Power of Compassion: Paths of Transmission of Avalokiteśvara across Asia

Humanities
College and Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
Art Department, East Asia Center, Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities
Dorothy Wong, Associate Professor, Art Department

Description of Project:

The Avalokiteśvara Digital Project will build and populate a detailed catalog of art objects and texts, accompanied by scholarly research and analysis, that will support conceptual understanding of the spread of the cult of Avalokiteśvara – arguably one of the most popular Buddhist mythic figures in all of Asia – as well as spatial and temporal patterns of this transmission through Asia. This focus on a specific devotional cult will shed light on both religious and artistic practices and on the particular manifestations of this cult in local social and cultural contexts. http://silkroad.iath.virginia.edu/

Project Director: Dorothy Wong
Project Co-directors: Daniel Pitti, Worthy Martin (IATH)
Graduate assistants: David Hsu (2008-09), Yoko Hara (2009-10)

Project Activities to Date:

Workshop on Digital Projects in Asian Art and Humanities, March 13, 2010
Held in conjunction with the “Cultural Crossings: China and Beyond in the Medieval Period” international conference: http://www.virginia.edu/artmuseum/culturalcrossings/

Workshop on Image Analysis, December 10, 2010

Workshop on Textual Analysis, February 18, 2011

Partner Institutions:

- Academia Sinica, Taipei
- Asia Society Museum, New York
- British Library, London
- Columbia University, New York
- Dharma Drum Buddhist College, Taipei
- El Colegio de México, Mexico City
- Freer and Sackler Galleries, Washington, D.C.
- Kyoto University, Kyoto
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
- Newark Museum, New Jersey
- University of Texas, Austin
- Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond
- Walters Art Museum, Baltimore


Sponsors: Buckner W. Clay Endowment for the Humanities, Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange (Taiwan), Dharma Drum Buddhist College (Taipei), East Asia Center, Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities, McIntire Department of Art, Page-Barbour Endowment, Ellen Bayard Weedon Foundation

Twelve-armed Avalokiteśvara, Indian
8th century, stone

Key features:

- Create a collection of digital images of two- and three-dimensional art objects depicting Avalokiteśvara.
- Provide access to selected canonical Buddhist texts that describe the abilities and iconographic features of the deity.
- Develop a catalog of the art objects and texts that will enable tracing the dissemination and transformation of the cult throughout Asia.
- Develop a public interface for accessing the art images and texts, and allows for sophisticated queries and displays.
- Collaborative research with individuals and institutions.

Impact:

- An innovative, dynamic approach to the study of the movement and subsequent evolution of ideas.
- Will influence the conceptual understanding of, and methods for studying, the transmission of other kinds of cultural artifacts and data, including movements of peoples in both temporal and spatial dimensions.
- A valuable resource and research tool for scholars and students of Buddhism and Buddhist art, religious studies, art history, literature, history, linguistics, cultural anthropology, and sociology.