

Introduction

The Zen school is the Meditation school, and the character of Zen can be traced in the tradition of its meditation teaching. Historians have shown us that the origins of the school in China are considerably later and more complicated than the traditional account of the lineage of Bodhidharma would have it and that the early history of the school is in fact a history of the teachings and traditions of several Buddhist meditation communities of the seventh and eighth centuries. If the masters of these communities did not yet see themselves as members of a Ch'an, or Meditation, school, and if—as is clear from their own reports—they did not always agree on their interpretations of Buddhism, still they were bound together by a common concern for the immediate, personal experience of enlightenment and liberation and, hence, by a common emphasis on the cultivation of spiritual techniques conducive to that experience. To this extent they may be spoken of as participants in a single reform movement, which sought to cut through the scholastic elaborations of the medieval Chinese Buddhist church and to translate the yogic traditions of north China into a popular modern idiom acceptable to the T'ang Buddhist community.

By the end of the eighth century the Ch'an reformation had established itself as a distinct Buddhist school, complete with its own history, literature, and dogma. Nevertheless, the emphasis on practice and immediate experience remained a hallmark of the faith. Indeed some scholars have held that it was precisely this emphasis that allowed the school to weather the persecutions of the late T'ang and emerge as the sole surviving form of Chinese monastic Buddhism. On several counts such a view is probably overdrawn; but, if the number of Ch'an books from the late T'ang and Sung suggests that there was considerably more to Ch'an religion in those days than simply "seeing one's nature and becoming a Buddha," there is much

in the content of these books to indicate that the ground of the religion continued to be the meditation hall and the daily round of the monastic routine.

Again, historians may rightly question the common claim that it was the school's practical bent and ascetic rigor that account for the subsequent adoption of Zen by the medieval Japanese warrior class; but there is no need to doubt that, quite apart from its obvious cultural appeal as the dominant form of Sung Buddhism, the Ch'an traditions of monastic discipline and meditation practice made the religion an attractive option for those in the spiritual turmoil of Kamakura Japan who sought concrete means to the direct experience of Buddhist enlightenment. Even today in the midst of our own turmoil these same traditions continue to characterize the school and attract adherents both in Japan and abroad.

Given the centrality of meditation to the school, it is hardly surprising that the interpretation of the practice should have formed a major—perhaps the major—issue of Ch'an and Zen doctrine, and that when the school has bothered to argue over doctrine, it has tended to do so in terms of this issue. We may recall that the most famous such argument, that between the "Northern" and "Southern" factions of the eighth century, revolved around the supposed differences between two accounts of the meditative path—one describing a "gradual" mental cultivation, the other emphasizing a "sudden" spiritual insight. Again, in the twelfth century, the well-known dispute between the Lin-chi and Ts'ao-tung houses of Ch'an was cast in terms of two competing meditation styles—one recommending the investigation of the *hua-t'ou*, or *kung-an*, the other advocating something known as "silent illumination" (*mo-chao*). This latter dispute was carried over to Japan, where to this day it remains—albeit in somewhat altered forms—the primary ideological rationale for the separation of the two major Japanese schools of Rinzai and Sōtō.

Throughout the long and sometimes stormy history of Ch'an and Zen meditation teaching, probably no single figure has been more closely identified with the practice than the Zen master Dōgen (1200–1253), a pioneer in the introduction of the religion to Japan and the founder of what is today the largest of its institutions, the Sōtō school. For Dōgen, seated meditation, or *zazen*, was the very essence of the Buddhist religion—what he called "the treasury of the eye of the true *dharma*" (*shōbō genzō*) realized by all the Buddhas and handed down by all the Patriarchs of India and China. The practice of this *zazen* was not simply an important aid to, nor even a necessary condition for, enlightenment and liberation; it was in itself sufficient: it was enough, as he said, "just to sit" (*shikan taza*), without resort to the myriad subsidiary exercises of Buddhist spiritual life. Indeed (at least when rightly practiced) *zazen* was itself enlightenment and liberation: it was the ultimate cognition, the state he called "nonthinking" (*hi shiryō*) that revealed the final reality of things; it was the mystic apotheosis, "the slough-

ing off of body and mind” (*shinjin datsuraku*), as he said, that released man into this reality. Such practice then (at least when rightly understood) was its own end, as much the expression as it was the cause of transcendence: it was “practice based on enlightenment” (*shōjō no shu*); it was the activity of Buddhahood itself (*butsugyō*). As such, this was, ultimately speaking, no mere human exercise: it was participation in the primordial ascesis (*gyōji*) of being itself, that which brought forth matter and mind, heaven and earth, the sun, moon, stars, and constellations.

Few Buddhists, whether of the Zen or other persuasions, would disagree with Dōgen that, since the days of Śākyamuni, meditation has been, in one form or another, a core element of the religion—though most might question whether it is in itself sufficient to gain the final religious goal. Few Zen Buddhists, whether of the Sōtō or other denominations, would be surprised by Dōgen’s claim that (at least when rightly understood) the practice of Zen is itself the direct realization of the enlightened Buddha mind within us all, but many would doubt that the meaning of this claim is best interpreted through the concrete exercise of seated meditation. Dōgen was not unaware of these questions and doubts. The true vision of the *shōbō genzō*, he held, was always the minority view, handed down in each generation through a unique line of transmission (*tanden*) from Śākyamuni and preserved in his own day only in the person of his Chinese master, the Ts’ao-tung teacher T’ien-t’ung Ju-ching (1163–1228). As for the rest—the benighted adepts of the Hīnayāna, the word-counting scholars of the Mahāyāna, and the self-styled masters of the other houses of Ch’an (especially of the Lin-chi house that had come to dominate Sung China)—they blasphemed *zazen* or paid it lip service without real understanding or authentic practice.

In our own day Dōgen’s vision of the *shōbō genzō* has become recognized as one of the major monuments in the history of Zen thought; yet even now the blasphemy continues. In the first volume of his *Studies in the History of Zen Thought*, the great Rinzai scholar D. T. Suzuki attacked Dōgen’s doctrine of “body and mind sloughed off” as mere negativism and his practice of “just sitting” as mere mental stasis. *Shikan taza*, he complained, failed to capture the vital spirit of Zen religious practice: like his forebears in the Chinese Ts’ao-tung school, Dōgen taught a form of quietistic Zen meditation—a version of the old “silent illumination” (*mokushō*)—that tended to put philosophy before experience and to ignore the dynamic aspect of Zen wisdom in favor of stillness and stagnation. For his part, Suzuki preferred the psychological power and spiritual insight of the *kōan* practice developed by his own forebear, the famed Sung Lin-chi master Ta-hui Tsung-kao (1089–1163).¹

1. *Zen shisō shi kenkyū* I (1943), repr. in *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū*, vol. 1 (1968), 1–344; for his treatment of Dōgen, see especially 57–83, and 161–98, where he is more critical of later Sōtō interpretations than he is of Dōgen himself and proposes a revisionist account of Dōgen’s Zen.

No one did more than D. T. Suzuki to bring Zen studies into the modern world, but here (as is often the case in his work) he is also carrying forward the old world of the eighteenth century and the ideological origins of contemporary Japanese Zen sectarianism. It is the world of Hakuin Ekaku (1686–1769), who fixed the orthodox Rinzai *kōan* practice and attacked what he called “dead sitting in silent illumination” (*koza mokushō*) as counter to the Buddhist path and disruptive of social ethics; and it is the world of Mujaku Dōchū (1653–1744), who established modern Rinzai scholarship and dismissed Dōgen’s Zen as “pitiable.” This Zen, said Mujaku, simply clung to the notion that the deluded mind was itself Buddhahood (*mōjin soku butsu*) and ignored the transformative experience of awakening (*satori*). Dōgen “never even dreamt” of the state of *satori* that was the meaning of the advent of the Buddha, the purpose of Bodhidharma’s mission to China, and the message of the patriarch of *kanna*, or *kōan* Zen, Ta-hui.²

It is not surprising that Hakuin and Mujaku should have failed to appreciate Dōgen’s brand of Buddhism. In modern times his rare vision of *zazen* has become the sacred centerpiece of Sōtō ideology, but it was not always so, and for some half a millennium after his death, his *shōbō genzō* was ever in danger of extinction even in his own school. In the eighteenth century the chief architect of modern Sōtō dogmatics, Menzan Zuihō (1683–1769), lamented the precarious history of the founder’s Zen. Only the Sōtō house, he said, preserves the teaching that sitting itself is the “treasury of the eye of the true *dharma* and the mystic mind of *nirvāṇa*” (*shōbō genzō nehan myōshin*); the practitioners of *kanna* have “never even dreamt” of it. Even within the Chinese Ts’ao-tung tradition, by the end of the Sung, only T’ien-t’ung Ju-ching still taught it; and, throughout the Yüan and Ming, the masters of Ts’ao-tung and Lin-chi alike have been wholly given over to Ta-hui’s *kanna*. In Japan as well, only the founding ancestor, Dōgen, proclaimed it; and after several generations the Sōtō monks went to study in the five Zen “mountains” of Heian and Kamakura, took up the style of Rinzai practiced there, and lost the *dharma* of their own house.³

There are many religious practices, said Menzan, that go by the name *zazen*, from the meditations of Taoism, Confucianism, and Shintō to the contemplative exercises of the Buddhist *sūtras* and *śāstras*; and, in Zen, at least since the decline of the orthodox transmission of Bodhidharma’s practice, individuals have made up their own techniques, like the *kanna* Zen so

2. *Shōbō genzō senpyō*, cited in Yanagida, “Dōgen to Rinzai,” *Risō* 513 (2/1976), 84. Mujaku’s interpretations of Dōgen have recently been treated at some length by Shibe Ken’ichi, in “Shōbō genzō senpyō no ichi kōsatsu,” SK 24 (3/1982), 72–77; and “Shōbō genzō senpyō to Edo ki shūgaku no kanren,” SK 25 (3/1983), 246–61. Hakuin’s remarks appear in the first letter of his *Orategama*. (*Hakuin oshō zenshū* 5: 128–29; see also his criticisms of the “dead *dharma* of the burned out mind and spent wisdom” [*keshin minchi*], in *Yabu kōji* [ibid., 331].)

3. *Eiso zazen shin monge*, SSZ.Chūkai, 3: 40b.

popular even today. But Dōgen's *zazen* has nothing to do with any of these.⁴ For Menzan and his church, Dōgen's *zazen* is like no other: it is the practice of "nonthinking," a subtle state beyond either thinking or not thinking and distinct from traditional Buddhist psychological exercises of concentration and contemplation; it is "just sitting," a practice in which, unlike the *kōan* exercise of Rinzai Zen, "body and mind have been sloughed off" and all striving for religious experience, all expectation of *satori* (*taigo*), is left behind. This *zazen* is nothing but "the mystic practice of original verification" (*honshō myōshu*), through which from the very start one directly expresses the ultimate nature of the mind.

The eighteenth-century movement of which Menzan has proved the most influential representative sought to return Sōtō faith to the religion of its founder, and in fact many of the premises behind the sort of interpretation of his *zazen* that we see here can be found in Dōgen himself. In theoretical terms this interpretation begins, like Dōgen's own, from a version of the "sudden practice" (*tonshu*) of the supreme vehicle (*saijō jō*), the venerable Ch'an ideal of a transcendental religion, beyond the expedients (*hōben*) of ordinary Buddhism, in which the spiritual exercise is brought into perfect accord with the ultimate principle of inherent Buddhahood. Again, as in Dōgen's own presentation of the theory, the assertion of such a transcendental religion is accompanied by a strong emphasis on two equally venerable historical corollaries to it: (1) that the full revelation of the religion is not given in the writings of ordinary Buddhism but is only "transmitted from mind to mind" (*ishin denshin*) through the generations of the enlightened Patriarchs; and (2) that in any given generation such revelation must occur "all at once" (*tongo*) in the Patriarch's accession to the transmission. There is not, then, in this style of presentation properly speaking any such thing as an intellectual history of Ch'an and Zen, either of the tradition as a whole or of the thought of any of its authentic representatives.

In one form or another, something akin to these three hermeneutical principles—of the higher unity of practice and theory, of the historical continuity of esoteric tradition, and of the inner integrity of spiritual experience—still guides the presentation of what is often called "Dōgen Zen" in the halls of Eihei ji, the chief monastery of the Sōtō school, and the classrooms of Komazawa, the university that now trains most of its academics. The principles can be seen at work throughout the religious writings of such influential modern masters as Nishiarī Bokusan and Kishizawa Ian and even find their way into much of the historical and textual work of the modern "sectarian studies" (*shūgaku*) represented by such eminent scholars as Etō Sokuo and Ōkubo Dōshū. Yet, if such principles go back beyond Dōgen to the very origins of Ch'an tradition, so too of course do the disagreements

4. *Fukan zazen gi monge*, SSZ.Chūkai,3:4b.

within the tradition over their implications for the understanding of Ch'an history and practice; and, if the principles continue to work in Sōtō theology today, there is no doubt that they have often brought "Dōgen Zen"—like Zen tradition in general—into conflict with the assumptions of modern secular philological and historical method.⁵

Even in Menzan's day, for example, the notion that the unity of theory and practice entailed a form of Zen distinct from Rinzai *kōan* study was dismissed by prominent Sōtō masters like Tenkei Denson (1648–1735); and in our own day Tenkei's tendency to accommodation with Rinzai has been preserved among a small but active faction of Sōtō popularized especially by such modern masters as Harada Sogaku (1870–1961) and Yasutani Hakuun (1885–1973).⁶ Much more important of course have been the intellectual developments outside the school that have challenged the Sōtō historical claims about the continuity of its tradition and of Dōgen's place in it. The discovery of this Zen master's thought by prewar philosophers like Watsuji Tetsuro and his subsequent treatment by historians like Ienaga Saburo, Buddhologists like Tamura Yoshiro, literary historians like Karaki Junzō, and so on, have led to a wide range of new interpretations of his Buddhism, all of which, whatever their obvious differences, tend to treat it as the product of an independent, Japanese religious thinker and, hence, inevitably to undermine the conviction that Dōgen merely served as a conduit for the orthodox *shōbō genzō* of his master Ju-ching and the Chinese Ts'ao-tung Patriarchs.⁷ Finally, the rapid development over the last few decades of the new Zen studies of scholars like Yanagida Seizan, based as they are on the critical use of historical documents, has forced a general rethinking of the old sacred histories of the school and, in the case of a figure like Dōgen for whom the documentation is rather rich, has replaced the old sacred biography with more modern, secularized accounts of the his-

5. The *shūgaku* style of presentation is still current in much of the writing on "Dōgen Zen": the former president of Komazawa University, for example, has recently twice reissued a representative sample of the style; see Kurebayashi Kōdō, "Dōgen zen no kihon teki seikaku," in the same author's *Dōgen zen no honryū* (1980), 11–32; and in *Dōgen*, ed. by Kawamura Kōdō and Ishikawa Rikizan, *Nihon meisō ronshū* 8 (1983), 76–96; the piece was originally published in two parts in SK 3 (3/1961), and 4 (3/1962). In a companion to the second anthology here that is otherwise largely devoted to representative historical studies, the same editors have seen fit to reissue a polemical piece in this style by a noted professor of Kurebayashi's university on the superiority of *shikan taza* to Hakuin's *kanna* practice; see Sakai Tokugen, "Zen ni okeru henkō," in *Dōgen zenji to Sōtō shū*, ed. by Kawamura and Ishikawa, *Nihon bukkō shūshi ronshū* 8 (1985), 22–41; originally published in SK 2 (1/1960).

6. Harada's efforts to spread a broader version of Zen meditation that accommodated the *kōan* can be seen, for example, in his early popular tract, *Ōazen no shikata* (1927); Yasutani's *kōan* style has been made famous in the West through the publication of Philip Kapleau's *Three Pillars of Zen* (1966).

7. For examples of these scholars' treatments, see Watsuji's pioneering "Shamon Dōgen," in his *Nihon seishin shi kenkyū* (1926), Ienaga's *Chūsei bukkō shisō shi kenkyū* (1947), Tamura's highly influential *Kamakura shin bukkō shisō no kenkyū* (1965), and Karaki's *Mujō* (1965).

torical circumstances of his ministry and the historical development of his thought.⁸

Clearly the Sōtō system of interpretation is now experiencing many of the sort of intellectual challenges to its faith with which we have been familiar for over a century. As in our own case, the most conspicuous developments have occurred in the area of historical understanding, and the larger, more difficult question of how such understanding should affect our reading of Dōgen's religion has inevitably lagged behind and has not yet, it is probably fair to say, received systematic attention. In particular the topic of his meditation, perhaps precisely because it lies so close to the heart of Zen tradition and especially of Dōgen's religion (and somewhat outside the most immediate interests of both the historian and the philosopher) has tended to remain insulated from the effects of the new scholarship. One of the purposes of the following study is to begin to break down this insulation by bringing to bear on Dōgen's meditation manuals some of the methods and findings of recent Zen studies. In this way I hope the work will serve not only as an introduction of these manuals to the Western literature on the school but also as one sort of prolegomenon to the rethinking of the traditional historical and theoretical principles of their interpretation. The study will seek, therefore, on the one hand simply to review what is now known about the manuals and on the other to raise certain questions, to locate problem areas, and to suggest possible new paths of inquiry. To this latter end, it will at times intentionally play the role of what we might call Māra's advocate, and it will in general be less concerned with completing a new model of Dōgen's Zen than with calling attention to the fact that our present model may be rather less complete than is often assumed.

Dōgen was a prolific author, who produced, over the quarter century of his active career, a sizable and varied corpus that ranged from formal treatises in *kanbun* (i.e., Chinese) to delicate Japanese verse. His work includes popular tracts on Zen practice, esoteric commentaries on Zen *kōan*, records of his lectures to monks, and detailed rules of monastic ritual and routine. Given the centrality of *zazen* to his religion and the breadth of (at least the more abstract of) his definitions of it, this entire corpus is in some sense concerned with meditation; and, in fact, references to the practice abound in almost all of his writing. Still, there are certain of his texts that deal specifically with *zazen* and that have been central to the interpretation of his teaching on the topic. Some years ago the Educational Division of the Sōtō administrative headquarters, concerned that the modern school might

8. Yanagida's seminal *Shoki zenshū shisho no kenkyū* has become, since its publication in 1967, rather like the bible of the new Zen historians; though the book itself deals only with the historical texts of early Ch'an, its methodological influence has spread over a much wider field, and in fact in more recent years Yanagida himself has devoted considerable attention to Japanese Zen, including Dōgen.

lose sight of its essential message (*shūshi*) of *shikan taza*, brought out a sourcebook of what it considered the prime sacred texts (*seiten*) on the subject to be used in the education of Sōtō adherents. The book contains eight texts by Dōgen. One of these, the *Shōbō genzō zazen gi*, is a practical manual of *zazen* included in the famous collection of his Japanese essays, the *Shōbō genzō*; others are more theoretical, like the *Shōbō genzō zanmai ō zanmai* or the *Shōbō genzō zazen shin*; still others, like the *Bendō wa* and *Gakudō yōjin shū*, combine both of these characteristics. Among this last type is by far the most famous and important of Dōgen's works on meditation, the *Fukan zazen gi*, or "Universal promotion of the principles of seated meditation."⁹

The *Fukan zazen gi* is a brief tract, in one roll of roughly 800 graphs, composed in a florid *kanbun* style and devoted to an explanation of both the theory and the procedures of *zazen* practice. It is generally held to represent Dōgen's first Zen teaching, promulgated immediately following his return to Japan after the pilgrimage to Sung China that culminated in his great awakening to the *dharma* of Ju-ching. As the opening act of his ministry, intended to reveal the very essence of the message he sought to bring to the Japanese Buddhist community, its composition is widely regarded as marking the historical origin of his Sōtō school. It was, the school would later say, the very "dawn of Buddhism in Japan."¹⁰ This historical significance for the tradition, coupled with the work's intrinsic importance as the primary textual source for the tradition's characteristic form of meditation, has given the *Fukan zazen gi* a central place in the literature of the Sōtō school. Indeed it has been taken into the litany of the church and is still recited daily at the close of evening meditation in the school's monasteries throughout Japan.¹¹

Like much else in modern Sōtō Zen, the place of the *Fukan zazen gi* was largely fixed by Menzan, who first singled out the work for special attention in his *Fukan zazen gi monge*, published in 1757. Thereafter, from the *Fukan zazen gi funō go* of Menzan's contemporary Shigetsu (1689–1764), to the commentaries of the present day, the little manual has been used by many masters of the church as a vehicle for transmitting the way of *zazen*. In this

9. For the sourcebook, see *Ryōso daishi zazen seiten*, ed. by Sōtōshū Shūmuchō Kyōikubu (1959). (Most of the work of annotation was done by Kurebayashi Kōdō; on the purposes of the book, see the afterword, following p. 203.) Also included here is a brief note by Dōgen, the so-called "Fukan zazen gi senjutsu yurai," and two texts by the "Second Founder" of Sōtō, Keizan Jōkin: the *Zazen yōjin ki* and *Sankon zazen setsu*. The book omits one significant document that I shall be using in this essay: Dōgen's *Bendō hō*, a work devoted to the rules of the meditation hall.

10. Preface to *Fukan zazen gi monge*, SSZ.Chūkai, 3: 1a.

11. A practice prescribed in the modern handbook of church ritual (see *Shōwa teiho Sōtō shū gyōji kihan* [1967], 40). The handbook also permits the substitution of Keizan's *Zazen yōjin ki*, which itself draws on the *Fukan zazen gi*. Both manuals were included in one of the first modern "bibles" of Sōtō (actually a liturgical reference book), the *Zenshū Sōtō seiten*, compiled by Yamada Kōdō at the end of the Meiji period and reprinted many times during Taishō.

century it has also been the subject of numerous historical and doctrinal studies in the religious and academic journals of Sōtō and, in recent decades, has several times been translated into modern Japanese and Western languages.¹² Yet for all its current reputation and wide public dissemination, in intellectual terms, the *Fukan zazen gi* has barely escaped the walls of the monastery: while outside those walls the academic study of Dōgen and of the history and teachings of Ch'an and Zen Buddhism in general has been making remarkable advances, the interpretation of this text and of its author's message has tended to circle narrowly within the confines of the religious concerns of sectarian tradition. In the following study I explore some of the contours of these confines and the ways they have circumscribed our understanding of the origins, intellectual background, and religious character of Dōgen's meditation teachings.

Though the monks who chant the *Fukan zazen gi* each day may do so in the conviction that it represents the founding document of their faith, in terms of the history of its author's own faith, the version of the work current in the modern church is rather late, probably dating from the last decade of his life. There is, however, an earlier version, preserved in an ancient manuscript thought to be in Dōgen's own hand, which describes a form of meditation seemingly somewhat different from that now celebrated in the Sōtō literature. The existence of this manuscript has been known for decades, but, apart from several technical articles, it has received surprisingly little attention, and its implications for our understanding of the origins and development of Dōgen's religion have not been taken very seriously. For this reason I begin my study here with a reexamination of the historical provenance of the two versions of the *Fukan zazen gi*, along with Dōgen's other major writings on *zazen*, bringing together what is now known or can be inferred about the circumstances of their composition and going on to suggest how this information might affect the way we are used to reading his texts and interpreting the inspiration of their message. At issue for the tradition here is the question of the relationship between the facts of Dōgen's new, secularized biography and the Sōtō faith in his enlightenment and accession to the Patriarchate as the primary and constant determinant of

12. Menzan's *Monge* can be found at SSZ.Chūkai, 3: 1–33; Shigetsu's *Funō go*, published in 1759, at *ibid.*, 47–53. For samples of the continuing commentarial tradition, see, for example, *Fukan zazen gi teiji roku* (1911), which records the teachings of the influential Meiji master Nishiyari Bokusan (1821–1910), as edited by Kishizawa Ian; Harada Sogaku, *Fukan zazen gi kōwa* (repr. 1982); Ōbora Ryōun, *Gendai kōwa Fukan zazen gi* (repr. 1982); Uchiyama Kōshō, *Shūkyō toshite no Dōgen zen: Fukan zazen gi ikai* (1977). Some years ago the chief monastery of the Sōtō school, Eihei ji, devoted two special issues of its journal to the text: see *Fukan zazen gi no sankyū*, *Sanshō* 372 (9/1974), 373 (10/1974). Perhaps the most recent modern Japanese translation has been done by Yanagida Seizan, in *Shisō dokuhon: Dōgen*, ed. by Yanagida (1982), 176–79; of the several English translations, see especially Norman Waddell and Abe Masao, “Dōgen's Fukanzazengi and Shōbōgenzō zazengi,” *The Eastern Buddhist*, new series 6, 2 (10/1973), 115–28.

his life and thought; and, in order the better to bring out this issue, I adopt here a somewhat “positivistic” treatment of the biography that may at times seem as alien to some recent styles of historiography as it is to the tradition itself. Whether or not it is the proper job of the historian to uncover “the facts” of the past, the sensitivity to such facts has separated modern Zen studies from the tradition, and for this reason we must begin with them. By the nature of both the method and the material here, the argument of Part I will sometimes involve considerable historical and bibliographic detail, and casual readers—or those interested more in meditation than the particulars of Dōgen’s life and writings—will be excused if they prefer to skim over some of this detail with an eye for the larger points behind it.

Though many modern interpreters may rightly hold up Dōgen’s *zazen* teachings as a seminal moment in the Zen meditation tradition, they have often tended to treat these teachings in isolation from the larger tradition, preferring to focus on the internal structure of Dōgen’s system and looking up from the system only long enough to establish its pedigree or dismiss its competitors. Yet, if Dōgen’s *Fukan zazen gi* is the first and most famous work of its kind written in Japan, it is also (as he himself emphasizes) deeply indebted to the heritage of the Buddhism its author sought to introduce from China. In fact, it is now well known to students of the text that it draws heavily on a Northern Sung Ch’an manual much read in Dōgen’s day. Interestingly enough, elsewhere in his writings, he himself dismisses this earlier work as failing to convey the orthodox tradition of *zazen*. This ambivalence toward his own sources reminds us of the need to pay more careful attention to the literary and intellectual background of Dōgen’s work and to the place of the work in the long history of Ch’an discourse on meditation. To this end, in Part II, I turn from the detail of Dōgen’s biography to the larger frame of this history and try to sketch at least the outline of what I take to be its major features. Chapter 3 deals with the history of the Ch’an meditation literature before and during Dōgen’s day; Chapter 4 discusses some of the religious issues that characterize this literature and set the stage for Dōgen’s own presentation of *zazen*. While my treatment of these broad subjects, spanning as it does fully half a millennium of religious history, will necessarily often skim lightly over some of the most complex topics and vexed issues of Zen studies, I trust that some of what I have to say here will prove entertaining not only to students of Dōgen but to those with interest in the history and character of the Zen tradition as a whole.

These chapters present one version of the sort of “intellectual history” of Ch’an that is now heavily impinging on the more traditional sacred history of the *shōbō genzō* and that has raised many questions about the meaning of Zen transmission and the spiritual continuity of the Patriarchate. Where traditional treatments preserved the model of the *shōbō genzō*

by explaining the discontinuities of Ch'an and Zen history apparent in its various factional disputes as the ongoing struggle between the true *dharma* and its heretical interpreters, some modern treatments have tended in effect to explain away these disputes as mere theological decoration on what was "really" political and social competition. My own approach here tries to avoid both these forms of reductionism and seeks rather to view the discontinuities in terms of the recapitulation, under various historical circumstances, of certain continuing tensions inherent in the Ch'an teachings themselves—tensions, for example, between exclusive and inclusive visions of the school's religious mission, between esoteric and exoteric styles of discourse, and especially between theoretical and practical approaches to its meditation instruction.

The recurrent "debates" over the interpretation of meditation that mark the history of Ch'an and Zen are justly famous and regularly receive due notice in accounts of the school. Yet there remains a sense in which we have not fully come to grips with the historical character and the religious problematic of the meditation tradition in which they occur. We are often told, for example, that Zen Buddhism takes its name from the Sanskrit *dhyāna*, or "meditation," and that the school has specialized in the practice, but we are rarely told just how this specialization is related to the many striking disclaimers, found throughout the writings of Ch'an and Zen (including Dōgen's own), to the effect that the religion has nothing to do with *dhyāna*. It is the gap between these two poles that serves as the arena for the debates and creates the kind of tension between Zen theory and its practice that is supposed to be resolved in the school's characteristic notions of the transcendental sudden practice (and in Dōgen's famous doctrines of enlightened *zazen* and just sitting). The supposition of such a resolution, whether valid or not, has had the effect of focussing our attention—like that of the tradition itself—on its various novel permutations and of limiting the degree to which we have taken the continuing historical tension seriously. In fact our treatment of Dōgen's *shikan taza* and our notices of the earlier debates of the Meditation school rarely seem to extend to discussion of the actual techniques of meditation that may (or may not) have been at issue, and we are not often told in concrete terms just how Dōgen and the other monks of the school actually went about their specialization. As a result, we are hardly in a very good position to consider what—if any—implications the school's meditation discourse may have had for the religious experience of its adherents.

To attempt to get "behind" the discourse to the experience is not, for more than one reason, an unproblematic exercise—particularly in the case of something like Zen meditation. The general tendency of Buddhist scholarship to favor the study of theory over practice, whatever else it may say about the discipline, is surely in part the reflection of an inherent difficulty

in getting at information on what actually took place in the meditation halls (let alone in the heads) of premodern Buddhists. To be sure, there have been Buddhists—like the famed sixth-century scholar and meditation teacher T'ien-t'ai Chih-i (538–97)—who left detailed and historically influential models of their spiritual exercises; but, by the nature of the case, the physical and psychological techniques of meditation are doubtless better learned through personal contact with an instructor than through books; and, in fact, despite (or perhaps because of) its abiding interest in meditation, the Ch'an and Zen tradition—with its emphasis on direct oral transmission from the master and its habit of making a virtue of ambiguity—has often been more loath than most to record the concrete details of its practice. Dōgen, for all his fame as a meditation teacher, is by no means the least delinquent in this regard. Still, if he shares a preference for the higher discourse of metaphysical interpretation, unlike most of the famous masters of classical Ch'an, he did write at length on practice; hence there is somewhat more room in this writing than we have hitherto exploited to ask him about the actual techniques of “just sitting” and to reflect on their relationship both to what we know of earlier descriptions of meditation and to the more theoretical levels of his and earlier Ch'an teaching.

This last issue—the relationship between the practical and theoretical levels of Ch'an discourse—provides the dominant theme of my treatment of the tradition and serves as the ground for Part III, where I deal with Dōgen's own teachings. Here I adopt a more analytic approach and try, through a close reading of selected passages of the *Fukan zazen gi* and related works, to reconstruct what Dōgen said (and also what he did not say) about Zen meditation, reflecting along the way on how some of this material is related to earlier accounts of the subject. Focussing first on the older, autograph version of the work, I use it to explore his teachings on the concrete techniques and historical tradition of *zazen*; I then turn to the revised, vulgate text to consider Dōgen's famous theory of enlightened practice and the knotty problem of how this theory both reveals and obscures the historical character of his practice. Finally, in my conclusion I step back a bit from Dōgen's texts and the ideological issues of Zen tradition that are the primary concern of this book to suggest very briefly what I think might prove a fruitful course for further study. In the back matter I have included for the reader's convenience a comparative table of translations of Dōgen's various meditation manuals, together with their Chinese predecessor, as well as translations of two other documents that figure in the discussion.