

capitalism, which would in turn require us to revive and rethink proletarian movements of the past. This is an extremely pressing message for our present, where capitalism is simultaneously proving unsustainable and providing the conditions for various right-wing reactions around the globe.

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Buddhas and Ancestors: Religion and Wealth in Fourteenth-Century Korea. By JUHN Y. AHN. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018. xv, 243 pp. ISBN: 9780295743394 (paper, also available in cloth and as e-book).
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A change of dynasties often attracts the attention of scholars and historians, who typically generate a plethora of theories and explanations for the change. Because this type of dynastic change was comparatively rare in Korea's history, the fourteenth-century transition from Koryŏ (918–1392) to Chosŏn (1392–1910) truly stands out as a unique moment in the country's history. It was also enormously consequential to the history of Korean Buddhism. Increasingly sharp criticisms were leveled at the Buddhist establishment in the late Koryŏ period, with attacks coming from a small but growing number of scholar-officials who were apparently influenced by the neo-Confucian teachings that had been recently introduced from China. With the inauguration of a new dynasty, and as the ranks of these reformist officials grew and their political power expanded, a process ensued of eradicating state support of Buddhism and curtailing the religion's power and prestige. Especially noteworthy was a gradual shift within elite circles concerning ritual practices to honor their ancestors: traditional Buddhist funerary practices and memorial rites for the ancestors were replaced by the (slightly modified) neo-Confucian rituals as prescribed by Zhu Xi.

Juhn Ahn's *Buddhas and Ancestors* takes aim at the dominant historical narratives regarding the role of Buddhism in the demise of Koryŏ and the birth of Chosŏn. Ahn identifies "three prevailing assumptions" that have characterized previous studies on the subject (p. 10). The first is that the anti-Buddhist movement was motivated by ideology, or what he calls at one point "ideological conversion to Cheng-Zhu learning" (p. 122). This Confucianization argument, he claims, "mistakenly confuses agent with subject" by assuming that the historical actors were driven by ideological commitments in their attempts at social reform (p. 10). The second assumption is that concrete social concerns, rather than ideology, were responsible for the changing attitudes. The more established elite families (*sejok*), according to this theory, sought to distance themselves from the rise of new powerful social elements (*kwŏnmun*) who used Buddhism in their quest to gain

status and power. This argument bears the closest resemblance to Ahn's own thesis, but he cautions against "the danger of rendering religion irrelevant by turning it into a simple instrument of social, political, or economic gain" (p. 11). Ahn dismisses as unfounded a third set of assumptions or claims that ascribe legitimate economic concerns about the growth of monastic landholdings and wealth in late Koryŏ or the practical anxieties about the excessive political involvement of Buddhist monks, both of which are taken as signs of corruption, to the origins of the anti-Buddhist movement.

Ahn's study attempts to set the record straight concerning these charges of corruption aimed at the Buddhist establishment by examining more closely the connection between wealth and religion in elite Koryŏ society. In contrast to conventional historical narratives, which all assume that these charges of corruption arose from the improper mixing of wealth and religion, Ahn argues instead that "the separation of wealth and religion into two independent spheres of human activity and thought" (p. 13) is what enabled the articulation of these accusations in the first place. He begins by explaining the religious basis for the widespread view in Koryŏ that material donations given to the *saṅgha* (monastic community) as a "field of merit" would have salvific effects for the person in whose name the act of giving was made (chapter 1). In this way, wealth and religion were thought to be compatible or commensurable: the larger the gift, in fact, the more merit that accrued, and thus the greater the chances of salvation.

By the early fourteenth century, however, the elites who built or (more often) restored Buddhist monasteries to house the funerary portraits of their deceased parents or loved ones and generously funded the memorial rites performed by monks on their behalf could no longer take for granted that their wealthy donations to the monastic community would bring about the expected religious and spiritual results. The separation of wealth and religion, therefore, opened a rhetorical space to assert "the novel claim that the efficacy of the ritual act of giving is a property of moral substance rather than material form" (p. 60). Through extensive analysis of stele inscriptions, tomb epitaphs, and similar forms of funerary writings from the fourteenth century, Ahn tracks these changes in the attitudes among elites about the traditional Buddhist methods of managing death. This approach also allows him to investigate the family backgrounds of the individuals who commissioned and wrote these inscriptions. The evidence he gathers is then used to support the second leg of his argument, which seeks to explain both the reason for the separation of wealth and religion in the fourteenth century and the concomitant emphasis on moral content over material form in assessing the efficacy of mourning rituals. These changes, he contends, were caused by a crisis of identity among elites in late Koryŏ.

In order to better understand why attitudes were changing, Ahn looks at the wider social and political transformations taking place at the time. He points to the rise of individuals from nontraditional backgrounds during the period of Mongol rule (mid-thirteenth to mid-fourteenth centuries) as a precipitating factor in the crisis of identity among elites, which then brought about the view that wealth and religion were incommensurable. When these newly established elite families, who owed their position to the favor shown by the Mongols or the Mongol-backed Korean monarchs, began to make "the earnest attempt to build great-family credentials by restoring monasteries, it became necessary ... for scholar-officials to ask what distinguished the true from the ersatz elite" (p. 77). Moreover, conflicts between the newcomers and the regular bureaucracy frequently broke out, which sowed divisions at court and caused the latter "to exert its distinct identity as a self-conscious social group" (p. 83). This meant, among other things, problematizing wealth and its conspicuous display, which had been closely associated with the Buddhist customs and rituals surrounding death.

One of the strengths of Ahn's book is his ability to integrate various forms of historical information, disciplinary approaches, and lines of inquiry to buttress his main arguments. Although his analysis does not completely upend or overturn the conventional historical narratives regarding the Koryŏ-Chosŏn transition, it does offer a layer of nuance to the discussions regarding Buddhist corruption in fourteenth-century Korea, offering a viable explanation for why some elite scholar-officials criticized, modified, and even turned their backs on Buddhist funeral practices in favor of neo-Confucian memorial rites. *Buddhas and Ancestors* would be an excellent addition in any upper-level undergraduate or graduate class on premodern Korean history, Korean religions, or Buddhism in East Asia.

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Writing Technology in Meiji Japan: A Media History of Modern Japanese Literature and Visual Culture. By SETH JACOBOWITZ. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015. xii, 299 pp. ISBN: 9780674088412 (cloth). doi:10.1017/S0021911818002802

Seth Jacobowitz's *Writing Technology in Meiji Japan: A Media History of Modern Japanese Literature and Visual Culture* is a long overdue, historically grounded critique of the common theoretical musings of the field of modern Japanese literature that were popular in the 1990s and early 2000s. By placing literary and, indeed, national history within the context of cultural material in Meiji Japan, the book takes as its organizing principle the notion that writing as we now know it was significantly transformed by practices and media cultivated and developed through the late nineteenth century. Without arguing that such methods of visualization, inscription, transcription, circulation, and standardization determine writing as we know it, the book makes the more nuanced claim that to understand modern writing (and particularly modern literature) we must understand its indebtedness to such techniques and their history. It is a thoroughly convincing argument and one that will have the field thinking for years to come, simply because of the historical truths it exposes, synthesizes, and explains.

As Jacobowitz explains in his *tour de force* introduction, literary history forgets the technologies at the focus of the book, because the nature of our recording media is that they become more and more transparent over time. And once they have become so clean and clear, we forget there was even ever anything else. This is as true today for high-definition television as it was for realist fiction in the decades after its inception in Japan. To use a visual metaphor, rather than being a lens for focusing our attention on various salient features, the book then conveys a feeling as if a distorting lens is being removed from our gaze. Thus, again and again Jacobowitz shows us how what we thought we understood about the impact of, say, language reform on Japanese literature is not quite right, and we need to see it again and more directly through his connection of that story to the history of standardizations of time and space, the development of a postal network, and phonography.

Of course, many pieces of the puzzle the book assembles have been discussed before, for instance, in studies on the unified style (*genbun'itchi*) movement by Karatani, Twine, and Tomasi, among others. But Jacobowitz contextualizes these pieces within the