

Image Localization in China's Buddhist Sculptures of Tang Dynasty

Wang Han

Ph.d. in University Psl, 100088, China

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Abstract: This paper deals with image localization in China's Buddhist sculptures of Tang dynasty, which are illustrated based on some pictures. According to the analysis of the images in China's Buddhist sculptures of Tang dynasty, Buddhist sculptures of the Tang Dynasty have completely omitted the foreign image of the high nose and deep eyes. And Buddhist sculptures of the Tang Dynasty have been reached to a higher level and stage; that is, the secularization, localization stage.

1. Introduction

Buddhism, originated in India, was introduced to China during the Eastern Han Dynasty (around 25-220AD). And Buddhist statues, with the promotion and dissemination of Buddhism, achieved its transformation from imitating foreign art during the Northern and Southern Dynasties(420-589) to initiating the localized creation. Until the Tang Dynasty, sculptural art basically completed the transformation of localization, vividly shaping Buddhist images with distinctive characteristics, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1 The head of the 45th cave of Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes, Tang Dynasty, clay sculpture painting, source: China Grottoes-Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes, Volume 4. Beijing, Cultural Relics Publishing House, 1992, p.39.

As shown in Figure 1, from left to right are the three Buddhist sculptures in Cave 45 of Mogao

Grottoes, which are respectively named the heavenly king, Bodhisattva and Buddha disciples. When compared, these three works will make us amazed at the realistic and distinguishing ability of the craftsmen of the Tang Dynasty. Specifically speaking, the king is of fierce and mighty expression; the Bodhisattva is of graceful posture with kind eyebrows and eyes, while the disciples are courteous and careful, honest and kind. Through modeling language, craftsmen accurately portray sculptures of various characters, identities and temperaments; and different textures can even be clearly identified via their clothing, which is shown in Figure 2.



Fig.2 Artial Enlarged View of Figure 1

Figure 2 shows the partial head of a Bodhisattva painted on a clay sculpture in Dunhuang. The Monk Daocheng of Song Dynasty, depicted many works of the Tang Dynasty as “children from palace are like a Bodhisattva” in the book *Shi Shi Yao Lan*[1]. Craftsmen learned from image shaping experiences of palace female servants, especially of their curvy eyebrows, plump cheeks, soft eyes and kind smiles that make the audience feel awfully cordial[2]. This Bodhisattva of feminine, sweet and secularized image, is very affinity, which conforms to the mission of saving all living beings.



Fig.3 Enlarged View of the Head of Figure 1

Figure 3 depicts the head of Buddha disciple, Ananda, which is the image of a handsome young man. The craftsman just gave a brief engraving of the face and head and weakened the depiction of facial bones and muscles, making the facial features more prominent. In addition, changes in the face are engraved subtle and richly to mainly reflect the handsome appearance with delicate and

tender skin. Ananda is the youngest Buddhist disciple and is said to “know the most knowledge”. Hence, his facial expressions and lips are slightly raised with his eyes downwards, which is not only to reflect the Buddhist disciples’ humility, but his eyes give people a lively look, as if he is thinking about something. The craftsmen engraved the sculpture closely revolving around the image of a handsome, honest, smart and thoughtful boy, so that the audience can easily guess that this is the image of a Buddha disciple.



Fig.4 Enlarged View of the Head of Figure 1

Figure 4 shows the head of the Heavenly King in Figure 1. The carving technique of the Protector Heavenly King is very different from that of the Bodhisattva and Buddha disciples of full and round face. Similar to the image of the ancient Chinese warrior, all its ups and downs and carvings are tightly surrounding the bone and muscle structure; in addition, its facial expression is intense, the ups and downs are large with less facial transition, generating people a sense of vicissitudes in age and mighty temperament. The raised eyebrows, the exaggerated brow-bones and cheekbones, the sunken eye sockets, the extremely prominent eyeballs, the enlarged nostrils, and the movement and contraction of the frown muscles correspond to each other, which is a unique expression when a person is angry, nervous, or concentrated. And the image of its majesty and deterrence and solemn protection of the law is expressed through obvious firmness generated by the tense muscles.

The images mentioned above are not only full of personality, but also rich in curving details. The texture created by craftsmen can be recognized from the clothes of the heavenly kings, Bodhisattva and Buddha disciples, as shown in Figure 5.



Fig.5 Artial Enlarged View of Figure 1

According to Figure 5, a partial screenshot of the clothes in Figure 1, three clothes, from left to right, are respectively thick and firm armor, silky soft tulle, thick dresses of cotton and linen and other textures. And it can be found that through the thickness of the folds, these three clothes with different thicknesses are not much different in the actual carving but craftsmen distinguishes them mainly by folds and outer contour lines.

Generally speaking, outer contour is less likely to change with the body curve with the harder and firmer materials; and it is less likely to produce wrinkles with the thicker texture. Therefore, the craftsman made the outer contour line of this armor relatively straight, only slightly swelled outwards. In addition, there are some concave and convex decorative patterns carved on the surface of the armor, but no folds were formed to express the hard armor made of leather and iron, which is like the armor of a Chinese warrior. To display the smooth and soft thin silk cloth worn by the Bodhisattva, craftsmen curved a lot of folds and formed a large number of U-shaped lines, which vaguely revealed the ups and downs of the body structure. When carving these folds, the craftsmen did not really carved thin clothes of the Bodhisattva, but the shape of the folds to show the sense of thinness; and the folds are carved with thick upper and lower thin. Therefore, the clothes don't look thickened although there are many folds, thus giving us the sense of cloth like cicada wings. When it comes to a loose dress of a thicker cloth on a Buddha disciple, the folds are evenly draped, which is the characteristic of a thicker cloth. Besides, it does not reveal the structure and outline of the body much in order to distinguish it from the gauze on the Bodhisattva. There are also no U-shaped folds that are distinguished from the complex folds on the Bodhisattva, forming a kind of diverse and distinguished aesthetics.

According to the analysis of the above images, Buddhist sculptures of the Tang Dynasty have completely got rid of the foreign image of the high nose and deep eyes. And through drawing on the image modeling of the local figures, Buddhist sculptures of the Tang Dynasty have been reached to a higher level and stage; that is, the secularization, localization stage.

References

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