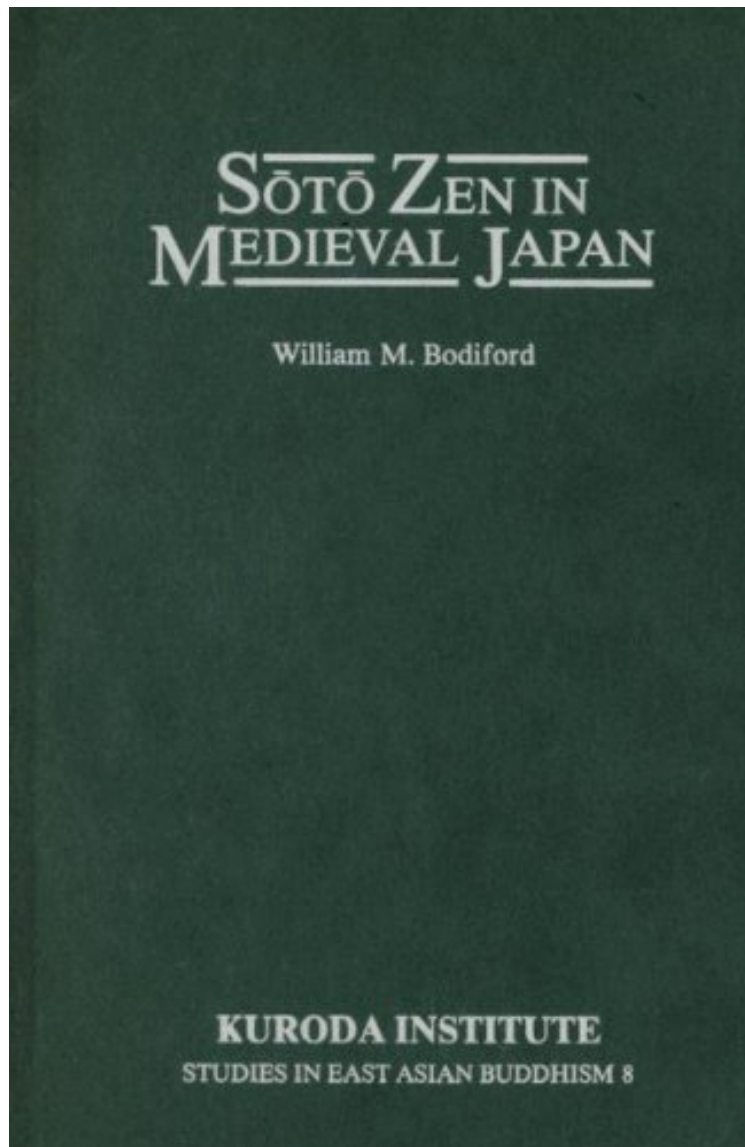


(Download pdf) Soto Zen in Medieval Japan (Studies in East Asian Buddhism)

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William M. Bodiford

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William M. Bodiford : Soto Zen in Medieval Japan (Studies in East Asian Buddhism) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Soto Zen in Medieval Japan (Studies in East Asian Buddhism):

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. The most extensive and informative English language book on the formation and development of Soto Zen to date. A+By Ted BiringerWilliam Bodiford's "Soto Zen in Medieval Japan" (Studies in East Asian Buddhism) paints an extraordinarily clear picture of the history of Soto Zen in Japan.No matter

what view you may have of the transmission of Zen (any school, not just Soto) from China to Japan, reading this book is bound to alter that view dramatically! If you believe a more accurate understanding is an improvement, then the your "altered" view will be a grand improvement. One of the more "unorthodox" discoveries that William Bodiford uncovered in his massive study was the role of Zen Koan literature in the earliest years of Soto Zen. While the role of koans in the Soto sect has often been characterized as minimal, or even non-essential, "Soto Zen in Medieval Japan" affirms that nothing could be further from the truth. While the founder of Soto Zen in Japan, Dogen, has often been portrayed as unconcerned with the Zen Koan literature, Bodiford bluntly reports different, stating: "...there is no doubt that Dogen himself trained in and taught his students systematic methods of koan investigation. His teachings cannot be comprehended without intimate knowledge of Chinese koan..." Not only does this remarkable scholar recognize that for Dogen a thorough grasp of the classic Zen koans was considered essential, he raises the purpose of Zen koans to a whole new level. Defined by uncomprehending scholars and pseudo-Zen adherents simply as "devices" or "riddles" aimed at some kind of "experience" brought on by psychological frustration, koans have been widely misunderstood. In his masterful study Bodiford resurrects many of the true, multifaceted and profoundly versatile uses and meanings of these unique literary expressions of enlightened wisdom. For instance, Bodiford states: "Medieval Soto monks and nuns mastered the depths of Zen enlightenment, the trivial moments of daily life, and the routine activities of monastic training through the language of the Chinese Ch'an patriarchs as recorded in koan texts. This specialized idiom allowed Zen teachers and students to describe different approaches to practice, various states of meditation, and fine distinctions between points of view or levels of understanding. More important, koan study--like ordination rituals and funeral ceremonies--encapsulated Zen transcendence in tangible forms, expressed it in concrete performances, and allowed it to be communicated easily to monks, nuns, and laypersons. For clerics and villagers alike this body of Zen praxis fused together the symbolic transmission of the Buddha's enlightenment, its embodiment in the words and actions of the Zen master, with the worlds lived and imagined, both inside and outside the monastery. While koan training, ordination rituals, and funeral ceremonies comprise only three of the Zen practices performed by medieval Soto monks, each proved indispensable for the rapid growth of Soto institutions and the religious efficacy of these institutions within rural society." Exploring the masterful ingenuity of Soto Zen's brilliant and charismatic founder (Eihei Dogen) and his relatively few, but dedicated disciples through the early and extremely challenging decades of Japan's 13th century, Bodiford reveals the unique forces that catapulted Soto Zen into Japan. It is no wonder that Soto Zen Buddhism is easily the most powerful force of Buddhism in Japan to this very day. Not only is this book easily the most extensive and informative English language book on the formation and development of Soto Zen to date, its illumination of the lives and teachings of Japan's early Zen master's (including Eihei Dogen) is astonishingly rich. Moreover, Bodiford's revelations concerning the early Japanese history of both Rinzaï Zen and Darumashu Zen are profoundly intriguing. William Bodiford's "Soto Zen in Medieval Japan" destined to stand as essential reading for serious Zen students/practitioners for many decades to come.

29 of 29 people found the following review helpful. A detailed background study. By Hakuyu While a trifle dry in places, this book - 'Soto Zen in Medieval Japan' - sponsored by the Kuroda Institute, will nevertheless appeal to the general reader who wishes to know more about the historical background to a Buddhist tradition which is striking roots in the West. As Bodiford puts it: The Soto school is the largest Buddhist organisation in modern Japan. It ranks with the various Pure Land schools as one of the most successful of the new Buddhist denominations that emerged during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods (roughly thirteenth-sixteenth centuries). During this medieval period Soto monks developed new forms of monastic organisation, new methods of Zen instruction, and new applications for Zen rituals within lay-life - many of which lie outside our received image of Zen. . . Yet in spite of its significance for enriching our understanding of Japanese religion, medieval Soto Zen has remained largely unknown, even among specialists. Most Western descriptions of Japanese Zen either ignore Soto completely or equate Soto exclusively with the teachings of Dogen (the school's nominal founder), even though modern Soto practices continue many medieval period elements unknown to Dogen or even foreign to his teachings. . . this book attempts to illuminate how Soto Zen (and rural Zen in general) functioned as a religion within the context of medieval Japanese society. While we might question Bodiford's claim that Soto Zen has been 'ignored' in Western writings (when the first ed. of Bodiford's text appeared in 1993, a limited but reasonably well informed range of Western Soto studies were available, with others underway), he is certainly right in declaring that the extant studies placed almost exclusive emphasis upon Dogen, neglecting other voices in the tradition. It is in this area that Bodiford's study repays careful reading. As such, it will prove challenging for readers espousing easy definitions of (neo) Soto 'orthodoxy.' To quote Bodiford again: In the eyes of many devout Soto adherents the story of early Soto communities begins with Dogen and ends with Dogen. It is a simple story of how Dogen's vision of pure Buddhism was established in rural Japan and then lost. Later the story starts over again with Keizan Jokin, who is credited with establishing a new institutional form for Soto more compatible with the simple religious sentiments of rural Japanese... Summarised in crude terms, Dogen provided high religious ideals while Keizan ensured their survival by implementing practical means of propagation - means which according to some commentators often were at odds with Dogen's ideals. While Bodiford doesn't question the details, he does question the interpretation placed upon them, arguing that it reflects the outlook of Soto reformers from the 18th c. onwards, pushing a rather puritanical view of

Early Soto Zen. Bodiford's study is too detailed to review at length here, but a list of chapter headings will give an idea of the main topics. For what it is worth, I have thrown in a few tentative remarks about certain key issues.

I. Introduction. Part One: Early Soto Communities. 2. Dogen: The Founder of Eihei-ji. 3. Giin. The Beginnings of Higo Soto. 4. Senne and Kyogo: Commentators on Dogen's *Shobo genzo*. 5. Gikai: The Founder of the Daijōji. 6. Jakuen and Giun: Local Growth and Ties to Eihei-ji. 7. Early Schisms: The Question of the Sandai Soron. 8. Keizan: The Founder of Yokoji. Part Two: Regional Expansion. 9. Sojiji: The New Institutional Center. 10. The Popularisation of Soto. 11. Formation of the Soto Order. Part Three: Soto Zen Practice. 12. Koan Zen. 13. Precepts and Ordinations. 14. Zen Funerals. 15. Conclusion. (Notes, Bibliography, Glossary, Index). This study covers a lot of ground, so compromises were inevitable. However, we might have expected more than the skimpy account of Dogen's life at the Koshōji, effectively the first Zen monastery in Japan with a proper Sodo or monks hall. Leaving the Kenninji (still a Tendai temple in Dogen's lifetime) and setting up at the Koshōji in Fukakusa, was a defining moment in Dogen's career and also a milestone in the history of Japanese Zen Buddhism. By the same token, we might have expected to hear a little more about the reasons for Dogen's rather abrupt departure from the Koshōji - and the move to Echizen (Fukui). Bodiford's discussion of this is squeezed into a few pages in the opening chapter titled 'Dogen: The Founder of Eihei-ji.' Still, Bodiford does explore some of the factors cited (not least by Dogen himself) which possibly account for the move. Dogen claimed that he had been harassed by Tendai monks from Mt. Hiei. But on the strength of contemporary records set down at Koshōji, even those written in the days shortly before the move to Echizen, the routine at Koshōji does not appear to have been marked by undue disturbance. That said, Tendai-shū documents would seem to substantiate Dogen's claims - but, in a cause-effect relationship, following Dogen's submission of a document or petition to the Emperor - the 'Gokoku shobōgi' (Principles of True Buddhism for Protecting the State) which was, in effect, a plea for independence - and, as such, a rejection of the Tendai establishment. The move from Kenninji to Fukakusa had already marked a break with the Tendai-shū and it seems that Dogen's wish to consolidate his position - at the Koshōji, met with resistance. It is of note that - at this time, Enni Benen was setting up at the Tōfukuji in Kyoto, roughly half way between the Kenninji and Koshōji. While Rinzai Zen was being taught at the Tōfukuji, Enni Benen accommodated Tendai practices and thus remained on the good side of the Tendai prelates. Dogen wasn't prepared to accommodate Tendai practices - and, it seems, he had to pay the price for it. @The wish for independence does not necessarily signify or breed rivalry, but it all depends on how that wish is cast. In Eastern Japan, well away from Kyoto, the Hojo regents in Kamakura seemed rather keen to embrace Zen as an independent Buddhist school, free from the religious politics of Mt. Hiei. In retrospect, we might look back upon Kamakura Japan as a period of cultural refinement and deepening spiritual aspirations. But it was also murky, laden with intrigue and power struggles. In fact, not unlike medieval Europe, ridden with pestilence and wars, charged with apocalyptic visions. Seen in this light perhaps, Dogen's decision to move to Echizen seems more comprehensible. Though plentiful references to him abound, it is surprising to find that Ejo - author of *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*, and responsible for copying and the initial editing of key elements of Dogen's own *Shōbōgenzō*, did not merit a chapter in this book - or least, a shared one. As a contemporary of Dogen, Ejo was in a privileged position to share his master's thoughts and teaching. Of course, Ejo wrote and recorded what he deemed appropriate. Suffice it to say that the Dogen Ejo speaks of - is open-minded. He recognised the 'five houses of Zen,' and accorded full respect to lay-practicers - including women. The later, post Koshōji Dogen, stressed the Soto transmission, regarded monks as superior to laymen, men as superior to women. How we reconcile these different faces of Dogen - is a big question. It may well be that the narrower definitions of Dogen's thought are later interpolations. In other respects, Dogen's own outlook may have changed. Among other topics, this study looks at the Nihon Daruma-shū, led by Dainichi nonin. Virtually dismissed in contemporary accounts as a minor school of little significance, Bodiford shows the close connections between Dogen and monks of this school, a number of whom comprised his earliest disciples. As Bodiford notes, Nichiren regarded the Daruma-shū as a major force in Kamakura Buddhism. However, like the Tendai prelates and secular authorities, Dogen took a dim view of the Daruma-shū per se - which allegedly taught antinomian doctrines. The material dealing with Giin (1217-1300) - a former Daruma-shū monk should be of interest, for we tend to forget that the Soto-shū spread to Southern Japan, the so called Higo-Soto (Higo=Kyūshū). Fittingly, we hear about Gikai, who completed the construction of Eihei-ji - still rudimentary in Dogen's lifetime, thus winning the title 'Eihei chūko' or the 'reviver' of Eihei-ji. Rather touchingly, Gikai retired from Eihei-ji to build a hermitage, where he looked after his ailing mother. He later moved to Kaga and the Daijōji temple, which flourished in his care. Keizan joined the community at Daijōji and soon became supervisor of the monk's hall. Strangely to say, when Gikai's health began to fail, he bequeathed to Keizan his Daruma-shū documents, as part of his Soto legacy. This raises the question of whether the teachings of the Daruma-shū were as decadent as some sources suggest. Daruma-shū monks had consulted the *Surangama-sūtra* to consolidate their training [at all events, an unlikely source from which to cull antinomian doctrines. As Dogen saw it, the Daruma-shū monks who had taken up his teaching had done so on the understanding that they were relinquishing their former views and practices. Perhaps, at bottom, the charge of antinomianism brought against the Daruma-shū monks signified nothing more than the fact that they regarded themselves as independent of the Kyoto Buddhist establishment - a complex of Tendai-cum-Shingon teachings, for which 'Zen' was but one practice out of many. Dogen's appeal to the authorities -

for an independent Zen-shu, while at the Koshoji, had elicited a similar response. He was accused of pursuing a separatist ideal or 'pratyeka' methods that neglected the well-being of others. Whether fair judgement or not, it reflected how the Buddhist 'establishment' of the day viewed its own teachings and processes. Evidently, Gikai had not jettisoned everything inherited from the Daruma-shu. To a certain extent, all religious traditions end up borrowing and synthesising different elements. While customarily referred to as 'syncretism' and usually taken in the pejorative, it is clear from the rest of the sources Bodiford has mustered, that other Soto adherents adapted or embraced elements of teaching - Shingon or Tendai esoteric methods etc. - not strictly in line with Dogen's ideas, yet without any over-riding sense that they were militating against his essential teaching. Given the marked increase in Western interest for Dogen's magnum opus - the Shobogenzo, the chapter dealing with Senne and Kyogo, and other commentators on the Shobogenzo, will prove stimulating. As personal disciples of Dogen - like Ejo, the commentaries of Senne and Kyogo had been informed by what they perceived of Dogen's teaching at first hand. Rediscovered in the Tokugawa, the writings of Senne and Kyogo are therefore of unique value, for they ostensibly yielded a record of Dogen's thought, untouched by the later assumptions of the tradition. Whether free from all tarnish, is another matter. While useful for their assessment of Dogen's teaching, their writings exhibit sectarian tendencies - perhaps a reference to the ill-famed Daruma-shu. It is worth noting that despite its 'hallowed' status these days, parts of the Shobogenzo have been viewed with suspicion, if not the whole text! It has been exploited - through selective reading, to justify sweeping institutional changes. Manzan Dohoku (1636-1714) attempted this, appealing to the Tokugawa Shogunate to alter the Soto school's system of temple lineages (garanbo). Opposing this, other Soto scholars appealed, citing other portions of the Shobogenzo. Manzan won the day, but in order to avoid any further confusion over the status or intent of Dogen's teaching, the Soto hierarchy requested the government to ban both the copying and printing of any version of the Shobogenzo, which the Shogunate did in 1722. Again, Tenkei Denson (1648-1735), a Soto Buddhist scholar, whose writings have recently attracted fresh interest in the West, rejected six chapters of the Shobogenzo. He also suggested numerous revisions, including various sectarian comments which crept into the Shobogenzo, criticising eminent Chinese masters. In this, his judgement seemed akin to that of Majuaku Dochu (1653-1744), a Rinzai monk who had shared similar doubts. As Bodiford says - 'Tenkei and Mujaku alike believed in basic unity underlying all Zen, Soto and Rinzai, Chinese and Japanese. Neither could accept Dogen's criticism of famous Chinese masters.' The upside of this, is that it shows how Buddhists can rise above sectarian identities and form an objective opinion. The residual question here, of course, is whether the remarks concerned originated with Dogen? Unless definitely in his hand, we must view that question with caution. I can't devote much more space to this review. Still, on the question of sectarian interest, it is startling to realize that - at one time, the Soto tradition had virtually split in two, with two 'head temples' - one Hon-zan (head temple) at Eihei-ji, the other at Sojiji. At some point, the ridiculousness of the situation seems to have caught up with everyone, with a recognition that the Soto tradition had one and the same founder. On a positive end-note, it is worth pointing out that Bodiford more or less dismisses the so called 'sandai soron' or schism in the third generation, of which so much has been said and written. Reassuring too, was the chapter devoted to the koan and koan-literature in Soto Zen. Contrary to what we often hear today, Soto monks once used 'jakugo' in their training. They had their own koan-collections or 'monsan' and at their best, the so-called Soto kirikami (kirigami) once functioned in a similar vein, even if they later degenerated into mere formalism. As Bodiford notes - in the past, it was not uncommon for Rinzai and Soto monks to study koan at each other's temples. This was still the custom in Hakuin Zenji's lifetime, and it needs to be said that the more restrictive practices, prohibiting such inter-action, originated with the government, rather than the temples. I would like to say more about this book, but suffice it to say that Bodiford's study is worth reading.

Explores how Soto monks between the 13th and 16th centuries developed new forms of monastic organization and Zen instructions and new applications for Zen rituals within lay life; how these innovations helped shape rural society; and how remnants of them remain in the modern Soto school, now the lar

"Rich and stimulating ... highly recommended reading for anyone interested not only in Soto Zen but also in Japanese Buddhism, religion, or medieval history." "Carefully researched and set forth with finesse, Bodiford's study advances dramatically our understanding of the introduction and development of Zen in Japan.... [This] is the most important English work on St Zen to date; it is a 'must' for any student, scholar, or practitioner interested in the genesis and early development of this important strand of Japanese Buddhism."