fool, nor should

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1. For a discussion of Dôgen’s early days as to the date of his return to Japan and the place where he first stayed after his return, see Carl Bielefeldt, “The *Fukan Zazen-gi* and the Meditation Teachings of the Japanese Zen Master Dôgen,” (Ph. D. Diss., U. C. Berkeley, 1980), pp. 8-43.

   Bielefeldt in his work provides up-to-date information discussed by Japanese scholars of many different positions regarding the above issue and the issue of the Tempuku manuscript and the Karoku Zazengi.


3. A recent theory makes it difficult to accept, however, that the Karoku version was composed at Kenninji and it seems uncertain whether or not it was originally composed in 1277. See Bielefeldt, pp. 13 and 20.

4. The manuscript has a colophon indicating that it was written on the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the first year of the Tempuku (August 21st, 1233) at Kannon-dôrîin temple. The manuscript, recognized as the one written by Dôgen himself, was designated a National Treasure in 1941.
distinctions be made between an able man and a dull man.”
Like the other Kamakura religious reformers, Dōgen selected a single practice: he picked zazen which was accessible to every person without distinction of sex or social position. The title of the work *Fukan-zazengi* itself expressed this idea of enlightenment for all. By putting the word *fukan* (universally-recommended) before *zazengi* (principles of zazen), Dōgen wanted his message of *zazen* to be spread widely among many people.

Dōgen’s other well-known early work is the *Bendōwa*. This is a controversial piece. Even the authenticity of the author, for example, had been seriously in question until Ōkubo Dōshu discovered a manuscript at the Shōbōji in Iwate Prefecture in the 1930s. At any rate, the *Bendōwa* and the *Fukan-zazengi* both express similar ideas regarding his propagation of *zazen*, and although the *Bendōwa* is the center of disputes, no one claims that the doctrine or teaching of Dōgen in the *Bendōwa* differs substantially from his other works of the time. Therefore, it can be said that Dōgen’s early thought is contained even in the *Bendōwa* we have today.

Dōgen’s main thesis in this work is fourfold: (1) *Zazen* is the right teaching of Buddha-Dharma since all Buddhas, Tathāgatas, and masters attained enlightenment in the form of *zazen*. (2) *Zazen* is not a practice which serves as a means for the attainment of enlightenment but a practice which is enlightenment itself (*shushō-itto* or *shushō-ichinyo*). (3) The laity and women can attain enlightenment. (4) The message of *mappō* (“degeneration of Dharma”) is denied.

Among these four themes, the third claim is most important to our present discussion. Dōgen in the *Bendōwa* stated that since the Buddha and other masters wanted all beings to attain enlightenment, they

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5 *DZZ*. 2, p. 3.
6 Dōgen had several important members of the Heian aristocracy among his contributors and supporters and was lecturing to both the laity and the monks during his stay at Fukakusa.
7 According to the traditional understanding, Dōgen wrote the text in June, 1231, at a temple called An’yōin in Fukakusa, south of Kyoto. He moved to An’yōin in 1230, and the text is believed to be the first chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō* and the second proclamation of his school of Buddhism. It is also held in this work that Dōgen expanded the essential thought of *Fukan-zazengi*. These claims are somehow controversial and need to be carefully examined. For example, Dōgen did not seem to hold such a claim of proclaiming his new school of Buddhism right after he returned from Chian and the *Bendōwa* was not written as a chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō*.
8 This fourfold summary is due to Takeuchi Michio in his Dōgen (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1969), pp. 207-8.
taught the Dharma with compassion and opened the great gate of enlightenment for all sentient beings. He then said that the attainment of enlightenment “should depend on whether one has a determination (to seek it), and it has nothing to do with whether one is a layman or monk.” Dōgen here insisted that being a monk did not give any assurance of enlightenment. The most important thing is to have a strong determination or intention regardless of one’s status as monk or layman. He encouraged the laity to practice zazen and was enthusiastic about propagation to the people in general at that time. We find this theme of general propagation throughout the Bendōwa. Dōgen said “as soon as I came home, I made a vow to propagate the Dharma and save the people. I felt that I was carrying a heavy burden on my shoulders.”

Dōgen, during his stay at An’yōin, became well-known and many monks and laymen came to him for instruction. As his followers increased in number, Dōgen, in 1233, moved to Kannon-dōriin and expanded it into the Kōshō-hōrinji temple. It was the first temple Dōgen built, and he stayed there for ten years, composing forty-four chapters of shōbōgenzō including “Genjōkōan” (“kōan of Present Manifestation”) and “Busshō” (“Buddha nature”). He also wrote the Eihei shose gakujin yojinshū and the Tenzo-kyōkun.

During this period, Dōgen laid out solemn rules and manners guiding monks to a life of right practice in the form of world-renunciation. At the same time, Dōgen was also directing much of his energy toward teaching his lay followers. In his “Raihai-tokuzui” of 1240, Dōgen strongly maintained the equality of men and women and the importance of actual realization regardless of one’s status, whether a monk or a layman. Dōgen said:

Even if one is a one hundred-year-old monk, if one has never understood the principle of Buddha-Dharma, then one does not come up to the level of (lay) men and women who have attained the Dharma.... One who practices Buddha-Dharma and comprehends it, even if one is a seven-year-old girl, is the guiding teacher of everyone and the compassionate father of sentient beings....

It is clear that Dōgen did not feel that enlightenment was beyond the

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9 DZZ, 1, p. 741.
10 DZZ, 1, pp. 729-30.
11 DZZ, 1, p. 251.
capacity of the laymen. Instead he stressed the importance of practicing and understanding the Buddha-Dharma regardless of one’s status.

Leaving Kôshô-hôrinji, Dôgen moved to a small temple named Kippôji in Echizen, a remote area from the capital, in 1243. Here, Dôgen constructed the Daibutsuji temple and changed the name into Eiheiji in 1246. During this period, until his death in 1253, he produced 29 chapters of Shôbôgenzô, many of which were intended for the training of monks at the new monastery. Here we find a significant transition in Dôgen’s message regarding the laity and the monkhood. Especially after having moved to Echizen from Fukakusa in 1243, Dôgen suddenly claimed that there was a supreme advantage to becoming a monk for the attainment of enlightenment, denying the laity style which he used to approve. Dôgen, for example, said in the chapter “shukke-kudoku” (“Merit of Becoming a Monk”) of Shôbôgenzô:

Even a single Buddha of all the Buddhas in the three generations and in the ten quarters never attained enlightenment in secular life. Because of those past Buddhas, priesthood and receiving precepts have merits. Sentient beings’ attainment of enlightenment is made always possible by becoming a monk and receiving precepts. Merits of becoming a monk and receiving precepts, since they are the permanent teaching of Buddhas, are immeasurable. Although there is a view of the laity’s attainment of enlightenment in the sacred teaching, it is not the right transmission. Although there is a view of women’s attainment, it is not the right transmission, either. The right transmission of Buddha and Patriarchs is the attainment of enlightenment by becoming a monk.12

Here as in other chapters which he composed in Echizen, we find a strong repudiation of the laity in favor of monkhood. In “Sanjûshichihignon-bodaibunpô,” Dôgen greatly criticized the life of the laity claiming the superiority of the monkhood. He went so far as to say that “even if a monk violates precepts and practices no precepts and has neither dharma nor wisdom, he is superior to a layman who has knowledge and keeps precepts, since the Karma of monks is wisdom, enlightenment, way and dharma.”13 In the short chapter called “Shukke” (“Becoming a Monk”), Dôgen expounded

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12 DZZ, 1, p. 612.
13 DZZ, 1, p. 513.
the importance of renouncing the world in order to attain enlightenment. In this manner, Dôgen in his later years strongly criticized the life style of the laity in favor of the monkhood.

(II)

We will now turn our attention to a discussion of a sectarian view on the issue. The Sôtô sect today has approximately one hundred thousand affiliated monks and nuns and over five million devotees and is one of the major Japanese Buddhist sects. Dôgen is claimed to be the founder of this sect. Although some sectarian scholars are concerned with Dôgen’s monastic focus and attempt to reconcile his monasticism and the laity’s attainment of enlightenment, we do not find specific arguments by the major sectarian scholars relating exactly to Dôgen’s denial of the laity’s enlightenment.

Generally, those scholars, who try to reconcile the two, first acknowledge Dôgen’s favor of monasticism in terms of his concentration on his training his monks after his move to Echizen. Without actually referring to his denial of the laity’s enlightenment, however, they attempt to reconcile Dôgen’s monastic focus and its relationship to the laity. In the following discussion, we shall examine a view by Etô Sokuô, which represents a typical sectarian position regarding Dôgen’s views on monasticism and laity.

Referring to Dôgen’s monasticism, Etô, one of the most influential modern scholars of the Sôtô sect, first agrees with the view that the purpose of Dôgen’s monasticism was aimed at the training of the monks. Etô insists that Dôgen’s mission was not just to educate the monks for their own sake but to train religious people to save the world under the name of true Buddha-Dharma. Etô says that although Dôgen built monasteries for monks, it cannot be immediately concluded that Dôgen’s rightly-transmitted Buddha-Dharma was the teaching only for the monks. Etô says that Dôgen in the *Eihei-kôroku* and the *Shôbôgenzô zuimonki* stated that monks strive to attain enlightenment in order to save sentient beings. Accordingly, Dôgen was training his followers to save others from *samsâra*, the cycle of suffering. Etô goes on to say that if Dôgen’s teaching was only for the monks and beyond the capacity of the laity, then his teaching would lose its meaning as a

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15 Other major traditional sectarian scholars, Nishiari Bokuzan, Kishizawa Ian, Ôkubo Dōshu do not strictly face the issue of Dôgen’s denial of the laity’s enlightenment, either.
propagational religion of the right Buddha-Dharma and the significance of the monks’ renouncing the world also would be lost and in vain. Etô’s position is that the Buddha-Dharma is meant for everyone under any condition.

Besides discussing the true intention of the monks’ renouncing the world, Etô says that Dôgen’s teaching was open to everyone as opposed to the “closed” teaching in which one has to strive hard in order to attain enlightenment. Etô criticizes kanna-zen, which provides a variety of practices including kôan by which one has to be enlightened. Etô criticizes this kind of Zen, since it is only for those limited numbers of people who can seriously practice, such as monks. Etô claims, however, that Dôgen’s teaching can be realized by anyone, anytime, and anywhere. Etô says: “Buddhist practice is not such that only monks are allowed and the laity cannot carry. It is decided by the fact whether or not one has the will of seeking the path.” In order to prove his point, Etô refers to the Fukan-zazengi claiming that Dôgen wrote this work so that all people could realize enlightenment. This is why, Etô says, Dôgen put the word fukan before zazengi.

Etô, however, does not discuss the issue of Dôgen’s denial of the possibility of the laity’s attaining enlightenment. Although Etô is aware of Dôgen praising the monkhood, he does not refer to the change of Dôgen’s tone regarding the laity and the monks. His main reason for insisting that Dôgen did not approve of only the monkhood is that if Dôgen’s teaching was only for the monks, then his teaching could be of no use as a propagational religion and it could lose its whole meaning as Buddha-Dharma. Etô obscures the issue by introducing a notion of monasticism for the sake of lay salvation and by maintaining that Dôgen’s teaching should be for the sake of the laity simply because Buddha-Dharma is meant for all people.

The sectarian scholarship usually authorizes the life style of the laity on the basis of Dôgen’s teaching called shushô-itto or shushô-ichinyo (“practice and enlightenment are one or equal”). According to Dôgen, although practice (gyô, or shu or shushô-itto) plays the central role in enlightenment, practice and enlightenment cannot be separated. In other words, the moment of enlightenment does not come sequentially after one’s undertaking practice. One is enlightened just while one is practicing. Practice itself leads to enlightenment simultaneously. In “Genjôkôan” for example, Dôgen presents a story of the Zen master Pao-chê of Ma-ku shan:

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When Zen master Pao-chê of Ma-ku shan was fanning himself, a monk approached and asked. “The nature of wind is permanent and reaches everywhere. Why do you still use a fan?” The Zen master answered, “Although you only know the fact that the nature of wind is permanent, you do not understand the fact that there is no place where it does not go.” The monk said, “What is the fact of ‘there is no place where it does not go’?” The master only fanned himself. The monk reverently bowed.  

The nature of wind refers to original enlightenment; the fanning refers to practice. Without actually using a fan there is no wind, although the nature of wind is permanent and reaches everywhere. Without practice there is no authentication of enlightenment, although enlightenment is everywhere and anywhere. And the very moment of practicing is the moment of enlightening oneself as if one is, according to Dôgen, continually ‘casting off one’s body and mind’ (shinjin-datsuraku). In the Bendôwa, Dôgen writes:

To think that practice and enlightenment are not one is a heretical view. In Buddha-Dharma, practice and enlightenment are one. Since practice is (referred to) on the basis of enlightenment, the practice of a beginner is the whole of original enlightenment. Therefore, in imparting the instruction of practice, (a master) teaches not to seek enlightenment apart from practice, since it is the very original enlightenment. Since it is already enlightenment of practice, there is no limit to enlightenment, since it is practice of enlightenment, there is no beginning to practice....

According to the theory of shushô-ittō, one is enlightened as one is in realization of one’s original enlightenment, and one has only to become aware of one’s true nature, since one’s original nature is enlightened. Practice in realization is practice of enlightenment and practice and enlightenment take place simultaneously and spontaneously. Dôgen in his Tenzo-kyôkun records a meeting with an elderly monk who was in charge of cooking at Ay wang-shan monastery, some 35 li

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17 DZZ, 1, p. 10.  
18 DZZ, 1, p. 737.
(about 80 miles) away from the port of Mingchou in China. Dôgen was staying on board a ship for some time after he arrived there in spring of 1223. One day, the elderly monk visited the ship to buy some Japanese mushrooms. In the course of his conversation with this monk, Dôgen asked him to stay overnight for more conversation. However, the old man refused and insisted on going back as soon as he purchased some mushrooms. Dôgen could not understand why the old man had to return because there must have been other cooks who could prepare the meals. The elderly monk answered: “The reason for holding this job at my old age is that this is my practice. How can I give it to others? Besides, I did not get permission to stay out.” Dôgen then asked: “Why don’t you, an honorable one, practice zazen or kôan of old masters? Why are you engaged in the troublesome task of being a chief cook? Is it worthwhile?” To this, the elderly monk loudly laughed and said: “You, a foreign good man, have not understood practice yet, nor have you understood words and letters.”

Dôgen recalled that at that time he was unable to understand the meaning behind this man’s words. This episode, however, later greatly helped Dôgen realize and advocate the teaching of shushô-itto. Enlightenment is not to be found in words or letters, it is to be attained and experienced in the practice of daily activity, in realization of one’s true nature.

If one is aware of one’s original enlightenment, then one’s whole activity including washing one’s face and hands, walking, sleeping, eating, etc, becomes a manifestation of one’s enlightenment. With this particular realization of one’s enlightenment, one does not have to be a monk and no longer has to take any specific form of practice as a monk. In this regard, there is no difference between the life style of the monks and that of the laity. One should be able to gain enlightenment being a layman as well. Although the life style of the laity is thus recognized, whenever Dôgen talked about practice and enlightenment as the same, he referred particularly to those of the monks (for example, Master Pao- chê and a cooking monk) and their daily normal activities (fanning and cooking) were referred to when practice was discussed in terms equal to enlightenment. Dôgen did not talk about mere ordinary daily life without any Buddhist discipline as practice equal to enlightenment. Furthermore, when practice was used in terms of shushô-itto by Dôgen, it was always used as practice on the basis of enlightenment (shujô no shu), in other words, “already-enlightened practice.”

In order to improve and reach the point where practice is no longer

19 DZZ, 2, p. 299.
acting as a means, however, practice as a means is needed.\textsuperscript{20} The monastery, for example, is an ideal place where one initiates oneself to Buddhism and undertakes one’s practice or totally devotes oneself to the life of Buddhism. Realization of enlightenment is then extremely hard for the laity because of their very limited opportunity for practicing and their deep involvement in the secular activities. They need full-hearted commitment to the Buddha-Dharma as they receive proper guidance and instruction from the monastic institutions or enlightened people. Certainly, Buddha-Dharma is for all the people, as claimed by E tô; however, we do not find any concrete attempt by the sectarian scholarship to explain why Dôgen, later in his life, criticized and denied the attainment of enlightenment by the laity.

( III )

In contrast to the traditional sectarian position of the Sôtô sect is the theory claiming that Dôgen was always in favor of the monkhood. This opposing position simply assumes that Dôgen was teaching strictly for the monkhood. Generally, those who regard Dôgen as an advocate of monasticism only for the sake of priesthood believe that he was not so concerned about the life style of the laity in terms of their actual realization of enlightenment. Those who hold this view base their claim on Dôgen’s own monastic life style, the difficulty of understanding Dôgen’s message as laymen, and his denial of the laity and praise for the monkhood later in life. However, there are passages in Dôgen’s early writings that show how he seriously encouraged the laity, including women, to achieve enlightenment. We shall first talk about how Dôgen’s encouragement of the laity. It would be explained by those who claim that Dôgen was extensively in favor of monasticism.

One explanation is that although Dôgen never believed that laymen \textit{qua} laymen could gain enlightenment, he avoided saying that until he had established an independent economic and institutional base. Dôgen, after all,\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{20} Traditionally, there are three types of learning (\textit{tisrah-śiksah}), i.e., \textit{śila} (ethics), \textit{samādhi} (meditation), and \textit{prajñā} (wisdom), which are considered to embrace all the aspects of Buddhist doctrine and practice. These three types of learning are contained in the Holy Eightfold Path, the Fourth of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism originally taught by Śākyamuni the Buddha: 1) life is suffering, 2) the cause of suffering is ignorance, 3) the cessation of suffering is achieved by the cessation of right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right meditation. The first two correspond to \textit{prajñā}, the next three to \textit{śila}; and the final three to \textit{samādhi}. All of these are the way or means by which one is to be led to nirvāṇa.
needed the economic support of the laity for establishing his monastic institution. Although he knew the excessive difficulty of the laity’s attainment of enlightenment, he needed to include them in order for his community to grow and to be established independently with their financial support. Because he was eventually working toward the establishment of his institution, Dōgen did not disapprove of lay life for the attainment of enlightenment and tried to encourage them.

Although we cannot totally neglect this view, especially the economic support of the laity, it is highly hypothetical as a whole. Dōgen surely needed a great deal of financial support, but it seems quite outrageous to believe that Dōgen intended to deceive lay supporters in this manner. Dōgen’s early works do not seem to flatter the laity simply to receive financial support. When Dōgen was approving the laity in early works, he did not make it too easy for them. Dōgen was always referring to a real will or intention of the laity, suggesting that they should be really serious about the path.

Another explanation is contained in a thorough presentation on Dōgen’s preference for monasticism given by Ienaga Saburō in his Chūsei bukkyō-shisōshi kenkyū. Ienaga first presents Dōgen’s rejection of the idea of mappō. Ienaga says that, unlike Hōnen and Shinran who established their respective teachings of Pure Land Buddhism on the basis of the social conditions of the time, Dōgen was not so concerned about mappō. He refused to accept this popular theory that, since people could no longer practice Buddhism in the same way Śākyamuni the Buddha did, the world was in decadence and that Dharma was very difficult to understand. Ienaga says that instead of having been influenced by the social conditions of the time, Dōgen was looking for an answer through Buddhism in China. Not having been satisfied with the teaching that he had received at Mount Hiei and Kenninji temple, Dōgen went to China to search for an “authentic” Buddhism. Ienaga continues to argue that through meeting Ju-ching, who Dōgen considered as his lifetime teacher and who passed away a year after Dōgen returned to Japan, Dōgen became convinced of the correctness of his way of experiencing enlightenment, which was based on a monastic life devoting his total life to Buddha-Dharma. Being thus influenced by the monastic Buddhism of China, Dōgen naturally propagated monasticism. Ienaga explicitly says that Dōgen’s ideas expressed at the time when he was in Echizen were the true ones reflecting Dōgen’s real intention. Thus, according to Ienaga, “the true intention of these words was to deny the laymen’s attainment of enlightenment and we have to say that the words which seemed to approve the laymen’s attainment of enlightenment were a
lapse of the tongue.”

Although Ienaga’s view that Dōgen was not influenced by the idea of mappō and was in favor of monasticism for training monks is acceptable, Ienaga’s conclusion on the laity is too hasty. Can we simply ignore Dōgen’s early works approving the laity’s gaining enlightenment? If Dōgen was advocating only the monastic life from the beginning, as Ienaga suggests, why did Dōgen write works like the Fukan-zazengi and the Bendōwa after he returned from China? In these works he encouraged both women and the laity to follow the way of zazen as they were. Dōgen claimed that there was no difference between the monk and the laity, saying that what mattered for enlightenment was how much one had the intention or the will. He added that being a monk just physically was not important for the attainment of enlightenment. Ienaga does not come to a conclusion concerning Dōgen’s denial of the laity by actually examining these early works of Dōgen. It seems too hasty and unreasonable to conclude that these early words of Dōgen were “a lapse of the tongue.”

( IV )

Next we shall examine a rather neutral view or explanation regarding Dōgen’s two different attitudes toward the laity and the monkhood in his life. The view is that Dōgen composed two separate literatures: one was for all, and the other for the monkhood. In other words, one was composed when Dōgen had all the people including the laity in mind, and the other was composed solely for training the monkhood.

Masutani Fumio divides Dōgen’s propagational period into the above two. According to Masutani’s Shinran, Dōgen, Nichiren, the first half of Dōgen’s propagational period took place before he moved to Echizen upon his returning from China. During this period, Dōgen had to express and demonstrate his realization of Buddha-Dharma “externally” to the outside world at large. Dōgen wished to preach generally the universality of enlightenment outside his world including the laity: his message was aimed at people at large. Later in his life, the stage at which he demonstrated his teaching of a monastic kind came after he moved to Echizen, where he could

21 Ienaga Saburō, Chūsei bukkyōshisōshi kenkyū (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1947), p. 49.

22 Masutani is a scholar of religious philosophy especially of Indian Buddhism and Kamakura Buddhism, and is a deep sympathizer and admirer of Dōgen although he is outside the sectarian circle.
concentrate on specific ways of training his disciples. Dōgen’s main concern during this latter period was the monkhood. Dōgen composed his works limiting the audience only to monks in order to train them properly, stressing the merit of becoming a monk, thereby occasionally neglecting the laity.  

In one of his other works called *Rinzai to Dōgen* published in 1971, Masutani refers to Dōgen’s change and evolution of his religious experience in Japan. According to this work, although Dōgen had attained enlightenment in China, he still experienced inner development (*naiteki-tenkai*) of his spirituality or thought more than ever after his return to Japan. Masutani expounds this experience of Dōgen in relation to his relationship to Lin-chi (Rinzai in Japanese) of China, claiming that the reason for Dōgen’s change from admiration to criticism of Lin-chi was due to Dōgen’s inner development of thought and spirituality. Although Masutani is clearly aware of Dōgen’s change and his criticism toward Lin-chi later in his life, he does not specifically discuss how Dōgen’s inner development is related to his criticism of the laity.

(V)

We shall now pursue a discussion on Dōgen’s relationship to the lineage of the Rinzai sect, another major Zen school in Japan. Clarification of Dōgen’s relationship to the Rinzai sect presents a new insight for our interpretation of Dōgen’s radical change of his attitude toward the laity. Around the same time he changed his attitude, Dōgen started criticizing the Rinzai leaders especially Lin-chi (?-867; the founder of the Lin-chi sect, i.e., Rinzai sect) and Ta-hui (1089-1163), a successor of the Lin-chi line.

Regarding Dōgen’s criticism of the Rinzai sect, there must have been some influence by Dōgen’s teacher Ju-ching, who died in 1228, a year after Dōgen returned to Japan. Ju-ching used to criticize the lineage of the Lin-chi sect when Dōgen was studying under him in China. Ju-ching’s criticism came from the Lin-chi sect’s deep involvement in secular activities, pursuing fame and self-interest. They took advantage of their power as a religious institution, and maintained a close relationship with the upper classes. Ju-


24 The separate and same article called “Rinzai to Dōgen” was originally published in 1968.

ching severely criticized this kind of secular involvement of the Lin-chi sect.  

One of the reasons why Dôgen moved to Fukakusa from the Kenninji temple was that Kenninji had undergone a change during the period when he was in China. In *Shôbôbenzô-zuimonki* (*Record of Listening to Shôbôgenzô as Accompanying*), completed by Dôgen’s major disciple Ejô (1198-1280) in 1238, Dôgen deplored the corruption of the temple. Dôgen, for instance, after preaching to his monks at night to live simply and frugally, recorded:

> I see the Buddha-Dharma gradually declining before my eyes. Things that I saw when I first entered Kenninji have changed seven or eight years later little by little: they have made closets heavily painted on in each dormitory, have utensils, have a preference for beautiful clothes, keep treasures, are fond of willful words, and have become rude in formal greetings and manners. Judging from this, I can imagine that other places are the same.

Dôgen also told that young priests were having chats and foul talks frequently, which he had never heard of when Yôsai (or Eisai; 1140-1215) was around. Kenninji lost the great spirit of studying under indigence and was full of secular and splendid drift. It is possible to see here that Ju-ching’s fastidiousness in part must have influenced Dôgen’s dissatisfaction with the secularization of Kenninji. Dôgen, however, did not criticize the Rinzai sect itself yet. There is no specific criticism by Dôgen of the Rinzai sect in his early works including the *Bendôwa*. Dôgen’s severe criticism actually started from around 1243, about sixteen years after his return to Japan.

In “Gyôji” (“Activities”), a chapter of *Shôbôgenzô*, written in 1242,

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26 Although Dôgen’s early texts do not refer to Ju-ching’s criticism of Lin-chi (the evidence for Ju-ching’s criticism of Lin-chi all comes from later Dôgen text) and therefore Dôgen was not immediately following the intention of his teacher of criticizing Lin-chi right after his return to Japan, Dôgen must have been influenced by Ju-ching somehow during his stay in China.

27 Another well-known reason for Dôgen’s move to Fukakusa is that Dôgen was driven from there by the monks of the Tendai institution on Mount Hiei and was forced to move to Fukakusa, as he declared independence of his own new Buddhism at Kenninji against the Tendai organization. This view is usually supported by a controversial claim that Dôgen wrote the Karoku version of the *Fukan-zazengi* at Kenninji right after his return to Japan.

28 *DZZ*, 2, p. 461.
Dôgen praised Lin-chi:

Heroes among founders are said to be Lin-chi and Te-shan. However, how could Te-shan equal Lin-chi? Lin-chi is indeed not one among a crowd. He is outstanding among today’s outstanding ones.  

From the year of 1243 when Dôgen moved to Echizen, however, his criticism of Lin-chi started. In “Sesshin-sesshô,” written at a small temple called Kippôji in Echizen in 1243, Dôgen said, for example, that Lin-chi had not fully realized enlightenment. In “Bukkyô,” written at the same place in the same year, Dôgen said:

Some believe that Lin-chi is by far better than Huang-po. That is not right. Although Lin-chi was studying under Huang-po for a while, when Ch’en Tsunsu encouraged (Lin-chi to ask a question), he did not know what to ask about.... Know indeed! He is not a superior person.

We are able to see the same tendency of a radical change after 1243 in Dôgen’s criticism of Ta-hui. Soon after returning to Japan, Dôgen did not show any hostile attitudes toward Ta-hui in the Bendôwa. Dôgen referred to a high official named Feng Hsuang-kung who attained enlightenment under the guidance of Ta-hui and became well-known. At the time the Bendôwa was being written, there was no indication of Dôgen’s showing any special feelings or emotions toward Ta-hui. After 1243, however, Dôgen started to criticize Ta-hui. In “Jishôzanmai,” written in 1244, Dôgen oddly attached Ta-hui. Dôgen said that although Ta-hui studied Zen at many places, he finally could not understand it. Ta-hui, yet, wanted a certificate of mastering Zen and asked his teachers without striving hard to practice. Naturally, he was not given one because of his lack of

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29 DZZ, 1, p. 136.
30 DZZ, 1, p. 362.
31 DZZ, 1, p. 410.
32 Imaeda Aishin, a specialist on Japanese history during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods and on Zen history, spells out the change in Dôgen’s criticism of Lin-chi and Ta-hui in Dôgen: Zazen hitosuiji no shamon (Tokyo: Nihon Shuppan Kyôkai, 1976), pp. 129-38. See also his Chûsei zenshûshi no kenkyû.
33 DZZ, 1, p. 741-2.
understanding and practice. Ta-hui, for example, “never investigated questioning, never cast off, never broke through, never greatly questioned, never broke down questioning.” Dôgen then said Ta-hui “had no mind of understanding at all. Worst of all, he did not practice. He was rude and not a person of understanding but a person of shallow learning. By wanting fame, passion, and profit, he was breaking Buddhism.” Dôgen even said that although Ta-hui preached his Buddhism, since his teaching was inferior, it is obvious that there was no true Zen practitioner in the Ta-hui school. In “Jinshin-inga,” Dôgen made a similar critical remark.

We would now like to see what was happening to Dôgen around the time when he began to criticize Lin-chi and Ta-hui. Imaeda Aishin brings new insight to this question of Dôgen’s criticism of the Rinzai sect. First, former disciples of Dainichibô Nônin such as Ekan, Gikai, Giin, and Gien joined Dôgen’s community in 1241. All of Dôgen’s massive criticism against Ta-hui started a few years afterward. Nônin was an originator of his own branch belonging to the Ta-hui school of the Lin-chi sect. He first studied the Teandai doctrine but later mastered Zen on his own through texts and scriptures. Although he preached his Zen and became popular, since he was despised by others for his lack of orthodox inheritance, he sent his disciples and letters describing his state of mind of enlightenment to Cho-an, a high disciple of Ta-hui, in China. Nônin then received a formal certificate from that school and became well-known.

We know that Dôgen was a serious path-seeker. Because of his seriousness, together with some influence of his teacher Ju-ching, a person of

34 DZZ, 1, p. 557.
35 DZZ, 1, p. 557.
36 Dôgen’s main disciple Ejô, the compiler of the Shôbôgenzô zuimonki and Dôgen’s successor of Eiheiji, was also once a former disciple of Nônin and joined Dôgen in 1234.
38 At the age of two Dôgen lost his father, and his mother died when he was seven. It is said that the loss of both parents deeply impressed Dôgen’s sensitive mind with the transient nature of life, so much so that he became determined to enter the priesthood to seek the answer to life’s ultimate question—the meaning of life and death.

According to tradition, one of the early questions that Dôgen had as a practitioner was why man had to exert himself at all, if one was originally enlightened as one was. The answer to this question is suggested in the story of Master Pao-chê’s fanning of “Genjôkôan” as we have see. We are able to see Dôgen’s seriousness for searching the path throughout his whole work.
integrity, Dôgen must have been unable to tolerate such an attitude by Nônin, as well as the Ta-hui school’s bureaucratization and aristocratization. They must have looked over-involved in secular activities in the eyes of Dôgen. Bureaucratization and aristocratization of the Ta-hui school were not the only reasons for Dôgen to criticize Ta-hui especially, according to Imaeda. Imaeda believes that another reason for Dôgen’s sudden criticism against Ta-hui was that Dôgen needed to strengthen the instruction within the Fukakusa community at the time of accepting former disciples of Nônin. Imaeda says that by strictly pointing out the faults of the Ta-hui school’s tradition from which the Nônin school was derived, Dôgen insisted on the orthodoxy of his own Zen, encouraged the former disciples to reflect upon themselves, and tried to guide and correct them, suggesting that they emerge from their old style.  

There was another event or situation developing around the same time in the Fukakusa area, which must have influenced Dôgen and his personal life. Enni Ben’en (1202-1280), a prominent monk who had studied in China, came up to Kyoto and when the new Rinzai school center, the Tôfukuji temple, was being built in Fukakusa. Enni returned to Japan in 1241 and transmitted the Zen teaching of Wu-chun Shih-fan, who was from the Hu-chiu school of the Lin-chi sect. In the early part of 1243, he was invited to Tôfukuji, where Tendai and Shingon doctrines were also being taught. With the support of two powerful patrons, Kujô Michiie (1193-1252) and Nijô Yoshizane (1215-1270), Tôfukuji became the largest Zen center of the time, and the temple and the fame of Enni became remarkably well-known. The name of Tôfukuji came from the two great monasteries, Tôdaiji and Tôfukuji in Nara. The main patron of Tôfukuji, Kujô Michiie, had an ambition of building a temple in Kyoto to rival those two temples. It took ten years to complete this temple, which remained for centuries as one of the most powerful and influential monasteries in Kyoto, being ranked as one of gozan (“five mountains,” i.e., “temples”), all of which belong to the Rinzai sect.

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39 Imaeda, p. 136.
40 The view that the rise of Tôfukuji temple had something to do with Dôgen’s criticism of Rinzai Zen and his move to Echizen in 1243 was first presented by Furuta Shôkin in his Nihonbukkyoshi no shomondai (Tokyo: Shunjûsha, 1964), pp. 145-61.
Around the year 1243, there were thus two different kinds of Zen temples in the Fukakusa area. The one temple was active and successful in gaining fame and power in the government and in the line of the Rinzai sect, while the other was rather small and not from the Rinzai line. Although Dōgen himself was from the aristocratic Fujiwara family, he was not recognized as such, and Michiie and other Fujiwara noblemen were visiting the newly established Rinzai temple to study. 42 Though there was no evidence that Tōfukuji threatened Dōgen’s community, 43 it is not difficult to suppose that Dōgen had a feeling of confrontation with the new temple. Dōgen left Fukakusa and moved to Echizen in 1243. It is still a mystery why Dōgen moved so suddenly to Echizen, a remote area from the capital, after having stayed in Fukakusa for more than ten years and after having his own monastery there. Typical previous explanations have been: 1) Dōgen did not like to seek fame in the area near the capital because of his upright character and 2) there was pressure from an old and powerful institution which did not welcome Dōgen’s “new” Buddhism. But the new interpretation of Furuta claiming that the rise of Tōfukuji had something to do with it contributes a new view to the mystery of Dōgen’s sudden move. We have now seen some possible reasons why Dōgen moved and began to criticize Lin-chi and Ta-hui especially after 1243, but what did these have to do with his denial of the laity’s enlightenment? 44

When Dōgen returned from China, he denied the schism and

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42 Ibid., pp. 45-6.
44 We have seen basically three theories explaining Dōgen’s sudden criticism against the Rinzai sect: 1) Imaeda views that Dōgen wanted to guide the former disciples of Nōnin who had Rinzai background; 2) Furuta Shōkin views that Dōgen reacted against the success of the Rinzai circle including Tōfukuji of Enni; and 3) Masutani Fumio views that Dōgen came to criticize Rinzai as a result of his inner development of his thought and spirituality.

Yanagida Seizan, a prominent Zen scholar, suggests another view regarding Dōgen’s criticism against Rinzai and the Sung understanding of Ch’an around the time. According to Yanagida, Dōgen’s criticism was largely due to his dissatisfaction with the Ju-ching yû lu (Sayings of Ju-ching), which Dōgen received from China in the summer of 1242: Dōgen’s criticism began as he was dissatisfied with the teachings attributed to Ju-ching by the Chinese compilers of his sayings. See “Dōgen to Rinzai” in Risō, 513 (2/1976), pp. 74-89.
sectarianism of Buddhism. Dōgen maintained that there was no difference among different schools of Buddhism. In the Bendōwa, he claimed that “although these Five Schools have their own characteristics, they are only one Buddha-mind.” Dōgen was also tolerant of other branches of Zen Buddhism. However, as the Rinzai sect became more popular and well accepted as in the case of Tōfuku-ji, for example, Dōgen must have been somehow disturbed. Irritated by the growing success of the Rinzai circle, he came to insist on this kind of Buddhism by criticizing the Rinzai sect, since in Dōgen’s view they were not transmitting the true Dharma. In his view they were much more interested in fame and wealth and thus were misleading the upper laity.

He thus tried to claim the superiority of his own transmission of true Buddha-Dharma, for example, over Ta-hui. He titled his major work, Shōbōgenzō, which was originally the title of a work by Ta-hui. It cannot be the case after having criticized him so much that Dōgen happened to use the same title by coincidence without knowing of Ta-hui’s work. Dōgen must have given the same title to his major work, suggesting that he, not Ta-hui, was the one who could really transmit the true Buddha-Dharma, the “Eye-Storehouse of the Right Dharma.”

After moving to Echizen, Dōgen started afresh in a remote area, where he could criticize the Rinzai sect rather freely without any pressure from those in power. He had former disciples of Nōnin among his followers. He then started writing a different kind of literature directed to monks in Echizen. (In this regard, Masutani’s view that Dōgen wrote two kinds of literature is well-taken.) He wrote a tremendous number of works around 1243, and more than two-thirds of Shōbōgenzō chapters within a few years of 1243. In the single year of 1243, Dōgen finished around 24 chapters, which is a quarter of the whole collection, in spite of the fact that he moved elsewhere in that year. Here, we can see Dōgen’s clear intention to make his message appeal to his disciples in Echizen. It is obvious that Dōgen was thus in favor of monasticism and he could be somewhat critical about the lay style in order to encourage the monkhood. But why did he have to refer to the negation of the laity’s enlightenment?

Dōgen was certainly aware that the Buddha-Dharma was for the sake of all people including the laity. We have already seen this in his early works. One of the most important questions, which Dōgen must have faced during the propagation of his teaching to the laity, was the question of one’s

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45 DZZ, 1, p. 730.
attainment of enlightenment as a lay person. Dōgen must have questioned this issue himself. Dōgen, therefore, encouraged the laity to have a serious intention or will for the attainment of enlightenment as seen in his early works. Dōgen said in the Bendōwa that the attainment of enlightenment “should depend on whether one has a determination (to seek it), and it has nothing to do with whether one is a layman or monk.” But some in the Rinzai school were only taking advantage of the upper lay society. Because of this particular relationship between the Rinzai institution and some of its noble followers, who together spoiled the real Buddha-Dharma in the eyes of Dōgen, his negation of the laity (in addition to his criticism of the Rinzai sect) was inevitable. Dōgen here could not help exposing his mixed feelings and he denied the laity’s enlightenment in order to claim that real and intense seriousness are needed especially for the laity. Dōgen’s denial of the laity’s enlightenment seems to have come from all of those conditions and situations. However, although the later works were composed for and directed to monks, and most likely Dōgen did not mean to address the denial of lay-style to his own laity, he was somewhat careless, for he did not consider the laity, who were seriously seeking the path as taught by him previously. Dōgen here seems to have shown a part of human weakness, having been caught in human affections.

Yanagida Seizan presents a somewhat critical opinion regarding Dōgen’s later works and attitude toward Rinzai and his school. In “Dōgen to Rinzai,” Yanagida first shows his disagreement with Masutani’s view which maintains that Dōgen’s massive criticism of Lin-chi came out of Dōgen’s outstanding inner development. While Yanagida agrees with Masutani as to Dōgen’s continual change or evolution in his thought and feeling after his return, he sees Dōgen’s massive criticism of Lin-chi as simply showing his own senility. Yanagida calls this criticism of Dōgen after his move to Echizen as “self-wrestling” (hitori-zumō) and says that Dōgen did not succeed in making a proper claim because of his senility of thought. According to Yanagida, the inner development of Dōgen’s thought had already reached its peak during his stay at Kōshōji in Fukakusa before his move to Echizen in

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46 See note #9.
47 According to the traditional sectarian interpretation, when Dōgen came back to Japan, he was prepared to propagate his teaching and there was nothing that Dōgen had to learn, since he had already fully attained enlightenment in China. Masutani and Yanagida disagree with this position.
1243, and the criticism against Lin-chi was a failure. Yanagida’s point here is that Dōgen did not treat Lin-chi in a proper way. Dōgen just criticized Lin-chi (since he was the founder of the Rinzai sect) in addition to his criticism against Nōnin and his school, from which many disciples joined. Yanagida says that Dōgen’s criticism did not reach the person of Lin-chi himself. Moreover, he says that if we let Lin-chi speak in Dōgen’s period, then their thoughts would have agreed in essence, and that Dōgen’s problem arises from the motivation of his criticism against Lin-chi (not from the difference in their essential teaching). The evidence for senility, according to Yanagida, can be found especially in his rather pointless argument against Lin-chi and in his other demonstrations of his thought after his move to Echizen.

The conclusion of Yanagida stressing Dōgen’s senility, however, is rather difficult to accept. Although Dōgen was sick at the very end of his life and passed away in Kyoto as he was seeking medical care, Dōgen was still devoting himself to hard training everyday at Eiheiji. However, Yanagida’s view which claims that Dōgen lacked vividness or point in his argument especially when it came to Lin-chi’s criticism is important here. Dōgen’s lack of vividness as such could have been due to his having been too disturbed by the secularly growing success of the Rinzai circle and due to his massive production of works in a short period of time. It is then possible that he could not be very careful about a presentation of his discussion, especially regarding the Rinzai sect and the denial of the laity in favor of monasticism, which he was advocating in Echizen. Though Dōgen seems to have shown his somewhat human weakness of emotional involvement, this involvement resulted from his seriousness and studiousness for the attainment of enlightenment for all.

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48 Yanagida, p. 85.
49 Ibid., pp. 86-7.
50 Ibid., p. 75.
51 Ibid., pp. 83-5.