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Conference Abstract

## **Embodied Dependencies and Freedoms: Artistic Communities and Patronage in Asia**

**14. and 15. October 2021**

(via Zoom or hybrid format)

This international conference brings together specialist from different disciplines, focusing on a number of regions of Asia, such as India, Nepal, Tibet, the Silk Route, China and Japan. All experts conduct research on extreme forms of dependencies, in which artists, craftspeople and their communities find themselves, as well as on the freedoms they find within their situations.

The life and practice of traditional Asian artist groups are governed by a number of different forms of extreme dependence. This can be the financial reliance on sponsors, such as private benefactors (kings, ministers, generals, influential traders, etc.) or religious institutions (temples, monastic institutions, sects, etc.). Asian artisans and artists are bound by religious texts, such as iconographic, iconometric or architectural treatises, dance manuals, the formalised canons of various religious schools as well as by religious, sectarian, social and gender conventions. On a more basic level, especially the production of architecture is governed by the local climate and the creation of art and edifices hinges on the availability of resources and building materials.

Whilst at a first glance, there are many conventions and extreme forms of dependency regulating the life and work of artistic communities, it is important to notice that they have, during all times and in all situations, found certain freedoms to express themselves. Despite rigid iconographical treatises and fashions, every sculpture, painting and edifice is individual and unique. This can also be seen in the continuation of local indigenous patterns in the art and edifices produced for new and foreign masters. Although socially often associated with groupings of lower community and societal status, artists frequently enjoyed liberties in dance, on stage and often even in life, which were or are not accessible to other members of the wider public.

Topics included in this conference are: visual expressions of the *bhakti* philosophy in India as part of which believers consider themselves ‘slaves of god,’ the enslavement and sovereignty of temple dancers and prostitutes (*devadasis*), allegorical representations of the suppression of divinities of rivaling religious groups in Nepal, the dependency of art and architecture on written canons and religious sects, depictions of ghosts who during their life time were

subjugated women, the adaptation of building traditions to extreme climatic conditions along the coastal belt of South India and in the deserts along the Silk Route as well as the reliance on silver from South America in the porcelain production of China, just to mention a few.