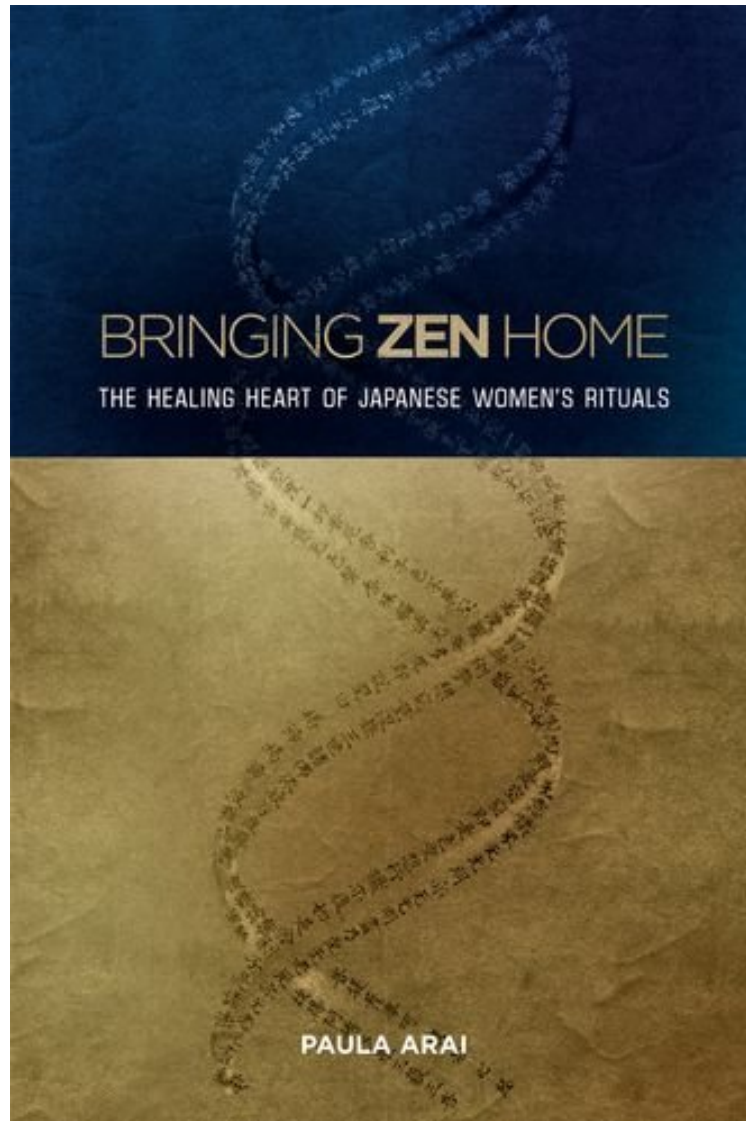


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## Bringing Zen Home: The Healing Heart of Japanese Women's Rituals

*Paula Arai*

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**Paula Arai : Bringing Zen Home: The Healing Heart of Japanese Women's Rituals** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bringing Zen Home: The Healing Heart of Japanese Women's Rituals:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. another great bookBy Buddhist BookwormI have read the authors other book "Women Living Zen" and I found it both scholarly and heartwarming. This one shares those characteristics,

but instead of focusing on Zen nuns, highlights the lives of lay women in Japan. This kind of study is unique and valuable to the study of Buddhism, but it also shows the wonderful spirits of women living every day lives. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An excellent read. I suspect it's a bit dense for ...By johnKAn excellent read. I suspect it's a bit dense for most people but worth the effort. Reads like a PHD thesis but, again, worth the read.

Healing lies at the heart of Zen in the home, as Paula Arai discovered in her pioneering research on the ritual lives of Zen Buddhist laywomen. She reveals a vital stream of religious practice that flourishes outside the bounds of formal institutions through sacred rites that women develop and transmit to one another. Everyday objects and common materials are used in inventive ways. For example, polishing cloths, vivified by prayer and mantra recitation, become potent tools. The creation of beauty through the arts of tea ceremony, calligraphy, poetry, and flower arrangement become rites of healing. *Bringing Zen Home* brings a fresh perspective to Zen scholarship by uncovering a previously unrecognized but nonetheless vibrant strand of lay practice. The creativity of domestic Zen is evident in the ritual activities that women fashion, weaving tradition and innovation, to gain a sense of wholeness and balance in the midst of illness, loss, and anguish. Their rituals include chanting, ingesting elixirs and consecrated substances, and contemplative approaches that elevate cleaning, cooking, child-rearing, and caring for the sick and dying into spiritual disciplines. Creating beauty is central to domestic Zen and figures prominently in Arai's analyses. She also discovers a novel application of the concept of Buddha nature as the women honor deceased loved ones as personal Buddhas. One of the hallmarks of the study is its longitudinal nature, spanning fourteen years of fieldwork. Arai developed a second-person, or relational, approach to ethnographic research prompted by recent trends in psychobiology. This allowed her to cultivate relationships of trust and mutual vulnerability over many years to inquire into not only the practices but also their ongoing and changing roles. The women in her study entrusted her with their life stories, personal reflections, and religious insights, yielding an ethnography rich in descriptive and narrative detail as well as nuanced explorations of the experiential dimensions and effects of rituals. In *Bringing Zen Home*, the first study of the ritual lives of Zen laywomen, Arai applies a cutting-edge ethnographic method to reveal a thriving domain of religious practice. Her work represents an important contribution on a number of fronts to Zen studies, ritual studies, scholarship on women and religion, and the cross-cultural study of healing.

In *Bringing Zen Home*, Arai shows, through her relationships with 12 Japanese Buddhist women over 14 years, that Soto Zen's teachings are also at the root of a paradigm for healing in the home.... This excellent ethnographic study has relevance beyond its field.-- "Choice" Essential reading for those who miss the perspective of Buddhist lay women in Japanese Buddhist studies; to overlook this aspect means to ignore an important part of contemporary Buddhism in Japan. Students and scholars of Buddhism, Zen, and ritual studies will leave this book with an enriched understanding of the diversity and complexity of Japanese contemporary Buddhism as well as on the healing function of rituals.-- "Religious Studies" It's glorious to hear all the voices in *Bringing Zen Home* to feel the common yearnings, the different responses to them, and the ways that host and guest can blend into each other. These women's prayers, their outer and inner pilgrimages, and their understandings have entered the vast net of interconnectedness, and we have the pleasure of receiving their communications, heart-mind to heart-mind.-- "Shambhala Sun" It's glorious to hear all the voices in *Bringing Zen Home*--to feel the common yearnings, the different responses to them, and the ways that host and guest can blend into each other. These women's prayers, their outer and inner pilgrimages, and their understandings have entered the vast net of interconnectedness, and we have the pleasure of receiving their communications, heart-mind to heart-mind.-- "Shambhala Sun" *Bringing Zen Home* broadens our idea of Zen in a welcome and enlightening way. It also contributes significantly to a range of developing new academic fields, from women's religious studies to the study of therapeutic ritual and everyday "domestic" religion. But this is not just a work of excellent and original scholarship; it is also a book of wisdom, the wisdom of generations of Japanese women who have found relief from their everyday sufferings in the "therapeutic" worldview and meditative ritual practices of Zen. The book is also written in a lucid and graceful style and so may well itself possess the "healing power" of drawing readers into a state of *dokusho zanmai* (reading *samadhi*).-- "New Zealand Journal of Asia Studies" In *Bringing Zen Home*, Arai shows, through her relationships with 12 Japanese Buddhist women over 14 years, that Soto Zen's teachings are also at the root of a paradigm for healing in the home.... This excellent ethnographic study has relevance beyond its field. (Choice) Essential reading for those who miss the perspective of Buddhist lay women in Japanese Buddhist studies; to overlook this aspect means to ignore an important part of contemporary Buddhism in Japan. Students and scholars of Buddhism, Zen, and ritual studies will leave this book with an enriched understanding of the diversity and complexity of Japanese contemporary Buddhism as well as on the healing function of rituals. (Religious Studies) Its glorious to hear all the voices in *Bringing Zen Home* to feel the common yearnings, the different responses to them, and the ways that host and guest can blend into each other. These women's prayers, their outer and inner pilgrimages, and their understandings have entered the vast net of interconnectedness, and we have the pleasure of receiving their communications, heart-mind to heart-mind. (Shambhala Sun) *Bringing Zen Home* broadens our idea of Zen in a welcome and enlightening way. It also contributes significantly to a range of developing new academic

fields, from women's religious studies to the study of therapeutic ritual and everyday domestic religion. But this is not just a work of excellent and original scholarship; it is also a book of wisdom, the wisdom of generations of Japanese women who have found relief from their everyday sufferings in the therapeutic worldview and meditative ritual practices of Zen. The book is also written in a lucid and graceful style and so may well itself possess the healing power of drawing readers into a state of *dokusho zanmai* (reading *samadhi*). (New Zealand Journal of Asia Studies) This book speaks to two main audiences: those interested in gender and religion and those interested in Japanese religion and culture, especially the role of Zen Buddhism in that culture.... The book is... a rich representation of the subtleties of Japanese religious culture, which are very difficult to capture in book format. (Rita Goss, University of Wisconsin) Arai paints a fascinating picture of the lives of her consociates. The close relationships she developed with these women enable her to describe in detail not only their ritual practices, but their everyday lives, their struggles, and their creative pursuits, making this work an important contribution to the growing body of literature on contemporary Zen.... *Bringing Zen Home* should be of interest not only to scholars in Japanese Buddhism, but also to those interested in ritual studies and in the relationship between religion and healing. (Gina Cogan, Boston University) Written in an affective, poetic prose, Arai's book explores the private "healing rituals" of contemporary Japanese laywomen.... [T]he book will be very accessible to readers without any background knowledge of Buddhism or Japanese culture, and may be of interest to those curious about the potential medical effects of religious practice. It will also be valuable for scholars or laypersons interested in learning about how Zen doctrine plays out in everyday contexts, in what we might call the "practical theology" of laywomen and nuns in contemporary Japan. (Jessica Starling, University of Virginia) This book is a rich ethnographic study on the religious practices of twelve devoted Japanese Buddhist women associated with the Aichi Zen nunnery in Nagoya.... *Bringing Home Zen* is an essential reading for those who miss the perspective of Buddhist laywomen in Japanese Buddhist studies; to overlook this aspect means to ignore an important part of contemporary Buddhism in Japan. Students and scholars of Buddhism, Zen, and ritual studies will leave this book with an enriched understanding of the diversity and complexity of Japanese contemporary Buddhism as well as on the healing function of rituals. (Michaela Mross, LMU Munich/Komazawa University)