



RESEARCH PAPER

An Analyses of Sculpture Patterns of Mount Xumi Grottoes in China

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ABSTRACT

Buddhism was introduced to my country from ancient India through the Silk Road during the Han Dynasty. It has formed a broad social foundation through the historical development of the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties. This article focuses on the historical and artistic approach towards the sculpture patterns of mount Xumi Grottes. The art of Xumishan Grottoes was founded in the Northern Wei Dynasty, and has continued from the large-scale construction in the Western Wei Dynasty, Northern Zhou Dynasty, Sui Dynasty, and Tang Dynasty to the repairs in the Song Dynasty, Yuan Dynasty, and Ming Dynasty. From the formation history of the Xumishan Grottoes and the development and evolution of the grotto art, we can see the secularization, nationalization and localization of the Buddhist art of the Xumishan Grottoes. The methodological aspect of the research is related to the qualitative research techniques and the patterns which are related to the art and observatory.

KEYWORDS Artistic Expressions, China, Mount Xumi Grottoes, Sculpture Art

Introduction

The transportation between ancient China and ancient India mainly passed through the Silk Road. The famous grottoes on the Silk Road, Mount Sumeru, are important historical and cultural relics of the Silk Road grotto statues. Guyuan County is located in the remnants of Liupan Mountain, on the north side of Shimen Pass (called Shimen Water in ancient times). It is a unique landscape on the Loess Plateau - Danxia landform. Guyuan City, where the Mishan Grottoes are located, is an important town in the north and a place of transportation, so it will inevitably be affected by various cultural factors. The "Silk Road" across the Eurasian continent is the carrier of cultural exchanges, and both Qiuci and Guyuan are at the heart of the Silk Road. The Tarim Basin east of Congling in ancient times was located in the middle section of the Silk Road. There were a series of passages connecting desert oases on the north and south sides of the basin, with Khotan as the center on the south and Qiuci as the center on the north. Guyuan is an important passage on the northern route of the eastern section of the Silk Road (Jiyu & Yansheng, 1985). "Xumi" is originally a transliteration of Sanskrit. According to legend, it is a famous mountain in ancient Indian mythology. It is also called "Mandala" in Buddhist scriptures (Zhou, 2022).

The Xumishan Grottoes were founded in the Later Qin and Northern Wei Dynasties during the Sixteen Kingdoms period, and flourished in the Northern Zhou and Tang dynasties. The Xumishan Grottoes have lasted for more than 1,500 years. Over the years, wind and rain have eroded the gorgeous appearance of the grottoes, but they have added to the growth rings of the culture and art of the grottoes. (Yongjun, 2011). Grottoes are generally dug into Buddhist temples or monks' houses on riverside cliffs or stone walls, and grottoes are also called cave temples. The Xumishan Grottoes are excavated on the eight cliffs of Mount Xumi. The peaks where the grottoes are located are densely forested and surrounded by flowing water. The mountains are stacked with

mountains, and ladder bridges connect the ditches. The distribution pattern of the statues in the Xumishan Grottoes is peculiar. Throughout the artistic statues of the Xumishan Grottoes, each statue has a different expression. The vivid expressions are rare in China. It is a rare natural and cultural scenic spot in the northwest Loess Plateau and an important part of the Buddhist grotto art in China (Shichang, 2014).

Unfortunately, after the Ming Dynasty, the decline of the ancient Silk Road gradually made this place isolated from the outside world due to the interruption of transportation. Especially in modern times, researchers have paid less attention and there is a lack of detailed records in historical documents. This magnificent group of cave statues has almost been forgotten by the world. The Xumishan Grottoes were an important place for Buddhism built with the economic and cultural development, ethnic integration, and cultural exchanges at that time (Yongzhong, 2015).

Literature Review

Buddhist sculptures have been studied by in different perspectives in the world to understand the basic system of the art and presentation of the Xumishan Grottoes, some of the peer reviewed articles and reviewed. The Buddha statue is influenced by local culture and aesthetics of the era, representing the essence of religious doctrine and humanity's ultimate goal. Buddha sculptures come in a variety of styles depending on the period, place, and local culture. This is due to the fact that cultural inheritance consists of two things: first, the preservation of culture's core values, which is why worshipping the top of the pyramid remains humanity's ultimate goal; and second, cultural assimilation and other influences contribute to the enrichment and innovation of local cultures (Ji, 2019). Xiangtangshan, Longmen, and Binxian, the three Dizang case studies, provide indicators for recognizing early Dizang sculpture. According to my research, Dizang's supposed status as a Hell savior and his customary iconography are not reflected in this collection of dated and inscribed paintings. During this time, he is typically depicted sitting in lalitasana rather than as a standing monk holding a staff and gem. This analysis of a collection of images shows that early Tang inscriptions and depictions generally focus on the alleviation of pain rather than explicit allusions to Hell, death, or Dizang's benevolent tendencies in the lower realms about the year 700. During this time, Dizang's iconography was pliable and erratic. Additionally, it is entwined with the images and personas of other gods, most notably Guanyin (Lee, 2005).

Important distribution of Xumishan Grottoes

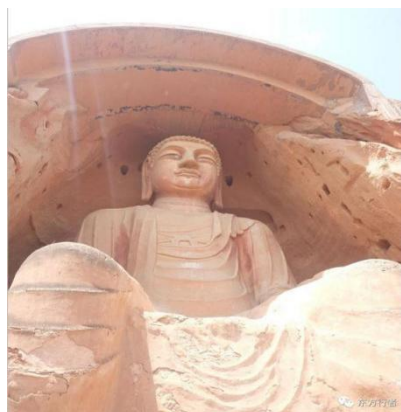


Figure: 1 The statue of the sitting Buddha in Cave 5

Era: Tang Dynasty

Location: On the southern foot of the cliff in the eastern part of the Big Buddha Tower area, where the Big Buddha Tower is located, with the Sikou River to the south

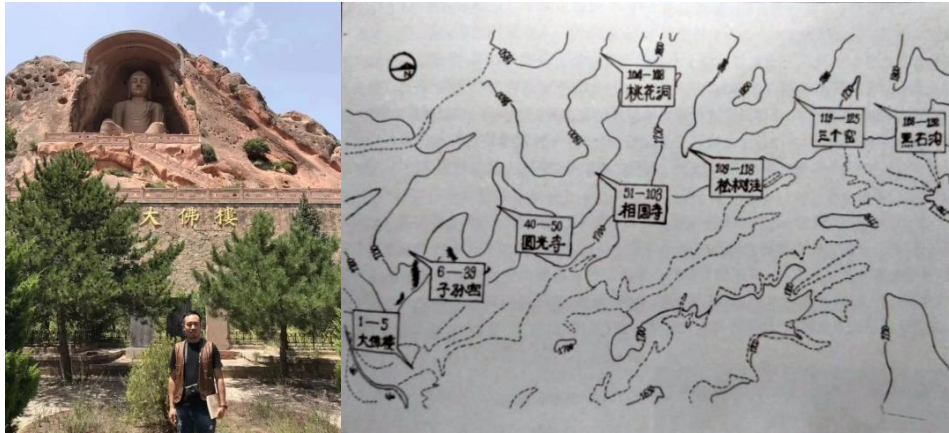
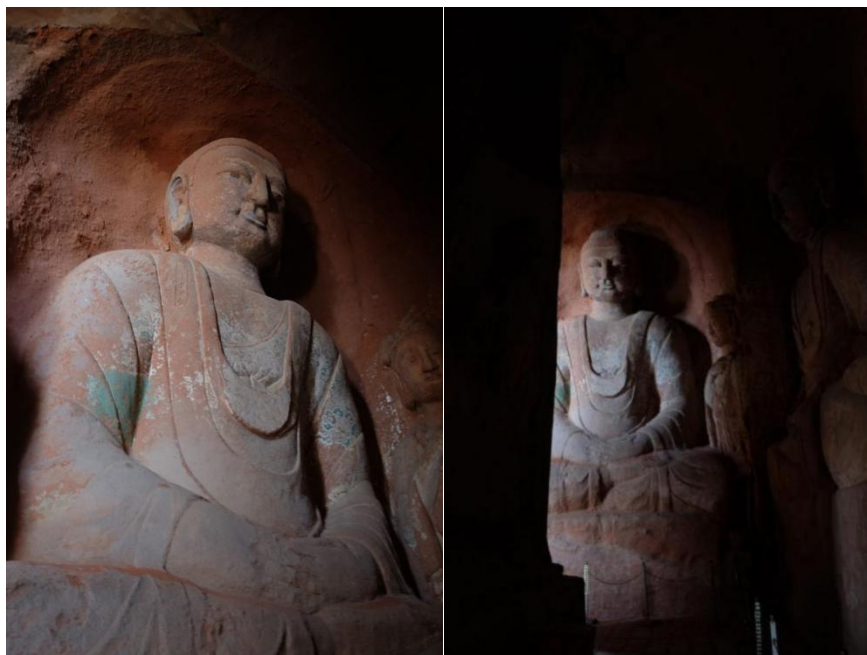


Figure: 2 Schematic diagram of the distribution of the Xumishan Grottoes area (picture from "The Contents of the Xumishan Grottoes").

Results and Discussions

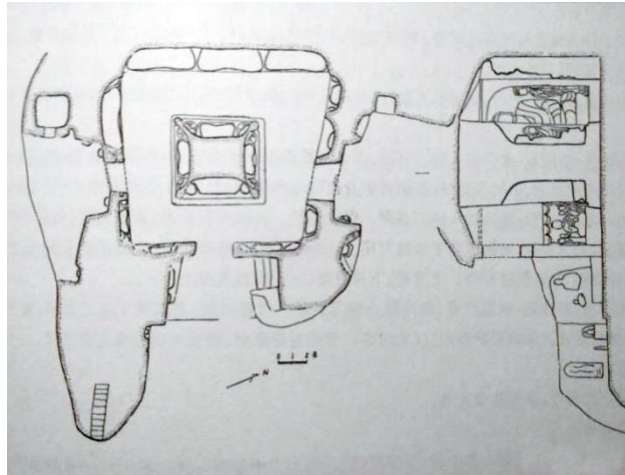


Xiangguo Temple was excavated in the Northern Zhou Dynasty. It is a hollowed-out cave with a cupola roof and a flat square center pillar. It contains 6 stone statues nearly 7 meters high. It was built in the third year of Emperor Wu of the Northern Zhou Dynasty (574). The excavation of the grottoes was suspended due to the policy of exterminating Buddhism, and the grottoes were considered unfinished (Li, et al, 2023).

The 8.5-magnitude "big earthquake" in 1920 caused the front half of the grotto to collapse, and the second half was filled with sand and gravel, and the back was preserved as a whole. In 1985, the cultural relics department reinforced and repaired Cave 51, allowing the art treasures of the Northern Zhou Dynasty Grottoes to be spread

throughout the world. In later generations, the grottoes as a whole are magnificent, with exquisite statues, exquisite carvings and well-preserved conditions. They are unique among the grottoes in the country. They represent the highest level of statues in Mount Xumi and are representative works of stone carvings in the Northern Zhou Dynasty in the country. They have unparalleled artistic appreciation value. and research value, it is praised as "the light of Xumi" by the cultural relics and academic circles. \

Figure 3: Light of Xumi



Source: Department of Archeology, Peking University

The structure of the cave is similar to that of the Five Buddha Hall temple in the Kizil Grottoes in Xinjiang in the 4th century AD. It has worship halls, lecture halls, meditation rooms, and miscellaneous rooms. It is convenient for monks to worship Buddha, chant sutras, and meditate. It can also take care of the monks' daily life. It continued into the Tang Dynasty. The caves of the Northern Wei Dynasty in Mount Xumi are mainly concentrated in the south, middle and west of Zisun Palace. The surviving caves from this period mainly include 13 caves, including 14, 15, 16, 22, 23 and 24. Among them, 14, 22 and 24 It is the central pillar cave, and the other caves and niches are monk room caves and Zen caves.

Figure 4: Pillar Cave



One of the biggest features of the Xumishan Grottoes is that the caves of each period were systematically excavated in different areas according to the terrain and local conditions.

The southern and central parts of the Zisun Palace area are dominated by caves during the Northern Wei and Western Wei Dynasties.

Yuanguang Temple District and Xiangguo Temple District - mainly caves in the Northern Zhou Dynasty, but also in the Sui Dynasty

The Great Buddha Building Area and the Xiangguo Temple Area are dominated by caves from the Tang Dynasty.

Songshuwa, Three Kilns and Heishigou - except for a few caves from the Northern Dynasties, most of them are small caves from the Sui and Tang Dynasties.

Figure 5: Three Kilns and Heishigou



Cave 68

Era: Tang Dynasty

Location: Central part of Xiangguo Temple District, west side of Cave 67

This is a flat, square-shaped Buddha hall with a bucket roof excavated during the heyday. It is 4.5 meters long, 4.7 meters deep, and 3.7 meters high at the top. There is a horseshoe-shaped Buddha base carved in the cave. The theme of the statue is the third Buddha and a lion appears. The Buddha statues are as tall as a human being, and their postures are graceful and graceful. Especially the Hercules statue made by Sheng Zao has a sense of fitness and is an outstanding work of the Tang Dynasty. It is one of the relatively well-preserved caves in the Tang Dynasty caves in Mount Xumi.

Figure: 6 Mount Xumi Grottoes



Image source: "Content List of Mount Xumi Grottoes"

The temples on Mount Xumi are all built on the mountain. The grottoes are excavated on the sedimentary rocks of the Eocene of the early Tertiary period of the Cenozoic Era. The mountain rocks have a medium-to-coarse-grained sandy structure and are loose. They are prone to natural erosion and are particularly indestructible. The erosion of rainwater can cause the cave to collapse in severe cases. The ancient craftsmen who were full of wisdom took this into consideration before digging the caves, so they basically designed and cut a "herringbone"-shaped drainage protection ditch on the cliff above the cave door, and dug a "herringbone"-shaped drainage protection ditch at the lower end of the ditch. A water cellar cave with the function of holding water. In this way, rainwater can flow directly to the water cellar grotto along the ditch, which not only avoids the direct flushing of the grotto by rainwater, but also solves the daily water use of the monks. The drainage ditch surrounding the upper part of the Yuanguang Temple Grottoes is more than 20 meters long. It is a very unique and arduous project incidental to the opening of the caves to create statues.

Figure: 7 Yuanguang Temple area



The gilded sculpture on the base of the central pillar of Cave 45

Era: Northern Zhou Dynasty

Location: On the west side of the middle floor in the center of Yuanguang Temple area, below Cave 44.

There are musical instruments carved under the base of the niche, all of which are kneeling facing the Boshan stove in the center. The four musical instruments on the east side are flute, drum, panpipe and yu. The four musicians on the west side hold drums, flutes, konghou and pipa respectively. This relief sculpture is not only full in shape, but also uses the intersecting relationship of streamers to express the sense of space inside the sculpture, and also creates the circulation effect of music in the air, giving the audience a very strong sense of rhythm and rhythm. It can be called a classic representative of Mount Xumi.

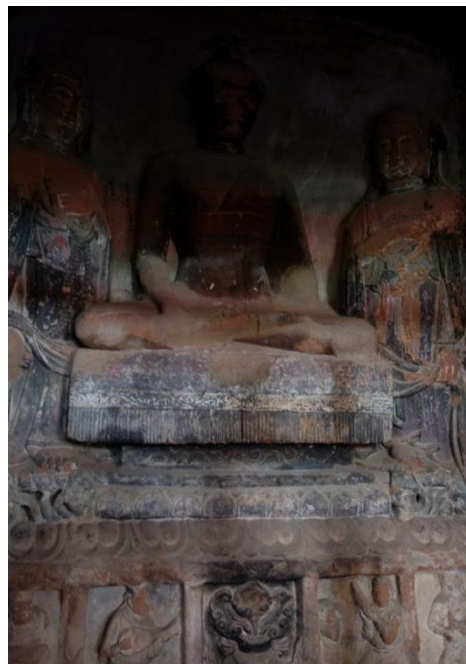
Figure: 8 Chang'an Model



The imitation wood structure cave in Cave 45 is called the "Chang'an Model" of the Northern Zhou Grottoes in Mount Xumi. It includes inclined marks, beams, corner pillars, buckets, etc. The precision of its architecture and the gorgeous carvings are amazing. This kind of imitation wood structure has never been seen in the Central Plains Grottoes. The imitation wood structure in the Central Plains Grottoes is usually to make the niche into a roof shape or to make eaves outside the cave door. That's it. The imitation wood structure of the Northern Zhou Grottoes in Mount Xumi is similar to this different. It is somewhat similar to Cave 43 of Maiji Mountain, which is the Cave of the Western Wei Dynasty after Emperor Wen of the Western Wei Dynasty. It can be seen that the imitation wooden frame structure of the Northern Zhou Dynasty inherited the practices of the late Western Wei Dynasty to a certain extent, and also had new creations and

developments. The imitation wood structure caves of the Northern Zhou Dynasty provide precious objects for studying the characteristics of the cave shapes of the Northern Zhou Dynasty.

Figure: 9 Yuanguang Temple District



Cave 46

Era: Northern Zhou Dynasty

Location: East side of Cave 45 on the middle floor of the center of Yuanguang Temple District.

A large number of Three Buddha themes appear in the art of the Northern Zhou Dynasty grottoes excavated in the middle period of the Xumishan Grottoes. In the front part of Cave 45, there are statues of "Three Worlds Buddha" and "Ji Le Tian", and in the right niche there is "Maitreya's Dharma of Tusita Heavenly Palace". The plot of the whole scene is that the future Buddha Maitreya Bodhisattva teaches yoga "Only" in the pure land world of Tusita Heaven. Theory of Knowledge".

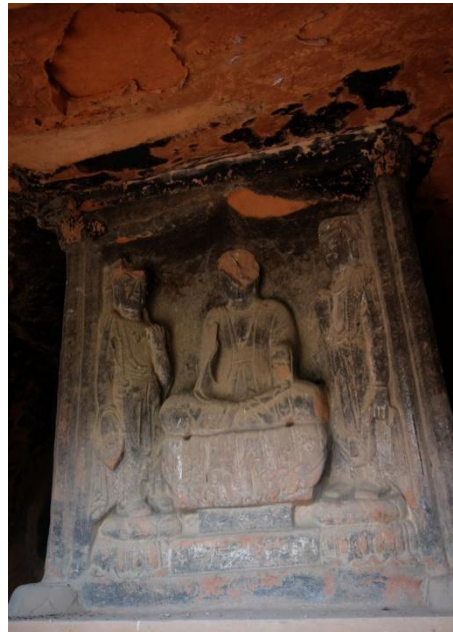
Figure: 10 gilded sculpture



The gilded sculpture on the base of the central pillar of Cave 45

Dome roofs appeared in the monks' caves in the Northern Wei Dynasty on Mount Xumi, and the architectural shape of the domes can be traced back to 3000 BC in the ancient Ur Kingdom in the Mesopotamian Plain (3000 BC - 2160 BC). In addition, there are also courseware Ancient buildings in Iran, ancient Rome and other places. It was adopted on a large scale in the early Western Wei Dynasty. This kind of roof, with a narrow circumferential platform left on the top edge and the middle part of the roof chiselled upward into a wide, round and gentle dome shape, has never been seen in the Central Plains grottoes. It is common in grottoes in Central Asia and Xinjiang. Shape: In the 4th century AD, Zen religion was popular in the Kingdom of Kucha in Central Asia. Its Zen caves generally used dome roofs. The transportation between China and the Western Regions and India mainly passed through the Kingdom of Kucha. The large number of such dome roofs may be related to the Qiuci Kingdom. It is related to the spread of Buddhism in this country. In addition, during the Northern Wei Dynasty, two powerful nomads, Rouran and Gaoche, appeared in the north and northwest after the Xiongnu, posing a major threat to the Northern Wei regime. After several conquests by the Northern Wei regime, Gaoche surrendered, and Gaoche surrendered. People were moved to Monan one after another, and the Hetao area also became their grazing land. At that time, Guyuan was the stronghold of the Gaoche people. The emergence of the dome may be related to the migration of ethnic groups and the integration of different cultural connotations (Hao, 2021).

Figure: 11 Gaoche people



The cave is a square pan-topped tower cave excavated in the Northern Zhou Dynasty...The cave is 240 cm high, 390 cm deep and 370 cm wide. There are stone carvings imitating wooden beams and corner pillars, niches and statues on the four walls, and three pavilions carved in the niche. picture. The lower part of the central pillar is a square base, and the upper part of the pillar has pointed arched tent-shaped niches on all sides. There are eight corner pillars carved beside the niche, and one Buddha and two Bodhisattvas are carved in the niche, this is a Buddhist cave with a relatively complete preservation of niche-style statues in the Xumishan Grottoes. It is very helpful for us to study the grotto statues of the Northern Zhou and Sui Dynasties.

Figure: 12 Bodhisattvas carved on the wall altar



There is a Buddha, two disciples and two Bodhisattvas carved on the wall altar. The face of the Buddha statue is broken, only the outline is visible. The hands are broken, and he fell down on the square seat. The disciple Kassapa on the left is in cassock, standing on the lotus seat with his hands clasped. Disciple Ananda on the right is severely weathered and denuded, but it can still be seen from the remaining form.

Figure: 12 Disciple Kassapa



3. Important stylistic characteristics of the historical period of Mount Xumi Grottoes sculpture art

Looking at the historical development of the Xumishan Grottoes from the large-scale construction in the Western Wei, Northern Zhou, Sui and Tang Dynasties and the repairs in the Song, Yuan and Ming Dynasties, one theme can be summarized, that is, the theme of the Amitabha Sutra. This theme reflects the "reincarnation of life and death" in mainstream social thought; most of the themes shown in the statues of Zhong in the early grottoes of Mount Xumi focus on common Buddhist practices such as "transcending the city to become a monk" and "riding an elephant to enter the womb", meditation and other image shaping. Among them, the main art forms of sculpture are meditation statues and narrative expressions of scenes from "Buddha's stories". The central pillar of the grotto is carved with artistic elements and Buddhist symbols such as lotuses symbolizing Buddhist teachings. The important theme of "enlightenment and practice" in the early statues of the Xumishan Grottoes is concentrated in Cave 14, Cave 24 and Cave 24. 32 Grottoes, etc.; the artistic expression themes of the Northern Zhou Grottoes excavated in the middle period are mainly those of the Three Buddhas. For example, in the front part of Cave 45, there are statues of "Three Worlds Buddha" and "Ji Letian", and in the right niche there is "Maitreya's Dharma of Tusita Heavenly Palace", which tells the story of the future Buddha Maitreya Bodhisattva teaching yoga "Consciousness Only" in the pure land world of Tusita Heaven. The plot of Cave 51 also includes themes such as "Thinking about Bodhisattva", which should be an image creation of Maitreya Bodhisattva's rebirth and enlightenment under the Longhua tree.

The sculpture art form of Xumishan Grottoes is called by academic circles as one of the representatives of the "Loess Plateau" sculpture style. What is the "Loess Plateau" sculpture style? Guyuan, Longdong and Northern Shaanxi belong to the Loess Plateau. The stone carvings in this area have a new expression in the technique of clothing pattern carving, which is the use of dense parallel lines for incising, so it is called the "Loess Plateau" carving style. This technique uses a strong knife, is straight and hard, and has deep and rough carving lines. Its effect is to make the pleats densely packed and appear thicker. For example, the Northern Wei Dynasty stone statues unearthed in Pengyang County east of Guyuan, the stone statues preserved in Yaowang Mountain in Yao County, Shaanxi Province, the statues on the fragments of stone pagodas preserved in Longdong Zen Buddhist Temple, and the clothing patterns of the statues in the three caves of Huashiyan in Yijun County, Shaanxi Province are all uniform. Densely parallel negative line carvings are used. The clothing patterns of the statues in Cave 24 of Mount

Xumi make extensive use of this technique, and are extremely smooth and mature, so they are called a typical example of the "Loess Plateau" carving style.

The reason why the Xumishan Grottoes are important is that among the Chinese grotto statues, there was a long process of change from the earliest clay sculptures and then painting to the excavation of grotto statues, that is, from statues to the period when colored sculptures and carvings coexisted, and then to pure During the stone carving period, this form of Buddhist carving art gradually developed from west to east. Most of the statues in the Kizil Grottoes in Baicheng, Xinjiang are clay sculptures, while the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang are mainly painted clay sculptures. The statues in Bingling Temple are mostly colored sculptures or clay sculptures with stone bodies. The Maijishan Grottoes are also painted with stone bodies. The main statues, as well as the Yungang Grottoes in Shanxi and Longmen Grottoes in Henan, were all carved into stone. Therefore, the Xumishan Grottoes play a turning and transition zone in Chinese Buddhist grotto statues.

In the history of Chinese grotto construction, the grottoes of the Sui and Tang dynasties developed the grand narrative theme of Buddhism around the theme of "Pure Land" belief and "transformation". In the expression of Buddhist statues, they focused on realizing the yearning for the "Western Pure Land" and also for all living beings. Emancipation from life and death and repentance of karma provide a powerful spiritual sustenance and religious worship. The artistic expression of the theme of the grottoes focuses on the people's value of artistic aesthetics to religious spirit. It is also an expression and embodiment of the precise and readable image of religion. In a sense, the essence of religious worship: "religion" Myths have a distinct tendency of perceptual images, which shows the important characteristics of belief in supernatural objects. If the nature of the supernatural becomes the object of people's worship, a fetish, idol, etc. must be objectified in the form of specific perceptual images. form to imagine. However, no matter which form they appear in, what people worship is only the elves and gods presented in vivid images in front of people (Chengshui, 2001)." Therefore, in the aesthetics of religious art, , fantasy and imagination beyond time and space play an extremely important role in people's inner spiritual world. The creation of sculpture art cannot be carried out without the inner spiritual world fantasy and imagination. Therefore, the grotto art not only expresses the spiritual needs of the people at that time for the era, but also is an important artistic aesthetic feature of the era.

Conclusion

In this study, the research conducted a comprehensive review of the sculpture art of the Xumishan Grottoes, and conducted an in-depth analysis from the origin and evolution of its art form to the development of technology and style. Research has found that the Mount Xumi Grottoes are not only the product of the integration of Buddhist culture and Chinese local culture after it was introduced to China, but also a testimony of cultural exchanges between the East and the West. By exploring the sculpture art of Mount Xumi Grottoes in different historical periods, this study reveals their important position in the history of Chinese Buddhist art. These sculpture arts not only show an evolution from simplicity to complexity in technology, but also show a transformation from imitation to innovation in style, ultimately forming a unique artistic style. This process not only reflects the localization trend of Buddhist art, but also reflects the changes and development of ancient Chinese social culture. The study of the sculpture art of the Xumishan Grottoes not only provides us with an important perspective on understanding ancient Buddhist art and cultural exchanges, but also provides valuable information for exploring religious beliefs, artistic expressions and their relationship

with social changes in ancient Chinese society. Future research can further explore the artistic expression of the Xumishan Grottoes in different cultural and historical backgrounds and its impact on future generations, especially the challenges and opportunities in its protection, inheritance and utilization in modern society. In addition, with the development of science and technology, the use of modern scientific and technological means to conduct more detailed analysis and protection of the Xumishan Grottoes will provide new methods and ideas for inheriting and promoting China's ancient cultural heritage.

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