

SOTO ZEN TEXT PROJECT

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Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma

Shōbōgenzō

Book 13

Ocean Seal Samādhi

Kaiin zanmai

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with

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Introduction

This fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō* was composed at Dōgen's Kōshō monastery, on the outskirts of the capital of Heian (present-day Kyoto), in 1242, a year perhaps the most productive in its author's career.

The work takes its name from a state of concentration, known in Sanskrit sources as the *sāgara-mudrā-samādhi*. In this state, likened to an ocean on which appear images of the forms of all beings, it is said that the bodhisattva can see the mental activities of all beings or, more generally, can discern all phenomena (dharmas) in detail. The samādhi is often, though not exclusively, associated with the tradition of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, which is said to have been taught while the Buddha was absorbed in this state.

Dōgen's piece represents a commentary on two texts. The first, which occupies him for some two thirds of his work, is a passage from the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*, with a comment by the famous Tang-dynasty Chan master Mazu. The sutra tells how the bodhisattva should regard his body as merely the combination of dharmas arising and ceasing. In his comment, Mazu says that in fact the dharmas occur in each moment without relation to each other, a condition he identifies as the ocean seal samadhi. The second text is a teaching on the ocean by Tang figure, Caoshan, one of the founding ancestors of Dōgen's Sōtō lineage.

Dōgen's commentary takes up almost every word in these texts, playing with their interpretation and glossing them with cryptic allusions to the sayings and poems of

the Zen masters. In the process, as is often the case in his writings, he seeks at once to lift the language of his texts to a more mysterious metaphysical plane and to ground the metaphysics in the spiritual practice of the buddhas and ancestors of his tradition. At times, the effort seems a bit strained, and it is probably fair to say that some passages of the *Ocean Seal Samādhi* may not show us its author quite at his very best; still, a test of these waters will give the reader a good taste of Dōgen's idiosyncratic approach to reading his sources.

The following English version, like all the translations of the Soto Zen Text Project, seeks to retain as much as possible of the syntax and diction of the original, even at the expense of readability. Other English versions of this work can be found at Kōsen Nishiyama and John Stevens, *Shōbōgenzō*, volume 1 (1975); Hee-jin Kim, *Flowers of Emptiness* (1985) (partial); Thomas Cleary, *Shōbōgenzō* (1986); Yokoi Yuho, *The Shobo-genzo* (1986); Gudo Nishijima and Chodo Cross, *Master Dogen's Shobogenzo*, Book 2 (1996), and and Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed., *Beyond Thinking: A Guide to Zen Meditation* (2004).

The text translated here is from the edition in Kawamura Kōdō, *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, volume 1, pp. 119-126. I should like to express my appreciation to Michael Radich, of Harvard University, for his invaluable contributions to the research and translation during our study of the text together in Cambridge.