

[« Chorus rehearsal and Kitazawa-san's Oppenheimer mask | Blog home | Oppenheimer Text and Video »](#)

24
SEP

Immolation >

by [Professor Allan Marett](#)



It is now only two days until Theatre Nohgaku members arrive to begin rehearsals for Oppenheimer in Sydney. Time is short, but the idea of self immolation has been very much on my mind so I want to post a short blog on this subject.

In the play, Oppenheimer's ghost is condemned to return to Hiroshima every year on the anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb, and to enter the flames and suffer the pain of his victims. Every year he is dragged back on an inexorable wheel of karma. How can he be free from this? Freedom comes with a change of orientation. When he accepts his fate, and willingly enters the fires, resolving to remain there for all eternity, rather than being dragged back unwillingly, he encounters Fudô Myô-ô—the Buddhist King who dwells unmoving in the midst of fire—and finds liberation not just for himself but for all beings.

Self immolation is a very confronting thing, and not something that I would invoke lightly.

Right now, Buddhist monks are immolating themselves in Lhasa in protest against the Chinese occupation of their homeland. In the September issue of the Monthly, the Dalai Lama was asked about this by Barry Hill.

"How much self-sacrifice do we need, if we are to fight for peace? What are your feelings about the monks and others in Tibet who are setting fire to themselves? How should we see those actions?"

A shadow passed across his [the Dalai Lama's] face.

The self-immolations in Tibet are regular these days. There have been 140 since 2009.

...

"Of course, very very sad. Very sad. They are really concerned about the situation, including religious freedom, and basic human rights. But the method [is] rather desperate, drastic. But it's a very very sensitive political matter, so I usually keep quiet!"

In his commentary on the Diamond Sutra (The Diamond That Cuts Through Illusion) the Vietnamese Zen Master, Thich Nhat Hanh writes movingly about the self immolation of the Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc in 1963. His words provide a valuable insight into this extraordinary act of self sacrifice. Any who has seen the images of Thich Quang Duc in flames and unmoving, will never forget it. It is one of the most powerful and enduring images from the days of the Vietnam war.

'In 1963 in Saigon, the bodhisattva Thich Quang Duc immolated himself in order to awaken our country's dictators. When poet Vu Hoang Chuong visualized the ground on which Thich Quang Duc had sat, he knew that that ground was holy ground, and he said, "The place you sit has become an eternal chef d'œuvre, your compassion shines from the heart of invisibility." Vu Hoang Chuong may not have studied the Diamond Sutra, but he arrived at the same insight. When a person uses his body to save the lives of his fellow beings, his compassion can transform the ground on which he sits into a holy ground. Even though no statue or stupa is there, it is still truly a holy ground and should be considered a place for worship.'

[Post a comment](#)

THE AUTHORS

> [Professor Allan Marett](#)

ABOUT THE BLOG

The Oppenheimer Noh Project focuses on the creation and performance of a new English-language Noh play, Oppenheimer, in the Music Workshop Theatre at 6.00pm on Wednesday 30 September and Thursday 1 October 2015.

[More](#)

SEARCH

SEARCH

CATEGORIES

ARCHIVES >

> [December 2015](#)

> [September 2015](#)

> [August 2015](#)

> [July 2015](#)

RECENT POSTS

> [Oppenheimer Text and Video](#)

> [Immolation](#)

> [Chorus rehearsal and Kitazawa-san's Oppenheimer mask](#)

> [The Dalai Lama on Emptiness, Relativity and Quantum Physics](#)

> [Oppenheimer Flyer](#)

> [Foxes and Karma](#)

> [Oppenheimer plot summary](#)

> [Fudô Myô-ô](#)

> [Oppenheimer rehearsal Japan](#)

> [The Bodhisattva of Compassion](#)

 [Subscribe to this blog's feed](#)

(If you haven't left a comment here before, you may need to be approved by the site owner before your comment will appear. Until then, it won't appear on the entry. Thanks for waiting.)

Name:

Email Address:

URL:

Remember personal info?

Comments: (you may use HTML tags for style)

Enter the code shown below before pressing post

PREVIEW

POST

© 2002-15 The University of Sydney, Australia
ABN: 15 211 513 464. **CRICOS number:** 00026A. **Phone:** +61 2 9351 2222.
Authorised by: Professor Allan Marett.

The views expressed on this blog are those of the respective authors and not those of the University of Sydney.

[Contact the University](#) | [Disclaimer](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Accessibility](#)