

Jacqueline I. Stone, *Right Thoughts at the Last Moment: Buddhism and Deathbed Practices in Early Medieval Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016. 624 pp. ISBN: 978-0824856434, \$68.00.

Reviewed by Elaine Lai

Jacqueline Stone's latest book, *Right Thoughts at the Last Moment: Buddhism and Deathbed Practices in Early Medieval Japan*, is the first comprehensive study in a western language to explore how the Buddhist ideal of mindful death was appropriated in medieval Japan, with a focus on the latter Heian and Kamakura periods (from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries). Stone utilizes a range of pre-modern sources including ritual manuals, hagiographies, doctrinal writings, didactic tales, courtier diaries, letters, which can be categorized under two broader genres of writing: 1) *rinjū gyōgisho* or instructions for practice; and 2) *ōjōden*, hagiographical accounts of people who were believed to have achieved birth in Amida Buddha's Pure Land.

The larger aim of the entire book is to understand religion on the ground in early medieval Japan, which for Stone entails how people interacted with and understood death and its associated practices, the kinds of concerns and anxieties surrounding the moment of death, and how Buddhist doctrine and practice both shaped and was shaped by these concerns. Central to "right thoughts at the last moment" is the cultivation of right mindfulness at the moment of death. In early medieval Japan, this was connected to practices of *nenbutsu* or recitation of the Buddha's name and Pure Land aspirations, with the trust that Amida Buddha and his assembly would descend to the dying person's side and guide them to the Pure Land. The special status assigned to the final moment before death finds its roots in a broader South Asian Buddhist context where the force of one's final thoughts was regarded as karmically "weightier." As such, a dying person's final thoughts were believed to hold particular salvific power by circumventing otherwise destitute karmic fruition, such as birth in the lower realms.

Drawing from a theoretical framework derived from anthropology and the sociology of culture, Stone frames Buddhism in early medieval Japan as a repertoire or toolkit of resources from which multiple and sometimes seemingly contradictory symbols, discourses, schemas, normative claims, tropes, idioms, and narratives are interwoven (4). The merit of using this kind

of analytical lens to examine deathbed practice is that it allows scholars to access Buddhism as a lived religion that incorporated different strands of thought and practice that might otherwise be judged as incommensurable. Stone, however, is careful to note that most people engaging in deathbed practices probably saw little incongruity between their views and actions, most likely moving from one perspective to another depending on life circumstances and with great fluidity too (376). To bolster her point, Stone's argument forefronts the divergent deathbed logics should not be seen as deviations from some original imaginary norm for Buddhist death, but rather that these multiple logics are themselves "constitutive of Buddhist approaches to death and dying" (9). Stone masterfully weaves examples from a variety of Japanese literature throughout every chapter of the book to illustrate this theory of multiple logics, demonstrating that there was never a single, uniform ideal of death, but instead a spectrum of understandings, responses, and coping mechanisms which sought to shape and partake in the attractive possibilities that an ideal death could offer.

The book is organized into seven chapters, which can roughly be subsumed under two main themes: 1) chapters one to four describe the characteristics of an ideal death; and 2) chapters five to seven describe the coping mechanisms created in response to the difficulty of achieving the ideal death. The first chapter traces the emergence of deathbed practices, which according to Stone comes about in the late tenth century as the result of the confluence of three main events: 1) Yoshishige no Yasutane's publication of the first collection of hagiographic accounts of people believed to have achieved the Pure Land (*ōjō Gokuraku ki*); 2) Genshin's instructions for deathbed practice, which effectively inscribed the whole bodhisattva path within a Pure Land framework (*ōjō yōshū*); and 3) the founding of the Twenty-Five Samādhi Society in which its members promised to look after one another at the moment of death.

Through tracing the historical predecessors to death bed rituals, Stone shows that while the conceptual framework for merit transference and liberating birth in Pure Lands had been formed by the Nara period, it was not until the late tenth century that we see exemplary death emerge as a distinct cultural form in literature. Chapter 2 examines the social expectations which shaped medieval Japanese approaches to death and cosmological conceptions of the Pure Land. In the latter part of this chapter, Stone offers penetrating analyses into the way that gender hierarchies played out in *ōjōden* and how even instances that celebrate female attainment tended to depict these women

as approximating a masculine ideal of renunciation and asceticism and thus continued to perpetuate inegalitarian gender conventions.

Chapter 3 looks at the characteristics of an exemplary death and how this ideal was achieved. Preparations for this crucial moment included withdrawal into a separate room where disturbance would be minimal; adorning the secluded room with the right ritual objects to facilitate mindfulness of Amida Buddha; the actual practice of recitation, which would be conducted until the moment of death, and finally the signs of *ōjō* that would ideally appear after a person had passed on. The next chapter elaborates upon the different kinds of extraordinary signs, which marked successful *ōjō*, for example, revelatory dreams of *raigō*-like images, seeing purple clouds in the sky, or even corporeal signs such as the body remaining fresh and omitting a fragrant scent after death.

Most significantly, the many narrative accounts that Stone highlights reveal that the interpreters of *ōjō* signs were not restricted to monks and religious adepts, but instead included people from all facets of society, demonstrating that belief in *ōjō* signs was not exclusive to the religious elite. Sometimes these signs were used to render tragic or inauspicious death – as was the case for Chōmei Hosshinshū and Emperor Horikawa – in a more bearable and meaningful light. As for whether or not these revelatory signs did indeed appear, Stone states that this is beside the point since “belief in the reality of such signs, along with their proper identification and interpretation was integral to religious culture of the time” (219). Stone’s position shows that she takes seriously the signs of *ōjō* insofar as she believes that people in early medieval Japan did so too, treating these signs as positive signifiers of a deceased person’s liberation from an otherwise uncertain existential predicament. I will return to this at the end of the review.

The second part of the book explores the darker side of the ideal of mindful death, namely how individuals coped with the potential failure of not being able to attain this ideal and the measures that were taken to prevent such a thing from happening. Chapter 5 begins with examining several possible hindrances to an ideal death, such as losing mental focus due to physical anguish, losing consciousness, possessing strong worldly attachments, or coming under the influence of demonic interference. The rest of this chapter shows how not-so-ideal deaths on the part of Buddhist lineage holders such as Master Enni were recast in a more positive light by their disciples, a move that was crucial for validating the authority and authenticity of one’s particular lineage. Other coping mechanisms included the sponsorship of Buddhist images dedicated towards the aim of achieving *ōjō*

as well as adopting a quantitative approach to amassing merit, such as by chanting one million *nenbutsu*. As a result of these anxieties about creating the perfect conditions for the right kind of death, the need for a ritual specialist, a kind of death bed attendant (*zenchishiki*) to care for the distinct needs of the dying and in particular for chanting on behalf of the dying one, emerged. Who these attendants were and what functions they played is the topic of Chapter 6. Finally, Chapter 7 outlines innovations in deathbed practice during the Kamakura period, beginning with a discussion on how death bed rites accommodated warriors who often met with violent and sudden endings. This final chapter also provides a short presentation on doctrinal innovations to the soteriological status of the last thought before death. Notable innovations include the Zen practice of “no mind” or “no thought” at the moment of death and A-syllable contemplation (*ajikan*), which gained an association with the name of Amida starting with figures such as Jippan and Kakuban.

Throughout the book, Stone demonstrates a high degree of self-reflexivity about the limitations of the material she uses as well as the analytical categories she applies in ways that current and future scholars in religious studies should note. From the very beginning of the book, Stone expresses a keen awareness of the potential bias in the material she uses – pre-modern sources were generally written for cultural elites. Moreover, most of the sources in the book represent prescriptive hagiographic literature which cannot tell us for certain whether or not people did die in the scripted forms that are described. Nevertheless, whether merely prescriptive or indicative of ways in which people did die, the literature Stone presents us with reflects the ideals that were important to pre-modern Japanese who became increasingly preoccupied with cultivating right thoughts at the last moment of life. As such, Stone treats this literature with the utmost consideration and care.

As for why early medieval Japanese people chose to adopt deathbed practices in the ways that they did, I was delighted to find that Stone does not try to psychologize hagiographical descriptions of *ōjō* signs or offer any kind of rationalization for narrative accounts that may not be immediately comprehensible or believable to contemporary scholars. She takes the opposite stance of endeavoring such rationalization in the conclusion of the book when she problematizes Peter Berger’s thesis that human beings have an overriding need for meaning and thus are willing to embrace uncomfortable and burdensome explanations “as a shield against the terror of meaninglessness” (381). Stone writes: “One problem with arguments for

religious meaning as a social construct lies in their tacit privileging of the observer, according her the superior status of one able to see through the ‘thaumaturgic bonds’ of pre-modern people” (381). This passage echoes Stone’s conclusions in Chapter 4, where she says that quibbling over whether signs of *ōjō* like purple clouds were really seen is missing the greater significance of *ōjō* literature itself. For Stone, the premise of the entire book is not to debate over the experiences people did or did not have, but to unpack what was at stake for those who conceptualized death practices in certain ways and why the attraction of the ideal – *ōjō* – outweighed the risks and anxieties of falling short of this ideal.

Skillfully working with a variety of Japanese literature while integrating useful analytic categories from which scholars can begin to make sense of the diverse repertoire of multiple deathbed logics, Stone eloquently and artfully takes the reader through pre-modern Japan and how Japanese people may have understood and attempted to achieve exemplary death. While the nature of the elite sources used cannot provide hard evidence of whether or not deathbed practices and ideals were taken up by Japanese people more generally, given the vast corpus of literature regarding exemplary death, it is probably more than safe to say that these were issues that people cared about deeply.

Encyclopedic in scope and meticulously written, *Right Thoughts at the Last Moment* is not only a must-read for those working in Japanese religion, literature or pre-modern Japan, but I would suggest that it is a necessary addition to the bookshelf of all scholars of Buddhist studies, Asian religions, and medieval studies more generally. Any scholar seeking to respectfully and critically represent or reconstruct communities, practices, and time periods that have the potential to be othered, misread or misappropriated, would benefit immensely from the benchmarks of reflexivity, caution, and care that Stone’s book exemplifies.

Kan Kimura, trans. Marie Speed, *The Burden of the Past: Problems of Historical Perception in Japan-Korea Relations*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019. 249 pp. ISBN: 978-0472054107, \$29.95.

Reviewed by Jason Morgan

The relationship between Japan and her counterpart in the southern half of the Korean peninsula has changed over time. As circumstances have shifted, the Japan-South Korea affairs have grown in complexity and depth. Their long-shared history, both beneficial and rancorous, freights whatever new exchanges the present brings. And yet, despite – or perhaps because of – this manifold depth, there is a tendency for the parties of this relationship to lose sight of the past in the heat of the moment. Proximity does not necessarily engender familiarity, and it can be as easy to reduce one's neighbor to a mere caricature as one's distant rival. Stereotypes readily pass for analysis when in close quarters, and we often tune out the nuances of a given situation on the assumption that we have heard it all before.

Kobe University professor Kan Kimura's *The Burden of the Past: Problems of Historical Perception in Japan-Korea Relations* provides an in-depth study of the historical strains between Japan and South Korea. In recent years, there has been a spate of unpleasant incidents, which have come to overshadow all other interactions between the two nations. These occurrences can make it all seem as though bad blood and ill will were the only aspects that South Korea and Japan ever had in common. Kimura's book (the deft English translation of the 2014 Japanese original from Minerva Shobo) is a welcome opportunity to take a step back and see the granularity and detail that are so often washed out in the glare of rhetoric. It is also vital to remember that the way the situation is now is not the way it has always been.

Take the comfort women issue, for example. Japan-South Korea relations took a nosedive in 2014 and 2015 after hundreds of US scholars issued a statement condemning the Japanese government for protesting counter-factual passages on comfort women in a world history textbook. Relations also went south after the *Asahi Shimbun* retracted comfort women-related articles from the previous two decades once it became clear that the source of the articles' narrative, Yoshida Seiji, had fabricated claims of having abducted young women on Jeju Island during the Second World War. What had been a reasonably effective working bond darkened into open enmity. The leaders of the two governments tried to create a resolution by

signing an agreement on the comfort women issue in late 2015 but to no avail. Comfort women statues continued to multiply in South Korea – and around the world – and poll after poll found that people in both countries had grown weary of interacting with the other side. Newspapers in Korea and Japan blared one comfort women headline after another. Whatever else was going on between the two nations got drowned out in the latest comfort women-themed round of the “history wars.”

However, this one-issue filter obscures the complicated interplay of factors that allowed for comfort women to become a point of discord between Japan and South Korea in the first place. As Kimura shows, it was mainly the local and global modulations of the Cold War in the 1980s that cleared the field for historical memory of sexual labor to become a bone of contention in the 1990s and beyond. Although it is difficult to imagine today, comfort women had been a non-issue for most of the postwar. But then two poignant factors occurred: Japan got rich, and South Korea transitioned – messily – to democracy. Kimura clearly explains that Japan’s rise to a world economic powerhouse, particularly during the “bubble era” of the 1980s, caused consternation and unease in South Korea. Was Japan preparing to reassert its might militarily and economically? At the same time, the loosening of censorship controls in South Korea led to what Kimura calls an “explosive receptiveness to Marxism.” This 1980s-style Marxism arrived on the shores of South Korea in large part as “dependency theory,” which was the ideological mix out of which the comfort women issue would eventually emerge (95–96).

According to dependency theory, Kimura explains, many in South Korea came to believe (96–97):

the modern world was controlled by multinational capital, and particularly that of the economic superpowers, Japan and the United States. This capital was using the power of its agents—the Japanese and US governments—to control the Korean peninsula, ruthlessly exploiting the Korean people. As the military regime ruling South Korea was no more than a puppet of Japanese and US giant capital, there was no way that it could seriously serve the interests of the South Korean people. The democratization of South Korea was a battle with this foreign-controlled regime, so the South Korean people had to take on not only the military regime but also its US and Japanese backers.

Kimura goes to point out that the comfort women issue took on an important meaning in this context:

Which group among the exploited South Korean people was in the weakest position? The answer was women, and particularly sex workers, who were placed in the most humiliating position of all. As exemplified by the fact that most of their customers were American soldiers and Japanese tourists (this was the peak of the *gisaeng* tourism era), prostitutes were the ultimate embodiment of the oppression and exploitation of the South Korean people. Comfort women represented the past of those Korean women exploited through their engagement in prostitution. In other words, in addressing the comfort women issue, one was also addressing the issue of women in capitalist society, and indeed contemporary South Korea in general.

Kimura concludes that, “In this manner, the comfort women issue was imbued with symbolic status within the new framework of the historical perception dispute, which clearly identified South Korea’s ruling elite as the enemy while positioning the ‘conscientious intelligentsia’ and the women’s movement in Japan as allies of the movement in South Korea.”

Coupled with this rapidly evolving ideological situation in South Korea, the Japanese government failed to understand that the political landscape of its peninsular counterpart was transformed by the democratic shift and its breakdown of elite hegemony. Japanese politicians, nonplussed by the sudden irruption of an issue that had been settled in the 1965 treaty, attempted to engage with the South Korean side, but to no avail. The comfort women issue had taken on an emotionally charged, nationalistic valence, and countless apologies by a long train of Japanese politicians from across the political spectrum did little but further antagonize the South Korean public. What we see as a historical issue today, then, is two historical issues at once: the comfort women issue, and the changes in East Asia – especially South Korea – brought about by the ongoing transmogrification of the Cold War.

Kimura’s book shines in foregrounding this intervenient Cold War period. Throughout his text, Kimura reminds readers that the Japanese-South Korean past did not end in 1945, but continued to unfold thereafter, often in counterintuitive ways. Particularly enlightening is Kimura’s use of databases to show how newspapers in both countries have focused on various issues

over the past eight decades. Comfort women, for instance, merited just eight mentions in the *Asahi Shimbun* from 1945 to 1989, and then 600 from 1990 to 1994, while there were only three mentions of the same issue in the *Chosun Ilbo* from 1945 to 1994, and then 459 from 1995 to 1999. As the Cold War waned, the comfort women issue was moved to the fore. Kimura also skillfully uses databases to show that the “textbook issue,” much touted in both South Korea and Japan as indicating a hard lurch to the right by the Japanese public, was almost entirely the product of bad *Asahi* reporting and picayune revisions to educational review procedures among Japanese bureaucrats (who are hardly known for their strident nationalism). What we think we know about the Japan-South Korea relationship has been greatly distorted by “historical memory” failures of our own. The data do not support the past version of the Japan-South Korea history rehearsed today.

Divided into three parts and seven chapters, *The Burden of the Past* is a step-by-step re-introduction to these and many other complexities between South Korea and Japan. The “theoretical examination” comprising part one is a helpful entrée to the case studies – the textbook and comfort women issues – which make up parts two and three. Serialized over a three-year period from the spring of 2011 to spring of 2014 for *Kiwameru* magazine, Kimura’s book has a lively immediacy. The English-language translation is especially welcome as it will make accessible to a wider public (both academic and lay) Kimura’s balanced approach to this topic. Students are especially encouraged to read it as an antidote to the often-shrill voices that portray Japan-South Korea interactions in stark, one-dimensional terms.

I have one quibble, however. Like many others in the academy and the media who write about East Asian history, Kimura speaks of South Korea’s “colonial” history under Japanese rule, but this is not quite correct. It is more than semantic hairsplitting to point out that, after 1910, the Korean peninsula was not a colony of Japan, but a part of Japan proper. Annexed in August of that year, the Korean peninsula became just as Japanese as Hawaii is American. This distinction has enormous consequences, some of which Kimura details. Indeed, the peace treaty signed between Japan and South Korea in 1965 contains language reflecting a compromise between these nations over whether the 1910 annexation was legal at all. Kimura’s use of the word “colonial” to describe the annexation period is likely an irenic linguistic gesture by a scholar striving to present his subject in a balanced way. Nevertheless, as the legality of the 1910 document impinges upon all subsequent Japan-South Korean matters, Kimura might have spent a little

more time explaining how his choice of terminology fits in with the larger rhetorical field.

That said, this cavil should not deter anyone from reading *The Burden of the Past*. Kimura's fine-tuned historical analysis and perceptive political insights stand to bring some much-needed perspective to a contested subject. The University of Michigan Press (in cooperation with the steadily growing Japan Library series) is to be commended for bringing into print this valuable addition to English-language scholarship on Japan-South Korean relations.

Bryan D. Lowe, *Ritualized Writing: Buddhist Practice and Scriptural Cultures in Ancient Japan*. Honolulu: Kuroda Institute, University of Hawaii Press, 2017. 296 pp. ISBN: 978-0824859404, \$60.00.

Reviewed by Justin Peter McDonnell

Bryan Lowe's *Ritualized Writing: Buddhist Practice and Scriptural Cultures in Ancient Japan* examines eighth-century scriptoriums and colophons to assess writing practices and ritual copying of religious scriptures and its role in constituting ethical beings and communities. His study pays particular attention to the functions and effects of ritual practice in different social and religious circles, including nonroyal officials, laborers, and scribes. In providing an account of Nara Buddhism that looks beyond elites and state-popular binary narratives, we bear witness to how religion was practiced across the archipelago.

Divided into six chapters, including an introduction and epilogue, Lowe's book traces the developments of the reproduction of East Asian traditions and how recitation and transcription come to be ritualized practices. The author draws from Saba Mahmood's ethnographic work, *Politics of Piety*, to explore how sutra copying could "create merit" (13) and help practitioners follow the bodhisattva path. It could, as we will see in the final three chapters, also reconfigure communities and imperial lineages. It is in the final chapters that Lowe delves into the 10,000 documents at the Todaiji Scriptorium in Nara, which illuminates text among monks and laity and ritual practice.

In Chapters 1 and 2, or Part One on "Ritual Practices," the author surveys tales across the Buddhist pantheon that describe transcribing religious texts and precautionary steps to ensure ritual purity. In texts as varied as *Nihon Ryoki*, *Fayuan zhulin*, and Gilgit's *Ratnaketuparivarta*,

defilement, including sexual misconduct and meat-eating while copying scriptures resulted in great consequences and even death. Furthermore, there is an abundance of stories of sutras seeking their owners to provide them with dedications, especially if proper attention to Buddhist ritual was not followed. Sutras were often dedicated to ancestors, parents, and emperors, and tied up with notions of karma and the repayment of debt. They also bestowed virtue on copyists and the commissioners of transcription. That is, they could serve as vehicles to the bodhisattva path for people from various walks of life. Furthermore, prayer texts or *gammon* employed Chinese literary and Buddhist canonical traditions and poetics, offering patrons a rich and appropriate way to express their understanding of Buddhist scripture and Buddhist cosmology creatively. In short, texts were objects of worship and were ritualized in their production and use.

Part Two, "Organizations," comprised of Chapters 3 and 4, focuses on communities of religious practitioners in the Nara period and the emergence and development of a systemic bureaucratic state to secure and administer large-scale ritualized writing. Chapter 3 delves into fellowship groups (*chishiki yui*), where faithful Buddhists participated in shared textual practices, as this ultimately helped spread Buddhism across Japan. Fellowships, Lowe argues, were active at every level of society and maintained dual loyalties between both the state and the local. Members of the collective served the interests of powerful figures and institutions, but the fellowships also gave them opportunities to cultivate themselves and foster solidarity with like-minded individuals. Women, too, could cultivate themselves via religious observances and practices and often held leadership roles in these collectives. In examining the Ketaji scrolls, Lowe posits that while fellowships could be harnessed by regional hierarchies to strengthen their lineages and affect local politics, there may also have been ecclesiastical fellowship groups composed entirely of monks of varying stature, nuns, and lay practitioners. True or otherwise, fellowships encouraged the deepening of religious practice and efficacy and the forging of bonds to create new ideas of friendship and community.

Chapter 4 traces the institutionalization of sutra transcription and the birth of the scriptorium. Large-scale projects commissioned by wealthy patrons required institutional expertise, resources, and skilled workers and administrators. In its early manifestation, scriptoria functioned as household organizations of wealthy patrons who could rely on and seek help from the state, but whose projects did not always overlap with the interests of the state. Prince Nagaya, for example, commissioned projects at his

household scriptoria to mourn and memorialize the dead. Komyoshi's scriptoria, whose household office would later become the *Todaiji* scriptorium, commissioned the largest canon up until that period. Though it became an official scriptorium, it also fulfilled Komyoshi's ritual needs to become a *bodhisattva*, mourn the dead, and bring stability to the political realm. The escalation of bureaucracy also benefitted private projects of transcription. Patrons outside the imperial line and beyond the capital could practice ritualized writing and utilize *Todaiji* for human resources and materials to mourn the dead and fulfill their ritual needs. Lowe underscores that there were multifarious interrelations with the social, cultural, and political fabric in the emergence of sutra copying that did not fit neatly into rigid categories of state and popular Buddhism.

The latter half of his book includes significant contributions to Japanese scholarship and, more broadly, to the field of religious studies. Using a micro-historical approach, Chapter 5 provides a glimpse into the life of a scribe named Kurakuni no Muraji Hitonari. While the work required of a scribe was difficult and the pay meager, the scriptorium allowed him to cultivate himself as a Buddhist practitioner and learn the skills necessary for full ordination as a monk. Indeed, power and politics are always present – as the reader is never sure whether he was forced to work at the scriptorium – but this narrative also reminds us that power was not always consumed passively by those from humbler origins. In participating at the Office of Sutra Transcription, he was able to embark upon a monastic path and gain the necessary qualifications, including calligraphic, literary, recitational, and bureaucratic skills. Others participating in administrative and laborious roles within these specific structures and institutions may also have been able to pursue monastic ordination or create other opportunities for themselves. Lowe demonstrates that low-ranking individuals “shouldered the rise of Buddhism in early Japan” (169). More scholarship is warranted that tells their stories, their abilities to craft meaning and opportunities for themselves in the face of adversity, and the meaning of religious practice in their daily lives.

In his final chapter, Lowe uses the same micro-historical methodological approach to examine those who have been privileged in scholarly narratives, members of the royal elite. However, he provides a new perspective on the relationship between ritual and state, asking us to rethink the control of Buddhism by the state as well as the theater-state model, first coined by Clifford Geertz and elaborated upon by Stanley Tambiah to describe the demonstration of statecraft and power through performance and ritual. Lowe begins by trying to appreciate why queen consort Komyoshi has

taken up the transcription of *Scripture on Saving and Protecting the Body and Life*, *Golden Light Sutra*, and *Scripture on Brahma's Spirit Tablets*. Noting the timing of the project and its timeline at Todaiji, he traces the political context of the period. At a time when there was uncertainty over whether Princess Abe would be able to preserve the future royal lineage, Komyoshi and newly abdicated Emperor Shomu began commissioning specialized Buddhist texts for fear of retribution for the illegitimate killing of political rivals. Whereas the copying of sutra has often been understood as a justification of authority, here it served to appease demons and deities and to ensure the safe passageway to the throne. In so doing, the deities not only “defended the realm from enemies of the throne; they also observed humans and punished them for misconduct” (202).

Although not mentioned by Lowe, there is a similarity to the Chinese Mandate of Heaven. Where the ruler had to be virtuous or otherwise be overthrown, elites were controlled by a heavenly system. Where there was agency for nonelites, there was also discipline for elites under a watchful divine. In copying and reciting sutras to rectify a violent past, were Komyoshi and Shomu trying to bend the deities and spirits to their will, or were they primarily concerned with upholding the ideals of the sutras and the Buddhist way? For the author's aims of this chapter, this question is not asked, but this reader is interested in whether the imperial relationship, in this instance, is more of an act of transaction than one of piety.

In conclusion, Lowe's argument that sutra copying was not necessarily in the service of state Buddhism is persuasive and nuanced. The approach – examining how religion was practiced and how the relationship between text and society was for the faithful Buddhist – provides a way of thinking about individuals beyond a kind of exclusive focus on elites and founders. Throughout the book, the fluidity between state and popular networks, and between individuals as well as communities, helps us to reimagine Japanese Buddhism that does not give prominence to demarcated social and economic divisions.

Furthermore, *Ritualized Writing* is the first piece of scholarship in English on documents from the Todaiji scriptorium and the Shoshoin; they are a vital and unique archival collection which he confidently details in his final historical narratives in Chapter 5 and 6. Lowe opens an essential world of further research and study, as only a portion of the documents have been studied here. Finally, his ability to wield tremendously compelling narratives from scriptoria sources that might typically seem of better use to an economic historian reminds scholars and writers to re-evaluate approaches to archival

research and the narrative qualities of historical writing. Lowe's work joins recent scholarship on the reconsideration of state Buddhism in early Japan, including Asuka Sango's *The Halo of Golden Light: Imperial Authority and Buddhist Ritual in Heian Japan*, which illuminates monks' sense of agency and power within state structures. His research also complements other works focused on the cult of the book, sutra religious practices, and the body, particularly Charlotte Eubank's *Miracles of Book and Body: Buddhist Textual Culture and Medieval Japan*.

Providing an intriguing portrait of early Japanese culture, the accessibility of this book makes it a worthy option for use in courses in Buddhist and religious studies, Japanese history, and courses at the nexus of ethics and politics. The book could also prove worthwhile for non-specialists of the Nara period and ancient Japan, especially because of the section of the micro-histories. By paving the way for greater consideration of agency and society as well as peripheral figures in scholarly accounts, Lowe's contribution to the field will hopefully be followed by other researchers.

Steven Heine, *Readings of Dōgen's Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. 312 pp. ISBN: 978-0231182294, \$35.00.

Reviewed by Jundo Cohen

This review can be titled, "Doin' Dōgen Right!" which is what Steven Heine provides in his excellent new book on Dōgen and his masterwork, the *Shōbōgenzō*. Indisputably, *Readings of Dōgen's Treasury of the True Dharma Eye* may be considered the single best and most-detailed survey and explanation of what Dōgen philosophized about that I have ever read by a leading scholar. I offer that opinion as a Sōtō Zen priest and longtime student of the *Shōbōgenzō* who is well aware of the tasks involved in analyzing it. Heine covers most of the same ground as other members of the "Dōgen Club" (such as the wonderful volumes by Hee-jin Kim, Shohaku Okumura, Kazuaki Tanahashi, Taigen Leighton, Carl Bielefeldt, Francis Cook, and others). However, Heine's presentation is unusually clear, comprehensive, and focused. It is well organized and well expressed, especially given the difficult subject matter.

I do not believe that Dōgen can be presented more completely and, most importantly, as accurately and comprehensibly as is done in this book.

For that reason, I believe the book will become the main “go-to” guide ahead of others, as the first book to turn to for a serious dive into Dōgen’s bottomless depths. Many priests and practitioners are sometimes heard to criticize “academic” as being unable to “get Dōgen” because they are not practitioners and thus are considered outside of the field or lost in their own ideas. That is very true quite often. However, it is not at all true in this case: Heine truly knows the teachings of Dōgen better than about anyone alive, has Dōgen’s number, gets his game. Period. Nine Bows.

Now, the book may not be easy for newcomers to Dōgen: Steven Heine’s presentation is precise and intelligent and avoids academic jargon, but the prose can be dense. The professor’s writing style consists of winding vines of beautiful words and multi-perspectival layered observations, although the density of his writing style is necessary for precision in expressing Dōgen’s equally tangled and layered interpretative offerings. The author’s elegantly structured sentences work to hit the target on what Dōgen was examining, and I feel that Heine succeeds in making the mark time and again. Nonetheless, it may be difficult for readers who are not already exceptionally well versed in Dōgen’s ways to get started. Equally so, anyone who already deeply appreciates Dōgen and gets his music will savor this as a tour de force.

Heine’s book should be on the shelf of every true Dōgen fan. Personally, if anyone asks me in the coming years what they should read for a comprehensive explanation of Dōgen and the *Shōbōgenzō*, especially if it is someone who already has some good understanding of the topic, I will point them to this book. This is where they should go, besides the *zazen* sitting cushion, of course!

Although I agreed with more than 99% of Heine’s interpretations of Dōgen, I found myself disagreeing with, or perhaps misunderstanding, two passages of the book. First, Heine’s explanation of the opening sentences of the “Genjōkōan” fascicle lost me a bit. Generally, I take the more obvious view of the effect that mountains are mountains, mountains are not mountains, mountains are mountains again, and yet we still live in a world where we cry sometimes. In other words, the first sentence refers to the divided world of birth and death, flawed human beings down here and ideal Buddhas on high, ignorance versus a distant and quite separate state of enlightenment, and the practice to move us from one to the other. Then, there is the realm of emptiness, where all the opposites drop away. Next, through just sitting meditation (*shikan taza*), we encounter such a level of wisdom that all these “opposites” are “not two,” so that there is no birth and no death. Even in a

world of birth and death, ignorant beings who are Buddhas yet do not know and act as Buddhas find that their liberation comes from such a realization, so sadness is felt, and flowers continue to fall.

I also struggled with Heine's view of four main stages of awareness, which (if I read it correctly) he finds in the lines, "Those who have great realization of delusion are buddhas; those who are greatly deluded about realization are sentient beings. Further, there are those who continue realizing beyond realization, who are in delusion throughout delusion" (迷を大悟するは諸佛なり, 悟に大迷なるは衆生なり. さらに悟上に得悟する漢あり, 迷中又迷の漢あり). I do not see this as four stages. I believe that Buddhas, in this world, have great realization about delusion even if they still live in a world of delusion, while ordinary people are just deluded both about what is their delusion and what is "enlightenment" that they think is far away. Further, those same wise folks do not stop with such insight but keep on each moment, making the realization come alive in circumstance after changing circumstance, while the ordinary deluded folks stay deluded in delusion after delusion. Therefore, the contrast is more between the two kinds of folks (which, by the way, in practice enlightenment, human beings can have both within at different times and situations), rather than "four stages." However, these are mere minor quibbles in trying to digest what is otherwise an altogether significant achievement in the field of Dōgen studies.