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In *Shaping the Lotus Sutra*, Eugene Wang presents a rich and subtle account of medieval Chinese visual representations derived from the *Lotus Sutra*. While this book can be read as an art historical examination of *Lotus Sutra* images--especially some of those from the Dunhuang caves--it is also an astute analysis of the religious, political, and social contexts in which these images were made. Wang's insightful deliberations on why only certain *Lotus Sutra* images became important to medieval Chinese Buddhists are of particular interest to scholars of Buddhism. As he considers this problem, Wang argues convincingly that particular *Lotus Sutra* images depicted alongside material taken from texts other than the *Lotus Sutra*, were utilized in part because of the workings of the medieval Chinese imagination. Thus, *Shaping the* Lotus Sutra sheds significant light on the logic of medieval Chinese Buddhism and the selective use of *Lotus Sutra* imagery.

Wang's book focuses on medieval Chinese images referred to as "transformation tableaux." Transformation tableaux are images that take their content from Buddhist sutras--in particular, descriptions from sutras of transformative experiences such as birth in a Buddhist paradise, the intervention of bodhisattvas in human affairs, the transfiguration of human beings into other forms as a result of karmic consequence, images of hell, and other events that are compelling to humans because of their liminal and numinous nature. Such images, serving ritual ends, were frequently found on the walls of Buddhist temples and monasteries, typically commissioned by the monastic community and lay patrons.

The crux of Wang's study is the corpus of extant material derived from *Lotus Sutra* imagery. However, as he notes, these illustrations are always part of complex representations that include ideas and images taken from other sutras as well as indigenous Chinese cultural traditions. Wang's agenda is to make sense of these multivalent scenes rather than simply to describe *Lotus Sutra* illustrations in isolation, and he demonstrates persuasively that medieval *Lotus Sutra* imagery can only be understood when taken as a whole. As stated in the introduction, Wang seeks to determine "what kind of world making arises from such a visual program" (p. xx).

Specifically, Wang is interested in the "worlds" envisioned by transformation tableaux, and the issues and problems that shadow scholarly efforts to encapsulate the worlds embodied in these representations. Wang utilizes the term "world" to designate "what we perceive as discontinuous categories and domains of experience or, rather, in our present case, it serves as a way of bracketing our modern cognitive habit in order to approximate

the medieval Chinese experience" (p. xvii). To this end, Wang interprets transformation tableaux through detailed studies of the "imaginary topography" tableaux construct: "When medieval Chinese painters visualized the world of the *Lotus Sutra*, they used a certain spatial structure to map out the disparate scenes described in the sutra. In other words, they were approximating the imaginary world of the *Lotus Sutra* inherent in the text with their own world picture they carried in their heads, which already had its own internal topographic structure and spatial logic, a mental grid on which they plotted the disparate scenes from the *Lotus Sutra*" (p. xx). In effect, Wang argues against treating Buddhist visual culture solely in terms of art historical categories such as iconography and connoisseurship, and apart from spatial contexts laden with additional Buddhist and Chinese cultural meanings. In sum, Wang recognizes that objects are inseparable from their spatial, temporal, and cognitive contexts--contexts that produce the imaginary topographies of medieval China.

Ultimately, two related questions guide Wang's study: 1) why do artistic images get interpreted in terms of a textual origin? and 2) why were certain images selected for representation while others were ignored or otherwise never garnered much attention? The *Lotus Sutra* as depicted in, for instance, Dunhuang cave illustrations is not restricted to the words and images found in the sutra itself. Traditionally, scholars have approached content like transformation tableaux as straightforward narratives derived directly from Buddhist texts such as the *Lotus Sutra*. Yet this view relegates tableaux to an inferior position, as secondary illustrations of a primary sutra narrative. According to Wang, trying to interpret tableaux by privileging the Buddhist textual sources over the visual representation can only produce dissonance because tableaux present a more complicated vision than the one described in Buddhist texts. Further, there is a "gap between textual and pictorial representation" (p. xiv) that Wang's volume aims to bridge. He strives to explain the logic of the medieval Chi-

nese cognitive topography expressed in these tableaux. For Wang, this topography includes not only *Lotus Sutra* ideas and imagery, but also material drawn from other sources -- both Buddhist and Chinese. In short, Wang concludes that the *Lotus Sutra* transcended a singularistic, one-directional influence for medieval Chinese Buddhists, and instead, Chinese cognitive frames shaped how the *Lotus Sutra* was conceived topographically and how it was arranged and juxtaposed alongside sources apart from the *Lotus Sutra*.

Wang makes clear that the *Lotus Sutra* as processed through the cognitive structures of medieval Chinese Buddhists was an expansive project that yielded a remarkable number of connections to related ideas and images. Rather than treat religion, art, and social and political expressions as separate domains, Wang seeks to recreate the organic visual arena in which these domains are intertwined. Wang elucidates the transparent, synergistic relationship between ideas and images in medieval China through numerous explications--too many to detail here. However, a brief overview of the content of each chapter will provide a sense of the complex narrative that Wang weaves around *Lotus Sutra* tableaux.

Chapter 1, "The Many Treasures St?pa: Visionary Signpost and Cognitive Model," explores medieval Chinese representations of ??kyamuni and Prabh?taratna (the Buddha Many Treasures) seated together in a st?pa suspended in space, a motif taken from chapter 11 of the *Lotus Sutra*. Wang uses this example to explore a central concern first raised in the introduction: "of the numerous scenes of miracles and spectacles in the sutra, why did this scene in particular capture the medieval Chinese imagination?" (p. xxiii).

The suspended st?pa image is of particular interest to Wang because extant Central Asian and Indian representations of this scene are few, although the *Lotus Sutra* was also widely disseminated in those regions. Wang concludes that the "visual model," a composition that includes not only

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the st?pa but Maitreya and other images, "was already part of the collective visual memory. Han funerary carvings repeatedly show compositions strikingly similar to the Many Treasures St?pa scene" (p. 27). In this chapter, Wang argues that *Lotus Sutra* illustrations reside within the broader context of a medieval Chinese Buddhist imagination which is framed by Buddhist texts, as well as other aspects of Chinese culture, including Han funerary carvings.

Both chapters 2 and 3 examine Dunhuang Cave 217, the site of a *Lotus Sutra* tableau whose numerous scenes have, in Wang's view, been misidentified. Further, the overall logic of the composition has been only partially explained. Wang's preferred identification of the scenes runs counter to traditional interpretations because he seeks "to explain the entire composition and its related wall paintings in the cave as constituents of a coherent pictorial program evocative of an imaginary topography" (pp. xxiii-xxiv). Wang identifies connections between image and larger context that transcend the paradigm of image as illustrative of a textual narrative. Among other contexts, Wang links the cave composition's imaginary topography with urban areas of Tang China and with lay religious ritual. He concludes that these elements interacted with *Lotus Sutra* imagery to create the particular "world" of medieval transformation tableaux.

Chapter 2, "Textual Space and Pictorial Reconstitution," looks at the shift from images of the Many Treasures St?pa that are loosely based on *Lotus Sutra* textual descriptions to detailed imagery that carefully follows sutra accounts. During the Tang dynasty, representations of the *Lotus Sutra* expanded to include scenes from all 28 chapters. Here, Wang's argument hinges on his conception of the "imaginary topography" that animates the illustrations composed by the painter or sculptor. The textual narrative does not guide the imagery; scenes from other sutras and Chinese narratives fill in "word pictures" absent from the *Lotus*

Sutra but important to the cognitive logic of medieval Chinese Buddhists, such as descriptions of the Pure Land. Further, Wang explains how scenes juxtaposed from non-sequential chapters of the *Lotus Sutra* make conceptual sense to the artist.

Chapter 3, "The Circumstantial World and the Numinous Realm," explores how eighth-century *Lotus Sutra* tableaux melded "two worldly domains." The first was "a hierarchical world that prioritizes royal interest expressed through a nirvana narrative" (p. 122). The second was "the numinous otherworld expressed through a general soteriological agenda" (p. 122). The first domain expressed political concerns, while the second domain represented the interests of the lay religious community.

Chapters 4 and 5 consider two aspects of *Lotus Sutra* tableaux: mapping and mirroring. In chapter 4, "Mapping and Transformation," Wang focuses again on the *Lotus Sutra* tableau in Cave 217 at Dunhuang. This tableau is anomalous for its conflation of both an older Han-period style with a more contemporary Tang representational style, commonly termed "pictorial illusionism." Why, Wang asks, would Tang-period Chinese have utilized an archaic Han style? He proposes that "[e]mbedded in the Han pictorial conception is a set of values which were consciously exploited in the making of transformation tableaux in medieval times" (p. 182). The cognitive framework through which medieval Chinese Buddhists made sense of the world also utilized non-Buddhist Chinese cultural memes and memories. Wang uses the term "mapping" to refer to the process of cognitive layering that orders the imaginary topography of *Lotus Sutra* transformation tableaux. In chapter 5, "Mirroring and Transformation," Wang uses the term "mirroring" to describe "a medieval Chinese perception that regarded mirror reflections and pictorial images as analogous" (p. 249).

Chapter 6, "Chronotope and Heterotopia," discusses the multi-faced transformation tableaux that are found on the four sides of the Longhuta relic pagoda in Shandong that dates to the Tang.

The main (east) face of this relief sculpture depicts Vulture Peak from the *Lotus Sutra*. The other three sides include scenes of Maitreya seated in his Tu?ita Heaven (west face), ??riputra's subjugation of the heretic Raudr?k?a (north face), and Amit?bha's Pure Land (south face). Wang asks, "What is the organizing principle governing the choice of these four tableaux?" (p. 340). He employs the terms "chronotope" and "heterotopia" to explain the logic of this imaginary topography. Chronotope, a term borrowed from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, refers to artistic representations of interconnected temporal and spatial relationships. Time and space are effectively collapsed or compressed within the same artistic context. Wang applies this notion to the idea that there are temporal and spatial aspects to Buddhas and bodhisattvas, such as the time and space occupied by ??kyamuni and Maitreya. Heterotopia, a term taken from the work of Michel Foucault, refers to the idea that a particular existing place can call forth spaces that are discontinuous and at odds with each other. In terms of the four faces of the Longhuta pagoda, circumambulating the st?pa--the particular space--places one in multiple spatial contexts of past and future through symbolic connections to both ??kyamuni and Maitreya.

This book, abundantly illustrated, clarifies the intricate and complex relationships that link the *Lotus Sutra* with some of its medieval Chinese expressions. Exploration of these issues and themes would be enough to make this book a worthwhile study, but the real attraction here is the rich interpretive perspectives that Wang applies to medieval Chinese transformation tableaux. Staid scholarly views wither as he applies broad knowledge to his explication of Chinese imagery and the tangled relationship between text and image. This book is highly recommended for those who seek a markedly nuanced view of medieval Chinese Buddhist imagery, and its relationship to texts specifically and to medieval Chinese culture more generally.

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