Introduction

Since the rediscovery in the 1930s of the Long Scroll, a hand scroll attributed to the artist Zhang Shengwen (ca. 1172–1180), the Buddhist art of Yunnan, especially that associated with the Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms, began to captivate the attention of scholars both in the West and in East Asia. While the foundation of the study of the Buddhist art of Yunnan was laid prior to the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, substantial developments have only taken place during the last three decades. Consequently, our knowledge of the Buddhist art of Nanzhao and Dali has increased significantly. This is the result of both ample and better documentation of the material itself, much of which was previously beyond scholarly reach.

Buddhist Painting and the Long Scroll

The most important source on Esoteric Buddhist art in Nanzhao and Dali is the so-called Long Scroll mentioned above. Together with the bronzes of the pagoda of Chongsheng Temple and the cave sculptures at Mt. Shizhong, the scroll provides us with extensive information on Buddhist practice and beliefs, albeit in a sort of retrospective format. Moreover, it can be taken as a manual of Buddhist iconography from the Dali period. A brief overview of the Long Scroll reveals that most of the divinities it depicts are related to Esoteric Buddhism; this includes Vairocana Buddha and the four other dhyanis, as well as Ekādaśamukha, the thousand-armed

1 See Chapin 1970a, 1970b, 1970c, 1971. Zhang Shengwen is discussed by Soper (in Chapin 1971, 134–136). The entire scroll has been reproduced in full color in Li Kunsheng 1999, 194–239. Soper and others have discussed the present condition of the Long Scroll, and it is apparent that the repairs and remounting it has undergone in the course of its several centuries of existence has caused alterations to the original sequence. Moreover, it would seem that several of the original pictorial frames are missing as well, which may explain the arbitrary, and sometimes confusing, iconographical arrangements in evidence.
Avalokiteśvara, Vajrasattva, Cintāmanicakra-Avalokiteśvara, and so on. The cults of Mahākāla and Vaiśravana are also prominently represented, the former of which appears in at least two different forms in the Long Scroll (Chapin 1971, nos. 119 and 124).

In addition to a wide range of Esoteric Buddhist images reflecting a standard iconography found elsewhere in the Chinese cultural sphere, the Long Scroll also contains images of many uncommon bodhisattvas, protectors, and other divinities that cannot be found elsewhere. Included among these significant, local forms are Brahma-Mahākāla, Ātavaka or Da Yuanshuai 大元帥, Mahāyakṣa, and Maheśvara (Śiva), as well as several forms of Avalokiteśvara and, of course, the celebrated Acuoye of both seated and standing types.3

Bronze Figures

Among the Yunnanese Buddhist bronzes, it is a special iconographical form of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, the so-called Acuoye Guanyin 阿嵯耶觀音, that is the most popular. Acuoye Guanyin is a transcription of the Sanskrit “Ajaya Avalokiteśvara,” which means “All-Conquering Avalokiteśvara.”4 This name obviously refers to the immense power ascribed to this bodhisattva by the faithful.5 In Zhang Shengwen’s Long Roll of Buddhist Images, the Acuoye Guanyin is referred to as Zhen-shen Guanshiyin 真身觀世音, i.e., the “True Image of Avalokiteśvara.” This image is usually shown in standing pose (although sitting versions with one leg bending are also known), and it generally can be said to reflect Buddhist art from Southeast Asia rather than China. This is most clearly evident in the elongated slender body in combination with a somewhat stiff pose (figure 1).6

---

2 For a detailed discussion of this divinity, see Duquenne 1994.
3 Cf. Li 1999, 232 [central frame] and 234 [right frame] for Brahmā-Mahākāla; 196 [right frame] for Ātavaka; 235 [central frame] for Mahāyakṣa; 237 [left frame] for Maheśvara; and 222 [central frame] and 227 [left frame] for Acuoye. Iconographically speaking, the Acuoye Avalokiteśvara is really not an Esoteric Buddhist deity, but it should nevertheless be considered as such on account of the contexts in which it occurs, including its function in Esoteric Buddhist rituals.
4 See also Sørensen “Esoteric Buddhism in the Nanzhao and Dali Kingdoms (ca. 800–1253),” in this volume.
5 The origin of this image is described in the Nanzhao tuzhuan 南詔圖傳 (Picture Scroll of the History of Nanzhao). For a detailed study of the history and cultural context of the Acuoye Guanyin, cf. Chapin 1944.
6 Münsterberg, a noted authority on Chinese Buddhist art, describes it as having “Gupta influence” 1967, 68, pls. 58–59. However, the alleged “Gupta influence” is