Iron Eyes

The Life and Teachings of
Ōbaku Zen Master Tetsugen Dōkō

HELEN J. BARONI

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Helen J. Baroni

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For my mother,

Lena C. Baroni

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Acknowledgments

I began the research that eventually developed into this book many years ago. Paul Watt, then my adviser at Columbia University, recommended that I look at the writings of Tetsugen and consider him as a dissertation topic. I began reading his *Dharma Lesson* on my daily commute into and out of Manhattan, and was deeply effected by the clarity of Tetsugen's message. When I read his description of human suffering during the famine of 1682 and his appeal for help in responding to the crisis, I wanted to understand the man and his teachings. Although the Ōbaku sect rather than Tetsugen became the central focus of my earlier work, Tetsugen remained a compelling figure to me over the years. I wish to thank Paul Watt for introducing him to me.

I took up the present project while on a sabbatical leave from the Department of Religion at the University of Hawaii, during which I completed the translations presented here and the bulk of the analytical chapters. I drew upon earlier research related to Tetsugen completed as part of my dissertation work. Funding from the Japan Foundation and a Whitehead fellowship supported that initial stage.

Several colleagues and friends assisted me in the project over the years. Gay Sibley, Julia Sopalski, and Sarah Thal read and commented on parts of the manuscript in its various stages. Many of my students at the University of Hawaii have read and commented on the translations, in a few cases checking my work with the Japanese originals. I especially wish to thank Leighton Ito, who made a special effort to provide me with a student's perspective. Robert Aitken made helpful suggestions to improve the translations of some of the more difficult passages in the teaching materials. Poul Andersen kindly provided assistance with a few of the more obscure passages in Chinese.

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Introduction

Tetsugen Dōkō (1630–1682) is perhaps the best known Ōbaku Zen monk in Japan and the West. He is credited with producing the first complete wood block edition of the Chinese Buddhist scriptures in Japan. Many older Japanese still remember reading about Tetsugen in school textbooks used in the first half of the twentieth century. Those textbooks included a lesson about Tetsugen that recounted a traditional legend: Tetsugen twice used the funds he had arduously raised for printing the scriptures to feed the victims of various natural disasters, and only with his third effort did he succeed in completing his original goal of printing the scriptures. In recent years, Tetsugen has been the subject of a television movie as well as several books geared toward a popular reading audience. Even among Western followers of Zen, his story has become well known and his name appears on numerous Buddhist websites. As is often the case, popular stories related to an historical figure are partly historical and partly legendary. The following chapters will explore both aspects of Tetsugen's story, and serve as an introduction to the translations of Tetsugen's writings that follow. Before turning attention to Tetsugen himself, however, an overview of the broader religious context in which he lived and worked may be helpful.

BUDDHISM DURING THE TOKUGAWA PERIOD

Tetsugen was born early in the Tokugawa period (1600–1867), what is commonly known in the West as Japan's early modern period. By that time, Buddhism had been a part of Japanese culture for more than ten centuries, having been first introduced in the sixth century. For many centuries during the medieval period, Buddhist thought dominated the intellectual and religious life of Japan, particularly among the elite classes. During the Tokugawa period, however, Buddhist institutions came under government constraint, and the tradition faced intellectual competition from movements within both the Confucian and Shintō communities. Nevertheless, important changes occurred within the

realm of Japanese Buddhism during the Tokugawa period that both broadened Buddhism's audience and circumscribed its role in society.

In order to eliminate certain officially banned religious movements, especially Christianity, the Tokugawa government established policies that effectively ensured that all Japanese individuals and families were affiliated with a Buddhist temple. At the same time, the government established policies constraining the growth of Buddhist temples and the behavior of Buddhist monks and nuns. The Tokugawa government developed a policy, known as the parishioner system (*danka seidō*), which enlisted the assistance of Buddhist institutions and clergy to control the religious affiliation of ordinary Japanese as well as to monitor certain religious behavior. This system, at first targeting areas heavily influenced by Christianity, eventually required every Japanese family throughout the country be officially affiliated with a local Buddhist temple. Families initially registered with a local Buddhist monk as members of a particular congregation. Subsequently, the family reported all demographic changes within the family, including marriages, births, and deaths. Eventually, the government extended the parishioner system to require that each individual be registered as a member of a recognized temple, and that the clergy continually monitor them for active affiliation as a prerequisite for ongoing certification. In this way, the government sought to ensure that individuals were not affiliated with any officially banned religious groups. In areas where Christianity had once been popular, for example, individuals were required to swear oaths rejecting any affiliation with the Christian faith. In this manner, at least outward behavior if not always internal belief could be brought under official scrutiny.[1]

The parishioner system thus garnered for Buddhist temples a captive audience of members, which tended to enrich temple coffers even when the affiliation was not necessarily wholehearted. Throughout the seventeenth century, more and more ordinary Japanese villagers and townspeople became affiliated with Buddhist temples, until the country reached nearly universal Buddhist membership. For most commoners, this represented the first time that they actually joined a parish. Previously, it was only common for wealthier and more prominent families and individuals to establish such a relationship, because membership amounted to patronage. Parishioners were obligated to make monetary donations or to offer manual labor in support of the temple. In most cases, with the exception of Pure Land and Nichiren devotees, families chose a temple based on geographic proximity rather than personal devotion to a particular school or sect of Buddhism.[2]

The legacy of required Buddhist membership survives even today, with the majority of Japanese families retaining some Buddhist affiliation. One sees this especially in the nearly universal use of Buddhist funeral and ancestral memorial rituals for the deceased. Indeed, the association of Buddhism with funerals represents another related legacy resulting from Tokugawa government policy. The government required that a member of the Buddhist clergy write up the certificate of death for all Japanese. This helped to popularize the

already existing practice of offering Buddhist funerals and memorial services for lay Buddhists. By the eighteenth century, Buddhist temples were requiring their members to make use of their services for funerals and ancestral memorial services as a prerequisite for temple certification of membership.

The vast majority of Buddhist monks served as parish priests at small local temples in villages and city neighborhoods. They provided for the ritual needs of their community, primarily by offering funeral and memorial services for the deceased and observing Buddhist holidays. In addition, many monks held services in times of special need, for example, to make rain or to heal an individual from spirit possession. It was not uncommon for monks to run small schools for local children. The Buddhist clergy enjoyed prestige in many communities both because of their spiritual authority and their education. As today, clergy sometimes misused their position, leading to scandals. As a result, the degenerate or debauched monk became a standard character in literature during the period.

While government policy expanded Buddhist affiliation to all Japanese, it also sought to bring Buddhist institutions and leaders under stricter control. Various government regulations and policies related to temples and clergy (*jiin hatto*) were enacted throughout the seventeenth century. For example, the government severely limited the right of Buddhist monks to publicly engage in intersectarian debates. Debates were regarded as potential threats to the peace. In addition, monks and nuns were constrained in their travel, and were encouraged to remain at home in their temples and monasteries, engaged in appropriate monastic activities such as ritual services, meditation, sutra chanting, and scholarship.

Buddhist clergy actively engaged in scholarship in the early Tokugawa period that had a lasting impact on Japanese Buddhist studies down to the present. Many of today's Buddhist universities had their origin in sectarian institutes established in the seventeenth century. In addition, some of the work done by various scholar monks of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries continues to influence research done today by religious and secular scholars alike. In particular, Buddhist scholars began to study and publish basic texts from within their own sects. Within the Sōtō Zen sect, for example, scholars such as Manzan and Menzan studied the writings of Dōgen and other founding figures of the sect. They published not only commentaries of their own, but the first wood block editions of Dōgen's writings, thus establishing what now serves as the canonical basis of their sect.

On a more popular level, many Buddhist monks made efforts to deepen ordinary people's commitment to Buddhism. A number of Buddhist monks, including Tetsugen, became well known as popular preachers, giving lectures on the basic teachings of Buddhism.[3] In some cases, Buddhist monks held ceremonies inviting laypeople to express their commitment to Buddhism by taking the so-called Bodhisattva Vows. Within the Zen world, monks such as Suzuki Shōsan and Bankei Yōtaku taught laypeople Zen practices that they regarded as accessible to ordinary people living busy lives as householders.[4]

As the period progressed, and more people became literate, monks and lay practitioners published Buddhist works designed for a lay audience, including picture books and religious tracts written in vernacular Japanese. Tetsugen's *Dharma Lesson in Japanese,* a translation of which is included in this volume, was one such text.

ZEN IN THE EARLY TOGUGAWA PERIOD

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Zen community included monks and nuns affiliated with the Rinzai and Sōtō traditions. The Ōbaku lineage, which became the third major sect of Zen in Japan, was established only later in the century. Like their colleagues from other schools of Buddhism, the majority of Zen monks served local parishes. They spent most of their time on ritual services, and only a small minority of monks concentrated their efforts on practicing meditation. In the Sōtō school, for example, it is estimated that only about 1 percent of monks regularly practiced meditation.[5] Meditation was the primary focus only at certain of the major training monasteries and at a few smaller monasteries, depending on the talent and proclivity of the abbot.

We know relatively little about the practice of Zen at the training monasteries of the day.[6] The early years of the Tokugawa period are overshadowed by the major reform movements of the eighteenth century, identified most closely with the work of Hakuin Ekaku (1685–1768) in the Rinzai sect and Menzan Zuihō (1683–1769) in the Sōtō sect. Until very recently, scholars in Japan and the West generally ignored seventeenth century Zen, regarding it as ossified and degenerate, lacking in strong leadership, and not at all edifying for those seeking to understand the teachings of Zen Buddhism. Scholars are now reconsidering the truth of these assumptions, and current research paints quite a different picture. There were indeed strong, and in some cases quite popular, leaders both within the mainstream of the Zen establishment and at its fringes. In addition, there is growing interest in the more popular manifestations of Zen religiosity.[7]

Many of the Zen voices of the seventeenth century called for the reform of Zen, seeking a restoration of an idealized past. In this regard, Zen monks were in step with the mood of the times. Intellectuals throughout the fields of Confucian thought, Shinto studies and Buddhism actively carried out research into the great texts and the founding teachers of their respective traditions. Within a Zen context, this "back to the original sources" movement could take as its focus any of three basic possibilities: first, the writings of early Japanese founding figures such as Dōgen; second, the recorded saying of Chinese masters from the Tang and Sung dynasties; and finally, the older canonical scriptures of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. Tetsugen's production of a complete wood block edition of the Buddhist scriptures served the latter purpose.

The early voices for reform in the Zen world included Sōtō masters such as Gesshū Sōko (1618–1696), Manzan Dōhaku (1636–1715), Baihō Jikushin

(1633–1707), and Tenkei Senson (d. 1735), the Rinzai teachers Takuan Sōhō (1573–1645), Gudō Tōshoku (1579–1661), and Mujaku Dōchū (1653–1744), as well as supporters of the new Ōbaku movement including Ryōkei Shōsen (1602–1670) and Chōon Dōkai (1628–1695). They considered such issues as the proper method for Dharma transmission, how to interpret and uphold monastic disciple, and the role of kōan in Zen practice. While everyone seems to have favored reform, much discussion and disagreement arose as to the best methods to employ toward that end.

Monks within the Rinzai and Sōtō communities generally enjoyed close and mutually beneficial relationships. It seems likely that during the seventeenth century, sectarian consciousness was much lower than it became later in the period, after the reform movements of Hakuin and Menzan promoted purging the respective sectarian traditions of "foreign" influences.[8] Early in the period, Zen scholar monks exchanged ideas both through their writings and in direct interchange in a manner that suggests that they regarded their community of scholarly discourse in broad terms to include all Zen practitioners. They formed alliances on common issues regardless of lineage, and sometimes collaborated in a common cause.

Exchange of ideas was not limited to the scholarly level, but extended to the realm of Zen practice. It was not at all uncommon for monks to travel outside the confines of their home monastery to practice for a season or two with masters from other lineages, crossing sectarian lines with apparent freedom. Zen masters at the larger training monasteries and in some cases at smaller local temples held intensive practice periods twice annually. Commonly known as the summer and winter retreats, these sessions lasted for three months each, and afforded monks a chance to practice under the direction of different teachers without necessarily altering their original affiliation.

The Chinese and Japanese monks who eventually founded the Ōbaku sect in the latter half of the seventeenth century participated in the interchange of the day. They contributed significantly to the transformation of Zen that continued into the eighteenth century. The Ōbaku sect emerged as a result of an influx of a small number of Chinese Buddhist masters to Japan and their interactions with their own Japanese disciples and with other members of the Rinzai and Sōtō communities. In time, Ōbaku became the third major sect of Zen in Japan.[9]

INTRODUCTION OF ŌBAKU ZEN

The Ōbaku sect of Zen was established in Japan in the latter half of the seventeenth century by a small group of Chinese Zen teachers and their Japanese disciples.[10] Tradition recognizes Yinyuan Longqi (1592–1673), the oldest and most prominent of the Chinese masters, as the founder of the new sect. Ōbaku never existed as an independent or distinct sect in China, although all of its Chinese teachers were affiliated with the same monastery in Fujian province,

Huangboshan Wanfusi. Yinyuan and the first group of his Chinese disciples arrived in Nagasaki Japan in 1654 with the intention of serving the needs of the Chinese expatriate community residing there. Many Japanese Zen practitioners visited Yinyuan in Nagasaki, and some of them joined his assembly and practiced as his disciples.

Yinyuan seems to have originally planned to stay in Japan for a few years and then to return to China. A small group of his Japanese disciples and other supporters, however, hoped that the master would remain permanently in Japan and provide guidance as abbot of a major training monastery within the Rinzai sect. They arranged for government permission for Yinyuan to relocate in the Kyoto area. Friction within the Rinzai establishment precluded Yinyuan from assuming the position as abbot at Myōshinji as his supporters had hoped, thus eventually leading to the establishment of a new monastery. In 1661, Yinyuan took up residence as the founding abbot of Ōbakusan Mampukuji, which would become the main monastery of the fledgling Ōbaku sect.

Yinyuan and his Chinese disciples practiced Zen in a somewhat different style than that seen at Japanese Rinzai or Sōtō monasteries, preserving the customs that they brought with them from China. This made Ōbaku monasteries unique within the world of Japanese Zen. Chinese and Japanese monks alike donned Chinese-style robes and shoes, chanted the sutras in the Fujian dialect of Chinese, accompanied by musical instruments previously unknown in Japan. Ōbaku monasteries were governed according to a monastic code, the *Ōbaku shingi,* which reflected the Chinese practices of the day, and which sought to preserve the Chinese character of the group. In addition, Ōbaku monastic services incorporated practices such as chanting the name of Amida Buddha (known in Japanese as *nembutsu*), which struck many Japanese observers as inappropriate within a Zen context.

Later generations of Japanese Zen teachers would argue that the primary difference between Ōbaku and its close relative Rinzai Zen is the matter of combined practice, that is, the use of both Zen and Pure Land techniques. As I have argued elsewhere, the differences were at once more subtle and more diverse.[11] As the decades passed, Ōbaku became less obviously Chinese in style, and more like its Japanese counterparts. At the same time, elements of practice unfamiliar to the Japanese before the arrival of the Chinese Ōbaku monks became commonplace at Rinzai and Sōtō temples. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Japanese described the experience of entering Mampukuji as if they had been transported to China, so foreign did it appear to them. This is not the case today. With a few notable exceptions, such as the style of sutra chanting (which continues to be done in an approximation of Fujian dialect), Ōbaku temples and monasteries appear very like their Rinzai neighbors.

Within the context of Zen Buddhism during the Tokugawa period, Tetsugen stands out as a fine example of several trends that gained in significance as the period progressed. Among these, the following chapters will stress his

contribution to the back to the sources movement within the Buddhist world and his emphasis on keeping the precepts both for monastic and lay practitioners. Tetsugen supported the trend to read and study the original sources of the Buddhist tradition in a concrete fashion through his project to produce a woodblock edition of the Buddhist scriptures. His efforts greatly increased the availability of Buddhist scriptures for scholar monks within all sect of Buddhism. In his own teachings, Tetsugen preached from the scriptures, rendering them into Japanese in order to make them accessible to lay audiences.

Tetsugen did not actively seek to reform the Buddhism of his day on an institutional level. Many such reformers were active during his lifetime and in the generations that followed. Indeed, the founding of the Ōbaku sect can be seen as one part of a reform movement current in the Rinzai Zen community during the seventeenth century. That particular current within the reform movement placed great stress on keeping the precepts and restoring monastic discipline as a vehicle for reinvigorating the Zen sect. Tetsugen clearly felt a great affinity for this approach to Buddhist practice. Within his own life and in his dealing with his disciples, Tetsugen stressed the importance of keeping the precepts as the only possible basis for genuine Buddhist meditation. In his lectures and in his writings, he enjoined his audience to establish Buddhist moral principles as the first step in their practice of Zen Buddhism.

What follows are four analytical chapters presenting the life, work, and teachings of Tetsugen, followed by a series of annotated translations of Tetsugen's writings. The appendix includes translations of three biographies of Tetsugen, two from the Tokugawa period as well as the above mentioned textbook lesson. Chapter 1 provides a biographical sketch of Tetsugen. Chapter 2 describes the project to produce a complete woodblock edition of the Buddhist scriptures. Chapter 3 presents the major themes found in Tetsugen's teachings, as well as a discussion of the techniques and pedagogical styles that Tetsugen employed. Chapter 4 explores the hagiography related to Tetsugen and the early modern and modern uses of his story.

Tetsugen wrote in both classical Chinese and in Japanese, depending on the purpose of the text and its intended audience. Each of the documents that follows includes a brief introduction providing the purpose of the piece, the language and style of the original, and the source used as the basis for the translation; whenever possible, I have also included the date and intended audience. I have divided the writings into four categories: teaching materials, texts related to the scripture project, poetry, and miscellaneous writings. The selections represent the bulk of Tetsugen's writings that have been preserved. I made an effort to include all the material of interest from a pedagogical perspective, that is, with significant teaching content, as well as items of interest from a social historical perspective. I included approximately one-third of the poetry preserved

in the *Yuiroku*, since Zen teachers commonly composed poetry as a part of their interaction with disciples. I chose not to include any examples of certain genre, such as bell inscriptions and eulogies, which I did not think would be of great interest to a contemporary audience. There is one major work attributed to Tetsugen, the *Kōmori bōdanki* (*The Forgotten Written Account about Bats*), which I chose not to include among the translations. The problems related to attributing this text with any certainty to Tetsugen are included in chapter 3, along with selected passages.

Historical Biography and Analysis

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CHAPTER ONE

The Life of Tetsugen

Tetsugen was born to the Saeki family, who lived in the Mashiki region of Higo province (now Kumamoto prefecture), on New Year's Day of Kan'ei 7 (1630). We know little of his family or his childhood, not even the names by which Tetsugen was known as a youth. The Saeki family was devoted to Pure Land Buddhism, and Tetsugen's father Jōshin served in some capacity as a member of the Buddhist clergy. Most likely he was a shrine monk (*shasō*) who served at the Buddhist temple within the compound of the nearby Hachimangū shrine.[1] Other traditions suggest that he was the resident monk at a True Pure Land[2] temple, Kōnenji.[3] Virtually nothing is known of Tetsugen's mother; the *Deeds of Tetsugen,* the biography written by his leading disciple, merely states that she was a virtuous woman. A memorial stone indicates that Tetsugen had at least one sibling, a brother.

It seems likely that Tetsugen married as a young man, as was the norm for True Pure Land priests. Until the modern period in Japan, only True Pure Land priests married, while all other Buddhist clergy were required to maintain the traditional Buddhist rule of monastic celibacy. None of the Ōbaku biographies, such as the *Deeds of Tetsugen,* make any mention of a wife, although nonsectarian sources from the period do so. The nonsectarian sources suggest that Tetsugen married a woman from his home region and that he left her permanently when he converted to Zen at age twenty-six. The biographical sketch of Tetsugen that appears in *Biographies of Unusual People of the Early Modern Period,*[4] for example, states

> Although [Tetsugen] was already married, he was dissatisfied that in the [True Pure Land] sect, people without talent or merit held high rank in the temple hierarchy. Therefore, he went up to Mount Ōbaku and followed [the instruction] of Muan.
>
> His wife came to [Mount Ōbaku Mampukuji] to find him, but he did not wish to meet her. So she camped outside the temple gate and watched for him to emerge. Finally, one day when he had no choice but to go out, she asked

> him to accompany her to their home province and return to their village. He escaped up the street and returned to the temple.

Several versions of the same basic story exist; some of them lean toward pious interpretations of events rather than the more ribald accounts in which Tetsugen hides from his wife as long as possible and then escapes up the street once she has cornered him. In the more sedate and instructional versions, Tetsugen accompanies his wife back to their home village and there converts both his former wife and mother-in-law to Zen. The two women then became Zen nuns and, as Tetsugen's disciples, aided him in his scripture project.[5] There is no external historical evidence to confirm any of these stories.

TETSUGEN'S EARLY BUDDHIST EDUCATION

Tetsugen began his Buddhist education at the age of seven, when his father taught him to read the Meditation Sutra (*Kanmuryōjukyō*),[6] one of the three sutras that form the basic canon for the Pure Land schools of Buddhism. At the age of twelve, Tetsugen took the tonsure and continued his education under the guidance of a local monk called Kaiun. Nothing is known for certain about this monk except that he was a True Pure Land priest, and probably the resident monk at Shōsen-bō, a small branch temple of the Nishi Honganji in the village of Notsu.[7] Tetsugen studied with Kaiun for at least the next four years.

In 1646, when Tetsugen was sixteen years old, he became the disciple of a well-known True Pure Land priest named Saigin (1605–1663). Saigin was an unusual True Pure Land teacher, with a broad background in the Chinese classics and Zen Buddhist thought. As a young monk, Saigin practiced for a time under the Zen master Sessō (d. 1649)[8] in Bungo province, and then went to Kyoto, where he practiced for a period of three years at the Zen temple Tōfukuji.[9] Only later, when he returned to Kyushu, did he dedicate himself to the exclusive study and practice of True Pure Land Buddhism.

Tetsugen first encountered Saigin when he attended a lecture on *The Awakening of Faith*[10] that Saigin gave in the nearby town of Kokura in Buzen province. Saigin served as abbot at Eishōji, a large Honganji branch temple in Kokura. According to the *Deeds of Tetsugen,* the young man was deeply affected by the lecture. Tetsugen may have accompanied Saigin to Kyoto the following year, when Saigin took up the post as the headmaster of the new True Pure Land academy (now Ryūkoku University).

The exact chronology of Tetsugen's time at the True Pure Land academy in Kyoto is not clear. He may well have left Kyūshū as early as 1647, departing for Kyoto when Saigin did, although the *Deeds of Tetsugen* makes no mention of this. Whether Tetsugen move to Kyoto in 1647 or 1650, his education was interrupted in 1650 by word of his mother's death. At that time, he traveled back to his home village to perform the appropriate memorial services and thus fulfill his filial obligations. According to the inscription on his mother's

memorial stone, which Tetsugen erected in 1662 on the thirteenth anniversary of her death, she died on the twenty-first day of the sixth lunar month of Keian 3 (1650).[11] The *Deeds of Tetsugen* indicates that he subsequently traveled to Kyoto to resume his education, but dates his departure to the spring of the same year.

In Kyoto, Tetsugen rejoined Saigin and studied with him at the True Pure Land academy. It is very difficult to assess the lasting influence Saigin had on Tetsugen, especially given the paucity of primary materials connecting the two men. Tetsugen seems to have been deeply impressed by Saigin's lectures, and both men shared a similar passion for teaching and lecturing based on Buddhist texts. The traditional pattern of instruction under a master such as Saigin would have included a great deal of memorization on the students' part. Tetsugen and the others would have listened to Saigin's lectures and repeated them in whole or in part to the best of their abilities, ultimately committing large portions to memory for their own use later.[12] Tetsugen was known for his skill in this technique. In this way, the master's teachings naturally became a part of the disciple's unless some kind of break occurred between them. Tetsugen's change to Zen practice would have constituted such a break.

Tetsugen heard Saigin explicate many Buddhist scriptures, and yet, as far as we know, he only included one of these, *The Awakening of Faith,* in his own repertoire. Nonetheless, Saigin's overall approach may well have had a more extensive impact than this alone suggests. Certainly, as a Zen monk Tetsugen would not have lectured on the Pure Land texts that comprised the majority of topics for Saigin's lectures. It is perhaps more reasonable to posit that Saigin's lasting influence on Tetsugen can be found in his openness to other Buddhist traditions, especially Zen. As Saigin's early monastic training demonstrates, Saigin may have shared with Tetsugen some inclination toward the Zen understanding of Buddhism. Indeed, Saigin's detractors specifically accused him of contaminating True Pure Land doctrine with Zen ideas and interpretations. Tetsugen's case may be an indication that these accusations had some basis in reality. Saigin's "contamination" of Tetsugen's training, his refusal to exclusively teach True Pure Land ideas, may have actually helped precipitate Tetsugen's break from True Pure Land Buddhism.

LEAVING TRUE PURE LAND BUDDHISM

When considering the possible reasons why Tetsugen broke off his True Pure Land affiliation in favor of Zen, one enters into the realm of speculation. Tetsugen never mentioned his decision to leave True Pure Land in any of his extant writings,[13] and his disciples did not address the issue in their biographical pieces. In fact, there is a significant gap in the *Deeds of Tetsugen* for a five-year period immediately preceding Tetsugen first entering the Ōbaku Zen monastic community in Nagasaki. The biography jumps from a brief entry for the year 1650, when Tetsugen returned to Kyoto to take up his studies, to 1655, when

Tetsugen traveled from Kyoto to Nagasaki to meet with Yinyuan. We know from other sources that, during the intervening years, conditions in Kyoto changed significantly, and that these changes would have had considerable impact on Tetsugen.

There are three factors that theoretically may have propelled Tetsugen to leave the sect of his birth and to convert to Zen. First, the Jōō incident, described briefly below, seems to have been the immediate impetus for Tetsugen to leave Kyoto and to reconsider his affiliation with True Pure Land Buddhism. Second, Saigin's intellectual influence may have steered Tetsugen toward a Zen understanding of Buddhism. Third, Tetsugen's own feelings of dissatisfaction with the True Pure Land sect may have motivated him to seek out a form of Buddhist thought and practice more consistent with his growing understanding of the scriptures.

Beginning in 1653, Saigin came under serious attack from colleagues within the True Pure Land sect who accused him of using Zen concepts in his teachings at the academy. The incident is known within the True Pure Land sect as the Jōō incident because it spanned the Jōō era, 1652–1654. Saigin seems to have had the full support of his superiors within the True Pure Land hierarchy, who rejected charges that his teaching was heretical. Unfortunately, they were unable to successfully settle the dispute on their own. When sect officials asked the government to intervene in 1654, the government exiled Saigin's primary detractor, and decided that the academy that lay at the heart of the problem should be closed. Saigin thus lost his position, and eventually returned to Kyushu later the same year. Although we have no reason to believe that Tetsugen was personally involved in the internal struggles of the sect, he and other students would have been directly affected by them. Tetsugen was left without a master to guide his studies, and the school was closed indefinitely. Whatever course Tetsugen would set for himself, as a result of sectarian disputes, he faced a serious decision about his future.

Although the *Deeds of Tetsugen* is silent on the matter, other Edo period biographies suggest that Tetsugen became increasingly dissatisfied with certain aspects of True Pure Land belief and practice, and that this dissatisfaction may have motivated him to look outside the sect for guidance. The passage from the *Biographies of Unusual People of the Early Modern Period* cited above states that Tetsugen felt discouraged about the low caliber of the True Pure Land clergy, especially those in positions of authority.[14] The *Kōko ruisan shūi* contains a similar observation, in somewhat stronger language: "[Tetsugen] despised the fact that individuals were placed in positions of high rank according to temple custom even though they were lacking in learning and merit in the [True Pure Land] sect's teachings."[15]

Major themes from Tetsugen's later writings suggest another area of True Pure Land practice that may have troubled him in his youth, the custom that monks and lay people alike married and ate meat. As an Ōbaku monk, Tetsugen wrote and preached most often on the theme of keeping the Buddhist

precepts, especially those against sexual misconduct and killing. For example, in his *Dharma Lesson in Japanese,* he promoted the benefits of celibacy and non-killing even for lay believers by explaining in graphic terms the suffering that the married life and meat eating actually entail from a Buddhist perspective. When explicating the *Śūramgama sutra* in *An Affidavit Concerning the Dharma Debate in Mori,* Tetsugen argued in more direct terms against monks marrying and eating meat. Although it is not known for certain whether or not he intentionally directed his arguments against the practices of the True Pure Land sect, his repeated teaching on this theme and his life-long dedication to the *Śūramgama sutra* suggest at the very least that his personal rejection of these customs was a basic reason for breaking with the sect.

TETSUGEN'S INITIAL ENCOUNTERS WITH ŌBAKU ZEN

When the Chinese Zen master Yinyuan decided to visit Japan, it set off a wave of excitement in the Japanese Zen community throughout the country, especially in Kyoto, where Tetsugen heard the news. Yinyuan arrived in Nagasaki in the seventh lunar month of 1654, the very same month that the government closed the True Pure Land academy. As foreign nationals, Yinyuan and his Chinese disciples were confined to the city of Nagasaki. At this early stage, before the government granted Yinyuan and a few of his disciples freedom of movement, any Japanese person who wished to meet with them had to travel to Kyushu to do so. Tetsugen determined to pay his respects to the famous Chinese master, and set out for Nagasaki in the Autumn of 1655.

Tetsugen made his way first to Osaka, where he awaited a vessel heading for Kyushu. In Osaka, he was fortunate enough to meet the Tokugawa government's administrator (*bugyō*) of Nagasaki, Kurokawa Masanao (1602–1680), who was then returning to Nagasaki from Edo (now Tokyo). It was Kurokawa who granted official permission for Yinyuan to travel to Nagasaki in the first place. Shortly after his return to Nagasaki, Kurokawa himself paid his respects and became a lay disciple of Yinyuan. Kurokawa generously permitted Tetsugen to sail aboard his ship, and in that way, Tetsugen arrived in Nagasaki and made his way to Kōfukuji, the Chinese Buddhist monastery where Yinyuan had taken up residence as abbot.

Tetsugen was admitted to see Yinyuan, and the two men conversed both through an interpreter and in written Chinese. The *Deeds of Tetsugen* briefly describes that first encounter in the following terms:

> [Tetsugen] changed his robes and entered Tōmyōzan [Kōfukuji]. He explained at some length that he was eager to seek the teachings. Master [Yinyuan] knew at a glance that he was a vessel of the Dharma (*hōki*).[16] He allowed him to follow the other monks and enter the monks' hall to begin practicing *zazen.* Tetsugen immediately cast aside what he had previously learned, and took up the matter of his Original Nature untiringly noon and night.

At that time, the assembly was in the midst of the summer retreat, held from the fourth through the seventh months, and Tetsugen thus had the opportunity to participate in its final weeks. The exact date of Tetsugen's admission to the assembly was not recorded, but based on the timing of Kurokawa's audience with Yinyuan, one can assume that it occurred sometime early in the sixth month of 1655.[17]

Tetsugen entered Yinyuan's assembly just as efforts to invite the Chinese master to Kyoto were coming to fruition. After months of planning and work, a group of Rinzai monks gained permission from the government in Edo for Yinyuan to travel to the Kyoto area. Within a month of Tetsugen's arrival, Yinyuan accepted their invitation to take up residence at Fumonji in Settsu province. Yinyuan left Nagasaki early in the eighth month, soon after the close of the summer retreat. After only two months at Kōfukuji, Tetsugen found himself once again without a teacher.

The government would not allow Yinyuan's Japanese disciples to accompany him to Settsu, so Yinyuan made arrangements for Muan, his leading disciple and Dharma heir, to take on responsibility for their guidance.[18] Muan himself had only recently arrived in Nagasaki from China and he was still under the travel restrictions applied to all Chinese nationals. He assumed the position as head monk at another Chinese monastery Fukusaiji, where he remained until receiving permission to join Yinyuan in Kyoto several years later. Tetsugen went to Fukusaiji to meet with Muan, but the first encounter did not go well. The scene from the *Deeds of Tetsugen* suggests that Tetsugen behaved brashly with his new master. First, he went straight up to the master's gate and knocked. When he entered the master's room, he stated his mind forcefully, without deferring to Muan's authority or trying to come to an accord. In typical Zen fashion, Muan slapped his face and dismissed him, refusing him permission to enter the assembly. Zen masters often initially refuse admission to test the disciple's resolve. In this case, Tetsugen did not remain in Nagasaki to seek another meeting with Muan immediately.

At this stage, the *Deeds of Tetsugen* says that Tetsugen wandered about "like a wild crane or a wisp of cloud," and eventually made his way to Fumonji in Settsu where he was allowed to visit Yinyuan once again. It is possible that Tetsugen practiced with Yinyuan for a time, but the sources are unclear. Sometime later, he returned to Nagasaki and once again approached Muan. The second time, Muan admitted him to the assembly, and he remained there until 1661, or so we are lead to believe by the biography's silence.

With the exception of the events outlined above, the *Deeds of Tetsugen* leaves the years from 1655 until 1661 largely a blank. Many scholars have tried to fill in those years, presenting a range of chronologies that indicate that Tetsugen suffered a period of serious doubt during these "dark years," traveling back and forth between Nagasaki, Settsu, and Kyoto. For example, Yoshinaga Utarō pieced together an expanded chronology with information gleaned from various documents that supplement the *Deeds of Tetsugen*. According to his

findings, Tetsugen returned to Fukusaiji in 1657 and practiced under Muan for a short time before returning to Kyoto once more in 1658. He contends that for a period of four to five years, Tetsugen experienced terrible doubts and seems to have even left Zen for a period of time.[19] Yoshinaga's chronology stands out among the other scholarly reconstructions because he documented each entry with the textual citation used as its basis. Other scholars present their chronologies as if there were no textual problems in explicating this period in Tetsugen's life.[20] Unfortunately, it is impossible to verify much of the additional information included in these accounts, since they do not document their sources methodically.

Based on historical documents, one can make a few amendments to the account in the *Deeds of Tetsugen* with a reasonable degree of certainty for the years 1655 to 1661. First, based on Hōshū's introduction to the *Tetsugen yuiroku,* it is possible to date Tetsugen's return to Nagasaki and initial admission to Muan's assembly to the year 1657.[21] As for his visits with Yinyuan in Settsu, Yinyuan was living under strict house arrest until the eleventh month of 1655, when a few Japanese visitors were allowed to enter. Therefore, Tetsugen could not have visited Fumonji before the end of 1655. If Tetsugen did actually practice under Yinyuan at Fumonji for an extended period of time, it would have been after the government lightened the restrictions in the seventh month of 1656. After that time, Yinyuan was permitted up to two hundred Japanese disciples in his assembly at Fumonji, and Tetsugen may have been among those who took advantage of the opportunity. Tetsugen probably did make multiple visits to Fumonji during these years and he probably stayed for an extended period of time in order to complete his first venture into publishing Buddhist texts. Tetsugen's name appears on the original woodblock plates as the publisher of Yinyuan's *Gukai hōgi,* dated 1658.[22] In the *Gukai hōgi,* Yinyuan provided a detailed description of the Triple Ordination Platform Precept Ceremony (*Sandan kaie*) used within the Ōbaku community.

TETSUGEN'S ZEN PRACTICE

The year 1661 seems to have been a turning point for Tetsugen, then age thirty. Although he had been struggling with Zen practice for some years, after 1661, he dedicated himself to the practice of Zen with renewed confidence and even began accepting his first disciples. Following a common Zen pattern, Tetsugen placed himself under the guidance of several Zen masters in addition to periodically visiting his primary master, Muan.[23] Muan had by this time left Kyushu for the Kyoto area, where he rejoined Yinyuan and spent the next several years engrossed in the project of establishing Mampukuji. Tetsugen spent more extended lengths of time practicing under the Rinzai monk Kengan Zen'etsu (1618–1690)[24] at Tafukuji in Bungo and the Chinese Ōbaku master Zhifei at Fukujuji in Kokura, but also made brief visits with other masters, including Duzhan, over the years.