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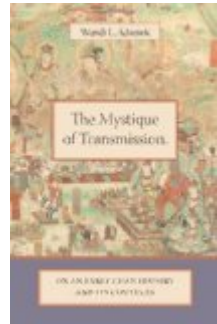
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Wendi L. Adamek. *The Mystique of Transmission: On Early Chan History and Its Contexts*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. 448 pp. \$51.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-13664-8.

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Welter on Adamek: *Mystique of Transmission*

It has become commonplace to acknowledge the levels to which Chinese and East Asian Buddhist studies in the West have risen in recent years, and the work under current review, Wendi L. Adamek's *The Mystique of Transmission*, is certainly no exception. If anything, *Mystique of Transmission* demonstrates the degree to which Western scholarship on East Asian Buddhism has come into its own as well as the distance traveled. This is a finely crafted piece of scholarship, over which the author has labored for years; it was the subject of her doctoral dissertation completed a little over a decade ago. One of the things that this work is not is a narrowly conceived treatise on an obscure Chan text. The name of the text in question, the *Lidai fabao ji* 歷代法寶記 (Record of the Dharma-Jewel through the Generations), appears in the book's title only obliquely, as "an early Chan history," and while it forms the core around which the trunk has been fashioned, it is "its contexts" around which this work revolves. The text is the product of an obscure Chan school of the late Tang, the Bao Tang 保唐 (protect the Tang dynasty), which fashioned a highly controversial claim to exclusive Chan orthodoxy on the pretext of having acquired the robe of the first Chinese Chan patriarch, the hallowed figure Bodhidharma. The movement died quickly and, except for a few notices in contemporary sources, was largely forgotten until the recovery of the *Lidai fabao ji* among the cache of manuscripts discovered in the library cave at Mogao 莫高, outside the Silk Road oasis of Dunhuang 敦煌, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Along with other manuscripts discovered at Dunhuang, the *Lidai fabao ji* has had a monumental

impact on our understanding of early Chan history. As the first book on the *Lidai fabao ji* and Bao Tang school to appear in a Western language, *Mystique of Transmission* makes an important contribution to the developing scholarly literature on Chan, Buddhist, and Chinese history.

The book is divided into two parts: part 1, "The Mystique of Transmission," and part 2, "Annotated Translation of the *Lidai fabao ji*." Part 1 is divided into seven chapters: "Authority and Authenticity," "Transmission and Translation," "Transmission and Lay Practice," "Material Buddhism and the Dharma Kings," "Robes and Patriarchs," "Wuzhu and His Others," and "The Legacy of the *Lidai fabao ji*." While many of the themes sounded here are familiar to the study of Chan, the subheadings tell a somewhat different story. Chapter 2 is a good example. While "Transmission and Translation," the title of the second chapter, would seem to fall squarely within the rubric of Chan concerns, the subheadings include topics like "Emperor Ming of the Han," "Daoan 道安 and Transmission of Forms," Buddhahadra 佛馱跋陀羅 and Transmission of Lineage," and "Huiyuan's 慧遠 Transmission of Space and Place." As these subheadings suggest, the concern in *The Mystique of Transmission* is not so much the contents of the *Lidai fabao ji* as how these contents may be framed within larger discourses on Chinese Buddhism. The same may be said for chapters 3 and 4. Subheadings of the chapter on "Transmission and Lay Practice" reveal concerns like "The Interdependence of Lay and Ordained Practice," "Criteria of Authenticity of

the Dharma and the Authority of the Ordained,” and “The Role of the Bodhisattva Precepts in Lay Devotional Practice.” Likewise, the “Material Buddhism and the Dharma Kings” chapter includes sections on “The Dangers of Empire,” “The Northern Wei 北魏 and Spiritual Materialism,” “Empires of Signs,” “The Legacy of Tiantai Zhiyi” 天台智顓, “The *Renwang jing*” 仁王經, “The Sanjie 三階 (Three Levels) Movement,” and “Imaginary Cultic Robes.”

Aside from the brief, introductory chapter 1—which includes a discussion on the background of the *Lidai fabao ji* text—the text figures parenthetically, but strategically, to the discussion until we get to chapter 5, at which time concerns central to the Chan school emerge to take center stage. The “Robes and Patriarchs” chapter includes discussions of “The ‘Chan’ Question,” “Tales of the Patriarchs,” “A Genealogy of Patriarchal Lineages,” “Shenhui’s 神會 Rhetoric,” “Inconceivable Robes in the *Vajrasamādhi-sūtra* and the *Platform Sūtra*,” and “Robes Purple and Gold.” Chapter 6 revolves around Wuzhu 無住 and the Bao Tang Chan faction, the aims of which the *Lidai fabao ji* text was compiled to represent. The author here sees fit to discuss topics germane to the text: mass precepts ceremonies and formless precepts, antinomianism in the Bao Tang monastery, the role of women in the *Lidai fabao ji*, and Wuzhu’s discourse with Daoists and confrontation with local powers. The final chapter discusses the legacy of the *Lidai fabao ji* through a discussion of the text’s portrait-eulogy (*zhenzan* 真讚) for Wuzhu, framed against examples of portrait-eulogies from Chan, other Buddhist and Chinese examples, and by considering it in the context of the Buddhist concept of the response-body (*yingshen* 應身) in Chan representations. Finally, we are provided references to the Bao Tang school in later records, particularly the *Beishan lu* 北山錄 (Record of North Mountain), references in Tibetan sources, and comparisons with the Hongzhou 洪州 school, which also originated in Sichuan province.

However formulated, the Bao Tang school and the *Lidai fabao ji* remain central to the discussion. The *Lidai fabao ji*, expertly translated and amply annotated, is contained in part 2. The translation is based on Stein ms. 516, which, following Koga Hidehiko 古賀英彦, whose seminar at Hanazono 花園 University in Kyoto the author attended from 1991 to 1993, is considered the best of the remaining Dunhuang manuscripts. Adamek also consulted Pelliot ms. 2125, the primary text used in Yanagida Seizan’s 柳田聖山 1976 Japanese translation in *Shoki no zenshi* 初期の禪史 II. The translation is divided into forty-three sections, following Yanagida, according to natural divisions in the narrative. Most annotations

are also based on annotations contained in Yanagida’s work. Students and scholars alike will be pleased that Adamek has included the Chinese text of the *Lidai fabao ji*. Each section begins with a heading, making it fairly easy to find one’s way through the text’s contents, and with reference to the corresponding *Taishō* 太正 page and line number, even though the *Taishō* text (T. 51.2075), based largely on Pelliot ms. 2125, has a number of errors. After the *Taishō* reference, one finds the Chinese text, followed by the English translation. The format is highly reminiscent of Japanese translations of texts of this nature, like Yanagida’s, and the author has clearly adopted it. Thus, part 2—the translation, annotation, and format—may be viewed as an adaptation heavily indebted to Japanese scholarship in the field. In this regard, part 2 stands in rather stark contrast to the wide-ranging discussions in part 1, whose style and narratives Adamek has taken largely from themes struck in recent Western, primarily English language, scholarship. Where East Asian language scholarship is cited in part 1, it is more to recent Chinese language than to Japanese scholarship. While this represents a trend that has been emerging in recent years, Adamek’s work affirms this shift to a heightened degree; it is a trend that we will likely see more of in the future.

Returning the focus to part 1, the approach Adamek takes there is consistent with the tendency in recent scholarship to move beyond a simple quest for historical fact, mired as it is in its own context, and to acknowledge how the fault lines of fiction may reveal “echoes from the past expunged from more authoritative works” (p. 4). One of the aims of the study is to contextualize Bao Tang transmission claims, to validate a position that, to modern eyes, seems only worthy of a charlatan. In an era where the transmission of Bodhidharma’s robe was believed to substantiate claims to Chan orthodoxy, the Bao Tang school alleged that the same robe which the fifth patriarch, Hongren 弘忍, had bestowed upon the sixth patriarch, Huineng 慧能—so famously described in the *Platform Sūtra*—was bequeathed by empress Wu Zetian 武則天 to Wuzhu 無住, a master claimed in the lineage of the Bao Tang school. The claim had little currency, and the *Lidai fabao ji* and Bao Tang school were quickly consigned to the dustbin of history (or, in this case, the library of Dunhuang), where they were rediscovered in the twentieth century. Even though the Bao Tang school has been roundly dismissed on the basis of the *Lidai fabao ji*’s spurious claims, Adamek finds a surprising variety of narratives pulsating through it, and uses them to animate a number of Chan and Chinese Buddhist anxieties.

It would not be going too far to claim that what we have here is a history of Chinese Buddhism converging in the late eighth-century narratives of the *Lidai fabao ji*. Indeed, it is Adamek's claim that the authors of the *Lidai fabao ji* "attempted to establish the place of the Bao Tang school within a chronicle of the history of Buddhism in China" (p. 4). "The fact that the Bao Tang school was so short-lived and its remains hermetically sealed," she argues, only accentuates its importance as "a more accurate reflection of the Buddhist world of the eighth and ninth centuries, the 'golden age' of Chan, than the authoritative accounts that were produced in the tenth through twelfth centuries" (p. 7). And even though Adamek admits she "cannot offer an entirely new vision or an expansion of frontiers, but rather a journey through familiar territory with a long-lost text in hand," for those with an interest in Chinese Buddhism and Chinese religions in general, the journey is a worthwhile one (p. 12). Her efforts will, without doubt, not only raise awareness of the *Lidai fabao ji* and its contexts, but also underscore a whole array of issues, themes, and debates that animate Chinese Buddhism.

While the topics addressed in *The Mystique of Transformation* are too numerous to discuss in any detail in a review like this, let me choose one example to give readers an idea of what to expect. In "The Dangers of Empire" section of chapter 4, Adamek begins with a characterization of the threat posed by spiritual materialism in the Northern Wei dynasty (386-534). Students of Chan will be familiar with the alleged dialogue between Bodhidharma and Emperor Wu 武宗 of the Liang 梁 dynasty (502-557) over the role of material donations in Buddhism. Bodhidharma's refusal to allow Emperor Wu's philanthropy as true merit (*gongde* 功德) constitutes one of the foundational episodes animating Chan ideology. Adamek treats the Northern Wei as "a study in the enthusiasm of a particular Buddhist 'age of innocence,' a short period when practical, propitiatory, and lavishly material Buddhism was adopted unreservedly" (p. 92). The Northern Wei is used as "an opportunity to trace a relationship between state and Sangha from hazy beginnings, through persecution and triumphant resurgence, to a precipitous end" (p. 92). As a result, the Northern Wei remained a lesson and a warning throughout Chinese Buddhist history of the dangers of material largesse, and this became a theme that would resonate through Chan discourse, as the story about Emperor Wu and Bodhidharma indicates. In Adamek's reconstruction, there are resonances between the Northern Wei experience and the reactions against the material Buddhism of

Empress Wu Zetian in the Tang (considered in chapter 5), which quickened the pace of Chan's development. By the time of the Bao Tang school, denunciations of spiritual materialism were common themes in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist discourse. Yet, Adamek is not content to leave the topic here, as many might be inclined, but reminds us of contradictions inherent in the monastic enterprise, where the principles of austerity and of the generation of wealth are both part of the soteriological amalgam that enlivens Sangha activity (p. 93). As a result, Buddhist clerics' relationships with political power were not always harmonious, but "without a strong civil and military service maintaining order and borders and the kind of economy that could generate expenditure for merit, Buddhist monasteries could not thrive" (p. 99).

In the next section, "Empire of Signs," Adamek explores five different textual and ritual responses to the fear of Sangha corruption that fueled Chinese "decline of the Dharma" (*famie* 法滅) or "final age" (*mofa* 末法) eschatology: the *Fu fazing [yinyuan] zhuan* 付法藏 [因緣] 傳 (Account of the [Avādana] of the Transmission of the Dharma Treasury), an early chronicle of Indian Dharma Transmission, probably compiled in China; Tiantai Zhiyi's systemization of doctrines and practices; the state-protection rituals of the *Renwang jing* (Scripture of Humane Kings); Xinxing's 信行 inexhaustible treasury; and Daoxuan's 道宣 visionary ordination ritual. It is beyond the scope here to consider any of these in detail. Adamek contends that each of these is a response to the same tension: the need to clarify the spiritual stream of true Dharma transmission from the flood of ordinations generated for profane, materialistic reasons. And, as a result, the seeds of sectarianism in Chinese Buddhism are seen as germinating from a desire to clarify a workable Buddhist identity in response to the pressures of imperial patronage. For rulers, Buddhism offered an "alluring mirror" and "a reservoir of spiritual wealth that could also become a tempting hoard of real wealth in times of fiscal crises," but also "a potentially dangerous rival for the favor of the masses" (p. 100). It is this tension, according to Adamek, that shapes the "decline of the Dharma" discourse that runs through the five responses she considers, "all of which reflect the Sangha's tug-of-war between self-accusation and persecution complex" (p. 100).

This provides but a hint of the abundant and variegated narratives contained in *The Mystique of Transmission*. While I might have wished for more extended discussion, I was pleased that Adamek called attention to the correspondence between Chan literature and secular fiction in the late Tang, where preparatory sketches and

notes in the margins of official literature developed into a new genre known as *chuanqi* 傳奇 (transmitted marvels) fiction. Characteristics of this new genre also appear in what has come to be known as “classic” Chan literature (p. 195). Adamek also notes similarities between the sparser and more colloquial mode of Chan literature and the caustic style of late Tang literati, such as Han Yü 韓愈. While readers with different areas of expertise may wish for fuller treatment of subjects in their areas

of interest, I found Adamek’s instincts on the mark even where I had wished for more. In short, this is a highly recommended work whose merits are likely to stand for some time to come. In addition to people interested in Chan and Chinese Buddhism, *Mystique of Transmission* will be of interest to scholars working in ancillary areas, if for no other reason than its ability to encapsulate complex subjects in a rigorous and engaging style.

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