The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture. By John Kieschnick. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. 343 pages including text, index, and images. Hardcover, $65.00; paperback, $24.95.

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Why do Chinese monks dress in sleeved robes? Why did members of the Qing court adorn themselves with Buddhist rosaries? How do bridge building and innovations in paper production and printing relate to Buddhism? What does the chair have to do with Buddhism in China? What about sugar? Tea? These questions guide the scope of this book. Kieschnick offers a collection of the histories of particular objects, considers the attitudes toward them, and the ways in which they were used over time that, taken together, reveal the complex and subtle ways in which Buddhism changed the material life of a civilization, in this case, China (p. 14). Buddhism altered the Chinese material world by introducing new sacred objects, new symbols, buildings, ritual implements, and a host of other objects, large and small, as well as new ways of thinking about and interacting with these objects (p. 1).

Kieschnick identifies the various schools of thought on material culture, some focusing on the objects themselves, others on their symbolic capital. His main focus, however, is on the *making* of the object, not in the object itself. He asks, "What negotiations were involved in *making* Buddhist objects? What were the objects used for? What were people's attitudes toward these objects?" (p. 16, emphasis added). Kieschnick places an importance on the origin of the object because it was of great significance in the way the object was used and treated (p. 18). Kieschnick notes that traditionally scholars of religions, in this particular case Buddhologists, have focused on texts and ideas, ignoring either accidentally or purposefully, how material objects may contradict scriptural pronouncements. This resulted in "convoluted explanations for the objects rather than [acceptance] that doctrines laid out in scriptures may not reflect the way Buddhism was practiced" (pp. 20–21). Furthermore, the preoccupation with text and ideas ignores the intimate relationship between religion and the material cultural world.

Material culture, as Kieschnick argues, will provide invaluable insights into the history of a religion. "A focus on material culture also reveals the extent of the impact of religious movements on culture" (p. 22). Kieschnick notes that China provides an abundance of data for the study of Buddhist material culture. There is a large body of artifacts and writings

about the artifacts from before the first century C.E. when Buddhism began to influence Chinese society, making "it possible in many cases to determine what came to China with Buddhism and what originated in China independently" (p. 23). Hence, the great challenge for Kieschnick and readers alike is the issue of data interpretation. His examination of material culture attempts to debunk the view that Indian Buddhism was more pure than its Chinese counterpart, but more importantly, reveals that they too struggled with the contradiction between meaning and language itself—just as the Chinese did. Instead, he stresses the "centuries of persistent contact" that were necessary for an object to take root in Chinese society (e.g., the chair over a period of seven centuries). He says, "More commonly, however, changes happened only very slowly under constant cultural pressure from Buddhist individuals and institutions. In other words, the persistent presence of Buddhist practices and ideas provided the resources as well as the vast stretches of time needed for the spread and development of particular forms of material culture" (p. 284). Furthermore, "material objects at once reflected a monastic identity that transcended the boundaries confining the behaviors and attitudes of other types of people, and at the same time gradually, persistently, introduced to outsiders new objects and new approaches to them" (p. 286).

In chapter one, Kieschnick explores the notion of sacred power in sacred objects, primarily in relics and icons. He notes that this notion was not new to China and existed prior to the entry of Buddhism. However, the types of objects associated with sacred power were new, in addition to the complex and vast apparatus used to produce and disseminate them (p. 29). This apparatus included monks, rich liturgical tradition, and a rapidly expanding lay following in the early centuries (p. 29). Buddhism introduced new icons into China, relics—bits of bone, teeth, and ash—imbued with sacred power. In China, relics were important for several reasons: relics were used as symbols for prestige and power, they had economic implications in that they attracted pilgrimage and patronage, and were of diplomatic value (pp. 37–43).

Kieschnick examines the impact of Buddhist icons on Chinese material culture. Monks used images for the confession of their faults and as tools for visualization. Soon after the introduction of Buddhism into China, "Buddhist images became an integral part of the devotional life of all Buddhists—monks and nuns, lay people, patrons rich and poor" (p. 55). The main question that Kieschnick explores on image worship is: "What was the nature of this sacred power, what function did it serve, and how did icons get it?" (p. 57). He continues by saying we can "at least assert that sacred icons were an important part of Buddhism at the time when Buddhism began to have a major impact on Chinese civilization" (pp. 57–58).

In chapter two Kieschnick examines the symbolism embedded in the images, which explains how Buddhism entered and permeated Chinese

material culture (p. 83). Kieschnick notes that early Buddhist iconography might not represent Buddhist symbolism at all, but rather, a vague association of the symbol with auspiciousness. Hence, during the early Han, "elephants, relics, and haloed figures may have been more lucky charms than indexes to episodes in the life of the Buddha and the doctrines inherent in the biography" (p. 84). However, by the Six Dynasties Period, there is firmer evidence of the self-conscious use of Buddhist symbolism on tombs. The author grapples with two main issues of iconography in this section: "the origins of symbols and the travails of their subsequent interpretation" (p. 84).

Kieschnick suggests that in discussing the emergence of Buddhist symbols in China, we need not confine ourselves to the symbolism in Buddhist arts (e.g., painting and sculpture) but should extend our examination to Buddhist objects of liturgy, as well as the personal articles of monks and nuns. He then focuses his discussion on a number of portable objects that were invested with symbolic significance: the monastic robe, the alms bowl, the rosary, the ring staff, and the *ruyi* scepter. The iconographic properties of these objects were never really fixed, nor were they fundamentally symbolic. "Yet, all are examples of objects whose symbolism was discussed at length over the course of the history of Buddhism in China and illustrate that symbolism was important for the way many Buddhist objects were understood" (p. 86). Furthermore, "the opportunity Buddhist symbols provide us for understanding this curious mechanism of interpretation and influence [is], I think, ultimately the most interesting aspect of the history of Buddhist symbols in China" (p. 86).

In chapter three Kieschnick explores the link between the production of Buddhist material culture and the theology of merit. He notes that the idea and system of merit-making and transfer was introduced into China with the entry of Buddhism. This discussion examines the underlying impact of the notion of merit in the production of Buddhist material objects in China (e.g., the book or *sutras*), in combination with the consequent innovations and developments in the production of the material itself (e.g., paper making and printing) (p. 167). Hence, the history of printing in China has many "Chinese firsts," which almost always are related directly to Buddhism (p. 181). One impact of book-making and distribution for merit is seen in the genre known as "morality books (*shanshu*)" which continues today with the massive production of morality books in Taiwan and mainland China (p. 185).

In addition to book-making, monastery construction and support were important merit-making activities. Donations to monasteries were often recorded and made public, hence associated with social and class distinctions. More importantly, monastic donation was often set against the backdrop of the potential for prestige, philanthropy, and intricate social relations. Ultimately, these forces dictate the flourishing and fall of a

monastery (p. 198). Additionally, Kieschnick notes bridge making as another major merit-making activity that included multiple social relationships—local polity, monks as structural engineers and trustful donation collectors, and ultimately, the local inhabitants who will use the bridges.

Overall, Kieschnick argues that the theology of merit fueled the production and innovation of Chinese material culture: from the donation of silk for the sleeved monastic robes, to the constructions of stupas and icons, search and production of relics, support of monasteries, bridge-building, book production, and the paper-making and printing innovations. The main thesis of this chapter, which is successfully argued, is that there are multiple motivations for the production and innovation of Buddhist material artifacts in Chinese culture, primarily driven by the preoccupation with merit-making.

Chapter four explores objects that are tangentially religious and/or Buddhist, such as the chair, sugar, and tea. These may be traced back to Indian origins, although there is proof that tea already existed in China before the entry of Buddhism. In this section, Kieschnick examines the role monks played in the dissemination and propagation of these new objects in China. He illustrates how the "monastic community served as a conduit along which knowledge of how to manufacture and use these things spread" (p. 221).

Kieschnick begins his discussion on tea by stating that "unlike most of the objects seen to this point, the relationship between Buddhism and Chinese tea has little to do with India, despite the controversy that raged from the early nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth over the origins of the tea tree" (p. 262). He notes that although tea was not the preferred drink, most scholars now agree that tea manufacturing, the cultivation and harvesting and use of tealeaves, originated in China (p. 263). During the Six Dynasties Period, milk was the drink of choice in the north, while in the south, tea was the drink of preference, but only among the literati (p. 264). However, by the tenth century tea had become established as the national drink of China.

As with the consumption of sugar, the monastic community consumed tea in the afternoon to avoid the hunger from fasting in the evening. Tea was also used in meditation to assist the monks in staying alert (p. 267), and further, for medicinal proposes (p. 269). More importantly, Kieschnick makes a point that tea became commonplace through the network of routes taken by monks traveling from one monastery to another. He writes, "it is not surprising, then, that in their travels, monks who had acquired the habit of drinking tea in the south spread it to the north. Extending this hypothesis a step further, once tea was established in northern monasteries, it spread from monks to literati along the same paths of influence we have already examined with the spread of the chair and of sugar" (p. 269).

Interestingly, Kieschnick argues, "skeptics can reasonably argue that even had Buddhism never entered China, sooner or later tea would have become China's national drink" (p. 274). One must wonder why Kieschnick would conclude that tea would inevitably conquer Chinese culture, but contends that the up-right chair would not? (p. 248). Since the tea that is known in China today first appeared during the twelfth century, we must wonder, What tea is Kieschnick referring to? Overall, Kieschnick's argument is straightforward—monasteries and monks are key players in the transmission of the use of the chair, techniques for refining sugar, and the nationalization of tea in Chinese material culture.

In his concluding chapter Kieschnick acknowledges the shortcomings of his book: (1) He notes that he has not discussed nuns (p. 282); (2) he admits that Daoists have been overlooked (p. 282); (3) he admits to being preoccupied with India as the "sole source of foreign influence on Chinese material culture, as if Buddhism had leaped directly from a uniform, monolithic India to China without passing through Central or Southeast Asia" (pp. 282–283) and; (4) the issue of temporality and the use of the word "impact" which may suggest a sudden meeting of objects and subsequent transformation. Instead, he stresses the "centuries of persistent contact" that were necessary for an object to take hold in Chinese society (e.g., the chair over a period of seven centuries) (p. 283). Hence he says, "More commonly, however, changes happened only very slowly under constant cultural pressure from Buddhist individuals and institutions. In other words, the persistent presence of Buddhist practices and ideas provided the resources as well as the vast stretches of time needed for the spread and development of particular forms of material culture" (p. 284). Furthermore, "material objects at once reflected a monastic identity that transcended the boundaries confining the behaviors and attitudes of other types of people, and at the same time gradually, persistently, introduced to outsiders new objects and new approaches to them" (p. 286).

Kieschnick returns to the theological contradiction in the relationship between material culture and Buddhist teachings with its tendency to renounce the material world. He asks, "How did the doctrines of the evanescence and ultimate lack of inherent existence of the material world affect the way monks related to objects? And what of the austere ideal of restraint and renunciation?" (p. 287). Kieschnick suggests that the case studies he examined reveal that this tendency toward the material was not a stark sign of hypocrisy or bad faith because there is ample doctrinal support for the justification and use of all objects (p. 288).

In addition to his four critiques of his own work, I would add that not only did he overlook Daoists, but also Confucians. Plus, although he mentioned the role of the merchants in passing on page 33 in reference to the Silk Road, the role of the merchant in propagating and popularizing

Buddhism and its material culture into China must be more significant. While there are some minor editorial problems, the overall content was exciting—a model of multi-disciplinary, multi-methodological investigations of Buddhism—not only in China, but anywhere else Buddhism has been implanted. The book is recommended for general readers interested in Buddhism, historians of material culture, Buddhologists, sinologists, cultural anthropologists, and students and scholars of religious studies.