Death is an event of cataclysmic separation. The deceased, once appropriately disposed of, cannot be seen, touched, conversed with. So we use rituals and ritual objects to help bridge the gulf, suture the wound to the collective body of family and of community, and overcome a sense of powerlessness in the face of death. This study looks at the way these special objects functioned in Japanese death rituals of the early medieval period. The first half examines case studies, culled from written records, that illustrate how elite members of Japanese society negotiated the boundary between the living and the dead through their funerals and memorial services. The second half deals with various types of funerary structures, painted and sculpted images, and other ritual articles that served in such negotiations, and analyzes their crucial roles in the performance of mortuary rituals.

Ritual Studies

“Ritual” is a charged concept, and one that has been well explored by anthropologists, religious historians, and scholars in other disciplines. Much has been written about death rituals, but this is the first study in any language to analyze the critical role of material objects in the practice of medieval Japanese death rituals.

In the West, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ritual became an area of special interest to scholars in the newly developing field of anthropology. In the mid-1970s a fully interdisciplinary discussion of ritual emerged and the field of ritual studies was born, engaging scholars from a wide range of disciplines, including religious studies, anthropology, theology, history, performance studies, literature, and the visual arts. Among these later scholars, S. J. Tambiah, Catherine Bell, and others have noted that words not
only describe rituals but are part of the performance itself. Likewise, I argue
that ritual objects are not simply visual appendages to the ritual sequence but
are part of the structure and performance. My way of interpreting the objects
that accompany the rituals of death in this study is similar to Jessica Rawson’s
characterization of the ritual function of Shang and Zhou bronzes in China:
“... all rituals communicate through physical structures and objects. Indeed,
the whole impact of a ritual must depend on a close fit between the objects,
physical structures and location of the ritual and the ritual procedures that are
used.” Physical objects, then, are crucial components of the actions per-
formed. As the real focus of my study is not the rituals themselves so much as
the relationship between the rituals and physical objects, I use the word “ritu-
al” in its broadest and most obvious sense, as a series of prescribed actions
that form part of a religious ceremony. I also employ the terms “ritual” and
“ceremony” more or less interchangeably throughout. Certainly, much more
could be done to elucidate the construction and meaning of the rituals them-
selves, but I leave this to other scholars.

Material Culture

Scholarship on the material things that people use in their daily lives is rela-
tively recent, much of it written in the twentieth century. Broadly defined as “all
data directly relating to visible or tangible things such as tools, clothing, or shel-
ter which a person or persons have made,” material culture is an approach rele-
vant for most disciplines in the humanities, but one of special interest to scholars
in anthropology, archaeology, and art history, because artifacts are essential
source material in these disciplines. Although objects play important roles in
forms of religious activity, historians of religion have tended, in general, to privi-
lege religious texts over images and artifacts. Scholars in Japan became inter-
ested in material culture in the 1970s as a way to better engage in the debate
between Marxist and non-Marxist economic historians. Their publications ul-
timately helped to make material culture and the lifestyles of common people
acceptable subjects of academic study in history and related disciplines.

Scholarship on the material culture of death in any period of Japan’s history
is negligible. But the topic of death per se in premodern Japan has been well re-
searched, and many such studies include details about the built structures and
ritual objects that accompany the dead. Although these publications straddle
the line between ritual studies and studies of material culture, none has focused
on the interaction between material culture and the rituals of death. Among the
most comprehensive studies on death are Haga Noboru’s Sōgi no rekishi (1970)
and Gorai Shigeru’s Sō to kuyō (1992). Both trace Japanese funeral practices ex-
haustively, from ancient through modern times. Gorai’s book, in particular, is a
massive compendium of terms and practices that includes much useful information on the historical context of Japanese funerary structures and ritual objects. More recently, the historian Katsuda Itaru published two important books on the topic of medieval death. In both *Shishatachi no chūsei* (2003) and *Nihon chūsei no haka to sōsō* (2006), Katsuda focuses on death in the medieval period as it evolved from earlier precedents. All three authors rely heavily on historical sources to support their interpretations, but Gorai also includes photographs of modern-day death rituals and related structures and objects, whereas Katsuda reproduces sections of medieval handscrolls to illustrate objects in his discussions. Itō Yuishin’s chapter “Moromoriki ni miru chūsei sōsōsai bukkyō” in *Sōsō bosei kenkyū shiusei: haka no rekishi* (1989) and Suitō Makoto’s “Morosuke no sōsō girei to chūsei no sōsai bukkyō” in *Chūsei no sōsō, bosei* (1991) were immensely helpful in interpreting medieval Buddhism in the context of the Nakahara funerals discussed in Chapter 1. My research is deeply indebted to the pioneering work of these Japanese scholars, and in particular to Katsuda, whose combination of text and visual material greatly influenced the shape of my project. None of the Japanese studies, however, focuses specifically on how the ritual objects functioned during the funerary and mortuary rituals.

**Art History**

Many of the objects discussed in my study, like clothing, coffins, enclosures, and grave markers, are not of a caliber to interest art historians. Conversely, other objects that accompanied medieval funerals have been and are studied by art historians but not considered within their ritual context. Once essential to the performance of death rituals, such objects as painted portraits, folding screens, sutra scrolls, and Buddhist implements are today generally classified as “art” and are valued primarily for their aesthetic excellences. That these objects now reside in museums or in the museumlike context of temple treasuries has further isolated them, causing them to lose much of the original numinous quality of their symbolism and function, and making it difficult to see them as other than objects made for pleasure and display. Indeed, one of the deplorable effects of the modern museum is to encourage the decontextualization of art works and to divest them of their centuries-old, multilayered meanings. True, their original owners also valued the preciousness of their materials and the quality of their craftsmanship, but primary to these owners was the particular function performed by the objects within the context of the ritual.

Art historians have tended to neglect the study of Buddhist ritual implements. This avoidance seems to be particularly true of Japan, where exhibition catalogs of temple collections, usually written by historians of religion and of art, introduce only a few ritual implements in contrast to the great
Introduction

The preponderance of the temple's Buddhist paintings and sculptures. For example, the 2001 exhibition catalog of treasures from Daigoji includes fewer than twenty entries on Buddhist implements (hōgū) and limits information about them to comments on their general role in the ritual adornment of the temple and a brief mention of ceremonies for which they were used; the remaining ninety or so entries treat paintings, calligraphies, and sculptures. This is not to say that Buddhist institutions were poor in ritual implements—quite the contrary. It is likely that ritual implements seldom appear in exhibitions and are little written about because they are intimately known by the Japanese public, which requires no detailed explanation of their function.

In the West the objects themselves and how they functioned in Buddhist rituals have only recently emerged as topics of interest among art historians. Indeed, until recently the important questions—by whom, when, where, and why certain implements were used—were not asked. The 1996 catalog for the exhibition at the Katonah Museum of Art, curated by Anne Nishimura Morse and Samuel Crowell Morse, focused broadly on Buddhist ritual objects and their roles in the ornamentation of ritual space. In their introduction to the catalog the authors state that elite Japanese patrons of Buddhism were inordinately fascinated with the “visual splendor of the material adornments,” and they advance the idea that the “most important rituals were often closely tied to aesthetic experience.” In a separate essay in the catalog, Kawada and Morse categorize ritual objects as “articles of ornamentation (shōgongū)” and refer to them as “Buddhist decorative arts.”

The year 1998 saw a significant shift in the current evaluation of ritual implements with the publication of the catalog Buddhist Treasures from Nara accompanying an exhibition that brought many important Buddhist works from the Nara National Museum in Japan to the Cleveland Museum of Art. In the foreword Michael Cunningham, curator of the exhibition, asserted that the objects exhibited should not be considered “art” in the traditional sense, that, “as much as we wish to consider the extraordinary objects in this exhibition as ‘works of art,’ in fact, they were neither created nor conscientiously safeguarded as such.” Rather, he said, the articles in the exhibition are “vehicles toward gaining spiritual insight and awakening.” The catalog is also noteworthy because Cunningham carefully analyzes a significant number of the exhibited ritual utensils and lays stress on their ritual functions.

The trend of historians of both art and religion studying the objects and images of religious practice as integral elements of that practice continues to gather momentum. In 2000 several essays published in a special edition of the Japanese Journal of Religious Studies discussed the significance of mortuary objects, and in 2001 Robert and Elizabeth Sharf published an edited volume of essays, Living Images: Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context, devoted to treating
Buddhist icons as integral elements in Buddhist practice. Neither publication, however, provided (or intended to provide) a sustained analysis of the role of material culture in medieval mortuary rituals.

The work of these and other scholars has been critical in bringing the function of images and objects in Buddhist rituals to the attention of the scholarly community and the public. I particularize their approach by questioning whether the ritual implements that accompany Japanese Buddhist funerals and memorial services fall under the rubric of art at all. Certainly, most are plentiful, durable, and produced by workshops—traits that effectively remove them from most definitions of “art.” Furthermore, nearly all were designed to perform specific functions and not primarily for aesthetic appreciation, which further suggests that they are perhaps better classified as religious objects.

This study overlaps ritual studies, material culture, and art history but is not contained completely within any one of these areas. I am interested in the rituals for the context they provide to the objects, and in the objects for how they functioned within the rituals. The terms “art” and “artwork,” in particular, are insufficient for this study, and I avoid using them throughout.

The types of objects explored in this study fall roughly into two categories: objects specific to death rituals and funerals, and implements used in mortuary events but also in other Buddhist contexts. The former were made and used for a single funeral and generally included objects in close proximity to the body, such as coffins, clothing, carriages, enclosures, grave markers, gates, and folding screens, whereas the latter comprised altar tables, bronze flower vases and censers, cloth banners, canopies, musical instruments, and sutra scrolls, all used and reused in a variety of Buddhist ceremonies. Objects of certain types, such as portraits and memorial tablets, might fit either category.

This study will examine how all these objects were used, and how such a diversity of articles reflected the religious practices of early medieval Japan. It will employ a combination of sources, including documents explaining how such articles were used and in which rituals, contemporary illustrations, and surviving objects. Taken together, such sources reveal how rituals and ritual objects not only helped to comfort the living and give sustenance to the dead, but also guided and cemented societal norms of class and gender.

Methodology: Manuals, Records, and Illustrations

I have attempted to view the material culture of death through the lens of contemporary medieval chronicles and illustrations. This involves a close reading and interpretation of funeral manuals, diaries, and other records, coupled with a careful examination of medieval illustrated handscrolls, which offer details of how implements were used in mortuary rites.
Historical Texts

Early in Japan’s history, official edicts issued by the emperor established the guidelines for the proper performance of death rituals. Even the earliest proclamations make it clear that rules governing rituals were meant to reinforce the contemporary social order. For example, the mid-seventh-century *Hakusōrei* (Orders for simple burials), issued by Emperor Kōtoku (r. 645–654) as part of the Taika Reforms of 646, exhorted the people to refrain from ostentatious burials with admonitions and prohibitions such as burial mounds should be kept low; inner and outer coffins should not be decorated or lacquered; the shroud should be made to last only until the bones decayed; no metal grave goods of any type should be placed in the tomb, rather, grave goods, from figures to chariots, should be made of clay; no pearls or jewels should be placed in the mouth of the deceased, nor should jade armor be used. Kōtoku clearly intended to control the cost of and the visual impact made by tomb mounds, coffins, and grave goods in Japan. Numerous burial codes, all similarly restrictive, were issued by the court in the following centuries and can be found in special sections of the *Yōrō* (718) and Engi codes (927–967).

Of more immediate interest for this study are a number of later funeral manuals, all written by elite members of Japanese society, who also sought to proclaim and reinforce the existing social order. The most relevant are *Kichiji shidai* (Order of auspicious affairs; late 12th c.), *Kichiji ryakki* (An outline of auspicious affairs; date and author unknown), *Sōhōmitsu* (Esoteric funeral practices; early medieval period), and *Daizōkyō* (Great collection of sutras). Shukaku Hosshinō (1150–1202), the second son of Emperor Go-Shirakawa and the sixth-generation monzeki of the Shingon-sect temple Ninnaji, is thought to be the author of *Kichiji shidai*. Little is known about the second text, *Kichiji ryakki*, but it seems to be a compilation of rituals based on *Kichiji shidai* and perhaps other, now lost, texts. Both show the influence of Shingon Buddhism on the proper steps to be taken after the death of a royal. As such, both texts were likely intended to update imperial funeral practices in the late Heian period and to emphasize the importance of Esoteric practices at a time when their dominance was being challenged.

Other texts recount the procedures for the funerals of monastics. *Sōhōmitsu* is an early medieval record of unknown authorship that revised earlier Shingon funeral procedures. The section on standard ceremonies for transferring merit (*ekō*) in *Daizōkyō* is useful in understanding the Chinese Buddhist monastic codes relating to funeral and memorial services that were adopted in Japan. I have incorporated information from these manuals to help explain and support my text and illustrations.

Another important source of information about elite Japanese funerals are the daily records kept by high-ranking Buddhist priests and members of the
court. The Muromachi-period diaries that I examined are written in a linguistic
style called wayô kanbun or “Japanese-style Chinese.” The texts look like Chi-
nese, but contain specifically Japanese vocabulary and honorifics, making them
difficult to decipher. Moromoriki (Record of Moromori), a lengthy chronicle
written by the courtier Nakahara Moromori during the era of the Northern and
Southern Courts (1336–1392), supplies unusually detailed coverage of the mor-
tuary events following the deaths of his father and mother. The author gives re-
markably complete information about the rituals held during the forty-nine days
after death and about the cycle of memorial services that took place in following
months and years. My analysis of Moromoriki is intended to illustrate the se-
quence of rituals associated with the death of a high-ranking member of society
in the mid-fourteenth century. This text also provides a wealth of information
about practices not common in later, more traditional Buddhist funerals.

Filling in the lacunae are a number of fifteenth-century records such as
Jishôindono ryôan sôbo (Complete record of national mourning for Lord
Jishôin), Kennaiki (or Kendaiki; Record of Kenshôin Naifu Madenokôji Toki-
fusa), Kanmon gyoki (Record of things seen and heard), and Inryôken nichiroku
(Daily record of the Inryôken, a cloister within Rokuon’in). These texts pro-
vide surprisingly vivid details about the lying-in-state period that immediately
followed a death as well as the funeral service proper. Here we find crucial ac-
counts of the placement of the ritual objects and their spatial relationship to
the corpse and to the participants in the newer, Zen-influenced, funerals. Jishôindono ryôan sôbo, for example, includes a diagram that locates each par-
ticipant and each ritual implement in the funeral procession for Ashikaga
Yoshimitsu (d. 1408.5.6) and at his cremation site. Kennaiki, written by the
Muromachi-period courtier Tokifusa, of the Fujiwara Kaôji line, and covering
the nearly thirty years from Ôei 21 (1414) to Kôshô 1 (1441), gives a thorough
description of the funeral of the fourth Muromachi shogun, Ashikaga Yoshi-
mochi, who died on 1428.1.18. Written by an imperial prince, Fushiminomiya
Sadafusa, Kanmon gyoki covers an almost identical time period, from Ôei 23
(1416) to Bunnan 5 (1448). Beginning on 1416.11.20, Sadafusa chronicles the
death ceremonies held for his father, the imperial prince Yoshihito (1361–
1416), who would posthumously become the grandfather of the future emperor
Go-Hanazono. Inryôken nichiroku was written by two Zen Buddhist priests,
Kikei Shinzui and Kisen Shûshô; Kikei wrote the entries from 1435.6.1 to
1441.7.6, and from 1458.1.10 to 1466.9.5; and Kisen those from 1484.8.18 to
1493.9.23. Beginning on 1463.8.8, Kikei relates the death rituals conducted for
Hino Shigeko, member of an important court family and wife of the sixth
Ashikaga Shogun, Yoshinori (1394–1441; r. 1429–1441). These documents give exhaustive information on medieval mortuary rit-
uals and are extraordinarily rich sources for the objects and structures used in
the rituals, providing detailed accounts of their positioning and function. The accounts span the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, allowing me to examine a continuous century of Japanese medieval death practices: Nakahara Morosuke and his wife Kenshin died in 1345, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu in 1408, Prince Yoshihito in 1416, Ashikaga Yoshimochi in 1428, and Hino Shigeko in 1463. These texts have the further advantage of illustrating funerals of all social levels within the educated elite, and of both men and women. They include a male court bureaucrat (Morosuke) and his wife (Kenshin), an imperial prince (Yoshihito), two shoguns (Yoshimitsu and Yoshimochi), and a female member (Shigeko) of an elite court family connected through marriage to the Ashikaga family of shoguns. The examples represent individuals from different religious backgrounds, whose funerals include a surprisingly eclectic array of rituals loosely associated with onmyōdō (yin-yang practices), Shingon and Tendai Buddhism, the Ji school of Pure Land Buddhism, and Zen Buddhism. The sheer diversity of the examples makes it difficult to perceive and track changes over time in funerary customs within a specific societal level, so that goal remains beyond the scope of this study. Furthermore, although the examples make clear that Zen funerary practices intersected and impacted the rituals of death across a broad spectrum of classes and for both sexes in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a systematic study of the extent and effects of Zen practices are for religious historians to sort out.

**Historical Images and Monuments**

Notwithstanding the wealth of information about mortuary rituals that texts provide, they seldom describe what the often sumptuous ritual objects looked like and how they were arranged. For a “picture” of the types of material objects utilized in the rituals, I looked to images of funerals and memorial services found in illustrated medieval handscrolls and to surviving examples of mortuary art and architecture. The most useful illustrated scrolls include Hönen shōnin e-den (Illustrated biography of priest Hönen; 14th c.), Zenshin shōnin Shinran den-e (Good and true illustrated biography of priest Shinran; late 13th c.), and Nichiren shōnin chūgasan (Annotated illustrations of priest Nichiren; early 16th c.). All these depict the lives of monks dedicated to Pure Land Buddhism, although Nichiren’s link was tenuous; he abandoned his early studies of Pure Land teachings in favor of devotion to the Lotus Sutra. Regardless of sectarian affiliation, however, the existing handscrolls illustrate funeral processions and cremation scenes that, by the fifteenth century, had become typical of Buddhist funerals. I am aware that the texts and illustrations I have relied on do not stem from a single Buddhist tradition, but problems related to sectarian differences are not at issue here. I did not find any illustrated biographies of Zen priests from my chosen period, probably because such scrolls were not customarily made in the Gozan temples. It is impor-
tant that, nonetheless, all of the documents, visual and textual, display to some
degree the influence of Zen Buddhism on the rituals of death.

I am mindful that the objects discussed in Section 2 are not those specifically
employed for the funerals described in Section 1. Many implements designed
for funeral use, such as coffins, carriages, grave enclosures, and so forth,
were made of ephemeral materials, not intended to survive. Other ritual ob-
jects belonged to Buddhist temples, not individuals, and were used and reused
for countless funerals and other rituals, making it less important to talk about
the particular objects than to consider the types of implements.

This integrative use of text and image enables me to present a compara-
tively full range of mortuary objects and structures used by a representative group
of Japanese elites in the period 1345–1463. I have limited the scope of this proj-
ect to members of the imperial family and court, high-ranking military families,
and Buddhist priests, because these are the individuals for whom the most ample
documentation remains. Scholars have asserted that Buddhism was transformed
from an elite to a popular religion during the Kamakura period (1185–1333) and
that Buddhist funeral practices thereafter began to appear at least occasionally
among the general populace; but only members of elite groups kept records,
composed diaries, and commissioned illustrated handscrolls. As a result, it is
their funerary customs that remain to some degree accessible to us. In contrast,
the customs of other nonelite groups in medieval Japan have been little studied
because textual evidence is scarce. Although some medieval popular stories
include descriptions of funerals, it was priests or courtiers, not commoners, who
wrote most of them, and we have little understanding of their intent or their
audience. Thus, the study of these nonelite groups requires a different type of
data and is outside the scope of this project.

The majority of my textual evidence focuses on laypersons’ funerals, which
were not traditionally depicted in illustrated scrolls. Therefore I have utilized im-
ages of the funerals of important priests like Hōnen, Shinran, and Nichiren who,
as the founders of sects of Buddhism in Japan, were sufficiently important to have
their lives and deaths memorialized in narrative scroll paintings. But in medieval
Japan the boundaries between elite laypersons and clergy were rather fluid: most
lay Buddhist followers took the tonsure at some point in their lives; for some the
ritual was even performed after death. Thus, it is not surprising that the funerals
for elite laypersons were similar to those for illustrious Buddhist priests, allowing
the depictions of the priests’ funerals to fill the lacunae quite credibly.

The Organization of the Book

Part 1 of the book, “The Rituals of Death” (Chaps. 1, 2), introduces the death
rituals typically performed for elite lay individuals in the fourteenth and
fifteenth centuries and establishes a vocabulary for the ritual objects that accompanied them. Chapter 1, “Death in the Fourteenth Century,” provides a detailed description of the funerals of and subsequent memorial services for two members (a man and a woman) of a family of court officials in the mid-fourteenth century. Also discussed are prefuneral rites, such as the ceremony of taking the tonsure (shukke no gi) and the ceremony of putting on the mourning clothes (chakufuku no gi), and postfuneral rites, such as the grave-stone offering ceremony (sekitō kuyō), along with directives about the numbers and types of alms (fuse) presented to the priests who conducted the services, the types of images that were offered, and the sutras and incantations performed. Alms and offerings are part of the material culture, but are also characteristic of the economic forces involved in the development of complex funerary rites. Additional examples would broaden the scope of our understanding of this century, but few contemporary records for the Nanbokuchō period (1336–1392) discuss funeral arrangements in detail.

Chapter 2, “Funerals in the Fifteenth Century,” discusses the rituals performed at fifteenth-century funerals, including the closing of the coffin lid (sagan), moving the coffin out of the residence (igan) and to the cremation site (kigan), and the final offerings of tea (tencha) and hot water (tentō) to the deceased. This chapter includes details and diagrams illustrating the organization of the funeral procession and the arrangement of the ritual objects in the temple and at the cremation site; it also deals with the positioning of the corpse and of those in attendance. The detailed specificity of these ritual performances reflects how important it was to maintain the balance between the needs of the living and of the dead, and underscores the care that was taken by the family, priests, and society to honor these demands. These first two chapters are crucial, for without them the objects discussed in the following chapters have no context.

Significant changes in the practice of death rituals can be seen reflected in the documents that survive from these two centuries. Although new funerary customs modeled on ancient Chinese Confucian ancestor rites were transmitted to Japan along with Zen Buddhism in the twelfth century, it is unclear how well integrated these innovations were by the fourteenth century, even among elite circles. With the new customs came new rituals, such as displaying portraits of the deceased during the funeral, and new ritual implements, such as wooden ancestral tablets, both of which originally served in Confucian ancestor rites but became intertwined with Chinese Buddhist mortuary rituals and were brought to Japan as components of Zen funerary practice. Yet these objects receive little attention in the texts on fourteenth-century funerals. My research suggests that fourteenth-century funerals for court personages show greater variation and less structure than those of the Ashikaga
shoguns in the fifteenth century, which epitomize Zen-style funerals based on the Chinese monastic model. The two centuries present a pivotal period in the development of Japanese funerary rituals, characterized by transition in the fourteenth century and codification of the new Chinese-inspired rites within elite funerary practice in the fifteenth century.

Part 2, “The Material Culture of Death” (Chaps. 3–5), addresses the types of objects treated in texts and visualized in contemporary illustrated handscrolls and in extant objects. The texts investigated in the first section refer to a number of ritual objects in their descriptions of funerals and memorial services but seldom describe those objects in detail. Perhaps, for contemporaneous readers, the objects required no description. For us, they do. We want to know how large the coffins were and how they were made, which ritual implements were used for the memorial services, and how and where they were arranged. We are interested in who commissioned the portraits of the deceased, when they were displayed and where, and who saw them. These questions are the focus of this section, and the objects are amply illustrated.

The three chapters show the critical importance accorded the visual components and aspects of death rituals. Ritual structures marked the boundaries between the living and the dead and guided the eyes of the mourners to their proper objects, restricting and revealing certain sights as necessary. Specialists handled the ritual implements in a prescribed manner of interaction; the objects did not function simply as passive recipients of veneration. Images were arranged in a strict order and mourners were encouraged to approach them in a certain manner. Colors, smells, sounds, and sights were all coordinated in the funeral and its aftermath in order to mend the tear in the social fabric caused by death.

Chapter 3, “Objects of Separation and Containment,” therefore surveys a range of built structures that were used to enclose and contain the body after death and to separate the dead from the living. In Japan, as in most cultures, this process began on the deathbed. The structures include golden folding screens (kin byōbu) that surrounded the body from the moment of death until cremation or burial, coffins and carriages that contained and transported the body to its final resting place, silk-wrapped wooden fences that surrounded the cremation site, and special constructions to entomb the corpse. The addition of each container or enclosure provided another layer of protection for the living and represented a further stage in the process of separating the living from the dead.

Chapter 4, “Ritual Implements for Funerals and Memorials,” examines the primary ritual implements and their uses. Traditional Buddhist implements (hōgu) were used to adorn (shōgon) and thereby sanctify Buddhist sanctuaries, and a number were also carried in the funeral processions and used for the memorial services that followed. These included banners (ban), canopies (tengai), long-handled censers (egōro), musical instruments—cymbals (hasshi),
gongs (shōko) and metal bowls (kinsu)—offering utensils and vessels (mitsu gusoku, rokki), sutra scrolls and wooden sutra tables (kyōzukue). These objects helped to visually “frame” the ritual space, and their relocation during critical junctures helped to mark the passage of time.30

Chapter 5, “Portraits of the Deceased,” addresses the types of and uses for portraits at funerals and memorial services. Although scholars are aware that portraits of the deceased were of central importance in Japanese death rituals throughout the premodern era, existing studies tend to view portraits primarily as sources of historical and social information. My study analyzes the terminology for mortuary portraits and raises questions that have not been satisfactorily explored, such as when and where the portraits were displayed, who commissioned them and when, and what types of rites were performed before them.

Physical objects combined with particular rituals helped the living negotiate the boundary between death and life. When death occurred, mourners sought and found solace in the symbolism of the object, and often in its specific connection to the deceased. Some objects were even imbued with special properties that were believed to facilitate communication with the departed or to improve the deceased’s situation in the afterlife. By analyzing these objects through texts, images, and the surviving objects themselves, we gain a sense of how they were perceived and used, and why they were treasured, thereby restoring them (as much as possible) to their original contexts. This volume raises many questions that extend beyond the scope of the project, but it is my hope that scholars from a wide range of disciplines will use it as a springboard to expand upon current knowledge of death rituals and the function of ritual implements in their performance.