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Review of *Networks of Faith & Profit: Monks, Merchants, and Exchanges between China and Japan, 839–1403 CE* by Yiwen Li, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2023. xvi + 211

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Yiwen Li's new book, *Networks of Faith & Profit*, does an outstanding job of carefully examining nearly six centuries of unofficial, de facto maritime exchange networks involving highly productive if seemingly conflicting interactions between Buddhist monks--who sought to spread their teachings and build monastic institutions through non-clerical support--and secular merchants--who pursued economic profit by purchasing or selling valuable products that were otherwise unavailable partly in order to also gain prestige through promoting religious affiliations. Some of the monks became key players in the world of commerce, and merchants greatly benefited from their connections with the clerical world. In both cases, cultural creativity such as poetry or other literary constructions helped facilitate the intricate interactions between exchange partners.

The saga that Li tracks began in the aftermath of the Japanese monk Ennin's early ninth-century travels to the mainland, which marked the end of the official tributary system and its replacement by alternative networks that often worked more efficiently than the stilted procedures of the official trade process. The story continued throughout the late Tang, Song and Yuan periods of China and the Heian, Kamakura, and Muromachi periods of Japan, until the tributary system was eventually restored at the beginning of the fifteenth century and a new era of regulated collaborations was launched just before the advent of Western colonialism that intruded on East Asian affairs.

In between the start and finish of the de facto networks, not only did commerce and the circulation of commodities remain uninterrupted, but in many ways the inventive methods of exchange thrived through the formation of complex religio-commercial arrangements that replaced tributary

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relations. Free of many governmental restrictions that frequently caused long delays, the new networks were able to make practical decisions for promoting growth without suffering from outside interference. The main locations contributing to the networks were the cities of Hangzhou and Ningbo in Zhejiang province, key ports near where major Tiantai and Chan school temples were located, and Hakata, Kyoto, and Kamakura, three major Buddhist centers across Japan that saw the rise of the Zen sect in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The development of Hakata and Kamakura as hosts for numerous well-funded and well-connected Zen monasteries was directly linked to the Chinese trade networks and the support received from, but also sometimes given to, the continental counterparts. Some of the most coveted products were silver, sulfur, mercury, wood, medicines, and vases and bowls, in addition to sutra scrolls, iconic statues, mandalas, cloths for robes, and paper and ink for painting and calligraphy as desired by monks and their patrons.

As Li notes, connections concerning religious-based travelers and traders was a longstanding tradition among Arabs and Jews, yet the Buddhist case appeared to be different and has for the most part been understudied largely because Indian Vinaya monastic regulations tried to preserve the purity of sanctuaries by prohibiting “unclean” practices, such as touching gold or silver as well as the misconduct of undertaking transactions for the purpose of profit. However, recent scholarship has shown that Buddhist monks often did take part in commercial enterprises, ostensibly in support of expanding the reach of the dharma rather than personal benefits. Historical continental Silk Road linkages between monks and merchants highlighted that Buddhist temple networks could appeal to traders eager to establish a stable foothold for their businesses, yet also contribute to evangelical efforts since the awarding of spiritual merit became a prime incentive for lay followers to find rapport with monastic-related rituals and related activities.

In her extensive research, Yiwen Li makes use of many kinds of materials including correspondences, diaries, pilgrimage accounts, and biographies by and about monks in addition to monastic histories as well as letters and poems regarding commercial engagements or written accounts of various kinds of gifts exchanged between clerics and merchants, plus some quantitative records of the outcomes of the export-import industry. Several especially interesting artifacts discussed by Li include: a) a set of at least nine poems written by the Chinese merchant Cai Fu to the Japanese monk Enchin, Kūkai’s nephew who sojourned for three months on Mount Tiantai in the mid-800s, which conveyed expressions of friendship and appreciation;

b) letters from mercantile partners received by the Chinese Chan school monk Yikong, who was invited by the royal family in 847 to spend five years in Japan, which provide details of exchanges that are cited in a table on page 39; c) the pilgrim monk Chōnen's early eleventh-century letter to Emperor Taizong indicating holdover elements of the tributary system along with key features of the novel era of unofficial exchange networks; d) a letter written in 1245 by the Chan master Wuzhun Shifan thanking his former Japanese disciples who, after returning to Hakata in the southwest island of Kyushu, shipped large amounts of wood for the rebuilding of prestigious Jingshan temple near Hangzhou; e) the shipwreck in Sinan, southwest of the Korean peninsula, which shows that in 1323, forty years after the defeat by Japan of the second Mongol invasion, a commercial ship was carrying, before it sank, very large amounts of ceramics (an ideal substitute for precious metals at the stricter monasteries), sandalwood, and bronze coins and artifacts, among other commodities; and f) a verse composed in 1342 by the Japanese poet-monk Chūgan Engetsu, who had traveled to China two decades before to study the prosody of Chan verse, which depicts the ten-year suspension of Sino-Japanese trade due to shifting political circumstances that led directly to a sharp increase in the cost of continental goods available in Japan.

The chapters of *Networks of Faith & Profit* are structured chronologically. Following an informative introduction explicating the book's scope and methodology, the second chapter covering the ninth century shows that while merchants, who increasingly traveled on a regular basis, were usually referred to as disciples (*dizi*) or lay disciples (*sudizi*) of monks, this did not deter their aggressive pursuit of greater profit. The third chapter, which deals with the tenth and eleventh centuries, focuses on three Japanese monks, Chōnen, Jakushō, and Jōjin, with the latter two spending decades in China and enhancing considerably the communications and commercial exchanges between business representatives and monastic institutions of the two countries. The next chapter on the twelfth century, when Zen Buddhism was initiated in Japan by Eisai, a pilgrim who traveled to the continent twice, highlights the expansion of the Chinese quarter in Hakata, which is known today primarily through the details of archaeological finds rather than written accounts which have been lost.

Then, the fifth chapter treating the span from 1200 to 1270 describes the way Enni Ben'en, a Zen pilgrim who spent six years beginning in 1235 studying with Wuzhun at Jingshan temple, created a long-lasting network connecting Jōtenji temple which he founded in Hakata and Tōfukuji temple in Kyoto, which was awarded to him by Fujiwara family support, with southeastern

China as a forerunner to the monastery-based trade expeditions that took place over the next centuries. The following chapter examining 1270 to 1368, or the end of the Yuan and the beginning of the Ming period, explains how the Sinan ship was linked to Jōtenji, but another vessel headed back to Japan from China in 1325 with supplies for the rebuilding of Kenchōji temple in Kamakura not only survived the arduous journey but also carried in both directions important Zen leaders and trainees, including Chūgan and other prestigious poet-monks. Then, the final chapter documents the renewal of the tributary system after the Ming rulers abolished in 1374 the Maritime Trade Superintendency that oversaw the private trade networks linking China with foreign countries and Ashikaga Yoshimitsu realized the benefit in paying homage to Emperor Yongle so as to maintain his power in a conflicted Japan.

As a contribution to the Cambridge University Press series on Asian Connections, Yiwen Li mainly deals with the aspects of material culture that were fostered by the trade networks connecting monks with merchants. In that context, the remarkable flourishing of literary and artistic culture that transpired through the cross-cultural maritime interactions—with poet-monks seeking instruction in the rigors of Chinese verse from continental teachers, and Chan painters such as Muxi (or Muqi) in the thirteenth century having their works appreciated more in Japan than their native country because of indifference on the part of the Chinese academy—is relatively underreported in this book. As Li does note in citing Izumi Mari, “for Chinese objects bound for Japan, once they left the Chinese ports, they would be evaluated according to a new framework, a framework shaped by the needs and tastes of the Japanese” (p. 180). Yet, for aficionados of the creative arts, what Muxi and others produced should not be reduced to the status of a material object and they are deserving of attention in their own right. With this minor critique notwithstanding since it is beyond the scope of Li’s scholarship, *Networks of Faith & Profit* should be considered an exceptionally informative and insightful volume that will long serve as an invaluable resource for historians and religious studies scholars of East Asia and realms beyond where comparable developments took place.