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Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma

*Shōbōgenzō*

Book 11

Principles of Zazen

*Zazen gi*

Translated by  
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### Introduction

The *Principles of Zazen* (*Zazen gi*) is said to have been composed in the eleventh month of 1243, at Yoshimine shōja, the monastery in Echizen (modern Fukui Prefecture) to which its author, Dōgen, had moved in the summer of the same year. This brief work is somewhat different in character from most of the texts of the *Shōbōgenzō*: it is not an essay commenting on themes in the Chinese Zen literature but rather, as its title suggests, a set of instructions for the practice of zazen. Thus, it shares much with Dōgen's more famous treatment of meditation, the *Fukan zazen gi* (*Universal Promotion of the Principles of Zazen*), as well as with his account of zazen given in the *Bendō hō* (*Rules for Pursuing the Way*), both of which were likely composed in the years following his move to Echizen.

The title, *zazen gi* (Chinese, *zuochan yi*, which might also be rendered “procedures” or “rites of zazen”), was used for a genre of practical manuals on Zen meditation in China. The best known example of this genre in the Southern Song when Dōgen visited there was the *Zuochan yi* included in the *Pure Rules of the Zen*

*Park* (*Chanyuan qinggui*), a monastic code composed in 1103 by Changlu Zongze. Dōgen borrowed heavily from this work in composing his own meditation instructions. Yet he was also critical of Zongze's understanding of Zen and went on to introduce into his instructions several crucial passages alluding to the sayings of other Chinese Zen masters.

The most important innovations in our text are thought to reflect the account of meditation presented in Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* essay *Lancet of Zazen* (*Shōbōgenzō zazen shin*). This work, originally composed in 1242 and apparently presented to Dōgen's monks soon after his move to Echizen, discusses two kōan on zazen known as "Nanyue polishes a tile" and "Yueshan's not thinking", both of which appear in the *Principles of Zazen*. Although, in the *Lancet*, Dōgen gives more attention to the former story, it is the latter that stands out in our text. Here, as in the *Fukan zazen gi*, "Yueshan's not thinking" is given as the very content of zazen, what Dōgen calls in both texts "the art" of the practice. Consequently, this passage has become central to the interpretation of Dōgen's meditation teaching and has received much attention in Sōtō commentary.

This translation is based on the text in Kawamura Kōdō, *Dōgen zenji zenshū* (1991) 1:100-102. Examples of other English translations of the *Zazen gi* can be found in Norman Waddell and Abe Masao, "Dōgen's Fukanzazengi and Shōbōgenzō zazengi", *The Eastern Buddhist*, New Series 6, 2 (1973), pp. 115-128; Nishiyama Kōsen and John Stevens, tr., *Shōbōgenzō*, vol 1 (1975), pp. 39-40; Okumura Shōhaku, ed. and tr., *Shikan taza: An Introduction to Zazen* (1985), pp. 59-62; Kazuaki Tanahashi, ed., *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen* (1985), pp. 29-30; Yokoi Yūhō, tr. *The Shōbō-genzō* (1986), pp. 129-131; Carl Bielefeldt,

*Dōgen's Manuals of Zen Meditation* (1988), pp. 177-181; Gudo Nishijima and Chodo Cross, *Master Dogen's Shobogenzo*, vol. 3 (1997), pp. 167-169; and Kazuaki Tanahashi, *Beyond Thinking: A Guide to Zen Meditation* (2004), pp. 7-8.