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*Authentic Replicas: Buddhist Art in Medieval China* by Hsueh-man Shen interprets the Buddhist art of medieval China (defined as the seventh through eleventh centuries) through the lens of replication. In it, Shen offers new methodological insights as well as fresh interpretations of well-known Buddhist works of art. Mindful of the broad scope of the book, Shen identifies the following five modes of replication: (1) sequential production of substitutable copies, (2) concomitant installation of multiples, (3) composition of design from multiples, (4) repeated performance of ritual and sacred acts, and (5) fabrication of replication stories (pp. 9-10). The book is divided into three parts, addressing the replication of texts, Buddhist images, and the multiplication of relics, each further subdivided into several chapters.

One of Shen’s main arguments concerns the unique position that the replication of material objects and rituals occupies in Buddhism, a phenomenon that she contends is not accounted for by Western art-historical scholarship that places emphasis instead on the original over the copy. The pan-Asian transmission of Buddhism, on the other hand, necessitated the replication of texts, objects, and rituals. Not only was such practice prescribed in Buddhism, but the authenticity and efficacy of these objects was assured, and according to Shen “[Buddhism] does not impose a boundary between copies and originals” (p. 4). This is an issue that reverberates throughout the text.

Part 1, “Reproducing the Text,” begins by taking the reader through several case studies of sūtra-copying projects that were supported by official transcription bureaus as well as private donations in medieval China and Japan. The focus then turns to print culture in China and its attendant textual authority. Shen rightly points out the co-existence of print and manuscript cultures while emphasizing the efficiency of woodblock printing technology and the possibilities it offered of producing “identical” and “accurate” reproductions (p. 26). Shen proceeds to provide evidence from woodprint prints to substantiate that carved text blocks were endowed with the status of an “ori-
original,“ the carving of which was a merit-making activity. She then hypothesizes on the preference for woodblock printing over manual transcription as a means of ensuring accuracy.

Part 2 addresses “Replicating the Image.” Shen uses modularity as a framework through which to examine case studies ranging from the Thousand Buddhas motif in manuscripts, woodblock prints, and mural paintings to iconographic groupings at Buddhist cave sites in Sichuan. Modularity, in turn, enabled the instantiation of “the One and the Many” based on Huayan cosmology (p. 98). It is unclear, however, whether all of the case studies presented in this section draw from Huayan thought. For me, some of the most exciting insights in this book stem from Shen’s analysis of terracotta tablets, which were instrumental in transmitting the iconography of the Bodhgaya Buddha throughout East Asia. Shen advances an intriguing argument that stone stelae were produced in imitation of terracotta tablets, which themselves were originally produced as “copies” of an Indian iconographic prototype. She further traces the chain of transmission to metal plaques in medieval Japan that were produced through the repoussé method by hammering thin sheets of metal over terracotta tablets, another example of transmedial transfer. Shen notes that the authenticity of the images was unaffected by the reduction in scale from the original statue in India, and that “copies or replicas did not have to be absolutely faithful to the original” (pp. 135-136).

Finally, part 3 turns to “Multiplying the Relics,” with a focus on important relic deposits and reliquaries in China, such as the Famensi reliquaries and the Aśoka stupas of Qian Chu of the Wuyue kingdom. The multiplication of relics and reliquaries mirrored the division of Śākyamuni Buddha’s relics, but with adaptations made to accommodate Chinese mortuary practice. Particular attention is given to the four additional relics that were interred at Famensi; made of jade and bone, they are described as “patent fabrications” (p. 181). The particular form of the Qian Chu stupas was inspired not by actual Aśoka stupas but by Central Asian precedents. Nevertheless, as with the terracotta tablets, Shen argues that their authenticity and therefore spiritual authority was undiminished.

Therein lies the main tension of the book. Despite the statement early on that “[Buddhism] does not impose a boundary between copies and originals” (p. 4), originals very often were clearly distinguished from their copies. In fact, in some cases, the originals—such as carved text blocks—carried their own spiritual authority, distinct from the copies that they generated. In other cases, spiritual authority was explicitly conferred upon the copy by the original. For example, as related by Xuanzang and cited by Shen, Śākyamuni Buddha acknowledged the Udāyana image (a statue made of sandalwood, purportedly carved from life and the first image of the Buddha ever made) and the responsibility it would bear for enlightening sentient beings in a latter age (p. 142). Furthermore, the book grapples with the expectation that copies ought to be faithful to the original. This is no longer the assumption in recent and emerging art-historical scholarship, particularly of the early modern period, that recognizes the generative nature of copying in light of transregional artistic engagement. Much of Shen’s work points in this direction and might have been more forcefully positioned within this framework.

In conclusion, Authentic Replicas: Buddhist Art in Medieval China is an exciting addition to the recent scholarship on Buddhist art in medieval China. It is a book that can be appreciated from cover to cover or section by section, for its methodological insights or for its detailed case studies, and is recommended for advanced undergraduates with some background, and up.
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