Storehouses of value: materiality of belonging in Japanese Buddhist temples

What, how, and why people “store” at local Buddhist temples? Can biographies of things deposited at a local temple tell a story of a community? How do people’s individual material histories become matters of communal concern? While walking a fine line between memory and abandonment, we will discover and map out the material and affective networks of community preservation in Japan’s depopulating regions. We will travel to rural Hiroshima Prefecture to imagine Japanese Buddhist temple communities as storehouses of value and consider Buddhist institutions’ role as anchors of people’s belonging in contemporary Japan. By stepping into the shoes of a local Buddhist priest at Myōkoji temple, we will walk down the corridors of donated artwork, photo albums, plane propellers, Buddhist altars, people’s ashes, and entire households to reveal physical, karmic, and emotional connections people strive to maintain and, in turn, make sense of the anticipated decline in their communities.

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