

# CREOPS - SALON ASIATIQUE

Conférence de Mme Jennifer Purtle,  
professeure à l'Université de Toronto



Unknown artisan(s), possibly under the direction of Benhong (fl. early-mid thirteenth century), Detail of "Boys heaping sand" (Tongzi ju sha), from the base of the East Pagoda, Kaiyuan Buddhist Temple, Quanzhou, ca. 1238. Carved stone, height: 27 cm. Kaiyuan Buddhist Temple, Quanzhou. © Ryan Whyte, 2019

## Durable Ephemera and Networks of Stone: The Iconography of Impermanence at Quanzhou's Zhenguo Pagoda

To build a pagoda is to mobilize durable materials into architectonic form, timber and stone, allowing it to stand and indeed rise stories above ground level, perhaps for several centuries. But pagodas can also be crafted using images and objects wrought in ephemeral materials: fragile printed texts and paintings on silk, indestructible objects fashioned from valuable metals ultimately recycled, and evanescent forms no longer produced. Once these ephemera disappear, they exist only as embodied in the fabric of the pagoda. The pagoda thus becomes a nexus of textual, pictorial, and formal transfer, a site at which imperishable media preserve others easily destroyed through artistic and intermedial processes, to create abiding texts and images able to outlive their models.

This talk examines how, in the Zhenguo pagoda 鎮國塔 (lit. "Stabilizing the State Pagoda") at the Kaiyuan temple 開元寺 in Quanzhou 泉州, Fujian 福建, one iconography of impermanence was established. It explores how what the Canadian media theorist Harold Innis (1894–1952) termed "time-binding media," media able to withstand the ravages of time, notably stone, preserved traces of "space-binding media," fugitive media easily transmitted across space, namely paper and silk. This convergence of time- and space-binding media temporally linked the Southern Song (Quanzhou: 1127–1276) iteration of the Zhenguo pagoda to the origins of cakravartin kingship under Asoka (ca. 304–232 BCE) and the idea of such rule in the WuYue kingdom that ruled Northern Fujian (945–978); spatially, it placed the Zhenguo pagoda in a network of monuments that extended from India, to Hangzhou, Fuzhou, and the Indian Ocean maritime trade networks of Song-dynasty Quanzhou. Ultimately, by using the durable images of ephemera found in the Zhenguo pagoda as indices of long-lost objects, this essay recovers the identity of an unusual local type of monument, itself a permanent representation of impermanence.

Jeudi 13 juin 2024 | 15h00 - 17h00  
Salle du CREOPS (bureau 239), INHA, 2e étage

Organisation  
Antoine Gournay, Christophe Decoudun, Zheng Yongsong

Contact : [antoine.gournay@sorbonne-universite.fr](mailto:antoine.gournay@sorbonne-universite.fr)