

Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography*. Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 1999, 227 pp., 22 colour illus., 104 black-and-white illus.

Gail F. Chin

Volume 24, numéro 2, 1997

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1071668ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1071668ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (imprimé)

1918-4778 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Chin, G. F. (1997). Compte rendu de [Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography*. Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 1999, 227 pp., 22 colour illus., 104 black-and-white illus.] *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 24(2), 71–72.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1071668ar>

Bauwerk und Bildwerk im Hochmittelalter. Anschauliche Beiträge zur Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte (Gießen, 1981), pp. 7–34.

- 7 See the seminal essay by Meyer Schapiro, "On the Aesthetic Attitude in Romanesque Art" (1947) in his *Romanesque Art: Selected Papers* (New York, 1977), pp. 1–27.
- 8 See, for example, Ronald Weissman, "Taking Patronage Seriously: Mediterranean Values and Renaissance Society," in F. W. Kent and Patricia Simons, *Patronage, Art and Society in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 25–45.
- 9 As Margot Fassler, "Liturgy and Sacred History in the Twelfth-Century Tympana at Chartres," *Art Bulletin*, 75, no. 3 (Sept. 1993), 499–520, makes clear, the allegorical tenor of the sculptures on the mid-twelfth-century Royal Portal explicitly reflects the liturgical entrance of the bishop into his church, rather than relating primarily to any transformative experience of the faithful.
- 10 Compare, for example, Kendall's transcriptions and translations with those of Christine B. Verzar, "Text and Image in North Italian Romanesque Sculpture," in *The Romanesque Frieze and its Spectator*, ed. Deborah Kahn (London, 1992), pp. 121–140, 205–07. Several transcription errors in Verzar's article jump out immediately, and her translations do not appear to respect as closely as Kendall's the original Latin syntax. In making this comparison, I in no way intend to belittle Verzar's very interesting work. She is one of a very small number of art historians who have begun to consider portal inscriptions seriously. Rather, I wish to indicate how valuable Kendall's work might be in furthering such efforts.
- 11 As with any pioneering first effort, it is to be hoped that this publication stimulates a wide response, and if necessary, a revised edition might eventually be considered by the publisher. One fairly significant set of inscriptions not included in the Catalogue, for example, are those of the two late 12th-century tympana from the church of Saint-Pierre-le-Puellier now in the Musée de Bourges; see Marie-Louise Thérél, *Le Triomphe de la Vierge-Eglise. Sources historiques, littéraires et iconographiques* (Paris, 1984), pp. 58–59.

ELIZABETH TEN GROTENHUIS, *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography*. Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 1999, 227 pp., 22 colour illus., 104 black-and-white illus.

Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis' book is a general survey of those Japanese pictures loosely referred to as "*mandara*" / mandala, encompassing the traditional esoteric mandala, as well as the Pure Land *hensōzu* of the Buddhist traditions and pictures associated with the *kami*-worshipping tradition, or what was formerly referred to as Shintō. The underlying theme of her book is that *mandalas* are pictorial evocations of geographic places in Asia. Secondarily, it is a defense of her use of the broad and popular interpretation of the word "*mandara*" in Japan, a term not only so used by the general public, but also by art historians.

The book opens with a chapter on the continental background of the Taima mandala, which was used as an icon of worship by the Japanese Pure Land sect of Hōnen (1212–1333). The first chapter deals with historical, doctrinal and textual matters concerning the Taima mandala in India and China. There is a discussion of the background of the texts relating to the iconography and its formation; particularly interesting is the section concerning the nine outer courts. These courts depict the nine ways in which the Buddha descends to greet the dying believer at the point of death. Recent research has shown that the concept of nine is based upon Chinese geography of nine provinces, nine categories of people, nine rankings of officials, painters, chess players, and so forth. The number nine was adapted into Buddhist thought from Confucianism and Daoism. The chapter is completed with a discussion of the manifestation of the number nine in paintings related to the Taima mandala from the Dunhuang Caves.

From here, ten Grotenhuis moves into the Dual World Mandalas of esoteric Buddhism and images of individual dei-

ties. In the second to the fourth chapters ten Grotenhuis discusses the mandalas of the Two Worlds – the Diamond and Womb Worlds – which is an introduction to esoteric Buddhism and the concepts surrounding mandalas. She relates the mandalas to notions of sacred geography from China, the Indian stupa, and South Asian sources. Discussions of esoteric Buddhism can become quite dry and incomprehensible to the uninitiated, but ten Grotenhuis manages to elucidate this subject clearly. After contextualizing the esoteric mandalas, there is a discussion of extant examples of these works from Japan. The fifth chapter is concerned with variations of the mandalas of the Two Worlds in Japan.

The sixth chapter again deals with the Taima mandala, but in Japan. Chronologically, esotericism precedes the sectarian Pure Land traditions associated with the Taima mandala, so I am unsure why ten Grotenhuis chose to isolate the first chapter on continental sources of the Taima mandala from the Japanese chapter by inserting the intervening chapters on esoteric imagery. It would have made more sense to place these two chapters on the Taima mandala and other Pure Land traditions together. The Taima mandala, which is of Chinese origin, was re-discovered after centuries of obscurity by a Pure Land Japanese monk, who was seeking an icon of worship for the newly founded sect. This matter is followed by discussions about copies of the Taima mandala and its variations in Japan and abroad. It is difficult to obtain permission to view many of these paintings, though one can find them in black-and-white reproductions in various books.

The book ends with paintings of the Kasuga and Kumanō cults within *kami*-worship of the native Japanese tradition. The Kasuga and Kumanō Shrines are actual places, which are sacred realms on the earth and paradises associated with particular deities. This chapter is interspersed with photographs of these

places by the author, which provide an immediacy to the discussion of other-worldly art. Scholarship on non-Buddhist Japanese religious art is rare, and while most Western scholars in the field have visited shrines, few have been allowed the opportunity to investigate the art or the beliefs of this fascinating facet of Japanese culture.

This book is an original contribution amongst Western-language studies. It is a welcome addition to Toyo Ishida's book, *Esoteric Buddhist Painting*, as well as ten Grotenhuis' other publications on the Taima mandala.¹ Other books in Western languages generally deal with mandalas more broadly, crossing Asian borders.² And, while ten Grotenhuis' work is focused on the Japanese mandala, it is, nevertheless, easily accessible for non-specialists, being written in a lucid non-technical style. The bibliography of the book, mostly art historical books and articles, is comprehensive. Nearly every major book and article in Western languages up to the year 1998 is included; it is obvious that ten Grotenhuis has read extensively in her field. Therefore, this book is very useful for students of Japanese art, especially for those who teach in the field.

There are some who would criticize ten Grotenhuis for her broad approach to the history of the Japanese mandala, but this should be recognized as evidence of her erudition on the topic. Most Buddhist art historians in Japan and elsewhere are trained to work within one sectarian tradition, such as esoteric or Pure

Land. This is because the field requires the specialist to understand the sectarian doctrine and the vocabulary of the art thoroughly. Reading and coming to terms with Buddhist primary sources and contemporary secondary materials is an onerous task; ask anyone who has read an article from Mochizuki's ten-volume encyclopaedia of Buddhism written in pre-war period style Japanese.³ Few native Japanese or non-Japanese can approach the reading of a sutra, a primary Buddhist source, with ease. Most of us, including the Japanese, read with a wide array of dictionaries, and we require years to master a single genre of Buddhist art, so ten Grotenhuis should be applauded for taking on the task of such a broad topic that crosses sectarian borders.

GAIL F. CHIN
University of Regina

Notes

- 1 Hisatoyo Ishida, *Esoteric Buddhist Painting*, trans. E. Dale Saunders (Tokyo and New York, 1987); and Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *The Revival of the Taima Mandala* (New York, 1985).
- 2 For example, Denise Patry Leidy and Robert Thurman, *Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment* (New York and Boston, 1997).
- 3 Mochizuki Shinkô et al., eds, *Bukkyô daijiten*, rev. edn, 10 vols (Kyoto, 1954-63).

Gill Perry, ed., *Gender and Art* (Art and its Histories: 3). New Haven and London, Open University and Yale University Press, 1999, 267 pp., 69 colour plates, 132 black-and-white illus., \$27.50 (U.S.), \$41.25 (Cdn) paper.

In the preface to this book we are told that it forms part of a six-part series published in 1999, for an Open University second-level course aimed at students who are new to the discipline of art history and for those who have already undertaken some study in this area. The six books cover the following subjects: *Academies, Museums and Canons of Art*, eds Gill Perry and Colin Cunningham; *The Changing Status of the Artist*, eds Emma Barker, Nick Webb and Kim Woods; *The Challenge of the Avant-Garde*, ed. Paul Wood; *Views of Difference: Different Views of Art*, ed. Catherine King; *Contemporary Cultures of Display*, ed. Emma Barker; and this book on *Gender and Art*. This review will comment on the latter, based on my experiences using this text in a course that was aimed specifically at two types of students: those who were new to the study of feminist methodologies within art criticism and art history, and students who had had a limited exposure to theoretical ideas in other courses, such as film studies or women's studies. My course had no prerequisites, and the book seemed to fill a niche, as it was "designed to

introduce readers to the role and importance of gender in the study of art and art history" (p. 7).

I should explain that my specialization in Late Medieval and Renaissance Studies influenced my placement of the book on the course reading list. Part of my motive in selecting the book was to address an important point within the discipline, a point sometimes lost on scholars who focus on modern and contemporary art: the gendered human subject, part of whose identity may be to produce or consume visual culture, can be examined in terms of systems of representation and social experience, as constituted in particular moments in time and space, for *all* periods in history. Although this book is certainly not ideal for those of us who wish to attract students to undertake historical research in pre-Modern periods, the book does at least assume that the gendered self can be studied from the Renaissance or early Modern period onwards. But I must also point out a limitation of Perry's editorial choice: this book represents a restrictive vision of earlier cultures around the globe. It is not uncommon, even amongst Renaissance scholars, to invoke the presence of earlier periods in history, such as the classical or medieval eras, as ahistorical others in the postmodern focus on modernity, in the search for an originary moment of modern culture and consciousness.¹ This book does not indicate the