



RESEARCH PAPER

The Localization of Buddhist Art in China: A Case of "Emperor and Empress Worshipping Buddha" during the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties

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ABSTRACT

In the long history of China, Buddhist culture flourished during the Wei, Jin, and North and South Dynasties, with Buddhist temples and grottoes such as Yungang, Gongyi, and Longmen emerging, and relief murals frequently depicting scenes of Buddhist rituals performed by emperors and queens. This article focuses on the art of Buddhist rituals of the empresses and queens, and shows the fusion of Buddhism and Chinese culture. Through the Wei Shu and other historical materials, the relationship between the empresses and Buddhism is sorted out; combined with anthologies and epitaphs, details of Buddhist rituals by the nobility are explored. Image analyses focus on cave murals, interpreting religious symbolism and aesthetics. This interdisciplinary study integrates historical, artistic, religious, and sociological perspectives, revealing the connotations of the Buddhist rituals of the Empress and the Empress, demonstrating the paths of the localisation of Buddhist art and its influence, deepening the understanding of history and culture, and providing insights into the study of contemporary art.

KEYWORDS Buddhist Art, Localisation Studies, Emperor and Empress Salute to Buddha

Introduction

Buddhism was introduced into China since Yongping (AD 64) of the Eastern Han Dynasty, and the art of Buddhist statues was initially influenced by the artistic styles of Gandhara and Moghul, showing obvious exotic characteristics in both themes and means of expression (Ruan, 2004). During the Wei and Jin Dynasties (AD 386-589), Chinese society was in turmoil and change, with the division and reorganisation of the political landscape and the collision of ideological and cultural pluralism, which provided fertile soil for the development of Buddhism. During the Wei, Jin, and North-South Dynasties, the three religions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism converged, and Buddhism began to widely penetrate into all levels of society. Buddhist art, as an important material carrier of Buddhist beliefs, experienced significant changes in its thematic content, image shaping, forms of expression, and ceremonial costumes during the Wei and Jin dynasties. With the fusion of Buddhist thought and traditional Chinese culture, elements of Chinese native art were gradually integrated into the creation of Buddhist statues.

The long period of division and war led to the destruction of lives and the suffering of the people. The frequent change of power made the regime in need of a strong spiritual force to unite people's hearts and solidify the rule. In order to consolidate their rule, the imperial emperors made use of the potential power of Mahayana Buddhism to pacify people's hearts and promote national harmony, as well as to alleviate social conflicts and strengthen the authority and legitimacy of their political rule, they made great efforts to propagate Buddhism and open caves for the construction of statues (Jiang, 2011). China's most famous Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes, Yungang Grottoes, Longmen Grottoes, Maijishan Grottoes, Bingling Temple Grottoes, and Gongyi Grottoes were all built during this period,

with the Yungang Grottoes, Longmen Grottoes, and Gongyi Grottoes all being built during the Northern Wei Dynasty. Almost all the major grottoes since the Northern Wei Dynasty, there are the emperor and queen of the Buddha ritual theme of artistic creation, or reliefs, or murals. At the same time, a large number of works permeated with elements of Buddhist rituals of the emperors and queens or the powerful and noble have also been circulated in the folklore. These works are very different from the early Buddhist art in terms of composition, clothing and rituals. It can be said that the theme of 'Rites to Buddha by the Empress and Empress' is a typical representative of the localisation of Buddhist art in China in the Wei, Jin and North-South Dynasties, and it is also the physical carrier of the fusion of Buddhist philosophical thought with Chinese native Confucianism and Taoism.

Through the study of the 'Emperor and Empress Salute to Buddha' theme, we can clearly see the vivid scene of the deep integration of Hu and Han cultures in the field of Buddhist art. From the evolution of the style of dress, to the subtle presentation of ritual details, all highlight the magnificent vitality of this special historical period of multicultural collision, absorption, fusion, for future generations to analyse the social landscape at that time, cultural exchanges provide a valuable and intuitive visual basis.

Literature Review

Tang Chi comprehends the development lineage of Buddhist art during the Wei, Jin, and North and South Dynasties, which involves the presentation of the 'imperial queen saluting Buddha' theme in cave art, providing a basic framework for understanding the artistic expression of this theme (Jin, 2019). He Yun'ao explores the spread and evolution of Buddhist culture from the perspective of material culture, and analyses the socio-cultural phenomenon reflected in the 'Empress and Empress Salute to Buddha' motif, pointing out that it is an important embodiment of the combination of Buddhism and local political culture (Liu, Li and Shao, et al., 2017).

Most scholars focus on the study of the artistic characteristics of the 'Emperor and Empress Rites to Buddha' theme. For example, through iconographic analysis, it reveals how the carving techniques, character modelling, and compositional layout integrate elements of Indian Buddhist art and traditional Chinese art, showing the unique style of the localisation of Buddhist art. Or from the level of cultural connotation, that the theme of 'Emperor and Empress Salute to Buddha' reflects the intertwining of imperial power and divine power at that time, as well as the interpenetration of Buddhist teachings and traditional Chinese Confucian ethical concepts.

There are some shortcomings in the existing studies. On the one hand, there is a lack of detailed research on the differences between different regions and forms of expression of the theme of 'Imperial Rites to the Buddha', and a lack of systematic comparative analyses across regions and forms. On the other hand, less attention has been paid to the spread and evolution of this theme in folk Buddhist art, and many works of art, though not explicitly titled as imperial and queen salute to Buddha, explicitly show the element of imperial salute to Buddha. The same applies to the deepening of a comprehensive understanding of the theme of 'Imperial Rituals' during the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties in the process of the localisation of Buddhist art in China.

Material and Methods

Through the method of documentary research, this paper has extensively reviewed the official historical materials such as the Book of Wei, the Book of Song, and the Book of Southern Qi, from which it has systematically sorted out the political initiatives and

religious activities related to Buddhism by the emperors and queens of various dynasties, and deeply excavated the intrinsic correlation between the dissemination of Buddhism, the development of sects, and the rituals of Buddhism by the emperors and queens. At the same time, this paper also refers to the valuable materials such as contemporary anthologies and epitaphs to explore the details of the Buddhist rituals of the aristocracy, which provides a solid textual basis for the restoration of the historical situation. In addition, using the image analysis method, this paper focuses on the reliefs and murals of the Buddha rituals of the emperors and queens surviving in the Yungang Grottoes, Longmen Grottoes, and Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, and starts from the visual elements of the picture composition, character modelling, clothing textures, action gestures, and spatial layout, to deeply interpret the religious allegory, hierarchical order, and aesthetic styles, and to visualize the combination of the Buddhist art and the secular imperial power in the figurative expression. Finally, through the interdisciplinary research method, this paper integrates the perspectives of history, art, religion, sociology, etc., to restore the background and political ecology of the era by history, to analyse the modelling style and creative techniques by art, to explain the integration of doctrine and ritual presentation by religion, and to gain insights into the interaction between classes and the dissemination of beliefs from the perspective of sociology, so as to explain the complex and diversified connotations behind the themes of the imperial rituals of the Buddha in a multi-dimensional way.

The origin of the theme of ‘Emperor and Empress Salute to Buddha’ in the period of Wei, Jin and North-South Dynasties

Since the outbreak of the Yellow Turban Uprising at the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty, the country was plunged into a situation of vassalage, war and chaos, through the three kingdoms, after a short period of unification, but also due to the ‘Eight Kings Rebellion’ triggered the ‘five hu chaotic China’, the northern ethnic minorities have to the south, the Central Plains, with frequent regime changes, there was a stage of sixteen countries in the chaos of war. There was a phase of war between the sixteen kingdoms. The Eastern Jin Dynasty was in the south of the Yangtze River, the confrontation between the north and the south continued, the southern dynasty through the Song, Qi, Liang, Chen, four generations of change, the northern dynasty, the Northern Wei, Eastern Wei, Western Wei, Northern Qi, Northern Zhou alternation. The long period of division and war resulted in the destruction of lives and the suffering of the people. The frequent change of power made a strong spiritual force urgently needed within the regime to unite people's hearts and stabilise the rule (Lu, 2019).

Buddhism showed strong adaptability and integration in the process of spreading. On the one hand, many Western monks came to the Central Plains to translate scriptures and give lectures, and Hatamarash presided over the translation of classics such as The Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law and The Sutra Spoken by Vimalakirti, which were accurately and fluently translated, and had a profound influence on the development of Buddhism in the later generations. On the other hand, metaphysical thought coincided with the Buddhist idea of avoiding the world. Wei and Jin metaphysics provided the medium and opportunity for the spread of Buddhism in the Middle Kingdom. Under the joint promotion of Confucianism and Taoism, Buddhism, as a foreign culture, was recreated in the Chinese cultural soil.

During the Wei, Jin, and North-South Dynasties, the spread of Buddhism took on a prairie fire proportions. During the period of Wei, Jin, and North and South Dynasties, the spread of Buddhism was a blazing fire, and the promotion of Buddhism and Buddhist art by the ruling class played a key role in the rapid development of Buddhism and Buddhist art. Temple buildings sprang up in the Central Plains. The emperors and empresses honoured and advocated Buddhism, which attracted attention from the superstructure to

the civil society. In the Northern Wei Dynasty, there were more than 1,000 Buddhist temples in Luoyang alone, and 'the pagodas were all in the same place'. Yungang Grottoes, Longmen Grottoes and other large grottoes and temples excavation, but also cohesion of countless craftsmen's efforts, the cave statues of solemn, exquisite murals, set architecture, sculpture, painting art in one, become a visual display of Buddhist beliefs and dissemination of the centre. This development was not only a political demand of the ruling class to consolidate power, but also a natural choice under the great cultural integration of the Hu and Han peoples.

There was already an inextricable link between imperial emperors and Mahayana Buddhism, which was integrated into the predominantly monarchical political form of China. In China, from the early Northern Wei Dynasty onwards, the act of 'worshipping the emperor is worshipping Nirvana' had already appeared. For example, the Venerable Daoist An, in addition to the construction of the Yungang Grottoes. At the same time, there are a large number of masters, subordinate to the form. This also stems from the Chinese national conditions of the relationship between heaven and man, ruler and subject, superiority and inferiority. In the worship of Buddha's faith, the Southern Dynasty Liang Wu Di Xiao Yan can be called a typical representative. Born into the royal family of Southern Qi, Xiao Yan rose to prominence during the political turmoil of the late Southern Qi, and was well aware of the instability of the people's hearts under the frequent changes of power. He promoted Buddhism and built Buddhist temples, and there were more than 500 temples in Jiankang alone. He sacrificed himself four times to Tongtai Temple, pretending to be a monk, the courtiers had to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to redeem it, which, on the one hand, to the world to show their devotion to Buddhism, for the people to set up an example of respect for Buddhism; on the other hand, through this behaviour, to the people to pass on the image of compassion, love, so that the people in the Buddhist faith to find solace in the mind, forget the war chaos and disturbance, easing the social contradictions. The Northern Dynasties also favoured Buddhism. During the Northern Wei Dynasty, Tao Wudi Tuoba Gui, at the beginning of his reign, realised the potential power of Buddhism to pacify people's hearts and promote national harmony, and began to introduce Buddhism by building a Buddhist temple in Pingcheng. After Wencheng Emperor Tuoba Joon assumed the throne, he even promoted Buddhism, and the excavation of the Yungang Grottoes was a great example of his reverence for Buddhism. The Five Caves of Tanya, built according to the face of the founding emperor of the Northern Wei Dynasty, allowed the Xianbei and Han Chinese populations to gradually bridge the gap between the ethnic groups and identify themselves with the rule of the Northern Wei Dynasty by worshipping the Buddha's statues. When Emperor Tuoba Hong carried out the reform of Sinicisation, he made use of the Buddhist teachings of compassion and equality to promote the concept of ethnic equality, reduce the resistance to Sinicisation, and promote the deep integration of the Xianbei and Han Chinese in terms of culture, customs, and political systems, thus laying the ideological foundation for the stability and development of the Northern Wei Dynasty.

These rulers used Buddhism to rule people's hearts and minds at the spiritual level, easing conflicts; at the political level, to strengthen the authority and legitimacy of the rule, Buddhism became a tool to consolidate state power. At the same time, the Wei, Jin, and North-South Dynasties were the first period of great ethnic migration and integration in Chinese history. The migration of peoples led to the fusion and collision of cultures. For the minority regimes, Buddhism became a bridge between their own cultures and those of the Han Chinese in the Central Plains. Take the Houzhao founded by the Capricorns as an example, Shi Le and Shi Hu employed the monk Fotucheng from the Western region, who won respect by virtue of his magical spells and profound Buddhist cultivation. Under the influence of Fotucheng, Buddhism was prevalent in Later Zhao, and the Hu people found commonalities with Han culture in Buddhist beliefs, such as the moral concepts of compassion and kindness advocated by Buddhism, which were compatible

with the traditional Han Confucian moral norms, so the Hu people gradually accepted the Han cultural etiquette, and the Han people were less reluctant to reject the Hu people because of their common beliefs, and the Hu and Han cultures began to merge initially under the bond of Buddhism.

Among the Han literati and scholars, the Xuan Feng (玄风) was prevalent, and the style of Qinghua (清谈) pervaded the scholars' class. In the late Wei and Jin Dynasties, the wars made the literati indifferent to politics, pursuing high spirituality, and deeply bored with emptiness, and Wushi San became popular in the society. The popularity of Wushisan led to the popularity of the wide-robed and big-sleeved garments in the society. At the same time, metaphysical thinking also coincided with the Buddhist idea of avoiding the world. Some accomplished high abominations, such as Zhi Qian, infiltrated Buddhist teachings into metaphysics and effectively used metaphysics to spread Buddhism (Luo, 2006). Many Han emperors and aristocrats financed the cause of translating scriptures, and Hatimo Roshi translated scriptures and gave lectures in Chang'an, bringing together monks and scholars from all directions, translating a large number of exquisite Buddhist texts, such as the Zhongguo Lun, the Hundred Treatises, and other classics of the Zhongguo school, which injected vitality into the development of Chinese Buddhist philosophy.

Artistic Representations of Buddhist Rituals by Emperors and Empresses

During the Wei, Jin and North and South Dynasties, cave temples flourished as important material carriers of Buddhist beliefs. The Yungang Grottoes, Longmen Grottoes and Gongyi Grottoes were all built during the Northern Wei Dynasty. Other famous grottoes in China, such as the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang and the Maijishan Grottoes, were built during this period. The Gongyi Grottoes and Longmen's Binyangzhong Cave both have extremely fine relief carvings of the emperor and queen saluting the Buddha.

Gongyi Grottoes Temple, located in today's Gongyi City, northeast of Dali Mountain, the north bank of the Yiluo River, and Yungang, Longmen Grottoes, the same as the Northern Wei Dynasty Royal Grottoes. There are 5 existing caves, 1 thousand Buddha niches, 3 cliff statues, 328 cliff niches, 186 inscriptions and 7743 Buddha statues, which are the essence of Buddhist art. And the most popular 'Emperor and Queen Rites Buddha Figure' is located in the first cave south of the entrance on both sides of the wall, the east side of the Emperor Rites Buddha Figure, the west side of the Empress Rites Buddha Figure, the two are opposite, just like a long scroll of history unfolding, will be the Northern Wei Dynasty Imperial Rites of the Buddhist spectacle is revealed.

The Emperor's Rites of Buddha is carved in layers, and the layout is exquisite. The first layer, the emperor wearing a crown and tassel, wearing a curved collar and wide-sleeved robes, waist ribbons fluttering, footsteps cloud crawler, holding a long-handled lotus, showing the dignity and majesty of the Han Chinese costume elements overflowing, highlighting the effectiveness of Sinicisation policy. In front of the monks under the tree to lead the way, seems to open the sacred Buddhist way; behind the two ministers followed. The second level, five officials in parallel, although the official position is lower than the upper level, but the physical appearance of solemnity, simple clothing and accessories, attendants are still a scale of honour, and orderly forward between the differences in rank. The third layer, monks damaged lead the way, five officials followed, the identity of the lower, neat queue, reflecting the overall travelling hierarchy. Empress of the Buddha ritual map and echo, also divided into three layers. The first layer, the Queen wearing a lotus flower crown, wide-sleeved robes and cloud head track plus body, elegant and luxurious, six maids of honour surrounded by the front of the female officials holding incense bucket service, umbrella fan Huagai cover, regalia highlights the status of the respectable. Behind the two concubines, slightly simple flower crown, handheld satchel, flowers, gentle manner. The second layer, four concubines accompanied by similar clothing, each with

four maids surrounded by an umbrella fan and a Huagai, specifications inferior to the first layer, the difference in rank is self-evident. The third floor, four concubines holding long-handled lotus, incense bag, incense box, look calm, decreasing body shape, the rank of high and low immediately appeared.

The entire relief layout and the same period of painting, frescoes, layered arrangement highlights the identity of the continuous composition to show the ceremonial, the characters side by side depictions, blank background processing, focusing on the main body but also to create a solemn and solemn, like a silent epic, telling the Northern Wei Dynasty royal piety, hierarchical and Han integration, artistic style unique, for the study of the Northern Wei Dynasty, society, culture and art to provide a valuable blueprint.

Longmen Grottoes, as China's stone art treasures, and Gongyi Grottoes Temple echoes, its Binyang Cave in the hole of the 'Emperor and Queen of the Buddha ritual picture' is also famous, but full of vicissitudes. Originally located on the east wall of Binyang Cave in the northern part of Longmen Xishan Mountain, this cave was excavated by Emperor Xuanwu of the Northern Wei Dynasty for his parents, Emperor Xiaowen and Empress Dowager Wenzhao, who spent a huge amount of money over 23 years and 802,366 person-times on the excavation, which is grand in scale and exquisitely decorated, and it shows the royal grandeur (Yang, 2024).

Located on the third level of the front wall of Binyang Zhongdong Cave, the picture of the Emperor and Empress Ritual of Buddha is in relief, presenting a grand scene of the ritual of Buddha by Emperor Xiaowen and Empress Wenzhao of the Northern Wei Dynasty. In the northern section, Emperor Xiaowen is wearing a tassel and a robe, surrounded by kings, officials, courtesans and imperial guards, marching solemnly and solemnly, showing his imperial demeanour as he moves his hands and feet, and the tassels he wears and the clothes he wears are all in Han Chinese style, which is a testimony to the depth of the reforms of Han Chinese culture. South Wenzhao Empress Lotus cape, a hand with incense, followed by the noblewoman, surrounded by courtesans Xu Xing, elegant, soft and dignified, female gentleness and piety is revealed. The figure is dense but distinctive layers of characters, looking forward and back, no sense of clutter.

It is saddening that, in the 1930s, 'the emperor after the Buddha ritual map' by the American Pu Ailun collusion Beijing Liuli factory antique trader Yue Bin stolen chisel, shipped overseas, now known as the 'Northern Wei dynasty emperor filial piety Buddha ritual map' a hidden in the United States of America New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the 'emperor Wenzhao ritual map' hidden in the United States of America Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

During the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties, in addition to the relief sculptures of the cave temples, murals and paintings were also important carriers of the theme of the Buddha rituals of the emperors and empresses, which expanded and enriched the artistic expression of this theme from different dimensions, and provided multiple perspectives for the future generations to explore the style of Buddhist art of the time.

The Mogao Grottoes at Dunhuang, as the world's art treasure trove, has a long history of mural painting through many dynasties. During the Wei, Jin, and North and South Dynasties, many of the cave murals contain rich elements of Buddhist rituals, which are hidden in the cave roof wells, the four walls of the sutra paintings, and between the paintings of the Buddha's story, just like the twinkling of the stars, glitter and shine. From the distribution of caves, the Northern Liang, Northern Wei Dynasty caves such as the 254th, 257th, 260th caves, etc., the earlier presentation of the rituals of the end of the Buddha. Cave 257, the west wall of the central painting of the 'nine-coloured deer Bensheng' story, the picture in the form of a comic strip spread, the nine-coloured deer

to help drowning people were betrayed, the plot ups and downs. The lower portrayal of the crowd heard the Buddha, pious worship scenes, characters dressed in Hu Han clothing, kneeling, facing the Buddha, although the painting does not account for a large proportion, but vividly show the early Buddhist believers salute posture, reflecting the state of Buddhism in the Dunhuang region when Buddhism was first spread the state of folk beliefs, at this time salute to the Buddha is still with a rustic folk atmosphere, and the Central Plains royal style is very different.

Dunhuang Mogao Cave 285, built in 538 AD. Cave wall paintings remain intact. The entire dome has figures of Taoism such as the Emperor of Man, the Emperor of Heaven, the Beast of Enlightenment of the Classic of Mountains and Seas, and Nuwa Fuxi. It is a particularly typical Taoist element, but we can clearly see that all of them are Buddhist masters below. Cave roof algal well painted lotus, flying sky, kabuki, surrounded by the gods, like the heavenly event; South wall painted five hundred robbers into Buddha, robbers were tortured to convert to Buddhism, the picture side of the picture painted monks preaching, the crowd listening to the picture, the characters have different expressions, or focus, or epiphany, the front row of the feeder dress gorgeous, holding a lotus and other offerings, sideways to the Buddha, the figure of the respectful, reflecting the east of Buddhism after the melding of the local culture, the secular classes The deep involvement of the secular class in the rituals of Buddhism and the gradual standardisation of religious ceremonies, and the integration of traditional Chinese painting into the composition of the picture, with its scattered perspective and clear hierarchy, are all indicative of the fact that Confucianism and Taoism were not differentiated from each other prior to the emergence of Buddhism. There were religious disputes between Taoism and Buddhism, but in this mural the artist has perfectly combined the mythological images of Buddha and Taoism through fantasy, laying the groundwork for subsequent large-scale sutra paintings of Buddhist ritual scenes.

Dunhuang 428 caves east wall painted a large 'Prince Sudana Bunsheng', the Prince gave away national treasures, wives and children to the family separation but no regrets, the picture is grand, many characters. Below the ritual scene, the emperor, consort image appeared, wearing tassels, crowns, dressed in broad robes and big-sleeved clothing, surrounded by attendants, neatly lined up, hands together to worship, the background of the building is majestic, curtains fluttering, showing the majesty of the Royal Family, the ritual of the Buddha figure into the more elements of the culture of the Central Plains, and the same period of the Central Plains Cave Temple reliefs echoed the Buddhist art in the wave of integration of nationalities under the new outlook, through the mural dissemination of the Buddhist teachings! At the same time, to strengthen the secular regime and religious ties, highlighting the emperor to protect Buddhism, praying for the blessing of the countryside.

In addition to the major grottoes, the art of painting in the Northern and Southern Dynasties of the Wei and Jin dynasties also flourished, and many famous artists' works are difficult to find, but fortunately there are copies of their works, many of which incorporate images of the emperor and queen of the Buddha's rites, with Gu Kaizhi being the most typical. Gu Kaizhi lived in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, and his unique style of painting and high theoretical achievements paved the way for the development of ancient Chinese painting. Gu Kaizhi's paintings, such as 'Lady's History' and 'Luoshen Fu', are not directly related to the theme of the emperor and the queen's Buddhist rituals, but they are subtly infiltrated with Buddhist elements. The painting is based on Zhang Hua's 'Proverbs of the Lady Historian' from the Western Jin Dynasty, which was designed to advise court women on moral conduct. The picture mostly depicts scenes of court life, with the women in graceful and elegant postures. In one of the sections, the women are combing their make-up in the mirror, and there are candlesticks and incense burners next to them. The shape of the incense burners is similar to that of Buddhist offerings, and the curling smoke

is similar to the scene of incense burning, suggesting that the court life was influenced by the Buddhist atmosphere of purity and introspection, and that the spirit of Buddhism was integrated into the mundane court scrolls with euphemistic strokes, so as to convey the concept of fusion of moral enlightenment and religious cultivation through paintings and to expand the influence of Buddhism in the nobility, so as to make Buddhism infiltrate the daily norms of daily life from the religious rituals. The Luoshenfu painting is based on the concept of moral education and religious cultivation.

The Luoshen Fu painting is based on Cao Zhi's Luoshen Fu, depicting the love between man and god. In the picture, the goddess of the underworld is depicted in a fluttering dress and a slight step, as if she were a fairy descending from the earth. In the scene depicted, the rolling hills and clouds, dotted with trees and flowers, the composition is similar to the Buddhist sutra painting of the Pure Land world, to create a transcendental and unearthly atmosphere, like the Buddha's Pure Land on earth. The lines of the characters' costumes are smooth and gentle, the colours are light and fresh, and the use of colour halo reflects a three-dimensional sense, echoing the lines and colours of Dunhuang murals, but adding to the subtlety and elegance of literati paintings. The fusion of literary classics and paintings transmits the Buddhist aesthetics to potentially guide the viewer to the sacred and beautiful spiritual realm of aspiration, which is similar to putting on religious aesthetics for the world's emotions, so that the Buddhist imagery will take root in the creations of the cultural elites.

Gu Kaizhi's painting theory of 'writing God in form' and 'thinking in a different way' had a profound impact on later generations. When expressing the subject of the imperial consort's Buddhist rites, painters followed this concept, focusing on portraying the characters' eyes, expressions and postures, capturing the spirit of piety and reverence, and displaying their inner religious aspirations through the delicate carving of the image of the imperial consort; the composition of paintings paid attention to the rhythmic rhythms of the picture, and the sparse and dense arrangement of the characters and scenery, so as to make the Buddhist rite scenes solemn and harmonious, without losing the spirit of the scene, which has inspired many later generations of court paintings and religious paintings to enrich the forms of expression of the subjects of the imperial consort. Many court paintings and religious paintings in later times were inspired by them, and they continued to enrich the expression of the subject of Buddhist rituals, either by incorporating landscapes to add spirituality, or by strengthening the dynamics of the characters to show their piety, and by using the brush as a medium, they inherited the fusion of Buddhist and secular paintings that was initiated in the Northern and Southern Dynasties of the Wei, Jin and Shang Dynasties, and continued the unique charm of the Buddhist art in China.

Cultural Integration in the Rituals of the Emperors and Empresses to the Buddha

The works of art on the subject of the Buddhist rituals of the Empress and the Empress are like a mirror, clearly reflecting the vivid scene of the deep fusion of Hu and Han cultures in the field of Buddhist art. From the evolution of the style of the characters' costumes to the subtle presentation of the details of the rituals, all of them highlight the majestic vitality of the mutual collision, absorption and integration of multiple cultures in this special period of history, which provides a precious and intuitive visual basis for the later generations to analyse the social outlook and the veins of cultural exchanges at that time.

As the main body of the ruling class of the Northern Wei Dynasty, the traditional dress of the Xianbei people has distinctive nomadic characteristics. Early Xianbei men wore narrow-sleeved short clothes, trouser pleats, easy to ride a horse, trouser pleats are generally matching the top and bottom of the trousers, short tight-sleeved top, trousers wide mouth binding trousers, to facilitate the action; women's clothing is to clip the collar

of the small-sleeved short jacket, long skirt, the material is mostly fur, coarse cloth, pay attention to the warmth and utility, and the Central Han wide robes and big-sleeved silk brocade dresses to form a stark contrast. With the reform of Hanification of Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei Dynasty, the characteristics of Hanification of the costumes in the Buddha ritual map of the Emperor and Empress became more and more significant. On the one hand, Wu Shi San was popular in the society. Taking Wushisan led to the popularity of wide-sleeved clothes in the society. At the same time, the metaphysical thought also coincides with the Buddhist idea of avoiding the world. People who used Wushi San became thin, and there was a clear preference for the immortal style, so there was a large number of clean images of beautiful bones. Emperor Xiaowen sent ambassadors to the Southern Dynasties to study the dress of the scholars. In 495, he began to reform the Xianbei clothing system, replacing the traditional hu clothing with crowns for all officials when he received his ministers, and ordering the whole country to ban the wearing of Xianbei hu clothing and replace it with Han clothing. The men wore cage crowns, big-sleeved clothes with curved collars, skirts, wattles, big belts, hairpins and ornaments from the top of the crown to the front of the forehead. The maid to wear double hair bun, wearing a large jacket, jacket two crotch, waist tie Jin belt, wearing wutou Cui.

Emperor Xiaowen vigorously pursued the policy of sinicisation of dress, influenced by ethnic and cultural habits, although the policy was not complete. There were many people who disobeyed the edict and continued to wear traditional national costumes, but after Emperor Xiaowen, although many Northern Wei Xianbei people began to resume their hu costumes again, although many of them would wear hanfu and hu costumes together (Shen, 2011). Emperor Xiaowen's dress reforms enabled the widespread spread of the Han's Zhangfu system in the Northern Wei Dynasty, which to a certain extent changed the dress style of the Xianbei. Longmen Grottoes Binyang Cave 'Emperor and Queen Ritual Buddha Figure' as an example, Emperor Xiaowen wearing tassels, wearing gun suit, tassels by the coronet board, tassel beads, tassel beads in accordance with the status of the strict number of regulations, gun suit embroidered with the sun, the moon, the stars, mountains and other twelve chapters of the pattern, showing the emperor's dignity and majesty, which is a traditional Han Chinese emperor coronation dress style, completely different from the traditional dress of the Xianbei people; Emperor Wenzhao queen Lotus Crown Xiapi, a wide-sleeved long skirt dragging the ground, Lotus Crown is delicate and elegant, Xiapi, a long skirt with wide sleeves, a long skirt, a long skirt, a long skirt with wide sleeves. Lotus crown delicate and elegant, cape soft and flowing, and Han Chinese noblewomen dress convergence. Gongyi Cave Temple, 'Emperor and Queen Rites to Buddha', the ministers beside the emperor wore sable crowns, wide-sleeved robes with curved collars, ribbons around the waist, and footsteps on the cloud crawler, which is also a typical Han official dress, and the maids of honour and concubines' dresses also incorporate elements of Han dresses, such as lapel pins, girdle waists, wide sleeves, and rimmed decorations, and the skirt tucks increase, and hemlines are wider, and all of them are closer to the Han Chinese dresses from the material to the styles, and the series of changes in the dresses show the process of national integration in a vivid way. This series of costume changes vividly demonstrates the process of ethnic integration.

In terms of Buddhist rituals, the traditional rituals of the Central Plains were deeply integrated with those of Buddhism. When the emperor and the empress pay homage to the Buddha, the steps of entering incense, bowing and chanting sutras are rigorous and standardised, incorporating the essence of Han rituals and pilgrimage ceremonies. When entering the incense, the emperor and the empress hold the incense burner in their hands, look solemn and solemn, incense action is soothing and elegant, and follow the ancient ritual of 'three worships and nine kowtows' to salute the Buddha statue, which originated from the Confucian respect for the heavens and earth, the ruler, the relatives and the teacher, transplanted in the Buddhist Buddhist rite of passage scene to strengthen the solemnity and sanctity of the ceremony, highlighting the imperial

power's respect for the Buddhist religion, not only expresses the piety for the Buddha, but also maintains the sanctity of the imperial power by means of the Buddhist rituals. This is to express the devotion to Buddhism and to maintain the sanctity of imperial power through Buddhist rituals, so that religion and politics are closely dependent on each other under the bond of rituals.

The Collision of Buddhism and Indigenous Thought

During the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties, the theme of emperors and empresses paying homage to Buddhism was not only a presentation of art but also a vivid reflection of the profound collision and integration between Buddhism and indigenous Confucian and Daoist thoughts. This ideological fusion, spanning from philosophical foundations to secular concepts, comprehensively reshaped Buddhist philosophy, enabling it to weave into the very fabric of Chinese civilization.

As the orthodox thought of traditional Chinese society, Confucianism has undergone millennia of accumulation, establishing a rigorous ethical and moral system that emphasizes a hierarchical order of family and state, wherein rulers and subjects, fathers and sons, each have their distinct roles. The depiction of emperors and empresses paying homage to Buddhism cleverly resonates with Confucian ethical principles in terms of character relationships and layout. For instance, in the painting "Emperor and Empress Paying Homage to Buddha" found in the Gongyi Cave Temples, the emperor occupies the foremost position in the procession, wearing the imperial crown and grand robes, standing tall and steady, exuding supreme authority, reminiscent of the Confucian ideal of the "Son of Heaven;" behind him, kings and ministers are arranged according to their ranks, their attire and ceremonial paraphernalia diminishing accordingly, strictly adhering to the identity distinctions prescribed by "ritual," such as ministers wearing caps made of sable fur and court robes, following respectfully and without overstepping, reflecting the formal etiquette of the Confucian court.

In the depiction of the empress paying homage to Buddha, the empress occupies the main position, surrounded by consorts and maidservants, who too are arranged according to closeness of relationship and rank, embodying the orderly hierarchy of the imperial harem. This aligns with Confucian principles of "differentiating between husband and wife, and maintaining order among the young and old." The homage to Buddha scene incorporates Confucian values of hierarchy into Buddhist ritual, creating a deep interweaving of both on a secular level. The people, through observing these depictions, experience religious devotion while simultaneously reinforcing their recognition of Confucian ethics, thereby constructing a framework conducive for Buddhism to take root in China, fitting into local order.

In terms of doctrine interpretation and dissemination strategies, Buddhism cleverly adjusts its meanings to align with Confucian contexts. Initially, Buddhism emphasized "escaping the world" in pursuit of individual liberation, which contradicted Confucianism's active "engagement with the world" and social responsibility. To resolve this conflict, eminent monks integrated Confucian concepts into Buddhism; for example, equating "compassion" in Buddhism with "ren" (benevolence) in Confucianism, advocating that followers of Buddhism should harbor compassion and aid the world, thus giving the "escaping the world" spirit of Buddhism a sense of "engagement." Furthermore, the concepts of karmic retribution were used to explain actions of good and evil, urging followers to adhere to Confucian moral standards, incorporating virtues such as filial piety and loyalty into Buddhist teachings. Though early stories like "The Samanta's Previous Lives" and "The Former Life of King Shibi" align somewhat with Confucian notions of self-sacrifice, their intentions were primarily about unconditional giving, which did not fully align with traditional Confucian ideas.

By the late Northern Wei period, this situation changed, with Dunhuang murals depicting themes of Confucian loyalty and filial piety. For instance, the act of cutting flesh to serve one's parents in "The Birth Story of Suśeṭha," and other stories highlighting filial piety, aligned with the Confucian classic "Twenty-four Exemplars of Filial Piety," promoting moral constraints reinforced by society's respect for Buddhism. This facilitated Buddhism's growth and propagation, allowing it to take root and flourish within the Confucian-dominated secular landscape, thereby expanding its reach and depth of dissemination from the highest court to the common streets, marking a critical step towards the integration of foreign religions with mainstream indigenous thought.

Daoism, with its reverence for nature and pursuit of ethereal realms, profoundly influenced the artistic style of Buddhism during the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties. At this time, Xuanxue (Neo-Taoism) was prevalent, leading to a trend of abstract philosophical discussions, as Daoist thought permeated various societal levels through this revival. The creation of the "Emperor and Empress Paying Homage to Buddha" was influenced by this atmosphere, creating an artistic context harmonious with Daoist ideals. Cave temple murals and reliefs often incorporated elements of landscapes, clouds, and mist; for instance, in the Dunhuang Mogao Caves, behind the Buddha and the emperor and empress, the mountains and clouds were sketched with light ink or color, establishing a space where reality and illusion coexisted, creating an ethereal and distant ambiance akin to the Daoist aspiration for the "Way is in accord with nature." In this setting, the figures of the emperor and empress paying homage appear to bridge the mundane and the celestial, showcasing the sacred and supernatural nature of Buddhism while also integrating the Daoist aesthetic of closeness to nature and pursuit of transcendence, allowing the viewer to perceive a spiritual realm beyond worldly disturbances in the act of revering Buddha.

In the portrayal of Buddhist statues, the pursuit of "divine charm" from Daoism was borrowed, diminishing the realism of the early Gandhara style, while enhancing the serene and transcendent facial expressions, with deep-set eyes and subtle smiles sculpted to convey an image that appears to transcend the worldly. This incorporates the essence of Daoism's "subtle form has no form" and "words have no significance," conveying religious wisdom through restraint and implicit expression, elevating followers' experiences from mere visual impressions to profound spiritual insights. By employing Daoist aesthetics to deepen the spiritual connotations of Buddhism, it facilitated the comprehensive localization of Buddhism across various aspects of its outward forms and internal meanings, allowing it to present itself anew within the diverse cultural landscape of the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties.

Conclusion

The emergence of artworks depicting emperors and empresses paying homage to Buddhism during the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties represents a crucial instance of the transformation of Buddhist thought and artistic style from foreign forms to indigenous styles. As Buddhism deeply integrated with native Chinese culture, its artistic expressions gradually shed the exotic features of its early forms and evolved towards a style that resonates with the aesthetic and spiritual essence of the Chinese nation, presenting a distinctive Sinicized style.

The transformation in artistic expression reflects underlying changes in ideological concepts. The phenomenon of emperors and empresses paying homage to Buddhism during this period can be seen as a top-down spiritual baptism, profoundly promoting the widespread dissemination and deep infiltration of Buddhist faith in the grassroots. This process led Buddhism, once a high and lofty doctrine, to gradually integrate into various aspects of secular life, initiating a grand process of the secularization of Buddhist belief. The veneration of Buddhism by emperors and empresses played a powerful leading and exemplary role, encouraging the aristocracy and even common people to adopt Buddhist

faith. Nobles showcased their status and accumulated merit through Buddhist activities, making the practice a fashionable trend within the aristocratic class. This trend gradually spread downward, permeating the lives of the common people. Although ordinary citizens could not afford to build temples like the nobles, they expressed their devotion to Buddhism by participating in temple gatherings, listening to teachings from monks and nuns, and offering simple Buddhist statues.

Early Buddhist texts were often obscure and difficult to understand, but local eminent monks translated and interpreted them, using folk stories and parables to elucidate Buddhist teachings, which allowed the common people to grasp the essence of the Dharma more easily and accept Buddhist faith. This facilitated Buddhism's transition from the court to the streets, becoming part of the everyday lives of the masses. Under the influence of emperors and empresses paying homage to Buddha, popular Buddhist faith flourished, giving rise to various unique Buddhist festivals and rituals, which became an important component of the spiritual life of the people.

The comprehensive, vivid, and distinct depiction of the emperors and empresses paying homage to Buddhism during the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties serves as a typical representation of the localization of Buddhist thought in China, illustrating its artistic manifestations and offering insights into the process of the Sinicization of Buddhist art.

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