

In recent years the study of the peoples and cultures which have lived (and still live) in the border regions of the greater Chinese empire have begun to draw increasing attention of the scholarly community. However, some of these cultures, including the Tangut and their state of Xixia (1038–1227), have been largely beyond the grasp of people with a sinological background for the very reason that the majority of the extant written sources relating to these people were written in a script that was extremely hard for most to read. With the exception of a motly crew of older scholars—mostly made up of Russians, Japanese and a single New Zealander, Tangut studies have remained a virtual backwater for several decades. During the 1980s a new generation of Chinese scholars from the PRC emerged, and with the recent spate of archaeological findings relating to Tangut culture and religion in particular, it appears as if the field is finally ready to “take-off”. In any case Tangut studies, and in particular that part which relate to Buddhism, has now become accessible to a wider range of scholars.

Belonging to the younger generation of scholars who have been captivated by the Tanguts and their history, Ruth W. Dunnell is one of the few Western experts in that field outside of Russia, and her previous studies—mostly articles—have dealt with a number of aspects pertaining to the status of Buddhism among the Tanguts, and in particular its role as part of the legitimation of the rulers. Not only must Dunnell’s book be seen as a most wellcome contribution to Tangut studies world-wide, but it is also the first time in many years that a fine study such as this is being published in a Western language other than Russian.

The present study, Dunnell’s first book, is devoted to an investigation of the role of Buddhism in the development of a Tangut state ideology during the first century of the existence of the Xixia empire. The work is divided into two parts and includes in addition to the usual appendixes and indexes:

Part 1.

1. “Introduction”
2. “Buddhism and Monarchy in the Early Tangut State”
3. “Buddhism under the Regences (1049–1099)”

Part 2.

4. “A History of the Dayun (Huguo) Temple at Liangzhou”
5. “Annotated Translation of the 1094 Stele Inscriptions”
6. “Reading between the Lines: A Comparison and Analysis of the Tangut and Han Texts”
7. “Conclusion.”

The author devotes a major part of the book to a discussion and careful study of the pair of stele-inscriptions, one in Tangut, the other in Chinese, which were set up—one on either side of the stele—in the Huguo Temple in connection with the repair of the Gangtong Stūpa in AD 1094. She has previously worked with this material on a number of occasions,<sup>1</sup> and has clearly much knowledge on the subject.

The most fascinating and informative chapter in the book is that on the political role of Buddhism under the Regences (1049–99). This chapter is packed with details on the relationship between statecraft and religion during the late early phase of state formation of the Xixia, and the author provides for a thorough and authoritative historical discourse on this important period.

As is evident from the list of contents Dunnell has limited her discussion to the early history of the Xixia state, and moreover remains focused on two sources only. Her annotation is copious and contains an abundance of useful and relevant information. In short, a highly qualified study that promises more of the same standard to follow.

Were I to point out any weaknesses with Dunnell's study it has more to do with its scope and limited use of the primary sources than with actual errors. There can be no arguing that the Huguo Temple inscriptions are important, and hence one can hardly blame the author for placing so much emphasis on them for the development of her argument, however, I am somewhat reluctant to credit them with the same degree of importance as does the author. I feel that Dunnell is placing too much importance on these sources—perhaps to the exclusion of other equally important ones—and in this way is allowing the inscriptions in question to set out the course for her argument rather than *vice versa*. This is a shame since it makes the study slightly imbalanced, and may cause us to lose sight of important contexts that other material might have revealed.

Another point with which I feel some misgivings concerns the way the author treats Tangut Buddhism. It is obvious from both the title as well as from the written material with which Dunnell works, that religion and Buddhism in particular play overshadowing roles. This is of course fully in line with the extant cultural material, including scriptures, sculptural images, architecture, cave sanctuaries, paintings etc., we have from the Tanguts, the large majority of which comes from a Buddhist context. For this reason I fail to understand why she has chosen to ignore the significance of this abundant material, much of which falls under the eleventh century, and instead concentrates on the more trivial information as contained in the remains of the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ruth Dunnell, "The 1094 Gantong Stūpa Stele Inscription of Wuwei: Introduction, Translation of Chinese Text, and Source Study", in *Festschrift for Tatsuo Nishida on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday*, ed. Akihiro Satō. Kyoto: Shokado, 1988, pp. 187–215; and "Construction of Tangut Identity in the 1094 Wuwei Stele Inscription", *Central and Inner Asian Studies* 7 (1992), pp. 61–114.

*Tangut Tripitaka*, and in the *Tangut Law Code* which was translated by E. I. Kychanov many years ago. One would at least have expected that Dunnell had attempted to account for the type, or rather types, of Buddhism that were current among the Tanguts in the period under discussion, but for some reason that has been more or less left out. This is surprising and hard to understand, since there is an easy-to-use and quite useful Chinese publication available, namely Shi Jinbo's 史金波 *Xixia Fojiao shilue* 西夏佛教史略 [A Brief History of Xixia Buddhism],<sup>2</sup> in which one may find much of the relevant information (it can actually be found in Dunnell's bibliography). The only attempt at defining Xixia Buddhism is done when the author refers to "Tantric Buddhism"; however, such a designation is too broad to be really meaningful if not accounted for in detail, i.e. contextualized. In any case Dunnell fails to distinguish between Chinese esoteric practices on the one hand, and Tibetan tantrism on the other, both of which were prevalent and important expressions of Buddhism in the Xixia state.

Related to this problem is that regarding the influence of Tibetan lamaism on Tangut culture. Although the period dealt with in Dunnell's study mainly covers the phase during which influence from Chinese (and Khitan) culture was at its peak, it would still have been interesting to know about the role played by the Tibetan Buddhists in Xixia at that time. Especially so since distinct traces from Tibetan tantrism can be found in the Tangut caves at Mogao and Yulin Kou in Anxi. However, in defence of the author, it should be noted that her focus is mainly historical rather than on the history of religion, hence one should perhaps not expect too detailed an analysis of distinct religious issues.

*The Great State of White and High: Buddhism and State Formation in Eleventh-Century Xia* represents a pioneering study, in effect the first of its kind, and it therefore has both the advantages and the shortcomings that one would expect from such a work. When seen in relation to the overall achievement that Dunnell has accomplished with this book, the points of criticism raised above, are not really significant, but may be taken as indicators of the need of further research. Having read it one can only admire the author for her determined effort in "excavating" as it were, the historical and cultural facts surrounding the political role Buddhism played in the formation of the Xixia state. There can be no arguing that this study is a major contribution to our understanding of the rise of the Tangut as a cultural and political unity, and it is destined to remain indispensable to any future studies on the role of Buddhism among the Tanguts, as well as the history of the Xixia state.

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<sup>2</sup> Published by Ningxia renmin chubanshe in Yinchuan in 1988.

*Latter Days of the Law: Images of Chinese Buddhism 850–1850*. Ed. Marsha Weidner. Honolulu: Spencer Museum of Art – The University of Kansas – University of Hawaii Press, 1994. 481 pages, 32 colour plates.

The study of Chinese Buddhist art has hitherto mainly been devoted to the pre-Song period, with the unfortunate result that a vast number of precious religious objects have been forgotten or simply ignored. The reason for this development should be seen in the previous history of the study of Chinese Buddhist art, which has either focused on pre-Tang and Tang sculpture, or on the wall-paintings, and banner-paintings from Dunhuang. Only recently has interest in the rich Buddhist sculptural art from the Ming begun to arouse interest, gradually followed by votive paintings and portraits. Still the sculptural art of the Song, Xixia, Liao and Jin dynasties need to be re-evaluated, and subjected to new, serious research.

The present volume, which is devoted to the Buddhist works of art that belong to this later period, is actually an exhibition catalogue—something which is hard to believe at first glance—since it with its monumental size amounts to a veritable telephone book. Despite its title, *Latter Days of the Law: Images of Chinese Buddhism 850–1850*, the book only deals with paintings, and one can hope that those who initiated this exhibition are planning a follow-up focusing on sculpture.

In addition to the standard foreword, preface, etc. *Latter Days of the Law* contains the following chapters:

“Introduction” by Marsha Weidner. A general but very well written introduction to Chinese Buddhist history and art with special emphasis on painting. She includes a most welcome revision of the now vastly outmoded concept that post-Tang Buddhism is degenerate and void of originality.

“Buddhist Pictorial Art in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644): Patronage, Regionalism, and Internationalism” by Marsha Weidner. This is an excellent article that with its convincing knowledge of the period in question provides a highly useful introduction to the Buddhist painting of the Ming. I shall here limit myself to pointing out two minor mistakes. In discussing the wall-paintings of the Fahai Temple in Beijing the author refers to the presence of “a Tibetan-influenced manner” (p. 55), but fails to account for this iconographical trait further. Personally I disagree with her analysis, and would instead want to see the image as a late example of Sino-Tibetan art that was already undergoing a Sinitic transformation by the time the walls of the temple in question were being decorated. I also fail to agree that the *luohan* paintings of cat. 27 should reflect Sino-Tibetan iconography (p. 57). The composition is straight-forward main-stream Ming style, and the use of *gesso* was already employed on Buddhist sculptures and wall-paintings under the Jin dynasty if not before.

“Preserving the Nation: The Political Uses of Tantric Art in China” by

Patricia Berger. This article is an attempt at accounting for esoteric and Tantric Buddhist art as it unfolded in China. The first part is devoted to the early phase of esoteric Buddhism in China, followed by a discussion of the later developments including the influence from the Tibetan tantric tradition. Whereas the previous article was lucid and comprehensive, the same can unfortunately not be said by this one. To describe esoteric ritualism as “Tantric ideas” that have “surfaced in the context of Daoist-tinged Buddhism in the service of the imperial court” (p. 90) is to miss the point. The use of visualization in Chinese Buddhism dates all the way back to the introduction of Buddhism during the Eastern Han (p. 90). It also contains information that contravenes the catalogue itself. The identification of fig. 33 which is referred to as “Ratnasambhava” (p. 118) when the catalogue identifies the painting as representing Samantabhadra (p. 252). For lack of space I cannot list all the numerous mistakes and misunderstandings that marr this article. The result is confusing, and with the exception of the Yuan and Ming periods, the author is clearly out of her depths. Here the editor ought to have found someone with a little more knowledge of subject to write this important and central article.

“The Evolution of Buddhist Narrative Illustration in China after 850” by Julia K. Murray is a brief but highly informative article that takes the reader through the early wall-paintings from the Mogao Caves, illustrated books, printed *sūtra* illustrations etc. I would have liked a more detailed discussion of the terms *bianxiang*, *jingxiang*, and *jingbian*, which are here treated as meaning the same, however that is a minor point that does not subtract from the good impression the article left on me.

“Guanyin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara” by Chün-fang Yü. The author first discusses the canonical forms of the deity, followed by a presentation of new images that developed during the tenth to eleventh centuries, the feminine forms of Guanyin, Miaoshan etc. Chün-fang Yü reveals a comprehensive knowledge of the lore surrounding the deity in question, and has many new observations to make. This makes the article one of the most interesting and engaging contributions to the present volume. There are however, a few points I would like to bring up. First of all I believe that the majority of Avalokiteśvara images—both sculptures as well as paintings— dating from the Northern Song were of the male sex. The same holds true for the contemporary Korean and Japanese images. There can be little doubt that the female forms grew out of the miracle tales describing the various manifestations of the bodhisattva. The author also has some problems defining the differences and similarities between the various forms of the bodhisattva. She seems to overlook the fact that there is a clear tendency by the tradition to collapse the “Water-Moon Guanyin” with the “White Robed Guanyin” (pp. 156–7). Here I should also like to add that the latter is not a Chinese creation as indicated by the author, but an Indian form that first occurs in the esoteric context (which she actually mentions elsewhere, i.e. on p. 169). The *Dazhidu lun* is not a commentary to the *Mahāprajñāparāmitā sūtra*

(p. 156). There is also a wrong translation from a passage from the *Zhengdao ge* 正道歌. Yü's rendering is: "To see the image in a mirror is not difficult. How can one grasp the moon in the water?" It should read: "The reflected image is not difficult to see. How can one grasp the moon in the water?" (p. 156). The canonical source for the dragon princess, who is often seen as the companion of Avalokiteśvara, is not "esoteric texts", but the account of the dragon princess attaining enlightenment in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (p. 163). I am also reluctant to accept the view that the Miaoshan cult had anything to do with the late Tang sculptures of Avalokiteśvara in Dazu. The Miaoshan cult developed much later (pp. 163–4). I wonder why the author neglects the various studies by Maria Reis on the Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara? Lastly I should add that extensive parts of this article have appeared in Chinese before.

"Depictions of the Guardians of the Law: Lohan Painting in China" by Richard K. Kent. Personally I fail to see why *arhats* (*luohans*) as a class merits the designation "guardians"?

"Catalogue with introductions to Buddhism and Buddhist subjects in Chinese art" edited by Alan G. Atkinson. This part of the book is sub-divided into the following sections: I. The Temple: Ritual, Devotion, and Study; II. Beyond the Monastery Walls: Professional Painters and Popular Themes; and III. From the Monks' Quarters to the Scholar's Studio. In the section on Buddhas and Buddhism esoteric Buddhism is treated in an off hand and superficial manner, and is simply seen as "the last major development in Indian Buddhist history". The author seems to forget that esoteric Buddhism forms an integrated part of Mahāyāna. Furthermore Buddhist *Tantras* in India developed as early as the fourth century AD (pp. 219–20). Elsewhere ritual manuals used in esoteric Buddhism are referred to as "tantras" (p. 294)! Likewise, the description of an esoteric *maṇḍala*, which is wrongly referred to as a "Tantric Buddhist charm" is also full of mistakes and strange notions (pp. 296–8). I fail to see how the item in question ends up showing "strong influence of Indo-Tibetan religious art" (p. 298). Also Siddham script did not decline in the late Tang to be replaced by Lantsa style script (p. 298). In the section describing the paintings used for the Suilu ritual, there is a reference to "radiant kings". This is obviously a mistake for *vidyārājā* 明王, one of the major classes of protectors in esoteric Buddhism (p. 284). This goes to show that contemporary Western research on the esoteric Buddhist tradition still has a long way to go.

Somehow I also feel that Sherman E. Lee's rambling preface (pp. 9–18) should have been more carefully checked. It contains a number of formal mistakes and strange interpretations. First of all, I fail to see how Li Gonglin's painting (cat. no. 43) depicting Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī should be seen as "The balance and rationality of the depiction is evident, epitomizing a Confucian rendition of a Buddhist text" (p. 13). Further on he insists that the painting has become secular because Manjusri and the other deities have no

halos. What kind of logic is this? Elsewhere Budai is mentioned as a “transformed Maitreya”, however the writer seems to have forgotten that Budai was a historical figure on whom the Maitreya “label” was later added (p. 14). In another vein Lee compares Chan painting with that done by the early Qing individualists such as Shi Tao, Luo Ping and Ji Nong (p. 14) on the grounds that they also experimented with their use of ink and types of brushes. However, such a comparison is irrelevant if not entirely misleading. The historical background and social context in which the early Qing individualists lived and worked were as removed from that of the Chan painters of the Song, as that of Picasso were from those who decorated the walls in the churches of medieval Byzans. In addition the inspiration of the latter had its origin in an entirely different type of aesthetics. I suppose this preface was included as a tribute to a scholar whose contributions to the field of Chinese art over the past several decades rightly have earned him many fans, however the present preface does him no honour.

When the *pros* and *cons* are weighed together, I cannot but conclude that *Latter Days of the Law* is a rather uneven publication. This is unfortunate since the ideas behind the catalogue and exhibition are indeed commendable. I would partly blame the editor (and the publishing company) for being too uncritical with the articles that went into the book. A little more expertise would have heightened the level of the book considerably. Nevertheless, books of this kind appear rarely, and despite its many errors and other problems it is certain to be studied and read by anyone interested in Chinese Buddhist art. In any case it is bound to be a useful companion to Thomas Lawson’s classic catalogue on *Chinese Figure Painting*.

Finally it must be said that *Latter Days of the Law* is an extremely well-produced book which features a fine lay-out and beautiful reproductions of the many Buddhist paintings in question. Despite my personal misgivings it should not be missed by those seriously interested in Chinese art.

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