

# Discussion on the Humanities and Artistry of Buddhist Sculptures in Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties

Changzong Shao<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> School of Ceramic Art, Jingdezhen Ceramic University, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi, China

\*Corresponding author. Email: 108861477@qq.com

## ABSTRACT

Buddhist culture prevailed during the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties. In this turbulent historical period, the ruling class was keen on carving Buddha statues. This religion originated from India began to develop in China. Through the interpretation of Buddhist sculptures of the Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, it is found that its artistic quality is not limited by the factors of Buddhism, and is integrated with real life, which embodies the humanities of Buddhism. At the same time, Chinese sculpture art has also entered a new way of development. It is an important manifestation of the sinicization of Buddhist sculpture art, and it is also a testament to the culture of the Central Plains. This thesis focuses on the study of the humanities and artistry of Buddhist sculptures in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties.

**Keywords:** Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, Buddhism, Sculpture, Humanities and artistry.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Chinese sculpture has a very high reputation all over the world. Looking at the role of sculpture in various social and historical periods, it can be found that in different historical periods, the artistic characteristics and aesthetic values of sculptures are different, all of which are related to the social and cultural customs of the time. There are different fashion elements in different periods, and the integration of popular preferences into sculpture works is the artistic embodiment of life. The introduction of Buddhism into China did not retain the original cultural connotation of Buddhism, but merged with Chinese Confucian culture. The collision and mutual penetration of the two cultures formed a Buddhist culture with Chinese characteristics. This is also the fusion of Indian national aesthetics and traditional Chinese national aesthetics. Sculpture, as a form of artistic expression, plays a carrier role in the spread of Buddhist culture. Tracing back to the history of Chinese art, the ruling class in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties attached great importance to Buddhism. Buddhist grotto sculpture art flourished during this period, and this trend was

very popular in the Northern Wei Dynasty[1]. The Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties experienced more than 300 years. The art of Buddhist sculpture realized sinicization, forming a unique style of Chinese Buddha statues, and its humanity is prominent. Most of the Buddhist statues of the Northern Wei Dynasty have a smile, and give people a sense of inner smile. The peaceful complexion and the slightly leaning body make the Buddhist statues no longer aloft, but make people feel close. The statues are no longer the images of gods that are different from the human world, and the care for people is embodied in an artistic way.

## 2. REASONS FOR THE FORMATION OF BUDDHIST STATUES IN THE WEI, JIN, SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN DYNASTIES

Religious modern historian Chen Yinke made clear his thoughts on Buddhist grotto sculpture art in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties. He believed that in the process of art development, the influence of religion cannot be ignored. In the process of religious dissemination, art also plays an

important role. He believed that during the Eastern and Western Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties, the Taoist Tao is a religion passed down from generation to generation, and his calligraphy has been passed down from generation to generation and existed as an art form. It can be seen that there is a close correlation between religion and art. This theory was used in the shaping of Buddhist statues in the Wei and Jin dynasties and can be used as an important factor. In the dissemination of Buddhism, art plays a role as a carrier, and the artistic image created is more in line with people's aesthetic needs, and Buddhism is easier to be accepted by the public [2]. Of course, the shaping of Buddhist statues does not stop at the level of aesthetic needs, but needs to rely on faith to drive people to obey. Therefore, Buddhist statues first highlight the religiousness. Most Buddhist statues have a huge scale. This is because people put their hopes on the Buddha statues to promote the endurance of karma during their lifetime, and hope that they can be enlightened by Buddhism through practice and resist actual suffering.

### **3. THE HUMANITIES OF BUDDHIST SCULPTURE IN WEI, JIN, SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN DYNASTIES**

#### ***3.1 The Turn of Buddhist Sculpture Art in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties***

The early Buddhist sculptures of the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties still retained the religious elements of the factors, so they exuded a strong religious color. Gradually, this original religious color gradually faded, and humanistic feelings merged into it. This was the Chinese Buddhism shifted from the original gods to humans. In Buddhist sculpture, the elements of the person themselves were embodied, and after artistic treatment, a sinicized Buddhist sculpture art was formed. Therefore, during this period, the images expressed by Buddhist sculptures were very rich. Whether it is a tall and magnificent Buddha statue, but a Buddha statue that gives people a sense of liveliness, it will give people a sense of novelty, and the artistic aesthetic mood is more in line with the artistic conception of traditional Chinese culture. For example, the various statues in the Yungang Grottoes are mostly female, colorful, giving people a sense of beauty, and the joyful faces does not lose a sense of femininity. These sculptures are

respectful but maintain dignity. When looking at the Maijishan statues, not only the faces are smiling, but the inside of these Buddhist statues are even smiling, giving people a sense of peace. This kind of smile that makes people feel inexplicable, especially the slight tilt of the body before, seems to be courteous to people, and the image of the gods make people feel more cordial. In the Maiji Mountain 123 Grottoes, there are some male and female waiters. Their images are more similar to children in real life. They are innocent and lovely, without any sense of being elevated [2].

#### ***3.2 Buddhist Sculptures Embody Worship That Transcends the World***

After the introduction of Buddhism from India in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, its cultural connotation and image have changed. The goal of Indian Buddhism is to liberate from the world, while Buddhism that has undergone sinicization is different. Although Buddhism exists as a religion, it is no longer a pure religious mystery, but a combination of mystery and secularity. The image of Buddhism is permeated with human breath. When people see the Buddhist statues in the Grottoes of the Southern and Northern Dynasties and appreciate them from an artistic point of view, they will find that the humanistic elements in the intuitively existing sculpture images are prominent and close to people, seeming that these images exist in people's lives. This is Chinese culture, which is full of humanistic colors, which makes it easier to accept, and even establishes a connection with the content of life [4]. In Guo Peng's "A Brief History of Chinese Buddhism", the content of this aspect is clear: the rulers of the Northern Wei Dynasty originated from the northern desert, and they were not infiltrated by Confucianism. Nor did they teach Taoist ideological education. In their view, Southern Buddhism was just empty talk, not marginal at all, so they didn't dare to be interested. These rulers were more pragmatic, so after the introduction of Buddhism in India, they incorporated reality into Buddhist thought. The main role of Buddhism was to bring blessings, do good deeds, and hope to be blessed. From this point, it is clear that the main descendants of Indian Buddhism were the northerners. Although they wanted to play the role of Buddhism to maintain the rule, the principles of Buddhism were not very clear, so they would reshape Buddhism according to their own ideas. The rule of the Northern Wei Dynasty and the people at the bottom were new to the foreign Buddhism, and they also felt that Buddhism

was very mysterious [5]. However, the original culture of Indian Buddhism would not be explored, nor would it be awakened to Buddhism itself, nor would it be considered to accept Nirvana and chronic loneliness. Instead, the image of the Buddha was introduced, which was ideologically integrated with the pre-Qin gods, and it also incorporated folk mythology, which made Buddhism a member that had surpassed the world of China's gods and fairies world, and can save the people of people and save all people from extreme misery. Therefore, in the early stage of the Northern Wei Dynasty, the religion of grotto sculpture was transcendent, which was influenced to a certain extent by the factors of Buddhist culture. The difference is that Buddhism and Chinese mythology are listed in the same way. The two have the same effect in transcendence.

### **3.3 The Humanization of the Image of Buddhism**

When Buddhism entered the later stage and began to turn to human culture, these can be reflected in Buddhist sculptures, which retained the religious color, and at the same time, realized the integration of humanity and religion. Just like this, Chinese culture accepted Buddhism and gradually deepened it. When Buddhism changed, the art of Buddhist statues showed a development trend of human culture [6].

There are many Buddha statues in the Maijishan Grottoes in Gansu. The images of boys and girls here are very eye-catching. The Buddha statues here do not have the characteristics of the Buddha as people imagined, but have become the incarnation of the children of the Han nationality. Carefully observing the dress, figure and face of these Buddha statues, they are not much different from those in reality. The interpretation of these images can be learned from the Western Han pottery figurines. The prototypes of those boys and girls can be found here. From the images of these Buddha statues, it is clear that the Buddha statues at that time had been humanized, and they were Chinesization. Through these Buddha statues, it can also be made clear that the Chinese had a deeper understanding of the principles of Buddhism. The image of Buddha was no longer inaccessible to humans. The understanding was full of "disenchantment", and it was gradually realised and more secular. This has a certain relationship with people's psychology at that time. Everyone wanted to become a Buddha, because becoming a Buddha

was a state. This was the unique psychology of the Chinese and the secular psychology of Buddhahood. These can be interpreted in the Maiji Mountain Buddha statues. The fusion of the image of the Buddha and the image of the person, and reflecting it through sculptures, is also a record of the history and culture of the time [7].

In the Sui and Tang dynasties after China's Southern and Northern Dynasties, a large number of Buddhist images were created. By inspecting the Longmen Grottoes, Tianlong Mountain and Bingling Temple in the Tang Dynasty, carefully observing these Buddhist images, people can discover new changes. The costumes worn by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are more characteristic of the costumes of the Han nationality in the Central Plains. These people have plump bodies, and their facial expressions are friendly and kind. Through interpretation, it is clear that the culture of the Tang Dynasty can be fully revealed in these sculptures. The sculptures of the Buddhist Art Academy at that time were pursuing the truth, and at the same time they incorporated ideal elements into them, and achieved the combination of reality and ideal, which showed that their inner world was kind and noble. From a practical point of view, they hoped that people's bodies are healthy and their lives are beautiful. In this way, the external image and the inner world can be unified, which can be clearly seen from the appearance of the statues at the depressed angle. Through in-depth exploration of the artistic characteristics and cultural connotations of Buddhist sculptures in the Tang Dynasty, people can realize that these sculptures in Tang Dynasty are in an imperial style, and the magnanimity is the result of the mutual penetration of Buddhism and Confucianism. In fact, Buddhist sculpture has undergone a human-cultural turn, and there is a correlation between it and sinicization. To study the clothing styles of the Yungang period of the Northern Wei Dynasty, it is necessary to look at the clothing styles of the Buddha statues in the Tanyao Grottoes. The features of these costumes are the "right-shoulder uncovered style" and "shoulder-covering style". It is clear that these are all foreign and not local. Among them, there is no lack of "crown-like" Buddha statues, these are Chinese costume styles. From this, it can be clear that in the Northern Wei Dynasty, the Xianbei nationality was the ruler, and the society at that time had undergone the process of sinicization. Judging from the dressing of these Buddhist statues, they were secular official uniforms. In addition, people can see the traces of the palace-style houses

from the stone carvings of the Northern Wei Dynasty and the stone carvings of statues. The window lattices are lined up. The young ladies are all aristocratic figures, graceful and charming, with wide sleeves. The lines drawn of the characters are very vigorous and smooth. From the composition point of view, they are complex and simple, reflecting the techniques and expression styles used in Chinese painting at the time [8]. The maid is elegant but refined, giving people a sense of affinity and a lyrical meaning. From these artistic expressions, it can be seen that the life of the aristocratic mansions of the Northern Dynasty at that time was very luxurious, and they lived in a prosperous place. The Buddhist sculptures of the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties conveyed a wealth of information. They did not represent concepts that transcended the world, nor were they tall and majestic images, but were the embodiment of social life and the representatives of history and culture.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Through the above research, it is clear that during the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, Buddhism was supported by the ruling class, and a large number of Buddhist sculptures emerged. Buddhism is an Indian religion. It was introduced to China and combined with Chinese Confucianism, which led to the development of the localization of Buddhist culture, which is reflected in the art of Buddhist sculptures. Absorbing a lot of religious nutrition from Buddhist sculpture works, it has promoted Chinese sculpture art to enter a new stage of development. Buddhism, as a religion, after being introduced into China, it was no longer restricted by Indian Buddhism. It was no longer constrained either in ideology or in cultural connotation. Instead, it merged from the original aloof into real life, and even became a moral standard. Various Chinese elements were integrated into the sculpture art, making Buddhist sculptures took on a new look and develop into China's excellent artistic tradition. Looking at the Buddhist sculptures in the Wei and Jin Dynasties will give people a sense of grace and luxury, or the image of "showing bones and clear appearance", or "big man", which were representative images of the nobles at that time. Buddhist culture has evolved in China, and Buddhist sculpture art has also changed accordingly. After the sinicization of Buddhist principles, it has also been accompanied by the evolution of the social era. Buddhist sculptures in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties

retained their religious colors, and their humanity was unique, which is also a manifestation of artistry. Through in-depth understanding of the Buddhist statues in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, people can experience the charm of Chinese culture, and accurately understand the deep-seated charm. The integration of humanity into religious and artistic nature has initiated a new direction for the development of Chinese art, which is worthy of in-depth study.

#### **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

This paper is independently completed by Changzong Shao.

#### **REFERENCES**

- [1] Qiang Feilong, An Analysis of Indian Gupta Art and the Artistic Style of Buddhist Statues in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties of China [J]. *Appreciation*, 2018(26): 47-48. (in Chinese)
- [2] Zheng Zhen, The Influence of Buddhism on the Sculpture Aesthetics in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties [J]. *Art Science and Technology*, 2017, 30(12):197-197. (in Chinese)
- [3] Niu Zhiyuan, A Major Achievement in the Research of Chinese Buddhist Art History — A Review of "Chinese Buddhist Art History" [J]. *Theory Journal*, 2017 (06): 36-37. (in Chinese)
- [4] Zhao Licen, On the Forms of Cave Art During the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties: Taking Bingling Temple and Yungang Grottoes as Examples [J]. *Art and Literature for the Masses*, 2016(02): 58-59. (in Chinese)
- [5] Yuan Jing, Ma Qiang, A Study on the Colors of Dunhuang Murals in Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties Under the Influence of Buddhist Themes [J]. *Grand View: Forum*, 2018(06): 158-159. (in Chinese)
- [6] Li Yuanyuan, A Brief Talk on the Painting Art and Style Characteristics in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties — Taking "the Picture of The Ode of the River Goddess" as an example [J]. *Fashion in Tomorrow*, 2017(07): 22-22. (in Chinese)
- [7] Jia Yu, Understanding of the Reasons for the Development of Buddhism in China in the

- Han Dynasty, Wei and Jin Dynasties [J].  
Cultural Relic Identification and Appreciation,  
2018(11): 64-65. (in Chinese)
- [8] Zhou Chunyu, Three Transitions from  
Metaphysical Aesthetics to Buddhist  
Aesthetics in Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern  
Dynasties [J]. Journal of Hubei Polytechnic  
Institute, 2019(03): 58-59. (in Chinese)