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正法眼藏第六十二
Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma
Book 62

祖師西來意
The Intention of the Ancestral Master's Coming from the West
(*Soshi seirai i*)

Translated by
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INTRODUCTION

This fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō* was composed early in 1244, probably at Kippōji 吉峰寺, the monastery in the province of Echizen (modern Fukui prefecture) where Dōgen was residing at the time. It occurs as book 62 of the 75-fascicle redaction of the *Shōbōgenzō* and book 52 in the 60-fascicle redaction.

Like several of the *Shōbōgenzō* texts from this period, the work is rather short. It focuses on a single episode in the Chan literature: the famous problem, posed by the ninth-century Chan Master Xiangyan Zhixian 香巖智閑, of the person, hanging by his teeth from the branch of a tree over a thousand-foot precipice, who is asked the intention of Bodhidharma's bringing the Chan tradition to China from India. Though this problem was very well known and often discussed by subsequent masters, Dōgen explicitly rejects the commentarial tradition as rarely having anything significant to say about the problem. At the end of his piece, he does, however, offer a remark on one comment, by the eleventh-century figure Xuedou Chongxian 雪竇重顯.

Dōgen begins his own comments with the advice that the problem should be addressed by thinking of “not thinking” and thinking of “non-thinking” while “sitting fixidly” on the same meditation cushion as its author, Xiangyan—a reference to the famous statement, much admired by Dōgen, of Yaoshan Weiyuan 藥山惟儼 (745-828) that his practice was “sitting fixidly” (*wuzou* 兀坐), “thinking of not thinking” (*siliang gu busiliang de* 思量箇不思量底). He then goes on to question the meaning here of the “person” and the “thousand-foot precipice”; to identify the person's mouth with the branch he bites, and the act of his questioner with biting the branch. In the end, Dōgen “solves” the problem by rejecting the distinction between the man's biting the branch and his opening his mouth to answer the question; both biting the branch and answering the question are Bodhidharma's intention in coming from the west.

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. 155-159. Other English renderings of this work can be found in Kōsen Nishiyama and John Stevens, *Shōbōgenzō*, volume 1 (1975), pp. 114-116; Yuho Yokoi, *The Shobo-genzo* (1986), pp. 711-714; Gudo Nishijima and Chodo Cross, *Master Dogen's Shobogenzo*, Book 3 (1997), pp. 241-246; and Hubert Nearman, *The Treasure House of the Eye of the True Teaching* (2007), pp. 755-759.