



Cynthea J. Bogel, *With A Single Glance: Buddhist Icon and Early Mikkyō Vision*

Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2009. xi + 476 pp. 112 illustrations, 33 in color, notes, glossary. Cloth, \$75.00. ISBN 978-0-295-98920-4.

DRAWING heavily on a large body of both Western and Japanese scholarship, along with theoretical studies in the area of religion, ritual, and art history, Bogel provides the most up-to-date and comprehensive study on Mikkyō (Japanese Esoteric Buddhism) and its relation to the development of visual and literary culture in Heian-period Japan. Even at first glance, the reader will be mesmerized by the clarity of the pictures throughout the book, which cover all aspects of Mikkyō visual culture. The book is divided into five parts, each including a detailed exposition of various topics that help to elucidate the influence Mikkyō had in the development of visual culture in the history of Japanese art.

Part One, “Definitions and Dynamics,” covers terminology and a range of issues that serve as an introduction to Buddhist visual culture. Chapter 1 establishes the signposts for terminology and presents a framework for understanding Japanese Esoteric Buddhism. Bogel states that in Mikkyō, “Art and ritual have essentially the same goal: to empower the devotee through his partaking of the source of power” (36), and that Mikkyō “refers to the sign system of the ‘system teachings,’ a matrix revealed not by form and visual culture, but by a ritual system in which form and visibility have equal ontological standing with the divinities” (39). These become core ideas that lie at the foundation of all chapters that follow. In Chapter 2, Bogel introduces the concept of Buddhism as the “religion of images” (*siangjiao*) as it was known in China, and discusses the idea of “representation as skillful means.” Bogel

argues that this kind of visual culture in Japan during the Nara period was scarce and shows how Mikkyō radically altered visual apprehension and icon worship in the Heian period. Chapter 3 discusses the concept of how religious icons in Buddhism work. Bogel coins a new word for what she sees in the Mikkyō episteme as “residual emplacement,” which she describes as “multiple meanings that adhere to the object of ritual or to the viewer-participant in ritual, and which then figure in subsequent interpretation regardless of ritual enactment” (55).

Part Two, “Mikkyō Visual Culture and Its Sources,” is an analysis of specific icons defined by Shingon and Tendai sects as “esoteric.” In Chapter 4, Bogel first introduces the historical context of Nara preceding Saichō and Kūkai’s journey to Tang China. Also discussed here is the status of Mikkyō-related esotericism in Tang at the time of Kūkai’s visit, focusing on a detailed discussion of the icons discovered in Anguosi. Bogel proposes that the statues of Anguosi’s assembly formed a similar *karma mandala* for the protection of the state, relating in concept to the esoteric rituals in the *Benevolent Kings Sutra*. Bogel also suggests its possible influence on what Kūkai later designed for the Tōji Lecture Hall, later discussed in Chapter 11. Chapter 5 is an analysis of the body of visual and textual material that Saichō and Kūkai imported from China, focusing particularly on a discussion of Kūkai’s *Catalogue of Newly Imported Sutras and Other Items*. Bogel introduces the texts and provides a detailed account of the mandalas and ritual implements that were handed down to Kūkai. Also included in this chapter is a detailed discussion of the portraits that Kūkai imported and their significance in relation to Kūkai’s focus on transmission and lineage. Bogel concludes that the items Kūkai imported and catalogued announced to the court both his training and his intentions.

Part Three, “Visions and Cosmologies,” covers various issues related to the concept of vision in the Buddhist doctrine. Chapter 6 covers a range of subjects: starting with terminology in Sanskrit and Pali literature that are related to “sight,” to Japanese literary works such as *Miraculous Stories of Good and Evil Karmic Effects in the Nation of Japan*. After discussing different concepts of “sight” in eighth- and ninth-century Japanese Buddhist contexts, Bogel again emphasizes the significant influence that the new Mikkyō pantheon had on the visual culture of the Heian-period. Chapter 7 deals with esoteric concepts seen in literary arts, focusing particularly on Japanese secular poetry and metaphorical language regarding vision and representation. Bogel first shows how Kūkai viewed writing as a “sacred technology rather than a tool for state governance” (169). She then demonstrates through an analysis of the descriptive language in poems of the Heian period to show that Mikkyō “transformed the range of salvific and visual possibilities presented to the devotee by an image or icon” (181).

Part Four, “Vision, Ritual and Imagery” focuses on the conceptions of the “eye” and “vision” in various aspects of the Buddhist traditions. Chapter 8 is centered on what Bogel calls “eidetic contemplation,” which is distinguished from the more common term, “visualization.” Bogel claims that “the construction of the Buddha’s

image is through a bodily and mental process that cannot be likened to “visualizing,” but instead is like the process of sculpting or painting” (205). The chapter also discusses the concept of “eidetic contemplation” in relation to various topics such as *nianfo/nenbutsu*, A-syllable contemplation, *guan* techniques in Zhiyi’s teachings, and the Shingon ritual of *abhiṣeka*. Chapter 9 continues the discussion of “eidetic contemplation” in relation to Mikkyō ritual texts while introducing Robert Sharf’s critical study of the Shingon ritual tradition, and offers her understanding of the role of mandala in the *abhiṣeka*.

Part Five, “Choreographies of Ritual Space,” bring together the various themes introduced throughout the book for a final analysis of the concept of ritual space in Mikkyō. Chapter 10 introduces a wide range of places and icons associated with Mikkyō, including Tōdaiji, Takaosanji, and Kongōbuji, and shows how the visual culture of Mikkyō influenced and changed the use of space in worship halls. Chapter 11, which is clearly the highlight of this book, features the Lecture Hall of Tōji. Bogel offers an in-depth analysis of the icons in the Lecture Hall of Tōji in relation to the *Benevolent Kings Sutra* and the *Ninnōkyō-hō* rite performed for the protection of the state. Bogel provides the reader with extensive information concerning the Tōji Lecture Hall and concludes by saying, “It is not my intention to posit the Tōji alter as an *illustration* of religious doctrine, but as a mnemonic device and an organic visual example of esoteric practice and doctrine by virtue of its visual and symbolic *referentiality* to concerns and forms central to practice” (334).

As indicated in the summary above, the amount of information in this book is massive. Compared to another academic work on Mikkyō art, Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis’s *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography* (1998) that was written for a more general audience, this book is written with the detail of an academic treatise, and a reader with only a modicum of knowledge in the field may feel overwhelmed. In other words, one should not expect this book to be a light read. However, not only is this book the most comprehensive study on this subject, but it also contains new perspectives and is bound to inspire further research in this field.

The only thing that made me uncomfortable was the author’s use of *Notes on the Secret Treasury*, which is traditionally known as a text compiled by Kūkai which contains notes based on the teachings of Huiguo, Kūkai’s dharma master in China. Recent studies have indicated the possibility, however, that this is an apocryphal text, due to some of its strong Tendai Mikkyō elements. If this is true, one must consider what parts of this text can truly be attributed to Kūkai, and what parts may be interpolations by later Shingon monks or the influence of figures such as Ennin, Enchin, or Annen of the Tendai school.

Although Bogel’s book is a groundbreaking study in the field of Buddhist visual culture in Japan, it also leaves space for further research and I look forward to reading the next publication by the author. In conclusion, with a plethora of new information now available through this book, along with an excellent bibliography of relevant Western and Japanese publications, one can expect that it will serve as a

reliable resource for future researchers and students interested in East Asian history and Buddhist art.

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