

© Sotoshu Shumuchō 2008

正法眼藏第六十一
Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma
Book 61

龍吟
Song of the Dragon
Ryūgin

Translated by
Carl Bielefeldt

INTRODUCTION

This fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō* was composed in the winter of 1243, at a small temple at Yamashibu 禪師峰, in the province of Echizen (modern Fukui prefecture). It occurs as book 61 in the 75-fascicle redaction of the *Shōbōgenzō* and as book 51 in the 60-fascicle redaction.

The text, one of the shortest in the *Shōbōgenzō*, represents a commentary on two sayings on the phrase, “the song of the dragon in the dried tree”—a common Zen metaphor for vitality within repose (or the teaching activities of a Zen master), reflected in similar expressions in our text: “the roar of the lion in the skull,” “the eyeball in the skull,” “the pregnant column.” Dōgen begins his comments by distinguishing the “dried tree” in these sayings from the common phrase “dried tree and dead ashes,” often used to represent a state of mental quiescence. Unlike such a state, Dōgen says, the “dried tree” of the buddhas and ancestors can “meet the spring” and “sprout.” This “sprouting” is “the song of the dragon,” and it is precisely the state of being “dried” that permits one to sing it. He concludes his brief remarks by identifying the Zen masters’ talk about “the song of the dragon” with the countless tunes sung by the dragon.

This translation is based on the edition of the text in Kawamura Kōdō, *Dōgen zenji zenshū* 道元禪師全集, volume 2 (1993), pp. 151-154. Other English renderings of this work can be found in Kōsen Nishiyama and John Stevens, “The Roar of a Dragon,” *Shōbōgenzō*, volume 1 (1975), pp. 111-113; Yuho Yokoi, “A Mysterious Sound Made by the Wind Blowing round a Dead Tree,” *The Shobo-genzo* (1986), pp. 707-710; Francis Cook, “Dragon Song,” *Sounds of the Valley Streams* (1989), pp. 97-100; Thomas Cleary, “The Dragon Howl,” *Rational Zen: The Mind of Dōgen Zenji* (1992), pp. 104-107; Gudo Nishijima and Chodo Cross, “The Moaning of Dragons,” *Master Dogen’s Shobogenzo*, Book 3 (1997), pp. 227-231; and Hubert Nearman, “On the Roar of the Dragon,” *The Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching* (2007), pp. 741-745.