

Pure Land rebirth. Genshin was a catholic Mahayana thinker who viewed the *nenbutsu* in that context. Certainly, Genshin drew upon and presented the Pure Land as a special path especially effective for our latter age, but in so doing did not reject the rest of the practices found within the broader Mahayana tradition (p. 287). Rather, it seems that Genshin marshaled that diversity in service of his project of outlining the essentials for Pure Land rebirth.

Rhodes reiterates three key points underlying Genshin's mission in writing the *Ōjōyōshū*: First, how do beings attain awakening in times of chaos? Like us today, Genshin lived in a time of great uncertainty and social, economic, and political change. In the Pure Land path, Genshin found a way to address this concern, and as we see the growing popularity of Pure Land Buddhism in later generations, we can see that while Genshin was not a prime mover necessarily, he was certainly an important contributor to an evolving Mahayana soteriological discourse rooted in the Pure Land path. Second, during the Heian period, the *nenbutsu* functioned in a diverse religious context, but emerged as a primary method whereby Buddhists could direct their own future rebirth in the Pure Land. Third, the *Ōjōyōshū* is a comprehensive text that exemplifies the catholic nature of Mahayana philosophy and practice, and is rooted in and especially prioritizes meditative forms of *nenbutsu* practice. Within this context, Genshin harnesses his considerable acumen and expertise in multiple areas of Buddhist study to promote the recitation of "Namo Amida Butsu" as a fundamental practice that renders the lofty goal of Pure Land rebirth possible even for ordinary beings.

In conclusion, this work will certainly be a classic in the field and prove extremely useful for graduate students and scholars interested in diverse fields in Japanese, Buddhist, and religious studies. Once Rhodes's translation of the *Ōjōyōshū* itself is published, I think that the work under consideration will function as a companion volume for studying the text in greater depth. I cannot recommend this book more highly.

Ritualized Writing: Buddhist Practice and Scriptural Cultures in Ancient Japan. By Bryan D. Lowe. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017. 296 pages. Hardback: ISBN-13: 978-0-8248-5940-4.

LAURENCE E. M. MANN

This book is impressive. It offers a sophisticated and detailed account of early Buddhist manuscript copying practices in Japan, and the ritual and political cultures surrounding them. In everyday discussions of books, "dense" is sometimes synonymous with "unreadable"—but not so in this case. *Ritualized Writing* is tightly packed with infor-

mation and would be of substantial value for the wealth of manuscripts and secondary scholarship it introduces alone. However, it is also clearly written and engaging, and at times almost journalistic. Throughout, Lowe's authorial voice comes across loud and clear, and readers are left in no doubt as to the tenets of his argument, which are credible and compelling.

Ritualized Writing fills a lacuna in English-language scholarship on the roles of writing and literature in early Japan. In this respect, it follows in a line of methodologically sophisticated and influential recent studies, including Lurie's *Realms of Literacy* and Duthie's *Man'yōshū and the Imperial Imagination*.¹ It is noteworthy that Lowe's study highlights the wealth of data on early Japan supplied by the *Shōsōin monjo* 正倉院文書 (Shōsōin Documents), a hoard of over ten thousand eighth-century manuscripts that has received less attention than it deserves. Manuscript material of this kind is scrutinized in light of other documentary evidence from Japan, as well as appropriate sources from Silla and China. While bringing them to the attention of the Japanese studies community in general, Lowe never loses sight of the Buddhist dimension of the texts under scrutiny—treating the latter as serious and important, and avoiding, as he puts it, “reducing religion to pure politics” (p. 8). His analysis centers on the concept of “ritualized writing.” This is understood as writing that is given a special status as part of a performative toolkit of ritual, which both gave structure to early Japanese society and challenges traditional notions of “state Buddhism” in this period. This approach is grounded in scholarship on manuscript culture from around the world and is convincingly consistent with accounts of interactions between other human societies and religious texts.

Chapters 1 and 2 offer an exposition of Lowe's overall conception of “ritualized writing” in the context of Buddhist scripture in early Japan. Chapter 1 identifies this as dependent on notions of ritual purity and the accumulation of ethically-defined merit through sponsorship of, and participation in, scripture-copying projects and rites. The chapter supports its contentions concerning manuscript culture with an impressive array of early Japanese and broader East Asian Buddhist scriptural traditions, glimpsed through manuscript colophons, anecdotes, and tales. Chapter 2 enters into a closer reading of some of the *ganmon* 願文 (Ch. *yuánwén*; Buddhist prayer texts) encountered in the colophons to sutra manuscripts from this period, surveying their ritual and literary contexts. While it leaves aside interesting questions of how the texts were vocalized, situating quotations of *kundoku* 訓読 readings (p. 69) alongside discussions of tonal prosody, it covers a lot of important new territory, particularly in its descriptions of the literary phrasing of prayers for the dead (pp. 71–79). The rhetorical construction and deployment of Buddhist prayers is consistent with what we know of ritual poetry and

¹ Torquil Duthie, 2014. *Man'yōshū and the Imperial Imagination in Early Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); David B. Lurie, *Realms of Literacy: Early Japan and the History of Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011).

other texts in this period, for example the Shinto *norito* 祝詞. Further, patrons' apparently careful management of intertext in the construction of suitable afterlives (p. 78) is consistent with Lowe's overall view of ritual merit and, moreover, underscores the role of literary language in assisting texts to achieve their performative functions in eighth-century Japan.

Chapters 3 and 4 together discuss the organizational community frameworks underpinning the copying, preservation, and reception of Buddhist scriptures during this period. These frameworks include fellowships and collectives (chapter 3), and institutions, such as state and household scriptoria and associated bureaucracies (chapter 4). In an approach that foreshadows the "microhistories" of chapters 5 and 6, chapter 4 also tracks the fascinating day-to-day bureaucratic processes involved in sutra-copying projects, as well as the involvement, in the development of so-called scriptoria, of several prominent individuals connected to the imperial family. Both chapters point to the intermingling of state and private interests. As state officials became the organizers of community fellowships of the faithful, so too were aristocratic and lower-ranking bureaucrats able to benefit from their personal connections with state infrastructure. Aristocratic household scriptoria could turn into state enterprises, as was the case at Tōdaiji 東大寺 (see the appendix, pp. 215–16); the growth of such institutions, likewise, spurred on and supported the privatization of scripture copying during the Nara 奈良 period (710–794).

Chapters 5 and 6 document the institutions of Nara scripture-copying through case studies—the personal stories of some of the individuals staffing them and specific examples of projects undertaken therein. These case studies evoke the integrative and nuanced approach Lowe adopts overall; individual practitioners adopted multiple, often complementary, roles over time, building experience and increasing their chances of social betterment. Scholars of Heian 平安 (794–1185) and medieval Japan will be unsurprised that the latter was more readily achieved by individuals who could also demonstrate knowledge of various continental literary texts, which they were able to access through their connections with scripture-copying institutions (p. 157). Rulers, alongside lower-ranked patrons and copyists, exposed themselves to the same powers of divine punishment and retribution if they did not regularly reveal themselves to be participating in meritorious acts of Buddhist discipline, such as ritualized writing. The final chapters of Lowe's analysis thus cast additional doubt on the once pervasive view that Buddhism was propagated among ordinary people in Japan chiefly during a sort of Kamakura Reformation. As Lowe himself concludes: "The Nara period was not a corrupt era that later reformers reacted against. It was a foundational time that enabled subsequent developments" (p. 213).

For me, the book's extraordinarily convincing narrative only wavers slightly in its framing of two relatively minor points. One is the fleeting juxtaposition of "inter-

nal notions of faith or belief,” in contrast with “embracing wholesome conduct . . . uphold[ing] precepts” and participation in “regular ritual practice” (p. 99). Can external patterns of religious behavior ever be wholly separated from commitments that are more internal to the individual? At various locations elsewhere in the book, ritualized writing is related to belief, particularly of divine retribution and punishment. Had practitioners not believed deeply in the powers policing their ritual commitments, would they have petitioned their concerns about potential defilement (p. 44), or been so keen to “express devotional commitments” (p. 139), or “personal piety” (p. 142)?

The second point arises from Lowe’s situating himself within an interpretative tradition described as “shifting the focus from meaning to *doing*” (p. 12), especially when this follows closely a note to the effect that “semantic meaning is frequently secondary to physically enacting the text” (p. 8). The speech act theory underpinning this discourse has given rise to decades of elaboration outside its original context; however, performative acts are constituted in the pragmatics of linguistic as well as non-linguistic communication, as this book clearly illustrates. The second half of chapter 6, for example, is dedicated to how the content (meaning?) of a sutra, copied at a particular time, reflected the politico-ritual needs of its historical moment. Chapter 2 is a skillful demonstration of the integrated power of linguistic manipulation, rhetorical structure, and performative intertextuality. Chapter 5 notes that Nara-period scripture copyists are known for a style of handwriting that is “highly legible in a way that facilitates recitation” (p. 162). It can, indeed, be argued that clear reproduction of characters and words helped practitioners chant the text, to fulfill various ritual and disciplinary commitments, rather than to “understand” the narrative in the way people in the modern world approach, say, a novel. However, in carrying this reasoning to an extreme, which Lowe does not, we run into the same artificial binary distinction seen above—the internality of understanding, versus the externality of practice or performance. The very existence of *kundoku* itself is testament to an exegetic tradition complementary to performative enactments of text copying and recital.

Overall, *Ritualized Writing* offers a sophisticated treatment of Buddhist texts in early Japan. It tends toward thick description of emic categories, in the process deconstructing numerous analytic binarisms: local vs. state, private vs. public, lay vs. clergy, bureaucracy vs. ritual, “popular” Buddhism vs. “state” Buddhism, to name a few significant examples. With so much to offer, in both theoretical sophistication and granularity of analysis, I have no doubt that this book will prove useful to scholars of early Japan for years to come.