Do Not Lose the Rice: Dōgen Through the Eyes of Contemporary Western Zen Women

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1 Introduction[1]

In *Bow First, Ask Questions Later*, Gesshin Claire Greenwood, a Soto Zen nun from the United States who ordained in Japan, describes an interaction with a Japanese nun that a fellow Australian nun later summarizes with the phrase, "just do your work, concentrate on that and nothing more, enlightenment is a male fantasy."[2]

Greenwood uses this interaction as an opportunity to reflect on Buddhist practice through sifting rice, an activity that Dōgen focuses on in the *Tenzo Kyōkun*, often translated as *Instructions to the Cook*. In the kitchen, Greenwood is assigned to separate the edible rice from the small stones and rice hulls intermixed with it. Bored with the practice, Greenwood begins thinking about a koan in which a monk, Xuefeng, is removing sand from rice, just as she is. Yet because Greenwood is in her head, and not focused on separating stones and hulls from rice, she does not accurately distinguish rice from hulls, and breakfast the next morning is ruined. When she then must re-do the work of separating hulls from rice, she ignores the koan, and focuses on the practice. She writes,

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[2] Gesshin Claire Greenwood, *Bow First, Ask Questions Later: Ordination, Love, and Monastic Zen in Japan*. Somerville (MA: Wisdom Publications, 2018), 74.

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> I just tried to actually take the hulls out of the white rice. This is also my experience of zazen practice. In the beginning I wanted some sort of enlightenment experience or understanding of Buddha. I didn't understand how a sitting practice could literally be *just sitting*. I sat, and I tried and tried to get enlightened, and this got in the way of actually sitting.
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> She continues, "Maybe I don't get koans, but at the end of the day, actually cooking rice is more important than answering a koan about rice, because a koan about rice is answered in cooking rice well."[3]

This passage in Greenwood's memoir illuminates two insights about how Western Zen women have interpreted Dōgen's ideas within Buddhist practice.[4] The first is that for Dōgen, zazen is fundamentally an embodied practice that is distorted when it is over-intellectualized. The second is that over-intellectualization, if it is a "male fantasy," is a problem to which feminist theorists and Dōgen scholars alike might offer a solution. These two insights are interconnected, for if alignment of Dōgen with feminism can offer a solution to over-intellectualization, then it can facilitate a return to embodied practice. This is a thought with some history. Philosopher Ann Pirruccello has compared Simone Weil's somatic practice with that of Dōgen,[5] while philosopher Erin McCarthy has found resonance between the form of non-dualism in Dōgen's writing and that of modern Western feminist philosophers such as Luce Irigiray, building from her earlier work on Watusji Tetsuro.[6] Similarly, Philosopher Ashby Butnor has highlighted the similarities between Dōgen's emphasis on embodied practice and contemporary care ethics.[7] These philosophers underscore the interpretation of Dōgen as an ally in the use of feminist thought to encourage practitioners of all genders to *just sift the rice* - just do the practice, without pursuing an idea of enlightenment.

In this chapter, I describe how contemporary Western Zen women and their allies have begun to reexamine Dōgen's texts as tools of personal and social transformation in line with feminist thought. In particular, I highlight the relationships between

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[3] Ibid., 75.

[4] While I focus on interpretations of Dogen by women in the United States and Europe, this is not to disregard work on Dogen by Japanese women, such as in Paula Arai, *Bringing Zen Home: The Healing Heart of Japanese Women's Rituals* (Honolulu, HI: The University of Hawaii Press, 2011) and Paula Arai, *Women Living Zen: Japanese Soto Buddhist Nuns* (New York, NY: Oxford, 2012), and as referenced in Michiko Yusa, "Dōgen and the Feminine Presence: Taking a Fresh Look into His Sermons and Other Writings," *Religions* 9, no. 232 (2018). Rather, my aim is to highlight the intersection of feminism as a Western phenomenon and Zen women practitioners' interpretations of Dogen.

[5] Ann Pirruccello, "Making the World My Body: Simone Weil and Somatic Practice," *Philosophy East and West* 52, no. 4 (2002).

[6] See Erin McCarthy, *Ethics Embodied: Rethinking Selfhood through Continental, Japanese, and Feminist Philosophies* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2010) and Erin McCarthy, "Embodying Change: Buddhism and Feminist Philosophy," In *Buddhist Philosophy: A Comparative Approach*, ed. Steven Emmanuel. (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2018).

[7] Ashby Butnor, "Dōgen, Feminism, and the Embodied Practice of Care," in *Asian and Feminist Philosophies in Dialogue,* ed. Jennifer McWeeny and Ashby Butnor (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

Dōgen's *Tenzo Kyōkun*, his lesser-known *Raihai Tokuzui,* domesticity, and gender egalitarianism. This underscores the practical nature of Dōgen's thought, in contrast to self-centered preoccupation with individual enlightenment or spiritual attainment. This analysis reveals a new and relatively unappreciated role for Dōgen: as the women's Zen Buddhist theorist.

2 The Philosopher and the Cook

Alongside Kyoto School philosophers Nishida Kitaro and Watsuji Tetsuro, Eihei Dōgen may be the third most-studied individual within Japanese philosophy, at least as it is taught in the Western world. The reasons for the primacy of the Kyoto School are well-known, foremost of which is the fact that their engagement with Euro-American philosophers in the middle of the twentieth century brought Japanese philosophy to the world stage. Dōgen, on the other hand, writing six hundred years earlier, is studied in part due to his foundational role in Soto Zen in Japan, his rich yet enigmatic writing, and his influence on subsequent Japanese thinkers, including those in the Kyoto School. To study Dōgen as a philosopher is to acknowledge this influence and to validate the depth of his philosophical thought.[8]

Philosophical work on Dōgen largely focuses on the fascicles of the *Shobogenzo*, arguably his densest writing (historically, there is some variation in which fascicles count as the "*Shobogenzo*"). As a "deliberately systematic and rational exposition of his religious thought and experience" (according to one set of commentators) it is considered to be the heart of Dōgen's philosophical thought, his most important work and also his most voluminous, accounting for more than half of all the words he ever wrote.[9] This is not to say that the *Shobogenzo* is necessarily good for practice, at least for early practitioners. In Japan, a Zen priest conventionally refrains from teaching Dōgen until the age of 60, when their practice has matured.[10] The thought is that one ought to come to Dōgen with a bedrock of practice from which to draw; if this is the case, then the *Shobogenzo* may be the very worst place to start.

Nevertheless, in North America, philosophers often begin to study Dōgen by tackling the *Shobogenzo.* As a philosophical work, it allows for comparative studies

[8] See Thomas P. Kasulis, "The Zen Philosopher: A Review Article on Dōgen Scholarship in English," *Philosophy East and West* 28, no. 3 (1978).

[9] See Dōgen, *The Heart of Dōgen's Shobogenzo,* ed. and trans. Norman Waddell and Masao Abe (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), xi-xii. It may come as a surprise that Waddell and Abe characterize the *Shobogenzo* as "deliberately systematic and rational." Arguably, this characterization depends on the point of comparison. Waddell and Abe's reference point is the literature of the Zen tradition, in the context of which Dogen's work certainly appears systematic and rational. This may not be the case if the reference point is changed to, e.g., Immanuel Kant.

[10] See Eido Frances Carney, ed. *Receiving the Marrow: Teachings on Dogen by Soto Zen Women Priests* (Olympia: Temple Ground Press, 2012), xi.

of, for example Dōgen and Heidegger,[11] Dōgen and Wittgenstein,[12] or Dōgen and Nietzsche.[13] In other words, the *Shobogenzo* is good material for *thinking* about Buddhism, and especially for the study of Buddhist metaphysics and epistemology. It contains ample material ripe for rumination and analysis.

The priority of the *Shobogenzo* in a philosophical context betrays a certain view of philosophy: philosophy as ideal or at the very least abstract thought, disengaged from practical experience and real life. This is the heritage of Western philosophy after Immanuel Kant: philosophy as the exercise of pure reason, of thinking purified of circumstance so as to permit logical analysis. Such a view of philosophy has been critiqued by a multitude of thinkers, of all genders and cultural backgrounds, who see philosophy not as abstract theorizing but as reflective practice.

One such critic is Annette Baier. In "Hume: The Women's Moral Theorist?" she argues that Humean ethics aligns with care ethics, in its thesis that "morality depends upon self-corrected sentiments, or passions, as much or more than it depends upon the reason that concurs with and serves those passions."[14] In contrast to Immanuel Kant, David Hume does not understand morality as conformity to general rules, and he emphasizes the interpersonal nature of the sentiments and the role of the family (biological and chosen) in moral development.

While the care ethicists to whom Baier refers have been criticized in recent years for a gender essentialist approach to moral thought, the crux of her argument need not rely on such points. Her thesis is that Kantian moral philosophy is just one type of philosophical thinking, which happens to be associated in the West with masculine character traits. Other types of philosophical thinking are equally rigorous and insightful, and Baier argues, may be even more practically useful. In another work, she proposes that moral reflection is a matter of "turning natural responses, not just on their natural target, but on responses, turning self-interest on the workings of self-interest, turning sentiments on sentiments"[15] not the "articulation of a system of moral laws vaguely anchored to intuitions."[16] In other words, Hume is the "women's moral theorist" because he focuses on the correction of the sentiments, which only happens through activity, not through detached thought, the latter of which has historically been the purview of men.

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[11] See Joan Stambaugh, *Impermanence is Buddha-Nature: Dōgen's Understanding of Temporality* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1990).

[12] See Laura Specker Sullivan, "Dōgen and Wittgenstein: Transcending Language Through Ethical Practice," *Asian Philosophy* 23, no. 3 (2013).

[13] See George Wrisley, "The Nietzschean Bodhisattva—Passionately Navigating Indeterminacy," in *The Significance of Indeterminacy: Perspectives from Asian and Continental Philosophy*, Routledge Studies in Contemporary Philosophy, ed. Robert H. Scott and Gregory Moss (New York: Routledge, 2019).

[14] See Annette Baier, "Hume: The Women's Moral Theorist?" in *Women and Moral Theory*, ed. Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers (Rowman and Littlefield, 1987), 45.

[15] See Annette Baier "Moral Theory and Reflective Practice," in *Postures of the Mind* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 225.

[16] Ibid., 223.

As with the philosophical focus on Kant to the exclusion of Hume, the focus on the *Shobogenzo* to the exclusion of Dōgen's other, more "practical" writings, betrays a bias in favor of abstract philosophical analysis, a form of thinking which is more concerned with the logical structure of conceptual space than with the relationship between being-time and doing the dishes. Yet from both a Buddhist practitioner and feminist perspective, such linkages are crucial and are central to Dōgen's philosophical project.

As it happens, among Zen Buddhist practitioners as compared with philosophers, the *Shobogenzo* is overshadowed by a different work: the *Tenzo Kyōkun*, or "Instructions to the Cook," initially translated into English by Thomas Wright and published alongside commentary by Kosho Uchiyama Roshi in 1983.[17]

If I had only learned of Dōgen through philosophy courses, I never would have heard of his *Tenzo Kyōkun*, despite the fact that it is written in a (slightly) more accessible style than the fascicles of the *Shobogenzo*. Buddhist practitioners, unsurprisingly, find great value in the *Tenzo Kyōkun* - especially American practitioners, ever practical and utilitarian. Bernie Glassman, founder of the Zen Peacemakers, a group dedicated to socially-engaged Buddhism, riffs off the *Tenzo Kyōkun* in his own *Instructions to the Cook*.[18] He attempts an explanation of the importance of the *Tenzo Kyōkun's* practical orientation in the prologue:

> As the Zen saying goes - 'you can't eat painted cakes.' This is true, as far as it goes, but like most truths, it is really only a half or perhaps three-quarter truth. Dōgen went deeper when he wrote in his greatest work the *Shobogenzo*, that 'painted cakes are real, too.' Maps, recipes, and instruction manuals are made up of real words and images that convey real information about our lives and the world we live in. A map can help us get from here to there; a recipe can help us bake a delicious loaf of bread; and words that come from experience and the heart can help us to live more fully and completely.[19]

The *Tenzo Kyōkun* is a metaphor, to a certain extent. As in the title of Kosho Uchiyama Roshi's commentary, it tells the reader "How to Cook Your Life." Glassman refers to personal development as a "supreme meal," requiring a menu, a clean kitchen to cook in, a set of ingredients, and people for whom to cook. Yet Glassman reminds us that the *Tenzo Kyōkun* is also a text about *how to cook*, quite literally. As Greenwood observes, a koan about rice might best be answered by cooking rice well.

In Kosho Uchiyama Roshi's commentary on the *Tenzo Kyōkun*, he relates a story about a university professor who came to visit his Zen monastery in Japan. This

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[17] See Kōshō Uchiyama, *How to Cook Your Life: From the Zen Kitchen to Enlightenment: Dōgen's classic Instructions for the Zen Cook with commentary by Kōshō Uchiyama Rōshi*, trans. Thomas Wright (Boston: Shambhala, 2005). I am leaving out the *Eihei Koroku*, Dōgen's later work following the *Shobogenzo,* and the *Zuimonki*, another of Dōgen's more practical works, because they are overshadowed by the influence of the *Shobogenzo* among theorists and the *Tenzo Kyōkun* among lay practitioners.

[18] See Bernie Glassman and Rick Fields, *Instructions to the Cook: A Zen Master's Lessons in Living a Life That Matters* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1996).

[19] Ibid., 10.

professor, he says, "refused to work alongside everyone else and when everyone was working in the garden or chopping wood he would be off reading a book somewhere. He claimed he was not any good at physical labor and said reading would be his work."[20] Uchiyama Roshi will have none of this - reading is not work, as growing an eggplant is work. The professor relents and chooses to do "the easiest task he could find," sweeping leaves into a pile to burn. When he lights the pile aflame, Uchiyama Roshi notices that the pile is underneath the camellia hedge and is scorching the flowers, and so must be put out and moved. "How can you assign work to a person like this?!" He asks. "Here was a fellow who, while the fire was burning right under his nose, could not even see where the heat and smoke were going."[21]

This passage reinforces the dichotomy I have been building in this section: between intellectual approaches to Dōgen on the one hand, and practical uses of his work, on the other. This tension can be seen in how Dōgen is studied by Western philosophers: through the abstract and inscrutable writing of the *Shobogenzo*, and how he is studied by Western Buddhist practitioners: through the practically oriented *Tenzo Kyōkun*. This dichotomy is just, of course, an interpretive lens: while my aim is to highlight certain features of the theory/practice distinction in interpretations of Dogen, this is not to undermine the relationship between theory and practice in Dogen's work or in legitimate appropriations of it by philosophers and practitioners alike.

In the next section, I introduce the *Tenzo Kyōkun* and explain how feminist reconstructions of Buddhism, and Dōgen in particular, can help to make sense of this interpretive divide, and I explore how they might begin to undermine it.

3 Dōgen and Domestic Life: The *Tenzo Kyōkun*

Philosophers might propose that, if practitioners are drawn to Dōgen's more practical writings such as the *Tenzo Kyōkun*, that is precisely because they are practitioners, and not theorists. Philosophers, they might offer, are primarily interested in conceptual understanding, not practical understanding. Yet as Annette Baier reminds us, this is only one view of what philosophy is and can be. Philosophizing need not be concerned only with conceptual reasoning purified of the residue of everyday life; it can examine the interface between our daily life and the concepts we use to describe and make sense of it. As Uchiyama Roshi understands Dōgen:

> The wonderful point about Dōgen Zenji's practice of zazen is that it is religion which must function concretely in one's daily life. He taught through the office of the tenzo [the cook], which he felt to be indispensable in a Buddhist community and which requires physical work, because he felt that zazen as religion must never be relegated only to those seeking to indulge in some rapturous state of mind.[22]

[20] See Uchiyama, *How to Cook your Life*, 52.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 53.

It turns out that the care with which Dōgen approaches daily life in the *Tenzo Kyōkun* coheres with recent feminist interpretations of Buddhist thought. As Rita Gross notes about Buddhism more generally, "Both Buddhism and feminism begin with experience, stress experiential understanding enormously, and move from experience to theory, which becomes the expression of experience. Both share the approach that conventional views and dogmas are worthless if experience does not actually bear out theory."[23]

For Dōgen in particular, experiential activity is so central to Buddhism that practice *just is* enlightenment. Part of the revolution of Dōgen's thought was the idea that zazen is not a means to an end but is an expression of that end.[24] When practitioners meditate they aim to realize the truth of their enlightenment (or realization), not to attain it. To think about enlightenment in the hopes that, by knowing it intellectually one will attain it, is to misunderstand Dōgen's project.[25] From a certain philosophical perspective, it is an understandable mistake to make. But it is a mistake, nonetheless.

In her feminist reconstruction of Buddhism, Gross observes that "In Zen Buddhism, daily physical work has become a critical part of meditation training. Cooking, cleaning, gardening, building, and maintaining the monastery, are all done with precise mindfulness and are regarded as central to overall training… Monastics by no means spend all their time in study and meditation… In short, they engage in all sorts of mundane, everyday activities."[26] Domestic activities are central to monastic life - one cannot meditate all day. While cooking is a metaphor, it is also something that must be done and can be practiced mindfully or mindlessly.

Gross continues to explain that "The feminist reconceptualization calls for seeing 'ordinary' activities as sacred. This call is an important challenge to the conventional religions, especially to those, including Buddhism, that have a long tradition of seeing spiritual discipline as otherworldly and anti-worldly, as promoting freedom from the world. The feminist call is for nothing less than finding freedom within the world, within domestic concerns, within emotions, within sexuality, within parenthood, within career."[27] This argument lines up with feminist reconstructions of Dōgen which stress the centrality of embodiment to the Zen project, as in Ashby Butnor's analysis of Dōgen by way of Shigenori Nagatomo.[28] Butnor reminds us that "Dōgen is known for his advocacy of a nonrealistic achievement of bodymind and the 'oneness of practice-enlightenment' (*shusho ichinyo*). Given our

[23] See Rita Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 130.

[24] See David Loy, "The Path of No-Path: Sankara and Dogen on the Paradox of Practice," *Philosophy East and West* 38, no. 2 (1988).

[25] This is not to say Dogen eschews thinking or writing about enlightenment completely: otherwise his prolific authorial output would be quite perplexing.

[26] See Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, 277.

[27] Ibid., 278.

[28] See Butnor, "Dōgen, Feminism, and the Embodied Practice of Care" and Shigenori Nagatomo, *Attunement Through the Body* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992).

tendencies to 'live in our heads' and associate our senses of self with our ideas and beliefs, we often become disassociated from our bodies and the knowledge and habits that reside there… The trick, then, is to bring together, or 'harmonize,' body-and-mind."[29]

A central facet of contemporary feminist philosophical thought is the proposition that certain philosophical values, primary of which is theoretical detachment, privilege those in a position to theorize from an armchair, so to speak. It is more difficult for women to occupy this position, due both to social structures in which women are expected to be responsible for certain domestic tasks (cooking, cleaning, etc.) and due to unique features of female embodiment, in which female bodies carry, give birth to, and nurse new human life.[30]

Greenwood touches on this point, noting that in Japan, Zen nuns could not own temples and often either turned to crafts such as *chado* (tea ceremony) or *ikebana* (flower arrangement) to make a living, or they supported the practice of male monastics through cooking, cleaning, and organizing schedules.[31] Greenwood references Paula Arai's work, noting that "gratitude and full engagement with life become the main practice, instead of seeking an explicit kind of enlightenment on the cushion or a drastic overhaul of society."[32] Women's exclusion from the loftier realms of Buddhist practice led to their focus on the embodied practices they could control: cooking, cleaning, and so forth. This is not to say that domestic work is essentially feminine, just that in a patriarchal social structure men maintain positions of power and autonomous choice, while women are relegated to the supporting roles for those powerful positions. How many Zen men uncritically rely on the women in their lives for domestic support and emotional succor? I wonder.

If maintaining a dichotomy between detached monastic practice and domestic practice is a form of conditioned socialization, then there should be no reason, from a Buddhist perspective, why domestic practice does not fall under the umbrella of Buddhist practice.[33] Indeed, Zen Buddhism has historically paid special attention to the tasks of cooking, cleaning, and gardening (perhaps as compared with forms of Buddhism in other cultural contexts, where these tasks are not completed by monastics but are delegated to volunteers or paid staff). The elevation of domestic activity as a form of practice in Zen Buddhism is clearly seen in Dōgen's *Tenzo Kyōkun*.

Yet one need not engage in domestic activity in a monastic context for it to qualify as Zen practice. Michiko Yusa translates Dōgen in the *Shobogenzo Zuimonki* as making the point that, "Such a distinction as the one who renounces the world

[29] Ibid., 232.

[30] McCarthy, "Embodying Change."

[31] Arai, *Bringing Zen Home*, and Arai, *Women Living Zen*.

[32] Greenwood, *Bow First, Ask Questions Later*, 75.

[33] Paula Arai, "Soto Women's Zen Wisdom in Practice," in *The Theory and Practice of Zen Buddhism: A Festschrift in Honor of Steven Heine*, ed. Charles S. Prebish and On-Cho Ng (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2022).

and the one who remains at home is ultimately provisional."[34] Earlier in the passage, he writes:

> … it is not the Buddhist practice that chooses the person who will attain awakening, but rather it is the person who chooses whether or not to embrace the Buddhist path. The determination and motivation of those who take up religious life should be different from those who remain at home. Among those who remain at home, should there be a person who aspires to renounce the world, then, let her leave home. On the other hand, if the one who renounced the world still retains the mental attitude of someone who practices at home, then, such a person is committing double error. The very resolution to renounce the world should be something special.[35]

Dōgen seems to suggest that practice need not be zazen but can begin anywhere one is - with whatever type of life one chooses. If one feels called to be a Buddhist monastic, then one ought to do that wholeheartedly. The key is not the type of activity one is engaged in, but one's relationship with it - whether one is able to "just" do it, to embody the practice, while dropping body and mind. Dōgen thus gives considerable scope to individuals' agency in determining the appropriate path for themselves.

This is born out in Teijo Munnich's commentary on *Bendowa*, "Dancing the Dharma," where she describes her realization that being completely absorbed in the activity of dancing was an instance of *jijuyu zanmai*, or self-fulfillment, a form of "playing freely in Samadhi." She writes, "Samadhi is the kind of concentration in which you absolutely merge; there is no distinction between you and what you are doing."[36] Munnich underscores that dancing can be zazen, just as Greenwood found zazen in the sorting of rice.

In this section I have proposed that, paradoxically, it is the fact that women have often been confined to social roles that prevent their separation from the minutiae of everyday life that allows them to embody Dōgen's dictum to "forget the self and be actualized by myriad things." If one must begin where one is, without intellectualizing enlightenment or misconceiving reading as work, then the types of activities to which women have been relegated may be the most authentic Buddhist practice for non-monastics.

4 Dōgen and Gender Egalitarianism: The *Raihai Tokuzui*

Thus far, I have argued that practice is central to Dōgen's Zen Buddhist project, and that domestic activity is a notable yet philosophically underappreciated example of Zen practice. In this section, I will highlight resources in feminist thought for

[34] Yusa, "Dōgen and the Feminine Presence," 10.

[35] Ibid.

[36] See Teijo Munnich, "Dancing the Dharma: *Bendowa*," in *Receiving the Marrow: Teachings on Dogen by Soto Zen Women Priests*, ed. Eido Frances Carney (Olympia: Temple Ground Press, 2012), 7.

upholding the value of everyday practice in the face of tendencies towards detachment and abstraction found in philosophical analyses of Dōgen's work. I will show how contemporary Western Zen Buddhist women have begun reappropriating Dōgen's work in a uniquely American, but no less authentic, feminist Zen project.

That the project of valorizing Dōgen's gender egalitarianism has been carried out by women perhaps comes as no surprise. Yet it is striking that, of numerous English-language anthologies of Dōgen's work, including biographies, few highlight Dōgen's gender egalitarianism or note the gender boundaries that existed at Dōgen's time (or continue within Soto Zen Buddhism today), other than the work cited in this chapter by Western Zen Women. This is despite a number of works that locate Dōgen within other social and historical forces of his time. The fact that Dōgen was a man writing within patriarchal social and institutional structures does not seem as relevant to many authors as his economic class, family relations, or political associations. Yet surely, in a society that stratifies opportunity and choice by gender, the fact that Dōgen is a male advocate of gender egalitarianism is relevant to his work.

Recently, Western Zen Buddhist women have begun to reevaluate Dōgen from a feminist perspective. One of the most interesting "discoveries" is the *Raihai Tokuzui*, translated by Kazuaki Tanahashi as "Receiving the Marrow by Bowing." In this fascicle, written during Dōgen's Kosho monastery period from 1233–1243, Dōgen advances a series of arguments for why women ought to be recognized as Buddhist teachers and allowed to train as Buddhist nuns. Tanahashi's English translation was published in 2010, and it is only in the past decade that English-speaking scholars have realized the import of this particular fascicle.

In Grace Jill Schireson's commentary on *Raihai Tokuzui*, she explains the revolutionary nature of Dōgen's argument in favor of women Zen teachers. She quotes a passage in which Dōgen is unequivocal and direct:

> Why are men special? Emptiness is emptiness. Four great elements are four great elements. Five skandhas are five skandhas. Women are just like that. Both men and women attain the way. You should honor attainment of the way. Do not discriminate between men and women. This is the most wondrous principle of the buddha way.[37]

Schireson reads Dōgen as making eight arguments in favor of gender equality in Zen practice. They are both theoretical and practical: (1) If all beings are buddha nature, then the idea that women cannot be realized beings is a conventional attitude, (2) It can be very hard to find a realized Zen teacher; excluding women only makes this harder, (3) Refusing to bow to a woman teacher is an exercise of ego, which impedes realization, (4) Women Zen teachers do exist, and students have been realized through them in China (this argument would have been influential in early Japanese Zen, as it was based in the Chinese model), (5) Students who can be realized by teachers despite social status and caste are especially humble, (6) Women teachers is the way of Zen ancestors, (7) Zen practice requires dropping both personal stereotypes and biases *and* cultural and social delusions, including the

[37] Dōgen, "Receiving the Marrow by Bowing," in *Treasury* of the *True Dharma Eye: Zen Master Dogen's Shobo Genzo*, ed. by Kazuaki Tanahashi (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2010), 77.

idea that gender relates to one's inner nature, and (8) There are numerous examples of Buddhist monks and sutras being distorted by negative cultural attitudes towards women, including the banning of women from sacred Buddhist sites in Japan such as Mt. Koya, Todaiji, and Mt. Hiei.

Schireson's commentary is part of *Receiving the Marrow: Teachings on Dōgen by Soto Zen Women Priests*, a collection of essays by eleven American Soto Zen women teachers. They draw inspiration from the fact that Dōgen himself advanced such clear and forceful arguments in favor of gender egalitarianism. Editor Eido Frances Carney describes Dōgen as a social reformer based on his more "enlightened" attitude towards women, inviting women students into his sangha and advocating for more egalitarian views of gender.[38]

In another passage of the *Raihai Tokuzui*, Dōgen writes:

> Foolish people who have not heard buddha dharma call themselves great monks and would not bow to younger ones who have attained dharma. Those who have matured practice over a long period of time would not bow to latecomers who have attained dharma. Those who have certificates as masters would not bow to others who have not been certified. Those who are in charge of dharma matters would not bow to other monks who have attained dharma. Those who are bishops would not bow to laymen and laywomen who have attained dharma. Bodhisattvas of three classes and ten stages would not bow to nuns who have attained dharma. Those who are imperial descendants would not bow to retainers who have attained dharma. Such foolish people have neither seen nor heard the buddha way, just like the one who groundlessly left parents and wandered in another land.[39]

This passage highlights that Dōgen was remarkably attentive to the role of stereotype and bias in impeding Buddhist practice. Indeed, Dōgen is not just an ally in using feminism to enrich Buddhist practice by acknowledging the significance of domestic activity, but in bringing Buddhist practice in line with broader social equality.

Nevertheless, even now, Soto Zen temples in Japan maintain strict gender boundaries. Sally Tisdale, an American Zen teacher, nurse, and writer, describes a visit to *Eiheiji*, Dōgen's own temple, where she was told that women could not practice because they had not had time to build women's bathrooms in the eight-hundred-year history of the temple.[40] I visited Eiheiji in 2012 - somehow it seems fitting that the only souvenir I have is a pair of chopsticks. Luckily, I was able to use a bathroom.

Grace Schireson relates an experience similar to Tisdale's at the opening of her book *Zen Women: Beyond Tea Ladies, Iron Maidens, and Macho Masters*:

> When a male teacher returned from an early North American conference of Zen teachers, one of his female students asked him, 'how many women teachers were included in this conference?' The male teacher answered, 'we were all women.' A long, confused silence followed… Do we as women not get it, or does this male teacher not get it? Fifteen years ago the women present looked uncomfortably at one another, perplexed at our bind, but

[38] Carney, *Receiving the Marrow*, xi.

[39] Dōgen, "Receiving the Marrow by Bowing," 74.

[40] Sallie Tisdale, *Women of the Way: Discovering 2500 Years of Buddhist Wisdom* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2006), 3.

> didn't challenge his answer. Today I would cut through the confusion by asking him politely, 'how many of you women teachers used the ladies' room at this Zen conference?'[41]

Who uses which bathroom (as well as where that bathroom is, and in what condition it is kept) may seem to be a minor concern for those who can take it for granted, but it is an important marker of equality for those who have been socially marginalized.

In the *Raihai Tokuzui,* Dōgen argues that exclusion of women from the roles of students, monastics, and teachers is counter to Buddhist teaching. Essentially, gender discrimination is a conventional attitude, just like any other. A patriarchal structure, or at the very least one which separates out roles and possibilities for men and women practitioners, is not essential to Buddhism. In recognizing this, Dōgen is not just an ally in using feminist thought to bolster the Buddhist commitment to practice, but in using feminism to encourage Buddhism "be true to its own vision."[42] This means that, as Dōgen recognizes, working towards gender equality is a form of Buddhist practice, by working to see through concepts that buttress gender discrimination.

A number of scholars have gestured towards the "modern implications" and applications of Dōgen's Zen thought.[43] Yet arguably, gender egalitarianism is central to Dōgen's thought. If the core of Zen practice is learning to just sit free of conceptual intrusion, then acknowledging and dropping off negative stereotypes, be they gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and so on is central to Dōgen's project. Tackling a concrete issue like gender discrimination is not an *application* of Dōgen's work - it is inherent in it. It prevents the over-intellectualization of Zen by rooting practice in a delusion that many people struggle with on a day-to-day basis.

While it may seem more advanced to focus on the abstract themes in Dōgen's work such as being-time or buddha-nature, this is part of a culture of detachment with which Dōgen's work has been viewed, a culture fueled largely by contemporary academic philosophical norms but also by patriarchal structures that exist in Zen Buddhist institutions today. Reading Dōgen through the lens of Western Zen Buddhist women and their allies shows how contemporary practitioners of Zen are appropriating the elements of social transformation latent in his work.

This is quite clear in Bernie Glassman's *Instructions to the Cook: A Zen Master's Lessons in Living a Life that Matters.* Glassman, the founder of the Zen Peacemakers Order, proposes that there are five courses in the "supreme meal" that makes up a Buddhist life. The first three courses are oriented around the individual: spirituality, study, and livelihood. Practitioners must establish a firm foundation for themselves before they can begin to help others. The latter two courses are other-oriented: social action and community. While people focus on different courses at different stages of their life, ideally they come together in the last course, which is

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[41] Grace Schireson, *Zen Women: Beyond Tea Ladies, Iron Maidens, and Macho Masters* (Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2009), xii.

[42] Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, 153.

[43] Steven Heine, *Dōgen: Japan's Original Zen Teacher* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2021), 271.

community, "the course that turns all the other courses - spirituality, livelihood, social action, and study - into a joyous feast."[44]

Glassman and others would argue that attention to gender discrimination - as well as discrimination on the basis of race, class, and so on - is a central aspect of Buddhist practice, not a particular application of it. Just as the university professor who visited Uchiyama Roshi's temple was unable to move beyond his self-centered focus on his own study, so Zen Buddhism urges practitioners and scholars alike to recognize the interconnection of theoretical understanding and practical action, especially as one moved through life's stages.

5 Dōgen: The Women's Zen Buddhist Theorist?

In the previous section, examination of the *Raihai Tokuzui* revealed Dōgen to be a theorist who not only had a keen sense of gender egalitarianism in practice, but who advanced theoretical and practical arguments in defense of the practice. This reading recalls Annette Baier's reading of David Hume as "the women's moral theorist," due to the resonance between his understanding of morality as a "correction of the sentiments through actual activity" and early work in feminist care ethics, such as that of Carol Gilligan.[45] While neither Dōgen's thought nor Hume's is essentially feminine, they accord with a set of virtues and values that have been conceptualized as feminine, and thus subordinate, to other virtues and values.

Acknowledging Dōgen's alignment with gender egalitarianism renders him as a special sort of thinker - one who is able to clearly see the relationship between theory and commonplace social practices. While this places him in the company of Baier's reading of Hume, it contrasts him with philosophers such as Immanuel Kant, whose work contains resources for a practical egalitarianism yet who was unable to think outside the social structures of his time.[46] Such a reading foregrounds the consonance or dissonance between a thinker's work and their way of life, and this type of reading remains controversial. Nevertheless, with Dōgen, it is striking that this type of analysis does not reveal dissonance between his abstract theory and his social understanding, but confluence - as well as the inherent resources in Buddhist thought for undermining discrimination based on gender, race, sexuality, class, and other forms of "conventional" thinking.

There is, however, a disconnect between Dōgen's thought and practice – a disconnect that existed for Hume, as well. Hume has been criticized for describing women as inferior to men in both bodily strength and intellect, such that Baier's contention that Hume was the "women's moral theorist" seems out of place. Likewise, Dōgen has been criticized for arguing in favor gender egalitarianism

[44] Glassman and Fields, *Instructions to the Cook*, 9.

[45] See Baier, "Hume," 37.

[46] Lucy Allais, "Kant's Racism." *Philosophical Papers* 45, no. 1–2 (2016).

while ultimately caving to patriarchal social pressures in restricting women's access to elements of Zen Buddhist training within Japan.[47] As Heine notes, Dōgen reinforced the traditional hierarchy of monks over nuns and monastics over non-monastics in his activities at Eiheiji.[48] Others have suggested that Dōgen changed his views about women later in his career, although Paula Arai argues convincingly that this is a misreading and that "the case for Dōgen reversing his views on women is not well-supported."[49]

If Dōgen did limit women's participation in Zen training in Japan, Carney suggests that Dōgen "may simply have chosen his battles,"[50] while Yusa argues that the fact that Dōgen had female students and disciples underscores his willingness to act outside of social convention. Baier's defense of Hume is also helpful here. She observes that Hume was a product of his time, such that his observation of women's inferiority states a social fact: women in Hume's society did have less power than men. Yet on Baier's reading, Hume did not essentialize this inferiority, but understood it to be a contingent social reality, not a necessary truth. Indeed, his work speculates on the possibilities for women should they avoid "servile dependence" on men and attain independence.[51]

As with Hume, Dōgen was also a product of his time, and Carney is likely right that Dōgen chose his battles. Yet the fact that his thinking ran up against social norms in practice need not negate his gender egalitarianism. Dōgen recognized the problems with gender discrimination, even if he could not change such practices wholesale. This is, again, in contrast to someone like Kant, whose intellectual achievements did not prevent him from embracing discriminatory views *and* practices.

6 Theory and Practice

It may be tempting to set up a dichotomous lens through which to view Dōgen. Either he is a religious practitioner or he is a philosopher. Either his words are studied as a form of scholarship, or as a form of practical inspiration. Feminist analysis of Dōgen helps to collapse this dichotomy.

Michiko Yusa highlights the following poem, which Dōgen wrote for a student:

> 'The mind is Buddha'—this is hard to practice but easy to preach.
> 'It is no mind, no Buddha'—this is hard to preach but easy to practice.[52]

[47] Carney, *Receiving the Marrow*, xi and Yusa, "Dōgen and the Feminine Presence," 3.

[48] Heine, *Dōgen*, 25.

[49] Arai, "Soto Women's Zen Wisdom in Practice," 259.

[50] Carney, *Receiving the Marrow*, xi.

[51] See Baier, "Hume," 54.

[52] Yusa, "Dōgen and the Feminine Presence," 7.

Dōgen was uniquely sensitive to the dichotomy of words versus action. Analysis of Dōgen by Western Zen women highlights the resources in his form of Zen Buddhism for collapsing this dichotomy - in which language aids practice, and practice inspires linguistic expression.

I have posited that over-intellectualization of Dōgen's work misses the significance of daily, domestic life for his understanding of Zen practice. Further, I argued that Western feminist analyses of Dōgen undermine this intellectualization by focusing attention on his arguments in favor of gender egalitarianism. Is this a "re-appropriation" of Dōgen as a women's Buddhist theorist?

In one sense, yes. As contemporary Western Zen women have increasingly recognized, Dōgen is a powerful ally in attempts to make Zen Buddhist institutions more equitable: he not only sees the world through a woman's lens when he valorizes practice in everyday life, but he argues directly for gender egalitarianism in Buddhist practice. As Michiko Yusa observes, "the picture of 'Dōgen the feminist' (if I may) emerges more convincingly, who stood by his original conviction of the equality of male and female in attaining awakening in the practice of zazen. The study also shows the fundamental importance of compassion that was at the heart of his practice. This nicely balances the image of Dōgen that tends to put stress on the philosophical and wisdom-oriented side."[53]

It likely comes as no surprise that these calls are coming from the Western world. As Sally Tisdale (optimistically) observes,

> Part of the American character is to push at boundaries. We are used to differences, and most Americans are fairly tolerant, I think. We are open enough as a culture to question our own cultural conditioning - not only about gender but about race, ethnicity, nation, age, class, and sexual orientation. It also happens that Buddhist practice requires us to question our assumptions - all the dear and deeply held beliefs by which we conduct our lives. One of the privileges of being an American Buddhist is the opportunity to speak openly about such things and try new things. American Buddhism can justly claim to have given women a far more equal share than that given in any other culture. We have to be careful not to think that talking about it means we are free from cultural conditioning.[54]

Tisdale cautions that this is not to say that Western Buddhists are more "enlightened," to use another meaning of the word. As Sebine Selassie has recently written, "An American Buddhist teacher, Joseph Goldstein, tells a story of his Indian teacher, Munindra-ji, who described his Western students as extremely diligent practitioners who were like people fiercely rowing boats, not realizing they were still tied to the dock."[55]

Western Buddhists have inherited their own cultural conventions - one of which is an alignment of patriarchal, colonialist values with elite scholarship. To return to Selassie: "In line with its elevation of rational intellectualism, the colonization

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[53] Ibid., 20.

[54] Tisdale, *Women of the Way*, 14.

[55] Sebene Selassie, "Turning Toward Myself," in *Black and Buddhist: What Buddhism Can Teach Us About Race, Resilience, Transformation, and Freedom*., ed. Pamela Ayo Yetunde and Cheryle Giles (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2020), 75.

project privileged written languages (associated with elite 'classes') over oral traditions. In South Asia, the project of translating ancient texts fed into the colonialist process of domination. Scholarly interpretations of texts produced Orientalist (often simplified) versions of what was in fact a complex interplay of lived practices."[56] While Western feminists work to simultaneously reinforce the relevance of Zen practice in everyday domestic life *and* to advocate for gender equity such that women are not confined to domestic work, it is crucial to remember that many of these texts grew out of a very different set of day-to-day experiences in Asian societies.

In the *Raihai Tokuzui*, Dōgen does not stop at gender egalitarianism, but is powerfully egalitarian in a broader sense. He writes, "In encountering teachers who expound unsurpassable enlightenment, do not consider their caste or facial appearance; do not dislike their shortcomings or judge their activities."[57] In the United States, while we have a come long way towards addressing gender discrimination, we still have a long way to go towards recognizing teachers as teachers, without regard to race, class, ability, and so on.

In another sense, it is not a re-appropriation to call Dōgen a "women's Buddhist theorist." Dōgen, as Michiko Yusa reminds us, "in his anti-denominationalist and a-sectarian stance, was adamantly opposed to calling the practice centered in zazen 'Zen school,' let alone calling his teaching 'Soto Zen'."[58] As I have emphasized throughout this chapter, social and institutional gender discrimination is an enshrinement of a deluded conventional attitude that Dōgen would have - and did - object to. If it benefits sentient beings to call Dōgen a feminist thinker, then so be it.

Finally, as Thomas Kasulis notes in the foreward to Erin McCarthy's *Ethics Embodied,* "Philosophy is, after all, the 'love of wisdom,' not knowledge. The knowledgeable person tells us something we did not know; the wise person reminds us of something important that we have forgotten, repressed, or ignored."[59]

Until recently, it seems that scholarship on Dōgen has, generously, "forgotten" the extent of Dōgen's gender egalitarianism and the significance he accorded to the work of daily life. It is easy to ignore these features of his thought in the context of philosophical scholarship that reveres abstraction and detachment. Yet as feminist theorists remind us, wisdom is often found in the particular and contingent nature of everyday life. Indeed, in their introduction to *Asian and Feminist Philosophies in Dialogue*, Ashby Butnor and Jennifer McWeeny propose that "we could characterize feminist comparative methodology in terms of the idea that philosophical insight and the personal, intellectual transformations that it entails occur when a philosopher: 1. Endeavors to acknowledge and embody, rather than ignore and transcend,

[56] Selassie, "Turning Toward Myself," 73–74.

[57] Dōgen, "Receiving the Marrow by Bowing," 73.

[58] Yusa, "Dōgen and the Feminine Presence," 2.

[59] See Kasulis in McCarthy, *Ethics Embodied*, xiv.

her own subjectivity and 2. Makes genuine, authentic contact with another philosophical perspective."[60] In this sense, Dōgen and contemporary Western feminist thought is a good match.

7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have proposed that, by viewing Dōgen through the eyes of contemporary Western Zen women, Dōgen can be thought of as the "women's Buddhist theorist." I have described a gap between his reception by philosophy scholars in the United States, who focus on his more abstract writings such as the *Shobogenzo*, and contemporary American practitioners, who often refer to the *Tenzo Kyōkun.* I have posited that this gap reveals an under-explored role for domestic activity in Dōgen's philosophical project, one which is supported by feminist analysis and bolstered by Dōgen's own arguments in favor of gender egalitarianism in the *Raihai Tokuzui*. I have argued that, contrary to suggestions that Dōgen's philosophical project can be fruitfully *applied* to contemporary issues of discrimination and inequity, Dōgen himself makes such issues integral to his project and, in some sense, a test of the successful interpretation of his work. This reading of Dōgen underscores that the work of *jijiyu zammai* or *shikantaza* begins at home: with our relationships to family and friends, with how we maintain our space, and with our role in our community. This is especially relevant for practitioners who do not become monastics and remain in lay practice, and who have not made the intentional choice to leave home. As Dōgen himself notes, what matters is not the choice that one makes, but whether one wholeheartedly practices in line with it.

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[60] Ashby Butnor and Jennifer McWeeny, "Feminist Comparative Philosophy: Performing Philosophy Differently," in *Asian and Feminist Philosophies in Dialogue*, ed. Jennifer McWeeny and Ashby Butnor (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 12.

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