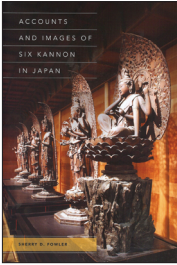


## REVIEWS



Sherry D. Fowler, *Accounts and Images of Six Kannon in Japan*

University of Hawai'i Press, 2016. 440 pages. Cloth, \$70.00. ISBN 978-0-8248-5622-9.

*ACCOUNTS AND IMAGES OF SIX KANNON IN JAPAN* by Sherry Fowler is a wide-ranging study detailing how the cult of Six Kannon was adapted to Japan, evolved throughout the country, and incorporated into various beliefs and rituals in the premodern period. Revealing a rich fabric of complex interrelations among sculptural icons, paintings, and devotional practices, the author demonstrates the interminable significance of the cult even after its popularity was superseded by other beliefs. While the book is overflowing with specialized knowledge of Buddhist concepts and scholarly analysis of images, its clear-cut organization makes it easy for readers to follow the discussions, and the abundance of illustrations and photographs visually support and enliven her detailed descriptions and analysis.

Chapter 1 begins with an examination of early textual references to belief in the Six Kannon, such as the sixth-century Chinese text *Mohe zhiguan* 摩訶止觀, which includes the earliest descriptions of six kinds of Kannon. This text, as well as later Chinese religious stories, show that Six Kannon were considered to have powers to aid sentient beings trapped in the six realms and that each was responsible for one of the realms. The concept of Six Kannon was adapted to Japan and by the eleventh century had become associated with specific images: Shō, Thousand-Armed, Horse-Headed, Eleven-Headed, Juntei or Fukūkenjaku, and Nyoirin Kannon. The only known complete set of Six Kannon from the Heian period are the incised images appearing on a bronze sutra container preserved at Chōanji in Ōita; other Kannon images originally belonging to sets of six are

still extant, but repurposed as principal icons at halls or as generic Kannon. The issue of identity change keeps resurfacing throughout the book, along with discussions about the cult's association with women.

The investigation of Six Kannon in Kyushu in chapter 2 is noteworthy because it spotlights underrepresented regional examples and situates them in a broader picture. In so doing, the author establishes the importance of the periphery in understanding developments of religious belief. Examining numerous Six Kannon sets worshiped across Kyushu, she demonstrates that images and origin stories of Six Kannon manifest in diverse forms, merging with indigenous beliefs, local legends, geographical features, and the demands of worshipers. As one example, she cites the prominent identification of Six Kannon with six kami, often referred to as six *gongen* 権現 (manifestations), who are closely related to the physical environment of Kyushu. Although many temples and shrines associated with Six Kannon also tend to indicate connections with authorities on the main island of Japan (Honshu), the author provides convincing evidence that the cult of Six Kannon in Kyushu was not merely influenced by beliefs generated at the center, and that worship practices fostered in the periphery also contributed to Six Kannon movements in the mainland.

Pointing out that the Six Kannon were associated with various individual efficacies and thus could meet diverse needs, the author categorizes their functions using the following three themes: saving sentient beings in the six realms, aiding women's salvation and granting them worldly benefits, and protecting sutras. However, the Kyushu examples demonstrate further diversified incentives to worship the Six Kannon. In addition to universal motivations such as salvation in the six realms, better rebirth, and worldly benefits such as well-being and safe childbirth, a concern for foreign invasion also fueled the growth of the Six Kannon cult in this region. The complex developments of Six Kannon worship in Kyushu suggest that a comprehensive understanding of the cult requires heterogeneous perspectives, for it was linked to multiple religious elements as well as the unique local environment.

Shifting the focus back to Six Kannon imagery in Kyoto, chapter 3 reveals how this assembly of deities responded to changing circumstances, patronage, and worshipers' needs. One example investigated in the chapter is the set of life-sized Six Kannon images from the thirteenth century enshrined at the Daihōonji main hall. The author discusses how this set played divergent roles at different locations, relating it to the three themes mentioned above. Among them, the connection between the set and texts is explicit. For example, between the fifteenth and seventeenth century, the Daihōonji Six Kannon functioned to protect Buddhist sutras as the principal images enshrined in a sutra hall near Kitano Shrine. Moreover, each of the Kannon images contains texts related to their specific identities, reflecting the concept of the six syllables transforming into

the Six Kannon. In addition to outlining the procedures for rituals, the author cites evidence suggesting that certain rituals appealed specifically to women's interests.

The other example discussed in detail in this chapter is the Six Kannon set from Tōmyōji, which is no longer active as a temple. The author discovered that one of the Tōmyōji images once believed to be Nyoirin was originally Fukūkenjaku Kannon. She argues that the identity was "adjusted" to correspond to the temple's new claim reflected in an origin story written in 1696, emphasizing its connection with the Shingon sect. In addition, she discusses how the difference in size and style of the sculptures reflected economic factors, suggesting that they were made one by one under individual fundraising campaigns based on the "One-Day Buddha" (Buddha constructed in one day) concept. Pieces of paper placed inside the Tōmyōji Nyoirin/Fukūkenjaku Kannon are inscribed with the names of a large number of donors, including monks, nuns, and laywomen, evincing that the statue was group-sponsored unlike the Daihōonji set whose main patron was an elite woman. The considerable number of female devotees involved in sponsoring the Tōmyōji image indicate that the popularity of Six Kannon among women had reached the commoner level.

Chapters 4 and 5 analyze Six Kannon pictorial images and rituals from the eleventh to eighteenth centuries. Chapter 4 focuses on the mandalas often used during the "Six-Syllable Sutra Ritual," which was habitually conducted between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries to avert calamity and promote healing. Although the *Six-Syllable Sutra* is not originally related to the Six Kannon, they were represented in the mandalas because Japanese monks came to associate the sutra with them, conceptualizing the six syllables as symbols of the Six Kannon. The author points out that while the Six Kannon portrayed in the mandalas share roots with images of the Six Kannon cult, the formulation of the mandalas should be considered as an independent phenomenon.

Chapter 5 further examines a range of other paintings related to the Six Kannon cult. The subjects of investigation include the fourteenth-century Six Kannon lacquered wood panel painting set in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the fourteenth-century set of large Six Kannon paintings at the Hosomi Museum in Kyoto, and Kannon images in the illustrated encyclopedia *Butsuzō zui* 仏像図彙 (Collection of Buddhist Image Illustrations; 1690). The examination of these diverse works demonstrates variations in grouping the Six Kannon. In addition, the author discusses how sets of separate scrolls allowed worshipers to repurpose the group according to their interests. There are cases where scrolls were replaced so that the formation accords with the religious affiliations of patrons and monks, or individual scrolls were used alone to serve ritual purposes outside the context of the Six Kannon cult. Furthermore, other bodhisattva such as Seishi or new identities of Kannon were incorporated

into paintings with Six Kannon, which then came to be associated with different beliefs and concepts.

The evolution and overlapping of visual imagery of the Six Kannon cult and the Thirty-three Kannon described in the *Lotus Sutra* are explored in chapter 6. The author organizes the significance of the number “thirty-three” for Kannon into four categories: thirty-three guises of Kannon described in the *Lotus Sutra*, sets of thirty-three Kannon images from China, icons related to the thirty-three Kannon pilgrimage routes, and thirty-three Kannon images in the *Butsuzō zui*. She then discusses how Six Kannon images came to be integrated into Thirty-three Kannon worship, which became increasingly popular in the Edo period. One new development was the establishment of Thirty-three Kannon pilgrimage routes, with each temple enshrining one of the Six Kannon as its principal icon. This inspired a range of devotional objects, including sets of small images (constructed of stone or wood) representing principal icons at the temples, reproducing the experience of the pilgrimage in a miniature size. Scrolls with painted or woodblock images of major icons along the routes were also popular, and sometimes pilgrims themselves had the small woodblock prints received from temples affixed to form a single scroll.

Another topic covered in this chapter is temple bells, which have rarely received attention from art historians despite the artistry of their cast designs. Focusing on five bells with Kannon imagery at temples on Thirty-three Kannon pilgrimage routes, the author argues how the Six and Thirty-three Kannon cults merge through the bells. Since the sound of bells is believed to ease the suffering of the deceased, especially those in hell, bells are linked to efficacy of the Six Kannon. Along with other common functions such as announcing time, calling for devotion, purifying defilements, welcoming and sending off the spirits of the dead, and symbolizing impermanence, the author discusses the significance of bells incorporated into worship practices by pilgrims. For instance, worshipers expected to receive multiple benefits from all six Kannon or Kannon along the major pilgrimage routes by ringing bells decorated with Six Kannon images.

The importance of the *Butsuzō zui* is touched upon in both chapters 5 and 6. The author explains how this accessible encyclopedia contributed to the reproduction of Kannon sets, serving as a handy reference and providing readers with numerous illustrations including Seven Kannon, Thirty-three Kannon, and principal icons at temples on the Thirty-three Kannon pilgrimage routes. Though not directly related to the cult of Six Kannon, she considers other features of the *Butsuzō zui*, such as its inclusion of several female manifestations of Kannon. The author devotes several pages to discussing “gendered images of Kannon” and the background from which they emerged. She also points to the text’s “international” contribution, that is, how foreigners learned about Buddhism and its plethora of deities by reading the *Butsuzō zui* translated by the German

doctor Phillip Franz von Siebold (first published in 1852). The author notes that the *Butsuzō zui* has enabled devotees and enthusiasts around the world to learn about diverse aspects of Japanese religion even though it was never an officially sanctioned religious text.

The author concludes her arguments in the final chapter by referring to the mysterious Hora Head monument placed in an outdoor natural setting near Nara Park. The Six Kannon are carved in relief on the sides of the stone hexagonal pillar, and a Buddha (possibly Amida) head is affixed on the top. Discussing how the themes investigated in the book are reflected in this stone monument, she demonstrates that such alternative images, which have been marginalized as “folk art” in Japanese art history, are significant sources for investigating variations from the norm and are indeed worthy of study. Although her book has illustrated how the concept and images of Six Kannon were widely diffused and absorbed into various beliefs and worship practices, the unorthodox representation of Six Kannon in the Hora Head monument suggests the possibility for even further diversity in form and interpretation.

This book will particularly benefit those in the fields of art history and religious studies, since the author offers her unique insights with comprehensive knowledge on the cult of Six Kannon, which has hardly been written about in English and has only been studied in limited contexts in Japan. It will also interest historians doing research connected with Kyushu, for the author situates Kyushu images in a broader picture while demonstrating the significance of local developments in understanding the evolution and growth of Six Kannon movements in Japan. Since the popularity of the Thirty-three Kannon pilgrimage persists in modern times, general readers, too, will enjoy learning about the historical background that contributed to the creation of this popular activity. Of the approximately one-hundred and sixty illustrations, twenty-seven are in color. Of course, it would have been wonderful if more of the photographs of paintings and sculptures could have been in color. However, the woodblock-printed illustrations and line drawings are clear enough in black and white, and the abundance of figures help readers to visualize how the concept of Six Kannon flourished and evolved throughout the centuries. Since the subject of this book has been underrepresented, this groundbreaking analysis of various aspects of the Six Kannon will serve as a solid foundation for future studies, opening the door for further research related to the cult.

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