

Soto Zen Text Project

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Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma

Shōbōgenzō

正法眼藏

Book 35

Spiritual Powers

Jinzū

神通

Translated by
Carl Bielefeldt

Introduction

This fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō* was composed in the winter of 1241, at Kōshōji, Dōgen's monastery on the southern outskirts of the capital, Heian kyō (present Kyoto). It appears as Book 35 in both the seventy-five- and sixty-fascicle redactions of the *Shōbōgenzō*.

As its title indicates, the theme of the work is the Buddhist teaching of the supernormal powers ascribed to the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other adepts of the religion. This teaching was widespread throughout both the technical and popular literature of Buddhism and represented one of the common assumptions of the Buddhist community. Discussion of the powers also occurs with some frequency in the texts of the Chinese Zen masters, who tended in one way or another to redefine, dismiss or make light of the traditional understandings of the teaching.

Dōgen's text takes up several of the passages on the powers from the Chinese Zen literature, using them to develop his own vision of the higher meaning of what he calls "the great powers" and "the powers of the buddha." In this vision, the powers become the welling up of the world itself, the fundamental activity through which all things emerge and in celebration of which the Zen masters act out their own eccentric powers. Throughout the text, Dōgen has harsh words for those Buddhists

who lack this vision and remain limited to what he calls “the small powers” of the thaumaturgical tradition.

In 1245, after his move from the capital area to Echizen, Dōgen returned to the theme of the powers, in an essay entitled “Penetrating Others’ Minds” (*Tashin tsū*). This text may be interesting to read together with the *Jinzū*. Our translations of both these texts can be found at the SZTP web site: <http://scbs.stanford.edu/sztp3>.

The present translation is based on the text edited by Kawamura Kōdō, in *Dōgen zenji zenshū* 1 (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1991), pp. 392-402; I have revised the paragraphed breaks for ease of reading. Other English versions can be found in Nishijima and Cross, *Master Dogen’s Shobogenzo*, Book 2 (1996); Nishiyama and Stevens, *A Complete English Translation of Dogen Zenji’s Shobogenzo*, vol. 3 (1975); Kazuaki Tanahashi, *Enlightenment Unfolds* (1999); and Yokoi Yūhō, *The Shobogenzo* (1986).