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Book Review



Yunchiahn C. Sena, *Bronze and Stone: The Cult of Antiquity in Song Dynasty China*. Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2019, xiv + 220 pp., ISBN: 978 0 29574 457 5 (hardcover).

Yunchiahn C. Sena's *Bronze and Stone: The Cult of Antiquity in Song Dynasty China* is a study of Song antiquarianism from the tenth through thirteenth centuries. The study demonstrates how Song elites collected, discussed, and appropriated ancient objects against the background of a flourishing literati culture and a thriving market economy. The book examines the historical phenomenon in three themes situated in three consecutive periods, ranging from mid-Northern Song (960–1127) through the Southern Song (1127–1279).

The introduction outlines several aims Sena intends for the book. First and foremost, it is a comprehensive study of the Song antiquarian movement with an eye towards its overall historical trajectory and broad characteristics. In contrast with previous scholarship, which often focuses on individual antiquaries, Sena proposes an interdisciplinary approach to reaching “an overall understanding” of Song antiquarianism (15). Second, Sena highlights a few areas of the movement that would particularly benefit from theoretical analysis. A good example is Song literati's intellectualization of ancient objects, a fluid and versatile process often resulting in diverse ideological meanings and reinvented material functions. Third, Sena compares the Song antiquarian movement to its counterpart in Renaissance Europe, revealing some parallels and differences.

Chapter I focuses on the early stage of the movement, and here Sena concentrates on one specific antiquary, Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072), and his interest in collecting ink rubbings. The chapter presents a number of interesting discoveries, with the discussion of “authenticity” (*zhen* 真) being particularly insightful. Ouyang valued an ink rubbing primarily for its authenticity, in that it captured an earlier impression of an inscribed surface (such as a stone stele), and thus recorded the history of the object more than its current

state. Another facet of the kind of authenticity Ouyang sought had to do with a conceptualized “urtext,” for which multiple inscriptions could serve as “alternate originals” (62). So, while Ouyang had an interest in the materiality of ink rubbings for its unique mediating capacity, he simultaneously endorsed a “non-materialistic strategy” that focused on abstract textuality instead of the material conditions of texts (63).

Chapter II scrutinizes the development of Song antiquarian writings as a genre, primarily against the background of ritual reforms. Sena makes two important observations. First, an intense interest in observing the physical forms of artifacts was both cause and effect of the popularity of illustrated catalogues. Following the example of the *Illustrated Catalogue of Ancient Vessels from the Three Halls in the Huangyou Era* (*Huangyou Sanguan guqi tu* 皇祐三館古器圖, hereafter *Huangyou Catalogue*), a number of famous antiquarian writings included line drawings made from actual artifacts, further guiding the production of archaistic objects. Second, Sena reminds us that antiquarian writers working on the same genre might have diverse authorial intentions. Some antiquarian writings, such as the *Jiayou Stone Classics* (*Jiayou shijing* 嘉祐石經), were intended to establish an authoritative edition of the Confucian classics, while others, such as the *Huangyou Catalogue*, were intended for an opposite purpose, i.e., encouraging discussion on the interpretation of ancient inscriptions. Some writers, such as Liu Chang 劉敞 (1019–1068), viewed ancient objects as primary sources necessary for a rigorous study of history, while others, such as Li Gonglin 李公麟 (1049–1106), allowed themselves liberty to appropriate old forms to express their own thoughts.

Chapter III transitions from a narrower focus on rituals to a broader concern with material culture, and investigates the ways in which Song literati refashioned ancient imagery for contemporary use. For some, such as Emperor Huizong (r. 1101–1125), antiquity was to be emulated in its physical entirety so that he could reenact the exact practices of ancient rituals using the same ritual paraphernalia. For many literati, their borrowing of ancient forms was often semiotic and tremendously fluid. The literati’s self-claimed rights to archaistic appropriation had to do with their identification as “the preserver and interpreter of the cultural heritage” (121). Two further phenomena grew out of the interest in refashioning antiquity. Numerous literati actively appropriated ancient imagery to showcase their personal tastes and aesthetic expressions. Some reinvented archaistic objects were even mass produced, becoming merchandise for literati and commoners alike. The final point certainly dilutes the focus on elites, shedding light on the popular culture of Song society.

In the conclusion, Sena does a wonderful job in clarifying the connections between the three chapters so that the aforementioned thematic discussions

appear more coherent as three developmental stages of one movement. To achieve this goal, she has incorporated more general historical context, such as the partisan contestation between Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086) and Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) and their contrasting conceptions of antiquity. Perhaps the goal of charting an overall understanding of Song antiquarianism would have been better realized, however, if the author had integrated some of this context and analysis into the introduction or main chapters. Precisely for this reason, therefore, I recommend that readers pay careful attention to the conclusion (as well as the concluding section of each chapter), as these sections provide information beyond a mere summary.

Bronze and Stone is a delight to read, and it will certainly reach a wide, interdisciplinary audience with concerns ranging from art history and material culture studies to the history of the book and intellectual history. The book brings unique perspectives from art history and material culture studies to the study of Song literati culture, placing new tools in the hands of historians who may previously have been overly reliant on textual analysis. *Bronze and Stone* opens new, interdisciplinary avenues for exploring the history of the Song dynasty. It should be essential reading for anyone interested in this period.

About the Author

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