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Mortification Practices in the Ōbaku School

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Introduction

The arrival of the Ōbaku monks is now widely recognized to have been the prime catalyst in spurring the reform movements in the contemporaneous Rinzai and Sōtō schools during the Edo period 江戸時代 (1603-1868). These movements are portrayed as having been largely achieved through the return to and reassertion of what were perceived as the native origins of Rinzai and Sōtō orthodoxy that were in danger of being compromised by Ōbaku's newly-imported Ming[1] Buddhist models. Initially, a large segment of the Japanese Buddhist community reacted to the Chinese monks with interest and enthusiasm, and generally only later did unfavorable assessments of the Ōbaku monks arise. Superficially, the Ming Buddhist models that the Ōbaku monks brought with them appeared to be quite different from what the Japanese Zen monks took to be orthodox practice. Perhaps the two most conspicuous features of Ōbaku practice were its models of monastic discipline and the Pure Land practice of the *nenbutsu*[2] within Zen training.

The precursor to the Ōbaku school in Japan was the Huangbo lineage in China, the organization that revived the eponymous temple complex on

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1 The Ming 明 period lasted from 1368-1644.

2 The term *nenbutsu* can refer to two separate practices: 1) to visualize Amitābha Buddha, recalling his merit and form (*buddha-anusmṛti*), and 2) to chant aloud the name of Amitābha Buddha in order to attain rebirth in his Pure Land (also called *shōmyō nenbutsu* 稱名念佛). The former meaning describes the *nenbutsu* practice of early Chinese Buddhism. From the time of the Chinese monk Tanluan 曇鸞 (476-542), standard *nenbutsu* practice increasingly came to refer to the latter meaning. See Nakamura Hajime, *Bukkyōgo daijiten* (*shukusatsu ban*) (Tokyo: Tōkyō Shoseki, 1981; repr. 1999), 1801a. See also Mochizuki Shinkō, *Bukkyō daijiten*, 10 vols. (Tokyo: Bukkyō Daijiten Hakkōsho, 1933-63), 5:4158a-4160b.

Mt. Huangbo, in Fujian province. Although monks from this lineage had come to Japan a few decades prior to the 1661 founding the Manpukuji in Uji, the terminus a quo for a recognizable Ōbaku school in Japan, none were masters of repute, and these monks were limited to Nagasaki where they served the needs of the considerable Chinese merchant community that had been growing for the previous several decades. The number of Chinese in Nagasaki grew from twenty to over two-thousand between 1608 and 1618, such a startling pace that the Bakufu was moved to construct the *Tōjin yashiki* 唐人屋敷, or Chinese quarter, at the end of the seventeenth century.[3]

Ōbaku practice naturally seemed foreign to the Japanese Zen community because contemporaneous Chinese Buddhism had evolved considerably since the last period of Japan's contact with the continent. The Song[4] example that Myōan Eisai 明庵榮西 (1141-1215), founder of the Japanese Rinzai school, and Dōgen Kigen 道元希玄 (1200-1253), the patriarch of Japanese Sōtō, witnessed in China had given way to Ming Buddhism, which reflected all of the evolutionary changes that had occurred in the last four centuries, such as a marked emphasis on the participation of the laity. Through the efforts of Yinyuan Longqi 隠元隆琦 (J. Ingen Ryūki; 1592-1673), Muan Xingtao 木庵性瑫 (J. Mokuan Shōtō; 1611-1684), Jifei Ruyi 即非如一 (J. Sokuhi Nyoitsu; 1616-1671), and Gaoquan Xingdun 高泉性潡 (J. Kōsen Shōton; 1633-1695), not only did Ming Buddhism come to Japan, but an enclave of Ming culture was established at the head monastery, Manpukuji 萬福寺 in Uji, which provided the Japanese with a domestic simulacrum of China. Since travel to the continent was prohibited by the bakufu authorities, Manpukuji was the local source for access to the cultural cachet of China.

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[3] Marius B. Jansen, *China in the Tokugawa World* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), 9-10.

[4] The Song 宋 period (960-1279) is divided up into the Northern Song 北宋 (960-1127) and the Southern Song 南宋 (1127-1279). The monastic models that Eisai and Dōgen witnessed and brought back to Japan were from the public monasteries of the Southern Song. See Theodore Griffith Foulk, "'Rules of Purity' in Japanese Zen," in Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, eds., *Zen Classics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 141.

Certain practices that were conspicuous in the early history of Ōbaku and that set it apart from the Japanese Zen of its day attract little or no attention in the modern Ōbaku school. While few Ōbaku monks today attach great importance to the *nenbutsu* within religious training, and there are those who explicitly deny it any place at all, in the writings of the founding Ōbaku masters, Yinyuan, Muan, and Jifei, the *nenbutsu* was one aspect of Buddhist practice and faith, and not an insignificant one. The Manpukuji's fourth abbot, Duzhan Xingying 獨湛性瑩 (1628-1706), took recitation of the *nenbutsu* to an extreme, thereby forever earning him the name "*nenbutsu* Duzhan." Today in frank discussions with Ōbaku monks, oftentimes mention of the *nenbutsu* elicits less than enthusiastic responses, as if it is still necessary to deemphasize the importance of the *nenbutsu* in order to demonstrate that Ōbaku is purely a school of Zen and not a Pure-Land hybridization. Another aspect of Ōbaku practice that is little discussed today is the various ascetic and mortification practices that both the Chinese and Japanese Ōbaku monks engaged in. The three most conspicuous mortification practices that the Ōbaku monks advanced are: burning off a finger as an offering to the Buddha, copying out sutras in blood, and the practice of absolute seclusion for a period of three years. Taihō Jōkō 泰峰淨高 (1697-1721),[5] a Japanese Ōbaku monk, even went to the extreme of self-immolation as a means to demonstrate his veneration of the dharma. His example will be discussed below.

Japan is the only East Asian Buddhist country in which mortification practices are quite rare. Monks and nuns in China, Taiwan, and Korea still engage in such practices to varying degrees. Chinese and Taiwanese monks are readily identifiable by the moxa burn marks on top of their heads that they receive at the end of their ordination.[6] Chinese and Korean monks can still be seen with one or several fingers missing, burned off as an offering to the Buddha. Such seemingly gruesome practices, however,

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[5] Ōtsuki Mikio, Katō Shōshun, and Hayashi Yukimitsu eds., *Ōbaku bunka jinmei jiten* (Kyoto: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 1988), 573.

[6] For an in-depth look at the practice of branding in early 20th century China, see J. Prip-Møller, *Chinese Buddhist Monasteries: Their Plan and Its Function as a Setting for Buddhist Monastic Life* (Copenhagen: G.E.C Gads Forlag, 1937), 318-325.

do not exist in modern Japan, and even though such religious austerities were introduced and practiced by some, they never took root. Naitō Masatoshi 内藤正敏 has made considerable investigations into the practices of self-immolation by fire (what James Benn terms "auto-cremation")[7] as practiced in Japan. His findings indicate that this practice had particularly come into vogue during the Heian period (794-1185) as a large portion of these auto-cremators burned themselves alive on Amidagamine 阿彌陀ヶ峰 in Kyoto as they aspired to be brought straight to the Pure Land.[8] Naitō lists numerous examples of monks and nuns who engaged in this practice, recorded in such works as *Dai Nihongoku Hokekyō genki* 大日本國法華經驗記, the *Shūi ōjōden* 拾遺往生傳, the *Goshūi ōjōden* 後拾遺往生傳, and the *Sange ōjōden* 三外往生傳.[9] Naitō also traces the practice of auto-cremation up through the Edo period, and although it can be said to have existed, the examples are exceedingly few. He does, however, list thirty examples of monks who interred themselves while alive. These incidents were not faithfully recorded in the *ōjōden* genre, since they were more a folk custom rather than a purely Buddhist practice.[10] Even in light of these recorded instances, on the whole, before the arrival of the Ōbaku monks practices that involved mutilation of part or all of one's body were the exception in Japanese Buddhism, not the norm. Nevertheless, Yinyuan, Muan, Jifei, Gaoquan, and many of their Japanese disciples took to these practices. Why these practices failed to find any meaningful and lasting form is an interesting question, and a revealing one at that.

Although the concept of personal mutilation—that is, offering a part of oneself as a sacrifice to the Buddha—may seem contradictory to the Buddha's mission of alleviating suffering, which entailed following the middle path between the extremes of pleasure and mortification, such practices nonetheless have scriptural substantiation. For the most part

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[7] James Benn, "Burning for the Buddha: Self-immolation in Chinese Buddhism" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2001), 7-8.

[8] Naitō Masatoshi, "Shōshin, kajō to dochū nyūjō" [Auto-cremation, fire samādhi and subterranean samādhi] in Hagiwara Tatsuo and Shinno Toshikazu, eds., *Bukkyō minzokugaku taikei* (Tokyo: Meicho Shuppan, 1986), 2:129-130.

[9] For a summary of each incident as well as the source, see *ibid*., 130-132.

[10] *Ibid*., 141. For the complete listing of these incidents, see *ibid*., 141-146.

these practices started to surface with the rise of the Mahāyāna. Some degree of legitimacy for corporeal sacrifice was provided by the *Jātaka* tales, the most famous example of which involves the Buddha sacrificing his body in a former life in order to save tiger cubs from starvation. This motif of the Buddha throwing himself to save the tiger cubs later became a popular topic for artistic representation.[11]

Scriptural Substantiation: Mahāyāna Sutras

Prominent Mahāyāna sutras that also encourage these practices are: the *Jinguangming zuisheng wang jing* 金光明最勝王經 which has a fascicle entitled "sacrificing the body" (*Sheshen pin* 捨身品); the *Dapan niepan jing* 大般涅槃經; the *Dafangguang fo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華厳經; and the *Dazhidu lun* 大智度論, to name only the most important. A passage from the *sheshen* fascicle of the *Jinguangming zuisheng wang jing* follows below:

> If one discards this body, then all one is throwing away is [nothing more] than a [lump of] infinite tumors, malignant illnesses, and 100,000 worries. This body is composed of merely urine and excrement and is as insubstantial as a bubble. It is the gathering place of myriad insects. The blood, veins, sinews, and bones [within the body] together bring great suffering and lament. Therefore, I now truly [desire] to discard it and thereby seek unsurpassed and final nirvāṇa, forever departing from the pain of impermanence and suffering.[12]

To say the least, the passage does not portray a very sanguine view of human existence, and the offering of the body is presented as an escape from the toils of the suffering inherent in life. Even the various monk histories contain sections pertaining to this type of devotion. Examples can be seen in the twelfth fascicle of the *Gaoseng chuan* 高僧傳 entitled *wangshen pian* 亡身篇; the twenty-seventh fascicle of the *Xu gaoseng chuan* 續高僧傳, called *yishen pian* 遺身篇; and the twenty-third fascicle of the *Song gaoseng chuan* 宋高僧傳 also entitled *yishen pian*.[13]

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11 Benn, 36.

12 T. 16:451c15-19.

13 Mochizuki, 3:2163b.

Perhaps the most important scripture that lent weight to the validity of mortification practices is the *Lotus Sutra* 妙法蓮華經. This sutra occupies such a prominent and venerated place in East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhism, that with the imprimatur of scriptural support from the *Lotus*, mortification practices (in particular self-immolation by fire) had ample authority for its validity. James Benn asserts that auto-cremation was primarily a Chinese Buddhist creation that first appeared in late fourth-century China. He writes:

> Rather than being a continuation of an Indian practice, as far as we can tell, it was constructed on Chinese soil by a particular interpretation of an Indian text (the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, *Lotus Sutra*) combined with indigenous traditions, such as burning the body to bring rain, a practice which long pre-dated the arrival of Buddhism in China. Self-immolation was reinforced by the production of Chinese apocryphal sutras which vindicated the practice, by the composition of biographies of self-immolators, and in time their inclusion in the Buddhist canon as exemplars of heroic practice. As time went on, the number of these biographies naturally increased, which, by giving more precedents, provided further legitimation for the practice. While acts of extreme asceticism are well attested in Indian Buddhist sources, in China self-immolation took on a life of its own.[14]

The power of the *Lotus* to establish precedent cannot be overstated. Benn also points out that there is a focus on material wealth found in the *Lotus*, which was attributed to the rise of a monetary economy in the early centuries of the Common Era.[15] From this idea of wealth came the concept of the donation of one's body as offering one's internal wealth. Also, the concept of a bodhisattva transferring merit appears in the *Lotus*, which, when applied to the act of self-immolation, combines to the effect of making the act of self sacrifice itself an exercise in merit transference, a fundamental Mahāyānist ideal. Benn concludes that "many of the underlying attitudes towards self-immolation in China, and not just the practice of auto-cremation itself, can be traced back to the *Lotus Sutra*."[16]

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[14] Benn, 7-8.
[15] *Ibid*., 290.
[16] *Ibid*., 290.

Sealed Confinement

In his study of early twentieth-century Chinese Buddhism, Holmes Welch lists seven practices of self-mortification in order of severity that he observed Buddhist hermits/practitioners engage in. These practices are: 1) striking a bell for the sake of the nether world; 2) sealed confinement; 3) vows of silence facing a wall; 4) writing [sutras] in blood; 5) burning scars on the body; 6) burning off fingers; and 7) self-immolation by fire.[17] Of the above, sealed confinement, writing sutras in blood, burning off fingers, and self-immolation will be discussed below in the context of Ōbaku monastic practice.

The various names by which "sealed confinement" may be designated —*kanshu* 關主, *enkan* 掩關, *heikan* 閉關, and *zakan* 坐關—are terms not often encountered in Japanese Buddhism. In China, however, the practice of sealed confinement had become a conspicuous element of Chinese Buddhism from at least the late Qing period.[18] The practice of spending a certain amount of time sequestered away from the mundane world within a temple or a shrine's precincts while engaging in continual devotions has existed in Japan, a practice termed *sanrō* 参籠.[19] There are plentiful examples of *sanrō* in works of classical Japanese literature, thereby attesting to its widespread practice. *Sanrō*, however, usually did not last more than several days, and compared with the length and demanding austerities of

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17 Holmes Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism 1900-1950* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 321-328.

18 Vincent Goossaert devotes a lengthy article to this practice as it was found in the nineteenth century as well as the present day. See "Starved of Resources: Clerical Hunger and Enclosures in Nineteenth –Century China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 62, no. 1:77-133. He describes the practice, writing: "The *guan* 関 is a cage, made of wood or bricks, where practitioners of meditation lock (also *guan*) themselves up for a fixed period of time or until a definite goal is reached." He also mentions that the practice is still regularly performed by Buddhist and Daoist ascetics. *Ibid*., 77.

19 Nakamura defines this term as: "sequestering [oneself] away in a temple or shrine for a determined number of days in accordance with a vow" (*shigan no tame ni nissū o sadamete jinja, bukkaku ni komori, nichiya gongyō ni tsutomeru koto*), Nakamura, 496a.

the practitioner in sealed confinement, it cannot be counted as belonging to the same category of severity. In discussing the meaning of sealed confinement, Welch writes:

> This [sealed confinement] meant staying within the confines of one room, usually for a term of three years, and devoting oneself to religious exercises, perhaps studying a particular text or reciting the Buddha's name … . Farewells would be said, the ascetic monk would enter his solitary abode, the door would be locked, and two boards would be nailed over the doorway like an 'X', inscribed with the date and particulars. Thus he was sealed in—in a sense. Usually he had large, airy windows as well as a wicket into the corridor through which he could receive his food and chat with visitors—even courteously handing them oranges, as one monk did to me. I found a little bell on the sill of the wicket, which I banged to summon him. He gave me not only oranges, but a copy of his book on Pure Land doctrine. He was not scheduled to be confined for three years, but for however long it took him to make a thorough study of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* … . He was not a hermit, however, because two devout laywomen lived there taking care of him. Sometimes the operation would be financed by a rich devotee, who thereby shared in merit created.[20]

While the practice as it was carried out during the Ming and Qing periods may have slightly differed from the account that Welch observed in the mid-twentieth century, it is probably safe to assume that the late Ming version would have been perhaps even more severe. Goossaert advances that a showmanship-like quality inhered in the practice of sealed confinement in late Qing China.[21] Employed as a spectacle for fundraising activities, monks would make a public display of their practice, often setting up their closure in a marketplace or other public venue. Nails were driven into the walls to increase the severity of the practice, since these prevented the monk from being able to lean against the walls of his cell.[22] Among monks of the late Ming period that engaged in this practice, some of the most conspicuous examples are: Miyun Yuanwu 密雲圓悟 (1566-1642), and the three Caodong monks, Zhanran Yuancheng 湛然圓澄

[20] Welch, 321.
[21] Goossaert, 80.
[22] *Ibid.*, 81.

(1561-1626),[23] Juelang Daocheng 覺浪道盛 (1592-1659), and Weilin Daopei 爲霖道霈 (1615-1702).[24] Miyun can be considered the founding father of the Huangbo lineage since he was the first abbot of Wanfusi (J. Manpukuji) and former teacher of the central figures in the Ōbaku story—Yinyuan, Muan, and Jifei. Yet, there is no record of Yinyuan, Muan, or Jifei engaging in this practice, although this does not necessarily mean that the practice was not encouraged. By the late Ming period, however, sealed confinement could be found within Buddhist practice in China, and it even made its way to Japan slightly before the arrival of Yinyuan.

Examples of Japanese monks who can be seen engaging in this practice are Dokushō Shōen 獨照性圓 (1617-1694)[25] and Dokuhon Shōgen 獨本性源 (1618-1689).[26] In 1638, well before Yinyuan's arrival, twenty-two-year-old Dokushō was moved by the *Goroku* of Gaofeng Yuanmiao 高峰原妙 (1238-1295),[27] who as well as being the master of Zhongfeng Mingben 中峰明本 (1263-1323), was also one of the early practitioners of sealed confinement in China.[28] Dokushō made a vow to Kannon to spend three years in seclusion practicing zazen. As evidenced by his zeal in undertaking the strictest discipline of sealed confinement, his religious practice unsurprisingly was also characterized by an emphasis on monastic discipline and the strict holding to the precepts. He would later find his way to Yinyuan, from whom he came to receive the transmission of the dharma.

A commonality surfaces among the monks that were drawn into the Ōbaku fold; namely, a penchant toward monastic discipline that is

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[23] Zengaku Daijiten Hensanjo ed., *Zengaku daijiten*, 3 vols. (Tokyo: Taishūkan Shoten, 1978), 1:115b.

[24] Nogawa Hiroyuki, "Minmatsu Bukkyō no Edo bukkyō ni taisuru eikyō: Kōsen Shōton o chūshin to shite" (Ph.D. dissertation, Waseda University, 2004), 464.

[25] *Ōbaku bunka jinmei jiten*, 274-276.

[26] *Ibid.*, 280-281.

[27] *Zengaku daijiten*, 1:298c-d.

[28] If it cannot be said that Gaofeng was the originator of this practice, it is probably fair to say that he took it to the extreme. For twelve years he lived in a cave that was only accessible with a ladder, and spent the whole time there without leaving. From this, Gaoquan Xingdun came to ascribe the origins of this practice to Gaofeng, and referred to Gaofeng's cave abode as the "death barrier" *siguan* 死關. See Nogawa, 469, note 139.

grounded in strict adherence to precepts. Dokuhon is no exception. As a young boy he was put under the tutelage of a Sōtō monk but later changed to the Rinzai school. At twenty-six he found his way to the Ryōanji where he studied under Ryōkei Shōsen 龍渓性潜 (1602-1670), Yinyuan's first Japanese dharma disciple. In 1653, the year before Yinyuan's arrival in Nagasaki, Dokuhon lectured on the *Weimojing* 維摩經 while in Edo, but unsatisfied with the state of his own religious training, he retired to a hermitage in Hachiōji where he remained in intense training for over two years. He only came out of his reclusion (literally, "broke the barrier" *hakan* 破關) when he heard that Yinyuan, an illustrious monk from China, was actively teaching in Nagasaki. He eventually came to serve in the senior position of *chizō* 知蔵 (the monk in charge of the sutras) and participated in the first Ōbaku-style precept ceremony, the *sandan kaie* 三壇戒會 at Manpukuji in the twelfth month of 1661.

Egoku Dōmyō 慧極道明 (1632-1721) is an example of a Japanese monk that took to the practice of sealed confinement at the recommendation of his one-time master, Daozhe Chaoyuan 道者超元 (J. Dōsha Chōgen; ?-1660). After Daozhe spent some time teaching Egoku, he instructed Egoku to go and study under Yinyuan, but only after a period of sealed confinement. Egoku's period of confinement was longer than the standard three years—he entered in 1658 and spent a full six years engaged in this practice, and only emerged from his cell in 1664 after he heard of the "Opening the Hall" (*shukkoku kaidō* 祝國開堂) ceremony at Manpukuji and recalled the instructions of his master, Daozhe.

Gaoquan's practice also included mortification practices. His own disciple, Sesson Dōkō 雪村道香 (1652-1718; also known as Donkai 呑海),[29] underwent a period of sealed confinement that is chronicled in Gaoquan's *Goroku*, which provides us with a glimpse of Gaoquan's view regarding the practice. The entry runs as follows:

> To Donkai in Sealed Confinement
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> As for the [way] of sealed confinement for those studying Zen, to enter a cell, lay on the floor, and close the heavy door with chains is not what is called "sealed confinement." [In true sealed confinement] there are no

[29] *Ōbaku bunka jinmei jiten*, 179-180.

> ropes, and one binds and obstructs oneself. Is this not the meaning of sealed confinement? Truly one then makes his cell everything in the ten directions and the world of emptiness, ten billion Mt. Sumerus become his bed, and he is locked down by the shackles of a single head word [koan]. Later, it is in here that he remains, walking, resting, sitting [in zazen], or sleeping. It is the chain of a single phrase [of the koan] that he unceasingly investigates. He knocks up against it, then hits it again, and again, and suddenly he breaks through and cuts away his [previous] failures [with the koan] and at once smashes the world of emptiness, levels the great earth, opens both eyes, and jumps out of the cell. His joy in body and mind and his freedom in action are as if he drank down the eight thousand great oceans in a single mouthful without leaving even one drop. Rather, it is at the place where no drops remain that limitless, great waves rise up. Indeed at such a time he [proves that] he did not betray his original intention in entering sealed confinement. Learn from this [example].[30]

Gaoquan seems to make light of the actual physical demands of sealed confinement, and clearly says that what is paramount is the state of mind. Rather than a bolt and a heavy door, one should instead be restricted by a single koan (*watō*). The fact that the practitioner is confined in a cell becomes a minor issue, as the whole endeavor appears to be a koan exercise. Donkai is to ceaselessly investigate the koan until it is penetrated and broken through, at which time the true seclusion comes to an end. It is here that one attains limitless freedom within a limited space, and that the goal of the entire endeavor of sealed confinement is revealed. Although the outward form of the practice may seem unconventional from the standpoint of Japanese Zen, the koan practice performed during the period of seclusion is very much in keeping with standard Zen practice.

There were other monks, both Japanese and Chinese, which spent three years or more sealed in a cell, all the while engaged in the strictest discipline and practice. Although such sealed confinement does not entail the letting of blood or physical mutilation of any sort such as those practices treated below, it nonetheless can still be classified under the rubric of mortification practices simply by merit of the psychological and physical difficulty of

[30] *Kōsen Zenji goroku* in twenty-four fascicles (1684 woodblock edition in the possession of the Ōbakusan Bunkaden, Uji), 18: 693-694.

remaining in a single room for years at a time. In Holmes Welch's listing of mortification practices in the order of severity, he places sealed confinement before sutra copying in blood and burning a finger, although this order is open to debate. In fact, making allowances for the momentary pain of a voluntary cut (for the draining of blood to be used for sutra copying) and the more considerable yet still fleeting discomfort from burning off a finger, the sustained and interminable monotony of remaining in a closed cell for years would seem to be the more demanding practice.

Copying Sutras in Blood

Blood writing has a long history in China, with the earliest mention of a Chinese copying a sutra (the *Nirvana Sutra*) in blood appearing in 579.[31] With the passage of time the popularity of the practice did not wane, and it was carried out by monastic and lay, men and women, rich and poor.[32] The copying of sutras in blood was doubly meritorious, for one was not only copying out sutras—loaded with merit in its own right—but was also offering a part of oneself to the Buddha. Transfer of merit was one of the persuasive reasons for the prevalence of blood writing. It was believed that by offering part of oneself to the Buddha, one could improve the karmic lot of those close to them, and copying sutras in blood was one of the efficacious means to that end. On this, Kieschnick writes: "The *Perfection of Wisdom* literature, the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Avataṃsaka Sutra* all extol not just the propagation of Buddhist teachings, but specifically the propagation of the physical Buddhist books that contain these teachings, and assure their readers of the merit accruing to those who copy Buddhist texts.[33] This practice has the imprimatur of ample scriptural substantiation in some of the central Mahāyāna religious texts. Below are some examples.

From the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經, one finds the following passage:

> Young followers of the Buddha, always intently hold in your mind [that when you] read and recite the Mahāyāna sutras and precepts, peel off your

[31] John Kieschnick, "Blood Writing in Chinese Buddhism," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 23/ 2 (2000): 177.

[32] *Ibid.*, 178.

[33] *Ibid.*, 181.

> skin to make paper, extract your blood for ink, and make water out of your marrow. [Also] break off a bone for use as a brush, and then copy the [sutras that concern] Buddhist precepts.[34]

The passage below appears in the *Dazhidu lun*:

> If you truly love the dharma, you should use your body to make paper from your skin, make a brush from your bone, and use your own blood [as ink] to copy [sutras]. [35]

And finally, the *Huayan jing* contains the following passage:

> In this sahā (mundane) world, from the time when Vairocana Buddha first set his mind [on enlightenment], he was unshrinking in his practice, and made offerings using his ineffable body. He peeled off his skin to make paper, broke off a bone to make a brush, and drained some blood as ink and then copied sutras. The accumulation [of the sutras] was as high as Mt. Sumeru. To venerate the dharma in such a way is to do so with no concern for one's own life.[36]

A commonality of the passages above is the insistence on the corporeal nature of the writing utensils. The underlying idea is not so shocking—presenting part of oneself as an offering—although the means may seem so. The third passage says as much when it states "If you truly wish to [express] your adoration of the dharma …" after which follows the litany of mortification practices. While one could reasonably suspect that these prescriptions were intended to be taken metaphorically, they found plenty of adherents who interpreted them literally in China and Korea, and via the Ōbaku monks, in Japan.

With such scriptural authority supporting the practice of writing with blood, whatever objections one may have to this practice, lack of textual substantiation cannot be one of them. If one were to take the passages above literally, this particular mortification practice would be difficult to

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[34] T. 24:1009a20-22. This series of three passages is found in Chō Shōgen (Zhang Shengyan), *Minmatsu Chūgoku Bukkyō no kenkyū – toku ni Chigyoku chūshin to shite* (Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 1975) 224-225.

[35] T. 25:178c24-26.

[36] T. 10:845c4-9.

carry out, not least because of the toil of extracting the writing materials. In the case of the Ōbaku monks, writing with blood is the only practice described above that one sees, and the act of writing does not occur with one's bone as a brush or one's skin as paper. Welch comments on the way the blood is extracted and used in this practice: "They obtained the blood by cutting their tongue or fingertips and then mixed it with water. They might use it to sketch a sacred image or copy out a whole sutra."[37]

Needless to say, the Ōbaku monks did not invent or revive these practices when they came to Japan, but rather simply brought over was already being practiced in their homeland. In fact, Zhang Shengyan asserts that three of the Ming period's four most illustrious masters engaged in and/or promoted the practice of copying sutras in blood: Zibo Zhenke 紫柏眞可 (1543-1603), Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546-1623), and Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 (1599-1655), and it would not be a stretch to assume that Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲袾宏 (1535-1615) did so also.[38] Among Yinyuan, Muan, Jifei, and Gaoquan, no one would have eschewed the practice of copying sutras in blood, and in differing degrees they all encouraged it. There are plenty of examples scattered throughout their *goroku* in which the masters praise those who engaged in this form of devotion. If Yinyuan and Muan passively supported the practice of copying out sutras in blood, then Jifei and Weiyi Daoshi 惟一道實 (1620-1692) were active enthusiasts. Weiyi presents an interesting case. Originally from Fuqing in Fujian province, he exhibited a propensity early in life toward mortifying practices. At seventeen, when his mother was ill he offered flesh from his leg as a remedy for her, and she was said to have recovered soon after.[39] At thirty years of age he took orders under Yinyuan and followed him to Japan in 1654, although he returned to Mt. Huangbo in China the following year. He made another journey to Japan in 1661 with Gaoquan's mission. He is most patently associated with the feat of copying out the *Kegon Sutra*—all 80 fascicles—in his own blood, earning him the name

[37] Welch, 323.

[38] Zhang, 227. Zhang provides the works that demonstrate these figures' penchant for copying sutras in blood, and he provides a table of the age, works, and the textual citations in the case of Zhixu. See *ibid*., 229-230.

[39] *Ōbaku bunka jinmei jiten*, 25.

"Kegon Bodhisattva" 華嚴菩薩. Gaoquan also would later devote a work to Weiyi's accomplishment entitled, *Kegon dōjin den* 華嚴道人傳. Yinyuan himself had the following to say about Weiyi's achievement:

> Excerpted from the attendant Weiyi who copied out the *Huayan Sutra* in blood:
>
> Even before obeisance to the sutra was finished, he drew blood from all ten fingers and stained one scroll with the words of the eighty [fascicles] of the Flower Treasury Ocean. It took roughly three years to complete. Everyone was held in awe. The merit from the act of [copying the sutra] greatly benefited everyone without limit. Such reverence is very hard on a person. Furthermore, is not writing something [in such a way also] difficult to do? Is not the difficulty of spilling blood [in this manner] in order to practice the way, spectacular? How can such a thing be a cause for lament? [What would be a cause for lament] would be not repaying the four [types of] gratitude and not attaining the fruits of the way.[40]

Muan also has a number of verses in which he lauds the practitioner whose devotion is sufficiently deep enough to copy sutras in his own blood. Two examples are:

> For the Zen Practitioner Sen, who copied out the *Jingang jing* in blood and thereby repaid [the gratitude owed to] his parents:
>
> Copy out sutras in blood if you wish to pay back your gratitude. The net of defilements expands out like the wind and the clouds. If you are to attain the state of non-attachment, first you must save your parents and deliver them out of this [world] sinking in suffering.[41]

> To the Zen practitioner Kotetsu who copied sutras in blood:
>
> For the repaying of gratitude, the spilling of blood for copying sutras is the meritorious [act] of a filial mind. The filial [merit] that both parents will receive is beyond measure. Its power is as high as Mt. Shou, and the benefit as vast as the oceans and the heavens.[42]

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[40] Hirakubo Akira ed., *Shinsan kōtei Ingen zenshū*, 12 vols. (Tokyo: Kaimyō Shoin, 1979), 7: 3457.

[41] Hirakubo Akira ed., *Shinsan kōtei Mokuan zenshū*, 8 vols. (Tokyo: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 1993), 5: 2054.

[42] *Ibid*., 5:2121.

Muan's verses touch upon the theme of filial piety and the accompanying gratitude, a conspicuous theme of Chinese culture. He portrays the very act of writing out sutras in blood as capable of repaying the vast gratitude owed to one's parents. He says as much in the second verse "For the repaying of gratitude, the spilling of blood for copying sutras is the meritorious [act] of a filial mind" describing the benefit as vast as the oceans and heavens. Similar to Yinyuan, Muan's verses can very well be interpreted as a clear call to engage in this practice for the great benefit that accrues to others. There are even more drastic ways of corporeally offering oneself as an expression of one's gratitude. This will be discussed below.

Jifei: Spilling out Blood, Serving Up Flesh

Of the three founding masters, Jifei undoubtedly displayed the greatest enthusiasm in freely spilling blood as an act of devotion. While Jifei's collected works are nearly a fourth as long as Yinyuan's and less than half as long as Muan's, he has more entries that include copying sutras in blood (*kessho* 血書) than Yinyuan, and more than twice that of Muan. According to the entry on Jifei found within Gaoquan's *Shakumon kōden* 釋門孝傳 (Biographies of Filial Buddhists), in 1648, while Jifei was serving as secretary at Mt. Huangbo, he also is said to have offered flesh from his chest to his mother in order to cure her illness, which, it is reported, instantly abated upon receipt of the sacrifice. The passage runs:

> Cutting the liver [for one's] elderly mother:
>
> [During the] Ming period, [there was] Zen Master Jifei of Xuefeng. His name was Ruyi. He was a person [from] Yurong, and his common name was Lin. His nature was sincerely filial. His wisdom and intelligence quickly matured, and at Mt. Bu he took off his worldly garments and then went to Mt. Huangbo. He served as secretary [at Mt. Huangbo]. Suddenly one day he thought of his mother and then returned home to see her. In her room, he prepared a medicinal fungus for her. Everyone present thought that this was the height of filial piety. One day his mother became seriously ill. All sorts of remedies were attempted but [the sickness] was difficult to cure. Then, [Jifei] prayed to the heavens, cut off some of his liver and [offered it] to his aged mother. Her illness was immediately cured. The various gentlemen

> of Yurong discussed among themselves about raising the flag [that tells of someone's death]. The master [Jifei] sternly requested them to stop, saying, "The single body of a child originally is born from the parents. Therefore, one throws it away for one's parents. Even throwing away 100,000 bodies as an offering for the sake of one's parents is nothing more than one's duty. It is good if I make a name for myself like this. How can those that hear this not be moved?" He made a verse of praise saying, "That which people hold the most dear is their own body. If one cannot cut his own flesh [and offer it] where is his sincerity? One who cuts his own liver without losing his life is truly like a deity. How can one not sigh at this?"[43]

A look at Jifei's biography reveals how he was particularly devoted to his mother, and how his relationship with her and the filial piety that characterized it influenced the movements in his life. In one instance he abandoned his duties while serving as the secretary at Mt. Huangbo in order to return to his mother's side while she was ill. The above passage ostensibly describes that incident. It would appear that Jifei's close relationship with his mother is by no means out of the ordinary within the Chinese Buddhist paradigm. In his book, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*, Alan Cole discusses the mother-son dyad among Buddhists, writing:

> Thus, for the Confucians, a son's sense of self-origin was tied to his father and his patrilineal ancestors, with little mention of his connection with his mother. Buddhist writers challenged this arrangement by redefining filial piety so that it reflected the importance of the mother-son relationship. Extended textual discussions stressed the deep emotional ties between mother and son and identified the mother, not the father, as the primary source of a son's being.[44]

And at another instance, Cole elaborates as follows:

> This focus on the mother as the more interesting person in the parental unit, together with the fact that the Buddhists aimed their filial piety discourse at sons and not daughters, meant that a mother-son dyad came

[43] *Shakumon kōden* (1725 woodblock edition in the possession of the Ōbakusan Bunkaden, Uji), 25.

[44] Alan Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 2.

> to headline Buddhist family values. "Headline" is perhaps too soft a word. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Buddhists became obsessed with writing about mothers and sons.[45]

Cole sees the evolution of this phenomenon in part stemming from the milk-debt that the son owes his mother, for just as she donated part of her body for his nourishment, so does the son for the mother when the occasion demands.[46] In the passage above that discusses Jifei's action of offering his liver to his mother, although all sorts of remedies were administered, all proved to have no effect. Only with Jifei's sacrifice and the offer of his own flesh does his mother's condition improve. While it is hard to imagine that the ingestion of human flesh would have any ameliorating effect on one's illness, the filial piety behind the act is the active agent in this remedy. Although the feeding of one's flesh to the parents has come to be associated in China with filial sons and daughters, it has been suggested that this was extrinsic to Confucian thought, and that it was Buddhism's introduction into China that brought with it new attitudes to the consumption of human flesh.[47] As Jifei explicitly says, one receives the body from the parents, and therefore even throwing away [offering] 100,000 of them is within the bounds of filial duty. Jifei's *Gyōjitsu* presents the episode and shows how he describes in his own words the merit of his actions.

> I [Jifei] greatly feared for my aged mother. She had caught an illness and was on the verge of death. This mountain monk made his way through the brush and grasses and arrived at her house. I prayed to the Buddha and heavens, and cut [the flesh of] my chest hoping that it would save her and that she would be cured. Then, outside, the various men debated about whether they should raise the flag [that announces one's death]. This mountain monk [stopped them] and cited the *Sutra for the Recompense of Gratitude* (*Baoen jing*) and answered saying, "Good men and women, if you were [to try to] pay back the gratitude owed to your parents by cutting your own flesh to offer them three times a day for a kalpa, it would not pay back even a single day of the gratitude [owed to your parents]. All the more should this mountain monk, whose body was born from his parents,

[45] *Ibid.*, 41.
[46] *Ibid.*, 145.
[47] Benn, 42.

> discard it for their sake. Even if you were to throw away 100,000 bodies as an offering for them, it is nothing more than minimum duty.[48]

This practice even persists in death—it should also be mentioned in this connection that in Jifei's last testament, he requested that his bones not be interred, but rather fed to the fish. Jifei says:

> After placing my ashes in a box, wait for a clear, sunny day, and carry it up to the top of the eastern mountain. Then, facing west, [again] consign it to the flames. Do not trouble the venerable monks with the [burden of the] cremation ceremony. [Simply] order Donshi to light the flame. After the flames [burn out], take the bones and ashes, mix them with barley, and feed them to the fish. Do not linger long.[49]

As gruesome as the practice of eating human flesh may appear, its origins can be traced to the ideal of filial piety as it evolved in an increasingly Buddhist China. According to orthodox Confucian thought as expressed in the opening to the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing* 孝經), the idea of corporeally sacrificing or hurting oneself in any deliberate way runs diametrically counter to filial action:

> One receives the body, hair, and skin from one's parents. Not harming them [in any way] is the beginning of filial piety.[50]

This thinking follows logically. If one's parents went to the considerable trouble to give birth to (supply the body) and raise a child, then to deliberately hurt the very body that they bestowed would perhaps be the most blatant type of familial betrayal. While Confucian thinking, replete with all its filial apparatuses, expresses one facet of the Chinese psyche, the other indigenous system of thought, Daoism, presents a very different picture with its own ascetic traditions. Buddhism was able to meld with both traditions in order to produce a new type as well as new level of mortification practices.

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[48] Hirakubo Akira, *Shinsan kōtei Sokuhi zenshū*, 4 vols. (Tokyo: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 1993), 3:1332-1333.

[49] *Ibid.*, 3:1289-1290.

[50] Kurihara Keisuke, *Shinshaku kanbun taikei* 35: *Kōkyō* (Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 1986), 78.

Perhaps it should be pointed out that in China, consumption of flesh was not always within the context of expressing filial piety. In *Cannibalism in China*, Key Ray Chong distinguishes between two broad types of cannibalism: survival cannibalism, that which is performed in a crisis situation such as famine or a condition of immanent starvation; and learned cannibalism, which is an institutionalized practice that in certain situations is publicly and culturally sanctioned.[51] Chong discusses the main reasons for learned cannibalism citing, loyalty, filial piety, and affection on the one hand, and hatred, resentment, and revenge on the other.[52] An additional function of the consumption of flesh was for medicinal purposes. It was this medicinal function of flesh-eating that characterized the type of act that Jifei engaged in as found in the above passage.

The documented practice within Chinese Buddhism of offering one's flesh as a remedy to cure illness cleared the way for the infinitely less demanding practice of writing out a sutra in diluted blood. If Jifei's excesses as a youth in China can be seen in offering his flesh to this mother, while living and teaching in Japan there is no case of such, and his corporeal sacrifices predominantly found expression in the sutras he wrote in blood and those others he encouraged to do so. Just a few examples from Jifei's own brush which extol the merits of this practice follow below:

> Sent to the dharma nephew Weiyi on his copying the *Huayan* [Sutra]:
>
> [In] the dharma world of mind-only there are not many roads. The cause and fruits of one's myriad actions lie in this very place. Trickling blood transforms into the Flower Treasury Ocean and on the tip of a single hair Vairocana Buddha appears. [53]
>
> To the Zen practitioner Sohaku [who] copied the *Jingang jing* in blood:
>
> Picking up the *vajra* spade one clears away the [defilements] of the senses. The essence of the blood that lies beneath the skin can transform [even] an illiterate in a snap [of the fingers]. [54]

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[51] Key Ray Chong, *Cannibalism in China* (Wakefield, N.H.: Longwood Academic, 1990), 1-2.

[52] *Ibid.*, viii.

[53] *Sokuhi zenshū*, 3:1028-1029.

[54] *Ibid.*, 3:1057-1058.

While Muan's verses extolled the filial virtues of copying sutras in blood, Jifei's describe the almost magical merit of the practice. The trickling blood transforms into the Flower Treasury Ocean, and on a single hair [of the brush] Vairocana Buddha appears. Although we have seen how all three of the founding masters were favorably disposed to the practice of writing sutras in blood, Jifei seems far and away the most emphatic advocate of the practice.

Gaoquan himself also actively engaged in and promoted *kessho*. In his collected works one can find twenty instances where he refers to the practice.[55] This is more than both Yinyuan and Muan, and although it surpasses Jifei's own thirteen instances, Gaoquan's works are at least as voluminous as Yinyuan's, thus, speaking proportionally, Jifei remains the most prolific proponent of the practice. The first recorded instance of Gaoquan's copying a sutra in blood occurred two years after his arrival in Japan, when he was aged thirty one. His *Kinenroku* records the events as follows:

> When the master was aged thirty one, while on a break from wiping the floor he thought upon the difficulty of repaying the debt of gratitude owed to one's parents, and thereby copied out a fascicle of the *Hōongyō*. He also pricked his fingers and copied the *Jūroku kangyō* [*Sixteen Visualizations Sutra*] in blood.[56]

The passage reveals the meritorious power that inheres in the practice of *kessho*, since it is the preferred means that Gaoquan employed in order to return the gratitude that is "hard to pay back." Also interesting is that among the sutras that he copied—ostensibly for the repose of his deceased parents—is included the *Guanwuliangshou jing* 觀無量壽經 a Pure Land sutra that explains the sixteen visualizations that help one attain rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitābha.[57] Even if the *nenbutsu* is only used during

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[55] Nogawa counts ten instances from Gaoquan's *Goroku*, verses, and prefaces, to which he adds ten more that he found in Gaoquan's *Sen'unshū* 洗雲集. Nogawa, 455.

[56] *Daien Kōe Kokushi Kinenroku* (1705 woodblock edition in the possession of the Ōbakusan Bunkaden, Uji), 15.

[57] For a complete listing of these visualizations with their corresponding explanations, see Nakamura, 662 s.v. *jūrokukan* 十六觀.

meditation as a means to focus the mind in Ōbaku monastic practice, this instance of Gaoquan's clearly speaks for the Pure Land elements in his faith.

Many of Gaoquan's disciples also actively took to the practice of writing in blood, such as Zenkan Dōtetsu 禪關道徹 (n.d.), Ichijōin no Miya Shinkei Hōshinnō 一乗院宮眞敬法親王 (1649-1706),[58] Raishū Dōkō 雷洲道亨 (1641-1678), and Raishū's own disciple, Kyūzan Gentei 九山元鼎 (?-1678?). Zenkan came all the way from the Ryūkyū Islands to study under Gaoquan. He took the practice of taking blood from the finger to use as ink to a new depth, literally in his case. Instead of draining a certain amount of blood that was to be mixed with water, he cut off the whole finger, and used the stump for copying a sutra. As we have seen, both the *Fanwang jing* and the *Shoulengyan jing* extol the merits of burning off a finger as an offering, and even in the Zen classic *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈録, there is the story of Yangshan Huiji 仰山慧寂 (803-887),[59] who cut off two of his fingers as a protest to his parents who opposed his desire to take holy orders.[60] Gaoquan includes this episode in an entry in his own *Shakumon kōden*, entitled *danshi konshin* 斷指懇親.[61] Zenkan's action seemed to be too much for even Gaoquan. In 1674, the year that Zenkan performed this feat, Gaoquan dedicated two verses on the occasion, entitled, *Kan zenjin yubi wo danjite kaikyō o kaku* 關禪人斷指書戒經.[62] Gaoquan wrote the following:

> To sever your finger with a steel dagger in order to copy out a sutra in blood [demonstrates] that you do not yet have a deep understanding of the

[58] Prince Shinkei was the twelfth son of Emperor Go-Mizunoo. After taking religious orders under Ichijōin no Miya Songaku Hōshinnō 一乗院宮尊覺法親王 he received the religious name Shōgaku 正覺. He eventually came to receive dharma transmission under Gaoquan, thus becoming a thirty-fifth generation master in Linji's line. See *Ōbaku bunka jinmei jiten*, 14-15.

[59] *Zengaku daijiten*, 1:97.

[60] T51:282a28-29b1. The passage runs, 年十五欲出家父母不許。 後二載師斷手二指跪致父母前 "At fifteen years of age he [Yangshan Huiji] desired to take orders but his parents would not permit it. Two years later he cut off two fingers of his hand and prostrated himself before his parents."

[61] *Shakumon kōden*, 30-31.

[62] Gaoquan Xingdun, *Kōsen Zenji Sen'unshū* (1690 woodblock edition in the possession of the Ōbakusan Bunkaden, Uji) 7:177.

> principle. Even if you were to sever all ten fingers, it does not equal the cutting off of your mundane mind.
>
> The thousand buddhas transmit the pure precepts. With the non-arising of ignorance, all precepts are empty [of themselves]. If you are successfully able to cut off the fingers of ignorance, then even the [ten] major precepts of Brahmā's Net cannot contain you.

Gaoquan's reaction highlights how the letter of scripture holds weight. While the writing with blood and the burning off of a finger as an offering both have scriptural substantiation, which thereby seem to make them acceptable to Gaoquan, there is no specific basis for cutting off a finger for the purpose of writing out a sutra. In this, Gaoquan admonishes Zenkan, letting him know that there is greater merit in cutting off one's mundane mind than there is in cutting off one's fingers. This is redolent of the incident in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya in which a monk pounds his erection with a rock.[63] The Buddha responds to this by pointing out that the monk "cut off the wrong thing," and that his desire was the problem, not his organ.[64] There is also a case of a prominent Ōbaku monk who castrated himself in revolt against his desire. At a time when the fine details of anatomy were little understood, Ryōō Dōkaku 了翁道覺 (1630-1707) understandably thought that by ridding himself of his penis, rather than his testes, he would also be freed of his sexual desire. Rather, his sexual desire did not abate, and he was also left with chronic pain for some time. It was at this time that his dharma master Gaoquan accompanied him to a hot spring where Ryōō hoped to mitigate and treat his painful predicament. Their journey together is recorded in Gaoquan's work, *Arima onsenki* 有馬温泉記.[65] This example of a more extreme sort of corporeal mutilation segues into the last of the Ōbaku mortification practices—the devotional measure of burning off a finger, or in the most drastic example, of burning oneself alive.

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63 T. 24.1451.220c21-221a6

64 Benn, 118.

65 Kawase Nobuo, *Meiso Ryōō Zenjiden* (Tokyo: Josei Bukkyōsha, 1990), 23-24.

The Burning of Fingers

Holmes Welch again offers an insightful example of a practice in action in his study of early twentieth-century Buddhism in China. In order to appreciate what exactly went into the devotional act of burning off a finger, it would be helpful to examine his case. He writes:

> This [burning fingers] offered a larger fraction of the body to the Buddha and argued a higher level of religious enthusiasm. Another of my informants, who had burned off the two outer fingers of each hand, was very proud of it and was eager to tell me how it had been done. He said that twenty or thirty monks has [sic] assisted him. Two of them wound a string around one of his fingers just inside the inner joint, then pulled it tight from each side with the whole weight of their bodies. This cut off both nerve impulses and blood supply. His hand was then placed, back down, in a basin of mud and salt. The two upper joints of the finger to be sacrificed stuck up above the surface of the mud, but the rest of his hand was flat at the bottom of the basin, protected from heat. Pine resin and sandalwood, apparently in a sort of amalgam, were then applied to the finger…They burned with a fierce flame, consuming flesh and bone. As they burned, all the monks, including the owner of the finger, would recite the *Ch'an-hui wen*. The whole ceremony took about twenty minutes.[66]

As seen above, this entailed considerably more physical trauma than required for copying sutras in blood. As gruesome as it may seem, this specific practice also has the weight of scriptural support. Two examples follow. The first, from the *Fanwang jing*, runs:

> For those who come a hundred *li*, a thousand, *li* in search of the Mahāyāna sutras and precepts, they should [engage in] all of the mortification practices as they are [found] in the teaching [by either] burning themselves [alive], burning off an arm, or burning off a finger. If they do not burn themselves, an arm, or a finger in their offerings to the many buddhas, they cannot [be called] bodhisattvas who have left home. [67]

[66] Welch, 324. The "*Ch'an-hui wen*" which Welch speaks of is the "Text of Repentance" 懺悔文.

[67] T. 24:1006a17-20. This is found within the section of the "Forty-eight Minor Precepts" *Shijūhachi kyōkai* 四十八輕戒.

And from the *Shoulengyan jing*:

> After I pass away if there are those monks who set their minds [on the way], attain correct knowledge, and practice meditation, [then] they can [prostrate themselves] in front of an image of the Thus Come One, and [like] lighting a candle with their body, can burn off one of the joints of a finger. Also, they can burn incense on top of their heads. As I am now explaining, [by doing so] one can finish paying back all of the karmic debt from a previous life. They can long retire from the world [of suffering] and forever divest themselves of their many defilements. [68]

While the burning of incense on the top of the head or the burning off of fingers as an offering were not conspicuous components of Ōbaku practice, there are instances of these practices having been carried out by both the Chinese and Japanese monastic members. As we have seen in the passages from the *Fanwang jing*, the mortification practices were primarily recommended to accompany the act of taking orders, and in time also came to be patently associated with the accepting of the bodhisattva precepts. In 1670, on the occasion of the *sandan kaie* 三壇戒會[69] that was held shortly after Muan's seventieth birthday, Gaoquan wrote the following:

> The monks [accepted] the perfect bodhisattva precepts and burned the incense on top [of their heads] thus searing their flesh. Having done this [I write]:
>
> The six sense organs are unstained, pure as water. From now all are permitted to rise to the [enlightened] status of the Buddha. [Everyone's] entire body is now fragrant with the scent of original wisdom. The flame atop [everyone's] head burns, and burns again without any suffering [whatsoever].[70]

As the ordinands accepted the precepts, the vow that they made was literally burned into their heads. Gaoquan himself received the same scars when

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[68] T. 19:132b13-17. See Zhang, 237

[69] *Sandan kaie* is the precept ceremony (*kaie*) in three stages (*sandan*). It was an eight-day ceremony in which precepts were conferred on lay and monastic practitioners alike. The exact origin of this ceremony is unclear, although it is thought to have been codified sometime during the late Ming period.

[70] *Sen'unshū*, 7:186

he took orders. In 1651, at nineteen years of age, he accepted the precepts, recorded in his *Daien Kōe Kokushi kinenroku* 大圓廣慧國師紀年録 as thus:

> This year, I completely accept all of the precepts and ascend the ordination platform, [and] burn [incense] on top of my head as I desire to clarify mind and thereby pay back the four types of gratitude.[71]

Among the Japanese monks who adopted this practice, the most notable perhaps would have been Tetsugyū Dōki 鐵牛道機 (1628-1700). In 1657, after meeting with Yinyuan at Fumonji, he started the return trip to Nagasaki to see his master, Muan. Along the way he stopped at Mitarashiura 御手洗浦. Here, in front of an image of Fugen, he made his devotions and burned incense on top of his head and on his arm.[72] It is interesting to note that on the Sōtō side, Menzan Zuihō 面山瑞方 (1683-1769), Ōbaku's most vociferous Sōtō critic, engaged in both the practices of sealed confinement as well as the burning off of a finger. In his article "The Life of Menzan Zuihō, Founder of Dōgen Zen," David Riggs mentions that Menzan's teacher, Sonnō Sōeki 損翁宗益 (1557-1620), ordered Menzan to undertake a thousand-day retreat while reading Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* and sitting in meditation.[73] Riggs points out, however, that Menzan was not totally isolated during this time, as he occupied himself in receiving visitors and performing ordination ceremonies. Also, in 1708 during the retreat he burned off one of his fingers.[74] It should be mentioned that Menzan studied and lectured on the *Fanwang jing*, and Riggs assigns Menzan's act of devotion to this factor. In light of Menzan's early contact with the Ōbaku school, however, it would not be out of the question to consider that the Ōbaku models and monks that he encountered played some part in this aspect of his life and practice.

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71 *Daien Kōe Kokushi kinenroku* (1705 woodblock edition in the possession of the Ōbakusan Bunkaden, Uji), 8.

72 Nogawa, 442.

73 David E. Riggs, "The Life of Menzan Zuihō, Founder of Dōgen Zen," *Japan Review* 16 (2004): 67-100.

74 *Ibid.*, 78.

Self-Immolation

Needless to say, self-immolation would doubtlessly be classified as the most extreme form of self-mortification. As compared with the practices described above, indeed this form of devotion is on the whole quite rare in Japanese Buddhism, and documented cases are relatively few and far between. There is, however, one prominent case of this practice found within the Ōbaku annals. Interestingly enough, it was a Japanese and not one of the Chinese masters who carried out this gruesome act of devotion. The person in question, Taihō Jōkō 泰峰淨高 (1697-1721) was a native of Mino province. Taihō took orders under the Ōbaku monk Mongoku Jōchū 聞谷淨抽 (?1666-1742)[75] at eleven years of age, and remained under him until the end of his short life. At least as early as his twenty-fifth year, Taihō was already engaging in mortification practices. After a period of fasting, he approached his master and related his desire for self-immolation. His master at first tried to stop him, but after Taihō refused to comply, he entered the abbot's quarters and made a final verse. The incident is recorded as thus:

> On the seventeenth of the first month in the year 1721, Taihō *jōza* entered the master's quarters and presented a death verse saying, "the mind is empty, and [one's] nature is empty. In the final analysis, emptiness itself is empty. From the start the buddhas and patriarchs only cloud one's eyes, [and] the worlds of confusion and enlightenment are equally empty." The master held up his whisk saying, "You understand the emptiness of self-nature. Therefore I pass you [this whisk]. Take and preserve it well, and when you come again [be sure to] help raise up the dharma." [76]

The next day he entered the master's quarters, and after a final question and answer session he set himself aflame. The act of self-immolation is described as follows:

> After the question and answer session ended, the master said, "Return to your original source and quickly enter complete and total extinction." Taihō, without waiting for his master to speak, blithely entered the flames, sat in the

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[75] *Ōbaku bunka jinmei jiten*, 358-359.

[76] *Kajō dōgyōjitsu* (1722 woodblock edition in the possession of the Ōbakusan Bunkaden, Uji), 1.

> lotus position, and was transformed [into flames]. At that time, the smoke and flames rose in the sky and formed a purple cloud. A fragrant scent emanated, and there was no trace of a bad odor. A gentle breeze suddenly stopped, and the trees in the forest were still. The mountains and hills were glowing brightly. Truly everyone was very moved. After the flames consumed him, there were no bones remaining [since] everything had been transformed into ash, leaving no traces. The people were all greatly surprised, and there was not a single one who did not gasp [in amazement].[77]

The auspicious signs or miracles that accompanied the cremation were partly a by-product of the great merit produced through the action. By appending reports of purple clouds and fragrant scents to the scene after an auto-cremation, what is in effect a ritual suicide is transformed into a miraculous merit-gaining and merit-bestowing endeavor. Purple vapor was an auspicious sign in medieval China, for it was said to appear when Laozi disappeared to the West.[78] Purple is also the color of the cloud that Amitābha is said to ride when he welcomes the faithful to his Pure Land. Furthermore, nothing of Taihō is said to have remained, not even his bones, suggesting that by giving up his life in such a manner he had also transcended death.

For a period such practices were part of the landscape of Ōbaku Zen, but gradually they faded out as the steady flow of Chinese masters came to a halt. There was never a move within the Ōbaku organization to specifically eradicate them, but the very fact that they ceased with the diminishing Chinese influence attests to their fundamental incompatibility with native Japanese sensibilities. That they are still practiced in China, Taiwan, and Korea further bears this out. In this aspect, their introduction, acceptance, and eventual decline warrant investigation since they shed light on a unique instance in Japanese Buddhism. We are afforded a glimpse of the transplantation of an active enclave of Chinese culture into Japanese soil, and are thus able to ascertain what practices and aspects came to thrive as well as those that did not. This is the type of environment from which we learn as much from the absence of a particular practice as we do from its presence.

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[77] *Ibid.*, 6.
[78] Benn, 53.