

## **Voices of Mountains, Trees, and Rivers: Kūkai, Dōgen, and a Deeper Ecology\***

Graham Parkes

Although environmental problems are now attaining global proportions, discussion of them tends to be conducted in quite parochial terms. Current debates for the most part presuppose a worldview with its roots in Europe—one informed by the Platonic/Judeo-Christian tradition as well as Cartesian philosophy and Newtonian science. Even though contemporary physics and biology are giving us a very different picture of the world from that envisaged by Newton and Descartes, the fact that these two figures enabled the development of modern technology has preserved the viability of their worldview and extended it over most of the globe. Belief in the natural superiority of human beings and justification for their domination of a supposedly soulless world stem from this religious and philosophical worldview, which continues to inform—even if in less arrogant forms—current debates in the ethics of environmental concern.

It may be a sign of progress when people begin to acknowledge the "rights" of beings other than humans, but the language is still too parochial. If the East Asian traditions, for example, contain nothing that corresponds to our conception of rights—and they do not—then talk of the rights of trees will have no more effect on Japanese timber interests than talk of human rights has on Chinese politicians. What is needed is a more radical revisioning of the human relation to the natural world, a shift toward a less hubristic attitude toward the environment upon which our existence depends.

It is fashionable in some ecologically correct circles to ascribe blame for the devastation of the earth to the combination of [112] Christianity and capitalism that made possible the enormous material achievements of the industrialized nations of the West. While such criticisms are often rather facile, it does seem reasonable to suppose that where people's lives are informed by ways of thinking that denigrate the physical world in favor of a purely spiritual realm (as with the Orphic strain in Platonism), or by cosmogonies according to which the natural world was created for the benefit of humans as the only beings made in the image of the creator (as in the Genesis story), or by soteriologies where the soul is alienated from the natural world and the crucial question concerns the individual's direct relation to God (as in Gnostic Christianity and "the American religion"), they are going to have relatively few qualms about exploiting the natural world for their own purposes.<sup>1</sup>

The corollary seems equally reasonable: that where worldviews prevail in which nature is regarded as the locus of ultimate reality or value, as a sacred source of wisdom, or as a direct manifestation of the divine, one can expect that, other things being equal, people will restrain themselves from inflicting gratuitous harm on the environment. The nature of the connection between a religious or philosophical worldview and actual behavior is difficult to determine since, for the most part, other things are precisely not equal. An individual's desire for material well-being may occlude his or her self-understanding vis-a-vis the cosmos, and the demands of culture—and of contemporary consumerist culture especially—may overwhelm one's reverence for the natural world. But rather than attempt to untangle that complex of difficult issues, let us simply suppose that someone concerned about the fate of the earth were to realize, experientially, the validity of a worldview in which nature is seen as sacred and a source of wisdom. That

person would then naturally incline (by virtue of the meanings of such terms as "ultimate value," "wisdom," and "the divine") to care for the natural environment on an individual level; and the deeper the experiential realization, the more one could expect that care to expand into the collective sphere. And if one could then find a way of imparting such a realization to a wider audience, considerable progress could be made toward solving environmental problems.

A proposal for a revisioning of our relations to the natural world comes with the program of "deep ecology," but this movement, insofar as it has been acknowledged at all, is often rejected for being [113] too radical or else simply incoherent.<sup>2</sup> While the hearts of the deep ecologists are surely in the right places, their minds are not always so clear—especially when they wander as far afield as East Asia. This is regrettable because the East Asian philosophical world is especially rich in resources for ecological thinking. In what follows, I shall outline some features of the philosophies of two of the foremost figures in Japanese Buddhism, Kūkai, and Dōgen, which would appear to be eminently salutary for the natural environment. There will be a need to respond to some doubts that may arise in this context, and to protest briefly a tendency toward simpleminded appropriation by some deep ecologists of Dōgen's ideas. A final concern will be the extent to which these ideas might be practically applied in the task of mitigating the environmental crisis.

## **Kūkai**

When Buddhism was transplanted from India to China during the first century of the common era, some thinkers there began to ask—perhaps under the influence of Taoist ideas—whether the Mahayana Buddhist extension of the promise of Buddhahood to "all sentient beings" did not go far enough. A long-running debate began in China during the eighth century, in which thinkers in the T'ien-t'ai school argued that the logic of Mahayana universalism required that the distinction between sentient and nonsentient be abandoned and that Buddha-nature be ascribed not only to plants, trees, and earth, but even to particles of dust.<sup>3</sup> (The contrast with the Christian tradition is striking, where Aristotle's musings on the vegetal soul were largely ignored and arguments over the reaches of salvation were restricted to the question of whether animals have souls.)

When Buddhist ideas from China began to arrive in Japan in the seventh century, they entered an ethos conditioned by the indigenous religion of Shintō, according to which the natural world and human beings are equally offspring of the divine. In Shintō the whole world is understood to be inhabited by *shin* (*kami*), or divine spirits. These are spirits not only of the ancestors but also of any phenomena that occasion awe or reverence: wind, thunder, lightning, rain, the sun, mountains, rivers, trees, and rocks. Such an atmosphere was naturally receptive to the idea that the earth and plants participate [114] in Buddha-nature. Although the first Japanese thinker to use the phrase *mokuseki bussho* ("Buddha-nature of trees and rocks") was apparently Saichō (766-822), founder of the Tendai school, the first one in Japan to elaborate the idea of the Buddhahood of all phenomena and make it central to his thought was Kūkai (774-835).

In a passage of verse in his essay "On the Meanings of the Word *Hum*" (*Unji gi*), Kūkai twice alludes to the awakened nature of vegetation (*somoku*):

If trees and plants are to attain enlightenment,  
Why not those who are endowed with feelings? . . .  
If plants and trees were devoid of Buddhahood,  
Waves would then be without humidity.<sup>4</sup>

In a later work he argues for the Buddhahood of *somoku* on the grounds that it is included within the "Five Great Elements" (earth, water, fire, wind, space) that comprise the *dharmakaya* (*hosshin*), or "reality embodiment" of the cosmic Buddha Dainichi Nyorai (Mahavairocana).<sup>5</sup> He qualifies this statement by adding that the Buddha-nature of plants and trees is not apparent to normal vision, but can be seen only by opening one's "Buddha eye."

In distinguishing his own Esoteric Buddhism from other schools, Kūkai makes a more comprehensive claim concerning natural phenomena:

In Exoteric Buddhist teachings, the four great elements [earth, water, fire, and wind] are considered to be nonsentient beings, but in Esoteric Buddhist teaching they are regarded as the *samaya-body* of the Tathagata.<sup>6</sup>

There seems to be an equivocation here, however, when Kūkai calls the natural elements the *samaya-body* of the Buddha, since this connotes not simple identity with the *dharmakaya* but a relation of symbolizing *and* participation at the same time. The ambiguity is brought out in another passage, where Kūkai writes:

The existence of the Buddha [Mahavairocana] is the existences of the sentient beings and vice versa. They are not identical but are nevertheless identical; they are not different but are nevertheless different.<sup>7</sup>

[115] It is interesting to note a similar equivocation in the philosophy of a close contemporary of Kūkai's in the West, John Scotus Erigena. (Their lives overlap by twenty-five years.) Erigena's major treatise—the *Periphuseon*, or *De Divisione Naturae*, from the year 865—is on nature, and he argues there that the natural world *is* God "as seen by Himself (704c). His understanding of the relation between God and the natural world is informed throughout by a tension between his Catholic faith and his devotion to Greek philosophy, as exemplified in the tension in Neoplatonic theology generally between God's emanation throughout creation (*processio Dei per omnid*) and His remaining in Himself (*mansius in se ipso*). Insofar as Erigena regards natural creatures as "theophany," he believes that they will ultimately be restored to their source in God—even though this restoration takes place only via the resurrection of the human. Dainichi is, for Kūkai, an "emanation throughout creation"; but his non-identity with, or difference from, sentient beings would not consist in his "remaining in himself." To the extent that he is the *dharmakaya*, which is "beginningless and endless," he would transcend the totality of all things that are currently present—but he would not transcend the totality of all things that have been, will be, and could be.

The practical (or practice-oriented) aspect of Kūkai's Esoteric Buddhism involves entering into what he calls the "three mysteries," or "intimacies" (*sanmitsu*), of Dainichi Nyorai, which are body, speech, and mind. Thus, by adopting certain postures (*mudras*), by chanting certain syllables (*mantras*), and by allowing the mind to abide in the state of

*samadhi*, or concentration, the practitioner will come to experience direct participation in the *dharmakaya*. We can be sure that those who successfully practice such a philosophy, realizing their participation in the body of the cosmic Buddha simultaneously with the divinity of natural phenomena, will treat the natural world with the utmost reverence.

There is another feature of Kūkai's teaching which helps illuminate the idea that natural phenomena possess Buddha-nature, and that is his notion of *hosshin seppo*, the idea that "the *dharmakaya* expounds the *dharma*" or, "the Buddha's reality embodiment expounds the true teachings."<sup>8</sup> This idea emphasizes the radically *personal* nature of Dainichi Nyorai in drawing attention to the way he teaches the truth of Buddhism through all phenomena, [116] and through *speech* as one of the three "intimacies." The element of intimacy, or mystery, comes in because Dainichi's teaching is strictly, as Kūkai often emphasizes, "for his own enjoyment." It is only in a loose sense that the cosmos "speaks" to us—for, properly speaking, Dainichi does not expound the teachings for our benefit. (The other embodiments of the Buddha—the *nirmanakaya* and the *sambhogakaya*—perform that function.)

Just as visualization plays an important role in the meditation practices of Kūkai's Shingon Buddhism, so the sacred nature of the world is also accessible to the sense of sight. As well as hearing the cosmos as a sermon, Kūkai sees, or reads, the natural world as scripture. As he writes in one of his poems:

Being painted by brushes of mountains, by ink of oceans,  
Heaven and earth are the bindings of a sutra revealing the truth.<sup>9</sup>

In this respect there are remarkable parallels between Kūkai and the seventeenth-century German thinker Jakob Böhme. Not only is the natural world of paramount soteriological importance for them both, but their suggested ways of realizing this, by meditation on images and sounds, are interestingly comparable. In reverting to the root syllables of the Sanskrit in which the mystical aspects of early Buddhism were embodied, Kūkai employs them as sounds as well as visual images. Böhme is equally concerned with mystic syllables, in his native German as well as in the Latin and Hebrew of the alchemical and kabbalistic traditions. And just as for Kūkai nature is Dainichi Nyorai expounding the teachings for his own enjoyment, so for Böhme the natural world is the "corporeal being" of the Godhead in its joyous self-revelation.<sup>10</sup>

## **Dōgen**

The philosophy of Dōgen (1200-1253) shares many roots with Kūkai's thought, and his understanding of the natural world is especially similar (no doubt owing to some influence). Parallel to Kūkai's identification of the *dharmakaya* with the phenomenal world is Dōgen's bold assertion of the nonduality of Buddha-nature and the world of impermanence generally. He rereads the line from the *Nirvana Sutra* "All sentient beings without exception have Buddha-nature" as 'All is sentient being, all beings are Buddha-[117] nature.'<sup>11</sup> Dōgen thus argues that all beings are sentient being, and as such *are* Buddha-nature—rather than "possessing" or "manifesting" or "symbolizing" it. Again, however, the usual logical categories are inadequate for expressing this relationship. Just as Kūkai equivocates in identifying the *dharmakaya* with all things, so Dōgen says of all

things and Buddha-nature: "Though not identical, they are not different; though not different, they are not one; though not one, they are not many."<sup>12</sup> Again as in Kūkai, while the natural world is ultimately the body of the Buddha, it takes considerable effort to be able to see this. Dōgen regrets that most people "do not realize that the universe is proclaiming the actual body of Buddha," since they can perceive only "the superficial aspects of sound and color" and are unable to experience "Buddha's shape, form, and voice in landscape."<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps in order to avoid the absolutist connotations of the traditional idea of the *dharmakaya*, Dōgen substitutes for Kūkai's *hosshin seppo* the notion of *mujo-seppo*, which emphasizes that even *nonsentient* beings expound the true teachings. They are capable of this sort of expression since they, too, are what the Buddhists call *shin* ("mind/heart"). And just as the speech of Dainichi Nyorai is not immediately intelligible to us humans, so, for Dōgen:

The way insentient beings expound the true teachings should not be understood to be necessarily like the way sentient beings do. ... It is contrary to the Buddha-way to usurp the voices of the living and conjecture about those of the non-living in terms of them.<sup>14</sup>

Only from the anthropocentric perspective would one expect natural phenomena to expound the true teachings in a human language.

While the practice followed in Dōgen's Soto Zen is less exotic than in Kūkai's Shingon, the aim of both is the integration of one's activity with the macrocosm. Whereas Kūkai's practice grants access to the intimacy of Dainichi's conversing with himself for his own enjoyment, Dōgen tells his students:

When you endeavor in right practice, the voices and figures of streams and the sounds and shapes of mountains, together with you, bounteously deliver eighty-four-thousand gathas. Just as you are unsparing in surrendering fame and wealth and the body-mind, so are the brooks and mountains.<sup>15</sup>

[118] If we devote our full attention to them, streams and mountains can, simply by being themselves, teach us naturally about the nature of existence in general. And yet for Dōgen this process works only as a cooperation between the worlds of the human and the nonhuman and as "the twin activities of the Buddha-nature and emptiness."<sup>16</sup>

Kūkai's idea that heaven and earth are the bindings of a *sutra* painted by brushes of mountains and ink of oceans is also echoed by Dōgen, who counters an overemphasis on study of literal scriptures in certain forms of Buddhism by maintaining that *sutras* are not just texts containing written words and letters.

What we mean by the sutras is the entire cosmos itself. . . the words and letters of beasts. . . or those of hundreds of grasses and thousands of trees.... The sutras are the entire universe, mountains and rivers and the great earth, plants and trees; they are the self and others, taking meals and wearing clothes, confusion and dignity.<sup>17</sup>

As in Kūkai, natural phenomena are a source of wisdom and illumination, as long as we learn how to "read" them. But just as Kūkai claims that *all* phenomena, as the *dharmakaya*, expound the true teachings, so Dōgen says that it is not just natural phenomena that are *sutras* but also "taking meals and wearing clothes, confusion and dignity"—activities and attributes that distinguish humans from other beings. So, while Western thinkers like Erigena and Böhme talk of nature as "God's corporeal being" and of the language and voices of all created beings, both Dōgen and Kūkai would want to go further and ascribe Buddha-nature to *all* beings and not just to natural (as in God-created) beings.

I have been suggesting that where such a worldview as Kūkai's or Dōgen's—in which nature is regarded as sacred and a source of wisdom—prevails, people will tend to treat the environment with respect. But now the universalistic strain in their thinking might appear to detract from the ecologically beneficial features, since it would seem to entail that all human-made things—including such environmentally noxious substances as radioactive waste—are similarly sacred and worthy of reverence. This consideration leads into a complex of issues, the complexity of which should be acknowledged before a solution is suggested. [119]

### **Problematic Issues**

It is hard to retain one's composure in the face of talk about the "love of nature" that is often said to inform Japanese culture, in view of Japan's dismal environmental record in recent decades. In a short but pointed article Yuriko Saito examines three "conceptual bases for the alleged Japanese love of nature" and finds them wanting in their ability to "engender an ecologically desirable attitude" toward the natural world.<sup>18</sup> She argues that "the tradition of regarding nature as friend and companion, which serves the individual as refuge and restorative" is too anthropocentric to be able to value the natural world for its own sake rather than for the benefits it can afford human beings (3). Saito also shows how the *mono no aware* ("the pathos of evanescence") worldview that has conditioned so much of Japanese culture is too fatalistic to promote salutary ecological awareness, arguing that deforestation or pollution can, according to this view, be "accepted as yet another instance of transience" (5).

The third conceptual basis Saito considers is Zen Buddhism—with its idea of the harmony between human beings and nature—which, "as respectful of and sensitive to nature's aesthetic aspect as [it] might be," still "does not contain within it a force necessary to condemn and fight the human abuse of nature" (8). "If everything is Buddha nature because of impermanence," she argues, "stripmined mountains and polluted rivers must be considered as manifesting Buddha nature as much as uncultivated mountains and unspoiled rivers." Similarly, the notion of "responsive rapport" between all things, which she associates with Dōgen, "makes it impossible for any intervention in nature to be disharmonious with it" (8).

These points about the anthropocentrism of nature-as-companionable-refuge philosophy and the fatalism of the *mono no aware* worldview are well taken, but not, I think, the criticism of Zen Buddhism. This last seems plausible initially, because when Mahayana distinguishes itself from early Buddhism in asserting that *nirvana* is not different from *samsara*, it appears to expose itself *eo ipso* to charges of quietism (or at least "anactivism"). For if this apparently imperfect world is actually *nirvana*, then what is there to be done? In that case there would hardly be any need for activity,[120] let alone

activism. Let me begin to respond to such criticisms with reference to Kūkai; although Saito doesn't mention him, or Shingon Buddhism, her point about strip-mined mountains and polluted rivers "as manifesting Buddha nature" applies equally to such phenomena as part of the *dharmakaya*.

It is easy to see why for Kūkai certain kinds of things produced by humans would constitute the *dharmakaya*. Works of art, for example, are especially effective expositors of the *dharmakaya*: "Since the esoteric Buddhist teachings are so profound as to defy expression in writing," he writes—a remark struggling readers will find consoling—"they are revealed through the medium of painting."<sup>19</sup> But while there is surely an important sense in which what we call "sick" buildings, for example, or toxic-waste dumps, are *speaking* to us, it may be hard to imagine them as the body of the Buddha or as expounding the true teachings. Since such insalubrious things are nevertheless part of the totality of beings, Kūkai would have to regard them as part of the *dharmakaya* and hence also as expounding the *dharmakaya*. But the important question concerns his attitude toward such things: if he would advocate reverence toward sick buildings and toxic waste as part of the body of Dainichi, one might well doubt the wisdom of introducing his ideas into current debates about the environment.

Let us make the question more pointed by taking more extreme examples: what is the appropriate attitude toward the tubercle bacillus (a natural being) and toward radioactive waste (something relatively unnatural, insofar as it has been produced only under very recent and peculiar historical conditions and requires enormously complex technology)? I choose a naturally occurring being for the first example since it points up a problem with the appropriation of Taoist and Buddhist ideas by recent deep ecology, with its "ultimate norm" of "biocentric equality."<sup>20</sup> This seems a rather infelicitous name for an ultimate norm—surely "biotic equality" would be more appropriate—but it does point up the narrower focus of deep ecology as compared with Taoism or Zen, where the inorganic realm of mountains and streams is as important as the vegetal and animal realms.

The principle, or "intuition," of biocentric equality, as defined by Devall and Sessions, is that "all things in the biosphere have an equal right to live and blossom and to reach their own individual [121] forms of unfolding and self-realization" (67), and deep ecology is also said to advocate "biospecies equality" as the idea that "all nature has intrinsic worth" (69). While the sentiment behind this ideal is commendable, the formulation is flawed: to adopt this idea as an ultimate norm would mean abandoning the work of human culture—and perhaps the human race—altogether. Imagine if, on discovering the tubercle bacillus, we had upheld its "equal right to live and blossom and to reach its own individual form of unfolding and self-realization": tuberculosis would have decimated our best poets, painters, and composers long ago. Nor would it take much effort to ensure the flourishing of the Ebola virus and thus bring the human race to a gruesome finish. The deep ecologists would do well to take a few other leaves out of the Taoist/Zen book—those emphasizing the importance of context and perspective and the problems that arise when one tries to universalize.

### **Kūkai and Dōgen Defended**

Let us begin with Kūkai. Just because the tubercle bacillus is part of the reality embodiment of the cosmic Sun Buddha does not mean that Kūkai would have us worship

it and celebrate its equal right to unimpeded flourishing. The image of embodiment is important here. Things can go wrong in a human body which can be put right by getting rid of the noxious element and taking steps to see that it doesn't recur (as in excising a cancerous tumor, for example).<sup>21</sup> Insofar as the blossoming of the tubercle bacillus would jeopardize the flourishing of good Buddhist practice (among other things), Kūkai would surely see it as a baneful element within the body of Dainichi and approve appropriate surgery to get rid of it. The important thing is to consider the body and to appraise its health, holistically. He would similarly regard the tubercle bacillus as a part of Dainichi's exposition of the *dharmā* for his own enjoyment. But Buddhist deities generally have their wrathful as well as their compassionate aspects, and there is no guarantee that their teachings will always be pleasing to the human ear.

The fact that radioactive waste is produced by humans would probably not be a factor in Kūkai's readiness to recommend surgery to remove it from the *dharmakaya*. But in view of the centrality of [122] *impermanence* in Buddhist teachings, and since the half-life of something like plutonium is measurable in *kalpas*, one can imagine that the relative non-impermanence of radioactive waste would be a reason for Kūkai's wanting to get rid of it. And if radioactive waste is expounding the *dharmā* in any way, it is probably by showing us that the farther things get from being impermanent, the more lethal they become.

What would Dōgen say about these causes of fatal disease and lethal pollution? Are deadly viruses and plutonium waste part of Buddha-nature? The former surely are, along with the tubercle bacillus, poisonous snakes, and other sentient beings that are deadly to humans. Dōgen naturally subscribes to the Buddhist view of the sacredness of life and the precept of not killing, but he (and a follower of his philosophy) would observe these precepts in the context of other features of his worldview, such as the "Buddhanature of non-being" (*mu bussho*), the interfusion of life and death (*shoji*), and the functional interdependence (*engi*) of all things more generally.<sup>22</sup> And given the difference in the "*dharmā* positions" (*hoi*) occupied by humans and bacilli, Dōgen would surely *not* condemn, in most circumstances, attempts to eradicate the tubercle bacillus as evil or as pernicious anthropocentrism. The "in most circumstances" is meant to suggest the importance, for Zen, of broadening one's perspective in order to see the total context.

These considerations demand a slight modification of my earlier formulation: a view of the world as the body of Dainichi or as Buddha-nature would naturally lead to reverence for and respectful treatment of the totality—but would not rule out destroying certain parts of it under certain circumstances.

The status of radioactive waste with respect to Buddha-nature would, I suspect, be somewhat problematic for Dōgen. There is no denying that his philosophy is distinguished by a radical expansion of the traditional concept of Buddha-nature:

Since ancient times, foolish people have believed man's divine consciousness to be Buddha-nature—how ridiculous, how laughable! Do not try to define Buddha-nature, this just confuses. Rather, think of it as a wall, a tile, or a stone, or, better still, if you can, just accept that Buddha-nature is inconceivable to the rational mind.<sup>23</sup>

[123] Here is another instance of Dōgen's superseding the distinction between sentient and nonsentient beings: he conversely claims in another passage that "walls and tiles, mountains, rivers, and the great earth" are all "mind-only."<sup>24</sup> He is also apparently



contradicting a statement in the *sutras* to the effect that "fences, walls, tiles, stones, and other nonsentient beings" do *not* have Buddha-nature.

Now, to ascribe Buddha-nature to stones is one thing, but to include walls and tiles is another, far more provocative thing. One reason for this is that the *sho* of *busscho* has important connotations of "birth," "life," and "growth"—such that it would be counterintuitive to apply the term to something constructed or fabricated by human beings.<sup>25</sup> It is doubtful whether the technology used in Dōgen's day to produce fences, walls, and roof tiles was environmentally destructive, but one might reasonably wonder whether Dōgen would be comfortable saying that even fences or roof tiles made of nonbiodegradable plastic are Buddha-nature. But again, as in the case of Kukai's talk of the body of Dainichi, the important feature of Buddha-nature for Dōgen, exemplified in his identification of it as "total-being" (*shitsu-u*), is that it constitutes an organized totality. He would thus *not* be committed to celebrating the chemicals polluting a river (which render the resident fish more impermanent than they would otherwise be) or the radioactive waste stored all over the planet (which is capable of radicalizing the impermanence of all life to the point of extinction) as venerable manifestations of Buddha-nature.

Dōgen was influenced, as was Kukai, by classical Taoist thinkers (Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu [Laozi and Zhaungzi]), as evidenced by his frequent talk of the "Buddha Way" (*butsudo*, or Buddha *tad*)—not to mention his name (which means "source of the Way"). Throughout his writings Dōgen advocates paying close attention to the natural world, just as the Taoists recommend following *t'ien tao* (the Way of Heaven). And, just as the Taoist sage practices an enlightened "sorting" (*luri*) of things on the basis of the broadest possible perspective on their various *te* (powers, potencies), so Dōgen exhorts his readers to "total exertion" (*gyūjin*) in attending to the different ways things "express the Way" (*dotoku*) and occupy their special "dharma positions" (*hoi*) in the vast context of the cosmos.<sup>26</sup> By contrast with the radical egalitarian deep-ecological picture of Taoism and Zen, whereby all living beings are to be encouraged to blossom and flourish, both [124] Chuang-tzu and Dōgen would want to take into account the effects of propagating tubercle bacilli or radioactive waste on the flourishing of human (and other) beings before deciding to let them bloom.

### **Practical Postscript**

The crucial question concerning these Japanese Buddhist ideas about nature is to what extent they can contribute to the solution of our current ecological problems. It would clearly be difficult to convince most citizens in Western countries, or their political representatives, that the solution lies in the ideas of a ninth-century thaumaturge from Japan. But it is demonstrable that this Japanese Buddhist understanding of the relations between human beings and the natural world has close parallels in several (admittedly non-mainstream) currents of Western thinking. (In the United States, the relevant figures would range from the Native Americans to more intellectually "respectable" characters, such as Emerson, Thoreau, Aldo Leopold, and John Muir; in Germany, there would be Böhme, Goethe, Schelling, and Nietzsche; in France, Rousseau; and so on.) If one were to show the underlying harmony among these disparate worldviews, and how these ideas conduce to a fulfilling way of living that lets the natural environment flourish as well,

there might be a chance of some progress.

The problem is how to bring about an experiential realization of the validity of such ideas on the part of the large numbers of inhabitants of postindustrial societies whose lives are fairly well insulated from nature. A few days away from watching television in a more or less hermetically sealed space, and spent in an unspoiled natural environment, would help immeasurably; but, since some kind of guidance is desirable, this is a labor-intensive project (already being undertaken at certain Zen centers, colleges, and universities) that can reach only small numbers of people at a time.

There is justified doubt as to whether the task could be well accomplished by publishing a book, since the people whose perspectives need to be changed (the politicians and general populace) do not read much anymore. But they do watch television—and so an optimal medium for the dissemination of these [125] ideas would be film, which can show as forcefully as it can tell and offers the alternatives of documentary (which can vividly present the dire situation we are in) and drama (which can make the problems and their potential solutions *personal*). A pioneer in this field, in the area of the art film, is John Daido Loori, whose Zen videography beautifully and forcefully conveys Dōgen's understanding of the natural world as a source of wisdom.<sup>27</sup>

With respect to film drama, it is by no means inconceivable, in view of the number of Hollywood stars and rock musicians who visibly promote environmental causes, that the right dramatic script(s) could attract the talents of some world-famous actors and actresses, with some well-known popular musicians for the soundtrack, and eventuate in a feature film with a salutary ecological message. We might then look forward to seeing, in worldwide distribution, the cosmic Buddha expounding the true teachings not only through mountains, trees, and rivers but also by way of celluloid and fiber-optic cable.

This little flourish of fantasy points up one of the more encouraging implications of the Japanese Buddhist outlook for our contemporary situation—insofar as that kind of philosophy resolves the tension between nature and culture. As the example of Dōgen (and of other figures in the Zen tradition) shows, there is no necessary contradiction between a simple life lived lightly on the earth and a life rich in refined culture. If Thoreau took his Homer to Walden, we can probably in good ecological conscience have our *sutras* on CD-ROM to complement the scriptures in mountains, rivers, and trees.

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Graham Parkes, "Voices of Mountains, Trees, and Rivers: Kūkai, Dōgen, and a Deeper Ecology," in *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds*, eds. Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 111-128.

## Notes

\* The writing of this paper was supported by a research grant from the Japan Studies Endowment of the University of Hawaii, funded by a grant from the Japanese government.

1. Harold Bloom has remarked on the pronounced Gnostic strain in contemporary American religion, thanks to which believers understand themselves as being in essence separate from nature; see his *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon and

Schuster, 1992), chaps. 1 and 2.

2. In the course of an attack on the "new fundamentalism" of deep ecology, the French philosopher Luc Ferry refers to its non-anthropocentric worldview as an "as yet unprecedented vision of the world" (*The New Ecological Order* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995], 60-61). Ferry is apparently unaware that similarly non-anthropocentric perspectives have informed sophisticated Taoist and Buddhist philosophies for centuries.

3. For an illuminating account of this debate, see William R. LaFleur, "Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature," in *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 183-209. The author goes on to show how these ideas were subsequently elaborated by several prominent figures in the Japanese Tendai school, notably Ryōgen in the tenth century and Chūjin in the twelfth. In the same volume, see also David Edward Shaner, "The Japanese Experience of Nature," 163-82.

4. *Kūkai: Major Works*, translated with an account of his life and a study of his thought, by Yoshito S. Hakeda (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972) (hereafter cited as Hakeda, *Kūkai*), 254-55.

5. Kūkai, *Hizo ki* (Record of the secret treasury), in *Kōbo daishi zenshu (KDZ)*, ed. Yoshitake Inage, 3rd ed. rev. (Tokyo: Mikkyō Bunka Kenkyūsha, 1965), 2:37; cited in LaFleur, "Saigyō and the Buddhist Value of Nature," 186.

6. Kūkai, *Sokushin jobutsu gi* (Attaining enlightenment in this very body), in Hakeda, *Kūkai*, 229.

7. Kūkai, *KDZ*, 1:516; cited in Hakeda, *Kūkai*, 93.

8. For a fine explication of this idea, see Thomas P. Kasulis, "Reality as Embodiment: An Analysis of Kūkai's *Sokushinjobutsu* and *Hosshin Seppo*," in *Religious Reflections on the Human Body*, ed. Jane Marie Law (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 166-85. See also, by the same author, "Kūkai (774-835): Philosophizing in the Archaic," in *Myth and Philosophy*, ed. Frank E. Reynolds and David Tracy (Albany: State University of New York, 1990), 131-50.

9. Kūkai, *KDZ*, 3:402; cited in Hakeda, *Kūkai*, 91.

10. "We show you the revelation of the Godhead through nature. . . . how the Unground or Godhead reveals itself with this eternal generation, for God is spirit. . . and nature is his corporeal being, as eternal nature. . . . For God did not give birth to creation in order thereby to become more perfect, but rather for his own self-revelation and so for the greatest joy and magnificence" (Böhme, *De Signatura Rerum*, 3.1, 3.7, 16.2).

11. Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō*, "Busshō" (Buddha-nature). Subsequent references to Dōgen will be made simply by the title of the relevant chapter/fascicle of his major work, *Shōbōgenzō* (in vol. 1 of *Dōgen zenji zenshu*, ed. Okubo Doshu [Tokyo, 1969-70]).

12. Dōgen, "Zenki" (Total working); cited in Hee-Jin Kim, *Dōgen Kigen—Mystical Realist* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press for the Association for Asian Studies, 1975), 164.

13. Dōgen, "Keiseisanshoku" (Sounds of the valley, color of the mountains), in *Shōbōgenzō*, trans. Kōsen Nishiyama and John Stevens, 4 vols. (Sendai: Daihokkai, 1975-83), 1:92.

14. Dōgen, "Mujo-seppo" (Nonsentient beings expound the *dharma*); cited in Kim, *Dōgen Kigen*, 253-54.

15. Dōgen, "Keiseisanshoku"; cited in Kim, *Dōgen Kigen*, 256.

16. Hee-Jin Kim's formulation (*Dōgen Kigen*, 256). See his insightful account of Dōgen's understanding of nature and the force of the nature imagery in his texts, in the section entitled "Nature: The Mountains and Waters" (253-62).

17. Dōgen, "Jisho zammai" (The *samadhi* of self-enlightenment); cited in Kim, *Dōgen Kigen*, 97.

18. Yuriko Saito, "The Japanese Love of Nature: A Paradox," *Landscape* 31, no. 2 (1992): 1-8.

19. Kūkai, *KDZ* 1:95; cited in Hakeda, *Kūkai*, 80.

20. Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living As If Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City: G. M. Smith, 1985), 66, where the norm is said to have been developed by Arne Naess. While there is no mention of Kūkai in this book, there are several references to Taoist ideas (which influenced

Kukai as well as Zen), as well as references to or quotations from Dogen on 11 (where he is invoked as a representative of Taoism), 100-101, 112-13, and 232-34.

21. The analogy between the *dharmakaya* and a physical body or organism breaks down with the consideration that there can be nothing *outside* the *dharmakaya*, though this does not reduce the efficacy of the analogy in other respects.

22. Dogen's idea of Buddha-nature—including "total-being Buddha-nature" (*shitsu-u bussho*), "non-being Buddha-nature" (*mu bussho*), and "emptiness Buddha-nature" (*ku bussho*)—is incredibly complex. See Kim's chapter "The Buddha-nature" (136-227) in his *Dogen Kigen*, and Masao Abe, "Dogen on Buddha-nature," in *A Study of Dogen: His Philosophy and Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 35-76.

23. Dogen, "Bussho," in Nishiyama and Stevens, *Shobogenzo*, 4:140. It is significant that the term *garyaku* in *shoheki garyaku* ("fences, walls, tiles, stones") also has the connotation of useless, insignificant things.

24. Dogen, "Sangai yuishin" (The three worlds are mind-only); cited in Kim, *Dogen Kigen*, 157.

25. Similarly, *hsing*, the Chinese equivalent of *sho*, is derived from *sheng*, meaning "birth, life, growth." At the same time, interestingly, the radical in the graph *sho/hsing* is the ***risshinben***—denoting "mind."

26. Hee-Jin Kim lays appropriate emphasis on the antiquietistic aspect of Dogen's philosophy: "In his view things, events, relations were not the given (entities) but were possibilities, projects, and tasks that can be acted out, expressed, and understood as self-expressions and self-activities of the Buddha-nature. This did not imply a complacent acceptance of the given situation but required man's strenuous efforts to transform and transfigure it" (*Dogen Kigen*, 183).

27. See—or, rather, view—the VHS tapes *Mountains and Rivers: An Audiovisual Experience of Zen's Mystical Realism* (Mt. Tremper, N.Y.: Dharma Communications, 1994) and *Sacred Wildness: Zen Teachings of Rock and Water* (Mt. Tremper, N.Y.: Dharma Communications, 1996).