

Study on the Evolution of Buddhist Statues in China

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ABSTRACT

Chinese Buddhism originated from India, Buddha statues are an important carrier of Buddhist belief, and Chinese Buddhist statues were originally inherited from Buddhism in India. After Buddhism took root and developed in China, Buddhist statues also evolved artistically, gradually merging with local styles. This paper analyzes the evolution of Chinese Buddhist statue art, and elaborates on the evolution of Buddhist cave statue and mudra of teaching, explores the evolution of Chinese Buddhist statue art, and provides reference for related research.

Keywords: Chinese Buddhism, Evolution of statues, Artistic evolution, Cave niche statues, Mudra of teaching.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 6th century BC, ancient India gave birth to the Buddhist guru Shakyamuni. After BC, it was introduced into China, and Buddhist statues also began to rise. Buddhist statues are not only the carrier of Buddhist beliefs, but also the inheritance of exotic art and culture, driving the development of sculpture art in China. When Buddhism first entered China, its status was similar to that of gods and statues in Chinese legends, and people's understanding of Buddhism was still relatively vague. Therefore, according to its own imagination, the statue is based on the immortals of Chinese legend, and integrates its own imagination to create. With the change of times and the changes in aesthetic standards of different eras, the art of Chinese Buddhist statues has also continued to evolve. Finally, the current relatively stable Buddha statue making mode is formed.

2. THE EVOLUTION OF CHINESE BUDDHIST STATUE ART

After the entry of Buddhist culture into China, people's acceptance of Buddhist culture was relatively fast. However, as a foreign culture, their understanding of Buddhism is still relatively shallow, and they confuse Buddhism with Chinese Taoism, mythological deities, and others, all of which are regarded as superpowers above humanity.

As a carrier of Buddhist culture, Buddhist statues are mainly based on Indian Buddha statues and Chinese deities as reference for their selection. With the deepening of Buddhism in China, people's understanding of Buddhism has become more profound, thus achieving certain development in Buddhist statues. Gradually integrating localization content from copying India and imitating deities, and with the development of craftsmanship and technology in different periods, the artistic image of Buddhist statues has also been continuously optimized and improved. Especially during the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534 AD) and the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), they were the two most prosperous stages of Buddhism, and also became the turning points of Buddhist statues, of which the statues were gradually visualized and refined from vague artistic creation methods, while maintaining human characteristics on the basis of deification.

2.1 Initial Statue Taking

Buddhism was first introduced to China, and people's understanding of Buddhism was not profound. They believed that it was similar to the deities in Chinese mythology. Therefore, during the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 AD), stone carvings and pottery statues of Buddha mixed with Taoist portraits, and many Buddha statues appeared in Taoist places. For example, the cliff statues of Kongwang Mountain in Lianyungang, China, are very similar to those of the Eastern Han Dynasty

(25-220 AD) and are integrated into Taoist statues. The Buddha statue unearthed from Pengshan Cliff in Sichuan Province, China, is completely similar to the Queen Mother of the West in terms of clothing texture and posture. Through extensive research, it was found that the Buddha statues at that time were worshipped as deities by the world. Starting from the period of the Five Hu Sixteen Kingdoms (304-439 AD), Buddhist statues no longer used shallow carving and relief techniques, but instead used circular carving techniques to form a relatively complete human body structure. Chinese Buddhist statue art also entered its initial stage. The early Buddha statues in China used a high bun with a plump face, large ears, and small mouth. The face was slightly longer, and there was a moustache on it. The fingers were printed and folded, which was a standardized state for early Buddha statues. In the later three-dimensional sculpture, the high bun did not change much, and the facial changes were more obvious, gradually transitioning from the form of Central Asians to the image of Asians. The nose bridge was flat, willow eyebrows and almond eyes, and the forehead was wide and flat, with a smile, making the overall image more friendly and dignified. However, due to the limited level of craftsmanship at that time, Buddhist statues were rough and difficult to form a stable form. Entering the stage of Taihe style Bodhisattva statues, the craftsmanship gradually stabilized, the creation became rich, and the localization mode tended to be adopted. [1] And this art originated from the Maijishan Grottoes art, with a distinct ethnic color, but the image of the cave owner presents diversity, which can be in different forms such as children, noblewomen, and monks. By the Northern Wei period (386-534 AD), Buddhist statues had formed a rich and diverse style in their clothing, with a tendency towards showcasing clear bones and delicate carvings. The realistic style was more prominent, marking the beginning of the era of Zhengguang style Buddha statues.

2.2 *Balanced Accommodating Shape*

After the gradual maturity of Chinese Buddhist statues, in order to avoid singularity and one-sidedness, Buddhist statues began to form a balanced and accommodating state. That is to pursue the perfect integration of Buddha statues. For example, the statue of Sakyamuni Tathagata was not shaped based on the image of literati or the single image of the ruler of the Heavenly Kingdom at that time, but rather formed a fusion of multiple elements, making the Buddha's face solemn and

affectionate, and the form deified without losing humanity. Although the overall form of Buddhist statues is based on human prototypes, it blurs the constraints of gender and age, forming a combination of surrealism and reality. At this time, Chinese Buddhist statues have entered a new realm. Among them, stone carved Buddha statues are the most obvious. For example, in the white stone Buddha statues unearthed in Quyang, Hebei Province, China, the overall shape of the Buddha statues is mostly round shoulders but not thin, with a broad and plump forehead, simple and soft clothing. For example, the stone Buddha statues during the Eastern Wei Dynasty were mostly sturdy in stature, with large ears and lips, wide forehead and almond eyes. There was a significant difference in overall appearance from the showing the bones and clearing the appearance of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534 AD). The expressions of Buddha statues have also begun to appear rich and diverse.

2.3 *Rich Design Techniques*

Entering the Northern Qi period (550-577 AD), the carving art of Buddha statues became more exquisite and proficient, with rich expression methods, numerous Buddhist figures, and the formation of a combined Buddha statue model. For example, during the Northern Qi Dynasty (550-577 AD) in Bozhou, Anhui Province, China, a Buddhist statue was created by a Shangguan monk. The center of the monument is a seated Buddha with a strong posture and a solemn face. The side statues are Manjushri Bodhisattva and Vimalakirti, and there are various sentient beings listening around, with different expressions on the characters. At the same time, many decorative items are carved, and the two powerful men and the double lion protectors are symmetrically left and right. The biggest characteristic of Buddhist statues during the Northern Qi period (550-577 AD) was the emphasis on large backlight. The height of the backlight in Buddhist statues from the Northern Qi period (550-577 AD) currently collected in the Shanghai Museum in China is close to one person tall. At the same time, the shape of a treasure bead is formed in the backlight of the head of the Buddha statue, and different patterns are decorated. The external appearance is a flame pattern, with a concentric circle in the middle and a lotus pattern inside. The sculpture with a large backlight does not make the Buddha statue bulky or dominate the Buddha statue itself, but rather makes the entire Buddha statue more luxurious and magnificent. During the Northern Zhou period (557-581 AD), the form,

structure, and craftsmanship of Buddha statues were larger and more exquisite. During the turmoil of history, countless temples and Buddha statues were destroyed, but the stone tablet of Buddha statues of Shakyamuni in Baoding, Northern Zhou was still intact. The development momentum of gold and copper Buddha statues in the Northern Zhou Dynasty (557-581 AD) began to weaken, but many excellent works also appeared. The Buddha statue has a high crown on top of its head, embedded in jewelry, with a robust shape and a plump face. The chest is adorned with wreaths and beads, and the details of the sculpture are exquisite. During the Sui Dynasty (581-618 AD) and Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), Buddhism was prevalent, and the techniques of Buddhist statues were more exquisite, but the overall image did not show any significant changes.

3. EVOLUTION OF BUDDHIST NICHE STATUES

The research on Buddhist statue art in China needs to start from the ancient Indian period, which was the birthplace of Buddhism. The development of Buddhist statues has a history of over 5000 years, emphasizing the simplicity and awkwardness of the Buddha's appearance, which is in line with the characteristics of folk art. The establishment of the Maurya Dynasty (approximately 324 BC to approximately 187 BC) brought ancient Indian art to its peak. The flourishing of Buddhism during the Maurya period in India left behind a large amount of Buddhist art, including Buddha statue art. The artistic creation of Buddha statues in India is mainly based on the local river god Naga and Yaksha as the main reference. After the introduction of Buddhist culture into China, although there was already local sculpture art at that time, Buddhist culture was still in its early stages and lacked symbolic modeling basis. The circular backlight and other shapes had a long history in Indian statues, but in China, it had not yet appeared. The plastic arts of Chinese sculpture were relatively mature in the Qin Dynasty (221 B.C. - 207 B.C.), and a large number of Terra Cotta Warriors unearthed can provide evidence. The experience and skills of Chinese Buddhist cave niche statues were lacking. By the Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties (220-589 AD), Buddhism gradually flourished, and Buddhist statues also developed, integrating local culture with Buddhist forms. [2] With the relocation of Emperor Xiaowen's capital to Luoyang, the excavation of Yungang Grottoes ceased, and the

construction of Longmen Grottoes Temple started, which made it become more and more enriched, forming a unique Chinese Buddhist cave niche statue.

3.1 Imitating Indian Art Forms

Buddhism was introduced into China from India, which can be divided into two modes: Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism is widely spread in China, with more devout Buddhists and emphasis on Caesaropapism. Chinese Buddhism combines Indian Buddhist culture with traditional Chinese culture to form a localized Buddhist culture. Buddhist sculpture art mainly focuses on cave carving and temple painting and sculptures. The development of Chinese Buddhist cave niche statues has evolutionary characteristics and is a product of the localization of Buddhism in China. Taking the statues in the grotto temples as an example, most of them were carved by famous craftsmen from the Northern Wei Dynasty using the flat knife method. The image of the Buddha is mainly the image of a great man, and the way of creating statues in the cave niches is one Buddha and two attendants. The main Buddha statue is in the form of flame patterns with backlight and headlight, similar to the shape of the Indian Buddha statue in the Gabbitas. During the Yungang Grottoes period in Datong, Shanxi Province, China, most of the Buddha statues were in the form of cassocks, with the right shoulder exposed and a very strong Indian color. In order to avoid the heat, people in India mostly wore light clothes, while exposing their right arm and part of their chest. Therefore, the clothing of Buddhist statues at that time matched the Indian ethnic costumes.

3.2 The Evolution of Localized Art

Buddhism was passed down to the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), and the number of Buddhist scriptures increased, including various Buddhist scripture schools such as Zen and Ritsu. Among them, Zen is the most sought after. The "Vajra Sutra" in Zen Buddhism is still widely circulated in modern times, while the Tiantai Sect reveres the "Huayan Sutra". Longmen Grottoes of the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD) in Luoyang, Henan Province, China, were the best preserved Buddhist statues and the peak of Tang Dynasty Buddhist statues. The Buddha statues during the Longmen Grottoes period in Luoyang, Henan Province, China, have undergone significant

changes in technique and form compared to the statues during the Northern Wei Dynasty. During the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), the Longmen Grottoes used a circular knife technique for carving, which was different from the flat knife technique used during the Yungang Grottoes period and ensured more vivid carving details. At the same time, in terms of statues, the Longmen Grottoes in the Tang Dynasty transformed the majestic and vigorous style of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534 AD) into a more people-friendly and gentle style that is more in line with Chinese tradition. The statues in the Longmen Grottoes in Luoyang, Henan Province, China have formed different carving styles based on different Buddhist images. The Buddha is mainly in a solemn style, the Bodhisattva is mainly in the image of women's love, and the heavens and warriors are mainly in a majestic and powerful form. From these sculptures, people can glimpse the aesthetic characteristics of the Tang Dynasty period [3]. At this stage, Buddhist statues formed many exquisite works, not only exquisite in art, but also exceptionally grand in scale. For example, the main statue of the Longmen Grottoes in Luoyang, Henan Province, China has a height of 17.14 meters and a length of 1.9 meters per ear. Most of the sculptures in the Longmen Grottoes are based on the figures of the time, and tend to be more feminine, such as the noblewomen and family performers of the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), headed in a high bun, wearing bracelets, and wearing a gauze robe and skirt. During the Wei and Jin dynasties (220-420 AD), Buddhist statues were more inclined towards deities who did not consume human fireworks, while during the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD), Buddhist statues were closer to the vivid life of the human body. People can feel the hardships of the world, be kind and humble. Different Buddhist images, either mature and dignified, dignified and virtuous, or brave and resolute, guard their own responsibilities and are related to the hierarchical concept of Confucianism at that time.

3.3 Integration into National Plastic Arts

During the Wei and Jin dynasties (220-420 AD), the Western style was more prominent in Buddhist cave niches. After the integration of Buddhism and local Chinese culture, during the prosperous Tang Dynasty (650-755 AD), traditional cultural content was integrated into the Buddhist statue style, resulting in a stronger sense of localization. From the development of Buddhist statues in China, it can be seen that there has been a gradual transition

from the West to the East, from the Gandhara art in Indian culture to the beautiful bone and clear appearance similar to Chinese mythological deities, and then to the elegant and humanized local cultural characteristics of the Tang Dynasty (650-755 AD). During the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), Chinese culture gradually matured, and many literati and painters joined in the creation of Buddhist statues in cave niches, giving Buddhist statues a stronger sense of imagery. The creation of Chinese painting is based on artistic language and forms three-dimensional decoration through different lines and colors. The lines do not express the image of objects, but also have a certain calligraphy intention, full of the power of the universe and nature, and integrate the rhythm of music to form an artistic rhythm rich in life spirit and the divine rhythm of art. By incorporating art such as painting and calligraphy into Buddhist statues, the backlight and facial features of Buddhist statues are elevated. Taking the Buddha statue in the niche of Fengxian Temple as an example, the clothes and clothing of the Buddha statue float upwards, the face is solemn, and the backlight adopts flame and lotus patterns, which are agile and dignified. Sculpture itself is a branch of art that can be co planned with painting to join the ranks of artistic creation. However, the difference between sculpture and painting is that sculpture emphasizes the exploration of three-dimensional beauty and emphasizes the creation of spatial space. [4] For example, most of the sculptures in Chinese grottoes use high relief images, reflecting the linear characteristics of Chinese painting art.

4. THE EVOLUTION OF BUDDHIST MUDRA OF TEACHING

Ancient India and ancient China are both four ancient civilizations, and the two countries have a long history of communication. The rise of Buddhism provides a spiritual bond for the integration of cultures between two countries. At the same time, Buddhist culture has also become the most influential foreign culture in China. Indian Buddhist statues have been introduced to China with Buddhist culture and have gone through a long process of development. There is a close relationship between the rise and fall of Chinese Buddhist art and Indian Buddhism. From previous research, it can be seen that Chinese and foreign scholars have conducted comprehensive research on Buddhist art in China and India, including the mudra of teaching. Buddhist handprints are also known as seals or seals, and their main forms

include mudra of meditation, mudra of fearlessness, and mudra of teaching. In early Buddhist statues in China, there were many applications of the Zen mudra of meditation and the mudra of fearlessness. Since the late Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), the form of hand prints has become increasingly complex, and different images of hand prints have become different, becoming an important way to distinguish statues. The mudra of teaching is also an important element of Buddhist statues and is widely recorded in Buddhist scriptures. The mudra of teaching represents the great power of merit and virtue, saving all sentient beings, which explains that the mudra of teaching has a very important power in Buddhism. The mudra of teaching in ancient Indian Buddhist statues can be expressed in two forms, including those of Gendra and Sarnath, which have different forms. But both mudra of teaching have traces to follow from ancient Chinese Buddhist statues.

4.1 Mudra of Teaching of the Northern Liang Dynasty (397-460 AD)

According to the form of the Buddha, there is a structure of mudra of teaching in Buddhist statues. There were no mudra of teaching in the earliest Buddhist statues in China, and only a few were found in archaeology. The earliest version of the mudra of teaching statue appeared in the stone pagoda during the Northern Liang period (397-460 AD). Among the 14 Buddha statues, 11 have their hands tied to their chests, a gesture known as the mudra. At the same time, in the Mogao Grottoes of Dunhuang in Gansu Province, China, there are also a large number of main Buddha statues holding the shape of mudra of teaching. From the analysis of the shape of a single Buddha statue, there are a relatively large number of stone Buddhas who hold the position of mudra of teaching statues. During the Northern Wei Dynasty, most of the stone statues were made with overlapping feet and hands placed on the chest to form a mudra of teaching. The statement at this stage is that mudra of teaching adopts a folding method of overlapping hands, similar to the statue of the Hindu deity.

In early China, the number of mudra of teaching statues was small, with only a few during the Northern Liang period (397-460 AD). During the Northern Wei period, the number of Buddha mudra of teaching statues increased, similar to the cross legged sculptures of the Buddha. In most cross legged stone carvings of Buddha and Bodhisattva, the hands hold the position of the Dharma mudra.

During the Northern Liang period, the number of Buddhist mudra of teaching statues was far less than that of Zen meditation, and they only appeared briefly before disappearing. In addition, through research on Buddha statues, it was found that there is a direct relationship between the mudra of teaching and the cross legged sitting posture of Buddha statues. In Chinese Buddhist statues, most of the scene sculptures with "teaching" are in the form of mudra of fearlessness.

4.2 Transitional Mudra of Teaching

In the 6th to 7th century AD, the scenes used in Buddhist statues underwent significant changes, and the gestures of the main Buddha statue became more complex, no longer relying solely on the right hand lifting the mudra of fearlessness. The shape of the fingers in the right hand underwent certain changes, with slightly curved fingers. For example, in the Kizil Grottoes in Xinjiang, China, the right hand of the main Buddha statue is placed on the leg, and the left hand holds the mudra of teaching. The shoulder position of the Buddha statue is carved with flames. The main Buddha carved the reclining position of the two deer on the left front. Through image observation, the middle and index fingers of the left hand of the main Buddha statue show a curved state, while the other three fingers are straight, which is very different from the previous mudra of fearlessness [5]. In the sculpture form of Maitreya Bodhisattva, the main figure sits on a stone platform with crossed feet, with the middle and index fingers of his right hand in a curved state, the other three fingers extended straight to the right, and his left hand holding a water purification bottle. The mudra of teaching of this period has changed. In addition, the changes of the mudra of teaching in this period directly affected the Buddha statues in the Mogao Grottoes of Dunhuang, Gansu Province, China. Most of the mudra of teaching made by the main Buddha are in a bent state with both hands and fingers.

It is no accident that the finger pattern of the Taoist Temple appeared. the Mogao Grottoes of Dunhuang in Gansu Province of China and Kizil in Xinjiang of China are located in the Western Regions, which played a very important role in the Wei Jin period (220-420 AD). The changes in the mudra of teaching are different from the mudra of fearlessness of early Buddha statues, and also differ from the Sarnath mudra of teaching model. Regardless of which hand is placed in front of the chest, the fingers are curved and the palm remains

outward. This mudra of teaching refers to the inheritance of a fixed template, incorporating the Buddhist statue style of India. This statement is similar to the configuration in the Kizil Grottoes, and the influence of Indian Kendala art is gradually fading [6]. In China and India, the shaping of mudra of teaching in Buddhist statues is generally that one index finger and thumb twisted upwards and held in front of the chest, while the other hand is placed on the leg. Through the analysis of the mudra of teaching in the Kizil Grottoes, it is evident that Buddhism originated in Tianzhu and continued to spread outwards with the development of interconnectivity in various regions during the era. After spreading to different regions, it merged with local culture and formed a new Buddhist style. The changes in the statues of mudra of teaching also developed according to this Buddhist statue pattern.

4.3 Sarnath Mudra of Teaching

After entering the 8th century, the mudra of teaching shape of Chinese Buddhist statues gradually stabilized, mainly using Sarnath's method of twisting his fingers with both hands, and it was widely used in local Buddhist statues in China. For example, in Cave 322 of Dunhuang, the main statue of the Buddha stands with both hands in front of the chest, and the index fingers of both hands are twisted with the fingertips of the thumb, forming a circle. In the 140 caves of Kumtura Grottoes, the mudra of teaching used by the main Buddha is the mudra of Dharma wheel. In the Talani Sutra, it is recorded that the mudra of teaching is twisted between the thumb and ring finger tips of the left and right hands, and the twisted fingers of the right hand are pressed against the twisted fingers of the left hand. At the same time, the other fingers of the left and right hands form an open and vertical state. Compared to the mudra of fearlessness and Zen mudra of meditation in early Buddhist statues, this type of mudra of teaching appeared relatively late and gradually appeared in the late Early Tang Dynasty. For example, the main statue in the Kizil 205 Caves and Dunhuang 329 Caves all adopt the form of printed sculptures for this mudra of teaching. One of the most typical statues that has been passed down to this day is the statue of the first Dharma wheel in the Sarnath Museum. The Buddha sits with scabs on his back and is exquisitely carved with backlighting. Under the Buddha's seat, there are many listeners and Dharma wheels. The Buddha's hands are twisted together, with fingertips facing each other. Above the

Buddha's statue, there is a flying sky, holding flower garlands, and two sides are carved with accompanying Bodhisattvas.

5. CONCLUSION

In summary, Buddhism has a long history of development in China. Although it was introduced as a foreign culture from India, it has formed a localized form over thousands of years of development. During this process, Buddhist statues, as an important component of Buddhist culture, also achieved significant development. From the current existing Buddhist statues and historical records, the development of Chinese Buddhist statue art has gone through several important stages of transformation. Starting from the introduction of Buddhist statue images from India, the statue based method gradually integrated into the localization of Chinese content. There have been significant changes in the art of Buddha statues, cave niches, and mudra of teaching. The art of the statues gradually integrated into localized culture, making Buddhist statues closer to the elegance, compassion, and humanity of traditional Chinese culture, and closer to Chinese Confucianism. During the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD), it reached its peak and formed a relatively stable statue model, which has been passed down to this day. Although there are slight changes, the overall changes are not significant. The evolution of Buddhist statues also reflects the development of Chinese culture and technology, as well as the progress in the field of art in Chinese history.

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