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The iconography of Avalokiteśvara in Java

Sundström, I.S.

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Author: Sundström, I.S.

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Chapter 4

The sorrowful Avalokiteśvara and Javanese artistic language

He, so compassionate for the world, shall once become a
Buddha, destroying all dangers and sorrows; I humbly bow to
Avalokiteśvara.

Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra, Chapter 24 (ed. Kern 1884: 417)

4.1 Introduction

The distinctive feature of the group of images discussed in this chapter is of Avalokiteśvara leaning his head towards one of his hands. Apart from this key feature they show the Bodhisattva seated in either *lalitāsana* (Cat. nos 53, 85-86) as discussed in the previous chapter, or in *mahārājālīlāsana* (Cat. nos 85-115) with various attributes in a variable number of hands. The seated pose, *mahārājālīlāsana*, shows both feet close to each other resting on the seat; one foot is pulled in towards the body to lift one knee up. This knee appears to support the arm the head leans on.

This iconographic form, with the head leaning on one hand, was popular for bronze statuettes in Java. However, no bronzes illustrating this iconography have, as of yet, been found in the rest of Southeast Asia. Thus far, I have identified 32 such statuettes, which are considered to originate from Java. These images have either two, four or six arms. Although, as we shall see, the majority have been given four arms (Cat. nos 89-111). A stone relief on Borobudur may also illustrate Avalokiteśvara in this pose. It figures in one of the *Bhadracarī* reliefs on Borobudur's fourth main wall (Cat. no. 124). Furthermore, three clay tablets illustrating this iconographic form were found at the site of Borobudur (Rohyani 1993: Table 1, Indradjaya 2011: Foto 2).

In this chapter, I examine the iconographic and stylistic features of this group of bronze statuettes and their development (Section 4.2). I try to trace how this iconographic form was transmitted to Java by comparing the Javanese images with images from South Asia (Section 4.3) and East Asia (Section 4.4). I also discuss the naming of this iconographic form, as the form has been given several names, including 'pensive', 'sorrowful', 'Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara', 'Mahākāruna' and 'Mahākāruṇika'. I will refer to these Javanese statuettes as 'sorrowful' Avalokiteśvaras and explain this choice in Section 4.5.

4.2 The Javanese images: iconography and style

On the basis of the number of arms and whether the head leans to the left or right, three iconographic groups can be established. The second and largest of these groups, will be further subdivided into three distinct stylistic sets that indicate a development over time.

A few of these statuettes include back pieces with a variety of silhouettes, but others now lack such supports.⁷⁴

Iconographic Group 1: Bronze statuettes with two arms (Cat. nos 85-88)

In Group 1, four statuettes show Avalokiteśvara with two arms, leaning his head to the left, rather than the more commonly opposite side. Correspondingly, his left hand supports the head. Besides these characteristics, on the basis of which I grouped them together, the statuettes show some differences (Table 16). Two of them have the right hand displaying the *varada-mudrā* (Cat. nos 85-86); in a third image Avalokiteśvara displays the *varada-mudrā* and holds a wish-fulfilling jewel or *cintāmaṇi* in the same hand (Cat. no. 87). In the fourth statuette Avalokiteśvara holds his right hand in front of his body, which usually indicates that the Bodhisattva is holding a *cintāmaṇi* (Cat. no. 88).

Regarding the first statuette in this group (Cat. no 85), the wear of the bronze makes it difficult to identify any Buddha figure in the *jaṭāmukuṭa*. This would have allowed us to identify the figure as Avalokiteśvara with certainty. Fortunately, a niche can be made out, indicating that a Buddha figure was once present. The head leans to the left and connects with the left hand. The Bodhisattva sits on a round lotus seat, with his right foot resting on a lotus that extends out from his seat. He wears a pendant necklace, armbands and bracelets. The statuette's solid, round back piece culminates in a floral pattern at the top, where a parasol would be attached. Here, and in the next image in the group (Cat. no. 86), Avalokiteśvara sits in *lalitāsana*. The final two statuettes in this group sit in *mahārājajalīlāsana*, the more common pose for Javanese Avalokiteśvaras holding their head in sorrow.

Three statuettes in this group do not have back pieces, while the statuette in the Ronggowarsito Museum in Semarang (Cat. no. 87) has a plain rim halo behind his head. Each of these three figures wears a necklace, bracelets and armbands. The Buddha Amitābha is at the front of the Bodhisattva's *jaṭāmukuṭas* (Cat. nos 86-88).

The relief from Borobudur, mentioned above, can also be associated with this group (Cat. no. 124).⁷⁵ The stone relief shows the two-armed Bodhisattva seated in *mahārājajalīlāsana*, supporting his head with his right hand, rather than his left. While the figure holds the stem of a fully blossoming lotus in his left hand, we see no Buddha Amitābha figure in the *jaṭāmukuṭa* in the published photographs (Krom and van Erp 1920-31 II: Series IV, Pl. I, No. 2). However, a closer examination of the relief in question reveals a triangular shape at the front of the *jaṭāmukuṭa*, which may have contained a Buddha figure, supporting the identification of this Bodhisattva as Avalokiteśvara. The Bodhisattva sits in the lower tier of the relief, with six Buddhas seated in *padmāsana* in the upper tier. A few Bodhisattvas join the figure in the lower tier, including Samantabhadra, identified by his three-budded flower attribute. The relief is part of the depiction of the *Bhadracarī*,

⁷⁴ Cat. nos 86-88, 91-95, 107-108, 114.

⁷⁵ First noted by Nandana Chutiwongs (1994:100).

but this text does not explicitly mention Avalokiteśvara. This relief will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

The consistent features in this group of bronze images include the figure having two arms and leaning the head to the left. The most common hand gesture in this group is the *varada-mudrā*. The otherwise common lotus attribute is not part of the iconography of this group, but two of the statuettes hold a *cintāmaṇi* (Cat. nos 87-88). These four bronze figures are decorated with jewellery and a sacred thread. The three surviving lotus seats show three distinctive styles, in which the lotus petals are depicted as triangles, separate petals or semi-circles. These three succinct styles indicate that these bronzes were made in three separate workshops.

Iconographic Group 2: Bronze statuettes with four arms (Cat. nos 53, 89-111)

The largest group among the sorrowful Avalokiteśvara statuettes shows the Bodhisattva with four arms. Apart from one image, all lean their heads to the right, rather than to the left, as in the images of Group 1. Avalokiteśvara displays various attributes and one hand gesture (Table 17). The lower right hand is often in *varada-mudrā* or is held in front of the chest, with the *cintāmaṇi*. The upper right hand supports the leaning head and frequently holds a rosary. On the left side, we see a greater variety of attributes, but the lotus is a common presence. We can usually see the flower by the shoulder, on a long stem. When the figure displays the *varada-mudrā* in the lower right hand, the lower left hand commonly holds a *cintāmaṇi* in front of the body. Other possible attributes on the left include a book and a bottle. The wish-fulfilling jewel and the gift-giving gesture fit well together and stand in juxtaposition to the sorrowful gesture. These two attributes illustrate Avalokiteśvara's infinite compassion, while the sorrowful gesture expresses his sorrow at not being able to save all sentient beings.

Within Group 2, I distinguish three stylistic sets. The first of these consists of two bronzes. They exhibit stylistic features associated with Northeast India (Cat. nos 89 and 90), discussed in the previous chapter (Section 3.4). Although the first of these statuettes (Cat. no. 89) has suffered some damage, we can still see a pearl rim around its lotus seat. The second statuette (Cat. no. 90) also carries this feature, along with flames decorating the rim of the back piece as well as a parasol directly above. Both statuettes lean the head to the image's right. The first does not wear any jewellery, while the second one is only sparsely bejewelled. One example of a sorrowful Avalokiteśvara with four arms was found in Bangladesh (as we shall see in the next section). However, he leans his head to the left, not to the right as in the images discussed.

To my knowledge, no metal four-armed Avalokiteśvara depictions without jewellery have been found in Northeast India or Bangladesh. Thus, we see in these two statuettes iconographic features that are not found in the northeastern Indian subcontinent. Stylistic features do link these statuettes to Northeast India and Bangladesh though, such as the pearl rim on the lotus seat and the parasol directly above the back piece.

This supports the conclusion in Chapter 3, that Javanese bronze workers produced statuettes with stylistic elements characteristic of Northeast Indian bronzes.

The second of these statuettes (Cat. no. 90), is better preserved. The back piece indicates a Northeast Indian or Bangladeshi origin for this statuette with its pearl-rimmed frame, the s-shaped flames along the edge and the parasol directly above it. However, as was demonstrated in Chapter 3, images that at first glance appear to originate from India or Bangladesh are, on the basis of a more thorough stylistic analysis, likely to have been produced in Java. Since the iconography of this statuette links up with other Javanese images, rather than Indian or Bangladeshi images, this statuette may be a similar case. I suggest that this bronze was also produced in Java, despite showing several Indian stylistic features.

The second stylistic set within this iconographic group comprises of 14 images (Cat. nos 91-105) that show a Central Javanese style. This style includes an oval double lotus seat, a solid back piece decorated with foliage, a parasol extended out over the seated or standing figure and a supple physical form. Some of the statuettes in this set have an oval, double lotus seat, a characteristic of the Central Javanese style (Cat. nos 91-92, 94-105). Two of these statuettes show a similar back piece and manner of body depiction, to the point that they appear to emulate each other (Cat. nos 96 and 97). The gilded bronze (Cat. no. 98) also has a similar back piece, but the foliage leaves around the herringbone rim are depicted separate from one another. There are other statuettes that show a close similarity, which have this type of back piece. I will discuss these in Chapter 6. While not all of the images in this group have a back piece, we see the typical Central Javanese style *prabhāmaṇḍala* in Cat. nos 96-100 and 102-105. A parasol, extending out over the seated figure, can be seen in Cat. nos 96, 99 and 101-104.

The third stylistic group among the Avalokiteśvara statuettes in the Iconographic Group 2 shows a style that seems to result from a further development of the Central Javanese style at a slightly later time, hence the late Central and early East Javanese style (Cat. nos 106-111). Stylistically these statuettes link up with the fourth stylistic group discussed in Chapter 3. In these figures, we see characteristics typical for this late Central and early East Javanese style: elongated limbs, closer and more intricate foliage around the back piece, and an increase in the decoration on the body. Three bronzes clearly illustrate the style of such elongated limbs (Cat. nos 106 and 109). The more intricate foliage can be seen in two of these and in another bronze belonging to this stylistic group (Cat. nos 106, 109 and 111). The increase in adornment is evidenced by a chest belt, besides a hip belt, and the addition of an extra armband (Cat. nos 106, 108, 109, 111). The three stylistic sets within this iconographic group illustrate a similar kind of stylistic development that we saw for Avalokiteśvara seated in *lalitāsana* (Chapter 3).

Iconographic Group 3: Statuettes with six arms (Cat. nos 112-115)

Group 3 includes only four images. The first statuette is in a private collection (Cat. no. 112) and shows Avalokiteśvara sitting in *mahārājalīlāsana* on an oval lotus seat

that rests on a rectangular base with a back piece similar to that seen in Cat. nos 64, 71, 96-98. He leans slightly to his right. The upper right hand reaches towards the head as if to support it, although apparently, it does not actually touch the head. The middle right hand is broken, and the lower right hand is suspended over the lower left hand, which holds a *cintāmaṇi* in front of the chest. The upper left hand holds a rosary and we see the middle left hand behind the body supporting the body's weight. Avalokiteśvara wears a lower garment with a circle-and-dot pattern as well as a necklace, armbands, bracelets and a *yajñopavīta* (Table 18).

Unfortunately, only a drawing remains of the next statuette (Cat. no. 113, Raffles 1817 Vol. 2: 56), while the following statuette is damaged to such a degree that the attributes cannot be determined (Cat. no. 114). All of these figures lean their head to the right. In the statuette in a private collection (Cat. no. 112) Avalokiteśvara supports his head with the upper right hand, while the statuette in the drawing supports the head with the middle right hand (Cat. no. 113). The last statuette in this group (Cat. no. 115) represents Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara, as the Bodhisattva carries both a jewel and a wheel. This is the only representation of this form of the sorrowful Avalokiteśvara that was found in Java. It is an interesting piece, as it links the artistic production in Java to the iconographic development of Avalokiteśvara images in China and Japan, where this form was popular (see Section 4.4).

Of these four images, the statuettes in a private collection and the Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara (Cat. nos 112 and 115) relate stylistically to the second stylistic set, in Iconographic Group 2 described above (Cat. nos 91-105). The six-armed Avalokiteśvara that now only exists as a drawing has a back piece decorated with flames and a parasol directly above it, relating it to the first stylistic group in Iconographic Group 2 (Cat. nos 89-90). The fourth statuette (Cat. no. 114) is too worn to distinguish any clear stylistic details.

Clay tablets illustrating the sorrowful iconography found in Java and Insular Southeast Asia (Cat. nos 116-119, 297)

Three clay tablets that may have illustrated the sorrowful gesture were found at Borobudur. There are no images of two tablets. One has been described as showing a figure with its head leaning to the right (Rohyani 1993: Table 1, no. 19). From the description, it is unclear whether this is the viewer's right or the figure's right. The right hand was held by the chest and the left hand displayed the *bhūmiśparśa-mudrā* (Rohyani 1993: Table 1, no. 19), therefore, none of the hands support the leaning head. Rohyani described a second tablet in which the seated figure leaned his head to the side. He was identified as Samantabhadra rather than Avalokiteśvara (1993: Table 1). In this case one of the Bodhisattva's hands rests in his lap and the other hand rests besides him. Indradjaya has also published a clay tablet found at Borobudur (Cat. no. 297, 2011: Foto 2). The partially damaged clay tablet shows Avalokiteśvara seated in *mahārājalīlāsana*. The Bodhisattva leans his head slightly to his right, just as we have seen in the four-armed Javanese bronzes.

A limited number of clay tablets from other parts of Insular Southeast Asia also show the sorrowful iconographic form (Cat. nos 116-119). I include them here as these are the only images with this iconography from Southeast Asia outside of Java. They come from modern day Myanmar, southern Thailand and Bali. The ones from Thailand, one with a two-armed figure and the other with a four-armed figure, both lean the head to their right (as in the four-armed and six-armed, bronze statuettes from Java); those from lower Myanmar and Bali, both with four arms, lean their head to their left (as in the two-armed Javanese statuettes). The combinations of either two arms with the head leaning to the left or four arms with the head leaning to the right, as in the Javanese bronze examples, was not repeated in clay tablets found in other parts of Southeast Asia.

Two of these tablets show a similar iconography, although both are damaged to a certain extent (Cat. nos 118-119). Despite the damage and wear we can determine a small *stūpa* on the figure's right side in both tablets. Similarly, we see a worshipper by the seat. Other resemblances include the placement of upper and lower right hands. Considering this last-mentioned similarity, these clay tables likely had a related source of inspiration. This may have been the stone tablet found in Bangladesh (Pl. 4A, see Section 4.3). Especially as the Bangladeshi stone figure has his head in an almost 90-degree angle from the neck, similar in the Balinese clay tablet (Cat. no. 118).

4.3 A comparison with South Asian images

In South Asia, we find this sorrowful gesture in Gandhara, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Northeast India and Bangladesh, but not all of the figures can be identified as Avalokiteśvara. The earliest images are from Gandhara, but the gesture itself is believed to originate from Greek and Greco-Roman art (Lee 1993: 31). There appears to be a difference in how this iconographic form is portrayed in Gandhara, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha, compared to Bihar and Bangladesh. In Gandhara there are sorrowful figures who either lean their heads to the right or the left, often depending on the symmetry of the image, such as in the *Buddha with Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī* stone relief (Lee 1993: fig. 5). These stone depictions are commonly dated to the second and third centuries CE (Lee 1993).

In Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha show figures leaning their heads to the right. At the Ajanta cave complex in Maharashtra, the sorrowful gesture is used with depictions of the death of the Buddha or *parinirvāṇa*. It shows a monk sitting in *bhadrāsana* and leaning his head in his right hand (Pl. 4C). However, the images from Bihar and Bangladesh show him primarily as leaning his head to his left.⁷⁶ The majority of these cases show the Bodhisattva with two arms.

I am aware of one depiction from the northeastern Indian subcontinent which shows the sorrowful gesture for a figure with four arms, such as we often see in Java. This image was found at Kutila Mura in modern-day Bangladesh (Pl. 4A). The image shows the figure

⁷⁶ I have, as of yet, not identified any sorrowful Avalokiteśvaras originating from West Bengal.

leaning his head to the left and dates to the seventh century based on the script of the inscribed Buddhist creed on the back (Imam 2000: 53). This would be earlier than the Javanese images. Several smaller figures surround the central figure, including a dancing figure at the bottom of the lotus seat's stem.

The body shape of the Kutila Mura relief shows little connection with the four-armed Javanese statuettes in Group 2. However, as was noted above, there is similarity in the depiction of the body with two of the Southeast Asian clay tablets (Cat. nos 118-119). The most common Javanese iconographic features for the sorrowful Avalokiteśvara are the *varada-mudrā*, lotus and *cintāmaṇi*. In the Bangladeshi image, we can identify the *cintāmaṇi* and possibly a lotus, but not the *varada-mudrā*.

A bronze image from Nalanda in Bihar (Pl. 4B), shows the figure in the same type of *mahārājalīlāsana* as seen in the two statuettes belonging to Group 2 (Cat. nos 89 and 90) with the non-supporting leg lying on the other foot. The two-armed figure leans his head to the left and cups his cheek in his left hand. His right hand rests on the lotus seat supporting his body. The back piece has suffered some damage, but we can still see a pearl rim and small flames at intervals along the outside. We find this same type of back piece among Javanese bronzes, as detailed in Chapter 3 (Cat. no. 48), but not among the Javanese sorrowful Avalokiteśvaras.

These two images from Bihar and Bangladesh, or similar ones, may have functioned as iconographic inspirations for the Javanese sorrowful Avalokiteśvara.⁷⁷ Considering the time difference between the Northeast Indian images (seventh century CE) and the statuettes produced in Java (mid-eighth century to the early tenth century CE) there may have been other sources of iconographic information as well. There is also a clay tablet of a six-armed sorrowful Avalokiteśvara identified as Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara by C. Bautze-Picron from Nalanda in Bihar (2004: 243, fig. 24).⁷⁸ He is named for the two important attributes he carries. This form will be discussed further in Section 4.4.

In Ratnagiri (in Odisha) and Ayodhya (in Uttar Pradesh), we find two stone images of the sorrowful Avalokiteśvara depicted in relief (Pls 4D and 4E). The Ratnagiri relief is dated to the tenth century CE and the one in Ayodhya to the late tenth century (Donaldson 2001: figs 207-208). Therefore, they were both created a century later than the Central Javanese period of the first half of the ninth century CE, when most of the Javanese, sorrowful Avalokiteśvaras were made. Both figures have two arms; in the left hand they hold a long-stemmed lotus in full bloom. The heads are bent towards the Bodhisattvas'

⁷⁷ Similar two-armed depictions of Avalokiteśvara, but not limited to these, include a bronze *caitya* dated to the ninth century (Bhattacharya 2002: Pl. 9.3, Indian Museum, Kolkata: No. 6301) and a stone relief from the Bodhgaya region in Bihar (Bhattacharya 2002: Pl. 9.5). For further examples from East India see Bautze-Picron 2004: Appendix 1b.

⁷⁸ A further clay tablet from Bihar shows a six-armed seated Avalokiteśvara, displaying the sorrowful gesture and leaning his head to his right. It was found in Bargaon near Nalanda (Bhattacharya 2002: Pl. 9.2), but no *cakra* can be identified among the attributes.

right, unlike in the two-armed images from Java that lean the head to the left. The figures from Ratnagiri and Ayodhya sit in *lalitāsana* and *mahārājālīlāsana* respectively.

In South Asia, the sorrowful gesture is used in connection with a number of other characters, including the Buddha Śākyamuni, other *bodhisattvas* and a monk. The same type of imagery can be found in Java, but there the large majority of the sorrowful images depict Avalokiteśvara. While the origins of the sorrowful Avalokiteśvara reside in South Asia, there was a local iconographic development of the four-armed sorrowful Avalokiteśvara leaning his head to the right in Java. There the sorrowful Avalokiteśvara reached higher levels of popularity as we may conclude on the basis of surviving bronze images.

4.4 A comparison with East Asian images

In China, the iconographic form of a seated figure leaning his head in one of his hands, occurs with a variable number of arms and in several different sitting positions. Denise Paltry Leidy described the icon, which was popular during the middle of the sixth century CE in Northeast China, as a figure sitting “on a high stool with his right leg crossed over a pendant left leg; his left hand rests on his left foot while he gently touches his right cheek with one or two fingers of his right hand” (1990: 21).

At times, the statuettes of this iconographic form in China carry an inscription describing the figure as “*siwei*” (思維) which can be translated as ‘dimensional thinking’ or thinking that connects dimensions (Qi 2015: 38).⁷⁹ Avalokiteśvara travelled outside the human realm in order to save the hungry ghosts or *pretas*. Humans may not be privy to this other dimension, but the Bodhisattva is capable of ‘dimensional thinking’ beyond the dimensions that limit human beings.

As the term ‘*siwei*’ was inscribed on some of the Chinese images illustrating the sorrowful gesture, it has been used to describe all depictions of this gesture in Chinese art, even those that are uninscribed. Hsu separated the images into groups: one being the “*siwei* statues”, carrying the inscription, and the second group with the same iconographic gesture, but without an inscription (2002: 6). Hsu argues that the “pensive images can be interpreted in two different iconographic contexts”, one related to the Prince Siddhartha in a narrative iconographic setting and the other to meditational practices, specifically “visualisation meditation” (2002: 6, 9-10). The use and appreciation of this iconography spread to Korea in the late sixth century, while in China the icon disappeared in the Sui (581-618 CE) and Tang (618-907 CE) periods (Leidy 1990: 31).

Altarpieces in bronze from Hebei in northern China, dating to the late fifth century CE, show Avalokiteśvara standing in front, while at the back of the piece sits a *siwei* or sorrowful figure under a tree. One example is 22 cm high and dates to 489 CE

⁷⁹ *Siwei* figures have also been referred to as “pensive figures”, the term itself was developed by Chinese translators to denote the verb – to think (Hsu 2002: 5).

(Leidy 1990: fig 2). Leidy interprets this image as illustrating Avalokiteśvara in his paradise, Sukhāvātī (1990: 24). The same type of depiction also exists for Maitreya, which would then be seen as illustrating Tuṣita Heaven. Leidy interprets the ‘pensive’ figure at the back as a waiting Bodhisattva (1990: 24). In the case of Avalokiteśvara, he would be waiting to descend to the human realm to aid sentient beings.

Another Chinese iconographic form of a six-armed Avalokiteśvara, supporting his head with one of his hands, is called Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara. The iconography of this form is described in the Japanese Buddhist dictionary *Bukkyō Daiji*. The three right hands, from the top, touch the head, hold the *cintāmaṇi* (the wish-fulfilling jewel) and a rosary (Chapin 1932: 38). On the left, the top hand holds a *cakra*, the middle hand a lotus and the lowest hand rests on the seat (Chapin 1932: 39).

Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara can be found in Mogao Cave 148, dated to 776 CE (Wong 2007: 153). In the cave, a niche was reserved for a statue of Avalokiteśvara in this form but this is now missing. The surrounding wall still shows the benefits of worshipping Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara (Wong 2007: 154). In Mogao Cave 384, dated to the late eighth and early ninth centuries CE, Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara is depicted opposite an image of Amoghapāśa (Wong 2007: 154). This depiction could have been made nearer in time to the sorrowful Avalokiteśvaras and the Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara from Java (Cat. no. 115) than the Indian images.

Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara also became popular in Japan. According to the *Bukkyō Daiji*, the *Cintāmaṇi-cakra mantra* was introduced between 1069 and 1074 CE (Chapin 1932: 43). The iconography was already known in Japan earlier, from 810 CE onwards, when Kūkai (Kōbō Daishi) brought examples of the *Garbhakośadhātu-maṇḍala*, in which Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara was included (Chapin 1932: 43). Thus, this form became known in Japan in approximately the same period as in Java.

The singular acceptance of the four-armed sorrowful Avalokiteśvara in Java, compared to the rest of Southeast Asia, may be difficult to explain. Nevertheless, it is clear that this form of the Bodhisattva was known in Java before the sole image of the Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara was produced (Cat. no. 115). The Javanese worshippers of Avalokiteśvara may have had no need of another Avalokiteśvara sorrowful form by the second quarter of the ninth century CE. This may be why only one image of the Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara survives from Java.

Chutiwongs suggested that the popularity of the sorrowful form in Indonesia could be due to two travelling Buddhist teachers, Vajrabodhi (671-741) and Amoghavajra (704-774, 1994: 103). Chutiwongs is not the only scholar to connect Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra to the development of Buddhism in Java (Sundberg and Giebel 2011, Sharrock and Bunker 2016).

Vajrabodhi was originally from South India and studied at Nalanda (Chou 1945: 272, 274). He eventually travelled, via sea, to China. However, the journey took three years and after

Vajrabodhi's temporary stop in Vijaya, there is no record of where Vajrabodhi was during this period (Sundberg and Giebel 2011: 14). There is only a reference to various countries before they became lost at sea and travelled more than 100,000 *li* (Sundberg and Giebel 2011: 14), or approximately 32,000 km.⁸⁰ One theory is that he visited the Thai-Malay Peninsula, Sumatra and Java during these three years (Sharrock and Bunker 2016: 238).

However, even if Vajrabodhi spent time in Java, the entire development of the local Buddhist art cannot be laid at his feet. He was certainly not the only monk to travel from India to Java, despite his modern fame. Once both Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra were in China they translated a number of Buddhist texts into Chinese, including the *dhāraṇī* for Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara and the *Spell Text of the Great Body of the Bodhisattva Thousand-Armed and Thousand-Eyed Avalokiteśvara*.⁸¹ No images of the thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara have been found in Java and, as of yet, only one Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara has been found (Cat. no. 115).

As noted in the previous section, there is limited evidence of Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara in India, but it is quite common in East Asia, suggesting a cultural link of Java with East Asia rather than South Asia. However, this is only one bronze, indicating that this cultural link could be limited to a single person requesting such an image from a workshop. The stylistic features of this statuette show that it was produced in the Central Javanese period, approximately in the second quarter of the ninth century (Cat. no. 115), past the time of Amoghavajra's possible return to Java in 741 CE (Chou 1945: 290 n. 29). This dating will be further discussed in Chapter 6, in which a group of Avalokiteśvaras in *sattvaparyāṅkāśana* is described, all in the same Central Javanese style.

4.5 The naming of an iconographic form of Avalokiteśvara

The iconographic form of Avalokiteśvara depicted as resting his head on one hand or leaning his head to either side has been given a variety of names. One of the earliest descriptions of this form in the West was by A. Grünwedel, translated into English in 1901. He described this iconographic form as “his right hand rests with the elbow on the right knee, and the head is sunk sorrowfully on the hand, the left hand rests carelessly on the left leg which hangs down” (1901: 202). Here, the form was not described as pensive, but sorrowful.

In articles from the 1930s, Chapin stated that Mahākāruṇa is another name for Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara and Bosch described a sorrowful Avalokiteśvara as “Avalokiteśvara as Mahakaruna”.⁸² Thus, by 1939 the term Mahākāruṇa was used in connection with the figure touching his head. Bosch theorised that this form shows Avalokiteśvara on Mount

⁸⁰ This is based on the Tang definition of *li* and, for reference, the circumference of the earth is approximately 40,000 km.

⁸¹ Orzech 2011: 349, Sundberg and Giebel 2011: 15.

⁸² Chapin 1932: 35, Bosch 1939: 9.

Potalaka contemplating the endless suffering of sentient beings that he, in the form of Mahākāruṇika, tries to end (1939: 10).

The Sanskrit term *mahākāruṇa* means ‘very compassionate’ and *mahākāruṇika* translates as ‘exceedingly compassionate’ (Monier Williams 1961: 795). Nevertheless, the term Mahākāruṇa or Mahākāruṇika does not relate to a specific iconographic form, as being compassionate is a general quality of Avalokiteśvara, and occurs in descriptions of his various iconographic forms. No textual evidence corroborates that this form illustrates Avalokiteśvara at his ‘most compassionate’.⁸³ It may be noted that L.A. Waddell therefore thought it fit to describe a four-armed standing image of Avalokiteśvara, not touching his hand to his head, as Mahākāruṇa Avalokiteśvara (1894: 76).⁸⁴

The initiative to call this iconographic form ‘pensive’ came from F.D.K. Bosch (1939), who examined a bronze statuette believed to originate from Klaten in Central Java (1939: 7, Cat. no. 86). It illustrates Avalokiteśvara seated in *lalitāsana*, leaning his head to his left. By giving his article the title “Le Penseur in Hindoe-Javaansche gedaante”, Bosch connected the form with the well-known statue by Auguste Rodin, *Le Penseur*. This was the first time that a connection between the term ‘pensive’ and the gesture of touching the head was made. Soon afterwards, it became the most common term to describe this iconography.

However, if we compare the silver Javanese statuette in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (Cat. no. 95) with *Le Penseur*, we see differences, not only in the artistic language, but also in what the image tries to convey. *Le Penseur*’s body with its defined musculature indicates contemplation coupled with physical, human capabilities. The sorrowful Avalokiteśvara in the Rijksmuseum shows us something different. As the figure has four arms, instead of two, he clearly is not just a human being. He does not possess a strong physical presence, but rather a lithe and supple body. Avalokiteśvara’s brow is not furrowed with trying to understand something or solving a problem. Instead his facial features attempt to portray the Bodhisattva’s compassion and openness through partially closed eyes and a soft smile.

Among scholars dealing with this iconographic form, it appears to be standard to use the term ‘pensive’ and Mahākāruṇa/Mahākāruṇika interchangeably. One such scholar, Anna-Maria Quagliotti, stated that the term ‘Mahākāruṇika’ was one of convenience and she noted that there was no textual evidence for the use of the Sanskrit term (1989: 338). Yet, in the same article, Quagliotti noted that “there is no doubt that the gesture of raising one’s hand to one’s head denotes pain” (1989: 339).

Prangopal Paul and Debjani Paul focused on a subset of the sorrowful depiction in which the seated figure touches or cradles his cheek, instead of supporting the head. They created

⁸³ The term Mahākāruṇika occurs in Buddhist texts when a list of *bodhisattvas* is given. It also occurs as a form of title for either Avalokiteśvara or the *bodhisattva* form of Śākyamuni (Harle 1979: 128).

⁸⁴ Unfortunately, Waddell did not thoroughly reference his source, but a note would indicate that the text he referenced was found at Zhalu Monastery (1894: 76).

a new term for this form, Karunāghana-mūrti (2001: 359).⁸⁵ The two authors highlighted the physical form as depicting more sensitivity and a bit less thoughtfulness than the ‘pensive’ form in which the Bodhisattva supports the head (Paul and Paul 2001: 359). However, the Javanese bronzes primarily show this form, of touching or reaching towards the head.

In the Indian text, *Nāṭyaśāstra*,⁸⁶ a treatise on performing arts, we find the pose of resting a head in one’s hand as “sitting in sorrow”. In the same text, there is a second pose to illustrate when a person sits deep in thought or is pensive (Mehta 1995: 138).

When a person is to assume (deep) thinking, (from the easy sitting position) he is to stretch slightly one of his feet, and the other foot is to rest on the seat and the head is to bend to one side.

When a person is in (deep) sorrow, (from the easy sitting posture) he is to put up his hands for supporting the chin, or head is to rest on the shoulder, and he is (to look like) one whose mind and the sense-organs are not working (lit. lost) (*Nāṭyaśāstra*, ed. Ghosh 1950-61: xiii, 197-199).

This indicates that in the cultures where this text was in use, the pose that we have seen in the images would have been associated with sorrow.

In his translation of the Sanskrit text, the *Śayanāsanavastu* of the *Mūlasarvastivāda-vinaya*, Schopen noted that in one of the chapters a householder sits “dejected, cheek in hand” as he is having trouble finding a wife for his seventh son (2000: 111). Schopen concluded that this pose is known for expressing sorrow. He also expressed in a footnote that there is a complication if this information is transferred directly onto Buddhist images, such as those discussed in this chapter.

In the texts the posture is invariably associated with dejection, disconsolateness, despair, anxiety, grief and depression. When the contexts are clear the same holds for the art. Indeed, the posture is prescribed for “sitting in sorrow” in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Mehta 1995: 138 and 140). All of this makes the identification of princely figures sitting in this posture as “celestial”

⁸⁵ Examples of this can be found in Korean Buddhist art (Chung and Smith 1998: 138).

⁸⁶ This text does not have a definitive date, but is considered to have been written within 200 years of the third century CE (Mehta 1995: xiii).

Bodhisattvas⁸⁷ very problematic, unless we allow that such bodhisattvas spent a lot of time seriously depressed (Schopen 2000: 158-159 fn. 4).

According to Schopen the gesture of leaning the head in one's hand could be interpreted as sitting in sorrow, particularly in a clear textual context. Schopen also wonders how a celestial Bodhisattva, who is advanced on the enlightenment path, could be seated in sorrow.

However, part of Avalokiteśvara's theogeny is his capacity to listen or see the suffering of the world and being able to respond. When he suffers from not being able to help as many sentient beings as he wishes, the Buddha Amitābha proceeds to give Avalokiteśvara 1000 arms and eyes so that he can come to the aid of more sentient beings. Another story tells of Avalokiteśvara visiting hell, liberating the sinners and bringing them to Sukhāvatī paradise. He discovered, on his return, that for each rescued being another took his place in hell. The Bodhisattva's despair then becomes so great that his head split into ten parts (Getty 1914: 64). Thus, Avalokiteśvara is a figure who is sorrowful and despairing, but he comes to a worshipper's aid and does not simply sit on Mount Potalaka pondering. Hence, being filled with sorrow is an essential part of his compassion.

In Java, there are several reliefs that depict the pose of leaning the head in one's hand in a narrative context. These may give us more information about the meaning of this pose in Java. One very clear example can be found in the *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs at the Loro Jonggrang temple complex at Prambanan. When Rāma returns to the place where he left Sita, in order to hunt the golden deer, and finds that she is no longer there. His grief is great, and we see him seated leaning his head on his right hand (Pl. 4G).

The same gesture is used on the walls of Borobudur in a few narrative reliefs, besides the panel that likely shows Avalokiteśvara in the context of the *Bhadracarī*. One example from the *Lalitavistara* series shows a ferry man seated with his head in his hand after he demanded a fare from Gautama, who then flew over the river instead (Krom 1926: 125). A second example from the *Lalitavistara* shows Mara seated with his head in his hand (Krom and Van Erp 1920-31: Ia 94). Therefore, the pose of leaning the head in one's hand was clearly associated with unhappiness in Java, as we see in these narrative reliefs in Central Java. As they figure within a narrative known to us, it is beyond doubt that the pose expresses unhappiness.

We have seen that this iconographic pose of supporting the leaning head with a hand has had several names. However, using a term such as 'pensive', based on the resemblance of this iconography to that of a European sculpture, alters our understanding of the intended meaning of the image of the Bodhisattva leaning his head in his hand. An individual deep

⁸⁷ A celestial Bodhisattva is one who is mentioned in the Mahāyāna texts and is advanced on the enlightenment path (Masson 1970: 1). Avalokiteśvara, along with other *bodhisattvas* such as Mañjuśrī, are identified as celestial Bodhisattvas (Harrison 2000: 162).

in thought over a problem is different from someone being sorrowful over the suffering he sees. The true meaning of the image can thus become undermined. Among the Chinese depictions of this pose, there are inscriptions describing Avalokiteśvara's ability for dimensional thinking. In Java, however, the narrative context of the number of images showing this gesture illustrates that it was meant to depict pain as sorrow as described in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Lalitavistara*. Taking the narrative reliefs and the description in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* into account, within the context of the compassionate nature of Avalokiteśvara, the appropriate description of this iconographic form, at least in the Javanese images, is 'sorrowful Avalokiteśvara'.

4.6 Conclusion

During the Central Javanese period, there was a prolific production of bronze statuettes and we have seen that the sorrowful Avalokiteśvara was important enough for a local iconography to develop. This combines the four arms with the head leaning to the right. The images in this chapter include relatively small statuettes as well as part of a relief on Borobudur. The size of the statuettes points to a private, rather than a temple setting for these objects. Avalokiteśvara, in his sorrowful attitude, displays compassion for the world's suffering, an attractive quality to the worshippers of these images. The wish-fulfilling jewel is often part of the iconography of the sorrowful Avalokiteśvara. The repetitive use of the *cintāmaṇi* in the Javanese images suggests that this iconographic form had a wish-fulfilling role for the worshippers.

The Javanese two-armed sorrowful Avalokiteśvaras lean their heads to their left. This pose may have been inspired by the sorrowful images produced in Bengal, as we there see a similar iconography. The sorrowful four-armed Avalokiteśvara statuettes could be divided into iconographic groups, which in their turn were separated further into stylistic groups. These stylistic groups connected with Northeast Indian, Central Javanese and late Central Javanese and early East Javanese stylistic features. The specific iconographic and stylistic combination for the four-armed sorrowful Avalokiteśvara (with his head leaning to the right) developed locally in Java. Only one example of this iconographic combination of a sorrowful Avalokiteśvara, having four arms and leaning his head to the right has been found outside of Java: the clay tablet found in Yala in Peninsular Thailand (Cat. no. 117). The other two clay tablets in which the Bodhisattva has four arms show him leaning his head to the left in the manner seen in the Kutila Mura stone image (Cat. nos 118-119). The Javanese iconographic rules dictated that if the sorrowful Avalokiteśvara had two hands, he would lean his head to the left, but if given four or six arms, he would be seen leaning his head to the right. This iconography did not develop further and remained consistent with the head leaning to the right and the other primary attributes of the *varadamudrā*, the *cintāmaṇi* and a book. By developing a local Buddhist iconography, the Javanese bronze casters illustrated their ability to not just accept external iconographic input, but to take this information and adapt it to their own artistic language.

The sorrowful gesture is also found depicted in China, often used for two-armed Bodhisattvas. In these cases, the Bodhisattva tends to lean his head to the right.

The Bodhisattva is generally not depicted with four arms in East Asia. The specific iconographic form of the Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara can be found represented several times in Chinese culture, but only one such image survived in Java (Cat. no. 115). Even so, this one image seems enough to illustrate a cultural link between China and Java during the first half of the ninth century CE. As we will see in Chapter 6, the statuette was produced by a prolific workshop. The one surviving image suggests that this workshop did not produce many of the Cintāmaṇi-cakra Avalokiteśvara form, but instead focused on the locally developed four-armed sorrowful Avalokiteśvara.

While the iconographic form examined in this chapter has been given a variety of names, the appropriate terminology for the Javanese Avalokiteśvara image leaning his head in his hands should be ‘sorrowful Avalokiteśvara’. Based on the reliefs illustrating the sorrowful pose in a narrative context, it is likely that the Javanese worshippers interpreted such sorrowful Avalokiteśvaras as illustrating sorrow born from compassion.



Plate 6. Avalokiteśvara as part of a triad in the depiction of the *Bhadracarī* on the fourth gallery of Borobudur (Cat. no. 130, IV 50)