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 premmodem 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.

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