

Ichibutsu Ryoso (One Buddha Two Founders)

Rev. Kodo Takeuchi
Institute of Soto Zen Studies

The Sotoshu Constitution (*Sotoshu Shuken*) declares in Article 4: Objects of Reverence, “The Sotoshu shall primarily honor Shakyamuni Buddha, and shall honor Koso Joyo Daishi (Dogen Zenji) and Taiso Josai Daishi (Keizan Zenji) as its Two Founders.” *Ichibutsu Ryoso*, whose literal meaning is “One Buddha and Two Founders,” is a phrase straightforwardly indicating that reverence of these three is a basic Sotoshu teaching. This expression began being used around ten years after the Meiji Restoration (1868). Since then, both *ichibutsu* and *ryoso* have been very important themes for the Sotoshu as it became a modern religious order in Japan, with each element having a different task to solve.

Let me start by explaining about *ichibutsu* – One Buddha. Since the Meiji Restoration, the Sotoshu, as a religious order engaging in propagation activities aimed at ordinary people, has had to establish a consistent and unified expression of its main doctrine and its objects of reverence. However, there were opinions both for and against making Shakyamuni Buddha the Sotoshu’s main object of reverence and chanting *namu Shakamuni Butsu* (homage to Shakyamuni Buddha). Some held that, since in the Zen tradition the abbot of a temple ascends the dharma hall altar and gives a sermon on behalf of the Buddha, we should not worship the Buddha outside our intrinsic Buddha-nature. Others noted that it is mentioned in *Shobogenzo Kie Bupposoho* and *Shobogenzo Doshin* that Soto Zen should have the Three Treasures as its objects of refuge. A third opinion was that chanting *namu Shakamuni Butsu* would be nothing but an imitation of Pure Land Buddhism and its Gate of Other Power. Another opinion was that, according to the doctrine of Three Bodies (the Trikaya doctrine) in Buddhism, Shakyamuni Buddha is a *nirmanakaya*, or created body, and therefore is the lowest and most inferior body among the Three Bodies, so he should not be revered as the main Buddha. And so it went.

How were these differences to be reconciled? There is an interesting question and answer in the manuscript version of *Bendowa* included in *Shobogenzo Zatsubun*, which was discovered at Shoboji in Iwate Prefecture. This interchange became a strong foundation for the argument for making Shakyamuni Buddha the main Buddha of the Sotoshu.

This passage is a response to a question from the scriptural schools. The question is “In the Hokke, Shingon, Kegon and other schools, the founder of the teaching is superior to and is not the same as the Nirmanakaya Buddha (Shakyamuni) under a tree. Therefore, the dharma taught by him is also superior, isn’t it?” This question is based on the doctrine of Three Bodies in the scriptural schools and is asking about the superiority of the teaching of the Tendai, Shingon, and Kegon schools, whose dharma comes from the Sambhogakaya (Reward Body) or Dharmakaya (Dharma Body) as opposed to the dharma taught by Shakyamuni Buddha, who is the Nirmanakaya. Dogen Zenji’s answer is

“ You should reflect on the fact that if, due to disease, your eyes produce spots in your

visual field, you will experience the illusion of flowers randomly scattering. Furthermore, based on statements in the Mahayana sutras, both exoteric and esoteric, it is not germane to assume, as you say, that there is a founder of the teaching other than Shakyamuni Buddha. It implies that you do not yet understand who is the founder of the teaching in your own school. To seek for a founder of the teaching other than Shakyamuni Buddha is to begin separating yourself from Shakyamuni Buddha, who guides you to awakening, and distancing yourself from the Buddha Way, like a child who leaves home behind, separates from a father, and wanders about various countries only to live in dire poverty (This refers to the parable of the prodigal son in the *Lotus Sutra* chapter, “Faith and Understanding”).

It is likely that this particular question and answer was removed later because it harshly criticized other Buddhist sects. However, this quotation clearly shows Dogen Zenji’s stance as a Zen person who takes the historical Shakyamuni Buddha as the founder of the teaching, prior to the formation of the doctrine of Three Bodies as a doctrine, and who attempts to be directly linked to Shakyamuni’s awakening.

Some people point out that chanting the name of the Buddha, *namu Shakamuni Butsu*, might change the Sotoshu’s main doctrine of “becoming Buddha” to one of “revering Buddha.” This would make chanting Shakyamuni’s name identical to chanting the name of Amitabha in Pure Land Buddhism. However, taking refuge in the historical Buddha by chanting *namu Shakamuni Butsu* is essentially different from salvation through chanting the name of Amitabha Buddha based on Amitabha Buddha’s eighteenth vow in the *Sutra of Immeasurable Life*. In the Southeast Asian Buddhist tradition it is also common to chant the Three Refuges after chanting *namu Shakamuni Butsu*.

Next let me talk about the Two Founders. We all know that Dogen Zenji is the founder of the Soto School who received the correctly transmitted Buddha Dharma from his master Nyojo, founded a Zen monastery, did *jodo* (dharma teaching) for the first time in Japan, and opened a full-fledged training monastery in accordance with the monastic rules of Chinese Zen school. *Shobogenzo*, *Eihei Koroku* and many other writings which contain Dogen Zenji’s remarkable thoughts still shine and guide us.

Keizan Zenji preserved the light of the dharma transmitted by Dogen Zenji and built a foundation for the development of the Soto order. He wrote *Denkoroku*, built Goroho (Peak of the Five Elders) at Yokoji. Both within and without, he vividly personified the bloodline of the Soto tradition. He left us the teaching that all descendants should collaborate with each other to protect and maintain the head monastery. This gave rise in concrete form to the cyclical residence system (*rinjusei*) for abbots at the head monastery. Keizan Zenji’s work brought about the nationwide development of Soto Zen. The *Keizan Shingi* is a record of daily practice at Yokoji whose content is reflected in the book, *Standard Observances of the Soto Zen School (Sotoshu Gyoji Kihan)*, which is essential to temple activities today.

Thus it is obvious that if either Dogen Zenji or Keizan Zenji had not been there, the Sotoshu would not have existed as it does today. It is necessary to know this outline of Soto Zen history in order to understand why the Sotoshu began to equally revere these two founders, especially since the Meiji Period. Soto Zen expanded phenomenally between the Period of the Northern and Southern Dynasties and the Age of Provincial Wars (fourteenth century through sixteenth century). Sojiji and its branches played a central role in this process of development.

In contrast, at Eiheiji after Dogen Zenji's death, there was a dispute between the third abbot, Tettsu Gikai Zenji, and the assembly. When Gien Zenji became the fourth abbot of Eiheiji, the temple lost supporters and went through a period of crisis and difficulty. Eiheiji was revitalized for a while by a group of Jakuen's disciples, but there were often disastrous fires, sometimes caused by wars. Thus Eiheiji continued to gradually decline. For about one and half centuries following the second half of the fourteenth century, Eiheiji was in a state of dilapidation. However, during the end of fifteenth century and the beginning of sixteenth century, momentum for reconstruction of the temple buildings grew. Those initiating this momentum were all from Tsugen Jakurei's group under the umbrella of Sojiji. They were people such as Kishi Iban, the third abbot of Daineiji in Nagato (present Yamaguchi Prefecture) and Donei Eno, the third abbot of Sorinji in Joshu (present Gunma Prefecture).

Before long, Donei Eno (1421-1504) became the abbot of Eiheiji and rebuilt the temple buildings with the support of Ishu Chushin and Konko Yoken. Eiheiji was finally reconstructed and the foundation was established for creating a modern Sotoshu as a religious order with Eiheiji at its head. But as Eiheiji turned toward prosperity, ironically, it began a long-term conflict with Sojiji for status, position and honor, a conflict that lasted about 400 years, until the Meiji Period.

As the Meiji Period began, Buddhism in Japan had to face the great challenge of an anti-Buddhist movement and the removal of the ban on Christianity. In the midst of such disorder, the Sotoshu had to deal with the crisis of the schism between its two head monasteries, Eiheiji and Sojiji, a schism in existence since the Middle Ages. In 1872, a compact was concluded between the two head monasteries and the Sotoshu moved toward establishing a new, modernized order by instituting the abbot-for-life system at Sojiji, the installation of headquarters, and the holding of the first councils for representatives of each branch temple's members. But the strife between Eiheiji and Sojiji reignited in 1891 in the form of a separatist movement of Sojiji.

The situation became so confused that the government finally set out to find a solution to the conflict. In 1895, settlement came at last. As the grand summation of this process, The Sotoshu Constitution (*Sotoshu Shuken*) was established in 1906. The names of Two Founders were recorded side by side to show that the Sotoshu has two head monasteries and needs to emphasize harmonious reconciliation between them, a rather unique situation for a religious order in Japan.

However, even though the unity of Two Founders is clearly mentioned in the Sotoshu Constitution, we cannot deny the fact that praise of Keizan Zenji, up to now, has been solely focused on his contribution in establishing the foundation for the development of the Sotoshu and has been very limited, compared to praise of Dogen Zenji. The reason for this, I think, is that Keizan Zenji has

been less well studied, in contrast to Dogen Zenji, who has been always the central focus of Sotoshu doctrine and Sotoshu studies.

But the following quotations clearly show that Keizan Zenji was Dogen Zenji's legitimate successor.

Try to sit cutting off the root of discriminating mind. Eight or nine out of ten will be able to immediately see the Way. (Dogen in *Gakudo Yojinshu*)

Our ancestral teacher, Dogen Zenji said: If you cut off the root of discriminating mind, a thousand out of thousand, ten thousand out of ten thousand will all attain the Way. Who would not take it with faith and practice it? I will illuminate the darkness of the future world with the dharma light of three generations. But I do not have any different doctrine or unusual wisdom. I have just sat down in the samadhi of the King of Samadhis and expounded the dharma gate of wondrous emancipation. I open, like a fan, the main point of peaceful mind for all beings. (dharma words of Keizan, founder of Tokoku)

At present, what is needed is the establishment of new Sotoshu studies addressing the question of the common thread in the teaching of the Two Founders. As for the way of practice in which continuous practice moves toward enlightenment, Dogen Zenji only points out that continuous practice is the Buddha's practice: "A day of continuous practice is the activity of all buddhas" (*Shobogenzo Gyoji*, part 2). But we can see that Keizan Zenji explained the same point much more exhaustively in his *Tokoku Kaizan Keizan Osho no Hogo*. I believe that it will be possible for us to understand Dogen Zenji more deeply through studying Keizan Zenji's teachings. It is our present-day task to deeply explore the possibility of a Sotoshu doctrine which is worthy of being known as the Sotoshu of the Two Founders.

Originally written in Japanese by Rev. Kodo Takeuchi

Translated by Rev. Issho Fujita

Assisted by Rev. Tonen O'Connor and Rev. Zuiko Redding