

# The Fate of a Materialistic Buddhist: A Cultural Edition of “Jikininki” by Lafcadio Hearn

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A traditional Japanese folktale, “Jikininki” tells the story of Muso, a traveling Buddhist monk, and the horrors he discovers in the mountains of Japan. In the story, he comes across a small, rural village where a citizen has recently died. Muso is told by one of the townsfolk that after every funeral the bodies mysteriously disappear. That night, he discovers that the bodies are being devoured by a corpse-eating ghost, called the Jikininki, cursed to consume the recently dead. In Japanese Buddhist mythology, Jikininkis are usually the spirits of greedy people, unable to enter the afterlife because of their earthly appetites (Roberts 62).

Little is known about the exact origin of the story, but much can be assumed from what is known about Japanese culture, specifically Zen Buddhism, one of the primary religions of Japan, and customs of rural Japanese communities. When studying “Jikininki,” it is clear that the teachings of Zen Buddhism and the cultures of rural communities are reflected in the fears and horrors surrounding the Jikininki, specifically in the monstrification of materialism and the denouncement of rural folk traditions. The corpse-devouring monster depicted in “Jikininki” is the intersection of two prominent cultural forces in rural Japan (the selfless transcendence from human nature depicted in Zen Buddhism and ancient folk-religions, such as Shintoism, built upon spirits of nature and ancestral worship) and, in addition, appears to represent the fear of losing both the global Zen Buddhist

## ABSTRACT

Lafcadio Hearn has written and adapted many Japanese folktales that explore religious and cultural traditions of the civilization. “Jikininki” tells the tale of a Buddhist priest who encounters a cursed, corpse-eating ghost. The authors examine the depiction of this corpse-devouring monster, its relation to the cultural forces in rural Japan, and the representation of a fear of losing both the global Zen Buddhist and rural traditions through selfish mistreatment and material desires.




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“Jikininki” was originally published in a collection of Japanese folktales, *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*, written by author and journalist Lafcadio Hearn. This collection is said to be loosely based on various excerpts of Japanese Buddhist mythology. From sections in his journal, it is apparent that Hearn had been fascinated with evil, demonic creatures from a young age (Bisland 26-28). Hearn was born in Greece and spent the majority of his childhood and young adult life in Ireland and America, but he found his home in Japan, spending fourteen years in various parts of the country. By day, he worked as an English literature professor, but he spent his free time carefully observing, learning, and recording the folklore of the ancient Japanese culture. *Kwaidan* is a culmination of what he learned and is considered to be his most successful work (Lewis).

Throughout history and around the world, it is clear that religion and philosophy drastically shape the societies they are cultivated in, and this idea is no different for Japanese culture. Zen Buddhism is one of the predominant religions that has influenced the Japanese way of life — their hopes and beliefs, but also what they fear. Buddhism was originally founded in India during the fifth and sixth centuries B.C.E. by Siddhartha Gautama, or the Buddha, and arrived in Japan by the sixth century C.E. (Roberts XV). While there are many variations of Buddhism (in China, Korea, etc.), Zen Buddhism is specific to Japan, and each sect has different ideas about how a person reaches enlightenment.

According to Paul Carus’s article “The Mythology of Buddhism,” Zen Buddhism is driven by four specific truths (or the Four Noble Truths) that comment on the origin of pain (Carus 415). Specifically, the underlying belief in these truths is that “to be human means to suffer” (Roberts XV) and that the root of suffering comes from our resistance to change and our attachment to the physical world; Carus writes, “The second noble truth states that the origin of suffering is the craving or clinging that clamors for the gratification of desire; it is the pursuit of pleasure . . . the lust of the senses, and the infatuation of all selfish conceits” (415). Buddhism contends that humans are fooled by the illusion of physical pleasure; the tangible, material world we reside in may satisfy a person in the moment, but, because the physical world cannot last forever, it will never truly fulfill a person’s nature or soul. Thus, we cannot be at peace simply by consuming the physical world.


Shunryu Suzuki, a modern Zen Buddhist master, also notes, “According to the traditional Buddhist understanding, our human nature is without ego. When we have no idea of ego, we have Buddha’s view of life. Our egoistic ideas are



delusion, covering our Buddha nature” (88). Buddhists believe suffering comes from the desire and pursuit of earthly pleasures in physical, bodily desire and material objects. This desire is not even real, but merely an illusion, preventing us from ever knowing the true nature of the world or reaching enlightenment. And, according to the Buddhists, because this desire goes against our nature, one must overcome desire before reaching enlightenment. In order to overcome suffering, one must overcome selfishness. These ideas of overcoming selfishness are condensed into the Eightfold Path of righteousness, a guide to the right mindset, right actions, and right understanding one must have in order to achieve enlightenment (Roberts XV).

The focus on selfishness as the root of all evil is emphasized again in Buddhists’ personification of evil in Mara, the Buddhist Devil (Carus 417). He is depicted as a creature that feeds on bodily desires, sensual delight, and wicked selfishness — essentially the opposite of what the Buddha and the Eightfold Path embody. Interestingly, the monstrous Jikininki seems to also portray the wicked selfishness that is demonized in Buddhist mythology: a Buddhist priest who “thought only of the food and the clothes that my sacred profession enabled me to gain” is cursed to return to earth as a haunted spirit, forced to eat the bodies of the recently dead (Hearn 4). Monster scholar Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes in “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)” that “[t]he monster is continually linked to forbidden practices in order to normalize and enforce . . . . The same creatures who terrify and interdict can evoke potent escapist fantasies; the linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster all the more appealing as a temporary egress from constraint” (16-17). In this sense, the Jikininki seems to be a representation of the priest’s selfishness; the indulgence of the priest’s desire is what creates the monster. The priest is punished for straying from his own teachings but is also punished for his desires for material goods instead of enlightenment. He is punished for giving in to selfishness, for ignoring his true Buddha nature. And, therefore, his suffering continues after his death.

For the rural areas of Japan, society is not only shaped by major religions, but also by the traditions and structures of small communities. Scholar and author Ichiro Hori claims, “The essence of Japanese folk-beliefs lies in the interaction between two belief systems: a little tradition . . . and a great tradition” (405). Little traditions are the native religions of rural Japan, whereas great traditions are the influences of major philosophies, such as Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. “Jikininki” is an excellent example of how these two traditions intersect; Muso Kokushi, a Zen Buddhist priest, represents the great tradition of major philosophy, while the Jikininki represents the little tradition of ancestor worship and respect for



the dead in rural Japanese folk traditions.


This theme of an outside major philosophical force entering a local community is a common theme among Japanese folktales; Hori states, “One of the major problems of Japanese religious history is to grasp the importance of the role played by such migratory missionaries in forming folk-beliefs in Japan” (406). The role of missionaries from larger, global religions, such as Muso Kokushi in “Jikininki,” was to introduce new concepts to rural communities, opening the door for greater knowledge and understanding. The culmination of these two forces, the global religion and the local religion, is echoed throughout “Jikininki” and is represented by the monster itself.

The selfishness of the Buddhist priest who becomes the Jikininki stems from both his desire for the worldly possessions given to him because of his religious position and from his apathy towards the treatment of the dead in the village he resides in. Japanese folk religion places a significant importance on its treatment of the dead, with ancestral worship and the sanctity of mountains being core attributes to their traditions (Hori 416).

Although Zen Buddhism is popular in Japan, individual nature-oriented deities still exist in rural Japanese folklore. Most common of these are the spirits of the mountains. For example, many Japanese farming villages believe “the god of the rice-fields comes down from the mountain or hill at the beginning of spring before seeding to guard his worshippers’ fields” (Hori 415). In the mountainous area of Mino, where “Jikininki” takes place, the landscape itself would have been an important part of the village’s folk religions.

Mountains are seen as sacred in many cultures, providing landmarks as a source of identity or signifying being closer to god. In Japan, mountains play a large part in the treatment of the dead, acting as burial sites or places of meditation. They are also seen as sites of spirits, both in relation to folk-religion and the dead. Hori claims, “Another important folk-belief is that a particular mountain . . . is associated with the spirit of the dead at the time of funerals” (416). Mountains were viewed as a path to the afterlife, and many Japanese legends, including “Jikininki,” involve “Buddhist monks, [and] Shinto priests . . . [meeting] ghosts in such mountains” (Hori 417).

In the story, the former Zen Buddhist priest says that “the bodies of the mountain-folk who died used to be brought here — sometimes from great distances — in order that I might repeat over them the holy service. But I repeated the service and performed the rites only as a matter of business” (Hearn 4). By disrespecting the importance of the treatment of the dead in a rural Japanese village, he is forced to spend his afterlife as a monster. The only way to relieve



himself of his monstrous existence is to have a devout priest honor the dead and treat his body with the same respect seen across rural Japan. Cohen states, “The monster awakens one to the pleasures of the body to the simple and fleeting joys of being frightened, or frightening — to the experience of mortality and corporeality” (17). The pleasures of this world are what caused the curse upon the priest, and he exists as both a frightened and frightening creature, forced to eat the corpses of deceased villagers as punishment for his decisions.

The Jikininki is forced to exist as a monster due to his selfishness and desire for worldly possessions, as well as apathy towards the treatment of the dead in Japanese mountain villages. He remains in his afterlife to plague the citizens of a mountainous Japanese village, their fear reflective of their shared beliefs; the loss of their values, represented in the Jikininki himself, invokes fear in the community. The culmination of the mistreatment of both community traditions and global religion leads to the birth of this monster.

### “JIKININKI” BY LAFCADIO HEARN

Once, when Muso Kokushi, a priest of the Zen sect<sup>1</sup>, was journeying alone through the province of Mino<sup>2</sup>, he lost his way in a mountain-district where there was nobody to direct him. For a long time he wandered about helplessly; and he was beginning to despair of finding shelter for the night, when he perceived, on the top of a hill lighted by the last rays of the sun, one of those little hermitages, called *anjitsu*<sup>3</sup>, which are built for solitary priests. It seemed to be in ruinous condition; but he hastened to it eagerly, and found that it was inhabited by an aged priest, from whom he begged the favor of a night’s lodging. This the old man harshly refused; but he directed Muso to a certain hamlet<sup>4</sup>, in the valley adjoining, where lodging and food could be obtained.

Muso found his way to the hamlet, which consisted of less than a dozen farm-cottages; and he was kindly received at the dwelling of the headman. Forty or fifty persons were assembled in the principal apartment, at the moment of Muso’s arrival; but he was shown into a small separate room, where he was promptly supplied with food and bedding. Being very tired, he lay down to rest at an early hour; but a little before midnight he was roused from sleep by a sound of loud


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<sup>1</sup> Zen Buddhism originated in China during the Tang dynasty. It emphasizes rigorous self-control, meditation-practice, insight into Buddha-nature and the personal expression of this insight in daily life, especially for the benefit of others (D. Suzuki 104).

<sup>2</sup> Mino is one of the old provinces of Japan. It lies in the southern part of modern-day Gifu Prefecture (“Mino Area”).

<sup>3</sup> An *anjitsu* is defined as a hermit’s cell, or a retreat (“*anshitsu*”).

<sup>4</sup> A small settlement, generally one smaller than a village (“hamlet”).



weeping in the next apartment. Presently the sliding-screens were gently pushed apart; and a young man, carrying a lighted lantern, entered the room, respectfully saluted him, and said:

“Reverend Sir, it is my painful duty to tell you that I am now the responsible head of this house. Yesterday I was only the eldest son. But when you came here, tired as you were, we did not wish that you should feel embarrassed in any way: therefore we did not tell you that father had died only a few hours before. The people whom you saw in the next room are the inhabitants of this village: they all assembled here to pay their last respects to the dead; and now they are going to another village, about three miles off, — for, by our custom, no one of us may remain in this village during the night after a death has taken place. We make the proper offerings and prayers; then we go away, leaving the corpse alone. Strange things always happen in the house where a corpse has thus been left: so we think that it will be better for you to come away with us. We can find you good lodging in the other village. But perhaps, as you are a priest, you have no fear of demons or evil spirits; and, if you are not afraid of being left alone with the body, you will be very welcome to the use of this poor house. However, I must tell you that nobody, except a priest, would dare to remain here tonight.”

Muso made answer:


“For your kind intention and your generous hospitality I am deeply grateful. But I am sorry that you did not tell me of your father’s death when I came; for, though I was a little tired, I certainly was not so tired that I should have found difficulty in doing my duty as a priest. Had you told me, I could have performed the service before your departure. As it is, I shall perform the service<sup>5</sup> after you have gone away; and I shall stay by the body until morning. I do not know what you mean by your words about the danger of staying here alone; but I am not afraid of ghosts or demons: therefore please do not have any anxiety on my account.”

The young man appeared to be rejoiced by these assurances, and expressed his gratitude in fitting words. Then the other members of the family, and the folk assembled in the adjoining room, having been told of the priest’s kind promises, came to thank him — after which the master of the house said:

“Now, reverend Sir, much as we regret to leave you alone, we must bid you farewell. By the rule of our village, none of us can stay here after midnight. We beg, kind Sir, that you will take every care of your honorable body, while we are unable to attend upon you. And if you happen to hear or see anything strange during our

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<sup>5</sup> Upon death, Monks prepare the body by chanting comforting words while preparing the body for the funeral fire. They also accompany the family to the funeral to provide comfort and guidance for those left behind (Bodiford 153).



absence, please tell us of the matter when we return in the morning.”

All then left the house, except the priest, who went to the room where the dead body was lying. The usual offerings had been set before the corpse; and a small Buddhist lamp — tomyo<sup>6</sup>— was burning. The priest recited the service, and performed the funeral ceremonies — after which he entered into meditation. So meditating he remained through several silent hours; and there was no sound in the deserted village. But, when the hush of the night was at its deepest, there noiselessly entered a Shape, vague and vast; and in the same moment Muso found himself without power to move or speak. He saw that Shape lift the corpse, as with hands, devour it, more quickly than a cat devours a rat — beginning at the head, and eating everything: the hair and the bones and even the shroud. And the monstrous Thing, having thus consumed the body, turned to the offerings, and ate them also. Then it went away, as mysteriously as it had come.

When the villagers returned next morning, they found the priest awaiting them at the door of the headman’s dwelling. All in turn saluted him; and when they had entered, and looked about the room, no one expressed any surprise at the disappearance of the dead body and the offerings. But the master of the house said to Muso:

“Reverend Sir, you have probably seen unpleasant things during the night: all of us were anxious about you. But now we are very happy to find you alive and unharmed. Gladly we would have stayed with you, if it had been possible. But the law of our village, as I told you last evening, obliges us to quit our houses after a death has taken place, and to leave the corpse alone. Whenever this law has been broken, heretofore, some great misfortune has followed. Whenever it is obeyed, we find that the corpse and the offerings disappear during our absence. Perhaps you have seen the cause.”

Then Muso told of the dim and awful Shape that had entered the death-chamber to devour the body and the offerings. No person seemed to be surprised by his narration; and the master of the house observed:

“What you have told us, reverend Sir, agrees with what has been said about this matter from ancient time.”


Muso then inquired:

“Does not the priest on the hill sometimes perform the funeral-service for your dead?”

“What priest?” the young man asked.

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<sup>6</sup> The gift of light and the accompanying prayers help bring less suffering and greater happiness in times of death, according to Zen Buddhism (“Lamp Offerings”).



“The priest who yesterday evening directed me to this village,” answered Muso. “I called at his *anjitsu* on the hill yonder. He refused me lodging, but told me the way here.”

The listeners looked at each other, as in astonishment; and, after a moment of silence, the master of the house said:

“Reverend Sir, there is no priest and there is no *anjitsu* on the hill. For the time of many generations there has not been any resident-priest in this neighborhood.”

Muso said nothing more on the subject; for it was evident that his kind hosts supposed him to have been deluded by some goblin. But after having bidden them farewell, and obtained all necessary information as to his road, he determined to look again for the hermitage on the hill, and so to ascertain whether he had really been deceived. He found the *anjitsu* without any difficulty; and, this time, its aged occupant invited him to enter. When he had done so, the hermit humbly bowed down before him, exclaiming: — “Ah! I am ashamed! — I am very much ashamed! — I am exceedingly ashamed!”

“You need not be ashamed for having refused me shelter,” said Muso. “You directed me to the village yonder, where I was very kindly treated; and I thank you for that favor.”

“I can give no man shelter,” the recluse made answer; “and it is not for the refusal that I am ashamed. I am ashamed only that you should have seen me in my real shape, — for it was I who devoured the corpse and the offerings last night before your eyes. . . . Know, reverend Sir, that I am a *jikininki*<sup>7</sup>, — an eater of human flesh. Have pity upon me, and suffer me to confess the secret fault by which I became reduced to this condition.


“A long, long time ago, I was a priest in this desolate region. There was no other priest for many leagues around. So, in that time, the bodies of the mountain-folk who died used to be brought here, — sometimes from great distances, — in order that I might repeat over them the holy service. But I repeated the service and performed the rites only as a matter of business — I thought only of the food and the clothes that my sacred profession enabled me to gain. And because of this selfish impiety I was reborn, immediately after my death, into the state of a *jikininki*. Since then I have been obliged to feed upon the corpses of the people who die in this district: every one of them I must devour in the way that you saw last night. . . . Now, reverend Sir, let me beseech you to perform a Segaki-service<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> “Corpse-eating devils in Japanese Buddhist myth. Many *jikininki* are the spirits of greedy people whose appetites for worldly goods kept them from entering the spirit world” (Roberts 62).

<sup>8</sup> “The name ‘Segaki’ means ‘feeding the hungry ghosts,’ and the rituals and practices done for this festival contain a great deal of teaching about training in Buddhism” (Carlson).





for me: help me by your prayers, I entreat you, so that I may be soon able to escape from this horrible state of existence” . . .

No sooner had the hermit uttered this petition than he disappeared; and the hermitage also disappeared at the same instant. And Muso Kokushi found himself kneeling alone in the high grass, beside an ancient and moss-grown tomb of the form called *go-rin-ishi*<sup>9</sup>, which seemed to be the tomb of a priest.

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<sup>9</sup> Also referred to as a “Five Circle Stone,” a *go-rin-ishi* is a Buddhist tomb. This idea is further explored in our primary sources (“Gorintou”).



## ELIZABETH BISLAND, LAFCADIO HEARN, AND BRUCE ROGERS'S "BOYHOOD" (1906)

To the devils indeed — because I supposed them stronger than the rest — I had often prayed for help and friendship; very humbly at first, and in great fear of being too grimly answered — but afterwards with words of reproach on finding that my condensations had been ignored. But in spite of their indifference, my sympathy of the enemies of Cousin Jane's God steadily strengthened; and my interest in all the spirits that the Church History called evil, especially the heathen gods, continued to grow. (26-27)

This letter was written by Lafcadio Hearn in regards to his thoughts on the influence his childhood had on his views of religion. This section of his letter is of particular interest because it denotes his fascination with "evil" and the dark side of religion. He finishes the section of the letter regarding "idolatry" and religion by stating, "[a]nd even to-day, in spite of larger knowledge, the words 'heathen' and 'pagan' — however ignorantly used in scorn — revive within me old sensations of light and beauty, of freedom and joy" (28). The conclusion to his letter illustrates his positive associations with a side of religion that is not typically advocated.

Through reading this excerpt from Hearn's personal letter, readers are able to get an idea of Hearn's point of view as is related to his upbringing. By reading about his childhood and his reflections on his childhood fascinations and religious ideals, the reader is clued into where Hearn was coming from when he wrote this short story. At the time, it was common for society to lump non-Christian religions, such as Buddhism, together with the Christian ideals of evil. As it is said that Hearn's book of Japanese tales is loosely based upon snippets of Japanese Buddhist mythology, it begins to make sense as to why Lafcadio Hearn is so interested in writing stories, like "Jikininki," that investigate the dark side of the Buddhist religion, when excerpts such as this one so clearly delineate Hearn's interest, or borderline obsession, with evil and heathen gods.

## LAFCADIO HEARN'S "THE LITERATURE OF THE DEAD" (1898)

As I write these lines a full moon looks into my study over the trees of the temple-garden, and brings me the recollection of a little Buddhist poem:

From the foot of the mountain, many are the paths ascending in the shadow; but from the cloudless summit all who climb behold the self-same Moon.

The reader who knows the truth shrined in this little verse will not regret an hour passed with me among the tombs of Kobudera. (147)

The Buddhist faith puts a strong focus on reflection and meditation. This primary source is a collection of Hearn's Buddhist writings and illustrates his deep connection with the Buddhist faith. Much of the background on the author depicts him as a world traveler, never staying in one place for an extended period of time, but all sources state that he spent most of his time in Japan, becoming absorbed in the Buddhist faith. While this excerpt does not specifically relate to "Jikininki," it illustrates Hearn's deep meditations and reflections in regards to Buddhism. As "Jikininki" revolves around Zen Buddhism, these deeply religious writings from Hearn provide an excellent example of the reason he chose to focus on Zen Buddhism in this short story as well as others he has written. In addition, while small, there is a connection in the setting of Hearn's excerpt and the mountainous setting of "Jikininki." Mountains can be viewed as quiet, removed places for reflection. As reflection is an important part of Zen Buddhism, the correlation between Hearn's reflections in the mountains and Muso's moments of reflection and prayer in the rural village in the mountains illustrates the importance of reflection in removed, quiet, and natural settings.

Additionally, this source gives the audience a strong, well-rounded background of the author and where he is coming from when writing "Jikininki." This conclusion to one chapter of his Buddhist writings illustrates the importance of Buddhism to Lafcadio Hearn. This provides an additional layer of connection when reading "Jikininki," knowing that the author is a devout Zen Buddhist who believes and takes part in the religious cultures and traditions depicted throughout the short story.

## BHIKSHU SUBHADRA'S A BUDDHIST CATECHISM: AN OUTLINE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE BUDDHA GOTAMA IN THE FORM OF QUESTION AND ANSWER (1920)

It is addressed to those for whom material progress and augmented means of luxury do not constitute the goal of life, and to whom the prevalent cruel strife for the possession of worldly goods and grandeur, which the general selfishness makes each day more pitiless. (6)

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “catechism” as “[a]n elementary treatise for instruction in the principles of the Christian religion, in the form of question and answer; such a book accepted and issued by a church as an authoritative exposition of its teaching” (“catechism”). While generally thought of as a part of the Christian religion, this Buddhist catechism serves the same purpose as defined above. Through question and answer, the guidelines are laid out to those who practice Buddhism. Very specific questions are posed, such as: “Who is Buddha?” “Is Buddha a proper name?” and “When was Prince Siddhartha born?” This catechism, *Doctrine of the Buddha Gotama in the Form of Question and Answer*, provides a detailed layout of what it means to be Buddhist, the history of Buddhism, and how to practice Buddhism.

Through this Buddhist catechism, and mainly through the quote that has been pulled from the source, readers become more acquainted with what it means to practice Buddhism, especially as it pertains to the idea of materialism in the Buddhist faith. With the quote spelling out who the catechism is addressing, readers are given reference to the implications of the negativity of materialism in “Jikininki.” The Jikininki in the story states that he was cursed for his materialistic nature as a Buddhist priest, implying that this is an important aspect of the Buddhist culture. In addition, Cohen makes the statement that “escapist delight gives way to horror only when the monster threatens to overstep these boundaries, to destroy or deconstruct the thin walls of category and culture” (17). This quotation is an illustration of one of Cohen’s seven monster theses: “fear of the monster is really a kind of desire” (17). In “Jikininki,” this specific desire is materialism, and, as we see from the catechism, the desire for material goods is explicitly warned against, which as Cohen states, only makes it that much more desirable. Throughout the story, we see that the Jikininki itself is punished for this monstrous desire for worldly goods and gives way to a horrific ending of living eternally as a flesh-eating monster after overstepping the Buddhist boundaries throughout his life as a human being.

## BURTON HOLMES'S "A GO-RIN-ISHI OR 'FIVE CIRCLE STONE,' THE TOMB OF MATSUDAIRA, IN MATSUE" (1922)

This photograph provides visual representation for the tomb mentioned at the end of "Jikininki." In the story, it is stated, "Musō Kokushi found himself kneeling alone in the high grass, beside an ancient and moss-grown tomb of the form called go-rin-ishi, which seemed to be the tomb of a priest" (Hearn 33). As stated in the title of the photograph, this tomb, or go-rin-ishi, is made of five stones. Each stone is said to represent each of the five elements of Buddhism. The bottom, square-like rock corresponds to the earth, the spherical stone represents water, the triangular stone represents fire, the "reclining half-moon" stone represents the wind, and the final stone on top represents space ("Gorintō"). The importance of nature in the Buddhist religion shines through in the description and explanation of this specific tomb for a Buddhist priest.

This visual representation provides context to readers as to what the tomb of a Buddhist priest looks like, as well as why it looks this way. With this concrete example of the tomb of a priest, readers are able to visualize what Musō is seeing at the end of this short story, which adds a level of understanding and connection. A second level of understanding is added when readers are provided with the context of what each stone means on the go-rin-ishi. The subtle focus on nature in the Buddhist religion and, specifically, in the short story, are illustrated well through this photograph and the explanation of the importance of each stone. Through better understanding the meaning of this Buddhist tomb, the audience is given a more well-rounded knowledge of the uses of nature throughout the short story. For example, "Jikininki" takes place in a rural Japanese village; this setting makes more sense when taking into consideration the importance of nature in the Buddhist culture. By understanding that each of the five stones that make up this tomb represent the most important elements of nature, the relation between the natural setting of the short story and the natural focus of Zen Buddhism creates a stronger understanding and focus for the audience.



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