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# The Heart Of Dogen's Shobogenzo



## Synopsis

The Heart of Dogen's Shobogenzo provides exhaustively annotated translations of the difficult core essays of Shobogenzo, the masterwork of Japanese Zen master Dogen Kigen, the founder of Soto Zen. This book is centered around those essays that generations have regarded as containing the essence of Dogen's teaching. These translations, revised from those that first appeared in the 1970s, clarify and enrich the understanding of Dogen's religious thought and his basic ideas about Zen practice and doctrine. Dogen's uncommon intellectual gifts, combined with a profound religious attainment and an extraordinary ability to articulate it, make Shobogenzo unique even in the vast literature the Zen school has produced over the centuries, securing it a special place in the history of world religious literature.

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## Customer Reviews

These translations, originally published in The Eastern Buddhist journal more than twenty years ago, are the most accurate and complete renderings available. Many people have been eagerly waiting for years for these pieces to appear in a single, handy book. Steven Heine, editor of A Study of Dogen: His Philosophy and Religion" "These translations, originally published in The Eastern Buddhist journal more than twenty years ago, are the most accurate and complete renderings available. Many people have been eagerly waiting for years for these pieces to appear in a single, handy book." -- Steven Heine, editor of A Study of Dogen: His Philosophy and Religion

The Heart of Dōgen's Shōbōgenzō provides exhaustively annotated translations of the difficult core essays of Shōbōgenzō, the masterwork of Japanese Zen master Dōgen Kigen, the founder of Sōtō Zen. This book is centered around those essays that generations have regarded as containing the essence of Dōgen's teaching. These translations, revised from those that first appeared in the 1970s, clarify and enrich the understanding of Dōgen's religious thought and his basic ideas about Zen practice and doctrine. Dōgen's uncommon intellectual gifts, combined with a profound religious attainment and an extraordinary ability to articulate it, make Shōbōgenzō unique even in the vast literature the Zen school has produced over the centuries, securing it a special place in the history of world religious literature. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I do not wish to critique Dogen himself at this time but instead to offer some praise to the translators. By first selecting some central fascicles of the Shobogenzo and then painstakingly elucidating them through concise translation and a liberal use of footnotes, Dogen becomes a little more approachable. Now, Dogen is still Dogen and reading his works is much like "scratching a fingernail across polished granite," but the footnotes in the text are amazing. I often find myself reading footnotes by some authors and quickly conclude that they have only superfluous comments or trivialities to add. I am sure you have encountered this too. However, the caliber of insight offered in Waddell and Abe's notes is simply marvelous. Each one is not only useful, but interesting. Although this is Dogen's work, the translators' knowledge on the subject comes through quite powerfully, adding a layer of depth to this text. I found myself clinging to each footnote as if it were as important as the text itself. In some cases, I found the text to be completely un-understandable until I read Waddell and Abe's notes. Also, there are just so many references to Chinese and Indian Buddhist sources that this makes easy work for tracking down future topics of research. If you are interested in Dogen, I think you will find the insight lent by the translators to be nothing short of amazing. I also hope you find them as enlightening as I did.

Many readers are probably fairly familiar with both the authors...Norman Waddell being an excellent translator of various Japanese works, and Masao Abe being an important figure in the influential Kyoto School who has helped interpret traditional and modern Japanese philosophy for Western audiences for many, many years. With a cast of expert authors like this, how can you lose? This book, as other reviews have noted, is actually a compilation of various translated articles that first appeared as a series in the "Eastern Buddhist" journal. These translations of selected essays out of

Dogen's masterwork (the Shobogenzo- lit. "Treasury of the True Dharma Eye"- which actually is a shared title with a koan collection) have always been highly regarded by Buddhaphiles world-wide. In fact, Waddell and Abe set the standard for later translations of Dogen's material with these excerpts in Eastern Buddhist. While there have since appeared many partial and full translations- as well as scholarly studies- of Dogen's zen teachings, to my mind none of the recent translation work achieves the accuracy combined with a smooth flow that Waddell and Abe rendered. Add to this high-level translation achievement the informative (if brief) notes that accompanied the texts, and you have a resource that should be in the library of anyone who is a fan of zen, regardless of how many other books on Dogen one may already possess. This compilation of their translations into one volume, then, is a welcome resource. As anyone who has studied his writings is aware, tackling Dogen's essays is a tough task in itself. Dogen packs a lot into condensed space, and the only way to really begin to appreciate his style of expounding is to take small doses at a time, and chew on each tidbit. That was probably his original intent anyway. Readers of popular modern zen works who first encounter Dogen often are mystified at his style, as Dogen likes to look at a topic through multiple lenses at the same time, and if one reads too carelessly, one will miss important nuggets where Dogen expounds from an "absolute" view even in simple-appearing statements. All this to say, Dogen isn't casual reading. Dogen "beginners" reading this book might do well to start out with some of the simpler material, such as Zazenji and Shoji (Birth and Death). The latter is one of my favorite brief pieces, having a simple "Pure Land" feel- heck, it's always nice to start out with a bang and get birth and death clarified, at least Dogen-style, before moving on to more complex material. Examples of the latter include essays such as Ikka Myoju ("One Bright Pearl"), supposedly a saying of an illiterate old fisherman-slash-zen master named Gensha. I'm not sure about Gensha, but when Dogen takes that famous saying and tweaks it all sorts of ways as he typically does, you may end up wishing you had gone fishing instead :-). The most famous essay, GenjoKoan, is also not particularly beginner material, although English-language Dogen studies seem to focus on this famous piece, showing remarkable confidence in interpreting Dogen's heart and soul for us. Uji (Being-Time) is another favorite essay for the English-language crowd, I suspect because the topic allows readers to inject about anything in as commentary. Uji is the ideal vehicle for wading out into speculations on absolute time and Einstein's relativity theory and what not, and drown out in deep water, just like everybody else.... well hey, I warned you. I wish I could say modern Dogen scholars have cracked the code and have unpacked Dogen adequately for us, but alas, that might be a little optimistic, Dogen was a very abstract thinker :-). Not that the scholars haven't tried themselves... So readers, for this very reason, it behooves one to read a wide variety of studies on Dogen -the more

the better- as each scholar tends to interpret Dogen a little differently and it is good to get a broad view of how moderns perceive Dogen's teaching. And that's the beauty of Dogen studies, folks- you can probably pull about anything out of the hat and nobody can prove you wrong :-) What a treasure-chest! Ah, I digress. Nevermind commentary, back to actual translations. To sum up, definitely include this Waddell and Abe compilation in your own library. It's a resource to peruse often, and it surely will exercise your brain more than those trashy novels you've been carrying on the airplane...yes, YOU. Think, for instance, how impressive you'll look next time you travel and the passenger next to you sees you reading something like GenjoKoan...it's a conversation starter!

These several fascicles of Dogen's master work are translated with authority and deep understanding.

The Heart of Dogen's Shobogenzo offers the complete translations of nine of Eihei Dogen's most important works. These translations, initially published in the journal, *The Eastern Buddhist*, are considered by many scholars to be the most reliable English translations to date. Each translation is prefaced with an introduction and provided with complete, detailed notes that explain terms, highlight implications, and draw the readers attention to Zen sources as well as Dogen's own unique handling of language. Eight of these works come from the Zen master's magnum opus, *Shobogenzo*. The *Shobogenzo* (Treasury of the True Dharma-Eye), Eihei Dogen's masterpiece, is considered one of the most important works of Buddhist literature, and even one of the highest achievements of world literature. The translations from the *Shobogenzo* that are included here represent eight of the most essential chapters making up this voluminous work. *Bendowa* (Negotiating the Way)...is a detailed examination and explanation on what Dogen considered as the authentic message, and practice Zen Buddhism. Much of this chapter consists of a "question and answer format" wherein Dogen outlines the authentic teaching of Zen, while simultaneously debunking some of the major aberrations of the Zen teachings of his day. *Ikka Myoju* (One Bright Pearl)...is one of Dogen's most creative, yet accessible expressions on the nature of life and death according to the Mahayana teachings of nonduality and emptiness. Dogen uses a classic Zen koan as the foundation of his exposition that the "whole universe is one bright pearl." *Genjokoan* (Actualizing the Fundamental Point)...may be the most direct expression of Zen practice and enlightenment in all of Dogen's work. Dogen's 95 chapter *Shobogenzo* was defined by one Zen master as, "simply footnotes to Genjokoan." Louie Wing's commentary (in *The Flatbed Sutra* of Louie Wing) refers to the *Genjokoan* as, "Skeleton Key" to the *Shobogenzo*, claiming it presents all

of the major points of the entire Shobogenzo. Uji (Being-Time)...is Dogen's remarkable explication on the nature of time and existence, being and time. Demonstrating the nondual quality of time and existence, Dogen reveals the profound implications this has for practice and enlightenment. Bussho (Buddha-Nature)...is a beautiful and complex work. In this essay, Dogen takes up and examines nothing less than the essential nature of reality itself. This is easily the most challenging (and rewarding) fascicle of Waddell and Abe's, *The Heart of Dogen's Shobogenzo*. The detailed notes on this masterful translation are alone worth the price of the book. Truly a profound analysis of Dogen's majestic treatment of the function and essence of Buddha-Nature. Sammai-O-Zammai (The King of Samadhis Samadhi)...is an in-depth treatise on what it means to actualize the authentic method of Zen meditation. This unique treatment on the methods and implications of the enlightened mind includes detailed instructions on how to apply one's consciousness in the actual experience of meditation. Shoji (Birth and Death)...is the shortest essay in the Shobogenzo; it is also one of the most profound. Here, Dogen uses one of the classic Zen koans to reveal a most sublime truth: the nondual nature of samsara and nirvana. In this explication by Dogen, we are shown how viewing the cycle of birth-and-death (samsara) through the Buddhist teaching of dependent origination, one realizes the truth of no-birth-and-death (nirvana). Zazengi (The Principles of Zazen)...is Dogen's most direct teaching on the physical aspects of sitting meditation (zazen). It describes precisely how, where, and when to sit in clear and lucid language that even a total beginner can understand. The ninth translation, is the vastly influential Fukanzazengi, an independent work outlining the fundamental characteristics the keystone of Zen practice and enlightenment. Fukanzazengi (Universal Promotion of the Principles of Zazen)...outlines what Dogen considered to be the very heart of Zen practice and realization. Boldly asserting the essential nature and function of Zen, as well as prescribing detailed, practical instructions of actualizing it in our lives here and now. Anyone that takes the time to carefully study Waddell and Abe's, *The Heart of Dogen's Shobogenzo* will be deeply rewarded. If this study is augmented by experimentation with some of the meditation techniques detailed within it, so much the better. All of Dogen's writings require active focused study, but anyone that truly perseveres, and masters the essential teachings in this book will be well on their way to a true appreciation of Eihei Dogen's Zen. They may even discover that when they get thirsty, Dogen himself drinks a cup of water.

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