



Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis. *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998, 227 pages plus 22 color plates and 104 black-and-white illustrations, ISBN: 0-8248-2000-2, US \$52.00 (cloth), ISBN: 0-8248-2081-9, US \$29.25 (paper).

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This scholarly and wide-ranging study of Japanese pictorial cosmography represents a significant addition to the Western literature on esoteric Buddhism in East Asia. Drawing heavily, yet effectively, on a large body of relevant Japanese scholarship, ten Grotenhuis offers a meticulously helpful introduction to the different meanings of the term *mandala* in its East Asian context. The three categories of visual representation covered in the book are:

- (1) Esoteric Two World *mandalas* of the Tendai and Shingon traditions;
- (2) Pure Land *mandara*; the author prefers to use the Japanese term here since these are, strictly speaking, “transformation tableaux” (*hensōzu*), that is, narrative paintings of otherworldly realms, rather than the more traditional geometric Indic-derived cosmograms;
- (3) Kami *mandara*, which seem to draw — both doctrinally and stylistically — from the other two categories.

The work begins with a consideration of the important Taimura *mandara* which seems to encompass both Indic and Chinese themes. Basing her detailed description on early Japanese reproductions of an eighth century Chinese tapestry still held at the Taimadera temple, Nara prefec-

ture, ten Grotenhuis ushers us into the *mandara*'s central court which depicts the paradise of Amida, largely following the textual traditions of the *Larger and Shorter Sukhāvati Sūtras*. The putative Chinese contribution is largely confined to the three flanking courts which illustrate the legend of Ajātasātru and his queen Vaidehī combined with various scenes associated with the *Visualization Sutra*. Ten Grotenhuis speculates that the ninefold classificatory scheme employed in these framing courts may have its origin in early Chinese geographical speculation. Indeed, the author's assertion of a structural connection between the arrangement of surrounding figures in representations of Amida's Pure Land in some of the Dunhuang caves and aspects of the Taimura *mandara* reinforces this possibility. Nevertheless, the significance of the ninefold arrangement, an issue that crops up on a number of occasions in the course of this work, need not point in a decisively Sinitic direction. Certainly the use of the number nine as a classificatory device in Indic sources is well attested. The Pāli tradition, for instance, understands the Buddha's dispensation to consist of nine genres (*navangabuddhasāsana*); there are nine openings to the body (*navadvārā*) and, on a specifically cosmological note, there are nine abodes of beings (*navasattāvāsā*). Indeed, the mystically charged integer 108 is itself numerically equivalent to nine! The book's sixth chapter seems somewhat misplaced since it reprises the introductory essay by giving detailed descriptions of a number of historically important representations of Amida's Pure Land with a concluding though brief note on the popular welcoming descent images of Amida and his retinue which seem, on occasion, to have been woven from materials that include the hair of Pure Land devotees.

Chapters two, three, and four address the esoteric Two World *mandalas*. Both visually represent the teachings of the *yoga tantras*, the major influence on the development of Shingon and other East Asian forms of esotericism; the *Dainichikyō* (*Mahāvairocanasūtra*) provides scriptural authority for the Womb World Mandala, while the Diamond World Mandala is based on the *Kongōchōkyō* (*Vajracchedikāsūtra*). These texts do not seem to have been paired until they entered China, ten Grotenhuis speculating that the pairing may have been the work of Amoghavajra and his circle (p. 75). The custom of relating the *mandalas* of the two worlds seems to have emerged in circles surrounding the Chinese master Huiguo and his prominent Japanese disciple Kūkai around the beginning of the ninth century. Found in both Tendai and Shingon settings (though with slight differences), the two *mandalas* face one another on opposing walls of the main temple sanctuary; the Diamond World on the western side representing the unconditioned realm, and the Womb World on the eastern side pointing to the sphere of conditionality. Ten Grotenhuis takes considerable care in de-

scribing the two *mandalas* of the Sañ sub-temple of the Toji, a major Shingon temple in Kyoto, which are dated to the second half of the ninth century and officially designated as Japanese National Treasures. Once again she detects the possible influence of some roughly contemporary Tibetan Buddhist cave painting from Dunhuang, particularly in the decorative shading of the faces and bodies of the principal deities (p. 86). However, it is a pity that ten Grotenhuis' discussion of the ritual use of the *mandalas* is so brief. The interested reader will, however, find Taikō Yamasaki's discussion of the topic in his *Shingon: Japanese Esoteric Buddhism* (1988) a useful complement.

The number nine crops up once more. The Womb World, for instance, represents a mandala of eighty-one squares — that is, nine squared — and our author notes that a variety of scholars have already pointed to the similarity between the nine courts of the Diamond World and the organization of space in some of the major ceremonial cities of China. The example of Chang'an is apposite since it was divided into nine wards in the Tang period (p. 54). Not only that, but the placement of Mahāvairocana in the top central register of the *mandala* precisely mirrors the position of the emperor's palace in that imperial city.

Chapter four, the final section in the discussion of esoteric Buddhism, examines various extant Japanese Two World Mandalas. The oldest set at the Jingoji in northwest Kyoto, dating from the first half of the ninth century and popularly known as the Takao *mandala*, is rendered in silver and gold on a dark blue ground echoing known Tang Chinese painting techniques. Another embroidered seed-syllable (*shuji*) version of the *mandala* (c. 1300) from Taisanji, Kobe, is noteworthy in that, in common with some of the previously mentioned welcoming descent images of Amida, it employs black human hair in the seed-syllable characters — a peculiarly tantric manner of indicating equivalence between devotee and deity.

In chapter five, ten Grotenhuis discusses the many kinds of *mandala* of individual deities (*beson mandara*) all of whom are held to represent aspects of Mahāvairocana. She also considers the various classification schemes generated by recent Japanese scholarship (pp. 97f) yet comes to no obvious conclusions regarding their respective merits. Many of the central figures of the *beson mandara* — Daibutchō, the personification of the Buddha's cranial protuberance (*uṣṇīṣa*), for instance — are not represented in this way in Buddhist cultures outside East Asia and, as far as I can tell, this is the first detailed introduction to the topic in English. The Star Mandala representing the Big Dipper from the Hōryūji dated to the mid-twelfth century is of particular interest in that it depicts the Western form of the zodiac rather than the expected Chinese animal-based system. Apparently

the Western zodiac was popular for a time in Tang China, although its currency did not survive the medieval period (p. 119).

The two final chapters examine *mandaras* connected with the kami pilgrimage sites of Kasuga and Kumano. Such artifacts seem to have acted both as objects of devotion and as pictorial guides to the pilgrimage itself. Given the Heian period doctrine of the “unification of kami and buddhas” (*shinbutsu-shūgō*), the kami are often represented as emanations of Buddhist deities who are held to represent their original forms (*honji*). Indeed, ten Grotenhuis identifies elements of the Diamond World *mandala* in some versions of the Kasuga shrine *mandara*, particularly in its representation of deities (p. 154). The Kumano mountain pilgrimage site seems to have undergone “geographic mandalisation” (p. 166) around 1180 when the *Shozan engi* (*Origins of Various Mountains*) described the sacred area in terms borrowed from esoteric Buddhist cosmography. Elsewhere in the book, ten Grotenhuis tells us that the great Shingon temple complex on Mount Koya also represented a physical sacred space in which the Two World Mandalas merge. This intriguing concept seems closely related to esoteric Tibetan attempts to mandalize space (apologies for the neologism) as recently described by some of the contributors to A. W. Macdonald’s *Maṇḍala and Landscape* (1997). In some senses it is a pity that the present author did not develop her treatment of this topic in a more comparative direction.

All in all, this is an excellent treatment of a neglected topic. My only major gripe is that some of the black-and-white reproductions are rather difficult to decipher. This partly reflects the abraded nature of many originals, but the volume’s glossy paper also plays an adverse role. As I have already noted, some of the iconographical discussion is very detailed and it is not always easy to relate it to the illustrations themselves. I personally remain to be convinced about the impact of Chinese numerology on the details of some of the artifacts discussed, not least because the same sort of argument could be erected on the basis of Indic evidence alone. Nevertheless, the book’s publication will certainly inspire further research. The comparative study of East Asian and Tibetan esoteric visual arts is an obvious case in point.

The work concludes with an excellent bibliography of relevant publications in both Western languages and Japanese.