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### PROJECT

## Relic, Text, and Image: Presence of the Buddha in the Visual Culture of Medieval East Asia)

My book project focuses on the Buddhist material culture that linked Northeast China to Korea and Japan between the 10th and the 13th centuries. I am exploring ideas such as the multifaceted relationship between iconography and architecture; the use of durable materials to preserve Buddhist texts during the Dark Ages; and the interlocked relationship between texts, images and relics in materialising the Buddha's presence.

### Recommended Reading

Shen, Hsueh-man. "Body Matters: Manikin Burials in the Liao Tombs of Xuanhua, Hebei Province." *Artibus Asiae* 65, 1 (2005): 99-141.

-. "Pictorial Representations of the Buddha's Nirvana in Chinese Relic Deposits." *East Asia Journal: Studies in Material Culture* 1, 1 (2003): 25-48.

-. "Realising the Buddha's Dharma-body during the Mofa Period: A Study of the Liao Buddhist Relic Deposits." *Artibus Asiae* 61, 2 (2001): 263-303.

## Relic, Text and Image:

# Presence of the Buddha in the Visual Culture of East Asia, 8th-11th Century

When the Buddha entered nirvana, or seemingly died, there were debates about the object to which the veneration of the "deceased" Buddha should be directed. Is it the human Buddha or the Buddhist truth? Divergent views emerged as responses to the questions concerning the Buddha's presence and the meaning of the Buddha's nirvana. Thus, theories concerning the form in which Sakyamuni Buddha existed or exists developed after the Buddha's "death." With the development of these thoughts, different ways of perceiving the Buddha emerged, hence the theory of the "three bodies" of the Buddha.

Chinese art historians have studied reliquaries, texts and figural images of the Buddha as separate categories. Moreover, paintings and sculptures of Buddhist images have received the most attention, for they fit in the traditional category of "fine art." My book project entitled "Relic, Text and Image: Presence of the Buddha in the Visual Culture of Medieval East Asia" examines the relic burials, texts and Buddhist images made in China, Japan, and Korea during the period from the 8th to the 11th century and argues that the thread connecting all three types of artistic activities is the desire to materialize the Buddha's presence and their function in manifesting the Buddha's three bodies.

The people living in north-eastern China and in Japan regarded 1052 as the year when the Buddhist Dark Age would begin. It was believed that by that time the Buddhist faith would wane and the sacred words of the Buddha would extinguish. At the time of crisis, the need to reassure believers of the Buddha's presence was apparent, as was the need to preserve the Buddhist teaching. During my fellowship year in Wiko, I will focus my research on Buddhist text veneration and the deposition of sacred texts in medieval East Asia. Archaeology has shown that scriptural deposits were built in the Chinese coastal area, Japan and Korea in association with two major concerns, namely a) texts as manifestation of the eternal truth and b) texts duplicated and preserved in preparation for catastrophe. It also shows that a small selection of texts were deliberately chosen, duplicated and deposited in pagodas. These texts share one common function: to duplicate themselves and multiply the merits derived from enshrining them. This self-duplicative nature of the texts poses interesting questions, such as "scale" and "originality", to art historians and shall be the centre of the latter part of my presentation.

Shen, Hsueh-man (Milano,2006)

Gilded splendor : treasures of China's Liao Empire (907 - 1125) : [... on the occasion of the exhibition "Gilded ...", organized by Asia Society] ; [Asia Soc. and Mus., New York, NY, October 6 through December 31, 2006, Mus. für Ostasiat. Kunst, Cologne, Germany, January 26 through April 22, 2007, Mus. Rietberg Zurich, Zürich, Switzerland, May 13 through July 15, 2007]

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=518583899>

Shen, Hsueh-man (2005)

Body matters : manikin burials in the Liao tombs of Yuanhua, Hebei province

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1816617598>

Shen, Hsueh-man (Zürich,2005)

Body matters : manikin burials in the Liao thombs of Xuanhua, Hebei province

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=768656516>

Shen, Hsueh-man (2003)

Pictorial representations of the Buddha's nirvana in Chinese relic depostis

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=829335617>

Shen, Hsueh-man (2002)

Liao yu Bei Song she li ta nei cang jing zhi yan jiu'

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=670710601>

Shen, Hsueh-man (2002)

Luxury of necessity : glassware in sarira relic pagodas on the Tang and Northern Song periods

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=670710555>

Shen, Hsueh-man (2001)

Realizing the Buddha's dharma body during the Mofa period : a study of Liao Buddhist relic deposits

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=181661789X>

Shen, Hsueh-man (2001)

Realizing the Buddha's "Dharma" body during the Mofa period : a study of Liao Buddhist relic deposits

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=768656869>