

In the Shadow of the Golden Age Art and Identity in Asia from Gandhara to the Modern Age.

**International conference at the University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany. 13.-15.
October 2011**

Martha Schulz

The three-day international conference 'In the Shadow of the Golden Age' initiated by Prof. Dr. Julia A.B. Hegewald, head of the Emmy Noether and DFG funded project 'Jainism in Karnataka' and head of the Department of Asian and Islamic Art History of the University of Bonn, assembled distinguished experts from the field of Asian art history. The subtitle 'Art and Identity in Asia from Gandhara to the Modern Age' promised an informative regional and cultural journey to an audience of scholars, students and the general public, taking place on the grounds of the University of Bonn, Germany.

The main theme and idea of the conference was to look beyond the definition of a golden age, especially in art history, and to draw attention to aspects which have thus far been subordinated without justifiable reason. These marginal areas, such as the visual expressions of confrontation, were brought to the attention of the participants as concurrent to high points of art history. While the golden ages or 'high points' of art have been the main focus of art historians and therefore widely reviewed, this symposium aimed to highlight the struggle or isolation of independent communities in the search for a new identity, which is captured in visual expression. By doing so, the participants of the symposium were invited to rethink how isolation affects a community, how new identities evolve, going beyond art, even more so, reconsidering how we generally classify and judge, asking ourselves if it is justifiable.

Border-crossing exchanges and global connections between various subject areas within Asian art history were presented including Buddhist, Central Asian, Indian, Islamic, Southeast Asian and Tibetan art and architecture. The papers and following discussions investigated the political and social conditions of cultures and of religious groups confronted by 'the other'. The variety of papers captured topics, covering among others the controversial visual representations of early scholarship of Buddha images, the transmission of artist traditions from Gandhara to Central Asia and China proper, temple transformation in Angkor, artistic documentation of antagonism against Jainas, trans-cultural temples in Goa, art and identity of Jaina art in Karnataka. Moreover, different types of reception in Islamic art, Newar religious artifacts as well as contemporary Tibetan art were discussed.

Even at the present time, we can ask ourselves what happens when we are exposed to something new – do we adapt and absorb (re-use) or resist? In which way are these changes expressed in art and architecture? How are hybrid identities and eclecticism defined? These key questions led to open discussions on art and identity based on the panelists' topics.

The evening of the conference proper began with a warm welcome and leading thoughts with the keynote speech delivered by Prof. Dr. Partha Mitter (Sussex and Oxford) on the role of history and memory in modernity. He not only questioned the definition of the golden age, as a term used typically by Western historians to categorize 'high points' in art history or to define an important time in history, but he also questioned the definition of modernity, asking the participants to do so likewise. Furthermore, Mitter inquired as to how these categorizations are used today and in which way these similarities and differences between the past and present still exist. He followed up with the fundamental question of what scholars should aim for. As a result the conference turned into a platform of lively debate on disciplinary, intellectual and problematic concepts of categorizations. Concluding the evening, the participants were invited to rethink the prevailing standard approach to the discipline and to look forward to an exciting program with this in mind: to reconsider the past, to look beyond the borders of mainstream topics and for researchers to relinquish established categories.

The first panel of the conference was dedicated to Buddhist studies in India, Central Asia and beyond defined or marginal borders. Prof. Dr. Susan L. Huntington (Columbus) opened the session with a case of a mistaken scholarly trajectory. Whilst acknowledging the British and European scholars of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries who greatly contributed to Buddhist studies in India, S. Huntington questioned Alfred Foucher and his aniconic theory. The latter states, that the Buddha image is not represented in anthropomorphic form. However according to S. Huntington this statement is a misinterpretation by modern Western authors who judged European art to be superior and therefore categorized Indic art as incapable of conceptualizing the idea of a Buddha image. Prof. Dr. Ciro Lo Muzio's (Rome) legacy of Gandhara in Central Asian painting was summarized briefly by Prof. Dr. Julia A.B. Hegewald. Lo Muzio states in his paper, that the transmission of Buddhist iconography along the Eurasian steppes has long been

recognized, yet Central Asian Buddhist murals should not be seen as a compensation for the loss of Gandharan painting of the Kushan period. Concluding the first panel and also thematically following the Central Asian transmission of iconography, Prof. Dr. John C. Huntington (Columbus) analyzed further examples of Buddhist art that suggest contact and influence between the West and the East. As an example he discussed the Chinese pagoda possibly originating from the worship of Mount Meru temples. Subsequently, with Chinese Buddha images that resemble Gandharan examples, J. Huntington emphasized the similarities of one specific Chinese Buddha image with 'rays of light' emerging from the shoulders to coins from the early Kushan kings [30-192 C.E.].

The second panel of the conference featured the artistic expression of inter-religious sites as a result of confrontation. This panel was opened by Dr. William Southworth (Amsterdam) with a focus on iconoclasm and temple transformation in Angkor during the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. Southworth questioned the transformation of temple structures by summarizing two examples of religious conflict: firstly, Buddhist sites erased or re-cut to Hindu aesthetics, and secondly, Buddhist reclamation of former Hindu sites. The following paper of this session also focused on aversion of 'the other', as Dr. Tiziana Lorenzetti (Rome) portrayed how from the tenth century onward, artistic evidence of antagonism towards Jainas can be found, not only from Hindus, but also from Virashaivas. The portrayal of new mythical stories and iconographical codes was used by the Hindu tradition to strengthen its own identity and supremacy.

The third panel of the conference examined the inter-cultural contact between natives and foreigners from the Western world. This session was opened by Prof. Dr. Mallica Kumbera Landrus (Princeton), who examined trans-cultural temples in Goa that were shaped through conflict of identity and practice by shifting frames such as class, caste, cultural boundaries as well as political and cultural movements. In particular, she introduced new perspectives on Hindu temples that were influenced by Western architectural elements which illustrate hybrid identities. Dr. Sarah Shaw (Oxford) portrayed how southern Buddhist temple art became an accommodation of the new and the diverse. In this regard, she pointed to the example of how '*farangs*' (foreigners) and their boats are found in Thai and Cambodian temple Jataka art. The illustrations of Western sailors or travelers found in early Buddhist narratives have been historically seen as extensions of Buddha's karmic biography, claims Shaw. She placed these

illustrations into a larger context by classifying them as present day observations of artistic expression and as an interpretation of fashion, artifacts and people of alien cultures, as conceptualized in an early Buddhist discourse.

The professorial inaugural lecture by Prof. Dr. Julia A.B. Hegewald (Bonn) concluded the first day of the conference with the question of golden age or *kali-yuga*, the changing fortunes of Jaina art and identity in Karnataka. Jaina temple architecture of the Hoysala period is portrayed by art-historical studies as the grandeur of artistic traditions, especially the remains of Jaina sites dating from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries of the late Chalukya and Hoysala periods. Hegewald focused on the confrontation of Jainas with 'the other' in Karnataka, who were threatened by Virashaivas and Islam. In particular, she portrayed the painful confrontation found in the absorption of new artistic features and aniconic tendencies in Jaina temple architecture. These Jaina temples transformed from relatively plain to ornamentally complex architectural forms. She evaluated whether it is justifiable that this historical period is considered as the golden age for the Jainas, in consideration of the lack of awareness and appreciation of the later temples, which express both continuity and the ability to adapt to changing frames and social movements.

The second day of the conference commenced with the fourth panel concerning Western perspectives on foreignness. Dr. Jennifer Howes (London) discussed how Indian Company painting reflected the pursuit of British knowledge on South Asia and how it changed over time. The paper was followed by approaches to alterity in the early twentieth century world art as laid out by Dr. Eva-Maria Troelenberg (Berlin/Florence). She presented different types of reception in exhibitions and publications on non-European art, Islamic art and the establishment of canons as visions of art and life.

The fifth panel placed us geographically in South Asia with visual, textual and ritual traditions. Prof. Dr. Parul Dave-Mukherji (Dehli) shared examples of contemporary Indian artists and their perception of the golden age, portrayed either with irony or as a myth. On behalf of textual traditions, Prof. Dr. Nalibi Balbir (Paris) evaluated the role of the only two texts of the Sventambara Jaina Agamas as illustrated with decorative paintings. She presented the "Illustrated garland of Agamas" and stressed the importance and required attention to the illustrations. Prof. Dr. Christoph Emmrich

introduced the Nepalese process of confrontation with 'the other', shown in how Newars protect their religious artifacts nowadays and how they deal with their theft.

During the last panel of the conference Regina Höfer (Bonn) discussed contemporary Tibetan art and its position within the global art world, which has proven unique through its geographical and international influences from India and China, as well as from the Western perspective. The final paper presented by Daniel Redlinger (Bonn) brought attention to Indo-Islamic elements in contemporary architecture of the United Arab Emirates. He showed a system of pan-Islamic quotations, which serve as a construction for building an identity for a global Indian community in an Arab-Islamic national state.

The concluding discussion ended on a positive note, as Prof. Dr. Julia A.B. Hegewald expressed her thanks to all who had contributed. Moreover, the participants of the symposium were reminded of the regional diversity and the widespread timeline of the contributions, their overlooked aspects in previous research and the interconnectedness of them through time and space. She emphasized how important our perspective and understanding of our discipline is and that inevitably researchers will be conflicted into using terms and categories. Throughout the conference many discussions were based on the classification of artistic objects and their afterlife. As researchers, we should explore the term 'golden age' and not fully abolish it from our vocabulary. Considerably, Hegewald expressed that, "this conference has made us sensitive to the usage of the expression and similar phrases like 'masterpiece'" and has made us reconsider them with a new sense of understanding. Aside from the many reflecting thoughts and questions during the discussions that arose on the subject of art, the interpretation and meaning of art and its contextualization, this conference shed light on the coexistence of styles and layers of traditions. Even more so, it focused our attention on the hitherto marginal areas of art history that are visual expressions of confrontation and made us reconsider its legacy.

Program Overview

Keynote address

Prof. Dr. Partha Mitter (Sussex and Oxford)
The Role of History and Memory in Modernity

Prof. Dr. Susan L. Huntington (Columbus)
Buddhist Art Through a Modern Lens: A Case of a Mistaken Scholarly Trajectory

Prof. Dr. John C. Huntington (Columbus)
The 'Movable' Golden Age: 'Western' Asiatic Art Beyond its Homeland and Transitioning to Central Northeast Asia

Prof. Dr. Ciro Lo Mucio (Rome)
The Legacy of Gandhara in Central Asian Painting

Dr. Petra Rösch (Cologne)
Illusionary Narratives: The Deconstruction of the Tang Dynasty as the Golden Age" of Chan Buddhism in China.

Dr. William A. Southworth (Amsterdam)
Iconoclasm and Temple Transformation at Angkor from the 13th to 15th Centuries

Dr. Tiziana Lorenzetti (Rome)
Political and Social Dimension as Reflected in the Medieval Sculptures of South India: Confrontations, Antagonism and Identity

Prof. Dr. Mallica Kumbera Landrus (Princeton)
Trans-Cultural Temples: Identity and Practice in Goa

Dr. Sarah Shaw (Oxford)
Art and Narrative in Changing Conditions: Southern Buddhist Temple Art as an Accommodation of the New and Diverse

Professorial Inaugural Lecture:

Prof. Dr. Julia A. B. Hegewald (Bonn)
Golden Age or Kali-Yuga?: The Changing Fortunes of Jaina Art and Identity in Karnataka

Dr. Jennifer Howes (London)
Indian Company Painting: 1780 to 1820

Dr. Eva-Maria Troelenberg (Berlin/Florence)
The „Golden Age“ and the Secession: Approaches to Alterity in early 20th Century World Art

Prof. Dr. Parul Dave Muckerji (Dehli)

Who is Afraid of Utopia? Contemporary Indian Artists and their Retakes on “Golden” Age

Prof. Dr. Nalini Balbir (Paris)

Old Texts, New Images: Illustrating the Śvetāmbara Jain Āgamas Today

Prof. Dr. Christoph Emmrich (Toronto)

Loss, Damage, Repair and Prevention in the Historiography of Newar Religious Artefacts

Regina Höfer (Bonn)

'Buddha@hotmail' - Contemporary Tibetan Art Goes Global

Daniel Redlinger (Bonn)

Building for the Brothers? Indo-Islamic Architectural Citations in the Recent Architecture of South Arabia

Coach to Cologne and visit to Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum, Cologne