

Elizabeth TEN GROTHUIS, *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography*. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1999. 240 pp. \$30.00 paper, ISBN 0-7914-3909-7.

WE USUALLY THINK of mandalas as geometrical configurations of deities or symbols based on Esoteric Buddhist doctrines, but the Japanese also used the term for representations of paradises based on Pure Land Buddhist doctrines and for depictions of kami and shrines based on Shinto beliefs. As Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis points out in her excellent introductory chapter, what unites these mandalas, despite their radically varying styles and content, is the idea that they represent sanctified realms where identification between the human and the sacred occurs. They map the geography of enlightenment, salvation, and purification. Esoteric mandalas chart the cosmic realm through symbols, deities, and Sanskrit characters arranged chiefly in square or circular compositions based on continental prototypes and encourage an internal pilgrimage to this space where enlightenment can take place. Pure Land mandalas, also based on continental models, replicate the imagined palatial courts of Buddhist deities. However, the Chinese called such works *bianxiangdu* (Jp. *hensōzu*), while the Japanese termed them mandala and developed associations between various Pure Lands and specific places in Japan. Mt. Mikasa, for example, is identified with Kannon’s paradise of Mt. Potolaka, and Kasuga is identified with the Tusita heaven of Miroku. Shinto mandalas, which have no continental prototypes, illustrate various kami and actual shrines within naturalistic landscape settings. The Shinto mandala can encourage actual pilgrimages, not merely imaginary ones, to sites of salvation and purification. Ten Grotenhuis uses the Sanskrit term *mandala* for Esoteric forms, and the Japanese transliteration, *mandara*, for Pure Land and Shinto forms of mandala to emphasize the expanded use of the term by the Japanese in contrast to their continental neighbors who used the term only for Esoteric compositions.

The book’s organization is straightforward. Ten Grotenhuis discusses Esoteric, Pure Land, and Shinto mandalas roughly in chronological order of their appearance in Japan and examines their doctrinal basis, the major

iconographical forms within each type, important Japanese examples, and possible prototypes or sources. The chapters on Esoteric mandalas cover, for example, the Mandala of the Two Worlds (Diamond and Womb Worlds), and those centered on individual deities; the chapters on Pure Land mandalas focus on the Taima, Chikō, and Shōkai mandalas; and the Shinto chapters highlight the Kasuga and Kumano traditions of mandala. If this were all ten Grotenhuis had done, the book would be limited to a clear and comprehensive explanation of Japanese mandalas, useful particularly in the classroom. However, she has done more than offer a forthright summary or the usual art historical descriptions.

Ten Grotenhuis makes a noteworthy contribution to the study and understanding of mandala by asking significant questions about “the degree to which Esoteric and Pure Land mandala reflect pre-Buddhist Chinese concepts, including geographical concepts.” She suggests that the prominent use of ninefold organizational schemes such as in the nine categories of rebirth in the Taima mandala or the nine assemblies of the Diamond World may have “unconsciously” evoked a familiar Chinese sense of cosmological and geographical organization. For example, the Tribute of Yu section of the *Book of Documents* and other early Chinese writings on geography divide China into nine districts. Over time a ninefold categorization or ranking system was used for such widely diverse things as fields and revenues, directions, court grades, and evaluations of painters. Clearly, the Chinese were accustomed to organizing ideas by a ninefold system. Moreover, the nine assemblies of the Diamond World, for example, bear some resemblance to the magic-square (*luoshu*) diagram, that has three registers of three squares each, in pre-Buddhist Chinese numerology. This spatial organization is also reflected in actual sites such as the city of Chang'an. On the other hand, the composition of the Womb World mandala with its concentric rectangles radiating out from a central square may well resonate with the pre-Buddhist notions of China as the center of the universe surrounded by the five dependencies. This notion is diagrammed as a central square representing the imperial domain surrounded by five concentric rectangles indicating the five dependencies or zones of 1) the royal domains, 2) the tributary feudal princes, 3) pacification, 4) the allied barbarians and 5) the cultureless savages. This familiar radiating pattern is replicated in the mandala of the Womb World.

Ten Grotenhuis’s observations are speculative and consist of an argument by similitude that is probable but not supported by direct evidence. The ordering of space into radiating zones around a center or in ninefold divisions is found elsewhere, including India and Central Asia. Moreover, one can hardly prove “unconscious” evocations. Nevertheless, the questions raised and the possible Chinese parallels and inspirations for mandala compositions are important suggestions that even in a very Indian form of Buddhism the Chinese added their marks. Buddhist art was not enslaved to textual prescriptions, and often transformed ideas into presentations familiar to new audiences. Ten Grotenhuis’s efforts to contextualize even those works that seem least open to individual or cultural adaptations is important for moving beyond a mere study of iconography.

Ten Grotenhuis's second contribution to our understanding of mandala is found in her discussion of Shinto mandala, although she prefers the term "kami-worshipping tradition" to "Shinto" because of the undesirable connotations arising from the Meiji attempt to institutionalize the kami practices into a formal "religion." She points out the influence of Esoteric and Pure Land mandala, discusses the association of actual Shinto sites with specific spiritual realms, and includes a good, though brief, account of the transition from devotional to pilgrimage Shinto mandala in the Edo period. Pilgrimage mandalas are not often included in discussions of mandala because they are executed in an amateurish style, often with inexpensive materials, by unknown painters for a broad audience. They served both as guides to and commemorations of pilgrimages. Ten Grotenhuis clearly demonstrates that they invoke the traditions of the past as well as popular religious practices of the Edo period. Above all, these works underline the essentially syncretic and multilayered nature of Shinto and Buddhism in Japan. Paintings such as the *Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala* include not only kami and shrine precincts, but also highlight elements such as Mt. Myōhō (the tall mountain behind Nachi waterfall that has a temple dedicated to Amida and whose summit symbolizes Amida's western paradise) and the departure of small rudderless boats with devotees of Kannon in search of Mt. Potalaka. Ten Grotenhuis's inclusion of practices related to the pilgrimage mandala again emphasize her interest in placing religious art in the fullest context possible.

Although this book relies chiefly on secondary sources, it moves beyond description to the author's central concern of how Chinese and Japanese appropriated and transformed foreign cultural ideas into ones that seemed familiar and suitable to native or local conventions of thought and representation. The book is useful for students and for scholars alike and should stimulate even more research on mandalas in the cultures in which they were actually used.

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