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Filled with beautiful, clear, and numerous full-page color images, *Women across Asian Art: Selected Essays in Art and Material Culture* shines an important light on women’s roles in art historical scholarship, collection, and artistic practice in Asian art through time. Comprising eleven distinct case studies divided between three sections, the chapters are united in their pursuit of exploring why and how gender matters in Asian art. Proceeding chronologically within each section, each of the eleven studies uses art historical methods to explore how women influenced, created, studied, or collected works of Asian art. While much of the book is focused on Chinese art and artists through time, there are chapters dedicated to Korean, Japanese, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi subjects. These chapters are especially important as they provide insight into the continuities and variations in not only how women were viewed and treated as creators, collectors, and muses cross-culturally historically but also how those views have influenced their roles in Asian cultures today.

Section 1, “The Feminine and the Goddess,” is composed of two chapters. The first chapter, “Mandala of Marici: A Goddess of Chinese Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, and Daoism,” focuses on a painting from the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri. The author examines the “distinctly feminine attributes of the goddess with reference to the historical context of her image and cult in India and Tibet through China’s Qing dynasty (1644-1911)” (p. 6). Using the art historical methods of stylistic and iconographic analysis, the author explores not only how the originally Vedic and Hindu goddess Marici was seen in her original Hindu context but also how she changed and evolved to fit new cultural norms as her image was transported eastward across Asia. Chapter 2, centered on gender roles in Bronze Age China, specifically looks at women through a number of inscriptions and symbols on bronze vessels from the Fu Hao tomb and compares them to later court paintings of the fifteenth century, in an attempt to analyze the impact of women’s changing roles on society. Both chapters explore what it
meant to be a woman and how gender roles were established and perpetuated in China over time, setting the foundation for the rest of the book.

Section 2, “Pioneers and Trailblazers,” focuses on women’s roles as scholars, muses, researchers, and collectors in Asian art and artistic practice during the early modern and modern periods. While women, especially in Asian art, are historically overlooked in favor of their husbands and peers, chapters 3-7 prove that women’s influence on art and material culture was extensive and varied. These chapters openly challenge previous scholarship that narrowly defines women’s contributions as mere muses for the arts or that minimizes women’s contributions to fields like calligraphy, architecture, painting, archaeology, and collecting. Instead, these chapters feature women who were essential players in the expansion of artistic modes of expression and scholarship and deserve to be recognized for their individual efforts.

Chapter 3, on the Joseon period in Korea and the role women played in elite and royal correspondence, is the only chapter in this section situated outside of China. The section, nevertheless, is still important to understanding the overall role women played in artistic endeavors and scholarship in Asia broadly because Chinese art and culture played a prominent role in influencing other countries and culture in Asia during the early modern and modern periods. Furthermore, this section also points to ties to recent trends in scholarship that shed light on women’s roles globally in such fields as archaeology, architecture, and painting. Chapter 5, “China’s ‘First’ Female Archaeologists: Rong Yuan, Shou Yingxue, Zeng Zhaoyu, and Zheng Shenxiang,” is especially compelling as it discusses a neglected set of Chinese women archaeologists who are left out of archaeological discourses. Several books, such as Breaking Ground: Pioneering Women Archaeologists (2006), by Getzel M. Cohen and Martha Sharp Joukowsky, and Ladies of the Field: Early Women Archaeologists and Their Search for Adventure (2010), by Amanda Adams, address how women have played a prominent role in archaeological inquiry in the last 150 years. Yet these works focus on “Western” women from the United States, Britain, and France. Chapter 5, therefore, augments this previous scholarship and supports the narrative that women were involved in early archaeological efforts on a global scale, showing that this was not exclusively a Western phenomenon.

Section 3, “Modern and Contemporary Makers,” is the most geographically diverse section in the book, featuring women artists from Japan, Pakistan, China, and Bangladesh. While only covering a relatively short chronology compared to the rest of the book, the cases provided discuss a variety of artistic movements and mediums, highlighting the increased diversity of artistic practice in Asia as it moved away from traditional forms of art after the late 1980s. This section features women artists who are often overlooked in favor of their partners or male contemporaries. These women artists are united by their shared interest in social and political critiques, which aim to subvert traditional gender roles and shine a light on systematic inequalities that prevail within their individual cultures and societies.

Like the earlier two sections, the women featured in this section are often lesser-known figures in their respective artistic fields. The inclusion of women artists from Pakistan (chapter 9) and Bangladesh (chapter 11) is especially intriguing because these countries and their artists are often left out of broader Asian art historical discourses. Including these women in this text broadens our understanding of women’s roles in the arts of the region, as well as within their specific fields, thus allowing for more nuanced discussions of gender and gender inequality. Concluding the book with these chapters fulfills a dual purpose: not only do these chapters restore to these women their individual contributions to art, but more importantly the chapters also examine the
systematic gender inequalities that women face today, showing how these artists are working to dismantle inequalities within their home countries and globally. As women fight for equality worldwide, it is important that Asian women are also included in current scholarly conversations, and this volume provides many chapters that do just that.

The eleven case studies present in this volume expand scholarship on the roles that Asian women have played in creating, collecting, and researching art through time. This volume gives these women back their individuality and agency, exploring how they have served as trailblazers in fields like archaeology, architecture, and painting. While this work certainly highlights the struggles that women artists and scholars have faced historically and the struggles they continue to face today, these chapters also provide a more nuanced path forward for the study of women and gender in Asian art.

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