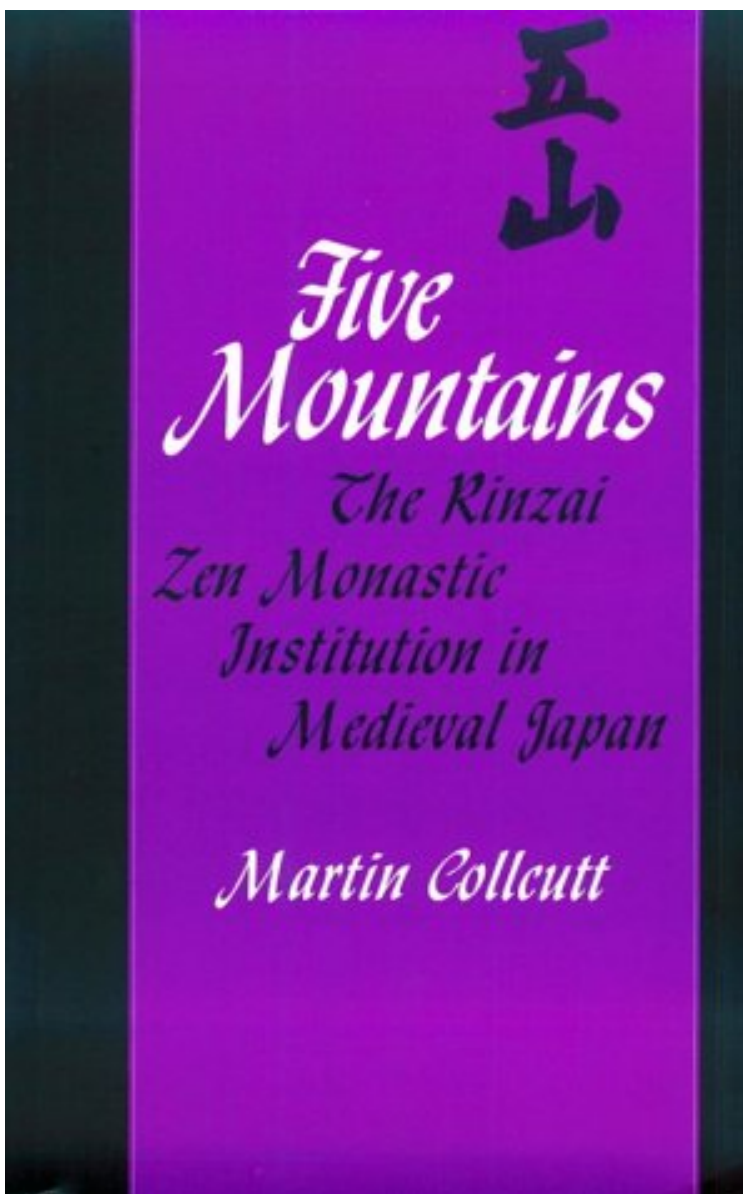


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Martin Collcutt

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Martin Collcutt : Five Mountains: The Rinzai Zen Monastic Institution in Medieval Japan (Harvard East Asian Monographs) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Five Mountains: The Rinzai Zen Monastic Institution in Medieval Japan (Harvard East Asian Monographs):

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Brilliant and Engrossing: Makes a Potential Boring Subject Exciting! By Jomo K Most readers who come to this text are, no doubt, overly familiar with the more playful spiritual intensity of Japanese Zen, whether it be through the writings of stoic mountain hermits (say, Dogen); the peripatetic musings of hip flask, sake swilling outcasts (say, Santoka Taneda or Ryokan); the no nonsense monastic types (say, Hakuin); the earthy, gritty advice for living in the modern world (say, DT Suzuki); or even the American literati influences (say, Gary Snyder). Far fewer readers, however, will be familiar with the logistical organization of Zen temples in Japan. As esteemed Japan expert Edwin O. Reischauer writes in the brief preface, "It is ironic that Zen philosophy, which is commonly characterized as being beyond words, has inspired millions of words in English print, whereas Zen institutions, though vastly important in many aspects of medieval Japanese civilization and in no way beyond description, has drawn so few." Indeed, yet, does a book about the logistical organization of Rin'zai's Gozan ("Five Mountain") temples sound boring? Perhaps. But let me tell you: this text is anything but boring! Author Martin Collcutt takes a seemingly mundane subject and delivers a delightfully informative product that will not disappoint even the most discerning reader. Moreover, he neatly ties the development of the temple system into the existing socio-political milieu of Medieval Japan. Quite frankly, this is a dream book for a Japanese history "otaku" (lit: "buff," or worse, "nerd" or "geek") like myself: clear and detailed but highly readable, unlike so many other academic texts. Lastly, I do not think you need to have too much knowledge of Japanese history or even Buddhism for that matter, as Collcutt does a great job of keeping the reader informed and up to date. Roughly speaking, there are three main branches of Zen in Japan: Rin'zai (founded by Eisai), Soto (Dogen), and the lesser known Obaku (imported by Chinese monks in the Tokugawa Era). This book, of course, focuses on how the first, Rin'zai Zen, which mirrored the organization of its "five mountain temples" on the Chinese model (and literally had main temples on five mountain sites). Though this book is full of details, it is exceedingly engrossing at every turn. I wish I could give it 10 stars. Buy it today!

11 of 11 people found the following review helpful. An excellent study! By Hakuyu Not everyone wants to explore the history of Rin'zai Zen as an institution - but, if you do, Martin Collcutt's study is a veritable treasure trove. Potted within its pages (382, excluding the index and bibliography), you will find fascinating references to just about everything of significance concerning the formation of the 'Gozan' or 'Five Mountain System' - its precedents in Sung China, its patrons and supporters in Japan, the temple builders, key figures, secular and religious, all the regulations, and all the myriad processes involved in the maintenance of these inter-linked temple complexes. Even at their best, studies like this can be tedious, in places, but this well informed account is never dry. It explores macrocosmic factors, and surveys microcosmic details. Collcutt conveys an almost organic picture of the entire complex of processes - social, technical, human and spiritual - which brought the 'Gozan' system into being and made it a living entity. While all of this was ultimately directed to one end - the spiritual life nurtured in the Sodo or monks hall, Collcutt's study makes us keenly aware of the managerial and administrative skills required to run such large complexes. Rather like their equivalent in medieval or late medieval Europe, these monastic institutions virtually became thriving 'businesses' - running large landed estates, even employing hired labour. Beating the Medici family to the game by several centuries, the Chinese Buddhists were the first people to print paper money - and lend it at interest. As with the European monastic institutions, corruption and worldliness sometimes took over. Similar traits sometimes characterised life in the Japanese temples. Collcutt's study can be statistical in places, but this is always tempered by the human interest - the notable figures and events which have shaped life in these temples. It details the virtues, vices and the vicissitudes, which have left their mark upon the Gozan system.

This work provides a history of the Rin'zai Zen monastic institution in Medieval Japan.

Five Mountains is a fine piece of historical writing and one of the richest sources now available in English for information on Japan's medieval age... Martin Collcutt deserves much praise for this book. It is an outstanding contribution to the literature in English on medieval Japan. (Monumenta Nipponica) This book should be read widely by students of history, Buddhism, and history of religions for its fascinating contents as well as its methodological astuteness. (American Historical) This study... explores many areas of Japanese monastic life not thoroughly examined before by Western scholars... [A] rich and competent study of major significance. (Journal of the American Academy of Religion) About the Author Martin Collcutt is Professor of East Asian Studies and History at Princeton University.