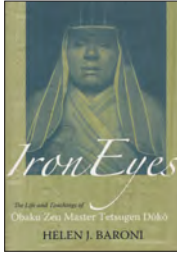


## REVIEWS



Helen Baroni, *Iron Eyes: The Life and Teachings of Ōbaku Zen Master Tetsugen Dōkō*

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006. 259 pp. Paperback, \$25.95. ISBN-10: 0-7914-6892-5, ISBN-13: 978-0-791468920.

BEYOND THE MUCH revered founders of the major sects of Japanese Buddhism, there are few noteworthy Buddhist figures who would be recognized today by many Japanese. Tetsugen Dōkō 鉄眼道光 (1630–1682) is likely an exception, at least among the older generation. As Baroni points out, Tetsugen’s success in printing the first complete woodblock edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon in Japan, along with stories of his acts of compassion in times of natural disasters, were included in elementary school textbooks during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In more recent years, she notes, he has also been the subject of a TV movie and of writings intended for a general audience. In *Iron Eyes*, Baroni provides the first critical examination of Tetsugen’s life and teachings in English, as well as translations of a range of his sermons, poetry, and letters. In an appendix, she includes translations of three of his biographies. Her work not only brings to light an important figure in Japanese Buddhist history, but it also adds to a growing body of academic literature in English on Tokugawa period (1600–1868) Buddhism.

After a short introduction in which Baroni sets the context of Tetsugen’s life—sketching the ways in which Buddhism was woven into the system of Tokugawa rule and providing a brief history of the introduction of Ōbaku Zen into Japan by Yinyuan Longqi 隱元隆琦 (1594–1673), known to the Japanese as Ingen—she devotes the first section of the volume to a study of Tetsugen’s life, his printing project, his teachings, and the myths that grew up around him. There is uncertainty about significant aspects of Tetsugen’s life, and Baroni conscientiously reviews the arguments and the relevant sources in each case. Born in what is now Kumamoto Prefecture, Tetsugen first became a priest in the Shin or True Pure Land sect at the age of twelve. At sixteen, he became the disciple of Saigin 西吟 (1605–1663), a Shin priest who had also practiced Zen for several years. Baroni notes that “Saigin’s detractors

specifically accused him of contaminating True Pure Land doctrine with Zen ideas and interpretations” (13) and she suggests that Saigin’s influence may have been a significant factor in piquing Tetsugen’s interest in Zen. At the age of twenty-six, Tetsugen formally left the Shin sect and the wife he had married during those years, and became a disciple of Yinyuan whom he met in Nagasaki in 1655. While Tetsugen never explicitly explained the reason for his departure from Shin Buddhism, his later frequent references to the importance of the precepts and the monastic life, which the Shin sect did not require, seems to indicate the critical point of divergence. On at least two occasions later in his career, Shin Buddhist leaders criticized Tetsugen for stressing these aspects of Buddhist practice.

Soon after Tetsugen became Yinyuan’s disciple, Yinyuan departed Nagasaki for Kyoto, where he eventually became abbot of Manpukuji 万福寺 and made it Ōbaku Zen’s main temple. Tetsugen’s guidance was left to another of Yinyuan’s students, Muan 木庵, and he practiced under him as well as other Ōbaku and Rinzai teachers before moving to Osaka in 1667. There he established Zuiryūji 瑞竜寺, which became the center of his activities. Much later, in the spring of 1676, Tetsugen was officially recognized as Muan’s heir.

Baroni points out that, from the time of his move to Osaka until 1680, Tetsugen focused his efforts on fundraising and making the necessary preparations for the woodblock printing of the Chinese Buddhist canon. His aim in undertaking this project was a simple one: to make the canon as widely available as possible in a country where access to the complete canon was limited. There had of course been earlier printings of the canon in China and Korea, and even in Japan, the Tendai monk Tenkai 天海 (1536–1643) had printed a Yuan dynasty edition of the canon using movable type in 1648 with government support. However, Baroni notes that Tetsugen based his edition on a later version of the canon that Yinyuan brought with him from China, the so-called Wanli edition, and he worked in the more permanent medium of woodblocks. In addition to allowing Tetsugen to use his sutra collection as a model, Yinyuan further supported the project by giving him land for the construction of a storehouse for the woodblocks. The Hōzōin 宝蔵院, which Tetsugen constructed there, eventually became a subtemple of Manpukuji. Tetsugen raised funds for his project among the wealthy layfolk of Osaka, but he reached out to people in all levels of society, even begging in the streets of Osaka and Kyoto. The carving of the woodblocks was completed in 1680, and in 1681 he set off for the military capital of Edo to present a copy to the Shogun and to ask for permission to begin distribution. However, while he was in Edo, Tetsugen heard of the famine that was spreading in the Osaka-Kyoto area. He returned to Osaka and, drawing on the funds that he had collected for the printing of the canon, he launched a relief effort that provided food to thousands. This is the most dramatic example of Tetsugen’s social welfare activities, but he is also remembered, for example, for having petitioned officials for the release of prisoners whom he believed had been wrongly convicted.

Tetsugen died in 1682, before the famine ended, but his followers carried on his printing project. The Ōbaku canon served as the primary edition of the Buddhist scriptures in Japan until it was replaced by the Taishō edition in the early twentieth century.

Baroni's translations bring to life Tetsugen's words and his relations with both monastic and lay followers. His "Dharma Lesson in Japanese," written for a woman "deeply committed to Zen," is a mediation on a classic theme, the emptiness of the five *skandhas*. There is much in this piece about the illusory nature of ordinary perception, but Tetsugen also stresses the positive side of emptiness. "When seen through the eyes of enlightenment, even fish and birds are the Tathagata, the Dharmakāya, and fundamentally one body with all the Buddhas" (99). The work also contains numerous references to Mahayana sutras and Zen masters and practices. In other pieces, we get accounts, at several stages, of his scripture printing project. A document that gives us a glimpse of Tetsugen the fundraiser, as well as the harsh conditions of the 1681–1682 famine, is a letter written to a lay supporter in Osaka, just months before Tetsugen's death. Tetsugen describes his relief efforts, noting the thousands of people that had been helped, and then asks directly for a donation of money. "It is difficult to describe the situation in words," he writes. "Some of the people are nearly 70 or 80 years old, leaning on staffs, but they find it difficult to relinquish their lives. Others are children of five or three years, dragged along by the hand by their mothers. . . . There are some who haven't eaten in days, and so [their stomachs] have become swollen and distended. Others have gotten so thin that they are nothing but skin and bones." The inclusion of a selection of Tetsugen's poems, something not often encountered in studies of the teachings of Zen masters, reminds us of how important poetry was in their lives and in the lives of their followers.

In addition to being a valuable contribution to our understanding of Tokugawa Buddhism, *Iron Eyes* provides yet another instructive perspective on Zen. A Zen master who devoted much of his life to lecturing on and preserving the scriptures is further evidence, if such evidence is needed, of the distorted popular image of Zen as being anti-text. Like all Zen advocates, Tetsugen understood the limits of texts, but also like most Zen masters, he understood their critical place in Buddhist monastic life and in the larger Buddhist community. Further, Tetsugen's life highlights another aspect of Buddhist history, and especially Zen, that has received too little attention: Buddhism and social welfare activities. Baroni's study contributes to a larger story in this regard that has yet to be adequately told.

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