



Journal of Buddhist Ethics

ISSN 1076-9005

Volume 5 1998:447–452

Publication date: 18 November 1998

The Zen Poetry Of Dōgen: Verses from the Mountain of Eternal Peace. By Steven Heine. Boston: Charles E. Tuttle Co. Inc., 1997, viii + 183 pages, ISBN: 0-8048-3107-6, US \$14.95.

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Steven Heine's latest book provides a fine collection of translations of the poetry of the famed Japanese Zen monk Eihei Dōgen (1200-1253). After two chapters of Heine's informative introduction and commentary on relevant issues, chapter three includes a complete translation of Dōgen's collection of sixty-three *wakas* (the thirty-one syllable Japanese verse form that was the antecedent of the haiku form). This collection of Japanese verses was first published in Dōgen's biography in 1472, and was reportedly compiled in 1420. Heine presents these poems with both his translation and *rōmaji* transliterations of the originals. They are grouped by theme or circumstance; for example, there are doctrinal poems, poems inspired by the *Lotus Sūtra*, poems composed during Dōgen's final illness, and the largest group, "From a Grass Hut," inspired by the practice lifestyle and the natural scenery of Dōgen's monastic retreat in his final decade when he established Eiheiji on the remote north coast of Echizen (now Fukui). Eiheiji is still one of the two head temples of the Sōtō sect that descended from Dōgen.

Chapter four offers translations of a selection of forty-eight of Dōgen's more numerous Chinese poems, or *kanshi*. Many of these come from Dōgen's *Eihei Kōrōku*, a lengthy collection of sermons, informal talks, and selected kōans. Dōgen's famous masterpiece *Shōbōgenzō* contains prose essays (many unquestionably poetical) with profound discussions of Buddhist philosophical issues and Zen kōans. But while Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* essays display depths of philosophy, the Dōgen poems Heine provides give us a greater sense of the man himself. A number of competent translations of a great many of the *Shōbōgenzō* essays have now been published. One hopes that the poems Heine provides here will give greater impetus for translations of the important *Eihei Kōrōku*, only fragments of which have appeared in reliable translation to date.

Many of the Chinese poems capped Dōgen's talks and commentaries. Heine's grouping of the verses by the circumstances of their delivery is very useful. One group of poems followed *jōdō*, or short sermons delivered to his monks. Another group are *sango*, more literary poems, but still often with Buddhist themes. The *juko* style poems are commentaries on traditional kōans. This grouping shows that Dōgen's poems were often a formal, explicit part of his teaching, even when they reveal personal or emotional qualities.

While many of Dōgen's poems amplify his philosophical and religious stance, they also illustrate his emotional life and aesthetic sensibility, and evidence some of the practice issues he wrestled with in his life and teaching. Along with didactic themes, some poems follow East Asian motifs of the reclusive meditator, and of the aesthetic relationship with nature.

Often spare and imagistic, the poems are evocative and subtly convey Dōgen's teaching. For example, from the Japanese is this *waka* entitled "Mujō" (Impermanence):

*To what shall
I liken the world?
Moonlight, reflected
In dewdrops.
Shaken from a crane's bill. (p. 118)*

An example from the Chinese shows Dōgen's use of the beauty of natural elements to heighten the personal poignancy of the Buddhist path, and an expression of personal emotion:

*The unspoiled colors of a late summer night,
The wind howling through the lofty pines —
The feel of the autumn approaching;
The swaying bamboos keep resonating,
And shedding tears of dew at dawn;
Only those who exert themselves fully
Will attain the Way,
But even if you abandon all for the ancient path of meditation,
You can never forget the meaning of sadness. (pp. 133-134)*

This poem reveals that Dōgen, even while ensconced with his disciples in a beautiful meditative retreat amidst the wonders of nature, continued to contemplate the fundamental purpose of awareness of the suffering of beings in the world, as well as of his own share of the sadness.

Steven Heine is one of the most astute of American Dōgen scholars, and his previous works have included explorations of Dōgen's philosophical approach to temporality, and, in *Dōgen and the Kōan Tradition*, Heine demonstrated convincingly how Dōgen not only emerged from, but profoundly expanded on and developed the Chinese Zen (Ch'an) Kōan practice tradition. In the first chapter of this book Heine further elucidates Dōgen's influences by showing his great rootedness in the traditional Japanese poetic aesthetic.

Dōgen was born to a prominent court family, and, because of early recognition of his extraordinary intellectual talent as well as his class status he received a first-rate education, which included study of secular literature. His poetry reflects his indebtedness to the Japanese literary tradition begun by prominent poets such as Saigyō (1118-1190) and Fujiwara Teika (1162-1241). Heine also demonstrates Dōgen's affinity with the great works

of meditative recluse literati such as Kamo no Chōmei (1153-1216) and Yoshida Kenkō (1283-1350). In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1968, Yasunari Kawabata surprised many by citing Dōgen’s influence and reciting his poem “The Original Face,” which Heine discusses in detail. This poem was used as the basis for a later verse by the popular and colorful Sōtō monk-poet Ryōkan (1758-1831), probably the second most celebrated Sōtō Zen figure after Dōgen himself. In a valuable appendix to this book, Heine traces Dōgen’s literary as well as spiritual influence on Ryōkan. Heine establishes that Dōgen is a significant figure in the Japanese literary tradition, in addition to his role as successor to Chinese Buddhist philosophical writing and to the Ch’an monastic training lineage.

Heine explores the important issue of the traditional Zen ambivalence (shared by Dōgen) about the role of poetics and literature, and their relationship to rigorous spiritual practice. In some of his early talks to his students (in *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*), Dōgen warned against versification and elegant literary activities as a dangerous distraction from the primary intention of practice/realization and its concomitant renunciation of worldly pursuits. And yet Dōgen himself is likely the most prolific, and accomplished, writer in the long history of Ch’an/Zen monks. Despite his admonitions, Dōgen had a subtle and practical relationship with the uses of language, as evidenced in his poetry and also overtly explored in some of his *Shōbōgenzō* essays. While he attempts to overcome the many pitfalls of language with complex wordplay and correctives in his essays, Dōgen also acknowledges the potential liberative role of language. The experience of awakening must be revealed or expressed and its teaching transmitted to others, and Dōgen accepts language and literature as a viable vehicle. Heine states that “Attaining enlightenment involves missing and longing for aesthetic experience and expression. But lyricism need not be excluded from the spiritual life if the appropriate paradoxical perspective about the interconnectedness of aesthetics and religion is maintained” (p. 86). In his poetry Dōgen is willing to express personal emotion and the dynamic tension between the transcendent and the ephemeral, since “the refined emotion of sorrow is more conducive than strict detachment to exploring the existential depths of enlightenment” (p. 30).

The natural images in the poetry illustrate Dōgen’s deep appreciation for the harmony and wonder of nature, but also his use of the transience of nature as a vehicle to explore the impermanence of all phenomena. From Dōgen’s viewpoint, the natural world itself becomes an agent for awakening, as “awareness of the fleeting quality of time transmutes into a resolve for perpetual training” (p. 46). This book does a further service by including photographs not only of calligraphy and paintings of Dōgen, but also of

a few natural sites in the Echizen area that inspired Dōgen’s nature poetry.

Through their demonstration of the teachings of impermanence and non-dualism, Dōgen’s nature poems are not unrelated to another group of poems discussed by Heine, Dōgen’s more doctrinally-based devotional poems. While venerating Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, these poems are “not a matter of worshipping an objectified, supernatural entity out of the reach of humanity, but of embracing and venerating the universal truth manifested in all phenomena beyond the dichotomy of self and other” (pp. 69-70). In this Dōgen not only follows the totality teaching of the East Asian Mahāyāna, but he exemplifies the Japanese aesthetic value of *Yūgen*, the serenity in which the gap between subject and object can evaporate in the fullness of image. Dōgen is faithful to both the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition and the Japanese aesthetic sensibility, and provides his unique synthesis.

Although these in no way detract from the overall great value of this book, I must mention two problems I had in reading it. First, I am uncertain if or how it could have been avoided, but there is inevitable awkwardness reading Heine’s commentary, which gives profuse references to the poems in the third and fourth chapters, many of which then have their own notes that must be referenced in the end of the book. The poems are all clearly numbered, either as Japanese or Chinese, but the cross-referencing becomes cumbersome when Heine refers by number to a half-dozen — or not infrequently to more than a dozen — specific poems in a single sentence. Therefore, some readers might wish to read the poems themselves, in chapters three and four, to feel some familiarity with them before reading Heine’s commentary, although Heine’s earlier discussion indeed provides a useful introduction to key themes and issues in the poetry.

My second difficulty, perhaps a quibble primarily due to personal poetic taste, involved reading Heine’s *waka* translations set next to *rōmaji* transliterations of Dōgen’s Japanese originals. In general, Heine’s translations of the poems seem to me to accurately convey their rich layers of meaning, and they are certainly readable as poetry, if not always elegant. Heine even performs an admirable feat of translation by often retaining in his translations Dōgen’s word-play and double meanings, incorporating the *double entendres* of Japanese “pivot-words” into the English renderings, all amply elucidated in the notes. However, I found myself distracted inasmuch as Heine does not seem to give significant priority to the order of the images in the original *wakas*. In the condensed imagistic *waka* and haiku forms of Japanese poetry, the sequence of the images provides a narrative and dramatic structure that is especially important to the overall impact of the original poem. At times it is certainly difficult, or impossible, to keep the

order of the Japanese images, while still accurately retaining the original Japanese grammar, or even the poems' basic sense, but even in poems that might readily have been phrased with the same basic sequence and impact of images as in the Japanese, Heine often changes the line order.

These minor reservations aside, Heine has provided reliable renderings of many of Dōgen's poems that will remain the standard for future English versions. As Heine's notes make clear, many of the poems could easily be translated following a variety of reasonable interpretations and emphases, not to mention English word choice and sound. Variant renditions may also help further clarify the sense of Dōgen's originals. The ground broken here by Heine will remain fertile territory for future translators and commentators of Dōgen's poetry.