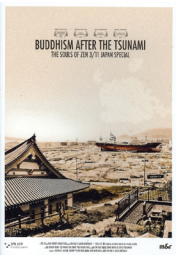

Tim Graf and Jakob Montrasio, editors and directors, *Buddhism after the Tsunami: The Souls of Zen 3/11 Japan Special* (Classroom Edition)

Tim Graf and Michael Zimmer, producers. 2012. 63 minutes. In Japanese and English, with English subtitles. Open access: https://vimeo.com/158309233.

This film, narrated by co-director Tim Graf, seeks to shed light on the role of Buddhist religious organizations in the wake of the triple disasters—earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear crisis—that occurred on 11 March 2011 (3.11) in Japan. Graf contributed two vignettes related to this subject in this journal (vol. 75, no. 1), a special issue focusing on religious groups' responses to disasters in Asia.

Buddhism after the Tsunami was not Graf's initial research project. He was investigating Zen Buddhism for his PhD in Japan when the earthquake struck at 2:46 p.m., which caused him to rethink his work. He saw that Buddhist organizations were among the first to mobilize a response to the earthquake by raising funds in the streets within days and helping survivors. As he was witnessing "the greatest religious mobilization in postwar Japanese history," he realized that he and his colleagues could help by telling this story.

A number of key themes emerge in the film. One concerns the direct effects of the earthquake and tsunami. Takahashi Seikai (now deceased), who was the head priest of the Jōdo shū (Pure Land) temple Jōnenji, and his daughter Takahashi Issei, then the vice head priest but now head priest, describe in detail life immediately after the disaster occurred. Jōnenji is located in Kesennuma, the city nearest to the epicenter of the quake. While the temple and its newly built main hall survived, 80 percent of the households affiliated with the temple were damaged. The temple provided shelter for over 140 victims, not all of whom were members of the temple.

Locals could not comprehend the extent of the initial damage for almost a week, we learn from Shōji Yoshiaki, head priest of the Jōdo shū temple Unjōji, which is located in the city of Rikuzentakata, one of the most profoundly affected areas. While

the world watched images of the tsunami's aftermath, those in the area were without electricity.

The effect on communities is explored in revealing ways. Takahashi Seikai explains how he achieved his dream of building a hall that would withstand earthquakes yet was forced to completely reevaluate his plans—he wonders whether he should ask temple members to pay the donations they had promised to contribute to the new building. He describes how a nearby Shinto shrine had also completed a large new hall just before the earthquake that was funded by donations from the community. Although the shrine's priest and his wife initially opened the hall for the affected community members, they demanded that they leave after two days. Takahashi notes that people were so angry they refused to participate in the shrine's annual festival that October, suggesting that the selfish actions of the priest and his wife were repaid through community anger.

The film also explores the changing nature of funeral rituals. Japanese Buddhism in practice is strongly linked with the dead, and the bonds connecting the living and their ancestors are crucial. Ninety percent of funerals in Japan are Buddhist, and complex rituals have developed over the centuries—temples have been the sites where the rituals are performed. But after 3.11, priests and temples in the area were forced to adjust rituals to the circumstances. There were no coffins available and bodies were simply wrapped in sheets for cremation. People tried to go to temples to cremate their relatives but the temples themselves were unable to provide traditional rituals for the dead. Takahashi Issei explains how the first thing people searched for were remains of family altars, photographs, and mementos of those who had perished—anything that would provide a sense of normality to the rituals that had guided their practice.

Kaneta Taiō, priest of the Sōtō-shū temple Tsūdaiji, discusses the difficulties his fellow Buddhists faced in giving services and how to actually speak to those directly affected. Priests became psychological counselors, dealing with survivors as well as fellow priests who could barely deal with the situation. In a fascinating interview, he discusses the Sōtō-shū organization amid the complex religious foundations of the seaside area and the local beliefs in Sanriku-chō. Sōtō temples in the area are dedicated to the dragon god, the dragon being a symbol of nature that is said to calm the sea.

Media representation of religion is another theme that the film touches on. Like the other themes, it could easily have been extended but the main points are enough for audiences to get a sense of its import. Graf notes that the Western media largely ignored the importance of spiritual support to disaster victims and focused on "Japan's stoic resilience in the face of adversity." This was due, he states, to virtually no reported cases of looting or disorder, and few public displays of grief. By contrast, the Japanese media is given credit for treating the social engagement of religious organizations during the crisis fairly. Traditionally wary of discussing religion—a situation exacerbated by the fallout from the Aum Shinrikyō affair of the 1990s—the media played an important role in showing how different religious groups can work together for communities.

One theme that appears somewhat out of place is that of the inheritance of family graves. Grave succession remains patrilineal in Japan and we see a temple in Tokyo that sold part of its graveyard plot to finance a subterranean memorial hall. This hall houses the remains and memorial tablets of those who joined the temple's "Society of Bonds" *En no Kai* (that is, those who have paid the one-time fee). While it is interesting to

learn that the temple is catering to single women and childless couples, for example, who are unable to find graves of their own, this five-minute section is not specifically related to Buddhism's response to the tsunami.

The footage for the film is a combination of visual ethnography taken by Graf, archival news footage, and interviews. There are some exquisitely shot scenes of temples and rituals but occasionally the music overpowers what people are saying, which is distracting because the interviews are revealing and profound. While focusing on just one or two themes may have been more effective, presenting a number of areas opens up the possibility for future discussion on these subjects. Despite this, the film is a thoughtful exploration of complex issues. Graf and his colleagues deserve praise for making the film open access, and I would encourage its use in classrooms.

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