



# *Buddhism and the Transformation of Old Age in Medieval Japan*

Edward Drott

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Scholars have long remarked on the frequency with which local and Buddhist deities were represented in premodern Japanese myths and legends taking the appearance of elderly men or, more rarely, elderly women. *Buddhism and the Transformation of Old Age in Medieval Japan* (University of Hawai'i Press) charts the shifting sets of meanings ascribed to old age in early and medieval Japan, examining how the aged body was used to conceptualize forms of difference and to convey religious meanings. More specifically, it traces the cultural, political, and religious circumstances that facilitated the transformation of the aged body from a symbol of alienation and despair into a symbol of otherworldly power in the late Heian period. Contributing to a burgeoning literature on religion and the body, *Buddhism and the Transformation of Old Age in Medieval Japan* applies approaches developed in gender studies to denaturalize old age, treating it as a matter of representation, identity, and performance. By tracking the ideological uses of old age in premodern Japan, this work reveals the role of religion in the construction of generational categories and the ways in which religious ideas and practices can serve not only to naturalize, but also challenge “common sense” about the body.

**Edward Drott** is Associate Professor of Japanese Religions at Sophia University. His recent publications include “‘Care Must be Taken’: Defilement, Disgust and the Aged Body in Early Japan” (*Journal of Religion in Japan*), and “‘To Tread on High Clouds’: Dreams of Eternal Youth in Early Japan” (*Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*). He has also published on the nexus of Buddhist and East Asian medical knowledge in early and medieval Japan. This was the topic of his article “Gods, Buddhas and Organs: Buddhist Physicians and Theories of Longevity in Early Medieval Japan,” (*Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*) and his chapter “Bukkyō igaku to jukyō igaku no kiro de: Manase Dōsan no *Rōjinmon*” (“At the Crossroad of “Buddhist medicine” and “Confucian medicine”: Manase Dōsan’s *Rōjinmon*”) in *Manase Dōsan to Kinsai nihon iryō shakai* (Ōsaka: Takeda kagaku shinkō zaidan, 2015). Most recently, he has completed a translation of the *Byōgiron*, a medieval Buddhist medical treatise, for inclusion in the forthcoming *Sourcebook of Buddhism & Healing* (Columbia University Press).