



A Comparative Study of the Aesthetic Characteristics of Buddhist Cave Image Art in the Tang and Song Dynasties

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DOI: 10.32629/asc.v3i1.696

Abstract: The three major peaks of Chinese Buddhist cave art were in the Wei and Jin dynasties, the Tang dynasty and the Song dynasty, which formed different aesthetic characteristics due to different contexts. The Tang and Song dynasties represent two major peaks of Chinese Buddhist cave art, with the "open" of the Tang dynasty and the "introverted" of the Song dynasty, making the art of Buddhist cave art "Openness" and "restrained," "flamboyant" and "simple," "rich" and "clear", "ideal" and "realistic" aesthetic characteristics are very different.

Keywords: Buddhist cave art, Tang-Song comparison, openness, introversion

1. "Open" and "introverted"

The Tang Dynasty was the most open dynasty in ancient Chinese history, and its open culture made the Tang Dynasty extremely prosperous in politics, economy, culture and social life, creating a "Great Tang Dynasty". Its open culture had deep historical origins. First of all, during the long opposition between the Southern and Northern Dynasties, the Hu and Chinese cultures inevitably intermingled. The rise of metaphysics in the Wei and Jin dynasties, the introduction of Buddhism, the activation of Taoist thought in Laozhuang, and the importation of Persian and Greek culture made this period extremely liberating in spirit, and this open ethos was bound to influence the Sui and Tang dynasties. Secondly, Li Yuan, the founding emperor of the Tang Dynasty, was a descendant of the northern nationality of Xianbei, and precisely because the Tang imperial family itself belonged to the Xianbeized Han race, its concept of Yi Xia was relatively weak and it pursued a foreign policy of good neighborliness and friendship. Then, in terms of ideology, the Tang Dynasty did not "burn books and bury Confucian scholars" like the Qin Dynasty, nor did it "revere only Confucianism" like the Han Dynasty, and its high degree of intellectual freedom contributed to the diversified development and openness of Tang society. Finally, the most important reason was the economic and military strength, which made the people of the Tang Dynasty extremely confident. This freedom and openness was inevitably reflected in the artistic creation of the period, making the art of Buddhist cave painting present a "graceful and luxurious" beauty.

If the word openness is used to describe the Tang Dynasty, then the Song Dynasty can only be described as introverted. On the one hand, the economic, cultural and social life of the Song dynasty was exceptionally prosperous, and was called by Chen Yinjing "the culture of the Chinese nation, which has evolved over thousands of years to create the ultimate in the era of Song". On the other hand, there was a conservative trend. Politically, the Song Emperor Zhao Kuangyin, in order to maintain his rule, adopted the policy of "emphasizing literature and suppressing military"; militarily, surrounded by Liao and Jin, with frequent foreign troubles, although there were some famous generals, weapons also made progress, but the military power of the Song dynasty was not strong; ideologically, the revival of Confucianism, Cheng and Zhu's philosophy Ideologically, the revival of Confucianism and the "preservation of the Divine Principle and elimination of human desires" restricted people's freedom in terms of thinking. It was the political and military weakness that caused the Song people's lack of self-confidence, and this lack of self-confidence was reflected in artistic creation, resulting in the Song Dynasty's subtle and introverted style.

2. Comparison of aesthetic features

2.1 "Openness" and "restraint"

The Tang Dynasty was a period of economic strength, political enlightenment, cultural prosperity, and freedom of thought, and it was this background that promoted the self-confidence of the entire nation, which was expressed in the full expression of its own beauty, which was expressed in the art of the Buddhist cave statues of the Tang Dynasty, which was a change in the posture of the Bodhisattva. At this time, the bodhisattva is no longer standing straight beside the Buddha, but with a "three-way bend" posture to show the beauty of women, the body itself in the Buddhist cave art, reflecting a "flair"

and "confidence". In contrast, the Song dynasty, due to its inherent political and military weakness, made the Song people no longer as confident and open as the Tang people, coupled with the shackles imposed by Cheng-Zhu theory, made the artistic aesthetic style of the Song dynasty shift to "restraint", so the Song dynasty rarely showed themselves, showing self-confident works of art, and turned to introspection and elegance.

2.2 "Flamboyant" and "simple"

Tang and Song dynasties are very prosperous economic dynasties, reflected in the Buddhist cave art but presents "noble" and "simple" two different styles. I think the main reasons are as follows: First, the status of Buddhism is different. The Tang Dynasty was highly liberal, the rulers themselves attached importance to Buddhism, Buddhism flourished. The Song Dynasty, however, the revival of Confucianism, "Cheng-Zhu" dominant, Buddhism decline; second, different people to support the Buddhist grottoes. Tang dynasty, the caves were mainly supported by the official, while the Song dynasty was mainly to the general public as the representative of the feeders; third, the cave statues show different objects. The Tang Dynasty Buddhist cave statues were mainly of royalty and nobility, while the Song Dynasty was mainly for the secular gods to meet the feeders' own needs and aspirations in the present. Fourth, the influence of the "open" and "introverted" styles of the times made the Tang dynasty "flamboyant" and the Song dynasty "simple". This "flashy" and "simple" mainly in the cave statues of clothing and costumes, the Tang Dynasty cave statues of clothing, flamboyant, colorful, and, conversely, the Song Dynasty is more understated and simple.

2.3 "Rich" and "Clear"

The people of the Tang Dynasty took obesity as beauty, and most of their bodies were "plump", and this plump beauty was mainly due to the following reasons: firstly, the Tang Dynasty was strong and economically prosperous, and people were able to eat and wear warm clothes to form a healthy body; secondly, the royal family of the Tang Dynasty belonged to the Xianbei-ized Han nationality, and had the aesthetic concept of fitness as beauty; Finally, as the Tang people were highly confident, this "rich" beauty was the redefinition of beauty for women and reflected the dynamism and vitality of the Tang Dynasty. This "rich" beauty is reflected in the art of the Buddhist cave statues of the Tang Dynasty, most of which have rounded faces and full, robust bodies, with momentum. In contrast, the Song Dynasty, the chaotic situation of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, making the people's lives difficult, body posture from rich to lean. After the Song Dynasty, the "introverted" style of the times made people advocate a soft, delicate, restrained beauty, reflected in the art of Buddhist cave statues, the face and body gradually lean, from the "rich" beauty to "beautiful" beauty.

2.4 "Ideal" and "realistic"

Buddhist cave art of the Tang Dynasty was more humane than the unspeakable wisdom of the Buddhist statues of the Wei Jin and North and South Dynasties, but the Tang Buddhist statues still had an "ideal" air, a "dominant god," while the Song Dynasty was completely "secular" god, a reflection of the Song people's concern for the present world. The Buddhist cave statues of the Tang Dynasty had a very strong aura of God compared to the Song Dynasty, such as the hair crowns of the Buddha statues, which were still influenced by India in the Tang Dynasty, but were already Han Chinese in the Song Dynasty, Therefore, the Tang Dynasty was "ideal" while the Song Dynasty was "realistic. In addition, we should also recognize that the secularization of religion was an inevitable trend in accordance with the law of religious development, and the Chinese people's emphasis on and demand for the present world also contributed to the process of secularization. Thus, the Dazu Grottoes in Sichuan were fully secularized during the Song dynasty, symbolizing the complete Sinicization of Chinese Buddhist cave art during the Song dynasty.

3. Concluding remarks

The "open" of the Tang dynasty and the "introverted" of the Song dynasty resulted in distinct aesthetic characteristics of Buddhist cave art, with "openness" and "restraint", "flamboyant" and "simple", "rich" and "clear", "ideal" and "realistic". This paper is a preliminary exploration of the impact of the two different era characteristics of the Tang and Song dynasties, "openness" and "introversion," on the aesthetic characteristics of the art of statuary from the perspective of Chinese Buddhist cave art. In addition, the influence of these two different characteristics of the Tang and Song dynasties on various aspects of the art is worthy of our careful consideration.

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