Book Reviews

Authentic Replicas: Buddhist Art in Medieval China by Hsueh-man Shen. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 2019. 352 pp.; 132 illustrations, 113 in colour. Hb \$72 ISBN-13: 9780824867058.

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In this tightly argued, lavishly illustrated work, Hsueh-man Shen concludes that Chinese Buddhist material culture is 'essentially a culture of replication' (p. 2). Concentrating on the seventh to eleventh centuries, the book has three parts – text, image and relics – each aligned with a form 'in which the Buddha replicates himself' (p. 10). Unlike in the West, where copies are considered less valuable regardless of how skilled their execution (p. 214), Buddhism *prescribed* replication of objects and rituals, considering it 'a path toward enlightenment' (p. 4). Boundaries between copies and originals were erased, uniqueness devalued, and multiples often favoured for their ability to explicate doctrine: replication was 'a prerequisite for authenticity - and therefore efficacy' (p. 4).

Part I, 'Reproducing the Text', concerns different methods of sutra production, manual transcription and woodblock printing, the latter enabling the production of swift and accurate copies. Shen argues that neither method was primarily concerned with quantity or efficiency, but with 'adherence to the Truth,' which could manifest in a copy just as authentically as in an original (p. 10). During translation, block carving, and manually copying, accuracy was key, as authenticity was crucial for transmission of the teachings expressed by the text (p. 27). While merit generation was a major factor in any project, large or small, for merit to accrue the resulting product must have efficacy, and this was dependent on accuracy.

Part II considers 'Replicating the Image.' In *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), Lothar Ledderose explained the importance to Chinese culture of easily replicated basic units (modules), multiplied and used in the creation of complex products. Shen deftly applies this analysis to Buddhist image creation. Taking advantage of well-established modular systems of replication, Buddhists used dense arrangements of multiples in printing, painting and carving to suggest abstract ideas, which were perhaps easier to convey in images than by text: the nature of the cosmos, the Buddha's omnipresence, the buddha-nature inherent in all beings (p. 83), the Huayan 華嚴 doctrine of 'All in One, and One in All', and the continuous process of self-discovery necessary for the attainment of Buddhahood (p. 101). Basic units of grouped images were rearranged in 'endless permutations' (p. 85), building sets of

Keywords: Chinese Buddhism, images, relics, stupas, authenticity

images such as those seen in the Mogao caves of Dunhuang and elsewhere (Shen examines Mount Beishan, in Dazu, Sichuan province, in detail). The modular system of replication created ‘a visuality characterised by multiplicity and density’, (p. 105) with modules duplicated and arranged to suit the needs (and pocket) of the donor, a process which suggests a rather freer relationship between text and image than often assumed (p. 92).

In Chapter 4, Shen explores the transformational journey taken by the descendants of Indian clay tablets to China and Japan. The Indian practice of pressing the mould into clay resonated with several traditional Chinese crafts (seal stamping, brick and tile moulding and bronze vessel casting) (p. 112) and Chinese craftsmen produced items visually similar to the Indian, but using two-piece moulds, enabling dedications to be incorporated on the reverse of the tablet. This change in manufacturing methods leads to a change in form and function, Shen argues, resulting in upgraded versions of their ‘foreign prototype’ (p. 122). The firing process increased durability, transforming fragile plaques intended for internment in stupas into ‘long lasting iconic objects suitable for veneration and display on an altar’ (p. 122). This increased durability made them suitable for long distance travel and hence models for further replication in Japan.

Chapter 5 examines how replicas can retain authenticity through a study of copies of the first Buddha image, commissioned by the legendary King Udayana. Xuanzang (玄奘 c. 602–664) who brought back a copy, explains that craftsmen were miraculously dispatched to the heaven where the Buddha was preaching to his mother to make an accurate image. This was venerated in his stead until the Buddha’s return, when he addressed the statue: ‘Is teaching not a big task? To educate and enlighten [those living] in the Latter age, [I] indeed rely on you’ (p. 142). Thus this ‘first image’, bearing a close physical resemblance to Śākyamuni, functioned as his equivalent; this was not a *substitute* for the Buddha, rather it was an *extension* of him able to act in an identical manner (p. 142). Shen concentrates on the copy of Xuanzang’s image known as the Seiryōji 清涼寺 statue, after the temple where it resides, commissioned in China by the Japanese monk Chōnen 喬然 (938–1016), and examines how this model was used to generate copies very different in scale and materials yet able to retain its ‘authenticity’. This chapter also examines the use of *yang* 樣 models, used in traditional Chinese art to produce freehand copies, in the creation of Buddhist images. These templates, which could be two- or three-dimensional, with ‘connotations of both original and prototype’ served as a model for future duplications and were able in turn to generate other *yang* in different materials (p. 155). The *yang* ‘retains the essence of the object referent, [so] is equivalent to the referent’; copies derived from it are equivalent to the referent also (p. 168). This, Shen argues, echoes the traditional Chinese view of duplication in the study and practice of painting: ‘if an artist can capture another’s spiritual projection, then the original and the copy occupy the same pedagogical level and express the same authentic hand’ (p. 168).

Part III is concerned with ‘Multiplying the Relics’ and, in Chapter 6, issues concerning authenticity and efficacy once again come to the fore. Shen relates that in

India such was the need for relics that there came a time when supply could not keep pace with demand, leading to a flexible approach to what could be regarded as legitimate substitutes for the 'real thing', and these included text-relics. All were considered equally efficacious stand-ins for the Buddha. This approach suggests that authenticity was not important: what mattered most was not what the relics were, 'but what people believed them to be' (p. 173). Replication was inherent in the practice of relic veneration, replicas and derivatives acceptable for veneration providing 'people had faith in them' (p. 173). Early Chinese relic burials followed the Indian model of depositing them inside stone boxes at the centre of the foundations of a stupa (p. 175), but by the end of the seventh century these interments had grown to resemble contemporaneous Chinese tombs complete with burial chamber, epitaphs and coffin shaped reliquaries. These tomb-like burials — an innovation not seen elsewhere — represent, Shen argues, an emphasis on the physicality of relics, and made 'the foreign practice of relic veneration comprehensible and more popular' in China (p. 193). The Buddha's relics, otherwise indistinguishable from ordinary bones, were housed in increasingly ornate containers; these decorations 'effectively persuaded the audience to believe in the real presence of the Buddha concealed inside' (p. 193).

Chapter 7 deals with the 'politics of reliquaries', the replication of relics and the manufacture of reliquaries to legitimate monarchical authority. The template is King Aśoka's supposed distribution of 84,000 relics throughout the continent of Jambudvīpa, an event much used by Chinese Buddhists to make their case that Buddhism was known in Chinese antiquity and not the new-fangled foreign import, wholly unsuitable for the Chinese, that Buddhism's detractors consistently argued it was. Since the fourth century CE, evidence of Aśoka's work was regularly unearthed in the form of ruined stupas complete with relics, providing evidence that China had long been part of the Buddhist world. Shen gives a fascinating account of the distribution of 84,000 miniature stupas, each containing a text-relic, in the mid-tenth century by the would-be new Aśoka, King Qian Chu 錢俶 of the Wuyue 吳越 kingdom, and this distribution's antecedents and imitators. The form of these miniature stupas was not Aśokan but Central Asian, and from there developed into a symbol of political authority in China (p. 205). Shen argues that these reliquaries and their replicas show no clear-cut division between copy and original, enjoying the ontological status of *both*, and suggests that art historians might be better off conceiving of a spectrum, original at one end and copy at the other, instead of attempting to force an object into any particular category (p. 214). Also discussed is the repeated exhumation and reburial of relics, a process that augmented their authenticity. Relic burial, Shen argues, is 'by its nature a replication', re-enacting a historical event that took place in ancient India; ritual repetition across time and space connected Buddhists of different eras, regions, and backgrounds (p. 228-229).

This gets to the heart of the matter. Chinese Buddhists were separated by many centuries and vast distances from the Buddha and his Indic heartlands. What this work demonstrates so well is the multiplicity of ways in which they met this challenge using the materials and technology at their disposal, adapting Indic material

culture and practices to suit a very different cultural environment, yet building a framework within which authenticity, and therefore the efficacy without which Buddhist teachings could make little headway, could be maintained or constructed. Some of Shen's arguments will provoke debate; for example, was replication really a *prerequisite* for authenticity? Scholars of Buddhism and art history in China and elsewhere will find much stimulating material for discussion here: how was Daoist art impacted by these developments, for example? Does replication of the Buddha's image elsewhere in the Buddhist world (such as those in the Dambulla caves in Sri Lanka) follow similar patterns, and have the same rationale? This is the hallmark of a good work of scholarship, and this book deserves a wide readership. Teachers will find in it much to interest their students, and Shen's lucid and engaging style will make this an appealing book for the non-specialist also.