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Iconographic Archives in the Past and Present (Beijing, 12–13 Oct 19)

University of Chicago Center in Beijing (20th Floor, Culture Plaza, 59A Zhong Guan Cun Street, Haidian District, Beijing), Oct 12–13, 2019

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Changing Frontiers: Iconographic Archives in the Past and Present

Time: 13:00 - 18:30, October 12 - 13, 2019
Venue: University of Chicago Center in Beijing (20th Floor, Culture Plaza, 59A Zhong Guan Cun Street, Haidian District, Beijing)
Language: English with Mandarin Simultaneous Interpretation
Organizers: V&A Museum, OCAT Institute
Sponsors: Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) of the U. K. Government, OCT Group Co., Ltd.

Introduction to Talks and Discussions

In Europe and North America, Iconography has been experiencing a renewal after a period of self-criticism and self-questioning especially during the 1960s and 1970s. Whereas in the past iconographical researches dealt primarily with religious subject matters or the representational style from classical and medieval periods in the western art, today the whole field has expanded to include topics and areas hitherto largely neglected, ranging from reception, gender, ethnicity and politics, to non-Western art, abstract and non-representational styles, to name but a few. With the advent of the internet, this iconographic revitalisation in the academic community is compounded with the surging interest in iconography among the general public. Recent user surveys have shown that better access to the content (as opposed to the form) of images is one of the most popular demand on the museum and gallery's collection databases.
All those changes have profound implications for the practice of iconographic documentation, particularly in those public institutions such as research institutes, universities, museums and galleries. In parallel with this iconographic revival in the West, there has been a rapid growth of interest in the subject as a branch of art historical researches and as a methodology in humanities in the Chinese academic world since it was first introduced into the country in the mid-1980s. Apart from many of the seminal texts dealing with the theory of iconography having been translated into Chinese, Chinese art historians and historians have begun to apply it to the investigations of visual materials (paintings, prints, photographs and other types of images) produced in historical or contemporary China. Within this iconographic turn arguably, in more recent years, some forward-looking Chinese scholars have also come to realise that the existing practice in documentation used in museums, libraries and image archives, typically arranging visual materials according to a simple chronological and geographical order, are inadequate for

recording and accessing detailed iconographic information, and therefore it is of paramount importance to build specialist image archives in order to make great strides in iconographic studies in the country.

This conference will be the first public event in China to look deeply into the critical issues central to historical and contemporary practices in Europe and North America in building image archives for iconographic studies with their frontiers having been constantly changing. How has the construction of iconographic archives responded to and benefited iconographic studies? What are the underlying connections between the new technology of image reproduction (in analogue or digital form) and the development of iconographic archives and art historical studies in general? How could we modify theories such as those of Panofsky and others and to develop new terminologies rooted in the specificity of the cultures in question, when we want to build iconographic archives of non-Western and non-literate cultures? To what extent are the existing iconographic concepts and classification schemes culture-bound, translatable, or universal? How is it possible to describe, classify and retrieve the content of images? What is the difference between the 'title' and the 'subject' of a picture?

The conference will explore these questions and possible answers by focusing on four specific examples of iconographic archives developed in Europe and North America during the last hundred years. The four examples will offer not only a series of different approaches and perspectives to the problems of iconographic archives building, but also an opportunity to observe historical connections and dynamic interactions between them. The speakers will include Paul Taylor, the Curator of the Photographic Collection at the Warburg Institute; Pamela Patton, the Director of the Index of Medieval Art at Princeton University; Hans Brandhorst, the Editor of the Iconographic Classification System (Iconclass) and Arkyves in Netherlands; and Zhang Hongxing, the Chief-Editor of the Chinese Iconographic Thesaurus (CIT) and Senior Curator of Chinese Collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Following each presentation there will be a discussion and Q&A session moderated by a Chinese scholar.

It is hoped that the conference will not only act as a platform for exchanging ideas and experiences on the subject between Western academics and Chinese students, scholars and professionals from cultural heritage organisations, but also open up opportunities for future collaborations in the use and further development of iconographic archives in China, Europe and North America. The conference is co-organised by the V&A's CIT project team and the OCAT Institute in Beijing and funded by the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) of the U.K. government.

SCHEDULE

October 12th

13:00 - 13:30 Registration

13:30 - 13:45 Welcome
Wu Hung (Executive Director, OCAT Institute)

13:45 - 14:00 Introduction to the Conference
Zhang Hongxing (Chief-editor, Chinese Iconography Thesaurus, V&A)

14:00 - 15:00 Lecture 1

From the Rise of Civilisation to the Rise of Capitalism: The Warburg Institute's Photographic Collection
Paul Taylor (Curator of the Photographic Collection, Warburg Institute)

15:00 - 16:00 Discussion
Fan Baiding (Lecturer, China Academy of Art)

16:00 - 16:30 Tea Break

16:30 - 17:30 Lecture 2
Iconography and Evolution at the Index of Medieval Art
Pamela Patton (Director, Index of Medieval Art, Princeton University)

17:30 - 18:30 Discussion
Zhang Qian (Lecturer, Shanghai Normal University)

October 13th

13:30 - 14:30 Lecture 3
A Word is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Why the Use of Iconclass Will Make Artificial Intelligence Smarter
Hans Brandhorst (Editor, Iconclass and Arkyves)

14:30 - 15:30 Discussion
Gao Jin (Data Standard Editor, CIT Project, V&A)

15:30 - 16:00 Tea Break

16:00 - 17:00 Lecture 4
Metadata Turn: The Origin and Construction Principles of the Chinese Iconography Thesaurus
Zhang Hongxing (Chief-editor, Chinese Iconography Thesaurus, V&A)

17:00 - 18:00 Discussion
Guo Weiqi (Academic Director, OCAT Institute)

18:00 - 18:30 Panel Discussion

Abstracts

Lecture 1 October 12th 14:00 - 15:00
Speaker: Paul Taylor (Curator of the Photographic Collection, Warburg Institute)
Topic: From the Rise of Civilisation to the Rise of Capitalism: The Warburg Institute's Photographic Collection
Discussant: Fan Baiding (Lecturer, China Academy of Art)
In the autumn of 1888 the Breslau art historian August Schmarsow travelled to Florence with a group of students, with the stated intention of founding a German art historical institute. This institute, now the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, was officially established nine years later.

One of Schmarsow's students was Aby Warburg, and while in Florence he seems to have had the idea of founding an institute of his own. Certainly he began to buy photographs of works of art from photographic companies such as Alinari, Anderson, Brogi and Hanfstaengl. The great majority of the photographs he bought throughout his career were of Italian Renaissance works, but when in 1913 he employed Fritz Saxl to act as his research assistant and the scope of the collection increased to encompass medieval manuscripts and art works from Germany and the Low Countries.

By Warburg's death in 1929, the Photographic Collection contained around 10,000 photographs, but it did not at this time have a systematic classification system. That would only come after 1933, when the Warburg library moved to London. Saxl employed Rudolf Wittkower as the first Curator of the Photographic Collection, and Wittkower sat down to design a system of iconographic categories that could incorporate all the Institute's photographs. The categories designed by Wittkower proved remarkably successful, and although the fine detail of the subfolders changed regularly and continues to change, the overall armature was designed well enough to allow the Collection to expand from 10,000 photographs in 1933 to 400,000 photographs today.

No new general iconographic categories were added between the 1930s and the 1990s, when I appended new sections on Pre-Classical Iconography, Asian Iconography and Non-Eurasian Iconography. While Wittkower's design was a major influence on Henri van de Waal's Iconclass system of iconographic categories and it can be adapted to Asian iconography, I have found that it is hard to apply it to the art of preliterate peoples. Quite why that might be will be the subject of my talk.

Lecture 2 October 12th 16:30 - 17:30

Speaker: Pamela Patton (Director, Index of Medieval Art, Princeton University)
Topic: Iconography and Evolution at the Index of Medieval Art
Discussant: Zhang Qian (Lecturer, Shanghai Normal University)
When Professor Charles Rufus Morey founded the Index of Christian Art in 1917 as a modest collection of image and data cards in his office at Princeton University, he doubtless never envisioned a system of the scale and complexity that characterizes today's newly renamed Index of Medieval Art. The evolution of the database from a chronologically and geographically limited print resource to a broadly conceived online platform that designed for ongoing response to developments in scholarship on medieval art has raised daunting but exciting challenges. This paper traces the hundred-year history of the Index, one of the oldest iconographic classification systems in Euro-American tradition, emphasizing the problems and solutions that have emerged as it evolves in parallel to changing scholarly ideas about the nature of medieval art and of iconography itself.

Lecture 3 October 13th 13:30 - 14:30

Speaker: Hans Brandhorst (Editor, Iconclass and Arkyves)
Topic: A Word is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Why the Use of Iconclass Will Make Artificial Intelligence Smarter
Discussant: Gao Jin (Data Standard Editor, CIT Project,V&A)
This paper takes as its fundamental point of departure that images are important and often

underestimated sources of historical information, and that describing their subject matter in a more systematic way will turn image corpora into more useful and valuable tools for historical knowledge discovery. First we shall discuss the examples of the type of iconographic information we consider interesting to historians of art, culture and mentality, showing the scope of systematic iconography. Next we shall show what it means to use Iconclass, the most widely used iconographical classification system in the world originally conceived by Henri van de Waal during World War II and further developed by him and his team after the War, for the description of image content. We shall demonstrate how using Iconclass transforms the raw data of our observation into information; it does so in essence by organizing all of its concepts in hierarchies, thus clarifying their semantics, creating powerful options to broaden or narrow searches and making it easier to translate the system into other languages besides the original English.

The paper shall go on to argue that by merely applying a classification system for iconographic information, museums and libraries do not make such information automatically available to the end users. Especially if the cataloguing system has a rich set of terminologies like Iconclass, the institutions still need to develop a software so that the iconographic information are also at the disposal of their end users. For Iconclass, a software called Harvester of Iconclass Metadata (HIM) has been developed to achieve this goal. The HIM software, which turns the Iconclass system into a self-contained add-on for any online catalogue, is freely available to anyone prepared to share the iconographic part of their catalogued information on Arkyves, a database currently containing 900,000 images of objects in the collections of a number of European museums and libraries. As most of these images are tagged with multiple Iconclass concepts, an additional software has also been developed to build a powerful web of cross-references, continuously suggesting new paths of research and iconographic discovery.

Lecture 4 October 13th 16:00 - 17:00

Speaker: Zhang Hongxing (Chief-editor, Chinese Iconography Thesaurus, V&A)
Topic: Metadata Turn: The Origin and Construction Principles of the Chinese Iconography Thesaurus
Discussant: Guo Weiqi (Academic Director, OCAT Institute)
Although the Chinese Iconography Thesaurus (CIT) project officially started in 2016, its earliest inspiration dates back to 1993, when I just arrived in Britain from China as a junior academic to pursue my study in Chinese painting in London. Within the first months of my arrival, I had a fortune to pay a visit to Sir E.H. Gombrich, which was arranged by Prof. Fan Jingzhong, one of my esteemed friends/teachers and an authority on Gombrich's works in China, who had earlier sent a personal letter to Gombrich introducing me. That visit and subsequent visits to the Warburg Institute's Photographic Collection were the beginning of my personal encounter with the Euro-American tradition of iconographic collections and classification systems. In October that year, I bought a copy of the Photographic Collection's Summary Guide with an aspiration to build an iconographic collection for Chinese art. This aspiration only became concrete enough to realise some twenty-three years later, thanks to special research project grant from the UK government's Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sports (2016-2019), the enthusiastic support of the colleagues at the V&A and Brill, the long-term collaboration and discussions with Hans Brandhorst and Etienne Posthumus and other specialists, and above all the sheer dedication of Jin Gao and Yi-Hsin Lin.
This paper will share the experiences that CIT project team have had in the journey of construct-

ing the CIT, one of the first iconographic classification schemes for Chinese art in the Euro-American academic world. The paper will place special emphasis on the series of thinking and testing behind the major decisions that have shaped the project, including employment of the imperial painting and calligraphy catalogue Shiqu baoji and Midian zhulin as the primary sources for creating CIT concepts and the adaptation of Iconclass principles for thesaurus construction. We hope that the CIT experiences presented here will not only be a valuable addition to the discourse concerning the development of iconographic collections in western cultural institutions, but also open up opportunities to forge collaborations with scholars and institutions in China.

About speakers

Dr. Paul Taylor has worked at Warburg Institute as the Curator of the Photographic Collection and one of the editors of the Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes since 1991. His research interests cover a wide scope, ranging from the seventeenth-century Dutch art and early modern art theory to technical art history, iconography and world art. In the 1990s, he initiated sections on Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Asian and Non-Eurasian iconography in the Photographic Collection. He has organised and published colloquia on Mesopotamian cylinder seals and on iconography without texts. He is currently working on a global history of iconography, which aims to write an account of the emergence and development of iconographic types such as fetishes, idols, narratives, portraits and scientific images.

Pamela Pattonis the Director of the Index of Medieval Art. Her scholarship centers on the visual culture of medieval Spain and its environs, particularly the role of the image in articulating cultural identity and social dynamics among the multiethnic communities of the Iberian Peninsula. Central to her work is the exploration of medieval iconographic traditions as uniquely expressive of community ideologies, practices, and folkways critical to modern understanding of the medieval world. She has published two monographs: Pictorial Narrative in the Romanesque Cloister (Peter Lang, 2004) and Art of Estrangement: Redefining Jews in Reconquest Spain (Penn State University Press, 2012), the latter the winner of the 2014 Eleanor Tufts Book Award. Before joining Princeton in 2015, Patton was professor and chair of art history at Southern Methodist University. She is a coeditor of Studies in Iconography and an editorial board member of Oxford Bibliographies in Art History. Her scholarship has been supported by fellowships from the Kress Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Spanish Ministry of Culture.

Hans Brandhorst is an independent art historian, the Editor of the Iconclass system and Arkyves, a member of Editorial Advisory Board of the Journal Visual Resources. Together with Etienne Posthumus, he has created the online Iconclass browser and the Arkyves website. Currently he is involved in the digitization of Kirschbaum's Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie for Brill Publishers, and the iconographic cataloguing of British Book Illustrations at the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC. He has published widely on illuminated manuscripts, emblems and devices, iconography and classification, and digital humanities. His practical research primarily focuses on the simple question "What am I looking at?" in an iconographical sense. His theoretical work deals with the issues of how humanities scholars, in particular iconographers, can collaborate and enrich each other's research results rather than repeat and duplicate efforts.

Zhang Hongxing is the Senior Curator of Chinese Collections, based in Asia Department at the V&A. Since 2016, he is the Chief Editor of the CIT project. He initiates and develops the CIT project's concept, intellectual framework and methodology. He designs the CIT's objectives, overall

schedule, and the model of collaboration with partner institutions. He also leads on the project's implementation since its inception, from applying for research grant, through creating and managing the research team and the project budget, to the actual construction of the CIT and annotation of images. Over the past fifteen years he has curated several headline exhibitions of Chinese art and design, including the critically-acclaimed Masterpieces of Chinese Painting 700-1900(2013), China Design Now (with Lauren Parker) at the V&A (2008). He served on the editorial board of Art History, the official journal of the Association of Art Historians, UK (2004-2007)

About discussants

Fan Baiding is an assistant professor and chair of Art History Department at China Academy of Art. Fan is also a guest scholar at the Getty Research Institute and a visiting fellow at the Warburg Institute. He has published many papers on art historiography and art theories. Fan's current research interests include issues concerning the history of iconographic studies.
Zhang Qian received her PhD in Art History in Shanghai University. Currently she is a Lecturer in Film and Television Art College of Shanghai Normal University. Her research focuses on the social history of art, especially in relation to Gustave Courbet. More recently her research interest extends to early Renaissance Italian painters and patronage. She has translated T. J. Clark's Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution which will be published soon.
Gao Jin is the data standards editor and project coordinator of the CIT project, Asian Department, V&A. She is finishing her PhD in Digital Humanities at the University College London Centre for Digital Humanities (UCLDH). Her research interests lie primarily in Digital Humanities and Network Visualisation. Gao has published works with ADHO conferences and journals, and has collaboratively translated the book Defining Digital Humanities: A Reader (Nanjing University Press, forthcoming). She is also a reviewer for several journals, such as Library Tribune, Digital Scholarship in the Humanities, Ars Orientalis.
Guo Weiqi (Ph.D in art history) has been teaching in the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts since 2005. He is now an associate professor in the Art and Humanities School at the Academy and the chair of the Department of Art History. Guo has served as the academic director at OCAT Institute since 2006. His main research interest is the historiography of Chinese art history. Major publications of Guo's include Norm and Form: A Conjecture on Wen Zhengming and the Style of Wu School in the Sixteenth Century (China Academy of Art Press, 2012). His major translations include that of The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things (2019). Guo has also published more than 30 papers in major academic journals. During his years at OCAT Institute, he has served as the editor of the World 3 series, publications on annual seminar series, and annual exhibition catalogues. His current research includes the images of beasts in the 20th century China and Coromandel lacquers in the 18th century.

About the Chinese Iconography Thesaurus at the V&A

Chinese Iconography Thesaurus (CIT) project was launched by the Asian Department at V&A Museum in 2016. The CIT brings together sinology, art history, and information studies to create the first thesaurus of Chinese iconography. CIT aims to create an indexing standard that will facilitate access and inter-operability of Chinese digital images across collections. It will provide professionals in museums, libraries, and image archives with a controlled vocabulary that will improve the quality of cataloguing practices for Chinese collections. An online database of Chi-

nese art images indexed with the CIT terminology will deliver a dynamic and open-ended research tool that will enable a wide spectrum of users to explore the contents of, and connections between, individual works of art. The CIT terminology will be released in autumn 2019 as an open-access and downloadable document, along with the image database that will contain objects from the V&A as well as The Metropolitan Museum in New York and The Palace Museum in Taipei and will feature browsing and search functions. The outcomes will be made available through the V&A website and a dedicated website hosted by Brill Academic Publishers.

About OCAT Institute

The OCAT Institute is a non-profit research center dedicated to the history of art and its related discourses. It is also a member of the OCAT Museums. The Institute has three main areas of activity: publication, archives, and exhibition. The scope of its research encompasses art from antiquity, modern and contemporary Chinese art, more specifically, it includes the investigation of artists, artworks, schools of art production, exhibitions, art discourses, as well as art institutions, publications and other aspects of art's overall ecology. It will establish a research archives and facilitate dialogue and exchange between China and abroad. In addition, it serves as an exhibition platform in Beijing.
The OCAT Institute aims to establish a paradigm of values, a system of academic investigation, and modes of applying historical research methodologies to modern and contemporary Chinese art. Through an interdisciplinary approach that bridges contemporary art research, critical theory, and the history of ideas and culture, it promotes an integrated methodology that seeks to cultivate an open spirit of academic research. The OCAT Institute is open to the public in 2015.

Reference:

CONF: Iconographic Archives in the Past and Present (Beijing, 12-13 Oct 19). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 28, 2019 (accessed Jun 7, 2025), <https://arthist.net/archive/21672>.