Dynamics of Interregional Exchange in East Asian Buddhist Art, 5th–13th Century

Edited by

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Front and back covers: Front and back views of an Avalokiteśvara statue in Fig. 2.5a, b. Photograph by Li-kuei Chien.

Professor Dorothy Wong's Dynamics of Interregional Exchange in East Asian Buddhist Art, 5th–13th Century *succeeds in presenting a series of complicated topics in a well-considered, approachable format. Arranged around three themes, this edited volume of nine essays brings fresh new perspectives to the field of Buddhist art history, making it a must-read for those interested in current scholarship. Featuring research by both emerging and established scholars, each essay complicates discussions within the field of Buddhist cultural studies, whether through revisiting received histories, reconsidering Buddhist works in light of new discoveries, or positing new methodological strategies. Multidisciplinary in nature, each essay brings together considerations of religious texts, historical documentation and previously disconnected works to shed new light on iconographic programs and related ritual practices. All of the essays take into account the movement of texts and images and draw upon this transmission to analyze changes that occur across time and space in the imagery produced and the impact these works have had. With more than one essay devoted to singular changes manifested in Buddhist imagery created after transmission has occurred, each a perfect example of the importance of close observation, this volume serves as a series of case studies on the various approaches possible for coming to better understand Buddhist visual culture.*

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The edited volume, titled Dynamics of Interregional Exchange in East Asian Buddhist Art, 5th-13th Century, represents new scholarship on the subject of interregional exchange that focuses on three themes, namely "transmission and local interpretations," "Buddhism and the State," and "iconography and traditions." It includes nine essays that deal with a wide variety of materials, ranging from miniature pagodas, sculpture, rock carvings, and woodblock prints to silk paintings and murals. What unites the essays is a common interest in adopting the time-honored approach of formal analysis and iconographic studies to analyze the dynamics of interregional exchange. Collectively these essays challenge the conventional model of linear transmission and emphasize the multifarious modes of reception as well as the agency of the recipients. The end result is a book that accentuates the transmission of art forms without losing sight of art's role in the process of disseminating the Buddhist faith across geographical and cultural boundaries.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the editors at Vernon Press for inviting us to submit a volume of essays on East Asian Buddhist art for publication. The theme of "tradition, transmission, and transformation" was earlier explored in a panel for the Association for Asian Studies' annual meeting, held in Denver, Colorado, 2019, which Hong Wu organized and for which I served as discussant. We expanded the framework and scope to more fully scrutinize the dynamics of interregional exchange by inviting additional scholars to contribute to the project. With the exception of my chapter, all the essays were written by young scholars at the beginning or at a relatively early stage of their career. The essays attest to their academic rigor and hold great promise for the field of East Asian Buddhist art. It has been a real pleasure working with each of them. I am thankful for the constructive comments and suggestions from the anonymous reader. I am grateful to Jane Friedman for her editorial skills and patience in ensuring stylistic consistency throughout the manuscript. The staff of the publishing team at Vernon Press has also been a delight to work with. Finally, I would like to acknowledge grants from the East Asia Center and the Art Department of the University of Virginia that supported the preparation and production of this volume.

Introduction

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A traditional approach to the study of East Asian Buddhist art revolves around the notion of artistic relay: India is regarded as the source of inspiration for China, and China, in turn, reportedly influenced artistic production on the Korean peninsula and in Japan. Likewise, the transmission of Buddhism is often described in a linear fashion, but, as many scholars have observed, the dissemination of the religion was a complex, multifaceted, and multidirectional process.[1] The linear model of the transmission of Buddhist art also implicitly assumes that art in the host country or region is only derivative, thereby precluding a deeper understanding of the complexity of transnational and transregional exchanges.

Examining the various patterns of East Asian Buddhist art exchange between the fifth and 13th centuries, the essays in this volume aim to go beyond the conventional query of origin tracing and the notion that the meaning of an image or motif remains constant through time and space. The essays comprise a series of case studies mapping exchanges and their outcomes, investigating the agency of the "receivers." This theme was earlier explored in a panel for the Association for Asian Studies annual meeting, held in Denver, Colorado, 2019, which Hong Wu organized and for which I served as discussant. Three of the four papers from the panel were revised and are included in this collection. They are joined by six additional essays that address the multifarious modes of reception of foreign or outside visual forms and the subsequent transformations that occur in dialogue with local traditions.

The essays in this volume all draw attention to the importance of understanding local conditions and circumstances. These include: emphases on specific religious practices, patronal wishes, artists' (mis)understandings of foreign or transmitted visual forms, new readings of doctrine in conjunction with textual interpretations, and cultic worship of deities. In turn, copies or productions of artworks inspired by foreign motifs, styles, and iconographies were adapted to local needs and developments. In some cases, established image types were

[1] See discussions in Buswell 2005; Sen 2014.

reconfigured in novel ways, giving rise to newfound iconographies; in other cases, new motifs were invented altogether.

Buddhist texts played a key role in all of this. The dissemination of Buddhist doctrines via sacred texts (translated from Indian and Central Asian scripts into Chinese) and the transmission of Buddhist art forms were two processes that sometimes, but not always, operated in sync. The study of Buddhist texts involves an array of complexities of its own, including the existence of different versions of texts translated multiple times over a long period as well as the emergence of "apocryphal" texts in China in response to local religious concerns. The popularity of particular translated versions and the doctrines therein, as well as the regional availability or impact of certain translations, contributed to divergent developments in visual representation. Localized cultic worship of deities accounted for the prominence of certain images and provided the setting to understand their presence in host countries or regions and their departure from original sources.

Copies, their dissemination and reception, are another topic addressed in several essays. These essays explore such topics as the reasons certain prototypes were valued more than others, the role of miraculous images, and whether some copies could be traced to one or more sources. Taken together, the microlevel of analyses in these essays attests to the intricate processes of artistic exchange in Buddhist art, with some tracing to Indian and Central Asian sources, and others deriving from intra–East Asian interactions.

The three chapters in Section I, "Transmission and Local Interpretations," address issues of transnational dissemination of Buddhist imagery and figural styles, and the subsequent alterations or adaptations based on local preferences, perceptions, and interpretations. In "Localizing the Buddha Realm: Pictorial Programs on Fifth-century Chinese Miniature Pagodas," Jinchao Zhao investigates the configurations of Buddhist imagery on miniature pagodas from northern China. While most motifs on the miniature pagodas have precursors in Gandhāran art from northwestern India, the new arrangements and inclusion of novel Buddhist images and motifs that originated in China at this time, Zhao argues, bespeak shifts in doctrinal emphasis as well as new understandings. Through careful investigations of translated Buddhist texts available in China at the time, Zhao demonstrates that the process of transmission and reception of Gandhāran motifs in early Chinese Buddhist art was complex and multinodal, challenging the generalized grand narrative of a linear transmission of Indian Buddhist art to China.

The worship of Avalokiteśvara (the Bodhisattva of Compassion) was introduced to China early on. In "Embodying Compassion and Contemplation across the Yellow Sea: Avalokiteśvara and pensive bodhisattva images in sixth-century

Hebei and Baekje," Li-kuei Chien examines a distinctive iconographic grouping that pairs an image of Avalokiteśvara with an image of a contemplative bodhisattva on the front and rear sides of a stone carving. While both bodhisattvas are known in Indian Buddhist art and have become established motifs with specific meanings in early Chinese Buddhist art, this particular combination is notable. Incorporating new archaeological evidence, Chien posits that the arrangement arose from an emphasis on meditation and asceticism in sixth-century Hebei, giving the pensive bodhisattva an independent identity beyond the usual understanding of it as an avatar of Maitreya. This novel grouping then spread to the Korean peninsula, where it further amalgamated with beliefs in the Western Pure Land and evolved into a new iconographic triad.

In "Magnifying Statuettes: Reconsidering the Artistic Production of the Earliest Buddhist Statues in Japan," Hong Wu analyzes an eccentric stylistic feature of the earliest Japanese Buddhist statues. Dating to the early seventh century and commonly known as the "Tori statues," the sculptures have long been seen as deriving from late Northern Wei (386–534) art in China. However, Wu digs deeper to comprehend how the Japanese sculptors' interpretive process shaped the replication and production of statues, resulting in deviations from continental conventions. Her meticulous analysis convincingly argues that portable small bronze statuettes were the artistic models available to early Japanese sculptors; owing to their limited knowledge, the sculptors variously misunderstood monastic clothing or copied abbreviated stylistic elements, features they then translated into the form of large-scale statues. Wu's study raises the prospect of rethinking the timeline for which Chinese and Korean artistic models made their way to Japan.

The three chapters in Section II, "Buddhism and the State," attend to the political dimensions of Buddhist art, the ways in which the transmission of Buddhism influenced political ideologies and notions of kingship in Asian polities. Both the religion itself and certain Buddhist sūtras and deities were believed to have state-protecting properties. They include the *Golden Light Sūtra*, an important and popular Mahāyāna text in East Asia, thought to be a state-protecting sūtra foundational to the implementation of Buddhism as a state religion in China and Japan. Dorothy C. Wong's essay, "Divergence in Art Inspired by the *Golden Light Sūtra* in China and Japan in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries," outlines the divergent art forms associated with that sūtra in China and Japan at that time. She notes that not all Chinese rulers were pro-Buddhist, while the longer duration of state Buddhism in Japan in the eighth century contributed to the development of a greater diversity of sūtra-related art forms there than in China. Some state-protecting deities promoted by the *Golden Light*, such as the Four Heavenly Kings, however, were also advocated in other texts advocating Buddhist kingship.

In Tang-dynasty China (618–907), the Indian monk Amoghavajra promoted Esoteric Buddhism for its efficacy in protecting the state. In "The Marble Sculpture *Maṇḍala of Scripture for Humane Kings* Excavated from Anguo Monastery in Xi'an: The Initiation of Vernacular Esoteric Buddhism in East Asia," Imann Lai shows how marble sculptures of the Esoteric deities provide material evidence of the rise of Esoteric Buddhism in China in the latter part of the eighth century. She asserts that rather than originating from an Indian Buddhist sūtra, the sculptures relate to an apocryphal text composed in China, the *Prajñāpāramitā Scripture for Humane Kings Who Wish to Protect Their States*. Around the time the Anguo Monastery sculpture group was created, China was facing invasions along its western borders; in an attempt to ward off China's enemies, Amoghavajra retranslated the apocryphal text and performed chanting in court. Lai posits that the Anguo sculptures relate to these events, which, in turn, facilitated the acceptance of Esoteric Buddhism in Tang China. In the ninth century, Esoteric Buddhism spread to Japan and became an enduring tradition throughout East Asia.

In the second half of the Tang period, Sichuan, in southwest China, was situated at the border between the Tang dynasty, the Tibetan Empire, and the Nanzhao kingdom. Clara Ma's chapter, "From State Protector to Local Warrior: The Transformation of Vaiśravaṇa in Sichuan from the 8th to the 10th Century," follows the transformation of Vaiśravaṇa (the Guardian King of the North), a deity associated with state protection and wealth. Ma compares the style and iconography of Vaiśravaṇa images in Sichuan with those in other regional centers in Asia during those two centuries. She argues that the fractured political and cultural environment in ninth-century western Sichuan contributed to an expanded iconography of Vaiśravaṇa, highlighting the deity's appeal as a devotional figure, especially for warriors. Her study points to the need to grasp the diverse regional changes in Buddhist art in the latter part of the Tang, when the country was fragmented and the religion and its image-making activities lacked central, institutional support.

Section III, "Iconography and Traditions," features studies of the transmission of and subtle variations in iconography and style of specific Buddhist deities. In "A Chinese Development in the Hairstyle of Acalanātha Images," Sakiko Takahashi discusses the eastward dissemination of Acalanātha, among the most important wisdom kings in Esoteric Buddhism, from India to Japan. While Acalanātha's hair is tied into a braid placed on or behind the left ear in Indian and Chinese depictions, in Japanese examples, the braid is always arranged before the left ear. Takahashi argues that the change in hairstyle resulted from deliberate acts of cultural appropriation and explores how Japanese Acalanātha image-making evolved from the tension between the persistence of a strong local religious tradition and the adoption of newly arrived Chinese forms.

The final two chapters discuss the iconography of the Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara, transmitted from China to Japan. Suijun Ra's "The Transmission of a Miraculous Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara Image from Southern Song to Japan: Images in Kōsan-ji, the Yūgensai Collection, and Shiofune Kannon-ji" examines the dissemination of a specific image type of the deity. The motif was based on a mural from Xiangzhou, China, said to be able to bring rain. The miraculous image became known as the "Painted Image from Xiangzhou," and was widely copied. Ra studies the three Xiangzhou-style images remaining in Japan and considers the possibility that they were modeled after a Chinese woodblock print. The mass production and subsequent replications of a prototype provide insights into how the Southern Song (1127–1279) cult of Avalokiteśvara developed and spread across areas culturally influenced by the dynasty. Referring to the reverence of the Chinese source as authoritative, Ra observes the Japanese tendency to value Chinese works and duplicate them "as they are."

Tamami Hamada's essay, "The Iconography of the Kiyomizu Temple-Style Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara," also focuses on a specific type of Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara imagery. The distinctive iconography of the so-called Kiyomizu Temple Style shows the deity's two hands holding up a small Buddha image above the head. Despite the fact that the motif bears the name of a Japanese monastery and is considered a unique Japanese depiction of the deity, Hamada, citing examples from Dunhuang and Sichuan, argues that the figure was actually based on a traditional iconography developed in Tang-dynasty China. She notes the close connection between the iconography of the Kiyomizu Temple Style image and the chanting of the Dabeixin dhāraṇī (Great Compassion chant) by Chinese worshippers, arguing that the image type was transmitted to Japan from China along with this important rite. The role of miraculous rituals and faithfulness to the original Tang format thus account for this distinct Japanese iconography, which could not otherwise be explained by scriptural or contemporary visual sources.

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I. Transmission and Local Interpretations

Chapter 1

Localizing the Buddha Realm: Pictorial Programs on Fifth-century Chinese Miniature Pagodas

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Abstract

Miniature pagodas commissioned in the fifth century in northern China are among the earliest Buddhist stone carvings with reliefs. Their surfaces feature various Buddhist images popular at the time. Except for the twin Buddhas motif that is considered to have originated in China, all images have predecessors in Gandhāra in northwestern India. This paper examines the configuration of Buddhist images on miniature pagodas to explore the transmission and transformation of Gandhāran Buddhist motifs. On miniature pagodas, one of the popular themes is Buddhas of the Three Ages, with Buddhas of the Past, the Present, and the Future arranged vertically. Nevertheless, the Seven Buddhas of the Past in Gandhāran art was replaced by the twin Buddhas motif on the pagodas to represent the theme of the Past Buddha, indicating a shift in doctrinal emphasis to Mahāyāna teachings in Chinese Buddhist art.

Keywords: Pagoda, Buddhas of the Three Ages, Northern Wei, Gandhāra

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Introduction

During the 20th century, approximately 20 miniature pagodas and hundreds of pagoda fragments were discovered among several monastic sites or hoarding pits in historical centers in present-day Shanxi 山西 province in the north and Gansu 甘肅 province in the northwest. On the basis of dedicatory inscriptions as well as period styles, some of the objects are attributed to the latter half of the fifth century, under the Northern Wei dynasty 北魏 (386–534), which occupied the northern half of China. The objects' provenance, Shanxi and

Gansu provinces, comprised the cultural and political hub of the Northern Wei. The pagodas' surfaces are carved with Buddhist images, including the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, the future Buddha Maitreya, the Fasting Buddha, narrative scenes from the Buddha's life story, and the Twin Buddhas (the pairing of Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna, a Buddha of the past). Because of the scholarly emphasis to date on the pagodas' architectural features, their rich imagery, including their iconography and religious significance, have not been fully grasped or appreciated.

For that reason, many questions have gone unexamined: how and why the various Buddhist motifs were selected, how the configurations differ from contemporary pictorial programs in cave-temples and on statues and steles, and whether and how their compositions relate to contemporaneous Buddhist teachings. Aside from studies identifying their physical characteristics, no serious research has been conducted on these Buddhist images and the pagodas' religious and cultural contexts. With the exception of the Twin Buddhas motif, which is said to have originated in China, all the Buddhist figures and themes mentioned above have predecessors in Gandhāra art, a style of Buddhist visual art that came into prominence during the Kushan Empire (ca. 30–375) in present-day northwestern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan. As such, the present essay first addresses the introduction of early Gandhāran Buddhist motifs into China, their subsequent appropriation in local milieux, and the ways in which these configurations reflect new developments in Chinese Buddhist thought. It further reveals how the reception and appropriation of early Gandhāran Buddhist motifs have been shaped by regional variations.

The first section proposes a relative chronology for miniature pagodas and pagoda reliefs carved in cave-temples.[1] The second section examines the configuration of Buddhist figures on miniature pagodas. The third focuses on the depiction of narrative scenes on miniature pagodas. The final and fourth section addresses regional variations, especially the inclusion of the Fasting Buddha on miniature pagodas from the Hexi 河西 Corridor. A region to the west of the Yellow River encompassing modern-day Gansu province, the Hexi Corridor constituted another artistic center connecting northern China to Central Asia from the first century CE. A detailed discussion of regional variations of the imagery on pagodas reveals that the metropolitan styles and iconographies are not always sources of influence on regional areas in early Northern Wei

[1] Here, a relative chronology—the assignment of objects to a timespan with a generally clear, successive relationship to one another—is used instead of an absolute chronology, which pinpoints the exact date of each object under consideration.

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