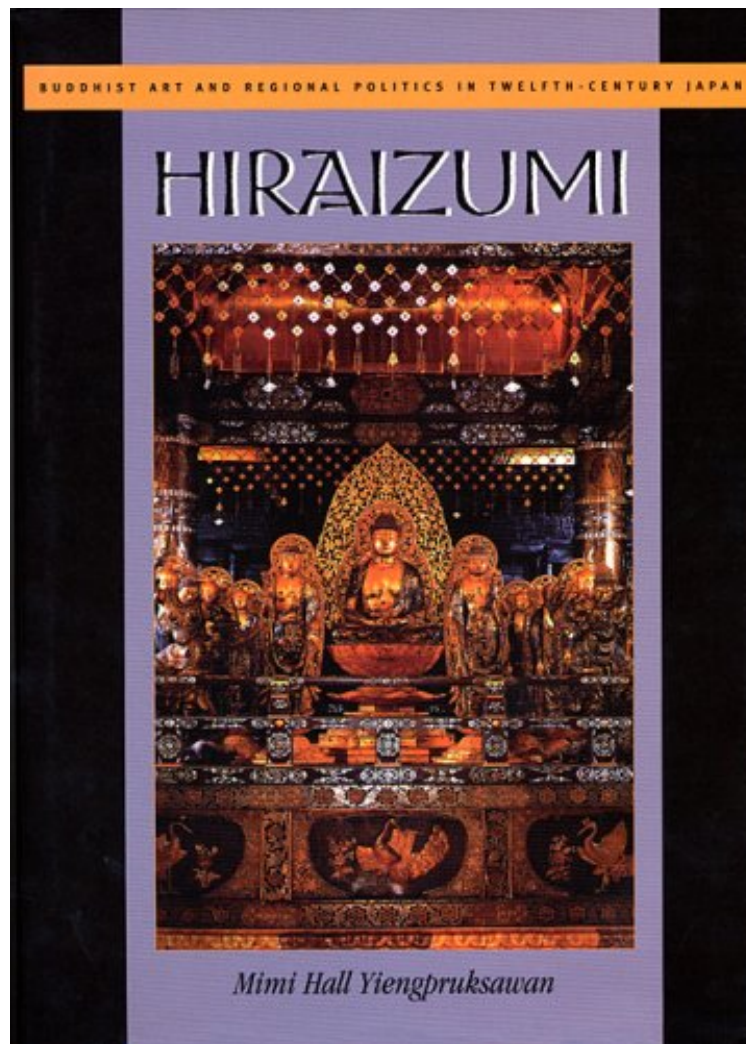


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Hiraizumi: Buddhist Art and Regional Politics in Twelfth-Century Japan (Harvard East Asian Monographs)

Mimi Hall Yiengpruksawan
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Mimi Hall Yiengpruksawan : Hiraizumi: Buddhist Art and Regional Politics in Twelfth-Century Japan (Harvard East Asian Monographs) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Hiraizumi: Buddhist Art and Regional Politics in Twelfth-Century Japan (Harvard East Asian Monographs):

7 of 9 people found the following review helpful. History not written by the victors By Nathan E Hopson The sheer volume of studies on Japan by putatively Western authors only serves to confirm the fact that Japan is not well

understood. This study takes one step in an interesting direction by introducing non-Japanese readers to Hiraizumi, one of the most enigmatic places in medieval Japanese history. This city marks both a physical and cultural boundary between Yamato Japan and the world of the Emishi. In much of Japanese historiography this subject goes almost completely untreated, which is not surprising given that it reveals a volatile heterogeneity which is often suppressed in Japan. Hiraizumi was built up by Emishi descendants in the position of what the Chinese called "barbarians over barbarians" -- they were given titles and dispensations in return for ruling over their people as colonial representatives. Yet the Fujiwara family retained a strong sense of pride in their "barbarian" northern roots. They built up a city which rivaled and perhaps even surpassed Kyoto in financial and cultural prosperity during its peak. But this could not go unpunished... The author's erudition and refusal to follow the beaten path of historiography is commendable. This is unquestionably a five-star book, save that the writing is a little jumbled in places and the pictures are of surprisingly varied quality, some appearing to have been taken with a disposable camera during a sake drinking bout. This lack of professionalism is dismaying at best, and mars an otherwise fabulous book. Think you know Japanese history? Try again.

In the twelfth century, along the borders of the Japanese state in northern Honshu, three generations of local rulers built a capital city at Hiraizumi that became a major military and commercial center. Known as the Hiraizumi Fujiwara, these rulers created a city filled with art, in an attempt to use the power of art and architecture to claim a religious and political mandate. In the first book-length study of Hiraizumi in English, the author studies the rise of the Hiraizumi Fujiwara and analyzes their remarkable construction program. She traces the strategies by which the Hiraizumi Fujiwara attempted to legitimate their rule and grounds the splendor of Hiraizumi in the desires, political and personal, of the men and women who sponsored and displayed that art.

Historians will find much valuable material in Yiengpruksawan's book...since the works in question are Buddhist temples and objects associated with them, religion specialists too will surely profit from reading this book...The book's design is elegant and features 103 illustrations...[allowing] readers to see exactly what Yiengpruksawan is describing. (Robert Borgen *Journal of Japanese Studies*) Mimi Hall Yiengpruksawan has written a magnificent book about northern Japan. Through exhaustive investigation of historical documents, archaeological reports, extant visual evidence, as well as critical analysis of the vast corpus of Japanese scholarship, she presents for the first time in English a comprehensive cultural history of northern Japan. More importantly, she advances innovative interpretations regarding the production and perception of Buddhist art. This book raises issues about the ethnic and cultural diversity of ancient Japan, and the expression of self-identity in the visual arts. Her detailed reconstruction of the temple complexes and icons, and her knowledge of Buddhism and political history allow her to convincingly demonstrate that Kiyohira and Shirakawa, both vigorously establishing new regimes, used Buddhist art as a visual statement of the new political order to legitimize their right to rule. (Chari Pradel *The Journal of Asian Studies*) About the Author Mimi Hall Yiengpruksawan is Professor of Japanese Art History at Yale University.