The Humanistic and Aesthetic Qualities of Guilin Cliff Rock Carving

2021, Vol.2 No.8
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DOI: 10.37420/j.adr.2021.035
https://masonpublish.org

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Abstract
Guilin is endowed with unique resources of landscape culture and cliff rock carvings, among which the cliff Buddha statues are the best. This paper interprets the aesthetic connotation and artistic achievement of its cliff Buddha statues from the big cultural background of history to reveal the relationship between religion, art, and culture realistically and scientifically. This has a very far-reaching impact and great significance for revealing the historical matrix of Guilin Buddhism, filling the gaps of religious cave art in the Lingnan region, and enhancing the development level of the Guilin cultural tourism industry and the profound connotation of the famous historical and cultural city.

Keywords
Guilin; Cliff Rock Buddha Statue; Aesthetic connotation; Artistic achievement

The Profound Art of Guilin Cliff Rock Carving

Guilin has a world of scenic beauty and a long history of culture, the Qing Dynasty scholar Ye Changchi in the "Stone of Speech" there are words: "Guilin boasts some of the 'finest mountains and rivers under heaven', and during the Tang and Song Dynasties, scholars and bureaucrats who came here from Lingnan inscribed names and wrote poems, and the cliffs were almost everywhere," pointing out the profound art of Guilin cliff rock carving. Guilin cliff rock carvings of a wide variety, huge shape, nearly 3,000 stone wall books and statues distributed in Guilin inside and outside the cliff caves, so that culture and these mountains organically into the Guilin cityscape system. Among them, there are as many as 600 cliff statues, which are distributed in Diecai Mountain, Fubo Mountain, West Mountain and Liuma Mountain. The cliff statues in Guilin are mainly Buddhist statues, as the second-largest Buddhist grotto group in southern China after the Dazu Grottoes in Sichuan, there are as many as 582 cliff statues of Buddha, including 242 on West Mountain, 23 on Liuma Mountain, 219 on Fubo Mountain and 98 on Diecai Mountain. These statues of different forms and fine carving not only deeply reflect the history and culture of Guilin but also provide rich

stone carving documents for studying the history of Buddhism in the south of China. At the same time, these fine statues, which contain the aesthetic ideals of wisdom and compassion, constitute a gallery of art and beautiful scenery on the cliffs.

Archaeological data show that in the late Western Han Dynasty, Buddhism was spread from the mouth of the Ganges River in India to the area of the Gulf of Tonkin by the Maritime Silk Road, and then reached Cangwu (Wuzhou, Guangxi) along the Nanliu River and the Beiliu River through the Jiaoguang Passage from Hepu. After the Jin Dynasty, the center of gravity of Buddhism in Guangxi gradually moved northward along the Gui River and the Li River. With the establishment of Guilin as the political, economic, and cultural center of the Guangxi region in ancient times, Guilin Buddhism flourished unprecedentedly in the Tang Dynasty, showing a scene of flourishing Buddhism and becoming one of the Buddhist centers in the south of China. The flourishing Buddhism had a wide and profound impact on Guilin's society, history, philosophy, literature, art, and other cultural forms. At that time, many Buddhist monks came to Guangxi to lecture on Buddhist scriptures. They trudged through mountains and rivers, carved stone inscriptions, which started the prevalence of the style of cave statue making. A large number of excellent craftsmen used techniques such as round carving, relief carving, line carving, and hollowing to bring profound religious content to life on the cliffs, reaching a state of perfection. Protecting the excellent intangible cultures of different nationalities and regions and maintaining the diversity of world cultures have become important issues of concern to the international community. It is necessary to vigorously strengthen the excavation and protection of national cultures, attach importance to the protection of cultural relics and intangible cultural heritage, and do a good job of organizing the cultural canon. Therefore, strengthening the research and analysis of the cultural connotation and artistic becoming of the Buddhist cliff statues in Guilin in the context of the great culture of history, revealing the relationship between religion, art, and culture realistically and scientifically, has a very far-reaching impact and significant connotation for revealing the historical matrix of Guilin Buddhism, filling the gaps of religious cave art in the Lingnan region, enhancing the development level of Guilin cultural tourism industry and the profound connotation of the famous historical city.

The Aesthetic Connotation and Artistic Achievement of Guilin Cliff Rock Buddha Statues

Unique Style and Self-contained

The form of the cliff carved Buddha statues in Guilin are quite different from those in Central Plain and northern China, but they are similar to those in India and South Asia, which proves that Guangxi Buddhism was introduced from South Asia by sea, the origins of the Buddhist system that did not belong to the north. In 1941, professor Luo Xianglin, a famous scholar in modern times,

inspected the cliff Buddha statues in Guilin and pointed out in his Research on The Cliff Buddha Statues in Guilin in the Tang Dynasty that although the cliff Buddha statues in Guilin were huge and exquisite in shape, they were quite different from those in Yungang in Datong, Shanxi, and Longmen in Luoyang, Henan. However, it has many similarities with the Bhutigaya Giant Buddha statues in India and the Java Buddha House Giant Buddha Statues in South Asia. For example, "Akshobhya Buddha has a round and long face with heavy end, a high but slightly waveless nose root, with eyes not connected to the nose root, and long, flat and serious eyes, which are not much like the eyes of the Chinese, but also unlike the eyes of the Hu people in northwest China". Professor Luo combined with relevant historical data and concluded that Buddhism in Lingnan was introduced from India through Vietnam at the end of the Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms, and was widely spread during the Six Dynasties and that temples and Buddha statues were flourished during the Sui and Tang Dynasties. He pointed out that Guilin was an important passageway for Indian Buddhism to enter China from the South Seas, and the West Mountain in Guilin was one of the centers of Buddhist activities. The cliff statues of West Mountain are distributed in West Mountain, Qian Mountain, Longtou Mountain, Liyu Mountain, and Guanyin Mountain, 98 niches and 242 statues of the cliff before the middle of Tang Dynasty, 2 niches and 2 stone pagodas in relief, 29 light niches, 7 niches of the light niche of the statue, mostly 1 niche and 3 statues, and also 5, 7 and 11 statues; the largest is about 200cm high, the smallest is only 5cm. Mainly engraved with Lushena, Guanyin, Akshobhya, and their disciples, individual niches also have offerers. Although these statues are not as grand as those in the north, they are of different forms, beautifully carved, and have a self-contained style, for example, the 11th niche of Avalokitesvara in Guanyin Peak is 1.13 meters high, with a long, square face, two ears hanging over the shoulders, a wide chest and thin waist, bare breast and shoulders, and a lightly floating robe with a natural attitude, representing the grotto art of Lingnan, which has important historical value and artistic characteristics. The common features of the Guilin cliff stone carvings of Buddha are: the face is long and plump, the ears hang down to the shoulders, the chest is wide and the waist is thin, the breast and shoulders are bare, the robe is light and thin, and the demeanor is mild, among which the earliest dated statue of Li Shi is particularly typical. The statue of Li Shi was engraved on Guanyin Peak in the first year of the Tang Dynasty (679). The statue is carved in a high bun, a plump face, a high nose, long flat eyes, a slightly upturned mouth, and two ears hanging over the shoulders. The statue has a three-sided head ornament, a pendant around the neck, full-body exposure, a clothesline carved on the right, hands arched, sitting on a lotus platform, and leaning sideways towards the Buddha. This shape is influenced by the art of Mola, reflects the love of nudity, advocating the aesthetic point of view of sensuality and Lingnan style of modeling features. Its carving skill is the best in Guilin, which not only contains the spiritual pursuit of the Buddhist monks but also shows the unique artistic elements.

Close to the World and Sensitize the Public

The cliff-carved Buddha in Guilin mentioned earlier is different from both the Chinese Han and Tibetan plateau. Instead of sticking to rigid forms of expression and religious rituals, it is good at drawing inspiration from real life and making bold imagination, endows the hard rock with vigor, and manifests the obvious secular tendency and the rich life-breath in the subject matter and the performance. Marx pointed out that there are two major ways for human beings to grasp the world: art and religion, and that religion and art share a common spiritual shore, and striving to create a spiritual temple to hold emotions is what they have in common. Guilin cliff rock Buddha statues are close to secular life in an artistic way, creating folklore, secularized and earthly religious images, shortening the distance between man and God, and reaching out to a wider range of beings. The word "image", quoted from Buddhism, does not focus on the thing itself, but on the doctrine beyond the concrete image. Vivid and accessible images are better than abstract doctrines, bring the illusory gods from high places close at hand, and make the esoteric doctrines as common sense.

For example, in the 23 cliff statues located at the northern foot of Liuma Mountain, the 1-meter-high Buddha sits in the center of lion seat, with a high meat bun, full face, two ears hanging down from the shoulders, wearing a wide coat with commendable sleeves, a fine pattern of shaded carvings and an oblique pointed collar, the left hand pressed to the knee, the right hand raised, and casting the seal of fearlessness. On either side are the disciples' Ananda and Kasyapa, with their palms, joined sideways towards the Buddha. Ananda has a clear face, while Kasyapa has a high nose and deep eyes, a half-bald top and curly beard, and bends his head in a reverent salute to the Buddha. The Bodhisattva has a long, thin body and a plump, rounded face. The right-headed Bodhisattva has his left arm hanging down, holding a purifying vase. On the outer side of the Bodhisattva is Vajra Rex, with a helmet on his head and a long robe on his head, holding a halberd and a sword; the right-headed Vajra has angry eyes and crossed eyebrows, and a long beard under his jaw.

These cliff Buddha statues of different sizes and forms are vivid and full of spirit, with less solemnity of God and more human image and temperament, reflecting the aesthetic pursuit of the unity of God and man. The carving techniques are also extremely diverse, with sophisticated skills and a tendency to realism. The other statues located in Mount Fubo, 45 niches and 219 statues exist, mainly Buddhist ones, both seated and standing, with very free posture, harmonious and proportional body, rich face, delicate skin, and gradually calming spiritual vigor, showing secularization and humanization, which have important artistic reference value. Spirituality and physicality go hand in hand, religion and secularism go hand in hand. Although the cliff-carved Buddha statues in Guilin reflect religious beliefs and fantasies, they are a twisted representation of reality and hold the ideal of people at that time to pursue liberation and seek true meaning, reflecting Buddhist teachings and the aesthetic style of the Lingnan region from different sides.

Fit into the Landscape

The combination of landscape and human landscape has given birth to the living and spiritual landscape group of cliff-carved Buddha statues in Guilin. In the surroundings of mountains, forests, and streams, hundreds of stone statues are carved in different poses to achieve the artistic effect of "like a natural", making the landscape and cultural landscape complement each other, which can be said to be another important feature of Guilin cliff rock carvings of Buddha. First of all, it is very respectful of nature and environment, most of the cliff rock statues in Guilin are built in famous mountains and scenic spots, integrating architecture, carving, and painting arts in one, reflecting with mountains, rocks, forests and springs, and harmoniously symbiotic with cliff walls, reflecting not only exquisite and superb craftsmanship but also reflecting touching and deep artistic charm, giving the natural landscape with spirituality, making people "A mountain is like a picture, a mountain is like a history" (Chen Yuanlong: "Poem of Long Yin Cave"). This is the logical and natural elevation of religion, which seems to be in line with the Taoist Laozi's so-called "great is passing away, passing away is far, far is reverse" (" 大曰逝，逝曰远，远曰反 ") process of reverberation, and one can even consider this reverberation as transcendence, as a kind of "self-transcendence" that "alone with the spirit of heaven and earth". Natural beauty provides the foundation for artistic beauty. "The landscape made by poets must conform to nature", "the wise enjoy mountains, the benevolent enjoy water", which is the incisive summary of our ancestors' aesthetic ideal and artistic philosophy of expressing love for mountains and rivers. The mutual infiltration between nature, religion, and art pushes the cliff Buddha statues in Guilin to a lofty realm of magic, abundance, and magnificence. This kind of communication between mind and nature is the sublimation of worship and beauty so that believers can wander in the mountains and rivers, and obtain safe soul belonging and beautiful spiritual hope.

Originality and Innovation

The artists of ancient Buddhist statues, with their dexterous hands, have perfectly demonstrated the extraordinary artistic expression and the inexhaustible creativity of the Chinese nation while expressing religious devotion. Guilin's cliff rock statues are rich in expressions, and the artisans of the past generations have left immortal masterpieces for future generations with their superb artistic attainments and skillful work, constituting a wonder in the field of religious art and a treasure in the treasury of Lingnan culture. For example, the "Statue of Sixteen Venerables" preserved in Long Yin Rock is the representative work of Guan Xiu, a famous painting monk in the Five Dynasties. The sculpting technique is general and concise, with a strong sense of the whole, not only paying attention to the proportion close to reality, but also the natural coordination of the ups and downs, connections, and changes of details. Some of the knives are simple and rough, the shape is simple and majestic, thick and powerful; some of the knives are delicate and varied, the lines are in a myriad of

postures, either hard or loose, straight or curved, smooth or stagnant, the points and lines are interspersed, sparse and dense. The composition is very strict, and despite the intricate layers of figures, it is harmonious and unified, with movement and relaxation. The artist's brilliance comes out on the page and makes a new face. As far as its aesthetic characteristics are concerned, it integrates delicacy into magnificence, which is worthy of being a masterpiece of vivid portrayal. Another example is a cursive Buddhist character carved by Wang Jingshan in 1836 at Long Yin Rock, which is 70cm high and 82cm wide and has attracted the interest of countless visitors over the past hundred years. From a distance, it looks like an old woman with her hair in a bun, a devout Buddhist believer, kneeling on both knees, holding incense in both hands, chanting with her eyes closed, and worshipping Guanyin with her head bent, and even a lingering smoke between the strokes. A closer look, it is a powerful "Buddha" (" 佛 ") with four strokes. This kind of shape is similar to the shape of the word god. The creation of "there are paintings in the word and people in the painting" can be called wonderful.

Imagery Aesthetics, Detached and Selfless

Religion and art are complex spiritual activities of human beings, as well as a social ideology and historical and cultural phenomenon, and they are mutually exclusive and integrated. Religion uses art as a tool for preaching, and art provides a vivid image expression for religion; religion constructs a sacred spiritual core for art, and art imbues religion with strong imagery and aesthetic sentiments. Guilin's cliff rock Buddha statues reach this state of transcendent forgetfulness with sensitive and wise embodiment, associating the poetry of art with the divinity of religion in a deep kernel, sublimating in faith and aesthetic pleasure and pain. Religious faith cannot be separated from emotion, and religious emotion is the driving force behind religious faith, and it is these sincere emotions that have contributed to the cliff stone carvings of Buddha statues in Guilin. For example, the wind cave in the superposition mountain, the crane two statues, after the destruction of the Tang dynasty statue of Buddha in Emperor Wuzong was severely damaged, now 98 statues remain, with obvious Song dynasty statue-making techniques and style, the characters are different forms, the attitude is exquisite, but without exception are thin face, melancholy attitude, pouring the human world about life and death, good and evil, spiritual and physical measurement and thinking. The work is deeply touching with its extraordinary layout and compassionate imagery that transcends the envelope of glorification and admiration.

Funding

This paper is supported by the following two projects:

[1] Education Reform Project of Guilin Tourism University "Research and Practice on the Tal-

ent Cultivation Mode of 'Diversified Integration' of Hotel Management Major from the Perspective of New Liberal Arts" [No. 2021XJJG023].

[2] Guangxi Science and Technology Base and Talent Special Project "China-ASEAN Tourism Cooperation Research Collaborative Innovation Center" [No. 2017AD19030].

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