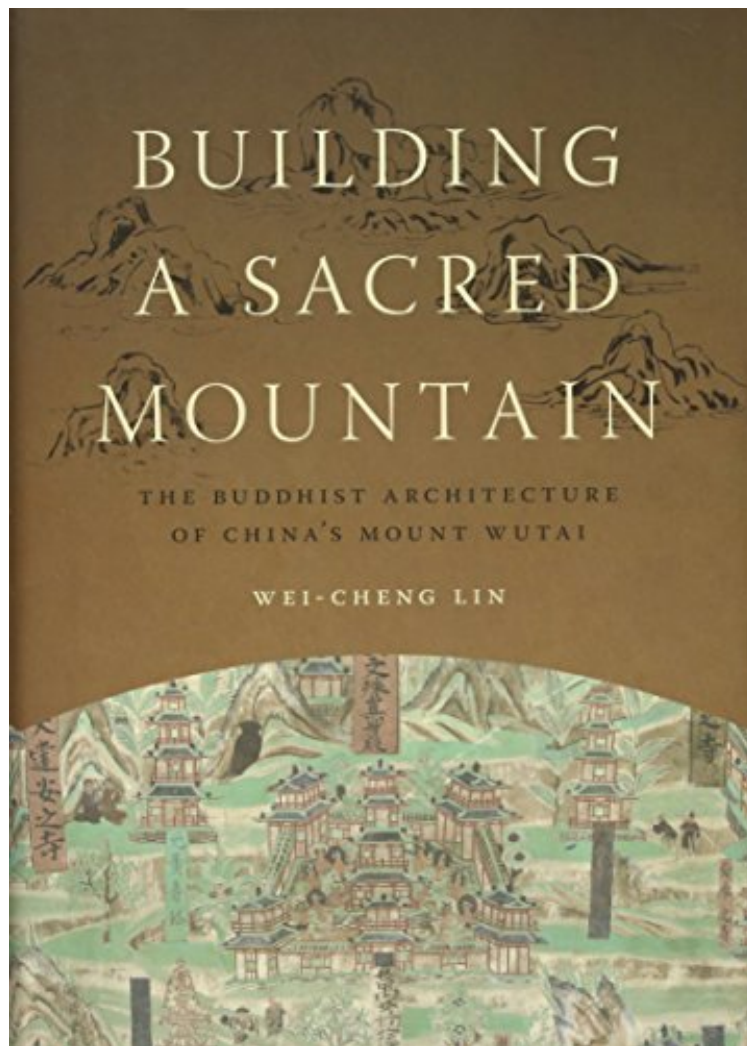


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Wei-Cheng Lin

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Wei-Cheng Lin : Building a Sacred Mountain: The Buddhist Architecture of China's Mount Wutai (Art History Publicatoin Initiative Books) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Building a Sacred Mountain: The Buddhist Architecture of China's Mount Wutai (Art History Publicatoin Initiative Books):

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. One of the best new books on Buddhism in China to appear in ...By PBjWOne of the best new books on Buddhism in China to appear in the past few years, Lin's Building a Sacred

Mountain is an in-depth historical and religious study of the locale in northeast China known as Wutaishan. It is not a work for newcomers to the field of Buddhism nor Buddhism in China; some background in the period and Buddhism is a prerequisite to getting the most out of this superb study as it assumes general knowledge of medieval Chinese history, some basic Buddhist tenets, etc. (The author apologizes for the length of time it took to bring the book to fruition in the Introduction, but I say the wait was worth it.) Beginning with the idea of mountain cults existing in China from the earliest of times, believed to exhibit mythical and primordial power, energy, being the abode of immortals, and believed to possess animated and living forces, the author covers how Wutaishan took on a Buddhist identity with the entry of Buddhism into China. Although credited with appearing in the mid-to late Han dynasty, Buddhism in China really got its kick-start during the N. Wei (386-534 CE). It was under their patronage that the earliest Buddhist buildings and sites began to emerge--all virtually virgin territory in China since (as Lin reminds us) "before Buddhism, neither relics nor images were worshiped religiously in China nor was the stupa a traditional building type" (p. 20). Buddhist devotees began to join Daoists and other religious figures who sought refuge, insights or visions in these special mountain regions, and by the second half of the 6C and early 7C Wutaishan had begun to be associated with the Buddhist bodhisattva of wisdom, Manjusri, fanned by various reported sightings of the 'true body' of Manjusri and/or the sighting and discovery of 'virtual or visionary' monasteries. The arrival of Amoghavajra, a Tantric Master from India and his Teacher Vajrabodhi to the royal court in Chang'an in 721 marked the beginning of Wutaishan's transformation from a Buddhist site into a Buddhist mandala with Manjusri's 'five wisdoms' being the stepping stone into the secrets of the site and Vajrayana. The popularity of a dharani or verse with magical powers of protection and transformation inspired by the five topknots of the juvenile Manjusri and their identification with the five peaks of Wutaishan is explained in two superb chapters that weave together the history of the site with the growth of Buddhism in China, the site as a pilgrimage center, many familiar figures of early Chinese Buddhism and such travelers as the Japanese monk Ennin, up to Wutaishan's eventual depiction in the caves of Dunhuang. Meticulously researched, and carefully (and well) written, this work will join other classics in the field. Thanks are also due to Lin for including a map exactly when you want to refer to one, as well as many very fine and detailed drawings to clarify the architecture of a building or a described mural. The index is almost perfect (it did take me four tries to find the name of the Emperor who during the N. Zhou briefly turned against Buddhism, which I knew I had read somewhere--there was no entry for 'Northern Zhou', 'persecutions' or 'emperors') but the excellent bilingual Bibliography and list of terms and original source material more than compensated. I read this book cover-to-cover twice in a row it was so richly documented and well, just plain interesting in how it fit together bodhisattvas, the Empress Wu Zetian, Dunhuang, the Emperor Xuanzong, Ennin and Amoghavajra not to mention Wutaishan; it was a work of discovery and revelation that anyone interested in medieval China and/or Buddhism in China will not want to miss. Don't let that be you.

By the tenth century CE, Mount Wutai had become a major pilgrimage site within the emerging culture of a distinctively Chinese Buddhism. Famous as the abode of the bodhisattva Majur (known for his habit of riding around the mountain on a lion), the site in northeastern China's Shanxi Province was transformed from a wild area, long believed by Daoists to be sacred, into an elaborate complex of Buddhist monasteries. In *Building a Sacred Mountain*, Wei-Cheng Lin traces the confluence of factors that produced this transformation and argues that monastic architecture, more than texts, icons, relics, or pilgrimages, was the key to Mount Wutai's emergence as a sacred site. Departing from traditional architectural scholarship, Lin's interdisciplinary approach goes beyond the analysis of forms and structures to show how the built environment can work in tandem with practices and discourses to provide a space for encountering the divine.

"A must read for any reader interested in Buddhist arts and architecture, or the history of East Asian religious traditions, *Building a Sacred Mountain* is a superb piece of scholarship and a model of appreciation for the integral relationships between religion and the arts." John Renard, *Religion and the Arts* "A well-researched, serious, significant book on fascinating subjects with profound impact on Chinese civilization." Nancy Steinhardt, University of Pennsylvania
About the Author
Wei-Cheng Lin is assistant professor of Chinese art history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.