

Paula Kane Robinson Arai

Navigating Cultural Intimacy and Scholarly Authority

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Paula Kane Robinson Arai has had a distinguished career as a scholar and teacher. She is a respected author recognized for her contributions to the study of women in Buddhism, Zen, and Buddhist aesthetics. She earned three degrees from Harvard University, including a PhD in Buddhist studies, where she studied with Masatoshi Nagatomi (Arai 2003, 16). She taught at Vanderbilt University, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and Carleton College. She taught Buddhist Studies as the Yuki Visiting Professor at the Institute of Buddhist Studies in Berkeley in the spring of 2015 and currently holds the Urmila Gopal Singhal Professorship in Religions of India at Louisiana State University (LSU Religious Studies n.d.). She has written three books, multiple book chapters, and journal articles and has curated several art exhibits in multiple locations across the United States. Despite all these and many other accomplishments, her

academic journey has not been easy. In this chapter, I highlight her many talents and achievements and explore the tensions and disappointments she has encountered in her academic career. In addition to the typical tensions a bi-cultural woman encounters in male-dominated, White academic institutions, she experienced tensions between gentleness and power, acceptance and determination, affect and rationality, art and intellect, and submission and authority. Her work as an academic is informed by the experience and knowledge gained in holding and managing these tensions in creative ways.

Early Years

Arai grew up in Detroit, Michigan, in a multicultural family and learned to code-switch at home, toggling between the language and perspectives of her Japanese mother, Masuko Arai Robinson, and the North American cultural norms and expectations of her Anglo father, Lucian Ford Robinson. Arai believes this bi-cultural identi-

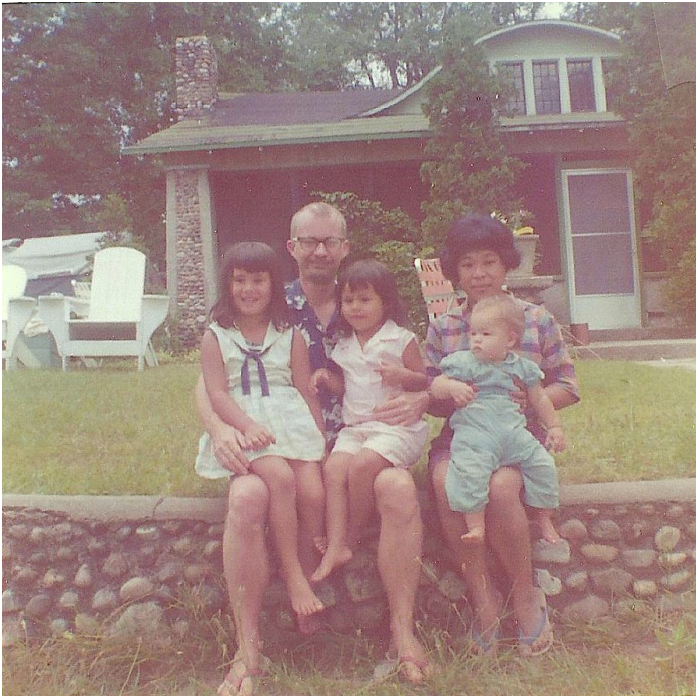


Image 1: Robinson family, 1961

ty gives her a distinctive perspective. As an American scholar with a front-row seat on Japanese culture, she easily sees through sexist, Orientalist approaches that portray Asian women as subservient and incapable and understands the damage wrought when Asian women internalize Orientalist perceptions. Her hybrid identity extends to religiosity, though she lands lightly on the Buddhist side of the fence. Her mother never described herself as a Buddhist, even accompanying her husband to Methodist Christian services, along with her children, who were baptized there. Nevertheless, her Japanese world view was thoroughly infused with Buddhist values and affinities. She began to realize that somehow her mother, raising her in Detroit, had knowingly or unknowingly imparted principles and patterns of perception that were recognizably Buddhist. Her mother's Buddhism was older, pre-war, and so tightly interwoven with Japanese cultural values that it was integral to all aspects of life, including Japanese psychology, communications, and aesthetics. Having internalized her mother's Japanese Buddhist sensibility, Arai feels a natural empathy with Japanese Buddhist women of earlier generations, and this has inspired her to research this often ignored demographic. Her mother's life, first in Japan and later in the United States, is the subject of Arai's current book project, *Samurai Daughter, Indentured Geisha, American Mother: An Odyssey from Buddhist Japan to Christian America* (Arai, pers. comm., November 20, 2020). Arai's father was also a major influence in her life. A White American, he went to Japan after WWII to "marry the enemy and begin the healing of the world." He was a big supporter of formal education, making it "natural" for her to pursue higher education to the highest extent possible (Arai, pers. comm., April 8, 2021).

Educational Journey

Inclusivity, intersectionality, and responses to power dynamics are concerns that drove Arai's education. She is grateful for the rich environments that supported her efforts to wholeheartedly engage with scholarly and public-awareness concerns. From 1978–83, she attended Kalamazoo College in Michigan, where she majored in religion and music. She studied abroad at Waseda University in Tokyo (1980–81). After graduating from Kalamazoo College with honors in 1983, she went on to study at Harvard Divinity School, earning a master's

degree in the history of religions in 1985. Arai's formal education in comparative religion began with an MTS degree (1985) from Harvard Divinity School that expanded her thinking about how systems of knowledge vary across cultures and time. An MA degree (1987) in the study of religion at Harvard's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences provided an opportunity to gain deeper insights into the nature of power and embodiment, especially in the diverse worlds of Christian theological discourse and Asian Buddhist social, political, and intellectual history. Earning a PhD (1993) involved applying her knowledge and insights to generate theories and methods that were in discussion with respected and established approaches. However, she drew primarily on the indigenous conceptual categories of the Japanese Zen nuns with whom she engaged in ethnographic and historical research on her dissertation, "Zen Nuns: Living Treasures of Japanese Buddhism," with Masatoshi Nagatomi as her advisor. She received generous support for her education, including a Fulbright Dissertation Grant (1989–90), Edwin O. Reischauer Institute Summer Research Grant (1989), and a Lilly Foundation Research Grant to study Asian-American Christians (1988–89) (Arai, pers. comm., September 14, 2020).

Arai navigates cautiously between her identities as a Buddhist scholar and as a Buddhist studies scholar. She seriously questions whether any term encompasses both identities. She prefers to relinquish any identity markers that essentialize human differences. Early in her career, Arai did not go out of her way to identify as a Buddhist, sensing that revealing her religious orientation might be professionally damaging. Currently, recognizing how easily labels can become reified, she understands Buddhist scholarship and practice as fluid categories that inform one another (Arai, pers. comm., November 20, 2020). Arai is not alone in this conclusion. Taking Buddhist philosophy and critical reflection at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) Annual Meeting as a reference point, it is obvious that, for many Buddhist scholars today, Buddhist practice and Buddhist scholarship are not mutually exclusive. Unlike days gone by, when rigorous scholarship and religious adherence were frequently regarded as antithetical, currently many respected scholars are practitioners of the religious traditions they teach. Ultimately, Arai developed her own worldview informed by her life experiences and her education. Reflecting on her significant formative experiences, she recalls that she carried the New Testament everywhere, met Martin

Luther King, Jr., studied in Japan for a year, and took her first class in Buddhism (Arai, pers. comm., November 20, 2020).

Arai survived and flourished in the academy by focusing on her responses to challenges rather than sinking into a litany of woes. Despite numerous obstacles, she appreciates the insights she gained through it all. She was fortunate to have caring teachers who guided her formal education. She had grown up in the social activist United Methodist Church of Detroit, where she once heard Dr. King preach, and she focused on Christian traditions as a religion major at Kalamazoo College. It came as a surprise to her when her professor—J. Mark Thompson, who specialized in comparative religion—surmised she was Buddhist, not Christian, because there was no God in her worldview. He believed she had imbibed Buddhist views from her mother, even though Arai herself was totally unconscious of it. Her mentor, John Bunyan Spencer, helped her hone critical reading and writing skills, especially when he tutored her in Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy, the subject of her senior independent project (bachelor's thesis). He counseled her not to try to please anyone or second-guess what is suitable for the field, either in graduate school or an academic career, but to pursue what she would choose even if there were no external rewards. At the time, she had no idea, but it was precisely the advice she needed to weather just about everything that came afterward. With this strong educational foundation, she was prepared to launch into graduate studies in the Buddhist tradition (Arai, pers. correspondence, May 9, 2021).

Once at Harvard University, Arai enrolled in Wilfred Cantwell Smith's year-long course on Faith: A Human Quality. She credits Wilfred Cantwell Smith with showing her that religion is beyond the categories we ascribe to it; in fact, the word "religion" is a 16th-century Western category that many of the world's languages do not have a word for. For most of human history, people did not have a name for their orientation to the world but just lived their lives. Smith presented his evidence and reasoning in his influential book, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (1964). In his course, she learned that, unlike monotheistic religions, the Buddhist tradition is not membership-based, which explains why Japanese do not think in terms of religious affiliation. Since Smith was her advisor at Harvard Divinity School during her MTS program, she asked to interview him for a Peace and Conflict Resolution course she was taking. When she asked how human beings might live in peace, he pronounced, "When all use the pronoun 'we' and mean everyone in the world." His schol-

arly guidance continued even after he retired, for he designed the doctoral exams. A major portion of the exams stressed comparative socio-historical aspects of the world's religious traditions and analysis of the categories central to the study of human religiosity, including scripture, ritual, and salvation. Professor Smith was central in developing the Center for the Study of World Religion—a living community of scholars where Arai lived during most of her doctoral studies. He believed one must become friends with those who live the tradition one studies. Many of the closest, most enduring friendships of her life began at the Center, where scholars help each other be better people and better scholars. Professor Smith's insightful vision of how to grow a scholar is something for which Arai is profoundly grateful (Arai, pers. comm., May 9, 2021).

During the summers, Arai was fortunate to be the administrative assistant for Dr. James Luther Adams, professor emeritus of Harvard and world-renowned ethicist. A large part of her job was helping him with his correspondence. His filing cabinets were stuffed with letters from high-profile politicians, including US presidents, world humanitarian leaders, Nobel Prize winners, top scholars, and people with all kinds of questions and concerns. Through these letters—the writings of luminary figures dedicated to an ethical and humane world—her view of the world expanded.



Image 2: Arai with His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

During ten years of graduate school, Masatoshi Nagatomi—Harvard’s first full-time professor of Buddhist studies—guided her in ways she only appreciated years later (Harvard University n.d.). Initially, he resisted her dissertation topic on Japanese Buddhist nuns, concerned that a Japanese-American woman specializing in Japanese Buddhist women would have trouble in the academy—concerns that were not unwarranted. When she graduated, he suggested a research topic for her to work on after publishing her dissertation as a book. During the six years it took to accomplish that, she totally forgot that conversation. Only in 2011, after completing *Bringing Zen Home*, did she remember his suggestion and realize that she had accomplished what he had recommended in 1993. The mixed messages she received during her doctoral education prepared her to overcome obstacles in order to make the contributions she was poised to make (Arai, pers. comm., May 9, 2021).

In addition to these male academic mentors, Kitō Shunkō and Aoyama Shundō have been exceptional mentors in Arai’s life. Both are Sōtō Zen nuns who teach at Aichi Senmon Nisōdo—the premiere nunnery in Japan. Kitō is a senior teacher, and Aoyama is the abbess. After they first met in Bodhgaya in 1987, Kitō Sensei helped Arai integrate her questions about life as well as her scholarly focus (Arai, 1999a). Arai describes her influence in this way:

She embodied the Buddhist teachings in an elegant Japanese manner and emanated a fearlessness and joyous kindness that warmed all who met her. Her ability to be gentle in harsh conditions modeled Japanese Buddhist women’s skill in navigating prejudicial treatment with dignity. Her presence invited me into a special world that became the focus of my research, with her personal guidance. Aoyama Rōshi generated an ethos that kept me vigilant and honest about my research on the nuns’ community. Her strict standards of behavior in the nunnery instilled an intense awareness and respect that not only helped me personally, but also honed my critical research skills. She helped me examine my assumptions, especially Western theories of interpretation as applied to their lives. She did not do this through academic discourse but through modeling how perception affects experience and our actions with others. The guidance of these two women enabled me to venture forth and persevere with my research agenda. They helped me cultivate the inner resources I needed to make my way in the field of Zen Buddhist studies, a field earlier dominated by male scholars and perspectives. (Arai, pers. comm., May 9, 2021)

Early Career

Embarking on faculty positions offered increased opportunities to engage and grow. Vanderbilt University (1994–2002) allowed her to defer a tenure-track appointment for a year to benefit from a rare teaching and research opportunity at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (1993–94). This sojourn not only afforded her a chance to immerse herself in Hong Kong’s unique variation of Chinese society during a pivotal moment at the end of a colonial era, but the university also awarded her an HKUST Research Grant (1993–94) to pursue valuable field research in Japan. At Vanderbilt University (1994–2002), her tenure clock was extended to enable her to solo-parent her infant and provide end-of-life care for her mother. Although not part of formal research, these natural yet intense life experiences launched her into the theme of healing, which became the basis for her subsequent work. Her research was generously supported by a Fulbright Senior Scholar Grant (1998), American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship (1998), three Vanderbilt University Research Council Direct Research Grants (1995, 1998, 2000), and a Vanderbilt University Research Council Summer Research Grant (1995). Before proceeding with a tenure review, she chose to join the faculty at Carleton College (2002–07). Arai had always wanted to teach at a liberal arts college where community interaction is an integral part of the educational philosophy. She was grateful for the felicitous conditions conducive to honing her teaching skills, which she continues to refine in order to support students’ learning and growth. During those years, she was awarded a Mellon Faculty Fellowship (2005), an American Academy of Religion Research Assistance Grant (2004), and a Carleton College Targeted Opportunity Grant (2003). In August of 2007, she chose to return to the teacher-scholar balance afforded at a research university and accepted a position at Louisiana State University (LSU) where she could cultivate an intimate learning-community ethos in her classes. In 2018, she was awarded the Urmila Gopal Singhal Professorship in Religions of India and, in 2020, was promoted to full professor. During her time with LSU, she received two Manship Summer Research Fellowships (2012, 2020), an ATLAS (Awards to Louisiana Artists and Scholars, 2008–09), and the LSU Tiger Athletic Fund Teaching Award (2014). Her research trajectory directs attention to materials and perspectives that have not been explored in previous scholarship (Arai, pers. comm., May 5, 2021).

Arai held multiple teaching positions and approached each one with sincerity, taking their declarations of support for social justice and racial justice at face value. Sadly, several of these institutions created an untenable environment for women, especially women of color. At one institution, her department, doubting her competence, rotated colleagues to attend and review 75 percent of the classes she taught during one term—a nerve-wracking and intimidating experience. She went to great lengths to cultivate and apply effective teaching strategies learned through faculty development programs to such an extent that the only critical comment she received was that student-to-student eye contact in the classroom was inadequate. In addition, she felt tremendous pressure to minimize her colleagues' awareness of the time and energy required to raise her child, lest it appear she was not fully devoted to her teaching and research. As is quite common in the academy, she watched male candidates with fewer awards and achievements sail through the tenure process, only to see her own tenure process aborted (Arai, pers. comm., December 4, 2020). In all these situations, guided by both her Japanese and American upbringing and insights, she worked hard to balance gentleness and power, acceptance, determination, and, often choicelessly, submission to authority.

Through all this, Arai continued to hone her teaching skills, always approaching research and teaching as synergistically intertwined. Her pedagogical approach draws heavily on ethnographic methods she developed for her research, where self-reflexive interaction drives the interchange. She is always considering ways to creatively engage in experiential learning. For example, when studying Japanese Zen arts, she has students do a tea ceremony. Since religious studies is an inherently interdisciplinary field, she also weaves in a range of methods, theories, questions, and trajectories, including history, philosophy, ritual studies, gender studies, environmental studies, and health sciences. Raising consciousness about post-colonial concerns, Arai's pedagogy is specifically designed to help students navigate a multicultural context, encouraging them to engage in a rigorous examination of their assumptions and analyze the worldviews of the people being studied. The effectiveness of her teaching is reflected in Arai receiving an LSU Tiger Athletic Fund Teaching Award (2014).

The Zen of Monastery and Family

A pivotal moment in Arai's life occurred in 1987 when she traveled to Bodhgaya, India—site of Buddha Śākyamuni's awakening—to serve as the Japanese translator for Antioch University's Buddhist Studies in India Program. The semester-long undergraduate study abroad program incorporated meditation sessions at the Burmese Vihar in the morning and the Japanese Temple in the evening. There, she met a Zen nun by the name of Kitō Shunkō at the Indosan Nippon Japanese Temple in Bodhgaya. The experience of meeting a person who authentically embodied the Buddha's teachings at this sacred Buddhist site was profoundly moving for Arai and set into motion a research trajectory that became the centerpiece of her early academic career (Arai 1990; 1999b). In the course of this encounter, Kitō Shunkō introduced her to a book by Aoyama Shundō, a nun of the next generation who received training at, and later became the abbess of, Aichi Senmon Nisōdō—a monastic training center for Sōtō Zen nuns in Nagoya, Japan (Tsomo 2020a). Deeply impressed by Kitō Shunkō, Arai determined to study the lives of the nuns at this exemplary monastic training center to better understand how the nuns developed such wisdom and compassion.



Image 3: Kitō Shunkō

In *Women Living Zen*, published in 1999, Arai writes with respect and humility about her experience of living at Aichi Senmon Nisōdō. As an undergraduate exchange student in Japan in 1980, Arai had been quite disillusioned by the consumerist tendencies of male temple priests who seemed to view their vocation as a lucrative profession. In the prologue, she relates this story:

When I was living in Japan in 1980, I was just beginning my formal study of Buddhism at Waseda University. I learned introductory material about major Buddhist leaders in Japanese history and basic Buddhist concepts, including that compassion was a fundamental value in the Buddhist teachings. Therefore, I was rather bewildered when I heard the wife of a priest say, "Our son wants a stereo. I wonder if there are any funerals around?" At the time, I had no idea what the connection might be between stereos and funerals. Finally, a friend explained it to me. Funerals are a temple's major source of income; indeed, funerals make many priests rather wealthy. This incident, as well as casual observances of life in modern Japan, led me to an impression that there was no genuine Buddhism left in Japan. I was disillusioned. I thought that the affluent economic impulse had ruined any vestige of the tremendous history and teachings I had been studying. My cynical, naive, and uninformed conclusion about the state of Buddhism in modern Japan shifted when I met a Japanese Zen Buddhist nun. (Arai 1999b, xvii)

At the monastery in Nagoya, she found that the nuns lived very differently. The nuns are celibate, diligent, artistically creative, and keenly devoted to sitting meditation (*zazen*) (Arai 1990, 48). Impressed by their sincerity, she resolved to live and practice with them in order to experience first-hand their simple, highly disciplined monastic lifestyle and document it for posterity (Heine 2007, 581). From my own experience, I know that seekers accustomed to the social freedoms of Western societies often struggle with the rules and expectations of Japanese monastic life. It was certainly not a foregone conclusion that the monastery in Nagoya would accept an American student, allow her access to their community life, much less allow her to document it and distribute her research. Yet, impressed by Arai's sincerity as well as her language skills, Aoyama Shundō gave her high praise: "In order to write this book, Paula experienced these nuns' path in a personally embodied way; she studied our history, actual circumstances, and various other dimensions. For Paula's pos-

ture of commitment and practice, I express respect from my heart. *Gassho*" (Arai 1999b). The book resulted from Arai's experience as a dedicated participant and astute observer of life and practice at the leading training site for Japanese Zen nuns. It is a singular achievement in the field of religious studies, opening up an entirely new direction for critical inquiry by examining women's roles in Zen.

If Arai had not gone to Aichi Senmon Nisōdō and embedded herself in the life of the monastery, she would never have been able to accurately portray this model training center for Japanese Zen nuns. And the training was not easy.

The monastery was 'bone cold' and the warmth of the *okayu* [rice porridge] was the only physical warmth I felt. I gained the nuns' trust by doing the more demanding work at the monastery. Being a little taller, with a strong back, I could do brute labor. By working hard, every single day 24/7, with no trace of arrogance or privilege, I proved over and over how honored I felt to participate in the life of the monastery. I tried not to be a drag on their practice and their efforts. I tried to compensate, knowing that the nuns were going out of their way to accommodate me. Without my embodied presence there, I think I would have been stonewalled every step of the way and gotten nowhere. Aoyama Sensei made it very clear that this was the very first time she had allowed anyone in who didn't want to become a nun. And she let me in because of Kitō Sensei. It's not a culture that appreciates the value of academic research. I had to demonstrate that I was there to become a better person and share the students' training.

In fact, scholarship is part of my practice. When I'm writing, I light incense and pray. I try to be cognizant of every word and ask myself whether it matters. "Who am I writing for? Who will benefit?" I feel a sense of responsibility for where the Academy is going. I appreciate textual scholars and reap the benefits. In addition, as a woman, I have to do enough to be taken seriously. I have the advantage that I only need five dictionaries instead of 20. I've had to create my own place at the table and I've had to do it in a way that connected with the Academy so I don't get kicked out (Arai, pers. comm., May 9, 2021).

In *Women Living Zen*, using ethnographic methods that emphasized embodiment and honored women's points of view, Arai sheds light on the ritual of gratitude to Buddha Śākyamuni's cousin and attendant Ānanda, who advocated for the admission of women to the monastic order in the sixth century BCE. In an earlier article titled "A

Case of Ritual Zen: Gratitude to Ānanda,” she documented the powerful ways in which ritual performance enabled Japanese nuns to express their deeply felt emotions and also make a covert political statement about gender equity at the time of the Buddha (Arai 2000a). The Anan Kōshiki is an example of a genre of ritual practices performed periodically to express gratitude to specific religious figures—in this case, gratitude to the monk credited with (or blamed for) convincing the Buddha to open Buddhist monastic life to women. This ritual practice can be traced to India, recorded in the travel writings of the Chinese monk Faxian in the fourth century and adapted in Japan during the Heian (794–1185) and Kamakura (1192–1333) periods. In her analysis of the Anan Kōshiki, based on ethnographic data, Arai sees the contemporary practice of the ritual, renewed at the beginning of the 20th century, as presaging the increased independence of nuns in Sōtō Zen institutional structures:

With the advantage of historical perspective, we can see that the revitalization of this nuns’ ritual occurred on the eve of nuns launching into a public and institutionalized effort to bring egalitarian practices to bear on Sōtō regulations. The ritual ends with a declaration that all women can attain enlightenment. From this vantage point, the erroneous ways of the male-dominated institution are glaring, yet imminently surmountable. (Arai 2000a)

Just as Arai’s first book, *Women Living Zen*, expanded the scope of Zen studies by including ethnographic data on Sōtō Zen nuns in Japan and advanced critical interpretations of female monastic practice, her second book, *Bringing Zen Home: The Healing Heart of Japanese Women’s Rituals*, significantly expanded the scope of Zen studies by including ethnographic data on Japanese laywomen. In this extensive study, Arai focused attention on the ritual practices that women use in the home to cope with the hardships and transitions in their lives. Again, her language skills—especially her fluency in the “dated,” rather formal Japanese she had learned from her Japanese mother—stood her in good stead with the older generations of dedicated Buddhist practitioners she cultivated, not only as an academic researcher but as a close and trusted friend. In the elitist world of academic research, the family may be considered unworthy of serious consideration. Arai took a professional risk by focusing on the Buddhist practices of women in the home. Her gamble was fruitful, however, as the colonialist penchant in religious studies is gradually

being unmasked. As the anthropologist Anna Grimshaw says in her review of the book, “Arai argues against the androcentrism of much Buddhist scholarship, seeking to establish the distinctive nature of female monasticism. She tells a story of success as she emphasizes in her account the resilience, determination, and creative adaptation of Soto nuns to changing historical circumstances” (Grimshaw 2001, 254).

In this work, Arai (2011a, 66) argues for the healing power of funerary rites, despite negative associations:

The dominance of funerary, memorial, and ancestral rites in the ritual landscape of contemporary Buddhism in Japan is so pronounced that scholars and lay people commonly refer to the phenomenon as “Funeral Buddhism.” Most people even report their primary engagement with Buddhism is when someone passes away. In addition, the biggest summer holiday, Obon, is a Buddhist rite to honor ancestors. Although scholars have done research on the topic of Japanese ancestor worship, the question of whether funerary, memorial, and ancestral rites offer healing for those living in modern Japan has not been thoroughly explored. Throughout this study, the positive roles mortuary and ancestral rites play in contemporary Japan become evident, especially in the lives of mature Buddhist women.

In her field research in Japan, Arai found that rituals for the dead and buried serve many constructive purposes; they help allay fears, remind adherents of impermanence, confirm the interrelatedness of all life, provide an opportunity for healing, and offer “an understanding of the dynamics of identity cultivation and transformation in the face of loss” (Arai 2011a, 67). In her field research, she also found that relating her own performance of ritual when her mother died created an intimacy with the twelve women whose narratives constitute the ethnographic foundation of her study. Her vulnerability transformed her research. Had she presented as a knowledgeable scholar, her informants—or, as she prefers, “consociates”—would have been reluctant to open their hearts. By preempting them in emotional openness, she made trusting friends eager to share their own vulnerabilities. The narrative she recounted to her twelve consociates is the story of her mother’s death in Nashville that opens her book:

This book took root on December 18, 1996, the day my mother died. After months of listening to the whir of the oxygen machine, a vacuum of silence filled her bedroom. Even though I had known she would die soon, when I stood looking at the threshold of life and death I felt as if one wrong move would send us off into an abyss of despair. The last several months had been one long fear of wrong moves: too much morphine or not enough, too much talking or not enough, not enough water or too much.

Suddenly all the palliatives seemed harshly out of place. Hands shaking, I cleared the bedside table of the vials of morphine, anti-nausea salves, and pink star-shaped sponges for removing sticky mucus from the tongue. The ultimacy of the moment engulfed me. How was I to ensure my mother's passage through this perilous transition? Kitō Sensei had encouraged me to call her. The elderly Zen nun had helped my mother and me through the past nine years, applying her healing balm of compassion. It was the middle of the night in Japan, but I knew that, although she devotes long days to ministering to others, at 3:45 a.m. Kitō Sensei would be at her temple: there she nurtures the Bodhi tree seeds she brought back from India. The telephone in my hand was a lifeline. I knew intellectually about Sōtō Zen rituals that recognize the deceased as a Buddha, but it was Kitō Sensei, in her unheated worship hall ten thousand miles away, who guided me through those first terrifying, disorienting moments.

Trusting her to know what to do, I followed her instructions for the ritual of safely sending off the deceased on her journey of death. Frantic to treat our new Buddha properly, I rushed to find the bronze plum blossom incense burner, sandalwood incense sticks, white candle, and plain carved wooden figure of Kannon, goddess of compassion, adding some white chrysanthemums I had been keeping on hand for this moment. Not more than ten minutes after my mother breathed her last, the bedside table was transformed into a mortuary altar. As I offered a stick of incense in her honor, I saw my mother's face take on the peace that I have seen so often on images of Buddhas. Our relationship was transforming before my very eyes.

When I placed the incense in the burner, I became one with all who had done so before. In the moment that had threatened to be the loneliest in my life, I instead experienced a profound connection with all grievers, past and future. I was not alone. I was united with everyone who had lost a loved one. Kitō Sensei had guided us through this critical transition with a wisdom that transcended barriers of

space, time, life, and death. At that moment, the healing power of ritual became a visceral reality. (Arai 2011a, 1-2)

As the bereaved daughter in these very personal passages, Arai illustrated her own experience of the constructive power of ritual; she allayed her fears about sending her mother on the perilous journey between life and death; she witnessed the impermanent nature of the bedside table as it was transformed from an apothecary into a mortuary altar; she confirmed her interrelatedness with all those, past and future, who had lost a loved one; she healed her anxiety and loneliness; and she transcended the limited identities of both the deceased and the bereaved. No further analysis is necessary.

Healing Body and Mind

One of Arai's major contributions in *Bringing Zen Home: The Healing Heart of Japanese Women's Rituals* is her observation and identification of a spiritual discipline practiced by women to restore a non-bifurcated body-mind way of being. She coined the term "way of healing" (*yudō*) to denote this spiritual discipline, which she considered parallel to the arts of calligraphy, tea, flower arrangement, poetry, and painting (Arai 2011a, 31). In so doing, she acknowledges the Japanese Zen context of these arts, liberally infused with Chinese Daoist aesthetics and ethics. She also acknowledges the Buddhist practice of recognizing one's delusions, desires, and aversions and healing one's suffering. Amalgamating these historical, cultural influences, she constructs a theory of *yudō* with ten distinct principles: experiencing interrelatedness, living body-mind, engaging in rituals, nurturing the self, enjoying life, creating beauty, cultivating gratitude, accepting reality as it is, expanding perspective, and embodying compassion. As the term "way of healing" implies, restoring a non-bifurcated body-mind is not conceived as an end goal but occurs in "each act of compassion and every expression of gratitude" (32).

Arai points to a strong connection between rituals and healing because rituals connect us with our bodies in ways that are intuitive, beyond reason, language, and cognitive processing. Rituals facilitate healing because they holistically involve the body and the senses to produce "a non-dualistic experience of reality" (Arai 2011a, 3). She notes that although rituals are not formally recognized as healing,

when the teachings of Dōgen—founder of Sōtō Zen in the thirteenth century—are applied in everyday life, ritual activities heal. Among the women she befriended, Zen Buddhist rituals were no mere formality but fulfilled emotional and psychological needs, especially in coping with the challenges of birth and death, grief and loss, love and loneliness.

The connection between death awareness and healing is a significant theme in Arai's research. In the prologue to *Bringing Zen Home*, she quotes from a private 1999 interview with the highly respected Sōtō Zen master and Komazawa University professor Suzuki Kazuzen Rōshi, who had been diagnosed with terminal cancer:

You must take death as the point of departure to understand healing. It is only then that you will see that you are already healed. This is the vow of Hotoke [Buddha], of Kannon [Bodhisattva of Compassion]. It is not that you pray and then receive the compassion of Kannon. It is only a matter of whether or not you become aware that you are already healed. (Arai 2011a)

The approach of equating the dead with the Buddha is a later doctrinal development not found in the early Buddhist traditions. The notion derives from a specific interpretation of the Mahāyāna theory of Buddha-nature. In Sanskrit, the term for Buddha-nature is *tathagatagarbha* (literally, “embryo of enlightenment”), meaning the seed or potential for awakening that exists within each sentient being. In Sōtō Zen, Buddha-nature is regarded as already manifest within sentient beings; we need only awaken to that reality, our true nature. As a consequence of this interpretation, Japanese Buddhist adherents in general and Sōtō Zen practitioners in particular attribute to their departed loved ones a status equivalent to a fully realized Buddha. Attributing this exalted status to the departed helps allay all fears about their destination after death. It sets survivors' minds at ease, helping them integrate the pain of loss and cope more skillfully with their grief. Therefore, funerary rituals and memorial services are skillful means (*upāya*) that Japanese Buddhists use to manage and come to terms with their feelings of remorse, abandonment, and longing (Arai 2011a).

As Arai's interviews with female Sōtō Zen adherents attest, rituals performed on behalf of the departed viscerally and holistically help them cope with grief and loss. These rituals—performed daily, monthly, or annually at a home altar or a temple, with or without

the assistance of a priest—create bonds of care and affection and enable the practitioner or parishioner to traverse the cold, alienating, and somewhat artificial binary between the living and the dead. The dead become what she terms “personal Buddhas” for the living, helping them cope with the physical, mental, and emotional adjustments that accompany their loss (Arai 2011a, 67) and challenge their sense of identity and security. Philosophy aside, imagining their departed loved ones as enlightened beings with whom they may communicate and whose protection they may receive is deeply comforting and healing for the bereaved. Arai’s contribution is her discerning awareness of how Buddhist philosophy becomes a source of personal healing.

Emotion and Intellect in Tension

Throughout her childhood and into adult life, Arai realized she was out of sync with her world. For example, as a young woman, she intuitively realized how women’s emotional, spiritual, and intellectual lives were intertwined. She wanted to understand those intersections more deeply even as she pursued her academic studies. However, when she proposed researching Zen nuns in Japan, her advisor found the topic unworthy of serious consideration, stalling her dissertation. “Serious” dissertations, at least at Harvard, focused on textual studies, not ethnography. The implication was that ethnographers got too close to their subjects, which was assumed to somehow distort their rational thought processes and capacity for critical analysis (Arai, pers. comm., November 17, 2020).

What Arai proposed was even more radical for her time and location at Harvard than a simple dissertation on Zen nuns in Japan. She intended to literally embed herself in the daily lives of her subjects. Although there could hardly be a better way to understand the nuns’ thinking, feelings, and perceptions than to live closely among them, when she presented her proposed topic and methodology to her dissertation committee, her advisor stopped communicating with her for a year. There is a sense that those interested in understanding women’s daily lives and feelings are not truly scholars because they deal with real life instead of theoreticals. Arai’s relationship with her research subjects was presumed to be “too emotional”—a common societal assumption about women that can strongly affect women’s

own self-perception. This assumption is leveled against women in general and especially against women who deviate from professional expectations. Professor Nagatomi's concern was driven by the fact that a woman working on women in Buddhist texts had recently been denied tenure at Stanford. He was concerned that if Arai worked on Buddhist women and their embodied practice, she would never get a job or keep one. Nevertheless, Arai intuitively felt that her approach was valid. Despite some trepidation at standing her ground amidst recognized authorities in her field, she overcame her doubts and decided to pursue her ethnographic fieldwork. As she puts it, "Undaunted, I plowed ahead, got a Fulbright, went to the nunnery, and immersed myself in the life there" (Arai, pers. comm., November 20, 2020).

In her article "Gender and Emotion: What We Think We Know, What We Need to Know, and Why It Matters," Stephanie A. Shields (2013, 423) notes that it is difficult to deny that "emotion's representations in beliefs and stereotypes have a powerful effect in shaping how we interpret our own and others' emotional behavior." This "differences paradigm . . . aids the circulation of essentialized beliefs about gender from popular culture to psychological science." In academia, it is not uncommon to see women's and men's work evaluated differently through the lens of affect by students, colleagues, and administrators. Research that takes feelings into account may be regarded as suspect, lacking in academic rigor, and discounted, based on the assumption that emotion and reason are intrinsically oppositional rather than complementary, equally valid modes of perception. Moreover, there is a commonly held assumption in many societies that rationality (the stereotypical province of men) is preferable and more worthy of value than emotion (the stereotypical province of women). This assumption may lead one to devalue the affective dimension of human experience and devalue or discount people who evince emotion or take it to heart. In Arai's case, her very identity was seen as suspect. Her dissertation committee assumed that she could not be objective in studying Japanese women because her mother was Japanese and she was part Japanese. This experience of being typecast plunged her into a vortex of self-reflexivity that revolved around the dynamics of culture, language, power, and the theories, methods, and root assumptions that undergird scholarship (Arai, pers. comm., November 20, 2020).

A cross-cultural exploration of the nature and expression of emotion is an integral aspect of Arai's scholarship and especially salient

in her work with Japanese women. In general, in Japanese society, possibly influenced by Buddhism and Shinto, the public display of emotions may be associated with weakness and, to spare others pain and embarrassment, may be avoided. The devaluing of affect and the association of unbridled emotion with women is not limited to Japanese or other Asian societies, of course. It occurs all too frequently in societies around the world, especially at universities. When emotion is thought to cloud judgment and is associated with women, it can become a pretext for discrimination; women as emotional beings are regarded as less suited to be hired, promoted, and become president. Discounting the affective dimension of human experience is an unmistakable, relentless, often crushing assertion of male intellectual superiority that women in the academy must endure to survive. This has certainly been Arai's heartfelt experience. Although the affective dimension of Arai's personal experience was ignored and denigrated in an academic setting, in Buddhist texts, certain human emotions are regarded as virtues to be cultivated (loving kindness, compassion, patience, and more), whereas other emotions are regarded as afflictions to be eliminated (anger, hatred, jealousy, pride, and more). The Japanese Buddhist women that she befriended and studied so appreciated her open expression of emotional vulnerability that they opened their hearts in turn. Her vulnerability and honesty about her personal perspective and experience became an asset in her research.

A Distinctive Ethnographic Methodology

Because Arai's work was based on her personal experience of living for more than one year at Japan's leading Sōtō Zen monastic training center for nuns and deals explicitly with emotional healing, I was curious to learn more about her ethnographic methodology and her experience of conducting research from both an insider's (emic) and an outsider's (etic) perspective, as both a practitioner and a scholar. On the one hand, in academic research, it is commonly assumed that getting too close to one's subject—often labeled “going native”—contaminates the data and impedes objectivity. On the other hand, keeping a distance and attempting to do research as neither an insider nor an outsider may leave one with a view from nowhere. As Thomas Nagel (1986, 3) frames it in his influential work *View from Nowhere*, “This book is about a single problem: how to combine the perspective

of a particular person inside the world with an objective view of that same world, the person and his [sic] viewpoint included. It is a problem that faces every creature with the impulse and the capacity to transcend its particular point of view and to conceive of the world as a whole.” Arai responded that being both an insider and an outsider has been the secret to her scholarship. Having grown up in a bi-cultural household, she always had to see through different lenses. When she first decided to take up ethnography, she asked others for some pointers but soon realized that she was on her own and would have to figure it out herself. Arai is explicit about her methodology:

First-, second-, and third-person perspectives are based on a concept that people are independent, individual existents. I write with cognizance that I am not a separate entity. Rather, whatever appears on the page emerges out of a “relational voice,” a voice that expresses a flux of mutuality, reflexivity, and interbeing. Shared time, spaces, and conversations generate an experience whose causes and conditions are too numerous to know. Even so, I am aware that my agency permeates my thoughts and writings, and I assume responsibility for what I convey. (Arai, pers. comm., April 8, 2021)

This relational or interrelational voice is interactive and relies on holistic interactions between the researcher and the research subject, who is perhaps better characterized as a conversation partner. A mutual understanding and appreciation establish a balance of agency and authority between the two dialogue partners in this reflexive conversation. Arai assumes responsibility for her reportage and her interpretation of the exchange, which she both conceptually interprets and also literally interprets from Japanese to English while engaging in a shared, mutually respectful exchange. Her innovative methodology relies on communication beyond words and concepts. Her qualitative research methodology contrasts with standard academic ethnographic methodologies that assume the importance of objectivity and even assume that objectivity is possible. She challenged those methodologies and the more traditional constructive, textual, theological approach that her professors expected of her because they did not illuminate the Japanese context she encountered in field research. In the course of many trips to Japan, as she engaged with both monastic and lay Buddhist women, she intuitively developed and followed her own interrelational methodology (Arai, pers. comm., April 8, 2021).

When Arai arrived at Aichi Senmon Nisōdō, she resolved to follow the rules to the best of her ability. That way, the nuns could see that she respected them and their way of life. This approach was an essential component of her ethnographic research methodology and a key element in negotiating Japanese social mores and Buddhist monastic culture. Aoyama Rōshi, the incumbent abbess, was very skeptical of scholars and kept a strict eye on her. This vigilance created an intense environment in which Arai pushed the limits to prove her sincerity. For four months, she vied to clean the dirtiest spaces and carry the heaviest tables to compensate for all mistakes and inadequacies. Only then did she begin interviewing. She quickly realized that the Western way of doing ethnography by trying not to contaminate the data was useless. She did her best to see each individual as a whole person and asked questions as respectfully as possible. Because scholarship is so highly respected in Japan, and because she was a research scholar from Harvard, albeit a doctoral candidate, she needed to reassure her consociates that she was not knowledgeable. They were. By revealing her insecurity and vulnerability, she empowered them and made them feel safe to speak freely. Though she had to be continually mindful about how her words and actions affected other people, she eventually passed the test (Arai, pers. comm., November 17, 2020). Aoyama Rōshi confirmed that her disciples opened up about topics they had never shared with her, including details about their lives before becoming ordained (Arai, pers. comm., April 8, 2021). Because the typical categories used in ethnographic research did not parse with what Arai was observing, she upended the process. First, she conducted her fieldwork, and later she tried to match the data with theoretical constructs to see which theories fit into an academic discourse.

By the time she wrote *Bringing Zen Home*, she felt much more competent to explain that the standard ethnographic categories often did not fit the data she had collected. She had to continually re-evaluate her methodology and revise it to determine what methods worked best with these women. She started the relationship with each interviewee (consociate) with the story of her mother's passing and explained how, through that experience, she came to understand the power of ritual. Without sharing her story, even with Aoyama Rōshi's affirmation, she would not have been able to gain their trust.

Arai discusses her methodology in the first chapter of *Women Living Zen*, under three subheadings—Scholarly Contexts, Theoretical Considerations, and Methodological Considerations (1999b)—and in

the first chapter of *Bringing Zen Home*, under “Mapping the Terrain” (2011a). The methodology chapter in the first book discusses the traditional view of the second-person observer as being the litmus test for scholarly research:

My research methods are attuned to the intersubjective dynamic between researcher and consociates, and, therefore, operate in the second-person. I use the second person to refer to the space and dynamics between people. It is the “we” of relational interaction. The second-person approach is especially fitting for qualitative research that aims to understand people’s healing experiences. A second-person orientation focuses on the relationship of the people involved in the research. . . .

There is no fixed word for ‘I’ in the Japanese language. The nuanced complexities of navigating selves as fundamentally relational beings is evident in the fact that there are fifteen ways to say ‘I’ in contemporary Japanese, each one designating an aspect of the self, depending on what one wants to present to another person. You can indicate gender, stress social status, negotiate levels of formality, note age, or convey a combination of any of these. Delineations of subjectivity and objectivity are not helpful in this sociolinguistic context, which makes a second-person mode of research especially helpful. (Arai 2011a, 7–8)

This approach entails not keeping a distance and getting emotionally involved. Although some scholars, such as the learning scientist Wolff-Michael Roth (2012), argue that first-person reporting is a valid perspective, it is still suspect in the academy.

Arai self-consciously works with the women from a healing perspective. She keeps a field journal related to her own experience. Over the course of her academic career, Arai developed a distinctive methodology—“affective empathy”—that is central to her research. While doing fieldwork for *Bringing Zen Home*, intermittently spanning 1998–2009, she saw that Japanese Buddhist housewives opened their hearts and shared their spiritual lives on a very deep level when they trusted they would be understood. This methodology is fluid and has evolved significantly. For example, after over three years of developing close relationships with women about their painful and healing experiences, she decided it was important to open up more about a significant change in her personal situation. Although it was not a situation that any of the women had experienced, she revealed

that she got a divorce, which unleashed a flood of emotions. From these experiences of dealing with trauma, she learned that one may no longer be stuck in the pain yet still not be impervious to the pain. She also realized the critical difference between empathy, which can be both physically and psychologically draining, and compassion, which is empowering. Initially, she doubted her capacity to complete an in-depth study about Japanese women's spiritual lives. She was concerned that an open heart might affect the nature of the data she collected. As her fieldwork progressed, she recognized that taking on another person's pain could paralyze her and, through her own experience, verified that the more sensitive the material, the more care one must take to ensure that one's data is reliable. Gradually, balancing scholarly objectivity and heartfelt subjectivity, she became more intuitive.

Her circumstances as a guest living and working at the monastery also enabled Arai to gain the trust of her consociates, since the laywomen trusted the nuns. Although doing field research with a toddler was demanding—even more than solo-parenting while teaching—the fact that she was a mother helped deepen her relationships with the women. Early in the field research with the women, however, she came down with pneumonia and had to cancel all the initial interviews she had just scheduled. This turned the tables of power. She was sick and needed their help. The situation provided the perfect catalyst for a change in their point of view. Rather than being seen as a professor of Buddhist studies with a Harvard PhD, she was a sick woman with a two-year-old opening the door in her pajamas. Suddenly she was no longer an elevated scholar but simply a human being in need of assistance, and they were the ones who knew how to take care of the situation. That shifted the power balance and cut through the notion that Arai knew more than they did because she was a scholar. They helped her through her illness and the ongoing grief of her mother's passing. Given this change in the power dynamic of researcher and subject, they were able to share their understanding as consociates in a way that went far beyond superficial answers to contrived questions. They were the experts and took her to the special places and events that helped them heal.

Using a methodology that embraced subjectivity over objectivity, Arai's consociates revealed their vulnerabilities and put their most painful foot forward. Expressing deeply felt emotions can be awkward, painful, and embarrassing, so normally people do not go there. However, in this special case, these spiritual friends felt safe shar-

ing their feelings with her, not because she was lighter-skinned and decades younger, but because her sensibilities and aesthetics were attuned with theirs. “You are different, but you don’t feel different,” they said. She was not a member of the community, yet culturally she was Japanese through and through. Having been raised by a Japanese woman who deliberately raised her with traditional Japanese values—hoping cultural refinement would shield her from enmity by White Americans with fresh memories of WWII—Arai embodies the sensibilities of the older generation. The remarkable contribution she offered was to be a bridge to help preserve the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of an earlier generation that went through dramatic socio-cultural changes (Arai, pers. comm., November 2020).

Resolving Scholarly Tensions with a Zen Sensibility

Arai is a prolific and versatile scholar with broad interests in multiple disciplines: Buddhist monasticism, gender studies, comparative religion, literary criticism, and Zen aesthetics, to name a few. Her publications on Buddhist ritual practices, particularly healing rituals (Arai 2011a; 2016) and women’s rituals (2000a; 2000b; 2007), pointedly resist drawing distinctions between philosophy, practice, and poetics. A poignant essay on authentic Zen monastic experience, “The Zen of Rags” (2017) illustrates her capacity to engage in fresh and insightful interpretations that weave together work with original texts, ritual theory, philosophical analysis, and ethnographic research to unpack “so many levels of meaning and metaphysical principles embedded in the use of a rag!”

Motivated to foreground embodied experience as an integral aspect of the predominantly text-centered field of Buddhist Studies, she and Kevin Trainor have devoted five years to co-editing the *Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Practice*—a volume that includes 39 scholars from around the world. To midwife scholarship that is contiguous with but not central to her own specialization was a keen intellectual challenge. The volume illuminates the conceptual categories, methodologies, and themes that undergird current inquiry into and understandings of the body, practice, ritualized activities, and modes of lived experience linked with Buddhist traditions. In keeping with a broad analytical reorientation within Buddhist studies over the past several decades, it reflects the fact that embodiment, material-

ity, emotion, race, gender, and ethnicity shape the manner in which most Buddhists engage with their traditions. The volume is organized around Buddhist practice and draws out how practice often represents a fluid and dynamic means of defining identity and negotiating the challenges of everyday social and institutional life. In writing the “Overview of Practice in East Asia,” she had the chance to synthesize and distill decades of knowledge acquisition and insight into a few dozen pages. Co-authoring the introductory chapter was a chance to develop relevant theoretical and conceptual issues that will engender advances in research and understanding of embodied modes of scholarly and religious practice. Publication is forthcoming with Oxford University Press (Arai, pers. comm., April 8, 2021).

After surviving stints in narrow-minded academic environments where her gentleness and heartfulness were perceived as intellectual weakness, she freed herself from the mental shackles of sterilized “objective” scholarship and flourished in the messy realm of lived dynamics. Rather than relinquish her integrity to fight for power and position, she found a sweet vantage point beyond the fray. To date, her most liberating scholarly endeavor was her radical foray into Japanese Buddhist aesthetics. As she had done in the monastery and in Japanese women’s homes, she threw herself wholeheartedly into yet another new direction—though this time with no inhibitions—to articulate the heart of Zen.

The world of Japanese aesthetics is vibrant, with its own vocabulary of concepts specific to Japanese culture—such as *wabi*, *sabi*, *mono no aware* (Parkes and Loughnane 2018)—that evoke a simple, natural, or rustic ethos of beauty. This ethos is often portrayed as conveying the unmediated insight and directness of Zen philosophy and practice (Bai 1997; Hoover 2010; Parkes and Loughnane 2018). There is some controversy regarding the cultural provenance of Zen aesthetics as purveyed in modern times, extending to martial arts, motorcycle maintenance, and health spas. Shōji Yamada (1963) provides a critical analysis that challenges traditional narratives regarding Zen aesthetics and makes a case for Western influences in the field. That Arai was bold enough to venture into Zen studies, a sub-field dominated by male voices, is a tribute to her creativity and courage. With numerous publications in various aspects of Zen philosophy and practice (1990, 1993, 1999b, 2000a, 2000c, 2007, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2017), she was well-prepared to make this leap.

It is rare for Buddhist scholars to bridge the disciplines of art and religion in more than a formulaic way. Arai’s momentous cre-

ative project *Painting Enlightenment: Healing Visions of the Heart Sutra* weaves together art, religion, and science in a published book and multiple exhibitions that feature the oeuvre of Iwasaki Tsuneo (1917–2002), a Japanese biologist and Buddhist painter (Arai 2019). Emerging from her prior research on healing (Arai 2006; 2011b), the book explores the healing dynamics of visual scripture in Iwasaki’s art. It required ethnographic field research and fluency in spoken and written Japanese to do in-depth interviews with the artist and read relevant primary and secondary materials. Her expertise in Japanese Buddhist culture and Buddhist Madhyamika philosophy enabled her to contextualize and interpret the Buddhist art he created with the *Heart of Wisdom Sūtra*, a seminal Buddhist scripture. His art demanded she expand her research vistas to include Buddhist art history, theories of aesthetics and perception, basic levels of cellular and evolutionary biology, and astro- and quantum physics to fathom and analyze the aesthetic and scientific dimensions of his work. The range of activities and conversations generated from this effort integrate her scholarly, educational, and community endeavors in ways that have garnered diverse, interdisciplinary, and international attention.



Image 4: Exhibition of Iwasaki’s Work.

Iwasaki—a Japanese contemplative scientist—integrates Buddhist metaphysics and art by fashioning perceptible forms of everyday objects using strands of the *Heart of Wisdom Sūtra* written in

tiny Chinese characters. His visionary work re-imagines the ancient art of sūtra copying as a means of creating merit and transforms it into a practice of replicating sūtras as prayers to heal humanity. He creates flows of dynamic energy that, like a mirror, reflect DNA—“a record of interrelatedness that spans billions of years and connects all life forms” (Arai 2019, 36). For him, the ethical implications of this boundless interrelatedness are obvious: “DNA reveals a profound commonality that, in Buddhist terms, underlies empathy and merits compassion.” For Arai, Iwasaki’s art encodes both the compassion and the wisdom of the Buddha—fleeting phenomenal forms arising from emptiness, the universe in a dewdrop, with each dewdrop teaching impermanence and reflecting the interrelatedness of all life.

Arai has been devoted to sharing Iwasaki’s work because it helps her heart ring with compassion (Arai 2019, 97). The wisdom of compassion then translates into concrete acts of compassion, such as listening empathetically to those who are bereaved. With these insights, she has dissolved all the vestiges of doubt she saw reflected in her circumstances and maintained her integrity through many difficulties. By consistently responding from the heart, her gentle power creates a compassionate bridge between cultures. Her eyes were opened by the injustices endemic in the system, but, instead of becoming bitter, cynical, or jaded, she learned to empathize more deeply. Her open heart and profound insight into the human condition are a triumph of resilience.

Arai’s story is one among many, including those whom the academy rejected. Her experiences of the academy reveal the creative strength of her intellectual and personal qualities and demonstrate how the environment, history of biases, and power dynamics can be challenging and challenged. She knows she is not the only one who faced the tensions of being a bicultural woman who encountered male-dominated, White academic institutions. Yet there were few in her midst during the hardest periods. Raising a child on her own intensified the demands on her time and energy. Navigating the tensions between gentleness and power, acceptance and determination, affect and rationality, art and intellect, and submission and authority, Arai forged a unique path, hoping others would be more readily treated with the open-minded and critical awareness that reflect the higher values of the academy.



Image 5: Arai with her son Kenji in Yosemite National Park.

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