



Jacqueline I. Stone and Mariko Namba Walter, eds. *Death and the Afterlife in Japanese Buddhism*

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IN *Death and the Afterlife in Japanese Buddhism*, Jacqueline Stone and Mariko Walter have collected nine essays on the history of death in Japanese Buddhist culture, spanning a full thousand years from the time of Genshin's 源信 activities in the Nijūgo zanmai-e 二十五三昧会 (Samādhi Society of Twenty-five) in the late tenth century until the present day. Although the book forgoes any sustained discussion of death rituals and funerary practices in the earliest centuries of Japanese Buddhism (prior to the mid-Heian period, that is), it is impressive for its broad range and scope. Covering a diversity of topics and employing a variety of methodologi-

cal approaches, including textual, art historical, anthropological, and ethnographic, *Death and the Afterlife* constitutes an exciting new contribution to English-language studies of premodern and contemporary Japanese Buddhist thought and culture.

The essays in the volume are arranged chronologically, beginning with Sarah Horton's and Jacqueline Stone's chapters on Pure Land-related practices and beliefs in the Heian and early medieval periods. Horton explores Heian-period concepts of *raigō* 来迎 (Amida Buddha's "welcoming descent" at the moment of a devotee's death), *raigō* paintings, and the early development and influence of *mukaekō* 迎講 "welcoming ceremony" ritual performances. Whereas Horton draws upon a range of extra-textual sources in order to illuminate "the critical role that performance art and ritual have played" in the evolution of Japanese Buddhist conceptions of death and the afterlife (53), Stone employs a more traditionally textual approach to explore the changing nature of deathbed practices and practitioner expectations over the course of time. As Stone demonstrates, from the tenth century on, responsibility for Pure Land rebirth gradually shifted from the dying devotee to deathbed assistants known as *zenchishiki* 善知識 ("good friends"), who were themselves later replaced, in the late-medieval and early modern periods, by performers of standardized funerary and mortuary rites.

Chapters three and four, by Brian Ruppert and Mark Blum, consider the topics of relic veneration and ritual suicide in medieval Japan. Ruppert draws upon a wide range of literary, historical, and liturgical sources to probe the uses of relics in funerary and mortuary practices from the mid-Heian period on, arguing that "the evident solidity of relics seems for many to have demonstrated the Buddha's permanence in a world of devastating instability" (125). Blum, who employs some of the same textual and material sources as Ruppert, investigates the collective *seppuku* 切腹 (disembowelment) suicide of twenty mourners on the occasion of a funeral: that of Jitsunyo 実如 (1458–1525), the son and successor of Rennyo 蓮如 of Honganji 本願寺. As Blum explains (139), his essay seeks "to increase our understanding of medieval Japanese attitudes toward death as both an individual and a collective phenomenon" through the consideration of a specific historical incident. His approach is engaging, and he concludes that "by the time of Jitsunyo's death in 1525, Honganji had been transformed in the half-century since the Ōnin War into a wealthy, influential church under Rennyo and then into a political and military force under Jitsunyo," a force in which "the traditional loyalty-response of a samurai would not be out of place" (163).

Chapters five and six, by Hank Glassman and Duncan Williams, can be described as the Tokugawa-period chapters, although Glassman's essay in fact straddles the medieval/early modern divide. Glassman and Williams cover some of the same disturbing terrain—the Blood Bowl Sutra (*Ketsubonkyō* 血盆經), the Blood Pool Hell for women, and postmortem fetal extraction, to name a few—and the two authors frequently cite each others' chapters in the course of their own. Glassman invokes a plethora of legends and literary sources to explore the phenomena of gendered damnation and the salvation of mothers, arguing that there was a major shift at the

end of the medieval period in the perceived relationship between pregnant women and their unborn children which “had profound soteriological implications for women who died in late pregnancy and childbirth and also for children who died prepartum or parapartum” (175). Williams, on the other hand, considers the “fundamental disjuncture” in the Tokugawa-period Sōtō Zen funerary system, which promised immediate salvation for the deceased as a result of the Zen funeral while also maintaining that there was an ongoing need for “long-term postmortem management” based on the assumption that “the dead person had fallen into a realm of immense suffering” (228). Williams argues that we might make sense of this illogic “by recognizing that two parallel understandings of the afterlife coexisted in funerary Zen without ever having to be fully integrated or explained” (228).

Chapters seven, eight, and nine, by Mariko Walter, Stephen Covell, and George Tanabe, pertain to the modern period. First, Walter takes an anthropological approach to the study of Japanese funerary practices, extrapolating a “deep structure” common to the “contemporary funeral procedures as prescribed in the Tendai, Shingon, Jōdo, Zen, Shin, and Nichiren sects” (247). Walter shows that “despite the complexity of their formal ritual instructions, couched in sect-specific Buddhist terminology, the funeral rites performed by the major Japanese Buddhist traditions exhibit remarkable commonality in their basic ritual pattern” (275). Next, as Covell explains in his first paragraph, his chapter “builds on the arguments raised by Williams and Walter to demonstrate how this reliance on postmortem rituals for income has in turn become a wellspring for critiques of the institutions of traditional Buddhism” (293). Covell focuses on the practice of granting, and in some cases actually selling, posthumous precept names, which he argues has fueled an antipathy toward the traditional Buddhist sects and which is emblematic of the increasing commodification of religious services. In the final chapter of the book, Tanabe explores the history of Japanese intellectual struggles with the so-called “funeral heresy,” which arises from the irreconcilable contradictions between the Buddhist teaching of no-self (*muga* 無我) and “the mortuary celebration of the surviving self” (328), and, in a specifically Shinshū Buddhist context, between the doctrine of immediate Pure Land rebirth (*sokutoku ōjō* 即得往生) and the supposed need for forty-nine days of memorial services. The conundrum has yet to be resolved, and as Tanabe shows, because Buddhist funerals are nearly universally performed in Japan today, they function “as the unchanging standard to which orthodoxy must conform. The heresy of funerals is thus orthodox” (327).

As fine as *Death and the Afterlife* is—and it is a very fine book indeed—it is not without imperfections. First, although the volume is supplemented by a handy glossary of Chinese and Japanese characters and a comprehensive index, it lacks a bibliography, either for individual chapters or the book as a whole. Second, in spite of the editors’ claim to embrace “a range of approaches,” including art historical (2), the book contains a mere two visual images (snapshots of a 2005 *mukaekō* procession at Taimadera 当麻寺, included in Horton’s chapter), and no pictures of the many paint-

ings, sculptures, and illustrated texts that are discussed in some of the essays. Glassman's and Horton's chapters in particular would have benefited from the inclusion of images. Glassman, for instance, writes that "the most famous illustrations of the *ubume* [birthing-woman ghost] are from Toriyama Sekien's late eighteenth-century encyclopedia of ghosts, goblins, and ghouls" (191), but he fails to provide a visual example. Likewise, Horton writes that "in many *raigōzu* [*raigō* paintings], Amida appears to be gazing at the viewer, as in a famous illustration at Mt. Kōya. Unfortunately, this effect is lost in photographic reproductions" (41). While it may be true that the effect is lost in photos, it would have been nice to have had one anyway, either of the *Kōyasan Amida shōju raigōzu* 高山阿弥陀聖衆来迎図 to which Horton refers, or of some other *raigō* painting. That said, the book's dust jacket is graced by a lovely image of the famous Chion'in 知恩院 *raigōzu* at the Kyoto National Museum, but considering that many libraries discard dust jackets as a matter of course, even this single illustration of Amida's welcoming descent will be unavailable to some readers.

A third and final complaint has to do with some contributors' occasionally imprecise use of literary sources. In chapters two and four, for example, Jacqueline Stone and Mark Blum cite examples from *Heike monogatari* 平家物語 as if there were but a single work with this title. *Heike monogatari* has a complicated textual history; it survives in multiple manuscripts of radically different lengths and contents. Although neither Stone nor Blum explicitly identifies the *Heike* text to which she and he refer (they do so only indirectly, by citing a modern published edition), they both draw upon the late fourteenth-century *Kakuichi-bon* 覚一本 in the *kataribon* 語り本 ("recited") textual line. For Blum, who cites the *Kakuichi-bon* as a source for the historical practice of suicide (151–52), this is an unfortunate choice, because the *Kakuichi-bon* is well-known among *Heike* recensions for having been embellished and abridged for the sake of enhancing its dramatic and aesthetic appeal. Blum would have been better off consulting the early fourteenth-century *Engyō-bon* 延慶本, for example, which, in addition to being significantly longer than the *Kakuichi-bon*, is considered to be more historically accurate. Similarly, in an otherwise wonderful chapter, Duncan Williams paraphrases a story from Suzuki Shōsan's 鈴木正三 seventeenth-century *Inga monogatari* 因果物語 without identifying which version of the work he cites, whether the *hiragana-bon* 平仮名本, which the *kanazōshi* 仮名草子 author Asai Ryōi 浅井了意 is believed to have edited and supplemented, or the unillustrated *katakana-bon* 片仮名本, which is thought to be closer to Suzuki Shōsan's original composition.<sup>1</sup>

These are only very minor quibbles, however, and given the overall excellence of *Death and the Afterlife*, they should be kept in perspective. The chapters are all, with-

1. Chapter six, 218–19. Williams appears to have consulted the *katakana-bon*, in Yoshida Kōichi's *Koten bunko* vol. 185, 34–35. (Williams cites the *Koten bunko* volume, but he fails to include page numbers.) Furthermore, although Williams sets his passage off in the manner of a block quotation, the passage is in fact a highly condensed summary of the *Inga monogatari* episode rather than a translation.

out exception, of the highest quality, and the editing is superb. The most remarkable feature of the book is its internal cohesion. Individual authors frequently refer to, anticipate, and build upon each others' chapters, lending the work an integrated quality reminiscent of a single-author monograph rather than a multi-author edited volume. This is of course a result of Stone and Walter's terrific editorial efforts, as well as the cooperative labors of their seven contributors. Stone and Walter's compilation of the volume is a great service to the field, and they should be commended for it.

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