

CHAPTER 1

Toward a Social History of Sōtō Zen

UNTIL THE 1980s, scholars of Japanese Zen Buddhism in the West almost always focused on three major approaches to Zen. Zen was taken as a form of mysticism, as an Eastern philosophy, or as a part of Japanese culture. Examining meditation, the philosophical writings of well-known Zen masters, or “expressions of high culture” such as the Zen garden or the tea ceremony, these scholars tended to isolate the Zen Buddhist tradition from both its sociohistorical context and the broader Japanese religious landscape in which it was embedded. Zen was portrayed as a pure and timeless truth, untainted by the social and political institutions of medieval and early modern Japan. Furthermore, both popular and academic writing about all three major Japanese Zen schools—Sōtō, Rinzai, Ōbaku—presented Zen as a unique tradition, set apart from other Japanese Buddhist and non-Buddhist religious traditions. In the case of the Sōtō Zen school, the subject of this book, such scholarship advanced the understanding of Zen philosophy, poetics, or meditation but failed to illuminate how the Zen school participated in the broader social and religious landscape of late medieval and early modern Japan. Edwin O. Reischauer, the well-known Japanologist, was one of the first critics of these approaches. He stated in 1981, “It is ironic that Zen philosophy, which is commonly characterized as being beyond words, has inspired millions of words in English print, whereas Zen institutions, though vastly important in many aspects of medieval Japanese civilization and in no way beyond description in words, have drawn so few.”¹ During the past twenty years, a small but significant scholarly response to Reischauer’s criticism has emerged in the West. These scholars, based on the postwar research of Japanese historians of the Zen school, have begun to examine the establishment and development of Zen Buddhism in Japan as a social and political institution.²

Following this newer scholarly lineage, this book uses the work of these scholars to address the question of how Sōtō Zen managed to grow from only several thousand temples in the early sixteenth century to 17,548 temples by the early eighteenth century and become the single largest school of Buddhism in Japan.³ The answer to this question cannot be found in the writings of the sect’s founder Dōgen (1200–1253), or in what is often presumed to be the sect’s primary activity, Zen meditation. Instead, the enormous growth of Sōtō Zen temples must be explained by an exploration of the broader political and religious life of the late medieval and early modern periods as well as the social role played by Buddhist temples in the ordinary layperson’s life.

During early modern (1600–1867) Japan, also known as the Tokugawa or Edo period, the Sōtō Zen sect was in certain respects distinct from other Buddhist sects. Despite these doctrinal, ritual, and organizational characteristics, Sōtō Zen at the same time fully participated in, and indeed helped to create, a common or transsectarian religious culture that characterized early modern Japanese Buddhism. The key to the growth of Sōtō Zen lay in its ability to maintain the sect’s distinctiveness and nonsectarianism simultaneously. For instance, while priests promoted the unique power of Sōtō Zen’s healing practices and funerals, those same priests also knew that for Sōtō Zen temples to be accepted in local society, they needed to incorporate local deities, beliefs, and customs, as well as participate in the emerging, common Buddhist culture of early modern Japan. Although many historians of Japanese Zen Buddhism have highlighted the distinctive aspect of the school, such as meditation and *kōan* practice, the tremendous growth of Sōtō Zen cannot be explained without equal attention to the ritual life of temples, which, if anything, deemphasized sectarianism. Especially from the perspective of ordinary village parishioners, the skill of the Sōtō Zen priest in adapting local funerary customs, incorporating local deities at the village temple, or fulfilling such social needs as healing the sick and praying for rain played a far more significant role in attracting followers than Sōtō Zen’s distinctive teachings or practices.

Although the mid-Tokugawa period saw the emergence of the so-called sect restoration movement that promoted a form of sectarian orthodoxy and orthopraxy, neither the study of Dōgen’s texts nor the practice of Zen meditation took place at any more than a tiny percentage of the roughly 17,500 Sōtō Zen temples during the eighteenth century. A few elite monks of the period may have imagined a return to the original teachings and practices of the founder, but the lived religion of the vast majority of Sōtō Zen temple priests and their parishioners centered around practical benefits to life in this world (*genze riyaku*) and the management of the spirits of the dead in the world beyond (*raise kuyō*).⁴ Practical Buddhism, which offered benefits in this world, and funerary Buddhism, which offered benefits for the world beyond, became the two major pillars of Tokugawa-period transsectarian Buddhist religious life for ordinary parishioners.

When examined from this perspective, the Zen priest’s main activities, which typically were praying for rain, healing the sick, or performing exorcistic and funerary rites, illuminate a different side of Zen. This book’s focus on “the other side of Zen” is much like Barbara Ruch’s concept of “the other side of culture” found in her study of medieval Japan, in which she argues for recovering “the texture and contours of the daily life of the great majority of medieval men and women.”⁵ As in Ruch’s study, I deliberately highlight some aspects of Zen while downplaying others. For instance, I have made a conscious decision not to profile the lives and writings of certain relatively well-known Sōtō Zen masters of the Tokugawa period, such as Manzan Dōhaku or Menzan Zuihō, important figures in the so-called

sect-restoration movement of the early eighteenth century, who in recent years have received attention for their contributions to doctrinal studies and their attempts to create a Sōtō Zen orthodoxy and orthopraxy.⁶ Although these two monks appear in this book, I have left it up to other scholars to discuss their place in the development of Sōtō Zen in the Tokugawa period because such monks, however great their impact on monastic training temples, had limited impact on practices at the vast majority of temples: the prayer and parish temples.

While not eliminating these monks from my discourse, I have “decentered” them from my account of Tokugawa-period Sōtō Zen history. Instead of focusing on the “great masters,” this book reveals the religious life of mid-level or typical Sōtō Zen priests and the ordinary people who came into contact with them, a counterbalance to the customary approach to the study of Japanese Zen Buddhism, in which “unique,” “great,” or “exceptional” Zen monks have represented the entire tradition. I discuss the “great monks” primarily for contrastive purposes, to reveal the ritual and mental universes of the majority of Zen monks and their lay followers, though avoiding an overly simplistic dichotomy of “popular” versus “elite” Buddhism.

The truth is that the well-known “orthodox” Zen monks of the Tokugawa period were paradoxically marginal, in the sense that their rhetoric of orthodoxy and orthopraxy had surprisingly little to do with the actual practices of most Sōtō Zen temples. In fact, as this book will demonstrate, the vast majority of ordinary Sōtō Zen monks and laypeople never practiced Zen meditation, never engaged in iconoclastic acts of the Ch’an/Zen masters (as described in hagiographical literature), never solved *kōans*, never raked Zen gardens, never sought mystical meditative states, and never read Dōgen’s writings. While some Tokugawa-period monks and some modern scholars may have construed such activities as true Zen, this study asks not what Sōtō Zen ideally ought to have been, but what Sōtō Zen actually was, as lived by ordinary priests and laypeople.

By deemphasizing the “great monks,” I am not making the error of trying to recover a Zen discourse of the margins and pass it off as the mainstream.⁷ This study’s articulation of the Zen Buddhism of the “middle,” which is neither the “great monks” nor an oppressed marginal group, focuses on the vast majority of ordinary Sōtō Zen priests and laypeople as a new type of social history of Buddhism. As James Obelkevich noted in an early social history of popular religiosity within the Christian tradition, “The older genre [of ecclesiastical history] has traditionally been occupied with the clergy, with the churches’ institutional machinery, and with ‘pure’ theology. . . . The result [of new studies on popular religion], even when the explicit concern is with church and clergy, is not so much ecclesiastical history as a variety of social history—a social and cultural history of religion.”⁸

A social history of this kind necessarily involves the study of “popular religion,” a concept laden with problems. In this book, I use the term in some contexts to mean a “common religion” shared by all members of the Bud-

dhist priesthood and laity, and at other times to refer to a religious life that was at odds with the orthodoxies and orthopraxies advocated by the so-called great monks.⁹ This “common religion” included not only the beliefs and practices shared by Sōtō Zen laypeople and clergy, but in many respects also the aspects of religious life common across Japanese religions. Ian Reader, for example, has attributed the growth of Sōtō Zen to its use of “the common currency of Japanese religion rather than the restricted currency of monasticism.”¹⁰ The complex interplay of customs, beliefs, and rituals shared across the spectrum of Japanese religions, such as healing or funerary rituals, often served as the common denominator that bound priest to layperson, as well as members of different sects in the same village. However, popular religion also generated tensions, contradictions, and beliefs that were at odds with the orthodoxies of the headquarter temples or with governmental policies on religion. This book thus explores both the continuities and disjunctions of popular Sōtō Zen within Tokugawa society. An examination of why this topic has not received adequate scholarly investigation leads us to explore new sources and employ new methods to uncover early modern Sōtō Zen Buddhism.

NEW SOURCES IN THE STUDY OF EARLY MODERN SŌTŌ ZEN

New sources uncovered by researchers in the past twenty-five years have expanded our ability to imagine various aspects of Tokugawa-period Sōtō Zen Buddhism. Valuable manuscripts—including temple logbooks, prayer and funerary manuals, letters to and from village officials as well as the government’s Office of Temple and Shrines, death registries, miracle tales of popular Buddhist deities, secret initiation papers, villagers’ diaries, fund-raising donor lists, and sales records of talismans—were unearthed in the 1970s when local governments and Buddhist temples started creating archives to house documents such as these.

Recent English-language studies on material culture and Buddhism, such as Gregory Schopen’s *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* and *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters: Some More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India*, and John Kieschnick’s *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture*, have also provided models for those of us working on the historical study of “Buddhism on the ground.”¹¹ The material record in Japan has been expanded to include collections of nonliterary sources such as roadside stone inscriptions left by pilgrims, talismans left in thatched rooftops, and cemetery tombstones. These historical materials were initially surveyed by local and prefectural governments, which began to collect and microfilm such artifacts from temples and shrines or private family collections for the purpose of publishing local histories. Beginning in the 1970s, in every region of Japan down to the smallest of villages, local

governments established historical archives for the purpose of publishing local history. Especially during the late 1980s and into the 1990s, with the cooperation of shrines and temples (which held some of the best data for local history), a rich trove of manuscripts was assembled, microfilmed, and cataloged.¹² Although only a very small portion of these handwritten documents have been transcribed into printed form, several million manuscripts have been collected from Sōtō Zen temples alone. While most Western scholars of Japanese Buddhism rarely avail themselves of these archives, I have made a point of using both handwritten manuscripts and printed transcriptions as they most clearly reveal the daily activities of priests and lay parishioners.

Local governments hoping to establish a special place in history for their town or city contributed to new research by scholars of Japanese Zen history who were interested in exploring the development of Zen temples at the local or regional level. Suzuki Taizan's 1942 work, *Zenshū no chihō hatten* (The Regional Development of the Zen School), had been the sole reference work on the spread of Zen in local society during the medieval period.¹³ But with growing scholarly interest in local history, the late 1980s and 1990s produced a number of seminal book-length studies on local Zen. These included Hirose Ryōkō's *Zenshū chihō tenkaishi no kenkyū* (1988), Hanuki Masai's *Chūsei Zenrin seiritsushi no kenkyū* (1993), Harada Masatoshi's *Nihon chūsei no Zenshū to shakai* (1998), and in English, William Bodiford's *Sōtō Zen in Medieval Japan* (1993).¹⁴ In addition to these books, articles on the spread of Zen and local society have been featured in Japanese university, local history, and religious studies journals.¹⁵

Local history projects also inspired a number of priests of Sōtō Zen temples to research and publish their own temple histories. Furthermore, starting in the mid-1980s and continuing into the 1990s, larger temples began to assemble teams of local historians and university professors to sort through their manuscripts. In the case of the Sōtō school, noted scholars such as Hirose Ryōkō, Ishikawa Rikizan, and Tamamuro Fumio adopted the techniques used by local historians to catalog the thousands of manuscripts held at individual temples.¹⁶ These techniques included cataloging manuscripts by theme (such as temple-government relations, temple founding legends, temple economics, and parishioner registers), number coding each document, and using special envelopes for their preservation. The basic methodology for such archival preservation and cataloging came from the experience of an earlier generation's techniques for sorting early modern political and legal documents. The resultant temple histories, which were often published to coincide with an anniversary of the temple's establishment or the founding monk's death, included such materials as documents on the temple's first patron, land deeds from feudal lords or the Tokugawa government, the founding legend of the temple, and information on the temple's abbots and parishioners, cultural treasures, and the relationship of that temple to other temples.¹⁷

Individual temples' efforts have taken place in tandem with two major sectwide projects to catalog temple manuscripts: (1) the Zenshū Chihōshi Kenkyūkai's cataloging of 12,470 documents in five volumes from 1978 to 1998,¹⁸ and (2) the ongoing project of the Sōtōshū Bunkazai Chōsa Iinkai (Committee on Surveying Sōtō School Cultural Assets), which has thus far cataloged nearly fifty thousand documents, which have been serialized in the Sōtō school's official periodical, *Shūhō*, since 1981.¹⁹ This study draws on hundreds of manuscripts from both the Zenshū Chihōshi Kenkyūkai and the Sōtōshū Bunkazai Chōsa Iinkai archives, many of which have never been studied before by either Japanese or Western researchers.

TOKUGAWA BUDDHISM

The large quantity of new sources makes a more detailed study of Tokugawa-period Sōtō Zen possible, and, more significantly, the increasing variety of materials enables the writing of an entirely new type of social history. Most archives of Sōtō Zen temple manuscripts have tended to focus on older medieval manuscripts, especially anything by Dōgen (such as copies of the *Shōbōgenzō*), philosophically oriented texts such as commentaries on Zen Master Tōzan's "five ranks," and other Zen masters' "recorded sayings" (*goroku*). On the other hand, materials related to a temple's founding (patronage or legends), ritual activity (manuals or log-books), economics (landholdings or fund-raising drives), relationships with its parishioners (parishioner registers or letters regarding legal disputes), as well as popular literature and art (miracle tales of Buddhist deities or mandalas) have also been more comprehensively cataloged since the mid-1980s. This variety is particularly evident with Tokugawa-period materials, which number roughly ten times their medieval equivalent. Temple fires, time- and weather-damaged paper, the nature of record keeping, and other factors have contributed to the relative paucity of extant medieval sources. Even within the Tokugawa period, more manuscripts are available later in the period. While the study of medieval Japanese Buddhism suffers in part because of a paucity and lack of variety of sources, the study of Tokugawa-period Buddhism can be made difficult simply by the sheer volume of manuscripts available.

Despite this abundance of sources, scholars of Japanese Buddhism have generally ignored the Tokugawa period and have focused instead on medieval Buddhism. This can be attributed, in part, to the thesis of the degeneration of Buddhism during the Edo period (*Edo bukkyō darakuron*) advanced by the influential historian of Japanese Buddhism, Tsuji Zennosuke, who viewed Buddhism during the Edo or Tokugawa period as corrupt and in decline and thus unworthy of serious scholarly attention.²⁰ This book, in contrast, will demonstrate that Tokugawa Buddhism was as full of vitality during the Tokugawa period as in any previous era, if not more so. As sug-

gested by a recent study of Buddhism in Song China, another period until recently marked as an age of Buddhist decline, we must critically examine the characterization of later periods as being in decline when contrasted with an earlier “golden age” of Buddhism.²¹

While it is true that Tokugawa Buddhism cannot be characterized as a golden age in terms of the development of new schools of Buddhist thought, it was a period that saw the unprecedented expansion of Buddhist institutions in Japanese society. This institutional growth of Buddhism came about due to the government’s establishment of a mandatory parishioner system in which every Japanese family was required to register and maintain membership at a Buddhist temple (*danka seido*). This allegiance to Buddhism of virtually the entire populace, even if it were at times only nominal and customary, was unprecedented in Japanese history.

The power to mandate allegiance to the Buddhist religion was derived from a larger system of authority in which the new shōgunal government, established by Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616), stood at the head of a pyramidal structure of authority that extended from the center to the farthest corners of Japan. In terms of the administrative of Buddhism, the new Tokugawa government’s Office of Temples and Shrines oversaw the so-called head temple and branch temple system (*honmatsu seido*). Each Buddhist sect designated a headquarter temple that was approved by the government. With the headquarter temple at the top of a pyramid, all temples in Japan were linked through a hierarchical network of head and branch temples to the sectarian headquarter. This relationship was originally formed by links between a Buddhist teacher’s temple (head temple) and his disciples’ temples (branch temples). This linkage between two generations of temples formed the basis for regarding a particular temple as being hierarchically superior to another. Under the Tokugawa regime, informal lineage-based ties became formalized, and even temples that had no lineage ties were sometimes arbitrarily placed in head and branch temple relationships. This system consolidated sectarian hierarchies for all Buddhist temples by the early eighteenth century as the government increasingly exerted its control over Buddhist institutions. At the same time, as we shall see in chapter 2, power relations between the government and headquarter temples, between head temples and branch temples, or between temples and their parishioners were never one-sided; instead they were often negotiated and sometimes inverted in an ongoing and dynamic process.²² The major structural features of Tokugawa Buddhism thus developed out of a secular need for control, but they also served to create a nation of Buddhists for the first time and to establish nationwide sectarian institutions that persisted into the modern period.²³

Although studies on Tokugawa Buddhism have dramatically increased in the past twenty years, this field remains relatively unexplored compared with the study of medieval Buddhism and other religious movements of the Tokugawa period such as Neo-Confucianism, “Shintō” and nativism (Kokugaku), early Christianity (Kirishitan), or the so-called new religions

that emerged at the end of the Tokugawa period.²⁴ Recent Japanese research on Tokugawa Buddhism focuses on particular temples, sects, monks, or Buddhist deities and challenges the notion that Buddhism was in decline. Reflecting the Japanese trend, Western scholars have also begun to give attention to the Tokugawa period through new book-length publications and a surge in doctoral-level research.

The Sōtō Zen school, however, has been curiously understudied. Even though it was one of the largest Buddhist schools during the Tokugawa period, book-length research on Buddhist traditions has mainly focused on the Jōdo, Jōdo Shin, and Nichiren schools because of the efforts of a few prolific scholars who have concentrated on those sects.²⁵ Although my decision to focus on one sect (Sōtō Zen) was based on its significance as the largest sect of Buddhism, and the fact that covering more than one tradition of Tokugawa Buddhism would have been too unwieldy, there are drawbacks to any sect-specific research. During the Tokugawa period, the government tried to organize Buddhist schools by distinct sects, but sectarian lines were like semipermeable membranes through which the ideas and practices of various sects readily crossed. Especially in the case of Sōtō Zen, the influences of esoteric Buddhism, Shugendō, “Shintō,” mountain cults, and Onmyōdō were particularly striking, as they shared—and sometimes accused each other of stealing—ritual practices (see chapter 3). The medieval “esotericization” (*mikkyōka*) of Sōtō Zen continued well into the Tokugawa period with mutual influences among this wide range of groups.²⁶ With this intermingling in mind, this book examines both the Sōtō Zen sect’s distinctive practices and its nonsectarian participation in the broader currents of the Tokugawa period’s religious landscape.

THE OTHER SIDE OF ZEN: A NEW APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF ZEN

This book consists of six chapters on the social contexts of Sōtō Zen’s growth during the Tokugawa period. Chapter 2 begins with an examination of the Buddhist parish temple (*dankadera*). In the case of Sōtō Zen, by the mid-Tokugawa period more than 95 percent of all its temples functioned as parish temples where parishioner funerals and memorial services constituted the primary ritual activity of the temple. Zen Buddhism, despite its image in the West of freewheeling, aniconic Zen masters, did not operate in a political and legal vacuum. Indeed, a key force in the growth of Sōtō Zen was its skillful alliance and cooperation with political authorities of the Tokugawa government (*bakufu*), as well as at the regional and local levels in the establishment of these parish temples. Unlike the Jōdo Shin and Nichiren schools, certain subgroups within which faced persecution from authorities, Sōtō Zen temples were at the forefront of the implementation of the state’s religious and social policies of control through the establishment of parish temples in every region of Japan. What began initially as a gov-

ernment policy based on the fear of subversive elements in the religious community, especially the numerically small but influential Christians, became by the 1630s a method for monitoring the entire Japanese populace through the system of parishioner temple-registration (*tera-uke seido*). The role of Sōtō Zen parish temples in the implementation of this system of governmental tracking of the population through temple-registration is examined in chapter 2, along with the development of a comprehensive system of parish membership at such temples. Parish members had both ritual and financial obligations to these temples, such as participation in funerary and memorial rites and the financial support of the parish priest and temple maintenance. Such obligations were placed on the heads of households who represented the family unit. These affiliations continued generation after generation, binding parishioner families to a particular sect's temple and providing a new legal basis by which Sōtō Zen—and any sect able to attract large numbers of new parishioners—was able to maintain its growing number of temples.

However, the practice of funerals and memorial services for deceased relatives cannot simply be reduced to a response to a government directive but must also be thought of as part of a deep human need for ritualizing death. Chapter 3 is a study of “funerary Zen,” a reference to *Funerary Buddhism*, the title of Tamamuro Taijō's classic book on Japanese Buddhism and its association with death management.²⁷ A Sōtō Zen-specific rite such as providing a deceased parishioner with a priestly ordination at the funeral appealed to parishioners because it purportedly enabled the deceased to immediately attain Buddhahood. At the same time, the popular notion in Buddhist and local religious culture that the dead required a more lengthy period of rites than simply a funeral played an equally important role in shaping Sōtō Zen funerary practices. The transsectarian and localized aspects of funerary Zen is illustrated through two topics: women's damnation into the so-called Blood Pool Hell because of the “pollution” associated with menstrual blood, and the Thirteen Buddha Memorial Rites, which continued at intervals over a period of thirty-three years. In both cases, the transsectarian Buddhist ideology of karma overrode Sōtō Zen-specific beliefs of immediate salvation at death, which led a dead person's spirit through a series of rites to a more gradual ascendance to Buddhahood, or (as was more commonly believed) to family ancestorhood. Chapter 3 argues that this flexibility of the Sōtō Zen priests, who permitted wide-ranging local variation in the coexistence of both the logic of the funeral proper and the management of the dead over time, was precisely what made funerary Zen a key element in the growth of the Sōtō Zen school in various provinces.

Although funerary rituals oriented toward the afterlife (*raise kuyō*) played a major role in the development of Sōtō Zen Buddhism, nearly as important to its vitality were practices that provided practical benefits in the present world (*genze riyaku*). Chapter 4 explores the world of Sōtō Zen prayer temples, which were populated with local deities and rowdy pil-

grims, and charismatic lay leaders who flourished during the latter half of the Tokugawa period. This chapter provides a detailed study of the Daiyūzan Saijōji Temple, a prototypical prayer temple and one of the so-called three great Sōtō Zen prayer temples (*sandai kitō jin* or *sandai kigan-sho*), and examines how it provided “this-worldly” benefits. Drawing on often overlooked sources such as temple logbooks, pilgrims’ diaries, roadside stonemarkers, local legends, and minutes of pilgrimage confraternity meetings, a colorful picture of this major Sōtō Zen temple emerges. This picture includes festivals particular to this temple that incorporate local Shintō *kami* and esoteric Buddhist rituals and pilgrim groups that congregated at the site to collect potent talismans and medicine. The success of this prayer temple stems from its careful balance of specifically Sōtō Zen aspects of the temple (its founder Ryōan’s legendary powers gained through meditation, and the transformation of his disciple, Dōryō, into a powerful *tengu* deity) and its incorporation of local deities and esoteric Buddhist practices.

Although most prayer temples offered a wide range of practical benefits, such as rainmaking, the protection of fishermen at sea, or financial success, one of the most popular benefits offered by Sōtō Zen was the prevention and healing of illnesses. Chapter 5 presents two detailed studies: of a herbal medicine manufactured at a Sōtō Zen-affiliated pharmacy in Kyoto (Dōshōan) and of a bodhisattva cult of Jizō faith healing at a Sōtō Zen temple in Edo (Kōganji). These case studies not only provide a sense of the role of Sōtō Zen institutions in Tokugawa-period medical practices but also illustrate how medical practices shaped the character of the Zen school. The herbal medicine (Gedokuen) produced at the Kyoto pharmacy, which had an exclusive contract with the Sōtō sect, was sold both directly to temples and to high-ranking monks who visited Kyoto. This popular medicine, which according to an early Tokugawa-period text was purportedly sanctioned by Dōgen, gave Sōtō Zen temples an attractive alternative to other herbal medicines sold by other sects, such as Daranisuke, the well-known stomach medicine promoted by the itinerant priests of Mount Kōya. These medicines appealed to the vast majority of Japanese villagers who did not have access to the expensive doctors of the major cities. The healing offered by Sōtō Zen temples was not limited to the sale of medicines but extended to faith in Buddhist deities housed at Zen temples. Kōganji Temple, commonly referred to as Togenuki Jizō, popularized the cult of the “Splinter-Removing” Jizō, whose talismans were produced at the temple and were ingested or ritually cast into a river or the sea as a prayer to the bodhisattva for healing. In a period of rampant epidemics, when a person’s sickness was believed to have been caused by angry spirits or their bad karma in a previous life, magico-religious therapeutics such as these played a significant role in the social arena of a Sōtō Zen temple.

Through the study of these kinds of prayer temples and parish temples, this book proposes a three-part explanation for the exponential growth of the Sōtō Zen school by the mid-Tokugawa period, namely, the ability of

Sōtō Zen priests to attend to the needs of both the dead (*raise kuyō*) and the living (*genze riyaku*) while successfully negotiating Tokugawa government directives. To arrive at this conclusion, Buddhism is treated first and foremost as a religion (a complex of institutions, doctrines, and rituals), not a philosophy.²⁸ “Lived religion,” in contrast to a timeless philosophy, compels us to examine the interrelations among religious and political institutions, doctrines, and rituals mediated through the religious lives of actual persons. Especially since we now have a breadth of sources, including popular literature, ritual manuals, villagers’ diaries, government records, and stone markers, we must make the attempt to integrate the triad of ideas, institutions, and ritual. In this sense, this book prioritizes the study of Buddhists, rather than Buddhism. To be more precise, it is a study of people’s lives in addition to the ideas that inform them.

However, the people at the center of this study are not the extraordinary or exalted monks recorded in the annals of Zen history. More often than not, in the field of Zen Buddhism, accounts of great Zen masters and their doctrines have often been strung together and then published as “the history of Zen”—an approach rightly critiqued by John McRae as the “string of pearls’ fallacy.” Without reference to nonmonastic institutions and popular practices, these studies masquerade as full representations of Zen history. This book examines the other side of Zen—the lives of ordinary clerics and laypeople—the “little people” as the Annalists would put it.²⁹ Just as the Annalists challenged traditional historical studies in Europe, this research challenges some of the traditional perspectives in the study of Buddhism and Japanese religions, aiming to shift our attention from an exclusive focus on outstanding, exceptional religious individuals and their ideologies to the daily practices of the majority of ordinary Japanese Buddhists. I am not suggesting that doctrinal dimensions of religion, or its exemplary figures, are of no importance, but rather that we question our tendency to place them at the center of what constitutes the Buddhist tradition. The individuals who searched for and experienced extraordinary spiritual insights and developed highly sophisticated philosophical doctrines must be noted. But to suggest that they or their doctrinal formulations are central to the Buddhist religion, or that the broader social contexts in which they existed is irrelevant, is to seriously misconstrue not only the Sōtō Zen tradition, but perhaps Buddhist tradition in general.

Especially in the case of Tokugawa Sōtō Zen, there is a major disjuncture between the doctrines, rituals, and institutions that constituted the mainstream practices of the sect and what the great monks of the day considered as orthodox. This book attempts to demonstrate that the Zen tradition was far more complicated, contradictory, and tension-filled than previously described. And yet, this is not a study simply replacing a focus on an elite tradition with a celebration of everything that it is not. Robert Sharf, in his recent study of Chinese Buddhism, correctly warns against a total dismissal of the elite monks in the writing of a more popular social history: “attention to

popular practice should not serve as an excuse to ignore the products of the elite tradition altogether.”³⁰ Instead of ignoring the elite tradition, I have attempted to put it in perspective. By focusing on the faith and practices of the vast majority of Sōtō Zen adherents, previously understudied popular apocryphal texts are highlighted, without denying the importance of the Buddhist scriptures of the elite tradition. What the gaze over to the other side of Zen permits is a recognition that most Tokugawa-period Sōtō Zen Buddhists saw Zen meditation not as a practice expressing Buddhahood or an aspect of monastic training, but as a technique for deriving esoteric powers to save those in distress.

I have left to a future scholar the difficult task of writing a history of Zen in which the gaps between previous understandings of the tradition and what is presented in this book are thoroughly resolved, giving a coherency to the sect. Part of the difficulty in writing a history of Zen in which highly complex doctrinal theories (such as Tung-shan’s “five ranks” or Dōgen’s theories of “being-time”) might be interwoven with themes such as salvation from the Blood Pool Hell or the worship of healing bodhisattvas as part of one field of religious practice is that, in many respects, they fail to form a whole. Of course, when an integrated landscape of Sōtō Zen life comes into view, such as the esoteric power of a prayer temple’s popular festival deriving from monastic discipline (chapter 4) or the efficacy of a herbal medicine coming from its association with Dōgen (chapter 5), it is duly highlighted to show how the Buddhist worlds of elite and popular shared a seamless reality. But at the same time, the real success of the medieval and early modern Sōtō Zen school lay in the fact that most of its priests ignored contradictions and lived in multiple universes of praxis without ever having to explain or integrate the whole. This book attempts to reveal a more disorderly and incoherent world of Zen from the one we more commonly know—the other side of Zen.