

CHINESE ZEN:

A Dialogue

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& NISHITANI KEIJI

1. *Chinese Buddhism before Bodhidharma*

Nishitani: It seems to me as a student of religion and religious philosophy that Buddhism has a conspicuous singularity that sets it apart from the other world religions, and that Zen too possesses very unique characteristics of its own among the various Buddhist schools. And this unique something in Zen is, I think, attracting interest in the United States and Europe today. Zen had its source in India, where the meditational form of discipline called *dhyaṇa* had been developed. But *dhyaṇa*, when introduced into China by Bodhidharma, presented itself as a special and unique way, claiming to be the authentic spirit of Buddhism. From this, by gradual development, emerged Zen as we know it today. In this sense Zen can be said to have developed on a foundation which was Chinese in character. Our first question is, then, what are the religious characteristics peculiar to Zen? And next, when Bodhidharma is said to have transmitted Zen to China from southern India, what significance did his coming have for that time? What was his position in the contemporary Buddhist world in China? These questions are of course related to the first. Let us begin our discussion from here.

Tsukamoto: As a student of Chinese Buddhist history, it seems to me that not only in Buddhism but in all Indian religions *dhyaṇa* is at the basis of the religious experience or enlightenment, as you have just pointed out. This was true also of Indian philosophy, which was called a philosophy of the forest, and of course of Sakyamuni's Buddhism as well. Even if wisdom was greatly stressed, it could be attained only as a result of meditation. Since

meditation had such a basic role, Buddhist sutras relating to it were also transmitted to China from an early date. Chinese Buddhists appeared who made great efforts to elevate themselves to the realm of Sakyamuni's enlightenment. I believe that the first to do this were Dōan (Tao-an, 314–385), and his disciple Eon (Hui-yüan, 334–416).

During the time of Dōan and Eon people tried to interpret Buddhism not from Sanskrit sources but from Chinese translations of Buddhist sutras—they understood Buddhism from the *Prajñā-pāramitā* sutras. This was how the Buddhist teaching was initially received by the Chinese intellectual classes. Scholars conceived of it as something similar to the thought of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu. A serious and religious-minded person like Dōan, however, attempted to relive somehow the discipline and experience of Sakyamuni by Sakyamuni's own means, and that meant the initiation of *dhyaṇa* as the way of meditation. Priests in general tried to understand Indian sutras as books. They studied them in the same way they studied the Chinese classics, which meant they resorted to commentary and hermeneutic literature. However, Dōan believed meditation was indispensable. Even though lectures on Buddhism might flourish here and there, he contended that because people did not practice meditation, no one could be found who attained enlightenment. So the sincere people among the followers of Buddhism in China had recognized early that Buddhism could not exist without the practice of *dhyaṇa* meditation, and made their efforts accordingly. I think, however, that their meditation was still something of the kind which aimed at mind-concentration and was similar to that of the Taoists, belonging to the period before the meditation that was born later in intimate relation with the peculiar climate and life of China. It was somewhat different from what we now regard as Zen Buddhism. But through that primordial movement the notion that meditation is important was gradually being implanted in the Chinese mind.

Nishitani: When did Dōan live?

Trukamoto: During the Eastern Tsin dynasty, in the fourth century. By this time people were gradually beginning to realize that *prajñā*-wisdom could be attained through the practice of Zen, and this led to the tendency to combine the study of the *Prajñā-pāramitā* sutras and Zen meditation. This, I believe, was the beginning of Zen Buddhism in China.

On the other hand, even in that age the number of Chinese translations of sutras never ceased increasing. In the case of a religion which has only a single scripture, like Christianity, there can always be a certain unity in doctrine as well as in faith, centering around that book. But in China, new sutras were translated one after another, and various different sects of Buddhism began to enter the picture. Men of various countries came to China and participated in the translation work. People were busily engaged in understanding and interpreting the heterogeneous Buddhisms that were entering. Though they were all considered the teachings of Sakyamuni, there were in fact hardly any sutras during the primary period of Indian Buddhism. They were compiled later, and with the advent of Mahayana Buddhism, their number increased more and more. And as more sutras were brought into China one after another, Chinese Buddhists, to whom authority lay in India alone, were frequently compelled to modify their view of what Buddhism was. This made Buddhist studies a highly complicated scholarship. Priests who could give lectures on sutras were considered great and learned priests. This trend grew stronger with time. For instance, in the *History of Eminent Priests* (高僧傳) which was compiled during the Liang dynasty when Bodhidharma came to China, we see among the biographies of eminent priests few practitioners of Zen but a long series of such erudite lecturers. All through this time, though, I think there was always an underlying consciousness of the necessity of religious practice.

An interesting story is found in the *Account of Buddhist Temples in Loyang* (洛陽伽藍記) written not long after Bodhidharma came to China, which is a quite trustworthy work historically speaking. It tells of a priest who dies and goes to receive judgment before the court of Yama, King of the Dead, but is sent back because he has been mistaken for a different person of the same name. Such mistakes happen very often in China, you know. Now, this priest describes what he witnessed at Yama's court. He relates how priest after priest dies and appears at the court. When Yama asks one of them what he has been doing, he answers that he has earnestly practiced zazen. Yama says, "That is the right Buddhist path. Go on to Heaven." One or two other such practitioners come up, and then the most learned scholar of the time from the capital at Loyang. He says that he has been propagating Buddhism by gathering followers and giving them lectures on the

Nirvana Sutra. Yama asks him to give a recitation of the *Nirvana Sutra*, but he can't do it. He says he doesn't memorize it, he only lectures on it. Yama's verdict is that such a self-important fellow has studied only in order to outdo other scholars, and he orders him to proceed to the "Black Gate." The priest who narrates the story and saw all this in Yama's court didn't go to Hell himself, but the Black Gate didn't sound to him like a very nice place. Other priests who come before Yama report of building large numbers of temples, of publishing the whole Buddhist Tripitika, or of accumulating a lifetime of good deeds and merits. But Yama tells them that is all useless and not the right way of practice for a priest. The last person to appear is a provincial governor. He boasts of building a splendid temple and of doing this and that. Yama reminds him that the temple wasn't built by him but with the money he collected in taxes from the people, and denounces him as not being a true Buddhist. This fellow also headed for the Black Gate.

The ruler at the time was the Empress Ling, who reigned with absolute power over her subjects. She was a follower of Buddhism, and when she heard about this priest's tale, she declared that the Buddhist world of contemporary China had gone wrong, and she sent out an edict ordering all Buddhists to make zazen their first consideration. And from then on Zen meditation came to be valued. So at that time, according to this work written not long after Bodhidharma's arrival, such evil tendencies did exist in Chinese Buddhism. Though the religion was flourishing in the Loyang area, it was after all an academic Buddhism centered in lectures, and practical disciplines such as meditation and ascetism were ignored.

2. *Meditation—the Search for Truth*

Nisbitani: Fu-daishi and Shikō, who appear in the *Hekiganroku*, belong to the time of Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty, don't they?

Sbibayama: Yes.

Nisbitani: Once Fu-daishi went up to the lecture seat to give a lecture on the *Diamond Sutra* . . .

Sbibayama: He went to the seat, swept aside the stand the text rested on with his hand, and then descended without a word spoken. While Emperor Wu and all the others sat in amazement, the philosopher Shikō said, "Your Majesty, the lecture is over." That was all.

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Nisbitani: Shikō was also there when Bodhidharma and Emperor Wu first met each other.

Sbibayama: I'm not very sure about the history, but I think in the *Keitoku-dentō-roku* people like Shikō and Fu-daishi are treated in a special category as "irregulars" whose Zen lineage is not clear—men of Zen with an unknown Dharma genealogy.

Nisbitani: Still the fact remains that there were people like them engaging in Zen practice before Bodhidharma's arrival in China.

Sbibayama: What I welcome about what Professor Tsukamoto described is the fact that men like Dōan and Eon existed in China prior to Bodhidharma's arrival, and although I'm not certain how authentic the words attributed to them may be from a historical standpoint, I think their sayings reveal an experience very similar to that of Zen. The religious experience there described seems to be possibly even more profound than that of men around the time of Bodhidharma. So the seeds for the future Zen had already existed when Bodhidharma happened to appear on the scene. As a man who valued personal experience above all, he came just at the time when sutra-lecturing was enjoying a great vogue, so his advocacy of a realm apart from lectures and sutras was all the more pronounced.

Tsukamoto: Yes. That was probably so, I think.

Sbibayama: I think it quite doubtful that Bodhidharma's Zen, which advocated "peace of mind in wall meditation," was truly Zen as we understand it today. But then it's natural that his Zen should have Indian colorings. Yet he was a remarkable man, an Indian Buddhist who took it upon himself to advocate a standpoint aimed to remedying the ills of Chinese Buddhism. In that sense, his coming was truly fortunate and timely.

Tsukamoto: A single Zen monk from India came when Chinese Buddhism had just about reached a point of decline beyond remedy.

Sbibayama: And he emphasized the importance of personal experience.

Tsukamoto: Bodhidharma saw a Buddhism at the height of prosperity, and said, "This is not Buddhism. It's completely different from the Buddhism we practice back in India." So he began his "wall meditation," sitting in samadhi in the Indian manner at the Sung-shan monastery. This act was an admonition, a revolt against contemporary Chinese Buddhism, and also a rejection of it. Coming from India, he must have felt this very keenly.

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Nisbitani: When he came to China the so-called "irregular sages" like Fudaishi and Shikō, people who didn't rise to distinction by giving scholarly discourses in Buddhist temples. . . .

Shibayama: Who were not lecturer-priests. . . .

Nisbitani: A type of Buddhist whose way of "lecturing," for instance, could astonish the Emperor Wu. Such people were thus already creating a tradition as a sort of irregular sage.

Shibayama: Such people were there in the background.

Nisbitani: Conditions existed which made it possible for Bodhidharma at least to some extent to be understood.

Shibayama: Which rather enabled him to utilize his teaching much more effectively.

Trukamoto: Your talking about "irregular sages" brought to mind the Japanese *bijiri* sages who appeared in the aristocratic Buddhism of the Heian period in Japan. These were men who realized that Mount Hiei or Mount Kōya or the Tōdaiji in Nara were not places for true self-discipline, and after having renounced the world once, had to renounce it again, and leave the monasteries. Kūya Shōnin (903-972) is an example. Those people were called *bijiri* (sage). A current of genuinely religious-minded people of such persuasion had existed all along in the history of that period, and from it Hōnen, Shinran, and Nichiren later emerged. A lineage of "sages" similar to this probably existed in China around the time of Bodhidharma.

3. *The Characteristics of the Sixth Patriarch's Zen*

Shibayama: Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch, still possessed a considerable Indian coloring. And the features of Zen until about the time of the Fifth Patriarch Gunin (Hung-jen, 601-674), although manifesting more and more the Chinese cultural and philosophical background, are still with some remaining Indian influences, however slight. The Sixth Patriarch Enō (Hui-neng, 638-713) was in no sense a scholarly priest. He was a young man of genius without any academic education, and I think that this produced a result of his giving great life to Zen. As great a genius as he was, if he had been educated, such a straightforward originality probably could not have developed in him. With education and learning some smell of speculation and learning is inevitable. Fortunately, the Sixth Patriarch possessed only

a rich endowment. Moreover, it was a time when things other than learning were in great demand. An uneducated man with deep religious experience, Enō was able to manifest his own personal experience directly and without hesitation. One can even say that almost all the uniquely original Zen expressions were uttered by the Sixth Patriarch. Being uneducated, he was able to stick closely to himself and to the actualities of life—he didn't have the weakness of the intellectual.

Nisbitani: I have the same opinion. In connection with this there is the fact—Dr. Suzuki pointed it out too—that Jinshū's (Shen-hsiu) Northern School of Zen stresses meditation most among the so-called Three Learnings (precepts, meditation, and wisdom), and Enō's Southern School asserts that "long sitting without lying" and the like, done to calm the mind, is useless. His standpoint emphasizes the importance of wisdom more than meditation.

Shibayama: Generally speaking, the Northern School of Zen believed that wisdom was attained after practice; first practice and then wisdom. The commonsense view, we might say. Enō, on the other hand, said right out that meditation and wisdom were one and the same.

Nisbitani: Enō speaks of "sudden enlightenment."

Shibayama: Yes. So if one practices and then attains wisdom, that form of enlightenment is gradual. In sudden enlightenment, meditation and wisdom are equal. When experience is attained, both meditation and wisdom are one. This is "sudden enlightenment."

Nisbitani: What is interesting is the fact that the so-called cultured people or intellectuals generally tend to enter Zen through meditation. Probably feeling that ordinary knowledge will not do, they attach importance to self-discipline and through it endeavor to attain true enlightenment. In contrast, those who have no learning or who from the beginning want to have nothing to do with learning—an uncultivated man like Enō, for instance—take a stand stressing wisdom or the standpoint that meditation and wisdom are equal. That is very interesting. In some sense it appears paradoxical, but it's very interesting.

Shibayama: "Wisdom" is emphasized as including "meditation." It isn't wisdom against meditation. Meditation and wisdom are equal. If anything, a little more weight is put on wisdom. That may be the right way to put it. There is something else in the historical background mentioned before;

the story that Bodhidharma selected the four-fascicle *Lankavatara Sutra* to give to disciples. If this story is true, the *Lankavatara Sutra* should have assumed a role as the authoritative scripture of Zen. Yet Enō clearly advocated the *Diamond Sutra*, belonging to the Prajñā-pāramitā sutras. The Fifth Patriarch leaned somewhat toward the Prajñā-pāramitā sutras too. One of the reasons for this was that the study of sutras and lectures on them involve theories which are generally highly abstruse, but the Prajñā-pāramitā sutras are very direct. They simply assert the idea of Emptiness.

Tsukamoto: I see.

Shibayama: Dr. Suzuki has written that the *Lankavatara* is a kind of notebook or miscellany of Mahayana Buddhism—it contains everything. I think he also says that when Bodhidharma transmitted it to his disciples, he probably selected it because at its center was the idea of “self-awakened sacred wisdom.” We can’t be sure whether this was the reasoning or not, but the fact that within the same Mahayana thought the Chinese interest shifted from complicated concepts such as those in the *Lankavatara Sutra* to the Prajñā-pāramitā thought probably indicates the existence of an inclination toward more simplicity in the historical current of that age.

Nisbitani: One reason is that simplification was very difficult in India where philosophical reasoning of a highly speculative and theoretical character prevailed. They tried to somehow synthesize and consolidate thoughts from various different standpoints, at the same time making the fundamental basis a concept like “self-awakened sacred wisdom.” The *Lankavatara* seems to contain a reflection of such circumstances, and Bodhidharma, being an Indian, valued that character in the sutra. But when it was introduced into China where the whole mental climate was altogether different, the Chinese found they favored something more straightforward, and gradually turned to the Prajñā-pāramitā sutras.

Shibayama: To something concrete and simple at the same time.

Nisbitani: Such a situation seems to have gradually developed during the period from Bodhidharma to the Sixth Patriarch.

Shibayama: There is another thing I would like Professor Tsukamoto to speak about. The Chinese thought of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu also has in a sense an Oriental or Zen flavor, I think, and it constitutes an ingredient in the Chinese cultural climate. The Sixth Patriarch appeared in such a climate.

I believe that the foundations for the Zen school that followed were laid by the Sixth Patriarch.

Tsukamoto: Yes.

Shibayama: And that style of Zen which was to develop later into the use of the staff or the Katz, which can be called an "action-Zen" rejecting all thought not directly connected with actual life—in which even raising a finger or clearing the throat can become Zen, where the "whole body is perfect Truth"—such an elaboration of the Zen style is thought to be in a sense a kind of progress. Possibly, however, it is already a commentary—based on real experience—of the Sixth Patriarch's Zen. That elaboration was brought to perfection on the groundwork laid by Enō's Zen. This took place during the T'ang dynasty.

That's why I think the Sixth Patriarch was an extraordinary figure even in the history of Zen. On the surface, he is not so colorful as Hyakujō (Po-chang), Nansen (Nan-chüan), or Rinzai (Lin-chi). He still has slightly academic tinges. But historically he was the one who laid the foundations for the T'ang dynasty Zen that took up his legacy and gave it a final elaboration to become truly Chinese, freed of any Indian cast at all.

4. *The New Buddhist Movement Following the Suppression of Buddhism in the Northern Chou Dynasty*

Tsukamoto: What had been a very small school during Bodhidharma's time became gradually more active and at last came to full flower. I think there was a historical condition which provided the opportunity for that growth. Neither Bodhidharma nor his disciple Eka (Hui-k'o) were accepted by the academic and cultural Buddhist circles of the time. Rather, they were persecuted. In short, theirs was a proud isolation. The first to the third Chinese Zen Patriarchs, however, proceeded ahead rapidly in the firm conviction that this was the true Buddhism. Just at that time the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534) of northern China, where Bodhidharma first went, split into two parts, east and west, and a tense life and death struggle ensued with northern China divided much like Vietnam today. Emperor Wu of Chou, the western country, which had its capital in Changan, decided to destroy his neighbor and bring about unity at one stroke. He tried various means. First of all, he started a movement for the consolidation of his subjects'

thought. He argued that Buddhism should cooperate and join hands with Confucianism and Taoism, which were then flourishing. This led to great debate.

Just at that time a monk came to Changan from Szechuan across the plank road of Shu, bringing with him an astonishing message: "Your Buddhism is not true Buddhism. The Buddhist organization is monopolized by a small number of men and the great mass of monks are no more than common laborers. Mahayana Buddhism is Bodhisattva Buddhism, the original Buddhism of Sakyamuni which aims at realizing the equality of universal compassion (*karuna*) in the whole of society. Your present organization is merely a gathering of selfish priests. It would be better to destroy it. True Buddhism is not realized in the construction of temples and pagodas. The whole country, the entire land, is the temple. There is no need to make a distinction between the high priests of rank and the mass of priests without it. According to the sutras Sakyamuni said on his deathbed that Buddhism thereafter should be entrusted to the king. Therefore, if the present emperor would realize an equal and impartial benevolence over his country, he is in effect Buddha; he is a present-day Sakyamuni. Let the emperor accomplish this. Select the wisest ministers and the bravest generals and let them consider how the country should realize compassionate equality throughout the land. If each member of the nation attains his proper place, the general public are Buddhist priests. Their country as it is is one Mahayana temple. Therefore, temples and pagodas and tonsured priests are all needless. The country, as it is, can become 'One Great Temple of Broad Equality.' This is the true realization of Sakyamuni's teachings." That was the strange proposal this priest made.

Emperor Wu took a hint from this. He made preparations to arm his country in haste without being noticed by his neighbor. The best way for him to do this was the collection of metal. All those corrupt temples should be abolished; all bells and other metal objects in the temples should be recovered and turned into weapons, or into farm implements to help raise farm production. He also said it was nonsense for monks and nuns to remain unmarried, so he ordered them to return to secular life and marry, "to be fruitful and multiply." But he said he didn't want to destroy Buddhism, he only wanted to realize true Mahayana Buddhism, the original Buddhism

of Sakyamuni. Under such pretexts, both Buddhist and Taoist temples were destroyed, and national institutes for the study of religion were built in their place, where Buddhism and Taoism were to be studied and religiously-inclined people were to be selected and employed as officials. Members were obliged to wear full court dress and wear official headwear on their unshaved heads. This was his peculiar way of abolishing Buddhism and rejecting its teachings.

Nisbitani: It was the time of the Second Zen Patriarch Eka, wasn't it?

Tsukamoto: Right after his time. Emperor Wu won the war and united the whole of northern China; and he continued his movement to abolish Buddhism in the newly united country. Thus, for a space of six or seven years Buddhism was completely swept out in northern China, although in reality there was a latent desire among the people for the revival of the religion. Then Emperor Wu died. The emperor of the following Sui dynasty was a maternal relative of his and had been an officer in his army. This was just at the turning point in Japanese national policy when Prince Shōtoku dispatched the first envoys to the Sui court, a practice that continued on into the T'ang dynasty, and sent Japanese students to China to study at national expense.

The revival took place at this time. An edict ordering the revival of religion was issued the year the Sui dynasty was established. The first emperor was a deep Buddhist believer. He built temples one after another and encouraged the copying of sutras. There was a sudden resurgence of activity. Priests who had concealed themselves came back to the priesthood. These priests were of two kinds. There were those who aimed at worldly fame in the religious hierarchy, taking advantage of the government's promotion of Buddhism; or who thought they could become scholars and gather large numbers of followers with their lectures. This was a revival of the old Buddhism. But there were also those who reflected on the reasons for the suppression and frankly admitted the corruption of the Buddhist organization. They believed Buddhism had to be centered around the Bodhisattva ideal, with its idea of compassion for all and the value of all men equally.

The activities of the second group of priests tended again in two directions. Already Bodhidharma, as well as Eka, though rejected by society,

had been committing themselves to serious practice in search of truth, believing that theirs was the only way to approach Sakyamuni. Now there were people of the same faith as these predecessors, and it was they who recognized the importance of Zen. They went forward with the conviction of men possessing something very special—Dr. Suzuki calls this “spirituality”—by which they could attain Buddhahood.

Shibayama: A sort of “New Buddhism,” wasn’t it?

Tsukamoto: Anyway a practical Buddhism. Its adherents believed that the new Buddhism should turn toward practice, not scholarship. If it remained the same old scholarly Buddhism, there would always be the possibility of another suppression. In contrast to that direction, there was another movement. It held that although men could truly be said to possess the Buddha-nature and the possibility of attaining Buddhahood, in actuality, they couldn’t help thinking it impossible to realize it. No matter how much they disciplined themselves the actualities of life in this world made Buddhahood impossible to attain. Moreover, contemporary society was absorbed in the pursuit of worldly fame and profit. It wasn’t a place for cultivating spirituality. This was their idea. Among them was a priest, somewhat of an intellectual and with a burning religious zeal, named Shingyō (Hsin-hsing, d. 581). He established the “Three Stage Teaching” (三階教). He became a priest and received the full two hundred and fifty precepts, but feeling that he could not carry them out in practice, and not wanting to commit the grave evil of violating them, he gave them up before he could violate them. He relinquished his status as a priest and became a *sramanera*, committed to upholding only the partial precepts. In this role he served the world as a mark of his compassion. He also claimed that we could not single out the Buddha as a special object of worship; we should pay homage to all men because all men are destined to become Buddhas in the future. There are evil demons in the world, but, he said, they were really Demon-Buddhas that gave man encouragement, promoting his practice by acting as obstacles to it. He took a standpoint of making no discriminations and worshipping all things everywhere. In his thought he adopted the idea of the Latter Day (eschatological) Dharma. Actually seeing in his lifetime the suppression of Buddhism and the rejection of Sakyamuni’s teachings, he was convinced that the times were such that man could do nothing about them.

Thus he followed the division of religious time into the three periods: the period of the right Dharma, the period of the decline of the Dharma when enlightenment becomes impossible, and the latter day period of the degeneration and extinction of the Dharma. Because of this, his teaching was called the Three Stage Teaching.

There was another priest who was Shingyō's junior and who like him returned to secular life when Buddhism was suppressed. This was Dōshaku (Tao-ch'ō, 562-645), who held that the Pure Land school with its single practice of nembutsu was the proper sect of Buddhism for China in the latter days of the Dharma. He himself was a nembutsu practitioner. He was the uneducated son of a poor peasant family in Shanhsi province. That is why he isn't even included in the *History of Eminent Priests*—because he was a peasant's son. He was born at a military outpost. Poor families, exposed to the perils of war and famine, often turned their children over to monasteries. There was even an imperial edict issued to promote it. So Dōshaku's parents sent him to a temple to give him a chance in life. But with the suppression of Buddhism and the ruin of his country in the war, he was forced to go into hiding. He now came out and entered the priesthood for a second time. In his case, the object of his mission was the peasantry. His native place was—and still is today—a very poor peasant society. He decided to enter into such an environment and live among the people whom the war had impoverished. He preached that the only thing children, old people, or even illiterates can do is place their reliance on the one Buddha. In this way he started the practice of reciting the name of Amida. This was the source of the Pure Land School. A pupil of this peasant priest, Zendō (Shan-tao, 613-681), gave elaboration to his teacher's teaching and made his way to the capital at Changan where he had a very active career. This happened about the start of the T'ang dynasty when Zen was just beginning to make progress.

Nisbitani: If I'm not mistaken, the Third Zen Patriarch Sōsan (Seng-ts'an, d. 606) ran up against this suppression too, and is said to have hidden himself in the mountains—though little is actually known about his life, I understand. Did the Sixth Patriarch live in the same period as Zendō?

Tsukamoto: A little later perhaps. In the same general period.

5. *The Indigenization of Buddhism in China*

Nisbitani: Besides Enō and Zendō, great figures like Genjō (Hsuan-chang, 600–664), and Hōzō (Fa-ts'ang, 643–712) of the Kegon (Hua-yen) school appeared in this period and were active within the doctrinal schools. The Pure Land teaching began to prosper thanks to Zendō. Zen flourished with the Sixth Patriarch. It seems to me that this constitutes a peak in Chinese Buddhist history.

Tsukamoto: Chinese Buddhism got free from India and took firm root in China.

Nisbitani: What we today would call the “indigenization” of Chinese Buddhism.

Tsukamoto: It was also its systematization.

Nisbitani: It seems to me that Sōsan's *Sbinjinmei* (“On the Believing Mind”) has a number of expressions which are deeply reminiscent of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu.

Shibayama: Compared with that of the Sixth Patriarch and after, I think the Zen of Sōsan's time does still reflect something of their thought. Then comes the time of the collapse of the existing religious order with the historical background described by Professor Tsukamoto. And when the suppression ended, many religious schools and many great men appeared. Zen, too, entirely freed of Indian elements, emerged as one path for this new Buddhism. Having started from an altogether fresh standpoint, wasn't it inevitable that Zen became more Chinese?

Nisbitani: Therefore the abolition of Buddhism just discussed greatly aided the indigenization of Zen in China.

Tsukamoto: Yes, very much.

Nisbitani: At the same time, Taoism and elements of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu came forward freely. Different from the logical and difficult speculations of Indian thought, their philosophy was intuitive and phenomenal. In Buddhism, aspects of the *Prajñā-pāramitā* sutras are noticeably present. These two different aspects seem to come together.

Shibayama: But the thought of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu still had a considerable philosophical element. Philosophy in a different sense from the Indian—a Chinese philosophy.

Nisbitani: I get the same impression from the *Sbinjinmei*.

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Sbibayama: The Zen of the Sixth Patriarch and after, however, was free of all that and the reality of life itself was affirmed in a very thoroughgoing manner.

Nisbitani: The Sixth Patriarch was from Kuang-chou province in southern China, a culturally backward area. There's a dialogue between him and the Fifth Patriarch. . .

Sbibayama: When Enō first met the Fifth Patriarch and was asked where he had come from, he said he had come from Ling-nan. Then he was asked why he had come. He answered right out, "I came to become a Buddha," that is, to attain true peace of mind. The Fifth Patriarch answered, "The savage tribes of Ling-nan have no Buddha-nature." Enō said that there might be north or south among men, but there was no north or south in the Buddha-nature. The Patriarch said, "You're a sensible fellow." Although he probably looked a little like a monkey from the mountains of Ling-nan, he must have appeared to have some good points, for he was told to go to work in the rice-pounding shed.

Nisbitani: What you said about Dōshaku can perhaps give us a hint about the process this indigenization followed. The Northern School of Zen grew up in the cities, the centers where culture was highly developed, but then when it encountered a severe setback, uncultured countrymen like Dōshaku, a poor peasant, and the Sixth Patriarch, who was said to be a woodcutter, appeared. From men like them a new Buddhism emerged, and this brought about the naturalization of Chinese Buddhism.

Sbibayama: Isn't that in a sense characteristic of China?

Nisbitani: Yes, the truly Chinese characteristic. That characteristic was able to emerge during the time of the Sixth Patriarch, and the broad basis for the future development of Zen was established. The Pure Land teaching too seems to have reached a key point with the emergence of Zendō.

Tsukamoto: Indeed.

Nisbitani: Since Chigi (Chih-i, 538–597) of the Tendai school belonged to the Sui dynasty, he was a bit earlier than the Sixth Patriarch. Hōzō (Fats'ang) of the Kegon school appeared at approximately the same time as Enō, at the beginning of the T'ang.

Tsukamoto: They came in succession, one right after the other.

Nisbitani: Genjō, too. Teachings such as the Hossō, Tendai, and Kegon—

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profound systems of religious philosophy which can be regarded as a philosophical Buddhism peculiar to China—developed approximately at the same period. Therefore, while on the one hand new things appeared from the complete denial of the intellectual's standpoint, there was on the other hand great progress on the intellectual side too. There were these two sides, weren't there?

Trukamoto: Yes.

Nisbitani: As a whole, I think the situation was very good. In Zen, for instance, among many eminent masters who came forward later, men such as Tokusan, Rinzai, Tōzan, there were hardly any who gave themselves to Zen from the start.

Sbibayama: That's right.

Nisbitani: They all attended lectures at the lecture institutes and studied Buddhist doctrine.

Sbibayama: It was called "making a tour of the lecture institutes."

Nisbitani: Were the lectures held in temples?

Trukamoto: Yes, probably.

Nisbitani: This continued for many years. Five or six hundred people would assemble together, like classes in today's large universities. Lectures were given on various sutras and treatises, the *Nirvana Sutra*, *Diamond Sutra*, *Avatamsaka Sutra* and so on. They made a kind of pilgrimage around to these lectures and such a way of learning became very popular. But those who were not satisfied with that went into Zen. In the later Zen masters such was very often the case. There were many such people.

Sbibayama: Yes, I think that was the general tendency of T'ang Buddhism.

Nisbitani: From the Zen standpoint, learning through lectures is in a sense like that "evil Demon-Buddha" mentioned before—necessary in order to be overcome. It must constantly have played such a role.

Trukamoto: The Buddhist establishment in China was on a grander scale than in Japan. One reason for this was the existence in the Buddhist organization of an ordered system for the precepts. When a monk was authorized as a priest, he got a special government certificate. Then he began "wandering." He went around the country visiting teachers. This continued for several years. In a country as large as China with different cultures in different areas, there were distinguished priests far and near, so a priest travel-

led about for three years or five years, visiting temples and listening to lectures. This was the first step a priest had to take. It widened his perspective and gave him the insight to select the sutras that suited him. Some would elect Tendai studies, some turn to the Disciplinary sects, and some take up practical Buddhism. The fact this kind of system existed in China is one thing to be considered. The other is the following:

As Professor Nishitani has said, the time of the Sixth Patriarch, Zendō, Genjō, and Hōzō, was a peak. The T'ang dynasty, having overthrown the Sui, rapidly consolidated its power and became a world empire like that of Rome. It corresponds somewhat to the Meiji-Taishō period in Japan. It covered the reigns of two emperors, Tai Tsung and Kao Tsung. The country was alive with an overflowing vitality working for the creation of the great T'ang empire. It was then that Genjō came back from India and was welcomed as one with the latest knowledge. But right after this, Kao Tsung, the third emperor, died, and his wife, Empress Wu, gradually gained control and overthrew the T'ang. The continuity of the dynasty was for a time interrupted. During this time of interruption people began to appear who circulated all kinds of mysterious tales. They used the most influential organization as a vehicle for their propaganda—that organization was the Buddhist church. Such people appeared among the Buddhists. They forged sutras such as the *Ta-yün ching* and many others that have been discovered at Tun-huang. They had Sakyamuni state in this sutra that in the Latter-day of the Dharma the heavenly Bodhisattva Maitreya would appear on earth as an empress to bring peace to the world; and this empress, they said, was the Empress Wu. So naturally the Empress Wu worked greatly to protect Buddhism. But people in the far south, away from the cultural centers in the large cities, were shocked to learn of these developments. This was the situation at the time of the Sixth Patriarch. Therefore he did not come when Empress Wu sent for him.

After that came the restoration under the T'ang Emperor Huan Tsung. In his later years, however, he fell under the extravagant influences of his beautiful concubine Yang Kuei Fei, and the central government was finally taken over by the rebels led by An Lu-shan. The Emperor was forced to flee to Szechuan. Changan society fell into utter confusion and people were at a loss, not knowing who to turn to for leadership. It was

just at this time that Jinne (Shen-hui, 668–780), a disciple of the Sixth Patriarch, came up from the south. He made a frontal attack on the Zen in Changan and Loyang and declared that his teacher Enō's Zen was the true Zen. Historical events such as these became powerful factors that greatly promoted the fortunes of Zen.

6. *Jinne and the Southern School of Zen*

Shibayama: Jinne had two reasons for advocating Enō's Zen and attacking Jinshū's Northern School. I mentioned the first reason before, that is, he believed sudden enlightenment in which meditation and wisdom are equal was the true Zen. Secondly, he contended that Hui-neng's succession was the rightful one, that is, he was in possession of the Fifth Patriarch's robe and bowl. As for the robe and bowl, my general opinion is this: Since Zen cannot be transmitted through writing or speech but only through experience, the certification of one's master is important, but it is not always necessary for this certification to involve transmission of the master's robe and bowl to the disciple. The master can just say that his disciple has reached attainment. I personally feel that transmitting such objects as a means of certification is rather meaningless and that it is more Zen-like to do without it. But the Sixth Patriarch's case was an exception. He was a young twenty-four year old monk from a rude country area. Certification by some such tangible means was necessary to give proof that he was now a full-fledged master in his own right. That's why Gunin gave him his robe and bowl. I think that Jinshū received no such articles because such certification was not necessary for him. However, Jinne had learning and seems to have been as voluble as he was talented. So he took up this problem.

Since it was a fact that Enō possessed the robe and bowl, Jinne said that the true Sixth Patriarch was rightfully his master Enō and not Jinshū. Here his argument is perfectly logical. As for the content of the teaching, he asserted sudden enlightenment, the oneness of meditation and wisdom, as against the idea of meditation first and wisdom after. This in itself suggests he was right.

To this he added the question of the legitimacy of succession. Giving these reasons, Jinne claimed that Jinshū of the Northern School was not *the* Sixth Patriarch. He was *a* Sixth Patriarch, in the sense that he was a disciple of

the Fifth Patriarch, but not the one in the legitimate lineage. This question decided the future of the Zen school. Since the Jinne line was creating, as it were, the history of the Enō line, I am afraid it became more or less distorted because of their attacks on the Northern School; although Jinne must certainly have been a very remarkable person for having achieved what he did.

Trukamoto: Jinne, who you described as being a man "ready with words and actions," was at the same time a very shrewd and enterprising fellow, whose achievements from the standpoint of T'ang history were of national importance.

When Changan and Loyang fell into the rebels' hands, war funds were needed for their recovery. The resources of the Imperial house were almost nonexistent. Among the various means they tried to raise funds was one to collect money (called "perfume money") from priests by selling them licenses to preach. Jinne collected a large amount of such money by canvassing among the ruins of Loyang and Changan. In other terms, this also meant a great increase in his own disciples. Through him hundreds and thousands of people suddenly became priests, and his faction grew into a very large organization. Jinne had the insight to understand the times and the talent to adapt himself to them.

7. *Developments After the Sixth Patriarch*

Sbibayama: Historically, the Zen of the Sixth Patriarch developed from his three disciples Nangaku (Nan-yüeh, 677-744), Seigen (Ch'ing-yüan, d. 740), and Jinne into three branches. I feel the reason neither Nangaku or Seigen were so conspicuous as Jinne is because they rather valued experience and believed in cultivating themselves through actual practice. The Nangaku line had a very dynamic style which later developed into the Zen of the Rinzai school, and the Seigen was moderate and steady, later developing into the Zen of the Sōtō school. Jinne, being the kind of man he was, tended to a synthesis of learning and Zen. Keihō Shūmitsu (Kuei-feng Tsung-mi, 780-841), who is one of the greatest philosophers of Zen, belonged to Jinne's faction. The Zen of the Sixth Patriarch branched out in the above three streams and thereby drove back the Zen of the Northern

school. In this, Jinne opened the hostilities and was responsible for fixing the general course.

Nisbitani: Enō's Zen was transmitted in one direction to his pupil Nangaku and from him to his follower Baso (Ma-tsu, 709–788).

Shibayama: From Baso to Hyakujō (Po-chang, 720–814), and from him to Ōbaku (Huang-po, d. 850).

Nisbitani: From Seigen's line appeared Sekitō Kisen (Shih-t'ou Hsi-ch'ien, 700–790). During the time of Baso and Sekitō Zen underwent a remarkable development. The whole of China was being gradually overwhelmed by its influence.

Tsukamoto: Yes, such a period came.

Shibayama: Of the three branches, Jinne's Zen gradually died out after Shūmitsu. In short, the line that was influenced by learning died out, and the ones without this influence but with deep personal experience flourished. Of these, the line descended from Seigen, which was destined to develop into the Sōtō school, was more tranquil and less prone to action. In contrast, the line descended from Nangaku through Hyakujō to Rinzai was the action-Zen that for a time dominated China. Sōtō Zen became enfeebled to the point that the author of the *Record of the Orthodox Dharma Transmission* (傳法正宗記) said it was "like a spring of water trickling out under a parched sky." At one time Sōtō Zen so declined that a priest of the Rinzai sect took charge of it, there being no suitable Sōtō priests to carry it on. The reason the action-oriented Rinzai Zen flourished in China is due, I think, to the cultural climate, which could produce someone like Enō, and where while things like sutra-lectures developed, on the other hand a practical aspect emerged that could immediately affirm Zen as everyday life itself and discard everything else. Rinzai's Zen thus predominated for a long time.

One cannot receive the reality of life as it is unless one has the depth to affirm that reality. Such a penetrating depth has the power to give life to everything, and this has a captivation for people. Doesn't man have this side? He aspires greatly in intellectual and ethical directions as well, but I believe that this first aspect is especially strong—when we are considering the naked human being.

Nisbitani: There are many religions but none with that kind of deep penetration. Perhaps that is something attracting people to Zen now. . . .

Sbibayama: Others must also go that far, if they are truly to be called religions. Zen boldly tells the truth without holding anything back. This may be its attraction.

Nisbitani: Rinzai himself certainly has great appeal as a human being, and someone like Jōshū (Chao-chou, 778–897) also has it. What is it really?

Sbibayama: Jōshū's character is somewhat different from Rinzai's. He does not directly assert himself in pointblank action like Rinzai does, but a penetrating sharpness comes through in his words. Rinzai immediately uses the Katz! or breaks out in some action, but Jōshū was the kind of person who achieved that with words, extremely brief words that took people by surprise.

Nisbitani: And his words have nothing theoretical. . . .

Sbibayama: Not at all.

Nisbitani: There is something appealing, words emerging without fixing on anything.

Sbibayama: Yes.

Nisbitani: There is one other thing. It concerns Zen in general. The dialogue (*mondō*) form made a great development. This was destined to combine with the Zen koan. I believe that Zen dialogues must have had great significance within the whole of Buddhism. Different from the dialogues that take place in schools or elsewhere, these were direct body attacks.

Sbibayama: Like two swordsmen fighting with real swords.

Nisbitani: It must have had the same essential significance for both the Rinzai and Sōtō schools. Isn't there, so to speak, a theorizing element in the *mondō*, or at least some "thread of reason" in the give and take?

Sbibayama: That thread of reason is not the usual way of logical reasoning. It concerns instead whether this or that touches the essential source or not. A *mondō* that touches this essence is a good *mondō*. Whether this or that penetrates through the very center or not decides whether the *mondō* works or not.

Nisbitani: Can't we say this. In *mondō*, there are various different things to be considered, and they boil down to two different attitudes. One, represented by the Sōtō school, is minute—it minutely probes into the reason of this or that problem treated in the *mondō*.

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Sbibayama: There is such an approach, for it emerges from the human being himself.

Nisbitani: The other is the direct body attack of one man against another, one to one.

Sbibayama: In the T'ang period people began to speak about the characteristics of the different schools. This did not occur immediately after Enō, but it did later. Disciples inherited the special characteristics of their master. Groups of disciples began to appear and they succeeded to their master's religious style. Therefore the different characteristics of the various branches or schools are naturally noticeable in the *mondo* as well. The underlying reason of the *mondo* passes through the heart or essence, but even so each person would manifest a different flavor in the manner of his expression.

Nisbitani: Each one's attitude is different.

Sbibayama: While each has a different nuance, still it must pass through the center to be a Zen *mondo*.

Tsukamoto: I see. As a historian of Chinese Buddhism listening to you explain about Zen *mondo*, I think, as you say, that even regarding the idea of dialogue, it was Zen that brought about a total change in the character of Buddhism. What I mean is that lectures on Buddhist sutras in China always took the form of discussions in which the questioner and answerer faced each other. A monk in his tour of study came to a lecturer, and a dialogue began. He would ask questions, cross-examining the other. When these discussions were really flourishing, sometimes outsiders in the audience would attack both sides of the discussion, like the travelling swordsmen did in feudal Japan. In the exchanges, a person would usually try to defeat his opponent by demonstrating his erudition, quoting phrases from sutras which the other person was not likely to know, saying, "This sutra says so and so." This, however, changed later through Zen, where dialogue is a throwing of one mind against another on the actual ground of man's true self. A great change thus took place in the way Buddhist problems were handled.

Sbibayama: It didn't matter if the other person understood or not, a man fought it out by directly displaying the strength of his attainment. This is something that seems to have emerged at this time.

Tsukamoto: It really was a great change.

8. *The Zen World of the Late Southern Sung*

Nisbitani: Let us turn the subject to the period from the late T'ang through the Five Dynasties and especially the beginning of the Sung, when Zen, as you mentioned briefly before, began to undergo a change. . . .

Sbibayama: This is seen even in the *mondo*. When we come to the Sung a great many literary expressions begin to appear in Zen, and the *mondo* get rather abstruse. The *mondo* of the T'ang are agreeably curt—sometimes they don't even become dialogues. All Gutei did was raise a finger without saying a word. But in the Sung period expressions in these dialogues became very literary, and I think this dulls the style. Literarily there is a great heightening.

Nisbitani: When did this tendency appear?

Sbibayama: It took place gradually beginning from the time of the Sung and reached a peak about when the *Hekiganroku* appeared, the time of Setchō (Hsueh-tou, 980-1052). This tendency to literary refinement carried on into the Southern Sung dynasty as well, and I think Zen in the latter part of the Southern Sung finally became sapped of its essential strength. Depth of practical experience grew less and less.

Trukamoto: It gradually became formalized, didn't it?

Sbibayama: So a book like Mumon's (Wu-men, 1185-1260) *Mumonkan* appeared. In the *Hekiganroku* Setchō holds up his Zen experience this way and that, playing around with it with a kind of pleasure, but in the later *Mumonkan*, Mumon has a slightly didactic tendency—he gives words of the old Zen masters and indicates that they are to be taken in such and such a way. It has the character of a textbook. That indicates that the actual Zen experience itself had become less penetrating. Zen had become that obtuse. In the following dynasty, the Yüan (1280-1368), Zen took a sharp downward turn—the immediate experience became more and more dulled.

Now the Chinese Zen Japanese monks brought back in the Kamakura period (1185-1333) was the Zen of the late Southern Sung. What I believe is this, and I would like to have your opinions about it. Looking at Japanese Zen masters such as Daiō, Shōichi, Eisai, and Dōgen, I feel that they were greater than the Chinese Zen masters at the end of the Southern Sung. Figuratively speaking, they received something worth eight or nine and made it a value

of ten. How, then, did Japanese Zen come to excel that of its Chinese teachers? One reason is that the men who went to China to study Zen were all great men—Eisai, Dōgen, and Shōichi were all personalities of the highest order in Japan at that time. Another reason concerns language. No matter what their caliber was, if their study had been the Buddhism of scholarly lectures on sutras their language handicap would soon have become a problem. But in Zen study which involves experience it is different, given the right man. The language handicap can rather prove a blessing. It can allow the religious experience to attain even greater depth and breadth. Tell me what you think about this.

Nisbitani: I somehow feel the same way. Chinese Zen in that period was in an overripe stage.

Shibayama: Yes. It was more than overripe—it was dull. . . .

Nisbitani: At any rate, it went as far as it could go. Culturally, it became something quite remarkable, and produced many highly cultured people. The students from Japan did not think of catching up with such an overripe culture at all—there is really no way they could have. Setting aside the later periods of Japanese Zen, the period of the Gozan literature and the like, at least in the beginning, the attitude of Japanese monks was quite different. Their aspiration for truth was purer. They put their whole being into the religious quest.

Shibayama: The voyage to China and back was itself a life and death matter.

Nisbitani: It must have been their youthfulness, like T'ang Zen.

Shibayama: Yes, just like the T'ang. The Kamakura period also was when many new Buddhist sects appeared in Japan.

Nisbitani: The students brought back only the most important part of Chinese Buddhism.

Shibayama: When Zen at the end of the Sung dynasty is compared with that at the beginning of the Kamakura period, I cannot help feeling the latter was superior. After giving thought to the various causes involved in this I came to view the matter as I have explained it. No one else seems to have said this, so I wonder about it.

Nisbitani: Chinese Zen at that time had, shall we say, theoretical minuteness to a high degree and a high level of culture. That made it difficult for the

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original standpoint of Zen to come forth simply and straightforwardly, although of course it was at work in the background.

Shibayama: In that respect it had become dulled.

Tsukamoto: Chinese Zen priests gradually changed from plain seekers of truth to priest-poets and priest-artists at about the time you just mentioned, didn't they. On the other hand, a Zen culture was developed as a new aspect in Zen.

Shibayama: Culturally, something was created, I think.

Nisbitani: We can say that this had great meaning from the standpoint of culture as a whole, but I think there is, after all, a problem from the standpoint of Zen proper. There is another problem, one which has involved Japanese Zen, too. It concerns the period when the tension between the "silent illumination" of the Sōtō sect and the koan study of the Rinzai sect developed.

Shibayama: That was the Southern Sung.

Nisbitani: When it began, Zen began to split. There is a problem there.

Shibayama: Zen was brought more or less to perfection in the T'ang period. Since then, as generations of disciples tended to continue in the Zen style of their masters, Zen became more conservative and cultured. Strictly speaking, when considering "Zen style" during the T'ang dynasty, we find that each individual master took on the character of a founder. But later, in the twelfth century when Maigan Chishō (Hui-yen Chih-chao) wrote about the characteristics of the five Zen schools in his work *The Eye of Gods and Men* (人天眼目), the style was no longer regarded as being the character of the individual master, but rather as the character of the heritage of an entire school. I think this signifies that Zen became more established in form and that its vitality was weakened. In the Southern Sung there was a desire for revival, so discipline in practice had to become very strict. But then what happened is that those belonging to the Sōtō sect began to advocate Sōtō-style practice and those of the Rinzai sect a Rinzai practice. The former is a silent and tranquil meditation which tends to represent the eternally subsisting "original enlightenment." They try to grasp practical experience so as to put forth one total world. The latter throws aside all such meditative matters and tries to affirm the Zen experience so as to transcend even the One, and to step out again in movement and action.

Since they thought that without self-awakening this was impossible, the way of Rinzai Zen centered around self-awakening, which is reflected in the practice. That practice became the subject of vigorous argument and its methods well defined may be indications that Zen was on the decline.

Nisbitani: I somehow get the same feeling. In Japanese Zen today there is a much more distinct division between the Rinzai school and the Sōtō school than there was in China. This, in some sense, is a tendency which embodies the kind of disunity present in that period of decline. At the beginning neither Dōgen or his followers probably had any clear sect consciousness. But gradually the break-up into different schools became more pronounced, as if the tendency of the low period of Chinese Zen had been brought over and expanded in Japan.

Shibayama: The opposition during the Southern Sung between Daie's (1089–1163) koan Zen and Wanshi's (1091–1157) silent meditation Zen emerged as a trend in Japan as well.

Nisbitani: And, as you say, these Zen schools divided following the different emphases in the manner of their religious practice. This was a rather unfortunate turn of events, and yet it has been continued in Japan as is, and the gap seems to become even more extensive.

Shibayama: When it ought rather to go back to the way it was before the division.

Tsukamoto: That's certainly true.

Nisbitani: Was it because there was such a problem inherent in Zen, or did it come about because of Zen's decline?

Shibayama: Rather, the differences lie within human beings themselves—in the same way some tend toward the Pure Land teaching and some toward Zen. I think, therefore, that when the central core weakens the outer form becomes stronger and more self-assertive. When that happens, it is not a good tendency.

9. *The Problem of Nembutsu Zen*

Tsukamoto: After the T'ang dynasty, the doctrinal development of Chinese Buddhism or the synthetic development of Buddhist scholarship flagged, and Zen and Nembutsu came to be included in the program of daily practice in the temples. In pre-communist China, most Chinese temples claimed

filiation to Rinzai Zen. Plaques, for example, declared that the head priest was so many generations removed from Rinzai. But on the walls we saw the words "Namu-amida-butsu" written in large characters. Priests could be seen not only sitting in meditation but also reciting the Nembutsu as they walked. This was done in some sense without any feeling of contradiction.

Shibayama: I'm not altogether sure, but it seems to me that because no contradiction was felt there, the koan became the Nembutsu. It is different from the Nembutsu of absolute other-power in Japan. Perhaps we can call it a Nembutsu of self-power. Instead of sitting with a koan, they use the Nembutsu—a koan Nembutsu. The benefit of the koan is linked to the Nembutsu. When Zen was predominant in China the masters of the Nembutsu frequented the Zen temples. But when Zen declined, the Zen school incorporated the Nembutsu into its practice and it gradually took the place of their koan. Don't you think the two came to be linked together in this way?

Tsukamoto: Until recently, their way of practice was just as you say. Practicers sat in meditation in the main hall of the temple. Those who became tired went outside for a while and recited the Nembutsu as they walked with half-closed eyes. In other words, this was not "other-power" Nembutsu, but something that helped them work on a koan. It was used as a practical method of calming their mind by concentrating it on a koan, the Nembutsu here taking the place of the koan.

Shibayama: I think that there are two aspects to a koan. One is the concentration of the mind, thereby denying all things, and the other is the opening up of wisdom from the bottom of that negation. I believe that Nembutsu will do for this purpose. The two came together in China. It would have been better if it had taken place on a higher level, for it can be said in a sense that they were linked because of Zen's decline.

Nisbitani: As you say, in the later history of Chinese Zen the so-called Nembutsu Zen got to predominate over the Buddhist world. The Nembutsu took the place of the koan, or was used generally as a koan for meditation practice. But isn't there is a problem here. When the Nembutsu becomes a koan, it seems to me that the so-called Great Doubt loses its vital function.

Shibayama: And also the literary element becomes prominent.

Nisbitani: Formerly, a person had a problem and wanted the master's response

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to it. The reply was something incomprehensible and so he was troubled and it taxed his brains. As Zen practice it ceased to be a problem merely of the brains. There was always a strong, vital doubt in him, and it continued until it was resolved. When the Nembutsu is made a koan, this element disappears completely. The mental element is gone.

Sbibayama: Later such questioning also becomes thin and weak, as the form of practice becomes set.

Nisbitani: The route the thinking takes has been fixed.

Sbibayama: Properly speaking, each person should have something within him like the masters of former times, and begin from there. Otherwise, sharpness and intensity is lost. Whether it comes from an intellectual contradiction or an emotional contradiction, or concerns self-power or other-power, it is always necessary to have something in oneself, something one intensely desires to resolve. This gives vitality. Otherwise, there is a dullness.

Nisbitani: Therefore, I think there was a very great problem in Nembutsu Zen.

Sbibayama: Yes, perhaps so.

Nisbitani: It might have been a manifestation of Zen's decline. . . .

Sbibayama: Apart from theory, when I hear something like "Amida in the mind only; the Pure Land in your mind," I feel that it might become a genuine koan, though.

Nisbitani: But there's no Great Doubt.

Sbibayama: Yes. What should come out of oneself somehow is transformed and now is received ready-made—now that side is stronger.

Nisbitani: When you have something within yourself, and then the trouble comes. . . .

Sbibayama: We can say that the stronger this is, the more it approaches the original form of Zen.

Tsukamoto: I should think so.

Translated by Hirano Umeyo