

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Department of History
澳門大學社會科學及人文學院歷史系
2010/2011 Spring Semester Seminar Series No. 1

History Lecture
歷史學講座

The Art of Avataṃsaka Buddhism at the Courts of Empress Wu and Emperor Shōmu/Empress Kōmyō

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17:00-18:00

17 Jan 2011 (MON)

American Corner (2F, UM Library)

English

Abstract :

The present paper examines the form and contents of art associated with Huayan Buddhism transmitted from Tang China under Empress Wu to the court of Nara Japan in the late seventh and eighth centuries. It is well-known that Empress Wu supported Huayan Buddhism, whose doctrine informed her political worldview and the art that she sponsored, such as the colossal statue of the Roshana Buddha at Fengxian Temple, Luoyang. Her court also attracted a group of foreign monks who were responsible for introducing the incipient form of esoteric Buddhism and esoteric deity cults. As a result Empress Wu also promoted the cults of several esoteric forms of Avalokiteśvara, examples of which have survived in sculptures and at the Longmen cave-temple. Because of the intense activities in Sino-Japanese exchanges at this time, it has been noted that it was largely the kind of Buddhist culture associated with Empress Wu's court that shaped the development of Nara Buddhism, culminating in the building of Tōdaiji by Emperor Shōmu. At Tōdaiji, we also find the iconography of Huayan Buddhism seamlessly melded with esoteric deity cults. This paper is an attempt to understand the similarities between the Huayan art associated with Empress Wu and that of Nara Japan as well as their divergences. The role of pilgrim-monks as agents of this religious and artistic exchange will also be examined.

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