

Book Reviews

Michael Como

Weaving and Binding: Immigrant Gods and Female Immortals in Ancient Japan
Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009, 306 pp.



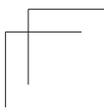
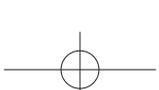
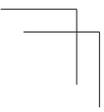
The author explores the contributions of immigrant clans from the continent (mainly those from Korea) as key elements in the “formation of the Japanese Buddhist tradition, the Japanese royal cult, and the popular worship of *kami*.” The book consists of Acknowledgments, an Introduction that questions past studies and views of religion in the Nara period and seven chapters: 1. Immigrant Gods on the Road to Jindō, 2. *Karakami* and Animal Sacrifice, 3. Female Rulers and Female Immortals, 4. The Queen Mother of the West and the Ghosts of the Buddhist Tradition, 5. Shamanesses, Lavatories, and the Magic of Silk, 6. Silkworms and Consorts, 7. Silkworm Cults in the Heavenly Grotto: Amaterasu and the Children of Ama no Hoakari. The main body of the work is followed by Conclusion, a Glossary of Names and Terms, an Appendix: Notes on Sources, Notes and Abbreviations, Works Cited, and an Index.



His object is pursuit of an “integrated approach” to the Nara period that takes into account religious, political, material, and technological advances that immigrant clans brought with them, or imported, from Korea and China. He argues that broadened communication through the expansion of roads, the advent of sericulture, and pacification of vengeful and disease spirits through yearly rituals in the court and at crossroads (*michiai sai*) were the basis for many imperial edicts, and that appropriation of the Chinese festival calendar underlay the adoption and performance of court rituals – the triad of “weaving, maidens, and goddesses” being of vital importance for those rituals, the economics of the period, as well as contributing to the “harmonization” of aspects of daily life.

In order to set the historical record straight, the author has culled a vast amount of information on continental influences and immigrant clans’ deities, which questions the Amaterasu myth and the unique “Japanese-ness” of the *kami*. He also has investigated the impact of immigrant clan religious practices on Nara period Buddhism and Buddhist-Shrine relationships. The diverse sources examined are cited in the annotated Appendix under the headings of Chronicles and Myths, Hagiography and Tale Collections, Provincial Gazeteers (*fudoki*), Ritual Texts and Law Codes, Temple and Shrine Sources, Other [Japanese] Literary Sources, Chinese and Korean Sources, and Buddhist Scriptures.

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There is a certain extent of repetition from one chapter to another, and the written style is much like that of a dissertation. The Glossary of Names and Terms is extensive and informative, and the Index is thorough and gives useful cross references. A major drawback is that no Chinese characters (漢字), so useful for students and scholars, are present anywhere in *Weaving and Binding*.

That said, the wealth of information on the economic and religious impact of immigrant clans and their widespread influence on popular customs and rites, the critical weighing of the sources on which the Japanese foundation myth and emperor cult arose, and continental contributions to Buddhism and popular shrines made through immigrant clan deities and monks makes *Weaving and Binding* of value to all whose interests are in Japanese studies whether of the country's religious, social, economic, or technological histories.

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Karen Gerhart
The Material Culture of Death in Medieval Japan
Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009, 259 pp.

In recent years, art historians have begun to extract religious objects from their museum settings and aesthetically-bound analyses to reveal their original contexts and functions in highly-orchestrated rituals. Karen Gerhart's work is one such successful contribution to this genre of scholarship, as her new book explores the wide variety of implements, images, buildings, and other objects used during fourteenth and fifteenth-century Japanese death rites.

Texts (diaries, funeral manuals) and objects (illustrated handscrolls, monuments, implements) are examined throughout the book in order to demonstrate that "ritual objects are not simply visual appendages to the ritual sequence but are part of the structure and performance." (2) Gerhart's study of objects and rituals reveals that death rites changed during the medieval period, influenced primarily by the expansion of Zen Buddhism in Japan.

The book is divided into two sections: the first, entitled "The Rituals of Death" examines textual records of several specific funerals and memorial services held during the fourteenth century. The first chapter, "Death in the Fourteenth Century," looks at a variety of records describing the funerals of two elites, Nakahara Morosuke (d. 1345) and his wife, Nakahara Kenshin (1289-1345). Gerhart reveals that these rites were a mixture of intra-sectarian Buddhist, as well as non-Buddhist elements, such as the recitation of Esoteric Buddhist sutras, the utilization of yin-yang diviners in the scheduling of events, the breaking of a certain "hearth-fire god," the absence of a portrait of the deceased, and the burial, rather

than cremation, of the corpse. Throughout, she emphasizes the complex concepts of the “spirit” in Japan and the danger of death pollution. She also highlights that men were given more elaborate, complex and longer (in duration) funerals than women, and that women had lesser roles in the funerals of their deceased male relatives.

In Chapter Two, “Funerals in the Fifteenth Century,” Gerhart examines the funeral records of the four elite lay people Prince Yoshihito (1361-1416), Ashikaga Yoshimochi (1386-1478), Hino Shigeko (1411-1463) and Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358-1408), in order to highlight the increased incorporation of Zen funeral-style practices (many of which had Chinese precedents) during this century. Here she examines changing attitudes towards death, and the alternate ways of dealing with spirit that accompanied these shifts. For example, in the fifteenth century, Zen priests, rather than yin-yang diviners, scheduled funeral events, and cremation, rather than burial, became standardized. Since this chapter discusses the funeral rites of an elite laywoman, Hino Shigeko, Gerhart takes the opportunity to discuss scholarship dealing with the larger number of funerals that were held for laywomen than laymen. Gerhart’s discussion of practical issues in this chapter, such as the effects of decay (funerals had to be sooner in summer), and the burning of incense to mitigate odors emanating from the corpse, offer glimpses into why certain practices came about. Her exposition on the delicacy of the soul during the liminal period when it was believed to be still attached to the body is not only sensitively written, but reveals that this was undoubtedly a prime driving force behind the reasons why certain funeral processes occurred.

The second section of the book, “The Material Culture of Death,” focuses on the specific structures, ritual utensils and portraits utilized in mortuary rites. This section is an example of the increasingly blurring line between art history and material culture studies. Chapter Three, “Objects of Separation and Containment,” discusses shrouds, folding screens, coffins, mortuary buildings, gates, and other objects that physically demarcated the world of the living and that of the dead. Gerhart successfully shows that such barriers were necessary not only to separate the contamination of decay, but also the more ephemeral pollution of death. She also skillfully explains how such objects served as a way for the living to manifest the spiritual and emotional loss into a physical object, thus facilitating the grieving process.

What are often perceived as more mundane objects form the core of Chapter Four, “Ritual Implements for Funerals and Memorials.” This chapter utilizes illustrated handscrolls to show the appearance, placement and usage of items such as incense burners, candles, flowers, banners, trays, lanterns, palanquins, and canopies. Gerhart gleans this information from the illustrated depictions of elite priest’s funerals and funeral processions, which only offer data on a small segment of society. Many of the scrolls were also created decades after the person depicted had died, and thus should be taken with caution.

The final chapter, "Portraits of the Deceased," highlights the function of funerary portraits as focal points for ancestor veneration, a primary tenet of Zen practice. She discusses the history of sculpted and painted portraits, as well as the patrons who commissioned them. One especially salient point she makes is that in fifteenth century, portraits of the deceased were displayed only after the coffin was sealed, in order to provide a new home for the soul. (164) Displaying both the body and the portrait could cause confusion for the soul, and its location during this liminal period was vital for its repose. A discussion of the functional differences painted and sculpted portraits would have been of interest, although sources explaining such concepts are likely scant.

The book would have benefitted from a brief conclusion that highlighted the connections between the first and second sections, as the ending of the book with something as specific as the functions of funerary portraits was somewhat abrupt. Furthermore, while Gerhart's use of the term "medieval" is undoubtedly excusable in light of a better term within Asian studies, it does, however, lack specificity, and carries notes of European historical studies. Her use of this broad term lies in contrast to her focus on the specific period 1345-1463, during which she states critical shifts occurred from Pure Land based to Chinese-style inspired rites. (11)

Despite these minor shortcomings, Gerhart's book is not only an excellent example of the ways in which art historical analysis has expanded in recent years to include or meld with material culture studies, but it is also a sensitively drawn illustration of the ways in which the medieval Japanese mediated the traumatic effects of death. In addition, although it may seem at first to reinforce the notion of "funeral Buddhism" in Japan, her in-depth analysis necessarily brings to light the multivalent aspects of belief (Buddhist, Confucian, local tradition, divination) that actually comprised death rites in fourteenth and fifteenth century Japan, as well as today. This book provides an insightful, meticulous examination of a field of Japanese studies and serves as a point for further research as well.

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Carol Richmond Tsang
War and Faith – Ikkō Ikki in Late Muromachi Japan.
Cambridge (Mass.) and London: Harvard University Asia Center 2007.

Based on a dissertation, this book deals with uprisings (*ikki*) connected with Hongan-ji (*ikkō ikki*), the Pure Land Buddhist sect called Jōdo Shinshū today, which evolved as a formidable power during the late Muromachi period (1338-1573). This period is also called *sengoku jidai* (time of the warring provinces, 1470-1570), because Japan lacked a strong central rule and many fights for hegemony broke out.

At the same time, economic problems, such as high taxation and tax exemption, or disputed land property and the loss of income from estates, caused most struggles of the time. In such a context of insecurities evolved the *ikkō ikki*. Its agents were peasants fighting for their economic survival, priests and merchants in tax exempt temple towns (*jinai-chō*), as well as warriors and daimyo associated with Hongan-ji in one way or another.

The period covered in this study reaches from the eighth Hongan-ji patriarch Rennyo (1415-99) to the eleventh patriarch Kennyo (1543-92). Rennyo is credited with enlarging the Hongan-ji sect through his missionary activities, especially the wide distribution of his “pastoral letters” (*ofumi*) in vernacular (58), and the increase of temples. However, because the growth of Hongan-ji implied loss of membership and income for other schools, it caused also a number of conflicts. In 1465, the Tendai head temple Enryaku-ji attacked Hongan-ji temples in Omi province because of reduced economic income in the area. (Cf. 50-54) Its warrior monks also burnt down the Ōtani Hongan-ji headquarters in Kyoto. Hence, Rennyo escaped to the north (Hokuriku) and established a flourishing center in Yoshizaki at the border between Kaga and Echizen. Since peasants became involved in uprisings, he admonished believers not to engage in conflicts with other sects and to obey the secular authorities. (Cf. 66) When fighting in the area broke out, Rennyo again had to move. In 1478 he began to establish Hongan-ji headquarters in Yamashina close to Kyoto. Eventually, a peasant uprising involving many Hongan-ji adherents in Kaga defeated the local daimyo in 1488. From this time on Hongan-ji members and temples began to play a significant role in provincial politics and conflicts in Japan. (Cf. 112)

In 1488 Rennyo resigned and his son Jitsunyo (1458-1525) became successor. He continued not only to strengthen the Hongan-ji institution and organization, but he also edited and published his father's pastoral letters to serve as canonical text for the sect (cf. 117) – for some time they became even more important than Shinran's writings! When the deputy shogun Hosokawa Masamoto exerted pressure to support his fighting in Settsu and Kawachi, Jitsunyo eventually gave in. Thus he became the first patriarch who ordered members into battle. (Cf. 131, 117) At the same time, Honganji members entered the center of the national stage. (Cf. 145)

When Jitsunyo died in 1525, his son Shōnyo (1516-54) became patriarch (ch. 5), but power struggles over his succession within his family soon triggered a provincial civil war among temples in Kaga. In the end, Shōnyo prevailed and Hongan-ji became the de facto ruler (*shugo*) of Kaga province. Hereby, Hongan-ji assumed political power on the same level as daimyo. (Cf. 166)

In 1532, another provincial conflict (Tenbun War 1532-36) broke out in Yamato because Kofuku-ji had prohibited Hongan-ji temples in the province, and for this reason believers burned down this ancient temple in Nara. When shogun Ashikaga

Yoshiharu asked the Nichiren sect to attack Hongan-ji in retaliation, the rival sect together with others burnt down Hongan-ji temples in Kyoto and destroyed the Yamashina headquarters in 1532. Subsequently, the Hongan-ji head temple again had to be relocated, this time in the fortified temple town Ishiyama (in modern day Osaka). (179) In subsequent fights, Enryaku-ji and other forces destroyed the Nichiren temples in Kyoto, and finally a peace treaty with Hongan-ji was reached. Hongan-ji then became so strong that it could afford to cease payments to Enryaku-ji in the 1540s. Thus it had reached full independence as well as recognition as a major political power by daimyos, the court and other influential Buddhist sects. (197, 200) Shōnyo became the first Hongan-ji patriarch who explicitly justified religious war by stating that those believers who had died in battles of the Tembun War would achieve birth into the Pure Land. (191)

The final chapter “From Peak to Defeat, 1554-1580” treats again two different struggles, one provincial and one occurring in various provinces. Both involved leaders who in the future would achieve military hegemony on a national scale, Oda Nobunaga (1534-82) and Tokugawa Ieyasu (as he would be called later; 1543-1616). In his attempt to establish his rule as daimyo in Mikawa province, Ieyasu challenged the Hongan-ji temples here by charging high taxes even though as temple towns they enjoyed tax exemption and other privileges. This led to an uprising in 1563 which in the end Ieyasu defeated in coalition with forces from the rival Takada branch of Pure Land Buddhism; the Hongan-ji priests were forced to leave the province. (Cf. 200-222)

Nobunaga, on the other hand, attempted to achieve hegemony on a national level. One obstacle was the independent economic and military power of Buddhist sects such as Hongan-ji and Enryaku-ji. Hence, he intended to levy tax on Ishiyama, Hongan-ji's temple town. Kenryo called upon the adherents to defend the sect, and together with believers as well as with a number of daimyos he engaged in a number of battles with Nobunaga (1570-74). In the end, the court helped to negotiate peace between the two parties. (Cf. 222-232)

In 1580 finally, the *ikkō ikki* perished in Japan, and Hongan-ji had lost its previous independence and power. (Cf. 234) As the author concludes, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Oda Nobunaga “redefined the place of religion in society, severing it from its independent economic and military base and confining it to a far narrower band of operation.” (243) The experience of *ikkō ikki* also affected Hideyoshi's and Ieyasu's later decision to root out Christianity because religion provided the power of cohesion and loyalty. (Cf. 244)

This study is the first English book on the *ikkō ikki*, an important phenomenon of Japan's religious and social history. Without attempting to ignore the achievements of this study, there are some problems which should be mentioned. First, from the perspective of religious studies, it contains a number of inaccuracies and mistakes in terms and formulations, such as the rendering of *ōjō* as “rebirth”

(3, *passim*) (the correct translation is “birth *into* [the Pure Land]” which is quite different from rebirth in the sense of *reincarnation*); to call Hōnen and Shinran “founders” of Jōdo-shū resp. Jōdo Shinshū (12) (they are the acclaimed founders); or the uncritical use of the term “heresy” (229 f). It is also difficult to comprehend why the author characterizes Kōfuku-ji as an “esoteric Buddhist temple” (174) since “esoteric” applies to Shingon and a part of Tendai. In addition, why does the author not provide a brief explanation of the Nichiren school’s practice *fuju fuse* (do not receive, do not give, 187) for those readers who are not familiar with this detail of Japanese religious and social history?

In a number of important passages, sufficient clarity concerning time and space is missing in the composition of the text. For those who are not familiar with (religious) geography, it would be difficult to grasp that Enryaku-ji’s attack of Ōtani occurred in Kyoto and not in Ōmi province. (50 f) An additional map of the area Ōmi, Mt. Hiei, Yamashina, Kyoto, Settsu, Kawachi and Osaka would have been helpful. The years of some important events are not provided at the place where one would expect it, such as the time of transition from Shōnyo to Kenryo (200), or the year of the peace treaty between Nobunaga and Hongan-ji. (232) In respect to formal shortcomings, the author does not provide some important references, for example, for the “most complete scholarly compilation” of Rennyō’s letters (58, cf. fn. 53 and 54), or for the banner (used in war against Nobunaga) “Advance and be reborn in paradise; retreat and fall immediately into hell” (dust jacket, 192, 229).

One important methodological step to treat a subject is to put the research into historical context and hence into perspective. Whereas the author several times indicates the consequences of the *ikkō ikki* in the politics of religion in the subsequent Tokugawa period (such as the persecution of Christianity), she fails to situate her research topic into the previous history. A comparison, for example, between the *senjōku* period and the *insei* period (1086-1185) would not only bring to light similar structural causes for social and religious disturbances, as well as resembling reactions (e.g. by *bushi* and *sōhei*, warriors and warrior monks), but also significant differences, which both would help to elaborate the specific character of the present subject of research. But, to be fair, such criticism does not concern so much the doctoral student, but more the advisors. Or, to extend this issue to today’s problems, why is this research of the *ikkō ikki* in the end not made relevant to the contemporary discussion of the acclaimed tolerance of Buddhism, its violence and its involvement in wars? The results of the present study already could contribute considerably to a better understanding of such important problems.

Finally, the author restricts her research to primary and secondary literature in Japanese and English (cf. 6), thereby excluding research in other European languages. The lack of knowledge of these languages seems to increase among young American scholars in recent years. This results in “reinventions of the wheel.” Already in 1985, Ulrich Pauly wrote a dissertation on the *ikkō ikki* in German

language at Bonn University which is much more detailed than the present study. A “wheel” once was invented to enable people to progress. Ignorance of other languages unfortunately prevents from progressing in research.

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Ugo Dessì, ed.
The Social Dimension of Shin Buddhism
Leiden: Brill, 2010, 286 pp.

The Social Dimension of Shin Buddhism, edited by Ugo Dessì, is a collection of articles exploring the intersection of the Shin Buddhist tradition with society, spanning from the Kamakura period into the present. The book’s stated aim is to address the dearth of studies of Shin Buddhism that are non-sectarian in nature, and this it performs admirably. Its seven chapters explore various episodes of the social, institutional and intellectual history of Shin Buddhism, with the majority of these concentrating on the modern period.

The volume begins with a prelude to Shin social history in Martin Repp’s study of the social and economic impact of Hōnen’s (1133-1212) Pure Land thought. Repp provocatively suggests that the Jōdo Shinshū, rather than the Jōdoshū, actually best embodies the principles of radical equality found in Hōnen’s exclusive *nembutsu* teachings, an argument supported by Shinran’s (1173-1262) innovation of the concept of *dōbō* (同朋, fellow companions), this concept’s later importance in Rennyo’s (1415-1499) teachings, and the putatively egalitarian structure of early Shin congregations. This chapter describes the principle of radical religious equality which underlies the Shin Buddhist teachings – and the translation of which into social reality has had a complex and troubled history, as is evident in the subsequent chapters – as having originated in Hōnen’s own thought.

Galen Amstutz reports on the situation of Shin Buddhist institutions under the *mibunsei* of the Edo period, in which Shin temples accumulated the vast majority of the underclass (referred to by a number of terms, but best known as *burakumin*) as their parishioners. This subject surely deserves its own volume, and as a rare study in English of the Shinshū’s early modern organizational structure and membership patterns alone, Amstutz’s chapter is extremely valuable. As the author admits, however, the extant sources on why the Shinshū developed this strong tendency to acquire *buraku* parishioners, and how instances of discrimination against *buraku* priests and laity by the Shin institution were rationalized (or contested), are frustratingly inconclusive. Amstutz importantly points out that the voices of parish priests and *buraku* themselves are almost completely absent from available documentation, and that the relationships between *buraku* parishioners,

their priests, and the administrative temples under whose authority they putatively functioned were likely extremely regionalized and, indeed, voluntary, involving a negotiation of autonomous interests.

Jessica Main addresses a later episode in the relationship between the Shinshū and *buraku* discrimination as she explores the ideology of Takeuchi Ryōon (1891-1968), who helped shape the Ōtani-ha's current institutional structures for social engagement. Main's explanation of Takeuchi's ideology as being forged both through his own experience of overseeing social work and through various discursive pressures, including contentious encounters with Marxist-liberationist approaches to eliminating discrimination against *buraku*, is very compelling. Considering that the issue of *buraku* discrimination has been central to the development of contemporary Shin ethical thought and institutional reform, this essay provides an important piece in the puzzle of the complex relationship between modern Shin religiosity, human rights, and social engagement.

Melissa Anne-Marie Curley's chapter on Shin Buddhist education in the modern period focuses on the writings of two important Ōtani-ha thinkers, Kiyozawa Manshi (1863-1903) the founder and first president of Ōtani University (originally Shinshū University) and his disciple Kaneko Daiei (1881-1976), also a faculty member at Ōtani University. Curley finds in Kiyozawa's educational philosophy a suggestion of resistance to the hegemony of the state in the form of his rather liberal "utopian vision of a society composed of self-sovereign individuals in which each person stands at the very center of his or her own realm, [a vision which] runs counter to the interests of centralized state authority." (129) Given the social emphasis of this volume, however, one craves more concrete information about how (or if) Kiyozawa's educational philosophy, and later Kaneko's, found purchase in reality. Nonetheless, this chapter admirably fills a gaping hole in English-language scholarship on the development modern Shin thought, and Curley's insight into the social ethics and liberal legacy of these two thinkers is extremely valuable.

Simone Heidegger's chapter on gender in the Shinshū introduces the consideration of gender in Shin thought since the movement's inception, and then explores the efforts of temple wife activists in the 1980's and 1990's to critique and eliminate gender discrimination from contemporary Shin institutions. By addressing the largely unconsidered issue of the status of women in the Shinshū, this chapter provides another important look at the tension between teachings and reality, as Heidegger problematizes the assumption that equality in the founders' teachings and in the official sphere of the religious community necessarily results in equality in practice.

Elisabetta Porcu's chapter, "Speaking through the Media," describes the use of *anime* and *manga* by the Nishi and Higashi Honganji organizations to present popular accounts of doctrine and to effectively "brand" Shin religious identity amidst an increasingly global and high-tech marketplace. Although Porcu mentions

that such religious representation through popular media is not new (209), this study would be strengthened by more explicitly relating (or contrasting) new media to the long-standing Shin tradition of using visual technologies in propagation, as well as by exploring the reception of this media among Shin followers (or rather, consumers?).

Finally, Ugo Dessì explores Shin Buddhism's confrontation with globalization by reporting on both institutional and individual responses to major issues of globalization. Dessì's survey of the religious beliefs of Shin priests and laity represents a rare effort by a scholar to inquire into the perspective of non-elite Buddhist teachers and lay practitioners; he finds, perhaps predictably, that the Shin Buddhist community is not univocal in its response to the challenges of globalization.

Overall, this book is enlightening, a must-read for students of Shin Buddhism, and strongly recommended to anyone interested in the social-historical dimension of Japanese Buddhism. In particular, its illumination of various Shin Buddhist responses to modernity – through human rights and gender equality reform, liberal approaches to education, uses of modern technologies in propagation, and doctrinal critiques of liberal humanism – is invaluable as the world of Buddhist studies seeks to better understand phenomena such as “Buddhist Modernism” and “Global Buddhism.”

In addition, the absence of any mention of funerals (apart from Amstutz's explanation of the posthumous naming of *burakumin* in the Edo period) in a volume dedicated to the social function of an established Buddhist school in modern Japan is striking. Death, justly or not, has tended to dominate studies of traditional Buddhism in contemporary Japan, but this volume presents us instead with a textured portrait of the variety of other social concerns with which individuals in the Shinshū have grappled throughout the modern and early modern period. Further, these essays offer a rich sampling of the perspectives of the religious actors – including doctrinal and institutional reformers, *buraku* liberation and feminist groups, and temple priests and their parishioners – who have been active in shaping the social dimension of Shin Buddhism.

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