

Authentic Replicas: Buddhist Art in Medieval China. By Hsueh-man Shen. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019. Pp. xi + 334. \$72.00.

Hsueh-man Shen's new monograph, *Authentic Replicas: Buddhist Art in Medieval China*, is a thoughtful discussion of the material culture of Buddhism in medieval China. Richly illustrated, the book examines the vast quantity of Buddhist art and artefacts made in a variety of materials and methods. To date, this is the first volume solely devoted to understanding the rationale as well as the means of production and reproduction in Chinese Buddhist art.

Most valuable in Shen's work is the careful attention paid to the techniques and processes of production of various types of artefacts. Given the Buddhist practice of accruing merit through the manufacture of vast quantities of devotional objects, Shen explores how that intersects with the Chinese mode of artistic production. Inspired by Lothar Ledderose's *Ten Thousand Things*,¹ a pioneer work theorizing the Chinese "modular system of production," Shen investigates how Chinese Buddhists deployed methods of the modular system to efficiently mass-reproduce artefacts to express Buddhist piety. A section in the "Introduction," entitled "Modalities of Replication," outlines the terms and concepts concerning copying and duplication in Buddhist practice (pp. 9–10).

Shen also scrutinizes Buddhist views, or what she calls ontology, about replicas and copies. She begins with stating how the Chinese Buddhists' aspirations for worldly benefits motivated them to produce and replicate massive quantities of objects associated with cultic worship. Imbued with the presence of the numinous, these material artefacts were perceived to possess spiritual power and were also points of entry to access the holy. In the book Shen liberally uses terms such as fabrication, replication, reproduction, and multiplication. She first disentangles the concepts' negative implications in the Western Cartesian binary opposites of authentic/replica, original/copy. As many passages in Buddhist texts urge devotees to make copies, be they images, texts, or stūpas, as devotional acts, Shen maintains that the ritual practice of producing replicas and the repetitive performance of doing so represent means for Buddhists to accrue merit, to gain worldly benefits, and to ultimately understand Truth. Nevertheless, the "authentic" and the "original" also carried significance in the Buddhist tradition, especially when such concepts referenced the source, and thus authority, of a text or a specific icon as coming from India, the homeland of Buddhism. Shen judiciously explicates what the authentic (*zhen* 真) or the original meant in each cult or tradition, and their relationship to subsequent replicas or the lineage of copies.

¹ Lothar Ledderose, *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

The book is divided into three parts, studying texts, images, and relics respectively. They correspond to Buddhist cultic practices, namely the worship of the Buddha's word or the cult of the book, the worship of images, and the worship of relics. In Chapters 1 and 2, which comprise Part I, Shen reviews the different means of sūtra production, from hand-copying individual texts, usually rendered in scrolls, to the use of woodblock printing technique. The focus of Chapter 1, entitled "Establishing Textual Authority in a Print Culture," is on the compilation of the Buddhist canon—called *yiqie jing* 一切經, referring to all known translated Buddhist texts—and the printing of sets of the canon. The chapter also discusses the carving of Buddhist sutras on stone steles at Yunju Monastery 雲居寺 in Fangshan 房山, Hebei, a project initiated by the monk Jingwan 靜琬 (d. 639), which continued for several centuries, and the printing of selected text passages, especially *dhāraṇīs*, as a form of *dharma* relics, or *dharmaśarīra*, and the encasement of these *dharma* relics.

Part II focuses on image-making. Buddhist art is replete with representations of innumerable identical Buddha images, be they part of the Thousand Buddhas motif or in a litany of numerous Buddhas in scrolls of *Sūtras of Buddha Names* (Foming jing 佛名經). Chapter 3, "Multiple Ways to Multiply Buddhist Images," investigates the various ways to produce or mass-produce many Buddha images. Painted on wall murals or handscrolls, or stamped on sheets of paper with block designs, Shen demonstrates how the use of modular designs created visual multiplicity. She further suggests that the repetition of modular images compels one to reflect on the concept of "All in One, and One in All," a central theme in Huayan 華嚴 Buddhism that espouses the doctrine of the interpenetration of all phenomena. The next two chapters focus on the relationship between the image cult and the transmission of iconic images. Chapter 4, "Replication and the Transmission of Buddhist Iconography," examines the mould pressed technique and the large number of clay plaques or tablets impressed with images and texts found in China. A significant number of these clay tablets from the seventh century disseminated the Bodhgayā image—the Buddha with his right hand in the earth-touching gesture to signal his victory of Māra (Lord of Evil) before proceeding to gain his enlightenment. Some were also stamped with the dependent-origination formula (Skt. *pratīyasamutpāda gāthā*) that became increasingly seen as the encapsulation of the Buddha's teaching. Chapter 5, "Replicating the Buddha's True Appearance," studies the Udāyana image, known in the Buddhist tradition as the first image of the Buddha commissioned by King Udāyana. The chapter begins with an examination of the Seiryōji 清涼寺 Buddha statue in Kyoto, allegedly the authentic Udāyana statue brought to Japan by the returning pilgrim-monk Chōnen 裔然 in the tenth century. The chapter also explores templates such as *yang* 樣 (a device to produce a freehand copy) in duplicating famous icons. In this chapter, questions regarding "authenticity" and "originality" come to the fore and Shen argues that concepts of the original and the copy can be collapsed, depending on the context (p. 167).

Part III, “Multiplying the Relics,” turns to the demand for remains of the Buddha in relic worship. Entitled “Manifesting the Buddha’s Body in Reliquaries,” Chapter 6 makes the argument that reliquaries both concealed the Buddha’s body and embodied his numinous presence. Starting with a discussion of the well-known finger bone relics in the Famen Monastery 法門寺, Shen discusses how Chinese Buddhists treated Buddha relics as a form of Chinese sacred burials, complete with tomb-like structures, epitaphs, and coffin-like reliquaries. The last chapter, “Reenacting the Devotional Act of Relic Burial,” investigates the special type of stūpa called the Aśoka stupa and its connection to Buddhist kingship and the multiplication of relics. Discoveries of relics were seen by Chinese rulers as “auspicious signs” (*xiangrui* 祥瑞) that conferred them the legitimacy to rule; as a result there were numerous reports and stories about the discoveries of relics, which could also miraculously self-multiply. Shen makes a compelling argument that the Aśoka stūpa type known in Chinese Buddhist art belongs to the type “copies without an original” (pp. 202–15). The last part of the chapter addresses the ritual enactment of relic burials, the authentication of the sacred, and the modular production of offerings to relics. Shen explains how repeated burials of relics engaged with worshippers across time, space, and social strata. Similar to the replication of texts and images, relics and reliquaries provided tangible contacts with the numinous.

The book is very rich in content, covering many important topics in medieval Chinese Buddhist art. Shen not only discusses the materiality of a vast array of Buddhist art and artefacts with meticulous attention paid to the means of production and design principles, she also provides the requisite Buddhist conceptual framework through which to understand the meanings and functions of these objects. It is an informed, comprehensive survey of Chinese Buddhist material culture with many perceptive insights. For example, Shen observes that printing has the advantage of transmitting an authentic copy devoid of errors that come with hand-copying; she notes, “the new *possibility* of accurate multiple reproductions was more important than any actual printing” (p. 26).

Are there ways the book can be improved? For sure, certain topics deserve more in-depth investigations. To this reviewer, below are a few observations. First of all, Shen claims that Buddhist worshippers’ desire to gain merit and worldly benefits contributed to the phenomenon of making vast quantities of replicas of Buddhist artefacts. By paying attention to Buddhism’s ritual practice and its material culture, Shen’s work is a corrective to the study of the religion dominated by the enquiry into Buddhists texts and doctrine to the exclusion of other aspects of the religion.²

² An exception is John Kieschnick’s *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

Nevertheless, it may be an overstatement to assert that Buddhist material culture of this period is “essentially a culture of replication” (p. 2) without further explanation.

Similarly, in the discussion of the production of copies of Buddhist canons in Chapter 1, Shen writes, “Although the modern practice of art history assumes a causal relationship between the reproduction of objects and the dissemination of ideas, the replication of Buddhist texts in medieval China had more to do with the preservation and veneration of the Truth and the desire to accumulate personal merit than with concerns about expanding the religion; that is, the patrons’ intentions were much more relevant than the distribution of the artistic products” (pp. 10–11). Thus, while Shen draws attention to the role of Buddhist texts or the Buddhist canon as cultic objects, one must not overlook the fact that these texts achieved their cultic status primarily because they embodied sacred knowledge and, for rulers, the sacred knowledge that informed the foundation of the state. The Chinese reverence for the Confucian canon as founding principles for the government and the carving of authorized edited texts of Confucian classics on steles to be placed outside the imperial academy in Han times became inspirations and models for later rulers. While Jingwan’s Buddhist stone sūtras project was created in the time of the End of the Dharma, later Tang and Japanese rulers’ efforts to produce or procure copies of the Buddhist canon could not be dissociated from the fact that the Buddhist canon embodied the sacred knowledge for Buddhist rulers, notwithstanding their protective power as cultic objects. Shen emphasizes the devotional intent of the patrons, though we also find numerous references to how Buddhist texts were revered as vehicles for the dissemination of sacred knowledge. For example, we read that as soon as Xuanzang 玄奘 finished translating a Buddhist text, multiple exemplars would be copied and distributed to other monasteries immediately for study. Copies of Buddhist texts were brought to Korea and Japan by returning monks for the same reason, for newly translated texts embodied newer or more authentic knowledge about Buddhism. At the Nara court, the imperial scriptorium sponsored by Empress Kōmyō 光明皇后 served a variety of purposes, as a demonstration of her piety and as a centralized library holding Buddhist sacred texts. Several important monasteries in Nara also held Buddhist libraries. The founding of monasteries or nunneries, especially official ones, were often accompanied with gifts of Buddhist texts from the court as foundational sacred knowledge. Monks would also borrow sūtras from the court or other Buddhist libraries for study, lectures, or for rituals. Jianzhen 鑑真, the Chinese monk and precept master who travelled to Japan in 753, borrowed a copy of the *Huayan jing* 華嚴經 from the court for lecturing at the Tōshōdaiji 唐招提寺 that he founded. In relation to the Japanese monk Genbō 玄昉, who returned to Japan with a set of the Buddhist canon which was a gift of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗, Shen repeated the number of 5,000 texts mentioned in traditional Chinese texts, though scholars who

work on Shōsōin 正倉院 documents have pointed out that the number was probably an exaggeration.³ Concerning the use of luxurious gold and silver ink for copying sūtras (Chapter 3, pp. 57–63) and materials used to fashion reliquaries as well as serving as substitutes for relics (Chapters 6 and 7), the application of the notion of the seven treasures (*sapta ratna*), associated with the seven emblems of the *cakravartin* (the universal monarch), would be appropriate, given the prominent link of relic worship with Buddhist kingship in medieval China.⁴

Because the book's emphasis is on the methods of production and replication of Buddhist artefacts, Shen organizes the contents along the division of Buddhist cultic worship of texts, images, and relics. This organization has its advantages, but it also sacrifices clarity in other instances, and certainly there are objects that do not easily fit into the discrete categories. For instance, the single-sheet prints discussed in Chapter 2 have both images and texts, and the clay tablets examined in Chapter 4 can be stamped with images as well as texts. The materials covered in the book primarily come from the Tang and Song dynasties, covering a span of over six centuries. Curiously there is a distinct lack of a sense of chronology in all three parts, as if ideas and practice of the entire period can be generalized without distinctions. In several chapters, Shen begins with well-known examples of later dates and then backtracks to discuss antecedents; examples include the discussion of printed Buddhist canons in Chapter 1, the Seiryōji Buddha in Chapter 5, and the Famen Monastery in Chapter 6. The author probably has specific reasons for the organizational strategy, but the reversed chronology and ahistorical approach is rather disconcerting. For the reader new to the field, providing a foundational typology and chronological developments of types of artefacts and techniques would enhance comprehension. At times a chronological approach can also lead to new insights. For instance, early attempts to stamp and print text passages and images laid the foundation for the invention of the wood-block printing technique, thus highlighting Buddhist contributions to advancements in technology and artistic production.

To support her interpretations of the ontology of Buddhist terms and patrons' intentions, Shen copiously cites Buddhist texts. The use of textual evidence is useful, though one gets an impression that certain passages are selected because they support the author's arguments. It would have been helpful to provide more context about the texts—social, political, and religious—and where they would fit in the larger

³ See the discussion in Bryan D. Lowe, "Contingent and Contested: Preliminary Remarks on Buddhist Catalogs and Canons in Early Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 41, no. 2 (2014), p. 222.

⁴ A discussion of the seven treasures is in Xinru Liu, *Ancient India and Ancient China: Trade and Religious Exchanges, AD 1–600* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 92–102.

understanding of Chinese Buddhism of the period. For instance, Shen notes that the Tang clay tablets, such as the one in Figs. 4.1A & B, probably reference the flesh body (*rūpakaya*) understood in the two bodies theory in Buddology (p. 117). She, at the same time, mentions the three bodies theory (*trikāya*) as a Mahāyāna doctrine, though one should note that the introduction of the latter probably post-dated the clay tablets in the mid-seventh century.⁵ In the book, Shen also frequently uses the term “votive.” However, as Peter Skilling points out, votive tablets or ex-votos were used in Greek, Roman, and Catholic traditions as votive offerings to a divinity or a saint after fulfilment of a vow, whereas Buddhist moulded images, tablets, or plaques were made to produce merit and for future benefits, not in gratitude for past blessings.⁶

All in all, the book provides a new lens to understand the materiality of Buddhist practice in medieval China. It introduces many important topics with up-to-date scholarship and opens up other topics for further investigations. It is essential reading for those interested in Chinese Buddhism and Buddhist art.

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西方學界對中國歷史研究參考工具書籍的殷切需求，從英國學人、外交官 Endymion Wilkinson 所編 *The History of Imperial China: A Research Guide* (《中國近代以前歷史研究手冊》) 的試行本 1973 年面世以來，一紙風行，至去年止，前後刊行五版即可見一斑。隨著中國歷史研究在西方學界蓬勃發展，該書內容也與時俱進，書名從 1998 年初版的 *Chinese History: A Manual* (《中國歷史手冊》)，直到 2012 年三版以降的 *Chinese History: A New Manual* (《中國歷史新手冊》)，篇幅則相應從試行本的 219 頁

⁵ See this author’s discussion in *Buddhist Pilgrim-Monks as Agents of Cultural and Artistic Transmission: The International Buddhist Art Style in East Asia, ca. 645–770* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2018), p. 46.

⁶ Peter Skilling, “The Aesthetics of Devotion: Buddhist Art of Thailand,” in Heidi Tan, ed., *Enlightened Ways: The Many Streams of Buddhist Art in Thailand* (Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum, 2012), p. 21.