



Ordinary Images

By Stanley K. Abe

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This richly illustrated book explores the large body of sculpture, paintings, and other religious imagery produced for China's common classes from the third to the sixth centuries C.E. In contrast to the works made for imperial patrons, illustrious monastics, or other luminaries, these ordinary images—modest in scale, mass produced, and at times incomplete—were created for those of lesser standing. Because they cannot be related to well-known historical figures or social groups, these images have been considered a largely nebulous, undistinguished mass of works.

Situating his study in the gaps between conventional categories such as Buddhism, Daoism, and Chinese popular art, Abe examines works—including some of the earliest known examples of Buddha-like images in China—that were commissioned by patrons of modest standing and produced by nameless artists and artisans. Sophisticated and lucidly written, *Ordinary Images* offers an unprecedented exploration of the lively and diverse nature of image making and popular practices.

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Ordinary Images By Stanley K. Abe Bibliography

- Rank: #3178719 in Books
- Published on: 2002-02-19
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.20" h x 1.20" w x 8.50" l, 3.09 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 408 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

“Abe treats the images as case studies of specific regional and temporal groups outside the scope of traditional surveys of Chinese art history and engages the reader with his fresh visual insights and conviction that ordinary images are significant in their own right. His focus on and respect for objects and his resistance to using them merely for rhetorical or illustrative purposes can serve as an example to art historians and those in other fields of study who work with visual materials.”

(Katherine R. Tsiang *Artibus Asiae*)

“Abe has presented a substantive study in this book, which is written with clarity and full of insights. The thorough documentation of sources is invaluable for further investigation.”

(Dorothy C. Wong *Journal of Asian Studies*)

“Abe’s elegant new book, packed with photographs, maps, and diagrams, follows on decades of consistent and often spectacular excavation and scholarship. . . . Abe reviews a good part of this material, describing both new finds and older ones, and presenting the new wealth of scholarship in English, Japanese, and especially Chinese on Buddhist artifacts from early medieval China.”

(*Journal of Chinese Religion*)

“This lavishly illustrated volume revises our understanding of China’s early medieval (200-600 CE) religious sculpture. Through an exhaustive analysis of run-of-the-mill religious art objects and their accompanying inscriptions, Abe skillfully demonstrates the explanatory insufficiency of previous interpretative paradigms. . . . For students of East Asian religion and culture, it is a must.”

(Keith N. Knapp *Religious Studies Review*)

From the Inside Flap

In this richly illustrated book Stanley Abe explores the large body of sculpture, ceramics, and other religious imagery produced for China's common classes from the third to the sixth centuries C.E. Created for those of lesser standing, these works contrast sharply with those made for imperial patrons, illustrious monastics, or other luminaries. They were often modest in scale, mass-produced, and at times incomplete. These "ordinary images" have been considered a largely nebulous, undistinguished mass of works because they cannot be related to well-known historical figures or social groups. Additionally, in a time and place where most inhabitants were not literate, the available textual evidence provides us with a remarkable view of China through the eyes of a small and privileged educated class. There exists precious little written material that embodies the concerns and voices of those of lower standing.

Situating his study in the gaps between conventional categories such as Buddhism, Daoism, and Chinese popular imagery, Abe examines works that were commissioned by patrons of modest standing in specific local contexts. These works include some of the earliest known examples of Buddha-like images in China; a group of small stone stupas from the northwest; inscribed image niches from a cavernous Buddhist cave temple; and large stele with Buddhist, Daoist, and mixed Buddhist-Daoist iconography from Shaanxi province. In these four case studies, Abe questions established notions of art historical practice by treating the works in a manner that allows for more rather than less contradiction, less rather than more certainty. Sensitive to the fragmentary nature of the evidence and his position in a long tradition of scholarly writing,

the author offers a sustained argument against established paradigms of cultural adaptation and formal development.

Sophisticated and lucidly written, *Ordinary Images* offers an unprecedented exploration of the lively and diverse nature of image making and popular practices.

About the Author

Stanley K. Abe is an associate professor of Chinese art history in the Department of Art and Art History at Duke University.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Carl Vincent:

The ability that you get from Ordinary Images is the more deep you excavating the information that hide in the words the more you get serious about reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to be aware of but Ordinary Images giving you buzz feeling of reading. The article writer conveys their point in selected way that can be understood by anyone who read it because the author of this reserve is well-known enough. This book also makes your vocabulary increase well. It is therefore easy to understand then can go along, both in printed or e-book style are available. We propose you for having this particular Ordinary Images instantly.

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