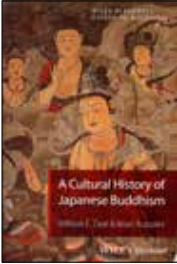


## REVIEWS



**William E. Deal and Brian Ruppert, *A Cultural History of Japanese Buddhism***

Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015. 314 pages. Hardcover, \$84.95; paperback, \$34.95; Kindle, \$25.24. ISBN 978-1405167000.

*A CULTURAL HISTORY OF JAPANESE BUDDHISM* takes up the monumental challenge of correcting some of the major misunderstandings about the history of Japanese Buddhism caused by the ways it is typically portrayed in texts on the subject. It begins by addressing readers' potential biases by pointing out in the introduction that classifying Buddhism as a world religion is a nineteenth-century Western invention. Similarly, studies have been deceptively selective about traditions and epochs they treat. Earlier studies often have represented Japanese Buddhism as a singular entity that can be divided into historical epochs marked by political reigns rather than according to struggles within Buddhism or Buddhisms and paradigm-altering events. The authors offer a consideration of texts, images, and ritual paraphernalia, thereby writing the cultural history of Japanese Buddhism promised by the book's title. The stated aim of the book is to stimulate conversations among upper-division undergraduates, graduate students, and researchers (2). Significantly, it contains thought-provoking treatments of Japanese Buddhism including that of modern times to the present. In particular, the book builds a multiple perspective analysis by comparing competing interpretations on their subject throughout.

Chapter 1, "Early Historical Context (Protohistory to 645)," considers early Japanese Buddhism within the contexts of both Asian and East Asian traditions. Following Joan Piggott, the authors also consider the interactions with East Asian Buddhism as multidirectional, but largely determined by the politics of the tribute-paying process contextualized in broader political and religious contexts. They present two models of transmission: the first being from the ruler of one country to that of another; the second is the often-ignored model based on transmission from person-to-person in the general population. Referring to the works of Tamura Enchō, the second model includes a consideration of "household Buddhism" in

contrast to a strict focus on “temple Buddhism,” as Michael Como (2008) has also recently explored in English. This raises the issue of who controls Buddhism. The authors locate the struggles between the Soga and Mononobe clans within this frame, as opposed to its usual representation as a struggle between Buddhism and Shinto, even though Shinto did not exist as a systemized institution at the time. In the process, they debunk the long-held myth of authorship of the *Sangyō gisho* attributed to Shōtoku. The chapter concludes with a review of Buddhist images that proliferated during early times.

Chapter 2, “Ancient Buddhism (645–950),” continues the book’s cultural analysis. The chapter traces the transition from Buddhism that was mainly sponsored by aristocratic families to the making of state Buddhism organized through penal and administrative codes and culminating in the Nara Period. The chapter states in brief and understandable terms the basic content of the most important sutras of the time as well as the form and function of the most popular rituals. The authors question to what extent previous scholarship provides an accurate picture of the Buddhism of the period, and join Yoshida Kazuhiko in arguing for a more nuanced treatment of state Buddhism. There are concise sections in the chapter describing the six lineages of Nara, the creation of the national temple system, the monastic code, Dōji, Gyōki, Ganjin, and Dōkyō. Gyōki is used to exemplify Buddhism outside state monastic regulations in contrast with the internal political power intrigues of Dōkyō. Again, the authors offer alternative interpretations of Dōkyō in accord with modern scholarship, that is, the depiction of him as a monk who manipulated Empress Shōtoku, which is the traditional view, or as one in the service of a political savvy empress, a recent view.

The chapter also reexamines the traditional view that the new schools of Heian Buddhism rejected the Nara traditions. For example, the authors point to scholarship that questions the extent to which the Nara lineages were fixed systems and describe the changing soteriological goals of the lineages. Referring to works by Lori Meeks, the chapter concludes with a discussion of women in this context. This is the first of a number of such treatments of women in the history of Japanese Buddhism that appear throughout the book. This inclusion is rare in textbooks on this subject and is a valuable contribution to the study.

Chapter 3 is titled “Early Medieval Society (950–1300): The Dawn of Medieval Society and Related Changes in Japanese Buddhist Culture.” This chapter considers organizational and political changes at court effecting Japanese Buddhism that developed in the Kamakura lineages. It raises questions about the traditional presentation of the so-called new schools as being completely distinct from earlier lineages. In particular, the authors point to the prominent position of Pure Land within Tendai of the time and the rise in popularity of deathbed rites. The chapter also focuses on how Buddhist practices informed the lives of the nobility. There is an interesting chart of annual court rituals broken down by month and based on Minamoto no Tamenori’s *Sanbōe* (The illustrated three jewels). The chapter

includes a substantial consideration of Buddhist performance and other arts, also rare in such studies but appropriate as a part of this cultural history. It also reconsiders the long-held notion that Japanese Buddhism developed in isolation from China during this period, providing modern scholastic evidence to the contrary. The chapter concludes with brief treatments of Honen, Shinron, Ippen, Dōgen, and Nichiren.

Chapter 4 is titled “Late Medieval Buddhism (1300–1467): New Buddhisms, Buddhist Learning, Dissemination and the Fall into Chaos.” In this period, shrine-temple complexes vied for power through the efforts of senior monks and attempted to increase their own holdings while also producing more items of material culture. The authors challenge the doctrinal approach to the study of new lineages, arguing that “we cannot assume that monks of groups such as the Pure Land lineages necessarily only studied works by Hōnen or directly concerning Pure Land teachings” (137). This is an important point that might be extended to questioning the extent to which doctrine informed behavior at all, especially in light of the rise of the singular holy person (*hijiri*) tradition explained in the chapter. The authors describe the Buddhist culture of learning, particularly the cultural as well as doctrinal networks of monks of the time. Their treatment includes a challenge to the idea that Zen was a transmission that took place completely outside of words and rational discourse. They provide a map showing centers monastic travelers used for networking at the time. The chapter concludes with a section on “women and gender in medieval Japanese Buddhism.” While official support of nuns and other Buddhist women generally declined, the authors present evidence of court women using various aspects of Buddhism as expressions of social dissent. Likewise, they point out that during the period, people came to value the image of “mother” as it appears in Buddhist texts and there was a selective expansion of the number of nuns. These developments would be influential over time.

Chapter 5, “Buddhism and the Transition to the Modern Era (1467–1800)” premises its remarks on the works of Yoshida Kazuhiko that suggest that the final of three major periods of Buddhism began in the mid-fifteenth century. This is a reconsideration of the traditional periodization of Japanese Buddhism. According to the authors, developments in Buddhism at that time greatly influenced the direction of its modern manifestations. The chapter focuses on the effect of the Tokugawa regime in broadening the influence of Buddhism in the general population, the development of the tea ceremony, and particularly on efforts by the monk Rennyo to propagate Jōdo Shinshū. They describe how new genres of preaching, illustrated texts, and new interpretations of pilgrimages all helped popularize Buddhism during this time. They also show how Buddhist scholasticism reached new heights during the period, despite the claims of other researchers.

Chapter 6, “Modern Buddhism (1800–1945),” begins by challenging the notion that lineages ceased to play a major role in the lives of Japanese people as the country emerged as a world power in modern times. The chapter describes anti-Buddhist

sentiments during the Meiji period, including the connection of the state to Shinto, the resulting violence, and anti-Buddhist language in political documents. As a result, some Buddhists saw a need to reimagine Buddhism and initiate a range of reforms, including blending Buddhism with Western philosophy and science. This, the authors argue, became an era of opportunity to make Buddhism relevant in modern times. They provide concrete examples of the work in this effort by a number of modern Japanese Buddhist thinkers and describe the new exportation of Japanese lineages abroad, as well as the rise of the study of Buddhism as an academic discipline. The chapter also includes a short consideration of some of the Japanese Buddhist-related new religions. In the final section of the chapter, the authors take up the controversial issue of Japanese Buddhist support of militarism during the fifteen-year war period (1931–1945), also mentioning examples of the contrary. Again, this treatment is quite unusual in such a textbook. Typically, a course on Japanese Buddhism would rely on supplemental readings on this issue; since Brian Victoria's *Zen at War* has drawn so much attention to the topic, it almost has to be addressed in today's classroom.

Likewise, both chapters 6 and 7, "Buddhism Since 1945," are likely to be welcome contributions to classes of this type, which often end their considerations at the end of the war in 1945, if not before. Unfortunately, not only are these the shortest chapters but they may be the weakest, particularly in terms of critique and alternative presentations that readers have come to expect from previous chapters. Some may wish that in chapter 6 there had been a treatment of Japanese Buddhists' restructuring, if not destruction, of indigenous Korean and Taiwanese Buddhism based on Japanese Buddhism's new premises and exportation of its parish system forced on others for the purpose of control. Instead, there is a near absence of explanations or even mention of World War II. This is likely to confound students and teachers alike. Even so, chapter 7 picks up with a nice treatment of postwar Buddhism in the country, which the authors say emerges with truly universal forms of Buddhism such as that found in some of the Buddhist new religions, including Soka Gakkai. I can imagine that some might object to this characterization, despite Ikeda Daisaku's work for peace and social equality, seeing instead that Soka Gakkai, like some of the other new religions, is essentially Japan-centric at base. The authors fail to mention the huge political movement springing from Soka Gakkai, the related scandals and later disassociation from politics, a gaping omission in an examination of modern Japanese Buddhism. In this gloss, I am reminded of Critical Buddhism's objections to the claim of Japanese Buddhists that Japan has eliminated discrimination. While chapter 7 does treat Critical Buddhism, it makes no mention of its objections that might apply to this book. That is to say, the book presents modern Japanese Buddhism as universal and ignores momentous social and political problems related to it, some of which have resulted from self-interest. Also, while the chapter describes some aspects of contemporary Japanese Buddhism's focus on *mizuko kuyō*, paid services offered for the repose of the spirits of miscarried or aborted fetuses, it does

not address the widely-held claim that Buddhism survives in that country because it became “funeral Buddhism,” that is, the multi-billion yen industry handling funerals. The chapter concludes with a unique, but maybe too brief for some, consideration of representations of Buddhism in manga and anime.

In short, this study is a welcome contribution to the field and will make an excellent textbook for the classroom. Teachers will need to supplement readings for the modern era, but not much more. Since most textbooks have ignored many of the significant changes in recent times, Deal and Ruppert may not have felt it necessary to critique dominant presentations of modern Japanese Buddhism as they did in the other chapters. Theirs, then, becomes the target for such future criticisms, but such is the academic process.

#### REFERENCE

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