



Haruko Wakabayashi, *The Seven Tengu Scrolls: Evil and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy in Medieval Japanese Buddhism*

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EVIL TAKES MANY forms in the human imagination. In *The Seven Tengu Scrolls*, Haruko Wakabayashi focuses on early-medieval Japanese representations of *tengu* 天狗—a kind of supernatural demon bird people—which she argues were employed in Buddhist discourse of the late Heian and Kamakura periods “as a manifestation of Māra or *ma*, the personification of the Buddhist concept of evil symbolizing obstacles to be overcome on the path to enlightenment” (xv). In this short but excellent book, the majority of which is devoted to analyzing a single artwork (the satirical *Tengu zōshi* 天狗草紙 picture scrolls of 1296, referred to in historical sources as *Shichi tengu-e* 七天狗絵, or “The Seven Tengu Scrolls”), Wakabayashi explores the concepts and legitimizing functions of evil in a Buddhist philosophical system that, through the logic of nonduality, paradoxically denies the existence of evil as a category in opposition to good. Wakabayashi’s work is smart, focused, and interdisciplinary in all the best ways; drawing on a wide range of visual and textual sources, including courtier diaries, petitions, polemics, and more mainstream Buddhist and literary sources, she evokes a world of religious rivalry in which some sectarian enthusiasts sought to defame their opponents by literally painting or otherwise identifying them as *tengu*.

The Seven Tengu Scrolls comprises six chapters in two parts. Part one, including chapters 1 and 2, takes up “Buddhist appropriations of *tengu* in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries in relation to the concept of *ma*” (xvi), which Wakabayashi

describes as not so much a moral condition as the “temptations of desire and passion that hinder one from attaining enlightenment” (xv). In chapter 1, “From Malign Spirit to Manifestation of *Ma*,” Wakabayashi explores “the transformation of *tengu* from a malign spirit rooted in indigenous folk belief to a Buddhist evil susceptible only to Buddhist rituals” (3–4), arguing in one subsection that the association of *tengu* with *ma* “was accelerated by the spread of Pure Land Buddhism and the popularity of *ōjōden*” rebirth tales (15), some of which were purportedly narrated by *tengu*. In chapter 2, “*Tengudō*, the Realm of *Tengu*,” Wakabayashi discusses the shifting notions of *madō* 魔道 and *tengudō* 天狗道 and the supernatural realms of *ma* 魔 and *tengu*, the former of which came to be seen as a kind of pseudo-hell where Buddhist monks might continue their religious practice after death if they failed to achieve Pure Land rebirth. Drawing on Mujū Ichien’s 無住一円 *Shasekishū* 沙石集 of 1283, Wakabayashi introduces the concept of good and bad *tengu*—those who oppose and obstruct Buddhism, and those who embrace it—setting the stage for the diversity of *tengu* images that she discusses in connection with *Tengu zōshi* in the remaining chapters of her book.

Part two, comprising chapters 3 through 6, is devoted primarily to *Tengu zōshi*. Although the work’s authorship remains uncertain, it survives in seven incomplete illustrated scrolls of various lengths, likely produced by the same brush. In chapter 3, “Structure and Relationship to Existing Variant Scrolls,” Wakabayashi discusses the general contents and configuration of the work in the light of several later copies and/or variant texts, using those variants to help her speculate upon *Tengu zōshi*’s original form. Wakabayashi divides the seven extant scrolls into two groups: the first five, which satirize the seven principal temples of Nara and Kyoto by depicting their leaders as *tengu*, and the final two (Miidera scrolls A and B), which illustrate several *tengu*-related *setsuwa* 説話 anecdotes, criticize the contemporary charismatic Buddhist figures Ippen Shōnin 一遍上人 and Jinen Koji 自然居士, and depict the Buddhist salvation of *tengu*. Chapter 4, “Critique of Kamakura Buddhism,” delves more deeply into the specific contents of the scrolls; by conducting a close analysis of the images in the Kōfukuji 興福寺 scroll as a major representative example, Wakabayashi demonstrates how and why the *Tengu zōshi* author sought to criticize the established institutions of the first five scrolls. In a latter part of the chapter, Wakabayashi explores the *Tengu zōshi* critiques of Ippen and Jinen Koji, who are taken in the scrolls to be representatives of the new Pure Land and Zen schools of Buddhism.

Chapter 5, “The Onjōji Scroll and the Question of Authorship,” is a revised version of WAKABAYASHI’S groundbreaking *Tengu zōshi* article from the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (2002). In it, Wakabayashi contests the prevailing view among art historians that the *Tengu zōshi* author was somehow affiliated with Enryakuji 延暦寺, arguing instead that the author was in fact closely connected to Onjōji 園城寺 (Miidera 三井寺). She builds a persuasive case, and without additional textual discoveries, it is hard to imagine that it will be easily overturned. In chapter 6,

“The Definition of *Ma*,” Wakabayashi examines the *tengu* metamorphosis scenes in the Enryakuji scroll in order to consider the *Tengu zōshi* author’s “understanding of the realm of *tengu*” (141). Then, in the second half of the chapter, she discusses “the textual definition of *ma* and *tengu* in Miidera B in an attempt to understand the discourse that explains how *tengu* as symbols of *ma* can eventually attain enlightenment” (141). She concludes that “two distinct types of *ma* prevailed in the minds of Buddhist reformers who belonged to the established schools: *ma* identified with the ‘bad’ *tengu* of the newly founded religious groups, who are denied salvation, and *ma* identified with the ‘good’ *tengu* monks within institutional Buddhism, who can be awakened and raised to the highest state of buddhahood” (160). Finally, in her conclusion, Wakabayashi explores the meaning of Kamakura-period stories of the great Tendai abbot Ryōgen’s 良源 transformation into a *tengu*, surmising that those accounts were formulated by members of rival temples “who were critical of or resentful of Enryakuji” (162).

My summary here is necessarily incomplete, and it can hardly do justice to the depth and detail of *The Seven Tengu Scrolls*. The book contains a wealth of images and information, including four pages of color plates, thirty-two black-and-white photographs of *Tengu zōshi* and other early-medieval picture scrolls, multiple charts and diagrams, and a four-page appendix (revised from Wakabayashi’s 2002 *Tengu zōshi* article) comparing the textual contents of the *Tengu zōshi* Onjōji scroll with an Onjōji petition from 1319. My favorite sections of the book include Wakabayashi’s discussion of the twelve *tengu* stories in volume twenty of the late Heian-period *setsuwa* anthology *Konjaku monogatari shū* 今昔物語集 (chapter 1, 19–31); her comparative analysis of images in the *Tengu zōshi* Enryakuji scroll (chapter 3, 60–67); and her ruminations on the meaning of *tengu* transformation in the context of *hon-gaku* 本覚 (original enlightenment) thought and the notion of *jikkai gogu* 十界互具 (the interpenetration of the ten worlds) (chapter 6, 159–60).

For scholars of *yōkai* 妖怪 (the panoply of supernatural creatures of Japanese art, literature, and folklore), the greatest value of *The Seven Tengu Scrolls* may be the way in which it complicates our understanding of *tengu*. As Wakabayashi amply demonstrates, rather than denoting a single, stable type of being, the term *tengu* is used in early medieval sources to identify a diversity of bird-people with different physical and behavioral characteristics. In addition to Mujū Ichien’s good and bad *tengu*, there are “five physical types” of *tengu* in *Tengu zōshi*, including those who “appear largely human but have beaks,” those who “dress as monks and *yama-bushi* but have beaks and short hair,” those who “have beaks, hair, and wings, and sometimes claws,” those who are “depicted as kites” (the bird rather than the toy), and those who “appear completely human, which makes them difficult to identify” (144). With an ornithologist’s eye for detail, Wakabayashi argues that in *Tengu zōshi* these five types of *tengu* occupy a discernable social hierarchy, which she elucidates in an elaborate table (6.1, 147–49). *Yōkai* enthusiasts are unlikely to think of *tengu* in the same simplistic ways ever again.

Despite her classificatory zeal, Wakabayashi knows, of course, that *tengu* are imaginary, and that the human-*tengu* metamorphoses she describes are actually metaphors for something else. This is why she shrewdly states in her introduction that rather than “attempting to define these mythological creatures for which there clearly exists no single identity,” she seeks to “explore through them the world in which they were created” (xv). For Wakabayashi, the plurality of *tengu* is useful insofar as it “reveals the diversity and complexity of Buddhist notions of evil” (svi). She explains that in the case of *Tengu zōshi*, “by employing the different images of *tengu* that had developed over time, the author is able to level varying degrees of criticism at both old and new Buddhist sects” (122). With this insight in mind, it might have made more sense for Wakabayashi to speak of monks’ transformation not into one of five physical types of *tengu*, but along a monstrous continuum according to which corrupt or heretical monks are physically effaced of more or less of their humanity. But that is a minor point.

The Seven Tengu Scrolls is a very fine book, yet if I were to have a complaint, it would be that it is overly narrow in scope. For the sake of comparative perspective, Wakabayashi might have sought to place *tengu* within the larger context of early-medieval monsters in general, including demons, foxes, and giant man-eating dirt spiders (*tsuchigumo* 土蜘蛛). She might also have sought to explore representations of *tengu* beyond the early-medieval period, perhaps in *noh* or late-medieval illustrated fiction. But insofar as Wakabayashi’s interests lie less in *tengu* themselves than in the world of early-medieval Buddhist thought from which they were born, such criticisms may be unfair. *The Seven Tengu Scrolls* is impeccably researched, carefully organized, and written in a natural, sophisticated style. It will be indispensable reading for anyone interested in *Tengu zōshi* and the early history of *tengu* for many years to come.

REFERENCE

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R. Keller Kimbrough
University of Colorado, Boulder