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Dialogues in a Dream
Dialogues in a Dream

The Life and Zen Teachings of Musō Soseki

Translated and Annotated by Thomas Yūhō Kirchner
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THE PUBLISHER gratefully acknowledges the generous contribution of the Hershey Family Foundation toward the publication of this book.
ZEN MASTERS have never been averse to using language as a means of conveying their message, even as they stress the ineffability of the experience that their message attempts to describe. The masters active during Zen’s early years in Japan in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were no exception, leaving numerous writings in the form of recorded sayings, Dharma talks, and poetry collections. Among these works, the one that has perhaps best stood the test of time, as judged by its enduring popularity throughout the ensuing years, is a moderately sized publication known as *Dialogues in a Dream* (*Muchū Mondō* 夢中問答). This three-fascicle work consists of ninety-three chapters, each chapter being a question-and-answer exchange between Musō Soseki 夢窓疎石 (1275–1351), one of the most influential Japanese Zen masters of his time, and Ashikaga Tadayoshi 足利直義 (1306–1352), a founder and leader of the Muromachi Shogunate that governed Japan between 1336 and 1568.

Compiled in 1342 and first published in 1344, *Dialogues in a Dream* appeared at a seminal time in the history of Japanese Zen. Zen was originally introduced to Japan at the end of the twelfth century by Myōan Eisai 大室妙厳 and nurtured through the following years by a succession of Japanese masters who had trained in China and Chinese masters who had immigrated to Japan. With the generation of Musō
Soseki, however, a growing number of the school’s leaders were native-born and native-trained, and the tradition was making the transition from a foreign import to a naturalized expression of Japanese spirituality. Musō himself was deeply involved not only in teaching Zen but also in shaping its cultural manifestation in such areas as poetry and garden design.

As a work that has been consistently available throughout the centuries since its original publication, *Dialogues in a Dream* has been one of Musō’s most enduring contributions to Zen teaching in Japan. Written in the Japanese language rather than the Classical Chinese that most Buddhist works were composed in at the time, it has always been more approachable to the literate public than most Zen literature. It is, in addition, expressed in a relatively straightforward expository style that testifies to Musō’s clear, systematic thought, refined through the years he spent studying the doctrines and rituals of exoteric and esoteric Buddhism prior to his practice of Zen meditation. His solid background in these traditions was to serve him well in his career of proselytizing not only to the ordained clergy but also to the Buddhist laity.

Given the importance of this background in Musō’s career as a teacher, as well as in the thought that found expression in the exchanges that comprise *Dialogues in a Dream*, a brief account of the master’s life provides an appropriate starting point for understanding this text.

**The Zen Master Musō Soseki**

Many factors—including Musō’s high profile as a teacher of emperors and shoguns, his large following of well-educated disciples, and his own willingness to discuss the events of his career—combined to make Musō’s life one of the best-documented among the early Japanese Zen masters. The primary source for Musō’s life is the *Chronological Biography of National Teacher Musō Shōkaku Shinshū Fusai, Founder of Tenryū-ji* (Tenryū kaisan Musō Shōkaku Shinshū Fusai...
Kokushi nenpu 天龍開山夢窓正覺心宗普濟國師年譜), compiled by Shun’oku Myōha; Muso’s nephew and Dharma successor, and published in 1353, just over a year after Muso’s death. The Biography is an invaluable resource, as Shun’oku’s proximity to Muso left him eminently positioned to give an accurate account of the master’s life, probably based on reports heard from Muso himself. A limited amount of additional information is found here and there in the master’s poems and other writings, including Night Talks on West Mountain (Seizan yawa 西山夜話) and Dialogues in a Dream.

Owing to the subsequent prominence of Muso’s Dharma lineage in medieval Rinzai Zen, a number of additional biographical texts were compiled in the centuries following Muso’s death, but much of the material in these texts that is not found in Shun’oku’s account (such as information relating to Muso’s ancestry) appears to be based less on verifiable historical fact than on attempts to burnish Muso’s image.

In the present biographical overview I have relied primarily on Shun’oku’s Biography, as translated into modern Japanese and supplemented with other historical materials by the Japanese scholar Nishiyama Mika 西山美香 in an appendix to her PhD thesis entitled “The Life of Muso Soseki” 夢窓疎石の生涯. Another especially helpful reference was Martin Collcutt’s chapter on Muso Soseki in The Origins of Japan’s Medieval World. Collcutt’s treatment takes full account of the information in the Biography as it contextualizes Muso’s contributions within the historical framework of fourteenth-century Japan.

The Biography provides only a sketchy picture of Muso’s earliest years, saying that he was born in the year 1275 in the province of Ise (the central portion of present-day Mie Prefecture), that his father was of the Minamoto clan and his mother of the Taira clan, and that Muso himself was a ninth-generation descendant of Emperor Uda 宇多 (867–931). It adds that his mother prayed to the bodhisattva Kan-non (Avalokiteśvara) for the birth of a son, and that one night she had a dream in which a golden light streamed from the west and entered her mouth. Thirteen months later Muso was born. Muso himself was later known for his devotion to Avalokiteśvara, constructing shrines
dedicated to the bodhisattva at most of the temples he founded and often performing Kannon Purification rituals during the course of his Zen training.

The Biography gives the year but not the date of Musō’s birth (though later materials suggest that it was on the first day of the eleventh month), and his exact birthplace remains unidentified. Regarding the latter there are two rival claims, advanced, respectively, by Tenryū-ji and Shōkoku-ji, the two largest temples associated with Musō. Tenryū-ji proposes the village of Miyake 三宅, located in the southwestern environs of the present city of Suzuka, while Shōkoku-ji’s candidate is the village of Katada Ido 片田井戸, about fourteen kilometers south of Miyake on the western outskirts of the city of Tsu.

In 1278, owing to an unexplained disturbance in Musō’s mother’s family, the family left Ise and moved to Kai (present-day Yamanashi Prefecture) in the mountains of eastern Japan. The family’s move to Kai may have been motivated in part by the fact that it was the seat of the Takeda family, a powerful branch of the Minamoto clan.

In the eighth month of 1278 Musō’s mother died. Although it is unlikely that Musō, just three years old at the time, was turned toward the religious life by this early loss, the Biography reports that there were already signs that the boy was temperamentally inclined in that direction. He is said to have been quiet and gentle, intelligent and studious. By the time he was five he was already able to write characters and demonstrated comprehension of the sutras he recited.

In 1283, at the age of eight, Musō was taken by his father to the nearby temple Heien-ji 平塩寺 and placed under the tutelage of the eminent priest Kūa 空阿 (n.d.). Although the Biography reports that Musō’s father did so out of a strong desire to have his son become a monk (Musō, according to the account, had already shown his spiritual fervor by chanting the Lotus Sutra for seven full days to mark the anniversary of his mother’s death), residence at a temple may simply have been the most effective way at the time to further the education of an obviously precocious and sensitive child.
There is some question regarding what branch of Buddhism Heien-ji was associated with. Founded in 755 as a Hossō school temple, it soon reaffiliated itself with the Tendai school; then—either while Musō was there or shortly thereafter—with the Shingon school. In any event, a shift from Tendai to Shingon would have meant little with regard to the content of Musō’s studies, which in either case would have focused on esoteric ritual and exoteric doctrine. Musō’s early education would also have included extensive readings in the classics of Chinese literature and philosophy as well as training in the secular accomplishments.

In 1286 Musō’s father remarried. His new wife, a woman of Minamoto ancestry, became like a second mother to Musō and was warmly remembered by him in later life. He paid visits to the family home every ten days, often bringing a number of young friends for a good meal. At the same time, his awareness of the ephemeral nature of life appears to have been deepening. The Biography reports that in 1288, at age thirteen, Musō completed the considerable task of painting the “Nine Images for Contemplation,” a series of illustrations showing the stages of decay a corpse undergoes until nothing is left but scattered bones. Musō meditated on these images until he came to perceive his own body as nothing but lifeless flesh, and he subsequently spent much time sitting in contemplation under trees and in quiet places.

In 1292, at the age of seventeen, Musō journeyed to the ancient capital of Nara, several hundred kilometers to the west of Kai, to take the formal precepts at Tōdai-ji 東大寺 under a precept master named Jikan 慈観 (n.d.). Following his return that year to Heien-ji, Musō abandoned all non-Buddhist pursuits and focused upon deepening his understanding of Buddhist doctrine and ritual. Musō’s spiritual life took a decisive turn in 1293, when one of the priests teaching Tendai doctrine at Heien-ji became ill and shortly thereafter died in a state of great suffering. This painful death caused Musō to question the entire direction of his education. According to the Biography, Musō reflected that
Buddhism has many paths, but all are directed toward leaving the world’s dust behind and gaining the Way. This lecture master was famous for his knowledge, but at the time of his death it benefited him nothing. The Buddha-dharma is beyond the reach of learning and intellect. Is it not for this reason that the Zen school speaks of “a separate transmission outside the teachings”?

In an effort to clarify his own future course, Musô embarked upon a hundred-day solitary retreat devoted to prayer and meditation. Where this occurred is uncertain, but Nishiyama notes that the historical records of Mitomi-mura 三富村, a village in the vicinity of present-day Yamanashi City, mention a ninety-nine-day period of meditation by the nineteen-year-old Musô in a hillside cave near the community.

Three days before the end of the retreat Musô had a dream in which a guide led him deep into the mountains to a solitary temple. The place was decorated in a dignified manner, though no one was there. When Musô asked the name of the temple his guide answered, “Sozan.” They then continued on to another temple, identified by the guide as “Sekitô,” where an elderly priest greeted them. Musô’s guide said to the priest, “This monk has traveled here in search of a sacred image. Please, Reverend, be so kind as to present him with one.” Thereupon the old priest picked up a scroll and handed it to Musô. Upon unrolling it Musô saw that it was a portrait of Bodhidharma, the Indian monk traditionally honored as the transmitter of Zen to China. Musô rolled up the scroll and placed it in the folds of his robe, at which point he awoke from his dream.

Sozan and Sekitô were two well-known Tang-dynasty Zen masters: “Sozan” refers to Sushan Guangren (J., Sozan Kônin), while “Sekitô” refers to Shitou Xiqian (J., Sekitô Kisen). While their exact significance for Musô is not explained in the texts, both were important figures who played significant roles in the development of Chinese Zen.

Musô’s dream settled for him the course of his future practice.
Seeing it as a sign of a deep connection with the Zen school, he took the new name “Soseki” (combining the “so” of “Sozan” with the “seki” of “Sekitō”) and “Musō” (meaning “Dream Window,” his dream having provided the window through which he could perceive his future course; although I have been using the name Musō for him as a matter of convenience, until this point in his life he had been known by his novice name Chikaku 智曜). He then commenced a training pilgrimage that was to last, off and on, for nearly forty years.

In 1294 Musō left Kai to visit Shinchi Kakushin,12 a Shingon priest who, like Musō, had turned to the practice of Zen, and who in the late thirteenth century was priest of the temple Saihō-ji 西方寺 in Yura, a town on the mountainous shore of present-day Wakayama Prefecture. On his way to Yura, however, Musō called upon a Zen monk named Tokushō 徳照, an old friend then living in Kyoto, who advised him that before setting off for a retreat at a remote temple like Saihō-ji it would be best to learn the basics of Zen practice at a large monastic community. Musō therefore changed plans and entered Kennin-ji, the oldest Zen monastery in Kyoto, to study under the master Muin Enban.13 Practice at Kennin-ji had originally consisted of the syncretic mix of Zen meditation and Tendai ritual introduced by its founder, Myōan Eisai, but Muin Enban’s teacher, Lanxi Daolong,14 had reformed life at the temple according to the strict monastic regulations of Song-dynasty Zen. It was in this style of Zen that Musō began his training.

In the tenth month of 1295 Musō traveled to Kamakura to continue his practice at Tōshō-ji 東勝寺 under the Lanxi-line master Mukyū Tokusen.15 Following a major fire at Tōshō-ji, Musō moved nearby to the great monastery of Kenchō-ji 建長寺 to study under another Lanxi successor, Ikō Dōnen.16 While at Kenchō-ji, an older monk encouraged Musō to read the Zen records. According to Night Talks on West Mountain, the monk spoke as follows:

The enlightened words of the ancient masters are published and read so that young monks may study them and
receive guidance in their quest for awakening.... In the Lat-
ter Age of the Dharma it is hard to find true teachers. If we
arouse our aspiration and read the Zen records, we will see
that the enlightenment of the ancient masters is itself our
enlightenment today. Why should past and present differ?

Hearing these words, Musō, who since turning to Zen had devoted
himself almost entirely to meditation, started spending what time he
could on examining the old records.

In 1296 Musō continued his instruction in Lanxi-line Zen from
Chōkei Tokugo at Engaku-ji 圓覺寺, a large monastery located a ten-
minute walk northwest of Kenchō-ji. When yet another Lanxi suc-
cessor, Chidon Kūshō, became abbot of Kenchō-ji, Musō sought
instruction from him at Chōkei’s urging.

Musō returned to Kyoto following the end of the 1297 training
season and reentered Kennin-ji to continue his study under Muin
Enban. In the summer of 1299, however, he encountered the Chinese
Zen master Yishan Yining, soon after the latter’s arrival from China.
Yishan appears to have impressed him very favorably, since, not long
afterward, Musō traveled to Kamakura to join him at Kenchō-ji,
where Yishan had just been installed as abbot. So many monks
flocked to the monastery to practice under him that Yishan, in order
to narrow the field, devised an entrance examination ascertaining the
applicants’ literary abilities. Musō was one of the two monks who
received top marks for the test.

Musō remained at Kenchō-ji for two training periods, then, in
the autumn of 1300, set out for the province of Dewa 出羽 (present
Yamagata and Akita prefectures) in the northern reaches of Japan
to visit an old friend. When news reached him that his friend was
no longer alive, he instead made his way to the temple Shōtō-ji 松島
寺 (present Zuigan-ji 瑞巖寺), a large Kenchō-ji affiliate located near
what is now the city of Sendai. While there, the Biography reports,
he was deeply inspired by a certain monk’s discourse on Tendai
meditation. Sitting in zazen (Zen meditation) through the night, he
had a sudden insight into the distinctions between the teachings of the various Buddhist schools, and he subsequently noticed that his thought was clearer, his speech more fluent, and his mind much freer of fear.

Although he didn’t regard this experience as true enlightenment, Musō was nevertheless interested in knowing what it signified, so late in the year he departed Shōtō-ji for the temple Ungan-ji in Nasu, about two hundred kilometers to the south, to check his understanding with the noted master Kōhō Kennichi. As chance would have it, when Musō arrived Kōhō had just departed for Kamakura. Musō decided to remain at the temple anyway, as he was suffering from a leg affliction. The Biography reports that while there he performed a Kannon Purification Ceremony during which he experienced a *makyō*—an illusory event that occasionally arises out of states of deep concentration—where the faded image of Avalokiteśvara suddenly appeared as if newly painted. Avalokiteśvara herself smiled and appeared vibrantly alive, then took on the form of monks, nuns, demons, and countless other beings. Realizing that all of these phenomena were nothing more than creations of his mind, Musō paid them no heed.

In February 1301 Musō returned to Kenchō-ji to resume his training under Yishan. The following year, when Yishan agreed to serve concurrently as abbot of both Kenchō-ji and Engaku-ji, Musō accompanied him to the latter temple in order to continue his studies.

By 1303, however, Musō was beginning to question the direction his practice had taken ever since he spoke with the old monk at Kenchō-ji in 1295 and occupied himself with investigating the traditional Zen records. *Night Talks on West Mountain* records Musō as saying:

Yishan at the time was serving as abbot of both Kenchō-ji and Engaku-ji. I had been with him for several years and received his teaching morning and evening as I continued studying the writings of the Five Houses. By that time I felt thoroughly confident in my understanding of the
principles of Zen. Then one day, upon examining my own heart, I realized how uneasy I still felt. For the first time I understood the saying, “That which comes from outside the gate is not the house treasure.” As an ancient master said, “Never obscure the light of the spirit—this is the eternal way; having entered the gate, do not tarry in intellectual understanding.” I had left the school of doctrine and entered the school of Zen, yet my studies, although different in content, were equally based on conceptual knowledge. If I go on like this, I thought, I’m simply obscuring the light of my spirit. I therefore took the bag filled with the notes I had accumulated over the years and threw it into the fire.

Musō then went to Yishan and said, “I still have not clarified the matter of self.” Master, please, directly point the way.” Yishan answered, “Our school has no words or phrases, and nothing to transmit to anyone.” “That may be so,” responded Musō, “but be compassionate and at least teach me an expedient means.” “There are no expedient means,” declared Yishan, “nor is there any compassion.” From then on this is all that Yishan would say to Musō.

The Biography reports that Musō, though recognizing the profound lesson that Yishan was attempting to convey, felt frustrated by his inability to communicate with the master in a more effective way. He decided to call upon Kōhō Kennichi, then serving as abbot at Manju-ji in Kamakura. At their first meeting Musō told him of his conversation with Yishan. Kōhō laughed and responded, “Why didn’t you say to him, ‘Master, aren’t you getting a bit confused?’” Kōhō then spoke as follows:

When I was sixteen I was ordained at Tōfuku-ji and placed under the tutelage of an old monk. The monk directed me to read the Zen records. Every time I read a line I would ask him the meaning, until he said, “The writings of Zen
are unlike those of other Buddhist schools—they are not to be explained.”

“But how can they be understood,” I asked, “if they are not explained?” “Only with enlightenment does one understand the meaning,” he replied. “If I persevere in my reading, will I naturally enlighten?”

“If you wish to attain enlightenment,” he replied, “you must directly investigate the self.”

Upon hearing this I read no more, devoting myself instead to zazen in the meditation hall. Many monks advised me, saying, “Young people should devote themselves to study. A momentary zeal for enlightenment won’t carry you through to the end. You will regret this when you are old.”

I simply practiced meditation even more than before. I’m now more than sixty years old, and to this day I have no regrets.”

Musō, deeply moved by Kōhō’s words, dedicated himself with renewed resolve to meditation. Night Talks on West Mountain continues as follows:

I sensed some progress, but was still unable to apply myself single-mindedly to the practice. Finally, desiring to seclude myself deep in the mountains so that I could thoroughly investigate the self, I departed Engaku-ji for Okushū.25 There I built a hut and vowed to myself that I would either clarify this matter or molder away with the grasses and trees. As a spur to training I laid on the table the Essential Teachings of Meditation Master Foguo Yuanwu Zhenjue;26 the Letters of Meditation Master Dahui;27 and the Zen Forest Records of Meditation Master Juefan Huihong;28 these were the only possessions I had.
This marked the beginning of a new phase in Musō’s practice, quite different in character from what had gone before. Whereas previously he had always stayed at temples or monasteries under the direct guidance of a teacher, for the next several decades he was to spend long periods meditating alone and away from established centers. During the times when he did live in communities it was often in remote areas.

Musō’s determination to meditate in the mountains and “molder away with the grasses and trees” if he failed to reach enlightenment echoes in many ways the stories of the two Chinese Zen masters Liang Zuozhu 亮座主 (J., Ryō Zasu, n.d.) and Nanyang Huizhong 南陽慧忠 (J., Nan’yō Echū, 675–775), and indeed his new direction may have been inspired in part by their example. Both of these masters would have been familiar to Musō from his extensive study of Zen literature, and both were in fact mentioned by him in his subsequent writings as men whose lives helped shape his ideals for spiritual training.

Liang Zuozhu, whom Musō mentions several times in the Biography, Dialogues in a Dream, and other works, was a semilegendary Chinese Buddhist scholar (“Liang Zuozhu” means, literally, “Eminent Scholar Liang”) who abandoned his studies to become a religious anchorite in the mountains. In the Zen classics Liang’s story appears in two parts. A representative example of the first part is found in the Compendium of the Five Lamps:

Eminent Scholar Liang visited Mazu. Mazu said to him, “I have heard that the master lectures on the sutras and śāstras. Is this true?” “Yes,” replied Liang.

Mazu then asked, “What do you lecture with?” Liang said, “I lecture with my mind.”

Mazu replied, “The mind is like an actor, consciousness is like an assistant.’ How can they explain the sutras?”

Liang said in a loud voice, “If the mind cannot lecture, can empty space lecture?”

Mazu said, “Yes, indeed, empty space can lecture.”
Liang disagreed and got up to leave. When he was about to step down the stairs, Mazu called to him, “Eminent Scholar!” When Liang turned his head, Mazu said, “What is that?” Liang had a great awakening. He bowed to Mazu, who said, “This stupid monk! What are you bowing for?”

Liang said, “I used to think that no one could lecture on the sutras as well as I. Today at a single question by Great Master Mazu my whole life’s work has melted away.” He then entered the West Mountains and was never heard from again.30

It was, however, the second part of Liang’s story that most deeply affected Musō. This part, which appears most notably in Dahui Zonggao’s *Zen Arsenal,*31 tells of two twelfth-century travelers who were journeying deep in the West Mountains one rainy day when they caught sight of an ancient monk meditating on a rock. The monk, who radiated an air of exceptional purity, had long white hair and wore a robe of woven leaves. One of the travelers, marveling that such a monk still lived in the West Mountains, suddenly remembered that they were in the area where Liang had secluded himself over three hundred years before. Approaching the monk, he asked, “Are you Eminent Scholar Liang?” The ancient monk raised his hand and pointed toward the east, and the travelers turned their gaze in that direction. When they looked back to where Liang had been a moment before, no one was there, although the spot on the rock where the monk had been sitting was still dry.32

Musō’s admiration of Liang is evident from his prominent mention of the hermit in chapter 46 of *Dialogues in a Dream,* as well as his use of Liang’s story in naming certain design features in the gardens he later created (such as the “Pointing-East Hut” at Saihō-ji 西芳寺, the Moss Temple). The image of the ancient monk sitting deep in the mountains and in full harmony with his natural surroundings epitomized for Musō one aspect of the religious ideal, one that, as we shall see, formed a continuing theme in his life.
As we will also see, however, Musō’s attraction to the life of solitude in nature was balanced by another dynamic that increasingly expressed itself in his later life: the call to leave the life of solitude and live and teach in the midst of society. The person who for Musō best served as an example of this pattern of practice—long years of postenlightenment cultivation in the mountains followed by a busy teaching career in the capital—was the above-mentioned master Nanyang Huizhong. Nanyang lived in the early Tang dynasty, when Zen was first taking form as a distinct tradition in China. He began his training at the age of sixteen under Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch. After succeeding to Huineng’s Dharma he left on a pilgrimage to various Buddhist sites, eventually settling in the Dangzi Valley on Mount Baiya in present-day Henan, where he dwelt as a hermit for forty years. He finally departed only in 761 at the age of eighty-six, when Emperor Suzong called him to Chang’an, the capital of the Tang dynasty. There Nanyang resided at Guangzhai si, a temple established for him by Emperor Daizong, who conferred upon him the title National Teacher Liangdi, “National Teacher of Two Emperors.”

The symbolic importance that Nanyang held for Musō is reflected in the fact that when, decades later, Musō was in Kyoto teaching, he bestowed upon Nanyang the same honor he had upon Eminent Scholar Liang by assigning names based on elements of Nanyang’s story to various features in the famous garden he designed at Saihō-ji.

Musō’s call to service in the world was foreshadowed in Kōhō Ken-nichi’s final advice to him as he prepared to leave Kamakura for his retreat in Okushū to the north, so let us return at this point to Musō’s spiritual journey. Kōhō said to his departing student, “If a follower of the Way separates the mundane and the supramundane by even so much as a hairbreadth, he cannot attain satori.” The true significance of these words struck Musō only some time later. In Night Talks Musō recalls:

I had spent three years in seclusion without yet reaching the stage of insight. Then one day I happened to remember
Kōhō’s parting words... I realized that although there was nothing I desired with regard to the secular world, thoughts of the Dharma may well have become obstacles to enlightenment. Having seen my error, my seeking mind vanished of itself and from then on I passed my time in stillness. Then one night I kicked over the age-old nest of delusion and finally realized that Kōhō’s words were true.

Although this passage gives the impression that Musō spent the next few years in a single solitary retreat leading to the experience of “kicking over delusion,” the Biography speaks of several shorter retreats interspersed with periods of wandering. After his departure from Kamakura, the Biography tells us, Musō first headed north for Shiratori 白鳥, an area located near the present city of Iwaki, where he made a grass hut for himself and passed the winter. A wealthy believer, seeing Musō’s simple quarters, offered to build a temple for him, but Musō demurred, realizing that such a project would simply distract him from his search.

Seeking perhaps to further distance himself from such hindrances, Musō left Shiratori in the second month of 1304 and moved to Mount Uchinokusa 内草, where he made another hut and resumed his meditation. The location of Mount Uchinokusa is uncertain; Nishiyama believes that it corresponds to a hill in what is now the northwestern part of the city of Iwaki. Musō spent about a year there, in the course of which he gave away the three texts he had brought with him for inspiration. From that point on he communed only with his natural surroundings.

The Biography reports that one night as he was sitting by the fireside a bright flame suddenly leapt into the air. The instant Musō saw the flash his mind opened and was filled with a shining clarity. The following day when he saw the shadows of the breeze-blown bamboos moving against his paper window he no longer felt hindered by the activities of daily life. At that time he reflected to himself:
Even the buddhas and the patriarchs cannot explain Original Nature, but if one perseveres in clarifying it one cannot fail to understand. Thus one must take every opportunity to practice. Still, desire for the Way cannot overcome the feelings. When the mind moves one loses oneself in the surrounding circumstances. Thus from today I will make no distinction between self and circumstances. As the Buddha said, “Waking and sleeping are the same; remembering and forgetting are one.”

Starting on New Year’s Day 1305, Musō conducted a week-long Kannon Purification Ceremony, promising himself that after finishing he would never again rest his side against his bed. Not long after the end of the ceremony, however, he was sitting on the floor when sleep suddenly overcame him, and it wasn’t until he felt the afternoon sun shining through the window that he awoke. Realizing what had happened, he first felt a deep sense of shame. Then he thought, “If it is true that ‘waking and sleeping are the same; remembering and forgetting are one,’ then there is nothing to be ashamed of even if one were to sleep through Maitreya’s coming.”

Wishing to discuss this insight with Kōhō, Musō left Mount Uchinokusa and set out for Kamakura in the second month of 1305. His reputation appears to have preceded him, however. As Musō passed through Usuba, near the present city of Kitaibaraki, a layman named Hisa 比佐 received him and implored him to stay for a time, saying that he owned a hermitage where Musō could meditate in peace. At first Musō declined the offer, citing his desire to meet with Kōhō as soon as possible. That evening, however, he remembered Kōhō’s parting words, “If a follower of the Way separates the mundane and the supramundane by even so much as a hairbreadth, he cannot attain satori,” and decided that the small rural town might be the best place to continue his retreat.

One day in the early summer Musō was meditating in the cool shade of a tree in front of Hisa’s hermitage. The sun went down, and
soon the night had deepened. Feeling tired, he stood up and entered the pitch-dark building. Intending to rest for a moment against a wall that, in the darkness, turned out not to be there, Musō lost his balance and fell over, precipitating a profound enlightenment experience. Musō broke out in sudden laughter. Later he described the moment in a poem:

For many years I dug the earth in search of the blue sky,
Piling useless obstructions layer upon layer.
One night in the darkness I kicked a tile
And no-mindedly smashed the bones of the void.

Musō continued his retreat in Usuba until the early winter, then walked the remaining distance to Kamakura. There he met Kōhō at the large temple Jōchi-ji 淨智寺, where Kōhō was abbot at the time. His teacher immediately noticed the change in Musō, and, after a lively exchange of questions and answers, recognized him as his successor. Musō was just thirty-one years old.

Musō’s awakening in the hermitage was the pivotal experience that resolved his spiritual questions, but it did not mark the end of his training. Following satori, Zen traditionally demands a period of postenlightenment training known as “long cultivation of the sacred embryo” (shōtai chōyō 聖胎長養). The classic literature is filled with stories of masters who, after their awakening, retreated to the mountains and spent twenty, thirty, or (like Nanyang) forty years cultivating their understanding. It is a time of integrating spiritual realization into everyday life and removing the “smell” of enlightenment, so that one can live the truth of the teaching that “ordinary mind is the Way.” In chapter 35 of Dialogues in a Dream Musō provides a succinct description of this stage of practice and its results:

The beginning student should first of all thoroughly grasp the intent of the Patriarch, and not dwell, lifeless, amid the words. The ancient masters, after awakening to the
Patriarch’s intent, would spend thirty to fifty years in intensive refinement, eliminating their remaining karma and residual hindrances. This type of training is known as “nourishing the sacred embryo.” When the process fully matures everything is united into one, and there naturally appears the lucid eloquence and appropriate functioning that enables complete freedom in helping other people.

The Biography’s account of the next few decades of Musō’s life makes it clear that Musō, too, attempted to follow the classical pattern of shōtai chōyō. Circumstances in Kamakura-era Japan, however, rendered postenlightenment training considerably more challenging than in Tang-dynasty China. Almost from the start Musō was in demand as a teacher and abbot, and his efforts to postpone such responsibilities until he felt spiritually mature enough to guide students sometimes bordered on the extreme.

After his meeting in Kamakura with Kōhō, Musō immediately set out for Kai. There he met his parents for the first time in many years and, at the invitation of the head of the Nikaidō clan (an influential branch of the Minamotos), took up residence at Jōko-ji, a temple newly established for him. He remained there throughout 1306 and into 1307, attracting many believers as well as Zen students eager to receive his instruction.

Sometime in 1307 he commissioned a portrait of Kōhō, which he took to Kamakura to be inscribed by Kōhō himself. Kōhō, who in the meantime had returned to Manju-ji, willingly wrote the inscription, then asked his attendant to bring a robe. He handed the garment to Musō, saying, “This is the robe worn by my teacher, Wuxue Zuyuan, when he delivered his lectures. I now present it to you as a sign of my trust.” He then asked Musō to remain with him at Manju-ji for a time. Musō acceded, serving as Kōhō’s head monk through the end of the training period of 1308.

At the end of the training period Musō took his leave of Kōhō and his former teacher Yishan (then abbot of the subtemple Gyoku’un-an
玉雲庵 of Kenchō-ji), saying that he wished to further cultivate his understanding in the rural surroundings of Kai. Both masters presented him with farewell gifts, Kōhō giving him a written sermon and Yishan a long formal poem. When Musō reached Kai and called upon “the doctrinal temple he had trained at previously” (presumably Heien-ji, although the Biography does not mention the temple’s name), his teacher, referred to as “the Venerable Jōtatsu 靜達上人,” entreated him to receive transmission in the esoteric teachings. Musō’s association with the Zen school was irrelevant, Jōtatsu said, arguing that “even Nāgārjuna mastered both the exoteric and esoteric teachings, and was simultaneously a patriarch in the Zen lineage.” Musō, the Biography reports, simply nodded his head noncommittally. Later he said to a disciple, “The doctrinal schools and the Zen school are as incompatible as charcoal and ice. Even if Nāgārjuna were to reappear and combine the practice of the various traditions, it would benefit the world nothing.”

The following year, 1309, Musō paid a visit to Kōhō, who in the meantime had retired from his position as abbot of Manju-ji and returned to Ungan-ji in the mountains north of the Kantō Plain. During the period of his stay Musō was appointed secretary of the monastery. As Kōhō was in poor health at the time, the monks in training started going to Musō for instruction, a development that Kōhō heartily approved of. The Biography, however, reports that Musō himself was not naturally inclined to the constant interaction of teaching and desired to withdraw to quieter surroundings. Finally, before the completion of the training period, he went to Kōhō and announced his intention to leave. Kōhō produced a letter from his own teacher, Wuxue Zuyuan, in which Wuxue, concerned about Kōhō’s taste for solitude and isolation, urged him to keep company with like-minded seekers and warned him that his duty to “repay the benevolence of the Buddha” by transmitting the Way is not something that can be accomplished alone.

Musō accepted the letter and returned to Jōko-ji. This was the last time he saw Kōhō, but in the twelfth month of 1309 he wrote a letter
to his old teacher informing him of his activities and promising that if his own attainments in the Dharma fell short of Kōhō’s he would not go forth into the world but remain secluded and “molder away with the grasses and trees.” Kōhō, worried perhaps that Musō intended to do precisely that, wrote back saying:

You must never think of remaining in seclusion and “moldering away with the grasses and trees.” Even the trees and the grasses turn the wheel of the Dharma.... Who will address the evils of the Latter Age? You must...scold the buddhas and revile the patriarchs, and restore the Buddha-dharma to its former vigor.

Musō, the Biography says, accepted this as Kōhō’s sincere attempt to cure his disciple’s hidden faults, and told himself, “I must remember Baizhang’s warning not to cling to petty gains and merits.”

Musō remained at Jōko-ji throughout 1310. In light of the 1306 Biography entry reporting the presence at the temple of numerous Zen monks already seeking his teaching, it must be assumed that by 1310 a large community had gathered. In order to further the cultivation of his own enlightenment in more tranquil surroundings, Musō left Jōko-ji in the spring of 1311 and moved to a hut he built for himself in the mountains of Kai. The hut, to which he gave the name Ryōzan-an 龍山庵 (Dragon Mountain Hermitage), was located on the upper reaches of the Fuefuki River about twenty kilometers from the nearest settlement. Once again, however, it was not long before fellow monks started to gather around him, seeking his instruction and making huts of their own.

In its entry for the following year, 1312, the Biography reports a small incident at Ryōzan-an that is interesting for what it says of Musō’s character. In the early spring a wildfire broke out on the mountain and threatened the collection of huts. Musō, taking with him only the robe he had received from Kōhō, went to the top of a nearby rocky precipice together with his students to wait out the
conflagration. Suddenly the wind reversed direction, blowing the fire back on itself and extinguishing the flames. The onlooking monks all attributed this to divine intervention, but Musō simply laughed and said, “In the mountains the winds change direction all the time. That saved us from misfortune this time, but why call it a miracle?”

Despite Ryōzan-an’s remoteness, the number of monks living around Musō steadily increased until huts covered the nearby hills and lined the banks of the local streams. Looking around, Musō reflected to himself that he had come to the mountain intending to live like the Chinese Zen recluse Yinshan, yet now was surrounded by what had become for all intents and purposes a sizeable village. Deciding that he needed even remoter surroundings, he walked down the mountain one day at the end of 1312, leaving the Dragon Mountain Hermitage behind.

It appears from the Biography account that at first Musō had no clear idea of where to go. He returned for a time to Jōko-ji, where friends suggested that he might find the peaceful environment he sought in the provinces of Enshū (present-day Shizuoka Prefecture) or Nōshū (the southern part of present Gifu Prefecture). He remained undecided, however, until his teacher Kōhō encouraged him to take the position of abbot of Chōraku-ji, an important temple in what is presently Gumma Prefecture. According to Nishiyama’s research, Chōraku-ji had long been associated with the lineage of Kōhō’s teacher Wuxue Zuyuan, and thus Kōhō was no doubt desirous of continuing this tie by installing Musō, his top disciple, as the new abbot. Chōraku-ji, moreover, had suffered a serious fire shortly before, and Kōhō likely recognized in Musō the administrative skills necessary to complete the task of reconstruction.

Musō, however, did not feel ready at that point to assume such responsibilities, so in 1313 he quietly left Jōko-ji and made his way west to Enshū together with another monk, Gen’ō Hongen, and six or seven others. From there they continued to Mikawa, Gen’ō’s birthplace, and then north through Nōshū until they reached the area of Mount Nagase. There, where the valley of the Toki River wound
its way through the range of low mountains just northeast of present-day Nagoya, they found what they were looking for: an area of outstanding natural beauty located far from their nearest neighbors. They received permission from the local landowner to build a small temple, which they called Kokei-an 古谿庵 (Old Valley Hermitage). The characters were later changed to 虎谿庵, pronounced the same but meaning Tiger Valley Hermitage, an allusion to Tiger Valley on Mount Lu, one of the most famous, and secluded, places of Buddhist practice in China.

During their first two months there not a single visitor disturbed the peace of their mountain retreat. By 1314, however, word of Musō’s presence had spread, and a growing stream of people was calling upon the temple. Within a year, the Biography tells us, Kokei-an had become every bit as busy as the Dragon Mountain Hermitage. Musō, tired of dealing with guests, put up a sign in front of the gate entreat ing callers not to disturb the tranquility of the temple and advising them that fine Zen teachers and quiet surroundings could be found elsewhere throughout Japan. This appeal, however, did nothing to slow the ever-increasing number of visitors. Musō finally reflected, “This land is not my private property, so it is unfair to try to keep it for myself and prevent others from coming. It is I who ought to leave.” At just this time believers at the nearby temple Seisui-ji 清水寺, knowing of Musō’s desire for a more peaceful location to continue his training, offered to build a hermitage for him in the nearby mountains. Musō, delighted by this proposal, promised to accept their offer the following year.

In the spring of 1316 Musō and two companions went to live at the new hermitage, which in later years became the temple Tōkō-ji 東香寺. Here again the peace of their new surroundings did not last for long—already by summertime monks eager for instruction were coming from Seisui-ji and elsewhere. Meanwhile the news reached Musō that the assembly at Kokei-an had dispersed, leaving only the monks who had originally accompanied him there. Now that the new hermitage was nearly as busy as Kokei-an had ever been, Musō
decided to return to his old temple, saying that it wasn’t Kokei-an itself he had disliked but the crowds of visitors it had attracted. Once back at Kokei-an he attempted to maintain some sense of solitude by leaving the main temple in the care of Gen’ō and taking up residence in a nearby hermitage.

In the winter of 1316 Musō, receiving word of his teacher Kōhō’s death, performed a memorial service with all due ceremony.

The Biography account tells us that in the ninth month of 1317 Musō left Kokei-an and resided for a time in the Kitayama area of northern Kyoto. No reason for this move is given, leaving several modern commentators free to conjecture political considerations on Musō’s part. Nishiyama, however, offers a more commonsense scenario. Since it is known that Musō’s former teacher Yishan had fallen ill at Nanzen-ji just before Musō arrived and died soon afterward, Nishiyama hypothesizes that Musō’s move to the capital was prompted by a desire to pay his last respects to the teacher under whom he had studied for so long. That he had so recently heard of Kōhō’s death only after the fact would have undoubtedly strengthened that desire.

The location of the Biography’s “Kitayama” is uncertain; Nishiyama suggests the area just east of Ninna-ji 仁和寺 in northwestern Kyoto, in the neighborhood of a hermitage, Shōmyaku-an 正脈庵, honoring the remains of Kōhō’s teacher Wuxue Zuyuan. In a poem Musō describes his life in Kitayama:

Staying a while in the busy town,
I keep my gate shut even during the day;
In the midst of the city I have the mountains of Wozhou.
This mouth I was born with is free of blood,
Suspended for a time between heaven and earth.

The poem portrays an atmosphere of silent serenity. Even in the vicinity of the capital Musō maintained his solitude, keeping his gate closed to casual visitors. The mountains of Wozhou were renowned for their quiet beauty; a mouth that is “free of blood” is one that is
not being used. “Suspended for a time between heaven and earth” suggests stillness and tranquility.

Once again, however, it was not long before Musō’s reputation cut short his retreat. This time the intrusion came in the form of an invitation from Kakukai Enjō-ni (d. 1345), the cloistered widow of the regent Hōjō Sadatoki (1271–1311), to come to Kamakura to continue Kōhō’s work. Hearing of the approach of Kakukai’s messenger, Musō left his Kitayama hermitage at the beginning of 1318, crossed the Inland Sea to the island of Shikoku, traversed several rugged ranges of mountains, and made his way to the province of Tosa on the island’s southern coast. Hoping perhaps that this time the remoteness of the location would allow him to practice in peace, he settled on a hillside overlooking a large estuary in the area of the present-day city of Kōchi. There, near an established temple named Chikurin-ji, he built himself a hut that he called Kyūkō-an. Musō was clearly quite taken by the beauty of the area’s natural surroundings, which he extolled in a collection of thirty waka poems.

Even the isolation of Shikoku did not protect Musō for long, however. In the fourth month of 1319, Kakukai, having learned of the master’s whereabouts, dispatched another messenger whom she warned either to return with Musō or not to return at all. Musō, again hearing of the messenger’s approach, attempted to conceal himself in the nearby countryside, but when the messenger threatened to prosecute anyone who hid the master he finally bowed to the inevitable. Stating, “One cannot escape one’s karmic obligations,” he made the long trip to Kamakura and was warmly received by Kakukai.

It would appear, however, that Musō proved a match for the determined widow. Though placed temporarily in the temple Shōei-ji, he kept the gate firmly shut and refused to meet even old monastic friends who had studied with him under Kōhō. When a short time later he was offered the position of abbot at Ungan-ji, Kōhō’s temple in the mountains, he firmly declined. Finally, at the end of the summer he departed Shōei-ji and traveled east across the neck of the nearby Miura Peninsula to the vicinity of present-day Yokosuka City,
where, on the side of a low mountain facing the bay, he established the hermitage Hakusen-an 浴船庵. Located no more than a few hours’ walk from Kamakura, Hakusen-an was near enough, apparently, to satisfy Kakukai’s demand that he reside close by, yet far enough to afford Musō the solitude he desired.

Visitors here, too, were many, but the Biography tells us that Musō protected his privacy with a gate he did not feel compelled to open to everyone. To those who felt it strange that he would not receive them, he laughed and said, “I can’t understand why you think it so. Those with eyes to see understand me and my situation. As for those without eyes to see, what benefit would it be to meet them?” On his gate he posted a poem:

My thatched reed roof is vast as the heavens;  
The surrounding mountains are my fence, the sea is my garden.  
I conceal not what happens in my hut, yet those who come still say my bamboo door is shut.

Musō was not a hermit, however, and actually seems to have had a fair amount of interaction with his friends and neighbors. The Biography reports invitations to dinner from Kakukai as well as friendly exchanges with Lingshan Daoyin, the abbot of Kenchō-ji at the time. Lingshan visited Hakusen-an on at least one occasion and regarded Musō’s Zen attainments so highly that he sent his Japanese students to Musō for instruction, explaining that he himself was not sufficiently skilled in Japanese to teach them.

Musō was active in other ways as well. In its entry for 1321, the Biography mentions that he built a pagoda, called the Kai’in Futo 海印浮圖 (Ocean-Imprint Pagoda), on top of Mount Hakusen as an object of devotion for the seafarers on the bay below. He also hoped, the account adds, that the sea creatures sensing the form of the pagoda through the clear waters of the bay would thereby form subtle connections with the Ocean-Imprint Samādhi of Buddhism.
Musō remained at Hakusen-an until 1323, when he moved to the rural area of Isumi in the central section of Bōsō Hantō, the large peninsula lying directly east across the bay from Yokosuka. There he built another hermitage, which he named Taikō-an 退耕庵 (Hermitage for Secluded Cultivation). The biographical materials offer no reason for this move, but the possibility that it was simply the next step in Musō’s “long cultivation of the sacred embryo” is supported by the fact that, cut into the cliffside to the rear of the site of Taikō-an (presently occupied by the temple Taikō-ji 太高寺), there is a meditation cave dating back to the time of Musō.

Since his move to Ryōzan-an in 1311 Musō had for the most part managed to reside in remote hermitages and deflect attempts to appoint him to important temples. Even Kakukai’s persistent invitations had been skillfully parried. In the spring of 1325, however, Emperor Go-Daigo dispatched a close retainer to Kamakura requesting Musō to come to the capital and accept the abbacy of Nanzen-ji, the preeminent Zen temple in Japan. When Musō demurred on grounds of illness the emperor sent a formal invitation written in verse, to which Musō responded with a matching verse expressing contentment with his simple lifestyle. Go-Daigo then dispatched an imperial messenger to the Kamakura regent, Hōjō Takatoki 北条高時 (1303–1333), directing him to order Musō’s compliance with the imperial summons. Left with little choice, Musō set out for the capital in the seventh month of the year. He followed a rather roundabout route that took him through Kai and the mountains of central Japan to Kokei-an in Nōshū. From there his old friend Gen’ō Hongen accompanied him the rest of the way to Kyoto.

His first meeting with Go-Daigo went well, according to the Biography, with the emperor listening to Musō’s explanation of the essentials of Zen with such great interest that he forgot the passage of time. When, upon finishing his lecture, Musō was once again asked by Go-Daigo to accept the abbacy of Nanzen-ji, Musō responded that he had no desire for status in the world and wished only to remain hidden deep in the mountains. Go-Daigo responded that Musō could
use Nanzen-ji as his hermitage, since his sole duty there would be to instruct the emperor occasionally in Zen; no administration would be required of him. Acceding to the emperor’s wish, Musō entered Nanzen-ji in midsummer and received Go-Daigo for instruction three times a month.

Musō’s assumption of the abbacy of Nanzen-ji was the occasion of one of the best-known criticisms directed against him. One month after Musō’s investiture, the retired emperor Hanazono 花園 (1297–1348) criticized both Musō and Go-Daigo in his journal, the *Hana-zono Tennō Shinki* 花園天皇宸記:

> Everyone says that His Majesty [Go-Daigo] earnestly desires the Buddhadharma to flourish. So I do not understand why he tries to make a secret of his reliance [on Musō]. To treat this man as a venerable abbot is to destroy the patriarchal succession of the Zen school. One cannot help but grieve. 48

The full story behind this critique is impossible to know, but it should be noted that it occurred in the context of a strong rivalry between Hanazono and Go-Daigo, members of the competing branches of the imperial family known as the Jimyōin and Daikakuji lines. The Jimyōin line, which descended from Emperor Go-Fukakusa 後深草 (1243–1304; r. 1246–1259), and the Daikakuji line, which descended from Go-Fukakusa’s brother Emperor Kameyama 龜山 (1249–1305; r. 1259–1274), each asserted its sole right to the imperial throne. In order to resolve the impasse an agreement was worked out under the authority of the Shogunate in which the imperial succession would alternate between the two lines at roughly ten-year intervals. Hanazono, a Jimyōin-line emperor, duly abdicated in 1318 after a ten-year reign, but his successor, the Daikakuji line Go-Daigo, soon showed signs that he intended to assert the supremacy of his branch over the Jimyōin line (and, indeed, over the Shogunate itself, as later became apparent). Not long after assuming the throne,
Go-Daigo began issuing imperial edicts and judicial rulings that were clearly intended to undercut the economic position of the Jimyōin line and thus relegate it to a subordinate position. Prior to 1325 Hanazono protested several times to the Shogunate regarding Go-Daigo’s actions and in several passages in his diary, the aforementioned Hanazono Tennō Shinki, lamented his successor’s highhanded behavior.\(^{49}\)

Hanazono thus had ample reason to resent Go-Daigo by 1325, and part of the tension between the two played out in rivalry over the patronage of Shūhō Myōchō,\(^{50}\) the founding priest of the great Zen temple Daitoku-ji. Although no specific written comments or other historical data exist, Shūhō is believed to have held Musō in less than the highest regard, perhaps because Shūhō, like Musō, had received Dharma recognition from Kōhō Kennichi and yet remained unsatisfied, prompting him to train further under the master Nanpo Jōmyō.\(^{51}\) It is interesting that Hanazono’s aforementioned diary entry regarding Musō was written immediately after a conversation with Shūhō and may therefore have simply reflected Shūhō’s sentiments. In any event, Hanazono’s reservations regarding Musō appear to have been short-lived, since a number of Hanazono’s immediate successors in the Jimyōin line, such as Kōgon 光厳 (1313–1364), Kōmyō 光明 (1321–1380), and Sukō 崇光 (1334–1398), went on to ordain in Musō’s lineage.\(^{52}\)

Musō taught at Nanzen-ji through the autumn of 1325 and until the end of the summer training session of 1326, spending exactly one year there. So many monks came to study under him, the Biography reports, that he was hard-pressed to keep them supplied with food. In the seventh month of 1326 he turned down an invitation from Hōjō Takatoki to assume the abbacy of the important temple Jufuku-ji 壽福寺 in Kamakura, but he nevertheless departed for the eastern capital in the eighth month. He stopped on the way to visit Ise, the province of his birth, where he established the now-defunct temple Zen’ō-ji 善應寺. After another side trip to the Kumano Shrines and the scenic area of Mount Nachi with its famous waterfall, he continued his journey east. By the ninth month Musō had reached Kamakura and
taken up residence in the hermitage Nanpō-an 南芳庵, located next to Yōfuku-ji 永福寺, an important temple built by Minamoto Yoritomo 源頼朝 (1147–1199), founder of the Kamakura Shogunate. He remained there until the second month of 1327, when he was asked by Hōjō Takatoki to become abbot of Jōchi-ji. Reluctantly accepting, he served in the position for only a single training period, after which he returned to Nanpō-an. In the eighth month of the year he moved into the new temple Zuisen-in 瑞泉院, built for him in the northeast corner of the city by Nikaidō Sadafuji 二階堂貞藤 (1267–1335), the head of the Nikaidō branch of the Minamoto clan and an important official in the Shogunate.

Although Musō was at Zuisen-in for only about two years, he appears to have developed a special affection for the place. At the foot of the cliff that rose behind the temple he designed a small landscape garden, the first garden known to have been specifically laid out by him. In 1228, a year after assuming the abbacy, Musō constructed a Kannon Hall and built the Henkai Ichirantei 遍界一覧亭 (Pavilion with a View of the World) on top of the steep hill in back of Zuisen-in. The Henkai Ichirantei, with its panoramic views of Mount Fuji and the rugged hills surrounding Kamakura, became the site of frequent poetry gatherings attended by Musō and his friends, among them Chinese émigré masters such as Mingji Chujun and Qingzhuo Zhengcheng, both of whom served as abbot of Kenchō-ji and other important temples in Kamakura and Kyoto. It was a fitting beginning for Zuisen-in, which later became the Kamakura base of the Five Mountain literary movement, a cultural tradition centering on the lineage of masters descending from Musō.

At the end of 1328 Hōjō Takatoki asked Musō to become abbot of Engaku-ji, but the master refused both this and a second request by Takatoki in the summer of 1329. He was equally resistant to similar appeals, made at Takatoki’s behest, from senior prelates and from fellow students of Kōhō. Finally, the Biography reports, the Engaku-ji monks themselves, “with tears in their eyes,” beseeched Musō to accede to Takatoki’s request in order that the lineage of Wuxue
Zuyuan, so carefully maintained by Kōhō, might continue. With this, Musō finally agreed to become abbot.

Nevertheless, in the ninth month of 1330 the fifty-four-year-old Musō, still feeling unready as a master, secretly departed Engaku-ji and returned to Zuisen-in, refusing to meet the monks who soon sought him out. Early the following morning he left for Kai. There, once again supported by Nikaidō Sadafuji, then living at the Nikaidō home estate, he established the temple Erin-ji in what is presently the city of Enzan. He stayed there until the second month of 1331, when he returned for a year to Zuisen-in. While at Zuisen-in he was invited by Takatoki to become abbot of Kenchō-ji, but he declined, instead nominating the master Kengai Kōan for the post.

After returning to Kai in the spring of 1332 Musō continued his quiet residence at Erin-ji; the only event for this year noted in the Biography is that Musō at some point established the temple Zuikō-ji in Banshū (present Hyōgo Prefecture), several hundred kilometers to the west of Kai. Despite the relatively peaceful picture of his existence conveyed in the Biography, Musō’s comings and goings between Kamakura and Kai may have been related to the fact that the early 1330s were years when Go-Daigo’s increasing ambitions to restore control of the government to the emperor had finally resulted in the outbreak of military conflict between the Shogunate and the imperial household.

Already in 1324 a plot by Go-Daigo’s subordinates to overthrow the warrior rulers in Kamakura had been discovered by the Shogunate; Hino Tsuketomo and Hino Toshimoto, leaders of the plot and close associates of the emperor, had been exiled to the island of Sado. Although Go-Daigo, too, had almost certainly been involved, the Hōjō accepted his claim of innocence. By the early 1330s, however, Emperor Go-Daigo’s ambitions had progressed from political intrigue to military action.

Go-Daigo’s struggle to overthrow the Shogunate, known as the Genkō War (1331–1333) after the name of the imperial era in which it occurred, started inauspiciously when his initial attack in 1331
ended in failure. The Shogunate counterattacked, and soon afterward the emperor’s stronghold on Kasagiyama was taken. Go-Daigo was exiled to the remote island of Oki and a new emperor, Kōgon 光厳 (1313–1364) of the Jimyōin lineage, was enthroned in his place. However, two of Go-Daigo’s best generals, Kusunoki Masashige 楠木正成 (1294–1336) and Prince Morinaga 護良 (1308–1335), remained at large and continued to harass the Shogunate’s armies, joined by growing numbers of disaffected samurai. When Go-Daigo escaped Oki in 1333, events quickly turned against the Hōjō. Two of the Shogunate’s most powerful generals, Ashikaga Takauji 足利尊氏 (1305–1358) and Nitta Yoshisada 新田義貞 (1301–1338), both members of branch families of the Minamoto, decided to side with the emperor, and with their defection the Hōjō cause was lost. Ashikaga seized Kyoto while Nitta overran Kamakura, marking the end of the Kamakura Shogunate.

There are good reasons to believe that Musō kept his distance from these events and was desirous of maintaining good relations with both the Hōjō and the Minamoto: he was by birth both a Minamoto and a Taira (of which the Hōjō were originally a branch family), and he had benefited from the support of patrons on both sides. Moreover, he seems by nature to have been little inclined to political activism. Certain Japanese biographers have argued otherwise, asserting that Musō was a proponent of Go-Daigo’s cause and adversary of the Hōjō, but Martin Collcutt’s analysis seems far more in keeping with the known facts of Musō’s life:

[Musō does not] seem to have had the strong antipathy to the Hōjō as patrons that Tamamura Takeji asserts in his biography of Musō. If anti-Hōjō and pro-Go-Daigo sentiments were motivating factors in his decisions, he would hardly have returned from Kyoto to Kamakura or accepted, however reluctantly, the headship of Jōchi-ji and Engaku-ji. I would prefer to argue that Musō, after years of semiretirement and outright reclusion, was shy of all authority figures and large institutional monasteries. He
was, however, being tugged steadily and somewhat reluctantly out of obscurity and into the mainstream of Rinzai Zen by powerful would-be patrons who were unwilling to take no for an answer.\(^{58}\)

In any event, Musō once again left Kai for Kamakura in the third month of 1333 to resume residence at Zuisen-in, even though earlier the same year he had declined, on grounds of illness, yet another invitation from Hōjō Takatoki to head Kenchō-ji. Two months later, in the fifth month of the year, the imperial armies under Nitta attacked Kamakura, and by mid-month the city had fallen. The entire Hōjō clan, including Takatoki and nearly nine hundred others, committed suicide at the family temple Tōshō-ji 東勝寺. The *Biography* reports that, with the city burning, “countless warriors’ lives were spared” owing to Musō’s intervention.

Go-Daigo entered Kyoto at the beginning of the sixth month of 1333 and assumed control of the government. The following month he asked Ashikaga Takauji to dispatch an imperial messenger to Zuisen-in conveying the emperor’s request that Musō come to the capital. Musō consented, arriving there during the seventh month. He received an imperial audience the day after reaching the city, and within a few weeks he was appointed priest of the temple Rinsen-ji 臨川寺, located on the grounds of the Kameyama-dono 龜山殿, Go-Daigo’s summer palace on the western outskirts of the city.

Rinsen-ji was situated on the site of a subpalace within the Kameyama-dono precincts, occupied by Shōkei Mon’in 昭慶門院 (n.d.), the widowed empress of Kameyama, and Prince Tokinaga 世良 (1306–1330), one of Go-Daigo’s sons. Tokinaga, perhaps because of ill health, had become deeply interested in Zen and taken up meditation under Musō’s longtime friend Gen’ō Hongen. The prince hoped to remodel his residence as a Zen temple and have Gen’ō live there, but he passed away before his plans could be realized. Go-Daigo established the temple in his memory, naming Gen’ō as founder. Gen’ō himself died in 1332 at Kokei-an, however, leaving the post of abbot
empty. Go-Daigo thus requested Musō to take the temple over and two years later, in 1335, issued an imperial edict officially designating Musō as founder.

From the time he called Musō to the capital Go-Daigo almost certainly had it in mind to install the master once again as abbot of Nanzen-ji, but there were sound reasons to place him in Rinsen-ji first, as explained by Collcutt:

Go-Daigo would have been aware that Nanzen-ji was regarded as an official, or public, monastery and that its abbacy frequently changed. Even if Musō wished to remain in Kyoto, he would not have been able to stay indefinitely as abbot of Nanzen-ji. A private temple would have to be made available for him. In the seventh month of 1333 (twenty-third day) Go-Daigo issued an edict addressed to Musō offering him “oversight” (kanryō) of Rinsen-ji and granting more landholdings to the temple.

In any event, the Biography reports that in the ninth month of 1334 the emperor invited Musō to the palace, received a robe, and became the master’s disciple. Later, overcoming the master’s protestations of age and infirmity, Go-Daigo prevailed upon him to accept the abbacy of Nanzen-ji, saying, “Whether the Buddhadharma prospers depends entirely upon the quality of the teacher. To whom can I turn if you refuse me?”

Musō, inviting Mukyoku Shigen of Engaku-ji to serve as his head monk, headed Nanzen-ji until the end of 1335. During his tenure he obtained an imperial edict to have Shōzoku-an, a subtemple honoring the memory of Wuxue Zuyuan, moved to Engaku-ji (where Wuxue had served as founder) from its previous location in Kenchō-ji (where Wuxue had been abbot for a time but not founder). It was also at this time that Musō was first referred to by his honorary title, Musō Kokushi (National Teacher Musō), in the aforementioned imperial edict designating him founding abbot of Rinsen-ji.
Meanwhile, the Kenmu Restoration—Go-Daigo’s effort, as leader of the Japanese government, to initiate various reforms—was already encountering difficulties. One of Go-Daigo’s errors was his failure to sufficiently recognize the importance of support from the warrior class. When the new imperial government set out to reform land policies and distribute properties to its backers, the disproportionate amount of attention paid to aristocrats and religious institutions left significant segments of the warrior class dissatisfied. Major samurai supporters such as Ashikaga Takauji and his brother Ashikaga Tadayoshi did indeed receive suitable rewards but were alienated when Go-Daigo made it clear that they would not receive positions of real power in the new government. Takauji’s discontent increased when Prince Morinaga was designated Sei’i Daishōgun 征夷大將軍 (Great Barbarian-Quelling General), a title that Takauji felt he had earned with his contributions to Go-Daigo’s victory in the Genkō War.

Matters reached a head in 1335 when Takauji, fresh from quelling a rebellion in Kamakura by Hōjō Takatoki’s son Tokiyuki 時行 (1322–1353), decided to turn on Go-Daigo. As he marched on Kyoto he defeated the forces of Nitta Yoshisada, sent by Go-Daigo to stop him. He reached Kyoto at the beginning of 1336 but was unable to capture the emperor, who had taken refuge with the soldier monks of Mount Hiei. Takauji was soon driven from the capital by the imperial armies under Yoshisada and Kitabatake Akiie 北畠顯家 (1318–1338) and forced to retreat to the island of Kyūshū. He managed to regroup there, however, and within a few months resumed his attack, defeating the imperial army near what is presently the city of Kobe and entering Kyoto in the seventh month of 1336. Go-Daigo once again escaped to the confines of Mount Hiei as Takauji took over the capital. Takauji proceeded to enthrone Emperor Kōmyō 光明 (1322–1380) of the Jimyōin line in the eighth month and, in the eleventh month, declared himself shogun on Kōmyō’s authority. Go-Daigo, after several failed counterattacks, retreated to Mount Yoshino deep in the mountain fastnesses to the south of Nara and there established the Southern Court, in opposition to Kōmyō’s
Northern Court. The period of the Northern and Southern Courts was to continue until 1392.

Musō, seeing the tumultuous events unfolding in the capital, had left Nanzen-ji in the first month of 1336 and returned to Rinsen-ji. Following the establishment of the new Muromachi Shogunate by Ashikaga Takauji and his brother Tadayoshi, the new authorities—apparently unconcerned by Musō’s previous ties with the Kamakura Shogunate and Emperor Go-Daigo—looked to the respected and charismatic prelate as a potential ally. Rinsen-ji records show that already in the ninth month of 1336 Emperor Kōmyō had confirmed Rinsen-ji’s lands, recognized Musō’s honorary title of National Teacher, and designated the temple first among the important shozan class of the Five Mountain system of Zen temples. Later, the Biography reports, Takauji invited him to his headquarters and asked to become a disciple.

In 1337 Musō, then sixty-two, turned over Rinsen-ji’s abbacy to his disciple Mukyoku and entered the subtemple San’e-in 三會院, which from that point became the de facto center of the Rinsen-ji complex. Musō, in marked contrast to his earlier penchant for solitude, became increasingly involved in activities related to teaching and administration, cooperating on several major projects with both the Northern Court and the new Muromachi Shogunate. One such project, conceived in 1338 and carried out during the following decade, was the establishment of a network of temples and pagodas in the sixty-six provinces of Japan. The temples, called Peace-in-the-Land Temples (Ankoku-ji 安國寺), belonged to the Zen school, and the pagodas, known as Benefiting-Life Pagodas (Rishō-tō 利生塔), were associated with existing Tendai and Shingon institutions. The new system, completed by about 1350, served both the religious purpose of honoring those who had died in the warfare that brought the Ashikagas to power and the political purpose of strengthening the Ashikagas’ oversight of outlying districts.

By this time Rinsen-ji was a growing center of Zen practice. In order to regulate the temple’s affairs and provide guidelines for the
students’ practice, Musō wrote two sets of regulations. The first, issued in the third month of 1339, was the *House Rules of Rinsen-ji* (*Rinsen-ji Kakun* 還源寺家訓), a code regulating the property, layout, and administration of the monastery; the organization and responsibilities of the community; and the conduct of everyday monastic life. The second, released in the fifth month of 1339, was the *San’e-in Admonitions* (*San’e-in ikai* 三會院遺戒), a shorter document in which Musō described the duties of the abbot and the makeup and activities of the assembly. In a famous passage he describes three types of disciples:

I have three kinds of disciples. The first group is made up of students who energetically try to remove all attachments and concentrate on investigating the self. The middle group are those whose practice is not pure and who are distracted by intellectual pursuits. The bottom group is made up of those who cloud their minds and only lick the spittle of the Buddha and patriarchs. As for those who shave their heads and poison their minds with foreign literature, aspiring to be authors, they are lay people with shaven heads, not even worthy to be placed below the lowest group. Even less worthy of being called monks are those who indulge in lavish meals, long hours of sleep, and unbridled pleasures.  

It was also in the spring of 1339 that Musō started on a project that enabled him to fully indulge his love of nature and garden design: the restoration of Saihō-ji 西芳寺, now popularly known as the Moss Temple. Saihō-ji, said to have been founded by the Buddhist holy man Gyōki, is located in Kyoto’s West Mountains about a thirty-minute walk south of Rinsen-ji. Although by the fourteenth century the temple had fallen into a state of complete disrepair, Musō was delighted when invited to restore it by Nakahara Chikahide 仲原親秀 (n.d.), an important vassal of the Shogunate and priest of the nearby Matsuo
Shrine. The Biography quotes Musō as saying, “I have always yearned to live like Eminent Scholar Liang. How wonderful that I, too, can now dwell in the West Mountains!” When Musō rebuilt the temple structures and gardens he obviously kept Liang in mind—as noted earlier, several features of the upper garden, such as the Shitō-an (Pointing-East Hut) and the zazen seki (meditation stone), recall elements in Liang’s story.

The place-names associated with the other master Musō honored in this way, National Teacher Nanyang Huizhong, were drawn from the following koan:

Emperor Taizong asked National Teacher Nanyang Huizhong, “What will you need after your life is finished?” The teacher said, “Build me a seamless tower.” The emperor said, “Tell me, what would the monument look like?”

Nanyang was silent. After a while the teacher asked, “Do you understand?” The emperor said, “I don’t understand.” The teacher said, “I have a successor, Danyuan, who knows all about this. Please summon him and ask.”

After the National Teacher passed on, the emperor summoned Danyuan and asked him the meaning of the master’s statement. Danyuan said: “South of Xiang, north of Tan; in between, gold fills the entire land. Beneath the shadowless tree, ferry boats; in the crystal palace there is no knowing.”

From this koan Musō drew the names of several features in the Saihō-ji garden: the Tanhoku-tei (North-of-Tan Pavilion), Shōnan-tei (South-of-Xiang Pavilion), and Ōgon-chi (Golden Pond). Atop one of the buildings was a crystal spire that Musō called the Muhō-tō (Seamless Tower). Around these features Musō laid out a beautiful garden with trees, watercourses, white-sand beaches, and pine-studded islands. This became a well-known sightseeing destination in Kyoto, famed for its beautiful views.
Regarding his garden-making efforts Musō wrote:

The benevolent naturally love the silence of mountains;
The wise naturally delight in the purity of water.
So do not disdain the pleasure I take in landscape gardens;
I’m simply attempting through them to refine my mind.

Not long after Musō began work on Saihō-ji, however, the death of Emperor Go-Daigo involved Musō in a far larger project, one that has remained one of his major legacies: the establishment of the great Zen temple Tenryū-ji.

The Biography reports that Musō foresaw Go-Daigo’s death when, in the sixth month of 1339, he had a dream in which the emperor rode a phoenix carriage into Kameyama-dono, his summer palace near Rinsen-ji. When Go-Daigo died two months later at the Southern Court, Musō suggested to the Ashikaga brothers that Kameyama-dono would be an appropriate location for a temple to honor Go-Daigo’s memory and pray for the peace of his spirit.

The Ashikagas acted quickly on the suggestion. Their interest was undoubtedly influenced in part by the popular spirituality of the time, which regarded the aggrieved spirits (goryō or onryō) of powerful people as capable of visiting misfortune upon those toward whom their resentment was directed. The classical example was the vengeance believed to have been wreaked upon the Fujiwara family by the angry spirit of Sugawara no Michizane.65 Moreover, the Ashikagas would certainly have perceived the political expediency of the move. The Southern Court retained a considerable amount of support, and in the years since their assumption of power the Ashikagas had been forced to fight periodic battles with Go-Daigo’s backers. Construction of a major temple complex in Go-Daigo’s honor would not only pacify the emperor’s supporters but would also constitute an important demonstration of the new Shogunate’s authority in the capital.

The Ashikaga brothers nominated Musō as founding priest of the proposed temple, but the master resisted the appointment on the
grounds that imperial prayer temples were traditionally associated with the Tendai and Shingon schools. The decision was thus referred to Kōgon, the cloistered emperor of the Northern Court, who on the fifth day of the tenth month of 1339 designated Musō founder by imperial decree. A week later Kōgon announced that the new temple would be called Reikizan Ryakuō Shisei Zenji, making it known by use of the appellation “Zenji” that it was to be associated with the Zen school, and by use of “Ryakuō” that it was to be honored with the name of the imperial era of the time, Ryakuō 厲応 (1338–1342).

Both moves gave rise to so much resentment from the established schools in Kyoto that Musō resigned as abbot just a month after Kōgon’s edict. The Zen master Kosen Ingen, Ashikaga Tadayoshi’s Zen teacher, replaced him, an arrangement that continued until Musō reassumed the abbacy in 1341. The year 1341 was also when the temple’s name was changed to Tenryū-ji (Temple of the Heavenly Dragon) because of a dream Tadayoshi had in which a golden dragon flew out of the river immediately south of the temple property. Musō oversaw affairs at Tenryū-ji even as he continued his activities at Rinsen-ji and Saihō-ji, since all three temples were within easy commuting distance. Work on the Tenryū-ji complex began in 1340 with the construction of a hall honoring the memory of Emperor Go-Daigo; the hall, known as Tahō-in 多寶院, was consecrated in the fourth month of the year. A year later, in the summer of 1341, construction of the main temple formally commenced when Musō, soon after reassuming responsibilities as abbot, performed the dedication ceremony for Tenryū-ji’s building site.

In the twelfth month of 1341 Musō and Tadayoshi devised a plan to send two ships—known ever since as the “Tenryū-ji ships” 天龍寺舟—on a trade mission to China to help finance the construction work. Musō proposed that the mission be managed by Shihon 至本, a trader in the Kyūshū port city of Hakata, who guaranteed Tenryū-ji a return of five thousand kan 76 regardless of the success or failure of the mission. The ships finally set sail in the fall of 1342, taking with them
not only merchandise for trade but also Zen monks wishing to train in the monasteries of Yuan China. The mission, which returned in the summer of 1343, realized a profit of one hundred times its original investment, according to the Taiheiki (although “one hundred times” in this usage can be interpreted to mean simply “many times”), and also brought back to Japan a set of the Buddhist Canon.

The year 1342 was marked by several other significant events. According to the Biography account, on the eighth day of the fourth month, not long after the foundations were laid for Tenryū-ji, Cloistered Emperor Kōgon visited Saihō-ji and received a robe from Musō to mark his formal acceptance as a disciple. The temple Mannenzan Shinnyo-ji 万年山震如寺 was constructed on the site of Shōmyaku-an, the hermitage in Kitayama honoring Kōhō Kennichi’s teacher, Wuxue Zuyuan (see p. 23 above); Wuxue was designated founder and Musō named second abbot. The Rishō-tō pagoda project also got a concrete start with the rebuilding of the five-storied pagoda of Hōkan-ji 法観寺 not far from Kennin-ji in the southeastern section of Kyoto; Hōkan-ji had been destroyed by fire in the fighting between Emperor Go-Daigo and the Ashikagas during 1336.

Meanwhile the construction of Tenryū-ji continued apace, with work on the framework beginning on the third day of the eighth month and the ridgepole-raising ceremony—attended by Emperor Kōmyō, Ashikaga Takauji, and Ashikaga Tadayoshi—being celebrated on the fifth day of the twelfth month. Shortly thereafter, on the twenty-third day of the month, Kōgon reorganized the Five Mountain Zen temple system, placing Tenryū-ji in the number two position together with Engaku-ji in Kamakura (in the number one positions were Nanzen-ji in Kyoto and Kenchō-ji in Kamakura).

One important development from the point of view of the present book was the first compilation of Dialogues in a Dream in an edition with a postscript by the Chinese Zen master Zhuxian Fanxian.68

The eighth month of 1343 saw the completion at Tenryū-ji of the Butsuden (Buddha Hall), one of the seven major buildings in every top-class Zen monastic complex. By the end of the year the Sanmon...
(Mountain Gate), another of the major buildings, had been finished. At Rinsen-ji, meanwhile, Musō oversaw construction of a sutra library.

In the tenth month of 1344 an edition of Dialogues, revised by Musō and with a second postscript by Zhuxian, was published under the sponsorship of Ōtaka Shigenari 大高重成 (d. 1362), lord of Wakasa Province.

By early 1345 Tenryū-ji was approaching completion. An opening ceremony for the Hattō (Dharma Hall) was held on the eighth day of the fourth month, with the Ashikaga brothers in attendance and Musō delivering the keynote sermon. The opening ceremony for the main temple was scheduled to coincide with the seventh annual observance of Go-Daigo’s death on the sixteenth day of the eighth month, but when the authorities on Mount Hiei heard that Cloistered Emperor Kōgon was to attend they demanded the destruction of Tenryū-ji and the exile of Musō. After weeks of escalating tensions, Kōgon, two days before the scheduled events, announced that he would not be present. A small ritual in honor of Go-Daigo, with the Ashikaga brothers attending, was held on the sixteenth, while the main ceremonies were postponed until the twenty-ninth.

As it was, these ceremonies, with an imperial representative present (though not Kōgon himself), went off without interference by Mount Hiei, its success no doubt aided by a major display of military force in the streets of the capital by the Ashikagas. Kōgon visited Tenryū-ji the following day to pay his respects, and Musō delivered a commemorative sermon in his presence.

Soon after the opening ceremonies, Musō, now sixty-nine years old, designated his nephew Shun’oku Myōha as acting abbot of Tenryū-ji; six months later, in the third month of 1346, he retired as abbot entirely, entrusting operation of the temple to his student Mukyoku Shigen. Although Musō remained active, the rest of his years marked something of a return to the quieter days of his life prior to his arrival in Kyoto in 1333. The Biography and other historical materials record little more than visits to Tenryū-ji and Saihō-ji by the imperial family,
the Ashikagas, and other important guests; poetic and other leisurely pursuits by Musō; and ceremonies honoring Go-Daigo, Kōhō Kennichi, and other figures close to the master.

Among the events noted in the Biography for these years were a visit by Musō to the imperial palace on the twenty-fifth day of the eleventh month of 1346 to receive a robe from Emperor Kōmyō; the following day he was granted the honorary title Shōkaku Kokushi (National Teacher True Awakening). On the twelfth day of the eighth month of 1347 Musō held a ritual for Emperor Go-Daigo at Tenryū-ji, attended by Ashikaga Tadayoshi. A year later, on the twentieth day of the tenth month of 1348, he presided over the memorial service marking the thirty-third anniversary of Kōhō Kennichi’s death; the occasion was commemorated by a large dedication ceremony for a recently completed revolving sutra repository.

An event of greater political significance is recorded for early in the year 1349, when Ashikaga Tadayoshi became a formal disciple of Musō. Tadayoshi had long maintained an ongoing communication with Musō but had avoided a closer master-disciple relationship, preferring to take instruction from Zhuxian Fanxian and Kosen Ingen. However, in the third month of 1349 he called upon Musō and asked to become a student, though only after first ascertaining the propriety of such a relationship, since a number of years before he had “received the robe” from Wuxue Zuyuan, the teacher of Kōhō Kennichi. Replying that it was all in the same family, Musō accepted Tadayoshi’s request and presented him with a robe and bowl.

Meanwhile the political situation around Musō had taken a disquieting turn for the worse. Since 1338 Tadayoshi and Takuaji had ruled as joint shoguns, with Tadayoshi responsible for administration and Takuaji for military affairs. Tensions between the two emerged, however, when Tadayoshi became disaffected with Kō no Moronao 高師直 (d. 1351), a warlord who served as Takuaji’s shitsuji 執事 (chief deputy). In the summer of 1349 Tadayoshi’s faction managed to have Kō removed as shitsuji; Kō’s faction, in turn, attacked Tadayoshi and forced him to take refuge in Takuaji’s compound, which the
Kō warriors then proceeded to surround. The siege was only lifted when Tadayoshi agreed to leave the government and enter the priesthood. In the eighth month, however, Musō mediated a settlement between Tadayoshi and Kō in which Tadayoshi retained administrative authority and Kō was restored to his position as shitsuji.

By late 1350, however, the tensions between Takauji and Tadayoshi had boiled over again. On the twenty-sixth day of the tenth month Tadayoshi fled Kyoto by night and joined the forces of the Southern Court, which at that time was headed by Emperor Go-Murakami 后村上 (1328–1368), one of Go-Daigo’s sons. Appointed general of Go-Murakami’s forces, Tadayoshi and his allies quickly dealt the Shogunate a series of defeats and occupied Kyoto. In the second month of 1351 Takauji and Tadayoshi reached another agreement, also negotiated by Musō, but this reconciliation lasted only a short time. At the end of the seventh month Tadayoshi left the capital and hostilities between the two brothers resumed. In early 1352 Takauji’s troops defeated Tadayoshi at Sattayama, in present-day Shizuoka Prefecture. Tadayoshi accepted Takauji’s peace offer and was taken to Kamakura, only to die there suddenly on the twenty-sixth day of the second month—the victim, most historians agree, of poisoning.

This final denouement would no doubt have been deeply distressing to Musō, but by the time of Tadayoshi’s end several months had passed since Musō’s own death. After accepting Tadayoshi as his disciple in 1349, the seventy-four-year-old Musō appears to have increasingly confined his activities to his three Arashiyama temples: Tenryū-ji, Rinsen-ji, and Saihō-ji. Following its entry on Tadayoshi’s lay ordination, the Biography mentions only an imperial visit in the second month of 1350 before describing Musō’s final major project, the construction of a meditation hall for Tenryū-ji in 1351. The seventy-six-year-old master told his disciples, “This year I will surely depart. Tenryū-ji was established by the present cloistered emperor in honor of the memory of Emperor Go-Daigo. Although the thirteenth anniversary of Go-Daigo’s passing is now drawing near, the meditation hall has yet to be built. If I do not complete it, who will?”
In order to expedite work on the project Musō once again assumed the abbacy of Tenryū-ji. Construction commenced in the fourth month and was completed in just one hundred days. Dedicated on the twentieth day of the seventh month, the meditation hall, as described in the Biography, was spacious and bright, with the capacity to seat a thousand people. A special training season followed the opening ceremony, and for the next month Musō disregarded old age and infirmity to teach the Dharma to the assembly. On the sixteenth day of the eighth month Musō presided at the large memorial service marking the thirteenth anniversary of Go-Daigo’s death. Two days later he retired as abbot, installing in his place the Chinese monk Dongling Yongyu.

On the first day of the ninth month Musō announced to his students that his departure was near and requested that anyone who had remaining questions on the Dharma confer with him soon. The Biography reports that he devoted several days to the host of seekers who responded, all the while showing no signs of fatigue. Nevertheless, his obviously weakening condition prompted the court to proffer the services of the imperial doctor. Musō declined, saying, “Old age and death are in the natural course of things. There is nothing a doctor can do about them.”

During his remaining days he continued meeting with well-wishers, including the reigning emperor and the cloistered emperor, and set to paper his final admonitions for his disciples. On the thirtieth day of the month, three days after designating Mukyoku Shigen as his successor at San’e-in, he bid farewell to those assembled at the temple and passed away at ten o’clock in the morning.

Musō was honored both before and after his death with seven imperially bestowed Kokushi (Teacher of the Nation) titles: Musō Kokushi 夢窓國師 (National Teacher Dream Window), Shōkaku Kokushi 正覺國師 (True Awakening), Shinshū Kokushi 心宗國師 (Mind Source), Fusai Kokushi 普濟國師 (Universal Salvation), Genyū Kokushi 玄猷國師 (Mysterious Path), Buttō Kokushi 佛統國師 (Buddha Lineage), and Daien Kokushi 大圓國師 (Great Perfection).
Musō’s Legacy

Among Musō’s many accomplishments, the most influential from the perspective of Japanese Zen history relate to the Zen school’s development as an institution. When Musō began his training in the late thirteenth century the Zen school was still centered in Kamakura and was, to a significant degree, dependent upon the protection of the Shogunate. When the great shift of political power from Kamakura to Kyoto occurred at the time of the Kenmu Restoration, Musō, with his ties to both the imperial family and the warrior clans, was able to oversee a parallel transfer of Zen influence to the capital. With the subsequent rise of the Muromachi Shogunate, Musō maintained the momentum of the Zen school’s growth through his promotion of the Ankokuji temple system and his foundation of important Five Mountain institutions like Rinsen-ji, Tenryū-ji, and Tōji-in. By the time Musō died in 1351, Rinzai Zen had the solid support of the imperial and feudal authorities in the capital and of increasing numbers of local leaders throughout the country.

With this as a basis the Five Mountain system developed during the medieval period into one of the most influential forces in Japanese Buddhism, occupying a privileged position among the various Buddhist schools and serving, in effect, as a bureaucracy through which the Shogunate countered the political and military power of the established Buddhist sects and strengthened its political influence. Musō’s successors dominated the system through their control of the post of sōroku (Registrar General of Monks), which had authority over the entire Five Mountain organization and was always filled by a member of Musō’s lineage.

Although it is likely that Zen would have continued its growth in the capital even without Musō, given the prominence of established Zen temples such as Nanzen-ji and Tōfuku-ji, the Northern Court’s patronage of eminent masters like Shūhō Myōchō of Daitoku-ji, and Ashikaga Tadayoshi’s commitment to Zen practice under Zhuxian Fanxian and Kosen Ingen, it is unquestionable that this growth was
facilitated by Musō, with his quiet charisma, cultural sensitivity, and wide popularity among the governing classes. Indeed, Musō’s success at working with the succession of rulers during the tumultuous period between the Kamakura and Muromachi Shogunates has led several biographers to characterize him as a master of political maneuver. The way in which he lived the first fifty years of his life does not support this view, however. Although Musō obviously possessed administrative talents, it is hard to imagine anyone drawn to secular intrigue spending what was in those days the span of an average lifetime meditating in remote areas of the country and deliberately avoiding rank and privilege. I personally find it far more likely that Musō so readily won the respect and cooperation of regents, emperors, and shoguns precisely because his motivations were obviously spiritual and not political. Certainly *Dialogues in a Dream*, far from attempting to advance the secular fortunes of the Zen school, urges upon the government authorities an even-handed approach toward all Buddhist traditions:

Because of their duty to support the Dharma, those of the ruling classes who receive it should not limit themselves to faith in a single school and reject all others. Nor, if one’s faith does extend to all traditions, should one utilize those traditions to offer prayers directed toward secular goals. In this degenerate age, is it not a privilege to receive the teaching of the Tathāgata? Vowing deeply never to betray this trust, support Buddhism externally by building temples large and small and support it internally by fostering the true spirit of the Way, supporting all schools and forming whatever connections might help in guiding all living beings to the realization of enlightenment. This is the truest of prayer rituals and the most boundless of meritorious acts. (Chapter 10)

Musō’s influence on Japanese literary culture was perhaps not as direct as his influence on the Zen institution, but it was quite
significant nevertheless, particularly through the association of his
direct descendants—Shun’oku Myōha, Gidō Shūshin,70 and Zek-
kai Chūshin71 chief among them—with the Five Mountain literary
movement. Although Musō’s San’e-in Admonitions make it clear that
the proper vocation of the Zen monk is “removing all attachments
and concentrating on investigation of the self,” and although they
severely condemn those students who “shave their heads and poison
their minds with foreign literature, aspiring to be authors,” Musō him-
self obviously loved verse and was fond of poetry gatherings like the
ones he hosted at Zuisen-in and Saihō-ji. Indeed, his taste for such
activities was unquestionably part of his appeal to the ruling classes,
particularly the court nobility. Although his statements in the Admo-
nitions suggest that Musō regarded literary pursuits as proper only for
monks who had completed their training, his enthusiasm for them
would have inevitably set the stage for his descendants to make such
pursuits a more central part of Zen temple culture.

Musō’s love of poetry was equaled by his affection for landscape
gardens, an affection undoubtedly rooted in the appreciation of natu-
ral beauty so often seen both in Musō’s verse and in expository writ-
ings like Dialogues in a Dream (see, for example, his descriptions of
Ise Shrine in chapter 7 and West Lake in chapter 76). Musō designed
gardens in most of the monasteries he lived in for any length of time
and obviously considered them an important part of the ambiance;
in the case of Saihō-ji the garden was for all intents and purposes
the soul of the temple. Musō was also unusual in that he expressed
in writing his ideas on the spiritual significance of these man-made
landscapes that obviously gave him so much pleasure. In chapter 57
of Dialogues, for example, we find the following remarkable passage:

[Some people] use landscape gardens to ward off sleepi-
ness and boredom as an aid in their practice of the Way.
This is something truly noble and is not at all the same
as the delight ordinary people take in gardens. However, since such people still make a distinction between gardens
and the practice of the Way, they cannot be called true Way-followers.

Then there are those who regard mountains, rivers, grass, trees, tiles, and stones to be their own Original Nature. Their love for gardens may resemble worldly affection, but they employ that affection in their aspiration for the Way, using as part of their practice the changing scenery of the grasses and trees throughout the four seasons. One who can do this is truly an exemplar of how a follower of the Way should consider a garden.

Therefore it cannot be said that a love of gardens is necessarily a bad thing, or necessarily a good thing. In gardens themselves there is no gain or loss—such judgments occur only in the human mind.

Although the connection between Zen practice and temple gardens is occasionally exaggerated (I have, for example, heard nothing in my many years at Japanese Zen temples to suggest that the stone garden at Ryōan-ji constitutes in itself a koan, a belief held by a number of Western Zen followers I have met), Musō’s words should remove any doubt that in traditional Japanese Zen the creation and enjoyment of landscape gardens has always been considered part of the practice of the Way. Musō states his own position quite unequivocally in the verse cited above (page 38), “Do not disdain the pleasure I take in landscape gardens; I’m simply attempting through them to refine my mind.”

Musō’s legacy as a Zen master is a bit less clear. His own Zen practice was plainly the central theme of his adult life, and he became without question one of the most influential teachers of his time. It may still be asked, however, whether Emperor Hanazono was justified in his claim that Musō’s inner awakening did not match that of his contemporary Shūhō Myōchō. To be sure, it could be pointed out that Musō’s influence as a master owed much to the prominence of his followers and was notable more for its breadth than its depth.
Although Musō is said to have had more than 13,000 students and 127 Dharma successors, none of these followers (even those, like Gidō Shūshin, remembered for the simplicity and piety of their lives) left a lasting legacy with regard to the transmission of the Dharma. Those in his lineage who earned places in Zen history generally did so as a result of their political or cultural accomplishments.

Nevertheless, it would be rash to dismiss the importance of Musō as a Zen master. His personal practice was held in high regard by as strict and astute a Zen adept as Hakuin Ekaku, and his wide influence as a teacher helped cement the acceptance of Zen in Japanese society. Though he may not have produced successors matching those of Shūhō Myōchō, it might equally be said that Shūhō was incapable of reaching ordinary people and spreading the teaching in the way that Musō was.

Indeed, I find Musō’s human side to be one of his most appealing qualities. Although he spent much of his life practicing in remote places far from the centers of influence and power, he was by no means a recluse or misanthrope. As indicated in the Biography, his pilgrimage wanderings were often directed to the residences of friends or to temples associated with people he knew. Even during his periodic escapes from the ties of temple life, as when he left Jōko-ji in 1313 and made his way to Nōshū, comrades often accompanied him. During his more solitary periods, such as his sojourn on the Miura Peninsula, his gate was open to kindred spirits, and he appears to have maintained good relations with the local people. He seems, in short, to have been a man who appreciated the company of others, despite the simultaneous taste for solitude that formed an enduring part of his spiritual search.

Musō’s views on the Buddhist teachings were fully in line with this accepting spirit. Even on those occasions when he criticized other traditions he was careful to balance his statements by contextualizing them in a broader outlook. One example is his critique of popular contemporary Pure Land teachings, which tended to privilege the nenbutsu as superior to all other Mahayana practices. In chapter 85 of
Dialogues in a Dream Musô writes:

Among ordinary nenbutsu devotees there are some who insist that calling the Name is the only correct practice and that all other practices are useless. This viewpoint goes against the true principles of the Mahayana and cannot be said to agree with the central teaching of the patriarchs.

It would be equally mistaken for followers of the Zen school to declare that the only true practice is zazen and that all other practices are a waste of time. Nevertheless, it is helpful for beginning Zen students to set aside other methods for a time and concentrate solely on zazen, singling out this practice though fundamentally nothing is rejected. It is in this sense that the eminent priests who established the Pure Land school set aside the “other practices” and aspired to “the samâdhi of the single practice [of nenbutsu]”; it was not that they condemned the other methods. Similarly, the intent of clear-eyed Zen masters when they criticize nenbutsu is never to condemn this practice.

This evenhanded approach is typical of Musô’s attitude toward all of the non-Zen schools of Buddhism. He follows his words on nenbutsu in the statement quoted above with the comment:

This is the case not only with criticisms directed toward the Pure Land school but also with those directed toward all other traditions. Even when non-Buddhists and celestial demons engage enlightened masters in discussion, the masters do not regard themselves as superior and their adversaries as inferior. Rather, they criticize their challengers only in order to disabuse them of their biased notion that “our views are better than the teachings of the Buddha”—a notion based on their failure to see that there is not a hairbreadth of difference between a sage and
an ordinary person. The *Sutra of Complete Enlightenment* says, “The Dharma attained by bodhisattvas and by non-Buddhist practitioners is the same bodhi”.... Anyone speaking of right and wrong who still has strong attachments to self and objects is not a true disciple of the Buddha. How could such behavior be in accord with the truth?

Because of such statements, and perhaps also because of the intimate knowledge of the sacred texts that he displayed in his writings on Zen, Musō’s teaching is often described as a synthesis of the doctrinal and meditative traditions, suggesting that his approach as a Zen master accorded equal value to *zazen* and textual study. The facts of his life and teaching suggest otherwise, however. Although Musō never disparaged the doctrinal teachings and consistently recognized them as an authentic expression of the Buddha’s original message, and although, as noted above, he urged the nation’s rulers to support all traditions equally, Musō, once committed to Zen practice, devoted himself almost exclusively to meditation. Even his study of the classical Zen records during his time in Kamakura ultimately left him more convinced than ever of the futility of focusing on the written word if one desired to realize the “separate transmission outside the teachings.” It is worth repeating here the passage, quoted earlier, from his *Night Talks on West Mountain*:

One day, upon examining my own heart, I realized how uneasy I still felt. For the first time I understood the saying, “That which comes from outside the gate is not the house treasure.” As an ancient master said, “Never obscure the light of the spirit—this is the eternal way; having entered the gate, do not tarry in intellectual understanding.” I had left the school of doctrine and entered the school of Zen, yet my studies, although different in content, were equally based on conceptual knowledge. If I go on like this, I thought, I’m simply obscuring the light of my spirit. I
therefore took the bag filled with all the notes I had accumulated over the years and threw it into the fire.

Musō, moreover, clearly identified the Zen path as one distinct from the paths of ritual and scholarship, as in the above-mentioned Biography passage (see p. 19) where he commented that “the doctrinal schools and the Zen school are as incompatible as charcoal and ice.” Musō also devoted considerable space to this matter in Dialogues in a Dream, with a particularly clear statement occurring in chapter 46:

Although he had long since mastered the teachings of the sutras and commentaries, [Eminent Scholar] Liang had yet to experience enlightenment. Why did he suddenly attain a great awakening at Mazu’s single phrase, “What is that?” You must realize that that which Liang awakened to is not found in the teachings of the sutras and commentaries. Those who devote their entire lives to intellectual understanding would more profitably have spent their time directly observing the arising and passing of thoughts, whether walking, standing, sitting, or reclining. Practicing in this way, how could anyone fail to experience enlightenment, like Nanyue or Scholar Liang? How unfortunate to spend all of one’s time in intellectual pursuits.

However, Musō, while he plainly saw enlightenment-oriented practice as the highest ideal, nevertheless regarded sutra study as far superior to the lazy type of practice that remained mired in delusion. With proper study, he asserted in chapter 66, “even if you have not attained enlightenment you will at least never mistake a fish eye for a pearl.” In the same chapter he continues:

Those born in the Latter Age have shallow karmic roots, so those who follow the scholarly path believe that the ultimate goal consists of mastering the various doctrines
expounding the principle of mind-nature, and thus they fail to realize the source of mind-nature itself. People who enter the path of Zen tend to regard such doctrines as something for scholars to discuss, and nothing for Zen practitioners to bother about. Sincerely abandoning both mundane delusions and supermundane teachings and wholeheartedly striving toward Supreme Enlightenment—this is truly what the Zen school encourages. But is it not a great error to avoid studying the doctrinal meaning of the sutras and treatises and indulge instead in false thinking based on your own mental biases, thereby confusing the thinking consciousness for the Original Mind?

Chapter 76 presents a clear discussion of the original unity from which both the Zen and doctrinal schools emerged, even as it explains Musō’s view of the differences between the two.

The ancient masters asserted that Bodhidharma came from the West, not in order to transmit a particular teaching, but simply to point out that which everyone already possesses in complete perfection. If it is already possessed by everyone, how can it be said to be limited to followers of Zen and to be lacking in followers of the doctrinal schools? Nor is it perfectly present only in the followers of Zen and the doctrinal traditions—it may be discerned in the labors of the farmer cultivating his fields and in the blacksmith and carpenter exercising their crafts. The essential point is that everything living beings do—seeing, hearing, thinking, knowing, walking, standing, sitting, reclining, playing, and talking—is without exception an expression of the Mysterious Principle of the Coming from the West. How much more so does this apply to the actions of those who, following the Buddha’s teachings, perform all manner of meritorious deeds?
However, not being aware of this Mysterious Principle, most people are deceived by the illusions of the world and squander their existence in the cycle of birth and death. The Buddha expounded various teachings intended to help people escape from this deluded thinking, but people then became attached to these teachings and again obscured the Mysterious Principle. Therefore the Patriarch came from the West and revealed Original Nature. This revelation is called “the Mysterious Principle outside the teachings that is transmitted by mind to mind.” This Mysterious Principle is not simply another type of Dharma gate transmitted in the same way as the various doctrinal traditions. If it were just another teaching passed on through words, then it would be no more than an unusual teaching method and could not be called “a separate transmission outside the teachings.”

The broadness of outlook revealed in this passage is typical of Musō’s manner of expression throughout *Dialogues in a Dream*. One is left with the impression of Musō as a clear, balanced thinker for whom discursive exposition, though ultimately inadequate for conveying “the separate transmission outside the teachings,” was an important means of instruction. This approach contrasts with the better-known Zen tactic of shocking the questioner out of conceptual thinking, a famous example of which involves Musō’s eminent peer Shūhō Myōchō, the founder of Daitoku-ji.

When, during a public debate between the Zen school and the older established schools of Buddhism, the Tendai prelate Gen’e 玄慧 (1279–1350) asked Shūhō to explain the separate transmission outside the teachings, Shūhō responded, “An eight-sided millstone flies through the air!” Gen’e is said not to have understood. Next a Tendai monk presented Shūhō with a box, telling him it represented the universe. Shūhō immediately broke the box with his stick and asked, “What about when the universe is shattered to bits!” The questioner was again bewildered.
Shūhō’s responses were unquestionably effective—the Zen school was judged winner of the debate, and Gen’e was impressed enough to later take up Zen practice under Shūhō’s instruction. And it should be noted that on occasion Musō, too, used methods similar to Shūhō’s. When Ashikaga Tadayoshi asks him, in the final chapter of *Dialogues in a Dream*, “Master, what, truly, is the Dharma that you teach people?” Musō’s response comes in the form of a koan as cryptic as Shūhō’s: “At midnight in Silla the sun shines bright!”

Yet it is interesting that this exchange comes at the very end of the book, after Musō has devoted thousands of words to explanation. Musō obviously recognized that the final destination of Zen lies in the ineffable, but also, and just as importantly, that there is a place for a clear understanding of the nature of the path. *Dialogues in a Dream* may be seen as his attempt to provide a comprehensive guide to such understanding.

**Dialogues in a Dream**

*Dialogues in a Dream*, the best-known and most influential of Musō’s writings, has remained available ever since its original publication in 1344. Originally compiled in the year Kōei 1 (1342), it was revised and published with a new postscript in Kōei 3 (1344), then reprinted in, to name only the editions for which records remain, Genna 8 (1622), Kan’ei 11 (1634), Shōhō 4 (1647), Jōkyō 3 (1687), Bunsei 2 (1819), and Tenpō 4 (1833). In postfeudal Japan it has seen numerous reprints, both in its original form and in modern Japanese translation.

*Dialogues in a Dream* is remarkable for the fact that it is the first book in Japanese publishing history to have been printed in kana-majiri, a type of text that mixes Chinese characters (kanji) and the Japanese kana syllabary, with the kanji indicating the root elements of words and the kana indicating articles, conjunctions, and grammatical forms. Kanamajiri, as the most logical and accessible approach to rendering Japanese in textual form, is now the standard way of writing the language.
As mentioned above, the main text of *Dialogues in a Dream* consists of three sections containing a total of ninety-three chapters, with each chapter comprising a question posed by Ashikaga Tadayoshi to Musō, followed by Musō’s answer. The present text concludes with two short postscripts by the Chinese Zen master Zhuxian Fanxian.

Tadayoshi’s questions deal at the start with relatively down-to-earth issues relating to the religious life, and over the course of the text gradually take up topics that are increasingly abstract. Thus in Part 1 of the book Tadayoshi asks about such matters as the need for moderation in the pursuit of wealth; the purpose of reciting the sutras and dhāraṇīs; the true meaning of prayer, ritual, and offerings; and the nature of demonic obstructions, both inner and outer. Part 2 takes up issues like the difference between knowledge, wisdom, and enlightenment; the nature of true practice and meditation; and the difference between “words” and “intent” in the Zen teachings. Part 3 devotes several chapters to topics like the Ground of Original Nature, the true mind, and the use of language in the various Zen schools, and also discusses the meaning of meditation, the true Dharma, and Zen’s “separate transmission outside the teachings.”

Although *Dialogues in a Dream* is in many ways a product of its era, with several of its chapters devoted to celestial demons and other subjects that may seem quaint to modern readers, it has stood the test of time precisely because its concerns are for the most part timeless in nature. Topics like the true meaning of prayer, compassion, and wisdom are as relevant today as they were in the fourteenth century. It was partly owing to this enduring relevance that *Dialogues in a Dream* was selected as the Tenryū-ji Institute for Philosophy and Religion’s next translation, following the publication of *Entangling Vines* in 2004. Also pertinent to the decision, of course, was the fact that Musō Soseki is the founder of Tenryū-ji.

The present translation had its origins in a trial rendition by Fukazawa Yukio 深沢幸雄, professor emeritus of Tokiwakai Gakuen University, made at the request of the late Rev. Hirata Seikō, former chief abbot of Tenryū-ji. The resulting translation, based on a
modern Japanese translation by Kawase Kazuma entitled the Muchū Mondō shū,\textsuperscript{74} provided valuable reference material regarding vocabulary and meaning even as it motivated me to forge ahead with my own version.

The translator of Dialogues in a Dream, as of any Classical Japanese text, faces a number of challenges. The first, needless to say, is the language itself. Classical Japanese, in addition to its frequent ambiguity regarding the subject of sentences, is more limited in vocabulary than modern Japanese, enriched as the latter has been with many new Sino-Japanese compounds inspired by the Western languages, as well as with numerous loanwords taken directly from those languages. Lacking such vocabulary, the Japanese of Musō’s time was forced to employ what words it had in multiple meanings. As a result Musō’s prose, though quite poetic, is occasionally lacking in precision, a quality aggravated by a paucity of conjunctions that often leaves the reader guessing as to the relationship between one idea and the next.

Reference to Kawase Kazuma’s Muchū Mondō shū and Nakamura Bunpō’s Gendaigo yaku Muchū Mondō,\textsuperscript{75} the two modern Japanese editions of Dialogues in a Dream, greatly eased the challenges of parsing Musō’s classical grammar, flawed though both works are by misreadings and a tendency to leave the really difficult passages virtually unchanged from the original Classical Japanese. More helpful in this regard were the modern versions by Karaki Junzō\textsuperscript{76} and Nishimura Eshin;\textsuperscript{77} unfortunately, both works include only selected chapters.

Partial translations also exist in English. The longest of these is Thomas Cleary’s Dream Conversations on Buddhism and Zen,\textsuperscript{78} which covers perhaps a third of the original text. Kenneth L. Kraft translated nine chapters of the text in an article for The Eastern Buddhist,\textsuperscript{79} and W. S. Merwin, with Sōiku Shigematsu, translated sections of three chapters in Sun at Midnight.\textsuperscript{80} All of these translations are of high quality, often bettering the modern Japanese versions in conveying the sense of especially obscure passages in the original.

There were, nevertheless, a number of sections whose meaning remained unclear even after repeated readings. Ueda Shizuteru,
professor emeritus of philosophy at Kyoto University, generously agreed to look over these passages with me. Prof. Ueda, who has been conducting a monthly seminar on *Dialogues in a Dream* for several years, was in every case able to reveal the logic of Musō’s thought and clarify how it fit into the larger context of his argument. Without Prof. Ueda’s help my translations of these passages would have remained tentative at best.

I would also like to thank Nishiyama Mika for the use of her aforementioned essay, “The Life of Musō Soseki,” which presented in a well-organized manner the major events in Musō’s life. Nishiyama’s research uncovered important clues, missed by other researchers, which help to explain certain developments in Musō’s life (his move to Kitayama in Kyoto in 1317 being a notable example). Her explanations also clarified several difficult passages in the *Biography* and the *Dialogues*.

The present translation, although it attempts to be academically responsible, is not intended as a strictly academic work. I have therefore felt free to employ certain conventions that are no longer followed in most academic writing, such as the capitalization of religiously significant terms like Original Nature.

I have also stressed readability when deciding how to render the many Buddhist terms in the text, keeping in mind that Musō himself envisioned it as a popular work.

Sanskrit and Japanese terms are rendered with the appropriate diaritical marks, except in the case of words that have long since passed into common English usage, such as “sutra,” “koan,” “Mahayana,” “samsara,” and “nirvana.” Although Japanese terms are generally italicized, I have followed the convention used by certain scholars of romanizing Sanskrit terminology. Names are rendered in their original languages; thus Chinese names are used even for Chinese masters known primarily for their work in Japan (e.g., Lanxi Daolong rather than Rankei Dōryū, as he is known in Japan). Sanskrit names are used even for bodhisattvas best known by their East Asian names (thus Avalokiteśvara rather than Guanyin or Kannon), except in the case of obscure bodhisattvas, whose names are translated into English.
Rev. Fukita Takamichi, the priest of Shōzen-ji in Kyoto and an instructor at Bukkyō University, offered much useful information on simplifying the onerous task of indexing the volume.

The completed manuscript was examined by Edmund Skrzypczak, former editor of *Monumenta Nipponica* at Sophia University in Tokyo, whose sharp eye for errors and inconsistencies greatly improved the overall quality of the text.

Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to Prof. Yoshizawa Katsuhiro of the International Research Institute for Zen Buddhism at Hanazono University and Rev. Toga Masataka of the Institute for Zen Studies, without whose constant support this project would not have been possible.
Dialogues in a Dream
Part I
Question: The Buddha, in his great compassion, alleviates the suffering of sentient beings and seeks to give them comfort. Why, then, do the Buddhist teachings urge restraint in our desire for prosperity?

Answer: Those who seek worldly wealth engage in farming or trade, devise moneymaking schemes, or sell their skills, knowledge, or services to others. Their activities differ, but the goal is the same. Observing them, we see that such people suffer lifelong hardship in body and mind while gaining none of the true prosperity they seek. Even when they do acquire some measure of wealth, there is always the danger that it may be lost to fire, swept away by floods, stolen by thieves, or confiscated by the authorities. Those lucky enough to avoid such misfortunes still cannot retain their property once their allotted years have passed.

Furthermore, great wealth commonly involves great wrongdoing, so that the rich often fall into the evil realms in their next existence. This is what is meant by “small gains bring great losses.” Poverty in this existence is retribution for avarice in past lives. Unaware of this basic principle, people often assume that poverty stems from a lack of worldly wisdom. They fail to realize that unless the karmic seeds for prosperity have been sown in past existences it is impossible to gain
wealth in the present life regardless of what practical skills one may possess. Rather than blaming poverty on a lack of worldly wisdom, people should recognize that a lack of worldly wisdom is the result of not having planted the karmic seeds for success.

Other people blame their poverty on their superiors, whom they accuse of refusing to grant them land due to them or wrongfully seizing their property. Here again, the situation of these individuals is the result, not of their superiors’ lack of generosity or their own loss of property, but rather of their having sown the karmic seeds for poverty. If people simply abandoned their craving for prosperity they would feel quite satisfied with the share of good fortune that comes their way in the natural course of things. It is for these reasons that the Buddhist teachings urge us to restrain our desire for prosperity. It is not because they expect people to renounce all wealth and live in destitution.

In ancient India, Śākyamuni’s great patron Sudatta lost his fortune during his old age and was left without any means of livelihood. Sudatta and his wife were utterly alone in their household, abandoned by everyone whom they had supported for so many years. Sudatta’s wealth was gone, and the storehouses that had once held his possessions stood empty.

One day, searching through his storehouses once again in the hope that something might still remain, Sudatta came across a rice-measure made of fragrant sandalwood. This he was able to trade for four shō of rice. Delighted, he calculated that this would be enough to keep him and his wife alive for a number of days. Soon afterward, however, while Sudatta was out on an errand, the Buddha’s disciple Śāriputra called upon the household during his begging rounds. Sudatta’s wife gave him one shō of the rice. Next came Maudgalyāyana and Māhākāśyapa, and to each of them, too, she donated a shō of rice, so that finally only a single shō remained. This, she thought, will at least suffice to keep us alive for today. Just then, however, the Tathāgata appeared. Unable to refuse him, she immediately offered the final shō of rice.
Afterward, though, she sadly pondered on what she would do when her husband returned, exhausted from his errand. Surely, she thought, he would be angry with her, saying that there’s a proper time and place even for dāna to the Buddha and Sangha, and that, at this critical moment when they were hard pressed simply to stay alive, it was absurd to donate their last four measures of rice. Heartsick, she fell to the ground and wept.

Just then Sudatta returned from his errand. When he asked why she was crying, she related everything that had happened. Hearing this, Sudatta said, “For the sake of the Three Treasures one mustn’t begrudge even one’s very life. Though we stand on the brink of starvation, how could we, out of our own personal concerns, refuse to make donations? How admirable that you understand this!”

Later Sudatta decided to search his storehouses again, thinking that something like the rice-measure might still be there. When he tried to enter, however, he found that every door was jammed and couldn’t be opened. Thinking this strange, he broke through the doors and found that each and every storehouse was filled with grain, money, silk, gold, silver, and various other treasures, just as they had been before. With this all the members of his household returned, and Sudatta was once again a wealthy man.

The restoration of Sudatta’s wealth was not a reward from the Buddha for the four measures of rice. Rather, it came forth from the pure, generous hearts of Sudatta and his wife. Even in this Latter Age of the Dharma, anyone as free from avarice as they were is sure to have happiness and prosperity to his or her full satisfaction. Though you may by nature lack such a spirit, if you renounce the mind that seeks after small gains and aspire to the spirit of Sudatta and his wife, how could you not but profit greatly? If you fail to emulate Sudatta’s freedom from avarice and, desiring only a comfortable lifestyle, seek after prosperity with a covetous mind, then you not only fail to gain any true benefit in the present life but invariably fall into the realm of the pretas in the next.