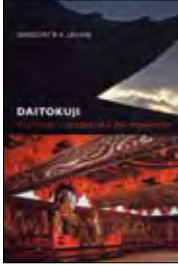


REVIEWS



Gregory P. A. Levine, *Daitokuji: The Visual Cultures of a Zen Monastery*

Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2006.
lii+444 pp. \$60.00. Illustrations, bibliography, index, cloth, ISBN
0-295-98540-2.

DAITOKUJI: The Visual Cultures of a Zen Monastery is a study of how Daitokuji's visual cultures functioned, and continue to function, in practice and in memory. In this monumental book, Levine has made the substantial amount of material manageable by organizing it into a prologue, epilogue, and four parts, each with a short section to introduce the unifying theme followed by two to three chapters.

Daitokuji is, of course, well known as one of the most important Buddhist temples in Japan, but Levine deals with the stuff of Daitokuji in new ways. Rather than concentrating only on Daitokuji's major monuments, as had been the custom of past art historical scholarship, he challenges old cannons by addressing topics of broad interest and weaving the monuments, as well as objects with less "art historical" panache, into his study. Daitokuji is an archive, a location of collecting, and a repository where objects not only reside, but it is also a space where people interact with them.

In the prologue Levine sets up key issues for the study and frames the site's material by considering the life of Daitokuji's "visual culture(s)," a fluid term, which he explains "is best taken as a placeholder in a dynamic semantic, visual, and social field" (xiviii). Another significant issue that runs through this study is the slippery subject of "Zen art," which Levine reminds us usually has more to do with notions set up in the modern era. "In short, objects of varied representational technique and form turn out to be far more profuse in Chan/Zen communities, and their meaning and status more flexible and contested, than we have heretofore believed" (p. 1). He continues, "Although I do not view this book as a direct response to the problem of "Zen art," I will speak to certain assumptions and debates" (p. 1).

Undoubtedly many reviews will be written about this magnificent book; here I will not only praise the virtues of its scholarly contributions, but will also discuss it from the standpoint of a teacher, since I have had the luxury of using it as an assigned reading in an art history seminar. In spring 2007 I taught a graduate-level seminar titled "Japanese Buddhist Temples in Context" at the University of Kansas for students with backgrounds in Chinese, Korean, European, and Japanese art history. In

the six years since I last offered this seminar, several new studies, including *Daitokuji*, were published that deal with site-specific studies of Japanese art and culture. In order to provide perspectives beyond my own and give consideration to how such a book comes across as a teaching tool, I will weave some of my students' reactions and comments into this review. As traditional notions collided throughout the seminar, discussion often turned to the territories and boundaries of disciplines and the question of what is art history. The relationship of these topics to *Daitokuji* made for lively class discussion on broad levels, while the individual sections also prompted more specific rethinking of old stereotypes about the temple and its monuments.

In Part I, Levine deals with the hotly contested issues of Zen, portraiture, and identity through the finding, along with temple authorities, that the head of Abbot Shōkei Jōfu's (1475–1536) wooden portrait statue formerly belonged to a different body. Students found the personal account of discovery to be engaging as well as an uncommon position for an art historian. Like an anthropologist acknowledging his own involvement, in his quest to consider the dislocation and reclamation of this statue, Levine breaks a formal notion that art historians should somehow remain neutral. In this section, he expands upon the issues that some readers may recall that he first brought to the world's attention in his article "Switching Sites and Identities: The Founders Statue at the Zen Buddhist Temple of Kōrin'in" (*Art Bulletin* LXXXIII, no. 1 [2000]: 72–104). On the surface Shōkei Jōfu's seventeenth-century portrait would unlikely inspire much scholarly attention, yet this investigation invites us to think about the shifting notions of identity along with almost "CSI"-style evidence and deep contextualization. Levine sensitively considers the stakes for the temple and for himself when the subject of worship proves to have a hidden, alternate identity. He uses the circumstances of this reconstructed portrait to consider whether verisimilitude is really necessary in Buddhist portraiture and concludes that an "expected presence" and "likeness to type" are actually more important.

Levine turns to a sixteenth-century image of the famed tea master Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591) that is only known through legends and nineteenth century iterations (figs. 7, 62) in Part II. As a main patron for the 1589 restoration of Daitokuji's main gate, Rikyū's portrait was installed inside its ritual space likely along with a host of Buddhist sculptures. Levine wades through the numerous documents, tales, rumors, and legends that suggest that after passing under the gate that housed this portrait, the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598) felt that Rikyū, whom he considered as a servant, had disrespected his authority. Hideyoshi subsequently ordered that the sculpture be strung up in public like a criminal while he allowed Rikyū himself to commit ritual suicide. "Though Hideyoshi may have desired the statue's destruction, it took on a more enduring life because of its visible and unusual demise" (p. 86). What does it mean to study something that no longer exists? As Levine carefully investigates the idea of this sculpture, he considers how iconoclasm, legends, and memory all work to help objects, especially portraits, live on long after their physical forms have vanished.

Tea culture is a fascinating yet thorny area of study, which has only recently

begun to receive more critical scholarly attention. Although Levine probably does not consider himself as a tea historian *per se*, his work certainly intersects with interdisciplinary investigations of the cultural and social history of tea. Members of established tea schools loyal to their respective traditions had previously conducted the majority of tea research in a situation where deviation from the “party line” could result in being cut off colleagues, the support of the traditional schools, as well as access to materials guarded by those schools. Refreshingly, Levine does not have an agenda to aggrandize a specific tea school nor to give Rikyū a new hagiography. He even expands the discussion of Rikyū to treat critically the modern manifestations of the story presented in film and television.

In Chapter 4 Levine moves on to examine the Daitokuji Sanmon, the original home of the Rikyū statue, which he dubs “The Gate of Memory.” Levine explains that, “The name Sanmon is an abbreviation of Sangedatsumon, or Three Gates of Liberation: “gate of emptiness” (*kūmon*), “gate of formlessness” (*musōmon*), and “gate of nonaction” (*musamon*). To pass through these portals was to enter the mountain, a metaphor for the temple as a remote and sacred place of religious practice” (p. 91). He discusses the gate through its various architectural phases and then examines the images housed inside the gate. Again, he challenges traditional art historical modes since, until relatively recently, studies of Japanese Buddhist sculpture rarely ventured beyond the fourteenth century because images made after that time were considered unworthy of attention. The fifteenth-century sculptural tableau (figs. 71–73) inside the gate represents Śākyamuni’s sermon at Vulture Peak where a great assembly of beings gathered together to hear the *Lotus Sūtra*. Several of my students were excited about the opportunity to study the brightly colored and expressive images of the Sixteen Arhats (*C. luohan*, *J. rakan*) included in the group. Levine neatly provides the context for these works within the “gate of memory” by considering how practitioners could “recall” Buddhist teachings while being surrounded by the three-dimensional creation of this pious scene in the space of the gate.

Convincing students to study handwritten texts, which are generally very difficult to read, can be one of the most difficult challenges in East Asian art history. Initially I thought of leaving Part III “Tracing the Calligraphic Past at Daitokuji” out of the class readings, but we read it because many of the students were enthusiastic about the topic. Levine deserves praise for a very accessible and engaging discussion of calligraphy, although some readers might find parts of this section to be somewhat dense. He does not attempt to teach readers the rules of calligraphy assessment, but instead involves us in the history of the practice of calligraphy connoisseurship at Daitokuji. The focus is on *Bokuseki no utsushi* (Copies of ink traces), written by Daitokuji Abbot Kōgetsu Sōgan during the years 1610–1643. “Kōgetsu’s journal is, in other words, a collection of calligraphic copies and writings about writings, one which grew in close relationship to *chanoyu* and the art market of the early seventeenth century” (p. 150). From Levine’s exploration of Daitokuji’s highly praised works of calligraphy as well as those associated with the problems of forgery,

we learn that *Bokuseki no utsushi* can teach us about reception and the social places where viewers and objects intersect.

Part IV “Taking in the Breeze: Airing the Visual and Textual Past at Daitokuji” is about Daitokuji’s practice of airing (*mushiboshi*), an annual event that was instituted to prevent its scrolls from being ruined by insects or mildew. “Despite the availability of climate controlled facilities, airings are still held each year because they serve multiple purposes: preservation, visual and aesthetic experience, devotion, and commerce” (p. 224). The author delves deeply into the practice, which has been often noted, but not discussed as a phenomenon. Among the many treasures at Daitokuji, the most celebrated are the paintings *Guanyin, Monkeys, and Crane*, known as the *Muqi Triptych* (figs. 14, 115) because they were painted by the thirteenth century Chinese painter Muqi. The paintings have been widely discussed as pinnacles of “Zen art,” but the purpose here is to consider their role as treasured objects of display. By examining the airing practice we are confronted with how the presentation of objects affects the culture of viewing or what Levine calls “museum effect,” “temple effect,” and “airing effect” in which the location acts on the objects to promote certain modes of looking. This type of inquiry is beneficial to students and scholars in many different fields to help think about how religious objects are viewed as well as secularized. Chapter 10, “*Mushiboshi* at Daitokuji” gives a detailed account of seventeenth to nineteenth century historical references to the Daitokuji airings. The use of guidebooks as sources for the social life of the temple and its objects brings Daitokuji into the popular realm.

In Chapter 11 “Airings, Exhibitions, and Feuds,” Levine deftly explores the social space of Daitokuji’s modern airings. Within the chapter he features Jon Carter Covell’s (1910–1996) article, “A ‘Vendetta’ Over a Koryŏ-Period ‘Willow Kuanyin’” (*Korea Journal* 19/1 [January 1979]: 36–45), as a counterpoint to his own investigation. Covell, whose goal for the article was to reclaim the Korean heritage of Daitokuji’s gorgeous Water-Moon Avalokiteśvara painting (fig. 18), was one the first English language scholars to grapple seriously with the art history of Daitokuji. Although Levine states he admires her effort to reintroduce Korean works of art into the Buddhist art cannon and thwart the legacy of Japan’s colonization of Korea, he is very critical of her scholarship, approaches, and lack of diplomacy. Perhaps because of the personal nature of this writing, students in the seminar reacted somewhat adversely to the discussion of Covell. Several of them felt this critique of someone from a past generation, who could no longer defend herself, was too harsh. Some were frustrated that Levine did not take a stand on whether the Water-Moon Avalokiteśvara/“Willow Kuanyin” is a Korean, Chinese, or Japanese work. Since Levine is using Covell’s work to exemplify the airing as a space for engagement with the objects, joining the debate over the painting’s heritage was not his objective for this section. In fact, he labelled the painting as Korean in the caption for Figure 18. Perhaps because this discussion is so critical of behavior, not just scholarly opinion, it made the students feel sorry for Covell and might have benefited from some

trimming. Nevertheless, this is the exactly the kind of reading that can spark lively discussions with students of various levels.

Throughout this book Levine has carefully engaged with an amazing array of international sources. In the epilogue “Repairing the Temple, Filling the Museum: Travels of the Daitokuji *Five Hundred Luohan*,” Levine follows the famous set of one hundred paintings of the *Five Hundred Luohan* (figs. 133, 134), that was made in China in the twelfth century. The paintings were taken from China to Daitokuji, then to the United States and then back to the temple. Of the forty-four paintings that travelled overseas for exhibitions in the nineteenth century, twelve (figs. 19, 129–131) stayed in the United States because they were acquired by Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and Freer Gallery of Art. In considering the length of this volume, the author must have considered dealing with this topic elsewhere as a separate, but linked study. However, its inclusion in the book forces us to consider Daitokuji beyond Japan. As we think about the relationship with the United States, readers of English might recognize familiar territory and feel as if they are participating in this global adventure.

The author and University of Washington Press have painstakingly constructed this book with lavishly illustrated photographs with a generous amount of color. Readers might wish a character list had been included, but I assume the budget for the production of this beautiful academic book was stretched to its limit. There is so much more to this important publication than I can cover in the space of this review, but in short it is a model of meticulous and thorough scholarship written with imaginative and eloquent language.

I would like to thank University of Kansas art history students Ashley Elston, Sooa Im, Ai-lian Liu, Shuyun Ho, Halle O’Neal, Larry Rotert, Rachel Voorhies, and Wenrui Zhong for their lively conversations, comments, and in-depth considerations of this book. I heartily recommend that this work be included in future reading lists for art history, religious studies, history, and culture studies courses. As the book stimulates fascinating class discussions, scholarly exchanges, and future research, I am convinced that *Daitokuji: The Visual Cultures of a Zen Monastery* will itself become a space of learning and engagement with Buddhist objects for years to come.

Sherry Fowler
University of Kansas