

Bryan J. Cuevas and Jacqueline I. Stone, eds.  
*The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations.*  
 Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007 (Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism 20), 491 pages.

As editors Bryan Cuevas and Jacqueline Stone emphasize in their introduction to this volume, a set of papers based on a 2002 conference at Princeton University, Buddhism is essentially a whole complex of religious material organized around the problem of death. From its analytical doctrines, to its psychology, to its range of concrete practices, to the notion of transcendence, to the popular basis for its institutional support, almost every feature of the complex involves tapping the urgency for some kind of proactive address to the question of death. Despite its obvious centrality, though, the theme of death in itself has garnered little attention in Buddhist Studies, reflecting as the editors note a long history of modernist assumptions about what Buddhism is "supposed" to be, i.e. a rational, modern philosophy. Lots of elements in the inherited Buddhist complex, including the extremely basic social function of the clerics in performing death work, have not appealed to moderns at first contact. Thus a major body of apologetics, both East and West, has attempted to explain the unwanted material away as superstition and accretion, a misunderstanding by Asians of the essential teaching of Buddhism as "non-self." The editors shrewdly remark that even scholars have been tempted into this apologetic as part of the need to render Buddhism "relevant" in Western intellectual (and mass media) life (and not only relevant, but obviously different from Christianity).

More comprehensive views of the Buddhist complex began with anthropologists of Theravāda in the 1960s. It is only even more recently, according to the editors, that Buddhist Studies have accumulated enough experience, and perhaps institutional stability, to reach a point of fuller self-reflection on the various self-justifying biases in the discipline's own hermeneutical position. This shift has been supported by a reorientation in Religious Studies generally towards wholistically accepting religious complexes in ways that transcend older folk/elite or great/little distinctions. All this movement has allowed a renewed objective approach to the richness of traditional Buddhism in all its colors both light and dark. Indeed, at this point in development, under the impact of accumulated empirical data and increased methodological sophistication, the analytical categories used in Buddhism have been thoroughly critiqued to the point that even a unitary conception of "Buddhism" is under suspicion.

In their introduction, the editors note the unending tension which is apparent between "doctrinal teachings of transience and non-attachment and the emotional adherence to stability and permanence found in multiple aspects of Buddhist funerary practices and attitudes toward the deceased." (p. 10) In this relation, they note that the Buddhist dead treated in their volume fall broadly (despite blurring or collapse in certain cases) into two principal groups: the special dead (the extraordinary, the Buddha-like, those who have achieved some transcendence of death) and the ordinary dead (unenlightened, still bound in *samsara*). The bulk of the volume consists of

chapters representing various researchers' close work on death in a diversity of Buddhist contexts. The themes, which fall into several clusters, can be generally listed, but the material is too splendidly extensive to explore in detail in a review.

The first cluster examines how the historical Buddha's death was paradigmatic for the tradition. John Strong's article on "The Buddha's Funeral" overviews the Buddha's death as the model for subsequent extraordinary deaths in Buddhism. Beyond the death event *per se*, however, the event generated Buddha-relics, which became one of the primary representations of Buddha and Dharma in the subsequent tradition, functioning like the living Buddha. Gregory Schopen's article on "Cross-Dressing with the Dead" takes up a story from the *Lalitavistara* text in which, just before his awakening, the Buddha is described as putting on for his clothes the polluted death shroud of a deceased village girl. While this story made a profound, even shocking ascetic statement, in later times it conflicted with the interests of established monastic Buddhism in maintaining for its patrons a less radically challenging, less dangerous, more palatably comfortable version of Buddhism's relationship with death.

A second cluster of articles deals with Buddhist claims about obtaining control, via meditation, over one's death process and future karmic fate. Koichi Shinohara's article on "Daoxuan's Vinaya Commentary" examines the recommendations of Daoxuan, a medieval Chinese vinaya master, concerning the monk's proper ritual death. Jacqueline Stone's article on "Esoteric Deathbed Practices in Heian Japan" studies how these deathbed practices attempted to manage an accommodation between tantric ideals of immediate Buddhahood and aspirations to be born in the Pure Land, which appear to be inconsistent. Raoul Birnbaum's article on the "Deathbed Image of Master Hongyi," a modern Chinese master, explains how (in part thanks to a famous relic-like death photograph) he has come to be regarded as an exemplar of "beautiful death" in Buddhism. Kurtis Schaeffer's article on "Death Accounts in a Tibetan Hagiographic Tradition" discusses how the deaths of the yogi Milarepa and his biographer Tsangnyön Heruka both reflect accounts of a paradigmatic mode of Buddhist death. In addition the hagiographical text itself became a kind of physical relic with the same uses as earlier Buddha-relics in concretizing the tradition.

A third cluster examines Buddhist religious suicide. Since one strand of the tradition held that an enlightened being was in total voluntary control over death, killing oneself was a possible kind of salvational or liberating act. James Benn's article on Self-Immolation in Chinese Buddhism discusses the cases of six medieval monks who committed suicide in protest against Chinese government policies and later became figures of hagiography. D. Max Moerman's article on Fudaraku (Potalaka) in premodern Japanese Buddhism discusses the (suicidal) ascetic practice of launching out to sea in a small rudderless boat aimed for Potalaka (the realm of the bodhisattva Kannon) which was undertaken as an exemplary death up at least through the sixteenth century.

A fourth cluster deals with communications between worlds. Along with containing the above extraordinary models of death, a great deal of Buddhism dealt with ongoing relations, usually ancestral, between the dead and those still living. These practices reveal the mixing of "official" Buddhist teachings with local traditions of all kinds.

Bryan Cuevas's article deals with death in Tibetan Buddhist popular literature by working from the biography of an ordinary seventeenth-century laywoman, Karma Wangzin, who journeyed to hell and back again. John Holt's article "The Dead Among the Living in Contemporary Buddhist Sri Lanka" discusses the activities of a village lay priestess who helps the living communicate with the recently deceased; he argues this type of Sinhala lay religiosity is not new but has ancient roots. Matthew Kapstein's study of Mulian and Gesar examines how the Chinese tale of the Buddha's disciple Mulian (Maudgalyāyana), who descended to hell to save his mother, was rendered into a Tibetan context and associated with the culture hero Gesar. Although no Chinese-style "ghost festival" was ever practiced in Tibet, Tibetan Buddhism still contained a great deal of filial piety which influenced the mythos of Gesar.

A final cluster of articles deals with the biological end of life. Since the dead and their disposal are a physical process in a society, Buddhism has been greatly concerned with the practical matters of funerary and mortuary rites. Hank Glassman's article on "Chinese Buddhist Death Ritual and the Transformation of Japanese Kinship" argues that Heian Buddhist funerary and mortuary practices evidence a shift to the patriarchally-oriented family grave and memorial system which dominated later Japanese society. Mark Rowe's article on "Scattering Ashes in Contemporary Japan" surveys the current movement away from the traditional Buddhist monopoly on family-oriented death ritual which is being expressed in innovative practices of scattering ashes or creating voluntary burial societies. Jason Carbine's article on "A Monk's Final Journey" describes how the death of the twentieth-century Burmese monk Bhaddanta Indācāra in 1993 has become an exemplary reference event for the care of the monastic dead in that Theravāda tradition today.

In summary, this volume presents research of the highest class by a set of the best scholars working in English in Buddhist studies. The editing is excellent; and besides supplying extensive bibliography for each article, the book includes Chinese and Japanese character glossaries and an index. Scholars of both Buddhism in general and of regional/national practices will need to turn to this collection for its up-to-date findings about the variety and importance of this fatally essential dimension of the religion.

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*Death and Social Order in Tokugawa Japan: Buddhism, Anti-Christianity, and the Danka System.*

Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007, 550 pages.

Every student of Japan knows that during the Tokugawa period every resident of Japan was required to become a member of some Buddhist temple as part of a national *bakufu* policy. In spite of the apparent importance of this phenomenon, it has not been given much detailed or critical attention by foreign scholars, which